



The Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at the National Level in Europe – Taking stock of governance mechanisms

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**ESDN
Quarterly Report
54**

December 2019

This report is published as a work of the ESDN Office. The opinions expressed do not reflect the official views of ESDN Steering Group countries.

Please cite this publication as:

Gottenhuber, S. & Mulholland. E. "The Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at the National Level in Europe – Taking stock of governance mechanisms", ESDN Quarterly Report 54, December 2019, ESDN Office, Vienna.

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Introduction

This European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) Quarterly Report (QR) seeks to provide an overview on the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level in Europe. In order to provide this overview, the ESDN Office sent out a survey to ESDN National Focal Points in over 30 European countries, asking them questions relating to the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their countries. ESDN National Focal Points (NFPs) are government ministry officials, who are working on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Questions and sub-questions were centered along the major governance aspects of sustainable development. These topics correspond to the different chapters of this QR. It should be noted that some of the sub-questions asked NFPs to provide their opinions and viewpoints regarding the topic. In these instances, answers that were given will not be linked to a specific country.

- National Level Implementation;
- Leadership;
- Horizontal Policy Integration;
- Vertical Policy Integration;
- Governance Innovations and Shortcomings;
- European and International Policy Cooperation;
- Evaluation and Monitoring;
- Participation; and
- Future Generations.

The methodology section discusses how the research and information for the QR was conducted, gathered, and analyzed.

Chapter 1 looks at the national level implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Europe. Sub-topics included: 1) Whether countries had National Sustainable Development Strategies that address the SDGs; 2) How comprehensive these strategies are in relation to the SDGs; 3) How active the country's parliament is in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and 4) The country's crucial achievements since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Chapter 2 looks at Leadership and 'good leadership' qualities in effectively implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The sub-topics that were addressed in this section include: 1) Ministry responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs; 2) Other ministries involved in implementation; 3) 'Good leadership' aspects of governments for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and 4) The kind of political commitment that is needed to support government officials in their implementation activities.

Chapter 3 looks at horizontal policy integration. The two sub-topics that are addressed in relation to horizontal policy integration are: 1) The kind of institutionalized mechanisms that are in place for implementing the SDGs; and 2) The important achievements and challenges of horizontal policy integration within the different countries.

Chapter 4 addresses vertical policy integration. Two sub-topics were looked at with respect to vertical policy integration: 1) The mechanisms in place that foster vertical policy integration; and 2) The major success factors and challenges of these mechanisms.

Chapter 5 looks into governance innovations and shortcomings in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Chapter 6 looks at European and international policy cooperation. The two sub-topics that were looked into are: 1) The countries' experiences in discussing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs with the European Parliament, the European Commission and other European Union Member States; and 2) The countries' experiences with discussing Agenda 2030 implementation with global policy actors, such as the OECD and the UN.

Chapter 7 delves into evaluation and monitoring. The two sub-topics that were looked into are: 1) The types of mechanisms that are in place to evaluate and monitor the SDGs, such as indicators, checks and audits, peer reviews, and external evaluations; and 2) The major success factors and challenges in evaluation and monitoring of the SDGs.

Chapter 8 looks into participation. Here, three sub-topics were addressed, which looked into: 1) the mechanisms in place for integrating stakeholders into the 2030 Agenda implementation process; 2) the major success factors and challenges; and 3) the roles that parliament, CSOs/NGOs, and academia have in implementation.

Chapter 9 examines the issue of 'future generations', in which two sub-topics were looked into: 1) how a country deals with the 'future generations' aspect of sustainable development; and 2) what specific activities for youth would be important in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The conclusions section of this report brings together the different trends from across the different survey questions and serves as the concise stock-taking of the current situation in Europe regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Methodology

How the Research was Conducted

The topics and survey questions on which this QR is based were drafted in June and July 2019. The questions and themes are based on concepts of *governance for sustainable development* and previous research conducted by the ESDN Office in, for example, Quarterly Reports and Country Profiles. Based on the 9 topics selected and their subsequent questions, desk research of country Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), ESDN Country Profiles 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*¹ was conducted to provide an information baseline for the survey.

The questionnaire, which can be found the Annex of this report, was then sent out to the ESDN National Focal Points (NFPs). The NFPs are civil servants from national government ministries with the primary responsibility of implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their respective countries. These NFPs are, in all cases but one, active within the ESDN Network, and all of them have longstanding experience of sustainability policy in their national context.

The questionnaire was sent out via e-mail to 32 NFPs in August 2019, and responses were collected during September and the first half of October 2019. From the 32 survey questionnaires that were sent out, 27 surveys were answered by ESDN NFPs². For the remaining 5 countries³, information was used from public reports and the documents listed above.

