



# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE EUROPE 2030 – FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION

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Background  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Session 1: Taking stock on the implementation at the global, European and national level: 4 years after adoption of the 2030 Agenda</b> .....	5
Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR): Paving the way for global transformation to sustainable development by 2030 .....	5
<b>Session 2: Transformative rather than incremental changes for sustainable development – What does it mean in terms of economics and governance for SD?</b> .....	6
Meta-governance for Sustainability: The full toolbox in implementing the SDGs .....	6
<b>Session 3: Key challenges for Europe in reaching the SDGs and 2030 Agenda</b> .....	7
SDG Index 2019 and Key Challenges for Europe .....	7
Economy of Wellbeing .....	7
Sustainable Finance, Reporting and Their Role in Achieving the SDGs .....	7
Global Responsibility .....	8
<b>Methodology: How the research was conducted for the ESDN study on the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the national level in Europe</b> .....	9
<b>Chapter 1: National Level Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs</b> .....	10
National Sustainable Development Strategies or Action Plans for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs .....	10
Comprehensiveness of National Sustainable Development Strategies and Action Plans in Addressing the SDGs .....	11
Active Involvement of National Parliaments in SDG Implementation .....	12
Crucial Achievements in Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs .....	12
<b>Chapter 2: Leadership and Good Leadership Qualities in Effectively Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs</b> .....	15
Ministries Responsible for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs .....	15
Ministries Involved in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs .....	17
Good Leadership Aspects of Governments for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda .....	18
Political Commitment Needed to Support the Government's Activities in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs .....	19
<b>Chapter 3: Horizontal Policy Integration</b> .....	21
Institutionalized Horizontal Policy Integration Mechanisms in Place for the Implementation of the SDGs .....	22
Important Achievements and Challenges of Horizontal Policy Integration that Need to be Solved	24
<b>Chapter 4: Vertical Policy Integration</b> .....	26
Mechanisms in Place to Foster Vertical Policy Integration .....	26
Major Success Factors and Challenges of Vertical Policy Integration Mechanisms .....	27
<b>Chapter 5: Governance Innovations and Shortcomings</b> .....	29

## Introduction

This background paper provides input on the **European Sustainable Development Network's (ESDN) Annual Conference 2019**, entitled “**Towards a Sustainable Europe 2030 – From Reflection to Action**”, which will take place in **Helsinki on 30-31 October 2019**. This ESDN event is organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Finnish Prime Minister's Office and coincides with the Finnish EU Presidency. The conference will be a 1.5-day event that will bring together policymakers and experts from different stakeholder groups from all over Europe to learn, exchange, and share their experiences on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs over the past four years.

The Conference will focus on specific topics relating to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Europe and take stock of where Europe stands after four years of implementation. The topics and discussions will feature the experiences that European countries have had in that regard, which will include presentations by 13 country representatives and 1 autonomous region (Åland). Other Conference topics will include the linking of the 2030 Agenda to economic reality and looking at meta-governance for sustainability. In addition, the Conference will focus on various challenges for Europe in reaching the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and will delve deeper into 4 key themes: Circular Economy; Economy of Well-Being; Sustainable Finance; and Global Responsibility.

In addition to the keynote speakers, panels and breakout groups, there will be ample time to discuss and reflect upon discussion topics and the experiences that have been shared throughout the Conference. The Conference will start with a welcome and opening session, followed by 3 sessions that will take place over the 1.5-day event.

### **Day 1 (October 30<sup>th</sup>)**

- **Session 1:** Taking stock on the implementation at the global, European and national level: 4 years after adoption of the 2030 Agenda
- **Session 2:** Transformative rather than incremental changes for sustainable development – What does it mean in terms of economics and governance for SD?

### **Day 2 (October 31<sup>st</sup>)**

- **Session 3:** Key challenges for Europe in reaching the SDGs and 2030 Agenda

A full documentation of the keynotes, discussions, and group work at the Conference will be published in a report shortly after the event. PowerPoint presentations will also be made available online.

This Background Paper will be divided up into chapters based on the ESDN Office survey that was sent out to the ESDN National Focal Points regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The survey questionnaire addressed 10 themes that relate to implementation. However, due to the extensive feedback and the number of countries that the survey covered, not all 10 themes and their subsequent questions will be included in this Background Paper. The full results will be further illuminated in the ESDN Quarterly Report that is scheduled to be published in December 2019. The methods employed for conducting this research will be discussed in the next session.

In addition to presenting the preliminary results and main trends that have emerged among European countries in the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda along the thematic areas chosen, this Background Paper will also feature information from the keynote speakers on their topics. These topics will be arranged based on the conference sessions in which they appear.

## **Session 1: Taking stock on the implementation at the global, European and national level: 4 years after adoption of the 2030 Agenda**

### **Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR): Paving the way for global transformation to sustainable development by 2030**

The 2030Agenda is a political framework towards a safe and just world. In 2016, the HLPF of UN mandated a group of 15 independent scientists to write a report on global sustainable development. In this keynote, the outcome, the GSDR2019, will be presented to the ESDN community.

The first years of the 2030Agenda have shown that only little progress has taken place and even negative trends are seen. The most worrying are the trends of growing inequalities, growing waste problem, proceeding climate change and increasing loss of biodiversity as this hinders the progress of the overall 2030Agenda.

Despite the worrying development, the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 (GSDR) emphasizes that the direction of the development can be changed, through starting immediately to transform societal systems in all countries in the world. The report indicates the levers to be used and calls upon transformation in knowledge production, to be able to use the existing scientific knowledge, as well as generate new knowledge to push the transformations forward all over the world. With 20 recommendations to specific actors, the report calls upon action for the plan.

## Session 2: Transformative rather than incremental changes for sustainable development – What does it mean in terms of economics and governance for SD?

### Meta-governance for Sustainability: The full toolbox in implementing the SDGs

The challenge to achieving the SDGs is all about governance. But what do you do when your governance mix on sustainability transitions doesn't deliver the right results? Several options will be discussed:

- checking if all principles for sustainability governance are taken into account, notably the ones on inclusiveness;
- analyzing whether the current approach is broad enough to tackle very different issues;
- finding out if different governance tools and mechanisms in the current approach undermine each;
- considering whether the balance between different governance styles (top-down rule-based: hierarchical governance; incentives-based: market governance; co-creation based: network governance) is sufficiently contextualized; and
- having a look at all potential governance tools to see which unused ones could be at least tried.

It will be argued that only after such an analysis, it is possible to successfully engage in a process of metagovernance: (re)designing and managing a governance framework based on a situational combination of elements of different governance styles. This may include starting to using tools and mechanisms that are outside of your favorite governance style(s) and beyond the mind-set of your organization. Co-creation by stakeholders may need to be increased, or the other way around, unsustainable behavior be regulated, or both. Metagovernance is not the only answer to governance failure but it is certainly a proven part of the solution.

## Session 3: Key challenges for Europe in reaching the SDGs and 2030 Agenda

### SDG Index 2019 and Key Challenges for Europe

The keynote address by Guillaume Lafortune (Sustainable Development Solutions Network – SDSN) will provide a sneak preview of the forthcoming “2019 Europe Sustainable Development Report” prepared by the SDSN and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) which will come out in November 2019. An overview of the performance of the European Union and its member states on the 17 SDGs will be presented based on 100+ indicators and latest available data. This will highlight the need for EU institutions to accelerate the pace of reforms and mobilize key mechanisms and resources to implement the SDGs and more specifically to respond to the climate and biodiversity crises, reduce income and other forms of inequalities and address negative international spillover effects generated by the EU including through trade.

### Economy of Wellbeing

Economy of wellbeing puts people in the center of policies and underlines that wellbeing of people is a prerequisite for economic growth and social and economic stability. The economy of wellbeing approach aims to ensure inclusion and equal opportunities for all.