The surveys returned were extensive and provided a comprehensive insight into national 2030 Agenda implementation. The collected results were gathered and separated on a country basis, the themes and sub-questions were further disaggregated to allow for the analysis of individual answers. Disaggregating the answers enabled a comparative analysis of the 32 countries surveyed. Where answers were not provided by the NFPs, additional information was used from current information available in public reports and VNRs.

The rigorous comparative analysis allowed for a distinction of clusters and trends in the answers provided. From these trends, patterns emerged and conclusions could be drawn regarding the state of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Europe.

¹ 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.

² AT, BE, BG, 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.

³ 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, 27 ESDN NFPs from national governments answered the survey. The information for the remaining 5 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:

- Does the country have a dedicated national sustainable development strategy, action plan, or sector strategy that directly addressed the SDGs?;
- 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.)?;
- How active is the country's Parliament in the country's implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda?; and
- 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, **2 countries⁴ did not have any government documents that were explicitly linked to the 2030 Agenda or the SDGs.** A further **6 countries⁵ 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 22 remaining countries do have strategic government documents that are aligned with the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. In total, **3 trends were observed:**

⁴ LT, and PT.

⁵ HR, DK, EE, GR, ME, and SK.

- 1) 13 countries⁶ reported having a dedicated NSDS that is directly linked to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in place.
- 2) **5 countries⁷ have governmental action plans that address the implementation of the SDGs.**
- 3) 4 countries⁸ 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 implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, or are currently in the process of establishing such a document. Out of the countries that 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) **13 of the 22 countries (59%) have strategies, action plans or sectoral plans that address all 17 SDGs.**
- 2) **The remaining 9 countries (41%) 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 that are linked to one or more SDGs.

Finland, for example, focuses on eight priorities, such as a carbon neutral society and a resource wise economy being two of the eight priorities. These priorities are then linked to the SDGs and can encompass more than one 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.

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

⁶ BE, CZ, FI, FR, DE, HU, IE, IT, LU, ME, RO, SI, and CH.

⁷ IS, LV, ES, SE, and NL.

⁸ AT, BG, CY, and the UK.

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.

26 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 26 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 26 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 26 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 26 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 6 out of 26 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 26 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 26 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 26 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 26 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 26 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, 8 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**⁹.
- 2) The second trend that was found was that **9 out of the 32 countries**¹⁰ 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.

⁹ BE, HR, CZ, FR, IE, LT, LU, MT, ME, SE, and CH.

¹⁰ AT, 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 countries¹¹ conformed to this trend.** However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the sole responsible ministry regarding SDG implementation in only 2 of these 10 countries, namely in Cyprus and Hungary. 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 countries¹² 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 countries¹³ 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 countries¹⁴, 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 countries¹⁵ 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.
- 8) The eighth trend that was found was concerning Bulgaria. As Bulgaria does not have an overarching NSDS that takes the SDGs directly into account and rather has sectoral policies that are linked to the SDGs, there is no specific ministry that is responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Therefore, no ministry is responsible for the overall coordination and ministries are responsible for their sectoral policies, which are linked to the SDGs.

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

¹¹ AT, HR, CY, FR, HU, IS, NO, PT, SK, and NL.

¹² AT, HR, FR, IS, NO, PT, SK, and SE.

¹³ DK and NO.

¹⁴ GR and IT.

¹⁵ PO, PT, SK, SI, and the UK.

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.

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 countries¹⁶ 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 countries¹⁷ of the 32 surveyed. Here, only a selected number of ministries were involved with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ BE, HR, CY, DK, HU, PO, and SK.

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, implementing 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 24 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. **14 of the 24 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 24 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 9 out of the 24 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. 8 out of the 24 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 24 countries felt that this was important.
- 6) Another important aspect that signifies good leadership is budgeting for the SDGs. 3 countries out of the 24 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 24 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 24 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 CO₂ 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 minuscule 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. 22 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 22 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 22 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. 5 out of 22 countries thought stakeholders and their more active involvement would 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 22 countries mentioned the parliament as being important for the government to implement the SDGs.
5. The last trend that was observed was about 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 be better 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.”¹⁸

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 spillover 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.¹⁹ 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”.²⁰ 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.

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

For this question, answers from 31 countries²¹ 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

¹⁸ Ingeborg Niestroy et al., [Europe’s Approach to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Good Practices and the Way Forward](http://publications.europa.eu/publication/manifestation_identifier/PUB_QA0219098ENN), 2019, http://publications.europa.eu/publication/manifestation_identifier/PUB_QA0219098ENN.