How does this concept resonate with Agenda2030 and the SDGs? Does it bring a new perspective to the discussion or cause confusion among policymakers as to which policies to pursue? Three/two sub-themes to discuss in groups are to 1) explore the linkages between the four pillars of the economy of wellbeing and the SDGs, 2) suggest how to use the four pillars in efforts to make the climate change actions more acceptable by people, and 3) brainstorm how to build synergies between the frameworks (can be more than just EoWB and A2030).

### Sustainable Finance, Reporting and Their Role in Achieving the SDGs

In my contribution, I will share with you observations on the topic of sustainable finance and how the EU Action Plan is impacting discussions in Germany, my analysis of the state of non-financial reporting two years after the implementation of the national CSR Directive Implementation Act within the scope of the Sustainability Code, a project facilitated by the RNE for seven years now, and how both policy fields could boost achievement of the SDGs ... if, well, if, we would truly apply them as the guiding star for sustainable finance and business.

As sub-themes for discussion I propose:

1. Open data solutions for ESG as part of the game: which thematic issues are of especially high importance with regards to climate and the environment, society and social cohesion, good (corporate) governance and the long-term economic perspective? What role do standards play? What are the performance benchmarks and the most relevant demands for action with regards to the SDGs?
2. SDG 17: mapping the stakeholder landscape – what are the stakeholders’ various roles with regard to sustainable finance and how can we empower them to contribute in their respective shared, but also differentiated responsibility?
3. Incentives for sustainable finance: how can we motivate companies to disclose comparable, reliable ESG information and investors to integrate such disclosures into their analysis? Which market incentives and elements for an enhancing regulatory framework can be identified?

## Global Responsibility

The Global Responsibility Theme will address the universality of the 2030 Agenda and how - as a global society - we must work collaboratively to achieve it. While some of the targets outlined in the SDGs are truly domestic issues, the majority are systemic challenges that require cooperation, shared knowledge, and common responsibility to achieve. Emissions and biodiversity loss occurring in any country affect overall planetary health. Conflict, corruption, lack of economic opportunities, and extreme weather cause increased migration. Pollution of rivers or water basins in one locality can be devastating to the communities in another who rely on them for their lives and livelihoods.

Specifically this theme will explore three dimensions of Global Responsibility that are crucial to Europe's Implementation of the SDGs. Climate and Security are increasingly linked issues as the planet begins to grapple with the effects of climate change and how to rapidly decarbonize. Europe must consider its responsibility as an industrialized nation in combatting climate change and the very real effects on stability and security in vulnerable and fragile states. Mutual Learning is a new mindset required by the 2030 Agenda, which aims to break down traditional north-south paradigms of development. The Agenda recognizes that developed nations have much to learn from developing and creates the space for new partnerships for sharing this knowledge. Technology Transfer is crucial to preventing an insurmountable digital divide globally, however it must be approached in a way that respects local needs and contexts. This complex balance requires structured policy frameworks and strong relations that consider inherent power dynamics.



## Methodology: How the research was conducted for the ESDN study on the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the national level in Europe

Topics and questions for the ESDN survey questionnaire that the following chapters address were drafted in June and July 2019 and were selected based on concepts revolving around governance for sustainable development. Based on the 10 topics selected and their subsequent questions, information was gathered beforehand and filled out by the researchers to provide support to the National Focal Points. This information came from the ESDN Country Profiles on the ESDN website, a country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), as well as from the study commissioned by the European Parliament: *Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward*, which was published in February 2019. This was done to increase the frequency of responses.

The survey was then sent out to 32 ESDN National Focal Points (NFPs) at the end of August and results were collected during September and the first half of October. Most of the NFPs are civil servants and long-standing members of the ESDN. From the 32 survey questionnaires that were sent out, 26 surveys were returned filled out by ESDN NFPs<sup>1</sup>. For the remaining 6 countries<sup>2</sup>, information was used from public reports and documents listed above.

It should be noted that due to the sometimes-sensitive nature of the questions that were posed to the ESDN NFPs, some questions will not be attributed to specific countries.

Considering the extensive nature of the survey questionnaire and the number of responses, only a few topics can be addressed in this Background Paper. The following chapters correspond to the different topics that were investigated and the sub-chapters refer to the individual questions that were asked within each topic.

While not every topic will be included and discussed in this Background Paper, they will be further elaborated upon in the next ESDN Quarterly Report, which will be published in December 2019. The topics included in the following chapters are:

- Chapter 1: National Level Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs
- Chapter 2: Leadership and Good Leadership Qualities in Effectively Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs
- Chapter 3: Horizontal Policy Integration
- Chapter 4: Vertical Policy Integration
- Chapter 5: Governance Innovations and Shortcomings

The remaining five topics that will be included in the ESDN Quarterly Report in addition to the above-mentioned topics, will be:

- Evaluation and Monitoring
- Participation
- Future Generations
- European Policy Cooperation
- Reality Check on Implementation

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<sup>1</sup> AT, BE, HR, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IS, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, ME, RO, SK, SI, ES, SE, CH, NL, and the UK.

<sup>2</sup> BG, CY, IE, NO, PO, and PT.

## Chapter 1: National Level Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

A critical aspect of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is their implementation at the national level by means of national sustainable development strategies, policies, programs and action plans. This helps in guaranteeing that sustainable development is a government priority and that the SDGs and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is being taken seriously by governments. National sustainable development strategies, policies, programs, and action plans also set the government's priorities, outline objectives, and help to ensure that targets and goals are strived for, including the SDGs.

Therefore, the survey questionnaire that was sent out by the ESDN Office focused on the national level implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Europe. Of the 32 countries for which information was gathered, 26 ESDN NFPs from national governments answered the survey. The information for the remaining 6 countries came from the ESDN website's country profiles, a country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), and the European Parliamentary report *Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward*.

For this topic, the questionnaire addressed the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda along four lines:

- (1) Does the country have a dedicated national sustainable development strategy, action plan, or sector strategy that directly addressed the SDGs?;
- (2) How comprehensive is the strategy, action plan, or sectoral plan in relation to the SDGs (i.e. are all SDGs treated equally?, Are there national priorities? Are only some of the SDGs targeted?, etc.)?;
- (3) How active is the country's Parliament in the country's implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda?; and
- (4) What were the country's crucial achievements since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015?

### National Sustainable Development Strategies or Action Plans for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Regarding the 30 countries for which information regarding this topic could be gathered, **3 countries<sup>3</sup> did not have any government documents that were explicitly linked to the 2030 Agenda or the SDGs.** A further **6 countries<sup>4</sup> also do not have strategic documents, but are in the process of planning action plans, NSDS, government priorities, etc., that have the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in the focus.** One country (Spain), not included in the numbers above, is also in the process of planning a NSDS, but currently has an action plan that is aligned with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda and will be counted in the trends mentioned below. It should also be noted that Greece, counted above within the 5 countries that do not have strategies, but that are planning national priorities or the incorporation of the SDGs into strategic documents, has defined national priorities that are based on the SDGs, but these do not constitute a NSDS. Furthermore, Greece's national priorities may be revised based on the new government's work program.

The 21 remaining countries do have strategic government documents that are aligned with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. In total, **3 trends were observed:**

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<sup>3</sup> BG, LT, and PT.

<sup>4</sup> HR, DK, EE, GR, ME, and SK.

- 1) 13 countries<sup>5</sup> reported having a dedicated NSDS that is directly linked to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in place.
- 2) **5 countries<sup>6</sup> have governmental action plans that address the implementation of the SDGs.**
- 3) 3 countries<sup>7</sup> make use of **sectoral policies, plans and strategies to align government plans with the SDGs.**

The trends show that 90% of the countries surveyed either have a NSDS/strategic document for the purpose of implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, or are currently in the process of establishing such a document. Out of the countries which reported having a strategic document, all of them indicated that this document was directly aligned with the SDGs and 2030 Agenda. The answers to this question show that **most European countries are taking the SDGs very seriously and trying to implement them into their national contexts through the use of NSDSs, action plans or sectoral strategies, or at least are planning to do so.**

## Comprehensiveness of National Sustainable Development Strategies and Action Plans in Addressing the SDGs

For the 22 countries, which listed having strategic documents explicitly linked to the SDGs, a follow-up question was asked regarding the comprehensiveness of such documents. In order to understand the comprehensiveness, NFPs were explicitly asked to state whether their strategies addressed all the SDGs equally or if there were specific national priorities. Two trends could be discerned from the answers to this question:

- 1) **12 of the 21 countries (57%) have strategies, action plans or sectoral plans that address all 17 SDGs.**
- 2) **The remaining 9 countries (43%) have established national priorities and have aligned those national priorities to the SDGs.**

It is interesting to note that there are two distinct trends regarding how to incorporate the SDGs into strategic documents. Some countries base their strategic documents on the SDGs, whereas others identify priorities which are linked to one or more SDGs.

Finland, for example, focuses on 8 priorities, such as a carbon neutral society and a resource wise economy being two of the 8 priorities. These priorities are then linked to the SDGs and can encompass more than 1 SDG. Therefore, there are no values placed on a country's preferred method of alignment with the SDGs, and that even though a country might prioritize its focus that does not mean they are not addressing all the SDGs, but rather doing it in a way that works for them. Further research could be conducted to see whether having nationally defined priorities has an effect on the overall attainment of the SDGs, the ease at which they can be communicated (i.e. is it easier to communicate the SDGs as 17 goals or as nationally defined priorities), etc.

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<sup>5</sup> BE, CZ, FI, FR, DE, HU, IE, IT, LU, ME, RO, SI, and CH.

<sup>6</sup> IS, LV, ES, SE, and NL.

<sup>7</sup> AT, CY, and the UK.

## Active Involvement of National Parliaments in SDG Implementation

Another important aspect in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level is the involvement of national parliaments in the SDG implementation process, as political decision-makers and political will also need to be present in order for the SDGs to be effectively implemented. Therefore, ESDN National Focal Points were asked how their national parliaments are involved with respect to the SDGs and their implementation. 26 National Focal Points answered this question. From the 26 answers, **2 National Focal Points said that their national parliament was not involved in the implementation of the SDGs. 1 National Focal Point said that it was planned to involve parliament in the implementation of the SDGs** and the 2030 Agenda. From the remaining 23 countries, there were varying degrees to which parliaments are involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Some countries fit into more than one trend, so the final number of countries will exceed 23. **5 trends were identified regarding the active involvement of parliaments:**

- 1) **In 3 countries, parliaments were only marginally involved**, where they were oftentimes only asking questions regarding the SDGs or were only consulted for the VNR process. More formal and institutionalized mechanisms do not exist.
- 2) **In 2 countries, the parliament was involved and consulted in the adoption of the NSDS.**
- 3) **In 2 countries, the parliament is involved with the SDGs through discussions on the budget.**
- 4) **In 6 countries, parliament is involved in the implementation of the SDGs through governmental reports** on their implementation and what the government is doing to meet the SDG targets.
- 5) **In 9 countries, the parliament is involved through parliamentary committees, councils, networks and commissions that discuss the SDGs.** These governance mechanisms will be elaborated on in the section on governance.

As a whole, it appears that **national parliaments in Europe are actively involved (receive reports or discuss the SDGs in parliamentary committees) in slightly over 50% of the countries.** As noted in the European Parliament's study, *Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward*, these results and trends may represent an increase in activities by the national parliaments of European countries in comparison to sustainable development before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (p. 86). However, the fact that only slightly more than 50% of countries in Europe have parliaments that are actively dealing with the SDGs in their capacity as parliament leaves room for improvement for parliaments to become more actively involved in the implementation of the SDGs at the national level. As elected officials, parliamentarians are important for setting national priorities and government programs. If parliament is not on board with the SDGs and their implementation, then the political will is also missing, making it more difficult for government to implement the SDGs and for countries to effectively and efficiently reach the targets by 2030.

## Crucial Achievements in Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

The ESDN National Focal Points were also asked, from their perspective and from their experiences as government officials, what their country's specific, noteworthy, and crucial achievements have been so far since the 2030 Agenda was adopted in 2015.

25 National Focal Points answered this question and provided their impressions regarding their country's three, and sometimes even more, main achievements, which helps to depict the direction in which Europe, in general, is moving.

With many National Focal Points listing more than 3 main achievements their country has made so far since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, **9 main trends have been detected:**

- 1) The first major trend that was detected was the **anchoring of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda within the government's programs and the government's coordination mechanisms**. 20 out of 25 countries mentioned this was important in making real progress towards the SDGs, as it provided a beginning for government to start addressing the SDGs and setting up or enhancing the appropriate coordination mechanisms.
- 2) The second trend is the **achievement centered on anchoring the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs within the stakeholder community**. 9 out of 25 National Focal Points mentioned that this was a particularly important achievement, as the SDGs cannot be realized and reached by government alone; it needs the combined efforts of everyone and all stakeholders.
- 3) The third trend, related to the theme of stakeholders, was **awareness raising with respect to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in stakeholder communities**. 8 out of 25 National Focal Points say that their countries efforts in this area are helping to bring the SDGs closer to the ground and all of society, so that everyone can engage with the SDGs.
- 4) A total of 7 out of 25 NFPs also focused on **their country's achievements regarding progress made towards reaching individual SDGs and their related targets**.
- 5) Another important aspect in terms of achievements since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda that were mentioned by 5 out of 25 National Focal Points was that the **2030 Agenda and the SDGs provided the opportunity for countries to evaluate their positions in terms of the SDGs and take stock of their positions**. **Many of these National Focal Points mentioned that their country's VNR was an important step towards SDG implementation**.
- 6) One unique trend that emerged from 4 of the 25 National Focal Points was the **achievement of aligned budgets or finance with the SDGs and making funding and resources available for the SDGs**, or at least embed the SDGs into the budgetary process. This allows governments to more actively track how ministries are allocating their designated budgets to attaining the SDGs. Budgets also have the added benefit that they need to be approved by national parliaments, which helps ensure that parliament is also more aware of the SDGs.
- 7) Another aspect that is important to consider in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, are indicators utilized to measure progress towards reaching the SDGs. 3 out of 25 National Focal Points mentioned that **their work on indicators was an achievement**. Indicators provide an important measuring opportunity that enables a relation to be made between the current state of affairs, such as how a country is presently doing regarding reaching certain SDGs and where a country would like to go, or be at, in the future. Indicators also allow progress to be tracked over time, which is important in keeping on track to reach targets and goals, as well as to inform the policy-making process as time goes on.
- 8) One trend that was identified by 2 out of the 25 National Focal Point responses were that **the SDGs have made it possible and easier to coordinate with the sub-national level**.

- 9) The last trend that was identified was in relation to country ranking in international comparisons that are done on a regular basis. 2 out of the 25 National Focal Points mentioned that **their country's rank in such studies and reports was an achievement, as it often time showed progress from one year to the next.**

As can be seen from the many trends of these 25 countries, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda have made a lot possible. Nearly 80% of the countries surveyed thought it was a huge achievement that the 2030 Agenda provided a means to anchor sustainable development in the government. Not only has it helped governments align targets with respect to the SDGs, but also government cooperation and coordination mechanisms have been improved or developed in many countries, which has enhanced policy integration overall. This, in turn, should help governments find synergies and avoid duplications of effort. The SDGs have also allowed for more enhanced government-stakeholder cooperation and an embedding of the SDGs in stakeholder groups and organizations, as governments increasingly realize that not only is a whole-of-government approach necessary to be able to reach the SDGs and their targets, but also a whole-of-society approach. This is further exemplified by the many outreach and awareness raising campaigns that countries have done among stakeholder groups. Both of these are trends that, while separate and important, are very much linked to one another and reinforce one another. The 2030 Agenda also provided countries with an opportunity to take stock of where they stand in relation to sustainable development and many countries used that opportunity and took part in VNRs and used those results to begin implementation in earnest, such as by developing SDG indicators, etc.