¹⁹ Fishman, A., 2019, IISD Knowledge Hub, SDG Knowledge Weekly: Policy Coherence in the EU and Beyond.

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

²⁰ UN Sustainable Development Goal: 17, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg17>

²¹ AT, BE, HR, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IS, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, ME, NO, PL, PT, RO,

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](#)²², 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 countries²³ 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 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.

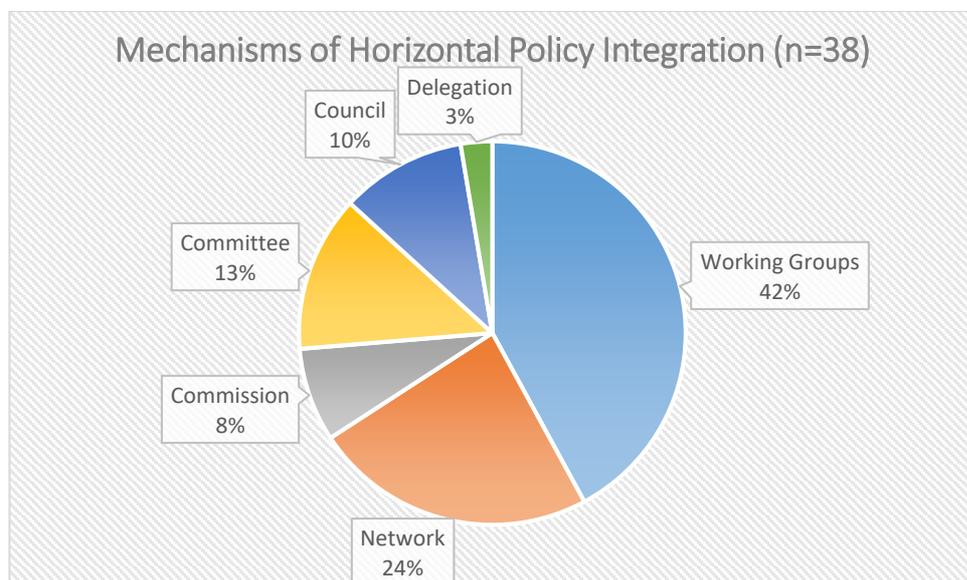


Figure 1 Mechanisms of Horizontal Integration

- 3) 9 countries²⁴ (33%) answered that their mechanisms also involved actors other than ministries, e.g. civil society representatives, youth organizations and non-governmental organizations.

²² Niestroy et al., [Europe’s Approach to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals](#).

²³ AT, FI, FR, DE, HU, IE, LT, LU, PT, SI

²⁴ AT, FR, DE, HU, IS, LV, LT, PL, SK

- 4) 24 countries²⁵ (88%) reported that their mechanism(s) involved **all ministries**, out of these, 8 countries²⁶ 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.

- 5) 5 countries²⁷ 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).

- 6) 25 countries²⁸ 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.

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:

²⁵ AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, GR, HU, IS, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, CH, NL, UK

²⁶ CZ, FI, DE, GR, MT, PT, SI, NL

²⁷ CZ, FR, HU, PT, UK

²⁸ 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

- 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 that described having active mechanisms. Out of these 16 countries:

- 1) 11 countries²⁹ 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 countries³⁰ 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

²⁹ AT, CZ, EE, FI, FR, DE, HU, IS, IT, PL, ES

³⁰ 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.

Chapter 6: European and International Policy Cooperation

This chapter concerns European and international policy cooperation, the analysis of which is based on the answers received on the two following questions:

- (1) What have your country's experiences been with discussing the **implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs with the European Parliament, the European Commission, as well as other EU Member States?**
- (2) What has your country's experiences been with other **global policy actors, like the OECD and the UN, etc.?**

European Policy Cooperation

NFPs from 23 countries answered the first question regarding European policy cooperation. 20 out of the 23 countries mentioned being a part of a certain process, initiative or organization that enabled cooperation between countries. The three countries, which did not mention being a part of any kind of process of exchange, still reported that they saw a need for exchange between European countries and the EU. Out of the countries that reported being a part of a process or initiative for policy cooperation, four trends could be discerned. As some of the answers listed one or more trends, some of the countries occur more than once, out of the 20 answers:

- 1) 10 countries³¹ reported being a part of the European Council's established **Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. This Working Party is established to assist the Council to regularly follow up, monitor and review the EU internal and external implementation of the 2030 Agenda across policy sectors at the EU level.³² Three of the countries which mentioned the Working Party also indicated their role in other initiatives such as the ESDN³³, a specific reform program on environmental tax assisted through the EU³⁴, as well as regional collaboration with neighboring countries (Visegrad country conference)³⁵.
- 2) 4 countries³⁶ (including Luxembourg which also reported being active in the above mentioned Working Party), stated that exchange with other European countries were facilitated through the **European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)**.
- 3) 4 countries³⁷ (two of which also reported being a part of the Working Party and one mentioning ESDN), also reported being a **part of other initiatives which fostered policy cooperation**. The organizations mentioned were the Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC)³⁸, an EU structural reform program, EUROSTAT³⁹ as well as being invited to a process of contributing to a reflection paper on Agenda 2030 and the EU.
- 4) 4 countries (out of which one country also listed being active in the Working Party), **listed own initiatives** as e.g. the Nordic Council of Ministers (Generation 2030 Program⁴⁰), an EU-

³¹ BG, DE, IT, LV, LU, MT, RO, SK, NL, UK

³² <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14809-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

³³ LU

³⁴ IT

³⁵ SK

³⁶ BE, FR, HU, LU

³⁷ HR, HU, IT, MT

³⁸ <http://eeac.eu/>

³⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/home?>

⁴⁰ IS

Montenegro Civil Society Consultative Committee, The Visegrad Countries' conference on Sustainable Development, as well as an established group of EU MS actively supporting the 2030 Agenda⁴¹.

The answers show that rather than addressing experiences with EU collaboration on implementing the 2030 Agenda the NFPs reported various initiatives, networks and groups that their respective countries were involved with. Similar to what has been seen in other chapters of this report, this may indicate that efforts are still in early stages. For example, the European Council's Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was only established in 2017 and it may still be early days in terms of concrete outcomes and experiences of the collaboration. The Working Party however, was often mentioned as important as its establishment signaled both EU support for the SDGs as well as a chance to ensure "focused discussions within the Council". The trends show that cooperation efforts take place and seem valued (20 out of 23 countries reporting their involvement in one or more EU-level or cross-Member State initiatives for collaboration on implementing the 2030 Agenda). Interestingly, NFPs reported that their countries had contributed to establishing their own initiatives for cooperation, which further hints to both the international nature of achieving the SDGs, as well as the willingness and perceived benefit of collaborating across borders. Moreover, a number of answers also indicated the usefulness of ESDN in promoting cooperation and collaboration across European countries, one answers stated: "We have experienced the understanding of having a collective view about the importance of the issue as well as the need for common action. We have found that many [Member States] [feel] the same although they have their own specialties and circumstances."⁴²

International Policy Cooperation

25 NFPs answered the question regarding experiences with other global policy actors, such as the OECD and the UN. All of the NFPs indicated, naturally, that their respective countries had experience with global actors in their work of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Two primary trends could be discerned regarding collaboration with global actors, namely experiences surrounding the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and various working groups and initiatives related to the OECD. The answers given often mentioned more than one global actor or process hence a country's result can occur in more than one trend.

- 1) The first trend noted concerned the role and cooperation with OECD. 15⁴³ (60%) out of the 25 surveyed countries listed cooperation with OECD in their answers. Primarily the answers listed that the **cooperation with OECD was 'active', 'positive', and 'fruitful'**. The answers related to OECD often mentioned that the work on **policy coherence and showing good practice** was 'very helpful'. Furthermore, NFPs mentioned working groups, participation in pilot projects as well as involvement in expert groups as some of the activities in which they were involved. A few answers indicated the **value provided in multilateral support as well as OECD providing a 'good practice'** example of strong integration of the SDGs.
- 2) The second trend concerned the role of the **High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)**. 7 countries⁴⁴ described usefulness **of preparing Voluntary National Reviews (VNR)**, conducting presentations and also highlighted their **active participation in the forum as helpful**. One answer specifically stated that HLPF was "key for follow-up and review – very successful and effective forum for monitoring SDGs on a global level"⁴⁵.