## Chapter 2: Leadership and Good Leadership Qualities in Effectively Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Important in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level is leadership and responsibility, as it sets the stage for should coordinate the entire implementation effort, as well as who is responsible for which areas of implementation. Along those lines, the ESDN survey questionnaire asked 2 questions that were related to leadership with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and a further 2 questions regarding what ESDN National Focal Points, in their role as government civil servants, thought make for good leadership aspects with respect to implementation, as well as what type of political commitments civil servants would need to be better able to implement the SDGs within the government.

The questions asked regarding leadership were:

1. Which ministry and department are responsible for the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs?;
2. Which ministries are involved?;
3. What do you consider good leadership aspects of governments for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?; and
4. What kind of political commitment would you need that would support the government's activities in the implementation process?

### Ministries Responsible for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

An important aspect in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is having a ministry that has been designated as the responsible authority in terms of coordination. All 32 surveyed countries have information as to which ministry is responsible for sustainable development, the overall implementation and coordination of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. From all the answers and information that was gathered, 7 trends have been identified in terms of responsible ministries. It should be noted beforehand that many of the surveyed countries have more than one responsible ministry for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Therefore, the number of answers will exceed the total number of countries. However, these overlaps will be pointed out in the trends below.

- 1) The first trend that can be seen regarding responsible ministries for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are **Ministries of Environment or Ministries of Sustainability and Sustainable Development**. This was the case in **11 of the 32 surveyed countries**<sup>8</sup>.
- 2) The second trend that was found was that **10 out of the 32 countries**<sup>9</sup> put the main responsibility for coordination and implementation at the highest level of government, meaning the **Prime Minister's Office or the Government Office**. As can be seen from the footnotes, Sweden appears in both trend one and trend two, as the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry for the Environment and Climate are both responsible for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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<sup>8</sup> BE, HR, CZ, FR, IE, LT, LU, MT, ME, SE, and CH.

<sup>9</sup> AT, BG, EE, FI, DE, IS, LV, RO, ES, and SE.

- 3) The third trend that was identified was that **Ministries of Foreign Affairs were often responsible for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, where 10 out of the 32 countries<sup>10</sup> conformed to this trend.** However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the sole responsible ministry regarding SDG implementation in only 3 of these 10 countries, namely in Cyprus, Hungary and The Netherlands. The remaining 7 countries have other ministries that are also shouldering the responsibility of implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. **It is overwhelmingly the case that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs are responsible for the external application of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, while another ministry is responsible for the national implementation** of the SDGs, such as the Prime Minister's Office or the Ministry of the Environment, etc.
- 4) The fourth trend that was identified has already been alluded to in the previous trends, as 8 out of the 32 countries<sup>11</sup> have more than one responsible ministry regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. As stated in trend three, almost all of these co-responsibilities come from the division of responsibility between the external representation of the SDGs versus the internal implementation, where 7 of these 8 countries have Ministries of Foreign Affairs as the second co-responsible ministry. The only country that shares responsibilities between ministries that does not include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is Sweden, where, as has already mentioned, it shares responsibility with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the Environment and Climate.
- 5) The fifth trend that was identified was that **2 of the 32 surveyed countries<sup>12</sup> have the Ministry of Finance as the main coordinating ministry responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.** As previously stated, Norway also has co-responsibility with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- 6) The sixth trend that was noticed is that in 2 of the 32 countries<sup>13</sup>, there is no responsible ministry per se, but rather a responsible coordination committee or general secretariat that is responsible for the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.
- 7) The seventh trend that developed was the designation of a responsible ministry that was not a Ministry of Environment or related ministry, nor the Prime Minister's Office. 5 of the 32 countries<sup>14</sup> exhibited this trend. Portugal fits into this trend and the trend of shared responsibility, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assumed overall control together with the Ministry of Planning and Infrastructures. In Slovakia, the responsibility is shared between the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for Investments and Informatisation.

It can be seen from the many different trends that the surveyed European countries have different ways of anchoring the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their respective governments. As the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are a UN-based Agenda, it makes sense that many of the surveyed countries have their Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a responsible ministry for the overall implementation of the SDGs, or at least the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the external representation of a country's progress regarding implementation. At the national level and the level of internal implementation, the responsible ministries are almost evenly split between Ministries of Environment and Offices of the Prime Minister.

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<sup>10</sup> AT, HR, CY, FR, HU, IS, NO, PT, SK, and NL.

<sup>11</sup> AT, HR, FR, IS, NO, PT, SK, and SE.

<sup>12</sup> DK and NO.

<sup>13</sup> GR and IT.

<sup>14</sup> PO, PT, SK, SI, and the UK.



This is an interesting trend to focus on, as in the past it has overwhelmingly been the case that National Sustainable Development Strategies were heavily the responsibility of Ministries for Environment, which can be explained by the perceived notion by some that sustainable development is a very environmental topic. The fact that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are being anchored within Offices of the Prime Minister offers some insight into how important sustainable development is and how the 2030 Agenda has been able to showcase this importance and act as a call to governments to do more to address sustainable development and directly coordinate implementation.

Another important trend to mention is the involvement of the Ministry of Finance as the main coordinating ministry, as aligning budgets along the SDGs helps ensure the government is addressing the SDGs in ministry budgets and then reporting to parliaments on how ministry budgets were spent and how much they have achieved with respect to the SDGs. While the Ministry of Finance is the coordinating ministry in only two countries, it should be noted that more countries have budgets that are aligned with the SDGs, such as Iceland and Finland. This suggests that some countries are seeing the value in aligning their budgets with the SDGs and it is worthwhile to monitor this trend to see if more countries will follow, as budgeting for the SDGs is mentioned often as being an important aspect for not only implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level, but also in effectively being able to reach the SDG targets by 2030. To read more about the topic of budgeting for the SDGs, consult the ESDN Quarterly Report [\*Budgeting for the SDGs in Europe: Experiences, Challenges, and Needs\*](#).

## Ministries Involved in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Another important aspect in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is the involvement of government ministries, as the SDGs are a multi-sectoral and cross-cutting set of goals and targets that often require a whole-of-government approach for their successful implementation. This question differs from the previous questions, as it does not denote overall responsibility for the coordination and implementation of the SDGs, but rather denotes sectoral responsibilities for implementation, where certain line ministries may be responsible for certain SDGs that correspond to their competencies. There were 2 main trends that could be identified with respect to how countries were involving ministries other than the ministry, or ministries in some cases, responsible for overall coordination.

- 1) The first trend that was discerned was the fact that the vast majority of the surveyed countries, 25 countries<sup>15</sup> out of 32, involve all government ministries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. One interesting sub-trend emerged from these 25 countries, in which 2 countries, the Czech Republic and Latvia, stated that all ministries except the Ministry of Defense were involved in the implementation of the SDGs.
- 2) The second trend accounts for the remaining 7 countries<sup>16</sup> of the 32 surveyed. Here, only a selected number of ministries were involved with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

It can be seen from these two trends that a high majority of the surveyed countries have a whole-of-government approach when it comes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and try to involve all government ministries. This high percentage reinforces the integrated nature of the SDGs, as every ministry seems to have a specific role to play in helping the country realize and meet the SDG targets. While the countries in the second trend may not involve all ministries, that should not suggest that their methods and reasoning for doing so make them any less effective at addressing, implanting

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<sup>15</sup> AT, BG, CZ, EE, FI, FR, DE, GR, IS, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, ME, NO, PT, RO, SI, ES, SE, CH, NL, and UK.

<sup>16</sup> BE, HR, CY, DK, HU, PO, and SK.

and reaching the SDGs. The survey questionnaire did not go into the specific country contexts regarding the reasoning for including all ministries versus relevant ministries.

## Good Leadership Aspects of Governments for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

ESDN National Focal Points were asked for their opinions on what they believed were good leadership qualities for governments to possess, or at least strive towards, when it came to implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In the survey questionnaires that were returned, representing 23 countries, 8 trends were identified regarding good leadership aspects that would be important for governments.

- 1) The first trend that was identified throughout the survey responses was in regards to **policy-coherence for sustainable development** as being an important aspect of good leadership. **13 of the 23 countries thought this aspect was important**, as incorporating the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into strategy documents in a coherent manner, taking into account vertical and horizontal policy integration (integration of the SDGs in different governance levels from the supranational to the local, as well as horizontal policy integration between ministries), ensures that duplication efforts are avoided and that one enacted policy does not negatively affect another policy area.
- 2) The second trend that became apparent was the need for governments to attribute a particularly high degree of **political attention and willpower** towards the SDGs and their effective implementation and embedment within the government. 9 out of the 23 countries thought this was a very important aspect of good leadership, as the higher the SDGs are anchored in the government, the higher the degree of importance the SDGs are afforded by all governmental bodies. For example, it makes a difference if the Prime Minister is claiming responsibility for the SDGs as opposed to only one single ministry.
- 3) Another strong trend, which received responses from 8 out of the 23 countries, was in regards to communication and awareness-raising with respect to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by governments. Good leadership, therefore, seeks to bring others onboard and foster dialogues and openness.
- 4) The fourth trend that was uncovered was that good leadership should seek to foster more stakeholder collaboration and participation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. 7 out of the 23 countries mentioned this as a key aspect of good leadership.
- 5) The fifth trend that was mentioned in the survey as being an important aspect of good leadership was in relation to monitoring and assessing the SDGs and the progress the government is making towards reaching them. 6 out of the 23 countries felt that this was important.
- 6) Another important aspect that signifies good leadership is budgeting for the SDGs. 3 countries out of the 23 mentioned this aspect as important, as the budget and its streamlining along the SDGs sets a clear task for government regarding implementation and the use of government resources to achieve the SDGs.
- 7) The seventh trend, which 3 out of the 23 countries mentioned as being an important aspect for good leadership, was the fulfillment of the SDGs in the mid- to long-term scheme of things, meaning past election cycles.

- 8) The last trend that was detected was in regard to government taking concrete actions regarding the SDGs that moves beyond merely talking about the SDGs to actually doing something. 2 out of the 23 countries mentioned that this aspect would be important for good leadership.

Adding onto the Chapter 1 subsection on the active involvement of national parliaments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, it is not surprising that high-level political will and attention was the aspect that was mentioned as second highest, which shows that in some countries, there is a perception that elected officials could do more to address the SDGs and set government programs, so that they are more in-line with the SDGs. Without the political willpower to definitively steer the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and define it as a priority of the government, then attention will not be kept up and implementation of the SDGs will not be prioritized. It must also be said that not only does political will affect the government's ability to implement the SDGs, but also sends signals to other societal stakeholders as to the importance of the topic at hand; government is not the only institution that can have an impact on the SDGs, as businesses, investment institutions, and other organizations also greatly contribute to the SDGs and they sometimes also need strong signals from government on how they, too, can and should address the SDGs.

This also fits into the trend on awareness-raising, as if there is a high political priority given to the SDGs, then the SDGs tend to stay in the focus more often and more prominently. This then has a ripple effect on the rest of society as it becomes normalized to see the SDGs in the political debate and discussion and for the reasons stated above regarding stakeholder participation in reaching the SDGs. If top politicians are campaigning for the SDGs, then everyone takes notice and this sends stronger signals of how important the SDGs are. This can also make it easier for stakeholders to take part and become involved, especially if those with the political will also see the benefit in involving all aspects of society in the SDG debate. As many NFPs stated, more stakeholder involvement would be needed and to get them involved, they need to be aware of the SDGs and how they can best contribute and become active.

However, the top-mentioned aspect that showcases good leadership regarding implementation of the SDGs is overall policy coherence in government programs and policies, which drives home the concept of the SDGs being all-encompassing and interrelated. Policy gains in one area now need to be measured against policy setbacks or regression in other areas. For example, providing tax incentives or subsidies that promote one good at the expense of another, such as tax incentives for producing energy from fossil fuels, which comes at the expense of the environment and rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. According to the National Focal Points, good leadership would seek to take these trade-offs into account when making decisions and strive to make decisions regarding policy that keep the trade-offs as miniscule as possible, or make up for them in other areas. This also helps to ensure that no one branch of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental - is valued more than the others.

## Political Commitment Needed to Support the Government's Activities in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

As political commitment and political will are often prerequisites for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the ESDN Office asked National Focal Points, as members of government ministries, what type of commitment they would need to better be able to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. 21 countries filled out this question on the questionnaire. The following trends emerged:

- 1) The first trend, regarding the type of political commitment that the government would need to support its Agenda 2030 and SDG implementation activities, is **high-level political**

**commitment at the national level.** 12 out of the 21 surveyed countries felt that having the SDGs cared for by those with the most power in government would help them better be able to implement the SDGs, as it shows the government that the SDGs are being seriously considered.

- 2) The second trend goes along with the first trend, but instead of national high-level political commitment to implementing the SDGs, 7 out of the 21 countries mentioned that **international and EU level political will** and commitment to implementing the SDGs would also be needed, as this further strengthens their ability to implement the SDGs, such as through a comprehensive EU strategy that is aligned with the SDGs.
- 3) Another trend regarding political commitment and how it can help the government is by including stakeholders more in dialogues and the implementation process as a whole-of-society approach to the SDGs. 4 out of 21 countries thought stakeholders and their more active involvement would also help them to implement the SDGs.
- 4) The fourth trend that emerged was in regards to national parliaments being involved and showing their political will to implement the SDGs. 3 out of the 21 countries mentioned the parliament as being important for the government to implement the SDGs.
- 5) The last trend that was observed was in regard to finance and budgeting along the SDGs, where 3 countries mentioned this support mechanism, since budgets that are aligned with the SDGs help government ministries much more with their own implementation of the SDGs than budgets that are not aligned with the SDGs.

Many of the National Focal Points, on answering the questions regarding the political commitment they would need to better be able to implement the SDGs, stated that having high political commitment in the first place would be a step in the right direction. This reinforces what other questions and trends have also turned up: within Europe, there is a general lack or not nearly enough political willpower that is being invested towards the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. This goes for not only the national level, but also the EU and global level. It seems as if political willpower regarding the SDGs is a common theme that runs through the SDGs. Without it, the SDGs seem to not be able to receive the attention and importance they need in order to be achieved by 2030.

However, some countries and National Focal Points responded that aligning the budgets to the SDGs would be particularly helpful in allowing them to implement the SDGs, as budgets are the monetary terms of a government's program put into action. Some countries have started doing this, with some countries even putting the responsibility for the national implementation of the SDGs within their Ministry of Finance. Some countries have also aligned their budgets to the SDGs, which helps in signaling what governments should be focusing on, effectively steering ministries. This then also helps to ensure that parliaments then see how government has spent the budget, including how they are reaching the SDGs, each year, as parliament needs to do the budgetary review.