⁴¹ ES

⁴² LT

⁴³ BG, CZ, EE, DE, IS, IT, LT, LU, RO, SK, SI, SE, CH, NL, UK

⁴⁴ BE, EE, FR, DE, LV, MT, ME, RO

⁴⁵ DE

- 3) The third trend was mentioning **other UN bodies as important collaborative bodies for implementing the 2030 Agenda**. 8 countries⁴⁶ mentioned different agencies and bodies within the UN, such as e.g. collaboration with UNEP, the initiative of a ‘global hub’ between OECD and UNDP, meetings with UN agencies located within the country, cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO), as well as a ‘good cooperation’ with the Secretary General of the UN as crucial for international policy cooperation. One of these answers also included recommendations to reform UN agencies to increase coherency and increase the level of collaboration between international organizations and individual countries.
- 4) The fourth trend involved **experiences of attending international events**. 6 countries⁴⁷ mentioned that attending international events, participating in conferences and meetings were important forums for interacting with global actors and other countries.
- 5) The fifth trend concerned answers that **mentioned other policy actors and global processes**. 6 countries⁴⁸ indicated actors they considered important and relevant in implementing the 2030 Agenda, for example, three out of these six countries mentioned the **role of G7 and G20** in facilitating international policy dialogue and achieving sustainable development. Regional collaborations were also mentioned as important to facilitate learning and exchange, such as the Arctic Council’s working group, Nordic cooperation initiatives (Nordic council), and the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development.

Unsurprisingly, the answers on the role of global policy actors, such as the UN and the OECD generated more elaborate responses on initiatives and experiences compared to the previous question on European policy collaboration. As the 2030 Agenda was established by the United Nations in September 2015, collaboration with UN bodies and initiatives should be prevalent. Interestingly, the important role of OECD was even more prominent in the answers given. The OECD states: “as a long-standing partner with the UN, the OECD is supporting its Members and Partners as they work to achieve this ambitious Agenda. It is adapting its expertise by applying a “SDG lens” to its multi-disciplinary and sectoral work, and has adopted a strategic response to the SDGs, in the form of an Action Plan.”⁴⁹ The answers addressing the role of the OECD mentioned how the OECD provided a positive example of strong integration of the SDGs. Very often, the answers also concerned OECD’s work in Policy Coherence as useful in providing support for implementing the SDGs. Moreover, the answers showed the need for, and positive outcome of, international events. Not only the High-Level Political Forum but also various other international events and conferences. This shows that there is a need for, and benefit of, forums for collaboration, perhaps also so in settings where both formal and informal exchange is premiered, as answers indicated a positive experience from participating in and presenting at international events. Furthermore, the answers also highlighted the important role of G7/G20 in facilitating international policy dialogue on Sustainable Development, showing the importance of global actors showing initiative and ownership of the SDGs and paving the way for a sustainable future.

⁴⁶ CZ, DK, IT, LU, ME, RO, ES, SE

⁴⁷ BG, GR, IT, MT, RO, ES

⁴⁸ DK, DE, IS, IT, ME, NL

⁴⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/sdgs/>

Chapter 7: Evaluation and Monitoring

The well-known maxim: 'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it', is not only relevant in the context of business operations, but is also helpful when it comes to global SD governance and the implementation of political priorities, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

Indicators provide an important measuring ability that enables a relation to be made between the current state of affairs, such as how a country is presently doing regarding reaching certain Sustainable Development Goals (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. In the context of the SDGs, quality and timely data and metrics are a powerful 'management tool' that can help governments, businesses, and civil society identify main challenges and focus their usually limited financial resources accordingly. Going beyond strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation when based on indicators also help **improve transparency and accountability**, and thus help to ensure the **overall success of the SDGs**. The development of global, national, or regional indicators, and their regular monitoring, allows countries to evaluate their progress and learn from the successes of others.⁵⁰

Regarding this topic in the context of the ESDN survey, two questions were posed to NFPs. Due to no trends being detected amongst responding countries regarding the successes and challenges they face regarding evaluation and monitoring, some highlights will be listed instead of trends.

- (1) What is in place right now? (indicators, checks/audits, peer reviews and external evaluations)
- (2) What are the major success factors and challenges?

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

The first question posed to NFPs asked them to elaborate on how their country was monitoring and evaluating the SDGs, which included indicator systems, assessments, reviews and evaluations on the country's progress with respect towards achieving the SDGs. 32 countries had information on how evaluation and monitoring of the SDGs takes place. From the answers, 4 trends were established. Cyprus was the only country for which information could not be gathered that linked their monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development to the SDGs. Although the country has indicators, and reports on those indicators, it is not clear whether they are linked to the SDGs. Denmark is working on linking the government's work program to the SDG indicators.

1. 29 out of the 30 countries⁵¹ are **actively monitoring the SDGs** and have developed indicators that can be linked to the 169 SDG indicators.
 - a. Countries typically linked and matched their national priorities to the SDGs and thereby nationalized the indicators to fit their specific contexts.
2. 21 out of the 30 countries⁵² **perform monitoring reports** and impact assessments on the progress the country is making towards the SDGs.

⁵⁰ Mulholland, E., Dimitrova, A., Hametner, M. (2018). "SDG Indicators and Monitoring: Systems and Processes at the Global, European, and National Level", ESDN Quarterly Report 48, April 2018, ESDN Office, Vienna. p. 4.