## Chapter 3: Horizontal Policy Integration

“While this is an important indicator of the SDGs being a political priority, this level of leadership needs to be supported by sufficient coordination mechanism at the working level in the Ministries. In every case of central leadership such a coordination mechanism exists to facilitate this. This demonstrates significant steps towards policy coherence and integration in achieving the SDGs across more than half of EU Member States. 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.”<sup>17</sup>

SDG target 17.14 specifically target policy coherence for sustainable development. The task of promoting policy coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is often addressed through three dimensions, namely the domestic, the international and the temporal. Policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) domestically entails national and sub-national policies being complementary and reinforcing rather than conflicting and hindering. On the international level, policy coherence also entails avoiding spill-over effects and negative consequences (of policies) across national borders. Regarding the final dimension, policies should also be coherent with the need of future generations, thereby enabling long-term sustainable development.<sup>18</sup> The indicator for the above-mentioned target (17.14.1) simply specifies that policy coherence can be indicated by the “number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development”.<sup>19</sup> For this ESDN Background Paper, the topic has been addressed through two integral aspects of achieving policy coherence, namely horizontal- and vertical policy integration.

Horizontal policy integration refers to institutional interactions across different policy sectors and streams on a specific level of government. Mechanisms of horizontal policy integration often concern cross-departmental or inter-ministerial exchange in order to achieve sectoral policy coherence and address potential policy trade-offs.

This chapter asked the ESDN National Focal Points the following questions:

- (1) What kind of institutionalized mechanisms are in place for horizontal policy integration (between ministries) regarding the implementation of the SDGs?; and
- (2) What is the most important achievement of horizontal policy integration in your country and what is the greatest challenge that still needs to be solved?

These two questions were either answered by National Focal Points, or utilizing existing public reports when no answer was given. Due to some challenges (listed in question 2) marked as containing potentially sensitive information the individual country information will not be linked to the answers of this question.

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<sup>17</sup> Ingeborg Niestroy et al., *Europe's Approach to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Good Practices and the Way Forward.*, 2019,

[http://publications.europa.eu/publication/manifestation\\_identifier/PUB\\_QA0219098ENN](http://publications.europa.eu/publication/manifestation_identifier/PUB_QA0219098ENN).

<sup>18</sup> Fishman, A., 2019, IISD Knowledge Hub, SDG Knowledge Weekly: Policy Coherence in the EU and Beyond.

<https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/policy-briefs/sdg-knowledge-weekly-policy-coherence-in-the-eu-and-beyond/>

<sup>19</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goal: 17, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg17>

## Institutionalized Horizontal Policy Integration Mechanisms in Place for the Implementation of the SDGs

For this question, answers from 31 countries<sup>20</sup> were analyzed (5 out of which data was taken from public reports rather than survey answers). Question 1, at a glance already, shows some clear trends of the use of institutionalized mechanisms in the surveyed countries. Similarly, to the trends highlighted in the study *Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practice and the way forward*<sup>21</sup>, the answers show that close to all countries surveyed had a type of mechanism for horizontal policy integration in place, often in the form of a working group, a committee or a council specifically tasked with implementing the 2030 Agenda and fostering policy coherence. Delving further into the answers, this sub-chapter highlights the major commonalities and differences of the answers, and includes examples, when appropriate.

Out of the 32 surveyed countries, 27 countries (84%) reported that they had one or more active mechanisms for horizontal policy integration in place. Out of the 4 countries that reported no active mechanisms, two countries indicated that this was not set up, but foreseen, and two countries described the activities related to the 2030 Agenda implementation as delegated to respective ministries. One of the latter responses also mentioned that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was steered by a specific committee, but that the mandate for said committee had been discontinued.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the characteristics of the 27 countries that reported to have one or more active mechanisms for horizontal policy integration in place. Out of these 27 countries:

- 1) All countries indicated that the mechanisms described were developed and **active for the sole purpose of the 2030 Agenda**.
- 2) 10 countries<sup>22</sup> reported having **more than one mechanism** for horizontal policy integration in place. The totaling amount of mechanisms reported in the 27 surveyed countries was 38. Out

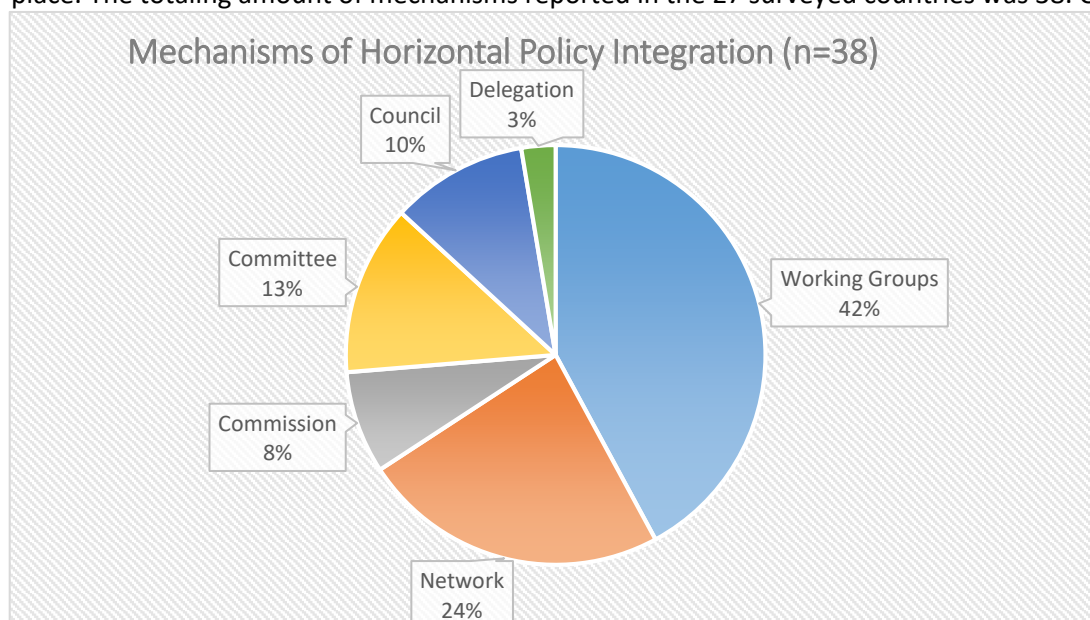


Figure 1 Mechanisms of Horizontal Policy Integration

<sup>20</sup> AT, BE, HR, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IS, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, ME, NO, PL, PT, RO,

<sup>21</sup> Niestroy et al., *Europe's Approach to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals*.

<sup>22</sup> AT, FI, FR, DE, HU, IE, LT, LU, PT, SI

- 3) of these 38 mechanisms, 16 were working groups, 9 were networks, 5 were committees, 4 were councils, 3 were commissions, and 1 mechanism was described as a delegation.
- 4) 9 countries<sup>23</sup> (33%) answered that their mechanisms also involved actors other than ministries, e.g. civil society representatives, youth organizations and non-governmental organizations.
- 5) 24 countries<sup>24</sup> (88%) reported that their mechanism(s) involved **all ministries**, out of these, 8 countries<sup>25</sup> described how their mechanism(s) contained a set-up that involved a 'ministerial focal point' system. The ministerial focal point system was prevalent in the countries with reported network mechanisms, but also in some instances in working groups and councils. The countries that outlined a system of ministerial focal points also described a division of responsibility regarding the 2030 Agenda, where respective ministries were responsible for SDGs relevant to their area of expertise.
- 6) 5 countries<sup>26</sup> out of the 27 surveyed also indicated in their answers that there was a division in the mechanisms regarding horizontal integration of SDGs relevant for **national implementation contra international implementation** (primarily in relation to international development cooperation). In some instances, this related to a division of responsibility between domestic and international implementation (e.g. Sweden), in some cases this division of responsibility was represented within the same mechanism for horizontal policy integration (e.g. Czech Republic), and lastly, one case reported having two horizontal mechanisms, one internal and one for development cooperation (Portugal).
- 7) 25 countries<sup>27</sup> stated a **specific purpose of the active mechanisms**. 17 out of the responses indicated that the mechanisms were tasked with implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 3 answers listed coordination, 2 answers listed monitoring, 2 answers listed exchange and promotion of SD, and 1 answer listed preparation of the VNR as the primary task of the mechanism.

The survey responses highlight a few interesting trends regarding horizontal policy integration. First of all, the importance attributed to having mechanisms of inter-ministerial and inter-departmental coordination can be seen from the large number of countries that reported having active mechanisms (27 out of 32). Moreover, close to a third of the countries which reported having active mechanisms also stated having more than one. Secondly, the most prevalent mechanisms of collaboration were stated to be working groups or a network system of integration (containing ministerial focal points). Thirdly, addressing the second dimension of policy coherence, a number of countries also highlighted the division between a national and an international agenda regarding policy integration, often stating involvement of international development cooperation authorities to ensure coherence between the 2030 agenda and international policies. Finally, the answers indicated that the primary task of the mechanisms concerned implementation, with only a few answers reporting mechanisms to be primarily tasked with coordination, monitoring, promotion and preparation of the VNR.

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<sup>23</sup> AT, FR, DE, HU, IS, LV, LT, PL, SK

<sup>24</sup> AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IS, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, CH, NL, UK

<sup>25</sup> CZ, FI, DE, GR, MT, PT, SI, NL

<sup>26</sup> CZ, FR, HU, PT, UK

<sup>27</sup> AT, BE, HR, CY, CZ, FI, FR, DE, GR, IS, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NO, PO, PT, RO, SK, SI, CH, NL, UK



## Important Achievements and Challenges of Horizontal Policy Integration that Need to be Solved

Going beyond listing the existing practices of horizontal policy integration, question 2 asked respondents to highlight what they deemed to be both achievements and challenges of horizontal policy integration in their country. As this question was marked as potentially containing sensitive (and subjective) components, the countries are not linked to individual answers.

18 NFPs answered the question ‘what is the most **important achievement** of horizontal policy integration in your country?’. The responses indicated three major trends regarding achievements. Out of the 18 answers:

- 1) Over a third of the answers (38%) listed **commitment and awareness of the importance of horizontal policy integration** as the most important achievement. The achievements listed the importance of approving a strategy, government committed to processes of horizontal policy integration, monitoring the progress and outspoken support for integration.
- 2) Similarly, more than a third of the answers (38%) mentioned that the greatest achievement thus far was **setting up mechanisms for horizontal policy integration**, be it networks of focal points, competence centers or working groups. Two out of these answers also highlighted that a success factor of the mechanism was the increased participation of non-governmental actors.
- 3) Over a fifth of the answers (22%) mentioned that the greatest achievement thus far, was the **increased alignment of national policies with the SDGs**. Half of these answers also indicated that achievements included a strengthened ownership of the goals. Two answers also described how aligning the budget with the SDGs provided cross-cutting coherence.

18 answers outlined **challenges** related to horizontal policy integration, these answers brought forward 4 distinct and overlapping trends. Out of these 18 answers:

- 1) A strong majority (over 60%) of the answers mentioned that **achieving coherence between compartmentalized policy sectors, aligning conflicting policy goals and managing potential trade-offs was the primary challenge faced**. Over a fourth of answers that mentioned the challenge of aligning conflicting policy goals and aligning policy objectives to the SDGs also stated ‘aligning national budget’ to implementing the SDGs and 2030 Agenda as a challenge that needed addressing. Comments related to this specific challenge often outlined how ‘operationalizing’ a holistic approach (such as implementing the 2030 Agenda) is particularly challenging due to policy silos. As such, challenges were mentioned to be two-fold, on the one hand achieving coherence between SDGs and prevalent policy streams, but on the other hand also achieving coherence between particular policy streams. Hence, conflicting goals and lack of overlaps between strategies and plans not adopting a holistic approach was outlined as commonly faced challenge.
- 2) Over a fifth of the answers (23%) mentioned **implementation as one of the primary challenges**. Aspects related to implementation highlighted as challenges were e.g. obtaining commitment from local governments and anchoring implementation with parliament. Further important aspects regarding implementation that were listed, were the importance of creating a shared ownership of SDGs and also ensuring commitment in electoral times.



- 3) A sixth of the answers (17%), primarily answers that mentioned the achievement of outlining the importance of horizontal policy integration, answered that the **actual “set-up” of the mechanisms** posed a particular challenge. The institutional restructuring and actual development of the mechanisms were listed as important aspects to consider.

Interestingly, both the answers addressing achievements and those addressing challenges showed clear trends. The answers also indicate that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda may still be in early phases, ergo achievements indicated ‘a work in progress’ and early successes, such as adopting a strategy, increasing awareness and commitment, and setting up mechanisms for horizontal integration. Similarly, the main challenge mentioned was adopting a holistic approach in compartmentalized governance structures. Addressing this challenge meant dealing with conflicting policy goals and trade-offs, and few answers suggested the importance of aligning the budget with the SDG as this often had cross-sectoral impacts.

## Chapter 4: Vertical Policy Integration

Vertical policy integration, unlike horizontal policy integration, takes place between different levels of government, e.g. from national level to regional and local levels of government. Implementing the 2030 Agenda requires not only national commitment and alignment between policy sectors, but also involvement and ownership from local authorities, as policy implementation more often than not takes place on more local levels of government. The following chapter addressed two primary questions:

- (1) What mechanisms are in place to foster vertical policy integration?; and
- (2) What are the major success factors and challenges of these mechanisms?

### Mechanisms in Place to Foster Vertical Policy Integration

For this question, answers were compiled from 27 countries, 24 answers were submitted by focal points, whereas 3 answers were taken from public reports. Out of the 27 surveyed countries, 11 answers stated that no active vertical policy integration mechanism was in place at the time of the survey. However, 4 of these answers stated that a mechanism for vertical policy integration of the 2030 Agenda was planned, but not yet active. Five countries indicating that there was no active vertical integration mechanism stated that the national framework steered local implementation, in one instance, this included local governments adopting their own SD strategies.

The remainder of this sub-chapter will focus on the characteristics of vertical policy integration in the 16 countries which described having active mechanisms. Out of these 16 countries:

- 1) 11 countries<sup>28</sup> reported having mechanisms for vertical policy integration that were **specifically developed for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**. 8 of these countries reported that the mechanism was linked to mechanisms of horizontal policy integration as discussed in the previous chapter, e.g. established SDG councils, committees and working groups. Out of the 11 answers, the most prevalent structure of the mechanism was listed as ‘working groups’ (6 answers), followed by commissions and councils. One answer listed that vertical policy integration was fostered through events and conferences.
- 2) The remaining 5 countries<sup>29</sup> not listed above indicated that the mechanisms in place were not developed for the sole purpose of implementing the 2030 Agenda but were **existing mechanisms also used for vertical integration of the SDGs**. The roles of these mechanisms ranged from consultative (2 answers) to cooperation and implementation, in one case this also concerned ‘implementation as delegated’ from a national level.

To summarize, mechanisms of vertical policy integration were not as prevalent as mechanisms of horizontal policy integration in the surveyed countries. In the instances where answers did not describe an active mechanism this was often due to mechanisms either being planned or that implementation was directly delegated to local governments. On the one hand, the planned mechanisms indicate that the commitment to ensure vertical integration is there but that implementation of such mechanisms may still be in an early phase. On the other hand, delegating responsibility for implementing national strategies may be linked to more centralized regimes where strategies are implemented locally in a ‘top-down manner’. Moreover, out of the countries which indicated that the mechanism was set-up for implementing the 2030 Agenda these mechanisms were often linked to established committees, councils and working groups (as described in chapter 3). The primary mechanism mentioned regarding

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<sup>28</sup> AT, CZ, EE, FI, FR, DE, HU, IS, IT, PL, ES

<sup>29</sup> BE, DE, MT, NO, NL

vertical integration of SDGs were working groups. The role of the working groups varied in the answers, from designing strategies to be consultative.