⁵¹ AT, BE, BG, HR, CZ, EE, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IS, IR, IT, LV, LU, MT, ME, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, SE, CH, NL and the UK

⁵² AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, DE, HU, IS, IR, IT, LV, LT, ME, PO, RO, SK, SI, ES, CH, and NL

3. 9 out of 30 countries⁵³ have websites or internet portals where **information on the SDG indicators is made available**.

4. 3 out of the 30 countries⁵⁴ take indicators that **measure well-being**.

The vast majority of European countries have adapted their national indicator systems to be able to provide coverage of the SDGs and the 169 targets. It was frequently seen that countries sought to match their national contexts, priority areas, existing indicators, etc. to the UN's 169 sub-targets.

Many countries also perform regular monitoring reports and impact assessments to be able to determine the country's progress towards attaining the SDGs.

Almost 30% of countries are making their indicators and the data collected through them available on online websites, portals and platforms, which helps issues like transparency.

Some countries have even started to include well-being indicators into their reporting, as there is a recognition that some measure of prosperity, such as GDP, are insufficient at measuring the well-being of society.

In addition there are some countries that have qualitative evaluation processes in place, for instance Germany (Peer Review of the GSDS) and Finland (comprehensive evaluation process started in August 2018 with its results and recommendations to be used for Finland's VNR 2020).

Major Success Factors and Challenges

As stated above, this question had a myriad of answers that very much reflects a country's specific context. Instead of attributing each success and challenge to a specific country, the results are listed below.

Success Factors

- Development of an IT solution for collection and dissemination
- Mapping of indicators and the identification of missing indicators
- Appoint of a sustainable development specialist focused on evaluation and monitoring within the national statistics office
- Developed an updated set of indicators
- Working on establishing indicators that measure well-being
- Increased collaboration with the national statistics office
- Publishing of reports that show progress towards the SDGs
- Stakeholders create inclusive and objective evaluation and monitoring when they are involved

Challenges

- Establishing a stakeholder model for indicator production
- Use of different indicators at the UN, EU and national level
- Identifying government institutions that are involved in producing sustainable development indicators
- Establishing cooperation mechanisms between producers of sustainable development indicators

⁵³ AT, BE, HR, FI, DE, HU, IR, PL, and SK

⁵⁴ CZ, IT, and NL

- Training staff in the production of sustainable development indicators
- Choosing indicators
- Establishing an adequate monitoring system
- Data availability
- Data gathering
- Developing new types of data, such as well-being indicators
- Securing sufficient attention on indicators that show the country is not on track
- Regular monitoring of indicators over time
- Diverging opinions between experts and politicians on indicators that should be used

Although many countries have taken concrete steps in aligning their indicators with the 169 SDG sub-targets, there are still challenges that countries are facing when it comes to evaluation and monitoring. Some countries feel that more work needs to be done to identify indicators that may be relevant for measuring the SDGs within their own country. Data gathering and the availability of data is also a challenge for some countries.

Chapter 8: Participation

The role of participation has been widely recognized as crucial from the very beginning of calls to achieve a sustainable development. Inclusive participation has been seen as a means to achieve ‘better decision-making’ on both a global scale (participation of all countries), as well as on local levels (participation to bring about sustainable change).⁵⁵ Participation can further be seen not only as a ‘means to defend democratic rights’ but also as a tool to promote collective learning processes to ensure a sustainable future.⁵⁶ The process and nature of the SDGs are founded on the **core roll of participation and global partnership** of all countries worldwide by providing a “shared blueprint for peace prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future”.⁵⁷ Participation is further addressed in **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Target 16.7 specifically states the need to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”, this target is further followed by indicators on proportions of representation and understanding of decision-making processes to be inclusive and responsive. Addressing the interconnected and multi-lateral challenges of sustainable development, researchers and practitioners alike have called for an international governance landscape that involves NGOs, business groups, think tanks, trade unions, networks and regional actors alike in ensuring implementation of the 2030 Agenda.⁵⁸

Drawing on the need for increased participation and involvement of non-state actors in the Agenda 2030 implementation process, the ESDN survey asked NFPs of 32 European countries involved with the network, the following questions:

- (1) Which mechanism or processes are in place for integrating stakeholders into the 2030 Agenda implementation process?
- (2) What are the major success factors and challenges?