## Major Success Factors and Challenges of Vertical Policy Integration Mechanisms

Following the practices of Vertical Policy Integration outlined in question 1, question 2 asked the respondents to describe major achievements and challenges of vertical policy integration in their countries. By request from national focal points, no individual countries will be linked to specific answers.

15 national focal points addressed the most prominent **success factors** of vertical policy integration in their respective countries. The answers to this question followed three major trends:

- 1) Two-fifths (40%) of the answers stated that the major success following vertical policy integration in their country was the **increased local commitment to the SDGs** and the 2030 Agenda implementation. These answers mentioned the strengthened local ownership of the SDGs and in some instances also described how local actors, municipalities and regions had instigated their own initiatives for collaboration. The answers highlighted how the efforts by local actors added value to national targets and goals, as well as how regions could learn from each other in terms exchanging best practices.
- 2) One-third (33%) of the answers mentioned that the mechanisms in place **had fostered collaboration and cooperation**. Successes listed under this trend were the increased participation of local actors and stakeholders, inclusion and continuity of meetings as well as jointly coordinated activities and collaboration on e.g. Voluntary National Reviews.
- 3) The remaining answers, more than a fourth (27%) answered that the **development and active role of the mechanism was a success in itself**. Half of these answers addressed that the mechanisms were active and had led to regular meetings or had already prepared strategic documents, whereas the remaining answers mentioned the creation of a mechanism or that the first meeting had taken place.

9 answers addressed **challenges** related to vertical policy integration in their countries. Given the somewhat low response rate to this question, the trends were not as easily discerned as in the previous answers. There were, however, similarities in the answers provided:

- 1) A third of the answers (33%) stated that the primary challenge was the **absence of vertical integration and mechanisms fostering cooperation and coherence**. This was attributed to the lack of mechanisms, but also the division of responsibility between national and local levels and the need for stronger support from national ministries in supporting local governments with implementation activities. One answer also highlighted that so far, primarily horizontal integration was addressed and similar efforts would be needed for vertical integration.
- 2) Over a fifth of the answers (22%) stated that the biggest challenge was **addressing the co-responsibility between stakeholders** to achieve the SDGs, and that a major task was defining common goals between national and local levels.
- 3) Two answers (22%) stated that the primary challenges concerned the current political system and 'set-up'. On the one hand, this concerned 'breaking down' the prevalent silo-approach to foster collaboration. On the other hand, a challenge was deemed to be the inherent political

competition present in the system as this was directly antagonistic to the calls for cooperation stipulated by the SDG and the 2030 Agenda.

- 4) The two remaining answers (22%) discussed how a challenge was fostering learning between local actors (in the absence of mechanisms facilitating such learning), and how progress of vertical integration and local efforts could be effectively monitored.

As was seen from the results of question 1, mechanisms of vertical policy integration were not as prevalent as their horizontal counterparts. This can be an indication of vertical efforts still being in a starting phase, or perhaps that the differing political systems and mandates adds to the complexity of vertical integration. As outlined by the challenges listed, development of a mechanism in the absence of channels for vertical integration was the most mentioned challenge listed by respondents. Where such endeavors were in place, the trends regarding achievements spoke a clear language, outlining increased local ownership, collaboration and increased participation. An interesting challenge that was mentioned was the apparent 'clash' between political systems of competition and 'silo-thinking' with the holistic approach of collaboration and cooperation embedded in the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Hence, overcoming such a divide warrants attention and a strategic approach, to which strategies and mechanisms for horizontal and vertical policy integration can be important tools.

## Chapter 5: Governance Innovations and Shortcomings

The following topic asked focal points to specify governance highlights and shortcomings on a national and international level. Primarily, the answers addressed national level highlights and shortcomings, but a few also addressed international challenges and provided recommendations for overcoming such challenges. As this question was highlighted by NFPs as potentially containing sensitive information, no individual countries will be linked to any of the responses. Addressing this topic, NFPs were asked the following question:

- 1) What were the **major governance innovations/highlights** on your country or overall (UN and European) since the SDGs? What do you think the **major shortcomings** of SD Governance are?

The question contains elements of both innovations and shortcomings, as well as an added layer specifying what level of society this relates to (national or international). In order to show trends of the responses the analysis will be divided into two – one addressing innovations and highlights, and one addressing shortcomings.

20 NFPs gave answers related to **innovations and highlights**. Out of these 20 answers:

- 1) Similarly to the trends in the chapter on Horizontal Policy Integration, all 20 answers stated that their current national integration mechanism in place was a major highlight. There were a few trends that emerged related to the effect of such mechanisms, namely:
  - a. A fifth of the answers (20%) stated that major highlights of the mechanisms in place were **increased ownership and community engagement**.
  - b. More than a seventh of the answers (15%) stated that the mechanism and national efforts of policy integration has led to **a new focus on policy coherence and a needed reform/update of current political systems**.
  - c. The remainder of the answers **outlined specific characteristics of governance approaches, primarily horizontal integration efforts** as major highlights, e.g. adopting a mainstreaming approach to implementing the SDGs, establishing national focal point networks, setting up inter-ministerial working groups and devising strategies and coordination tools for the SDGs. For more information on the various mechanisms please consult chapter 3 and 4 on horizontal and vertical policy integration.
- 2) A fifth of the answers (20%) mentioned **international highlights** in addition to national ones. The international highlights were considered to be the strengthened evidence-informed approach by the UN, the High Level Political Forum, the Global Hub for Governance (OECD-UNDP initiative), the process of Voluntary National Reviews, and the EU sustainable finance initiative and reflection paper towards sustainable Europe. Optimism towards an expected strategy from the EU on implementing the SDGs was also mentioned.

10 NFPs mentioned particular shortcomings of SD Governance in their answers. Out of these answers:

- 1) Half of the answers concerned only national shortcomings. These answers indicated that the major shortcomings regarded establishing **ownership of implementation, aligning state budget** (lack of capacity), challenge to achieve a **holistic view and common mindset** between actors with differing interests. Another interesting shortcoming which surfaced (2 answers) addressed achieving lower levels of natural resource use and GHG emissions whilst not impacting lower income households negatively.

- 2) Close to a third (30%) of the answers addressed both national and international shortcomings. The national shortcomings outlined were similar to those listed above, namely **lack of financing and aligning budget** for SDGs, clash between the need for growth (GDP) and objectives to reduce resource consumption. One answer also addressed the need for both a national, regional and global inter-institutional system led by SDG coordinators. The international shortcomings addressed in these answers further called for alignment between EU policies and the SDGs as this was seen as something lacking.
- 3) A fifth of the answers (20%) addressed only international shortcomings. These answers called for a **strengthened role of the HLPF** to establish learning and a common vision, as well as the need for **internationally comparable data and indicators** for Sustainable Development (especially environmental).

To summarize, the topic of governance highlights and shortcomings displays similarities to the answers regarding horizontal policy integration. In so far as the answers to question 9 seem to address the establishment of a mechanism for horizontal integration as a key highlight of national governance efforts. Novel information arose on the topic of international highlights (and shortcomings). Here, the answers expressed the importance of international processes, such as the HLPF and VNRs. Joint initiatives were further highlighted and suggestions to address shortcomings often involved strengthening the role of these initiatives. Similarly to challenges addressed in the chapters on horizontal and vertical integration, shortcomings of national level governance were aligning budgets and increasing 'ownership'. Interestingly, a few answers addressed a more abstract level of lowering resource use and emissions in a way to not impact low-income households negatively, and further how the "growth paradigm" seemed to clash with the holistic approach advocated by the SDGs.