Mechanisms and Process for Stakeholder Integration

The first question asked to NFPs concerned ‘which mechanisms or processes’ were in place for integrating stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda implementation process. For this question, all 32 countries involved with the Network either responded or had answers readily available in VNRs or on online platforms. Out of these 32 collected responses, all of them indicated that they had a type of mechanism for participation in place. These mechanisms ranged in terms of being purposefully in place for the 2030 Agenda, as well as their specific form (ad hoc, institutionalized, working group, council, etc.). Four countries⁵⁹ indicated that they had a mechanisms for participation in place, but that this was either not formally related to the SDGs, or that the mechanisms was a part of general national consultation procedure. Such mechanisms were, in all but one case, which included ‘collaboration with existing networks’, in the form of online public consultations. The remaining trends will concern the 28 countries that reported 2030 Agenda-specific mechanisms.

⁵⁵ World Commission on Environment and Development, ed., [Our Common Future](#), Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵⁶ Jeppe Læssøe, “Participation and Sustainable Development: The Role and Challenges of Mediating Agents,” in [Participation and Learning](#), ed. Alan Reid et al. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008), 144–58, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6416-6_9.

⁵⁷ “SDGs :: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform,” accessed December 3, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

⁵⁸ Jonathan W. Kuyper, Björn-Ola Linnér, and Heike Schroeder, “Non-State Actors in Hybrid Global Climate Governance: Justice, Legitimacy, and Effectiveness in a Post-Paris Era: Non-State Actors in Hybrid Global Climate Governance,” [Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change](#) 9, no. 1 (January 2018): e497, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.497>.

⁵⁹ BG, CY, LV, SI

1. 19 countries⁶⁰ reported that at least one of their **described mechanisms was formal and institutionalized**. The mechanisms often took the form of a specific council, a commission, advisory groups or various continuous working groups. Where answers concerned which stakeholders were represented they indicated either involved ‘expert’ representatives, ‘invited stakeholders’ or described larger platforms or forums for increased involvement of stakeholders. An interesting example was provided from the Netherlands which have a ‘SDG-Charter’ in place, which constitutes a platform for state and non-state actors that, together with a national SDG coordinator, facilitates and contributes to working groups for each individual SDG.
 - a. 7 countries⁶¹ reported that **the mechanism in place was ad-hoc** (on demand), these mechanisms were related to the development of a report (Denmark), a roadmap (France) or specific instances where consultations were needed e.g. in the design process of a strategy.
 - b. 2 countries⁶² reported that they were planning to formalize mechanisms for participation.
2. 11 countries⁶³ that mentioned that their mechanism had a specific role, described how the **process of involving stakeholders concerned the development of the Voluntary National Review (VNR)**, or a national strategy. This was primarily done through the establishment of working groups or ‘task forces’, but some answers also highlighted processes of informal consultations and public debates (e.g. Norway and Romania).
3. 11 countries⁶⁴ indicated in their answers that they had **more than one mechanism in place**. Some examples showed a combination of e.g. specific stakeholder conferences with forums, committees and councils (Germany), different coalitions and commissions (Estonia), or advisory groups and platforms (Switzerland). An example from Ireland included both a process of stakeholder consultation, an establishment of a national stakeholder forum “to provide a mechanism for stakeholders to be engaged on an ongoing basis”, as well as examples of a “bottom-up alliance of NGOs.”

The answers and trends above show that stakeholder participation and integration are key aspects of implementing the 2030 Agenda. All countries reported having at least one type of mechanism in place for stakeholder consultation, and positively, 28 countries indicated they had mechanisms in place for the sole purpose of increasing participation in relation to the 2030 Agenda. The forms that these mechanisms take, whether they are institutionalized or ad-hoc, suggest a flexible approach in integrating stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda process, with some countries reporting on-demand mechanisms for a specific purpose (e.g. VNRs and strategies), whereas some reported having formalized structures of continuous stakeholder involvement in various formats.

Major Success Factors and Challenges

With respect to the success factors and challenges of stakeholder participation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, 20 countries had information:

Success Factors

⁶⁰ AT, BE, EE, FI, DE, GR, HU, IS, IE, IT, LT, MT, ME, PO, SK, ES, SE, CH, NL

⁶¹ HR, CZ, FR, NO, PT, RO, UK

⁶² DK, LU

⁶³ AT, CZ, GR, IS, IT, LT, LU, NO, PL, RO, UK

⁶⁴ AT, EE, DE, IE, IT, LT, MT, ME, PT, SK, CH

In total, 10 countries provided information regarding the successes they have had in including stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. As two countries provided individual answers regarding their success factors, they are not considered in the following clusters and trends. However, it is worth noting that one of these country's success factors was the establishment of more formal collaboration mechanisms with stakeholders. The other country was able to establish a Youth Council that deals with the 2030 Agenda. The remaining 8 countries can be clustered into two distinct trends regarding what they believe to be the success factors concerning stakeholder participation:

- 1) 5 out of the 8 countries stated that **consulting stakeholders and having them participate in drafting the VNR, NSDS, and national priorities was in itself a success.**
- 2) 3 out of the 8 countries determined that the **ability of stakeholders to provide recommendations and input to policy design and content was a success.**

Challenges

In total, 14 countries provided information regarding the challenges they have encountered when it comes to stakeholder participation in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Countries could also list more than one challenge and be counted more than once. 14 different countries, however, responded to this question. From those 14 countries and the answers they provided, 3 trends could be identified:

- 1) 10 out of the 14 countries reported a **need for stakeholder coordination mechanisms linking stakeholders to government processes.**
- 2) 3 out of the 10 countries stated that **raising awareness and providing tools to stakeholders was important in order to allow stakeholders to participate.**
- 3) 2 countries listed **providing resources**, i.e. financial or manpower related, in order to **enable better participation of stakeholders in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.**

The success factors and challenges that NFPs listed reaffirm the assessment from the previous questions that more institutionalized mechanisms of stakeholder participation are desired by countries when it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Ad-hoc participation systems are fine, but do not instill a sense of continuity of consultation when it comes to implementation. Since the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs require a whole-of-society approach, it makes sense that societal actors are included in dialogues that determine the direction countries head towards concerning the SDGs.

Chapter 9: Future Generations

As stated in the 2030 Agenda: **“We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.”**⁶⁵ This statement echoes the definition of the transformative Brundtland Report (1987), in which Sustainable Development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁶⁶ Simultaneously, this report, **Our Common Future**, states: **“Future generations do not vote; they have no political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions.”**⁶⁷ This sentence allures to the complex task of policy and politics today to include a notion so seemingly abstract without power, will, nor ability to transform or affect any decisions in their favor. One tangible aspect regarding consideration of future generations is the active involvement of youth to increase intergenerational ownership as well as longevity of sustainability efforts.

Addressing the topic of future generation and youth involvement the ESDN survey asked NFPs the two following questions:

- (1) How do you approach and deal with the ‘future generation’ aspect of Sustainable Development?
- (2) What specific activities for youth do you foresee or that would be important in your opinion?

Approaches to the ‘Future Generation’ Aspect of Sustainable Development

NFPs from 23 countries answered this question. Out of these 23 answers 20 answered that they approached the aspect of ‘future generation’ aspect in one way or the other. The three answers not included in the listed trends below stated that they had no specific target nor strategy in place particularly focusing on future generations. For the 20 countries surveyed, a few interesting trends emerged. Firstly, a strong majority of the answers (all but one) related this question to the topic of involving youth in strategies, working groups, supporting youth delegations, or placing emphasis on education on sustainable development. The answers indicated one or more trends; hence, a country may be counted in more than one trend. Moreover, the following trends were discerned in the answers:

- 1) 14 out of 20 countries⁶⁸ responded that they either **had a specific strategy in place regarding involving youth, focusing on future generations or had established mechanisms for the sole purpose of involving youth in the work on achieving the SDGs**. Examples of this trend can be seen in e.g. Cyprus which developed a ‘National Youth Strategy 2017-2022’. Interesting observations within this trend involved the establishment of specific youth working groups as a mechanism to provide input and guidance to government or contribute to SDG reporting initiatives, this was reported by 4 NFPs. Another interesting aspect that surfaced in this trend was the establishment of a ‘future generation’ guardian role, mentioned by Malta and Wales, this position was established to monitor the interests of future generations across policy sectors and legislation.

⁶⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

⁶⁶ http://netzwerk-n.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/0_Brundtland_Report-1987-Our_Common_Future.pdf (p.15)

⁶⁷ http://netzwerk-n.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/0_Brundtland_Report-1987-Our_Common_Future.pdf (p.15)

⁶⁸ BG, HR, CY, EE, IS, IT, LU, MT, RO, ES, SE, CH, NL, UK

- 2) 11 out of 20 countries⁶⁹ mentioned that the **aspect of 'future generations' were addressed through collaboration with youth organizations and groups in their respective countries. These organizations were either involved in governmental advisory bodies on sustainable development and/or invited to different high-level meetings (UN events, stakeholder meetings).** The answers often outlined the existence of a 'national youth council', 'SDG youth council' or similar.
 - 9 out of the 11 countries that **mentioned collaboration with youth organizations also reported that these organizations and groups were directly involved in the design of strategies to 'involve young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of policy'** (Bulgaria), some answers also listed youth groups as being involved in SDG progress reports (The Netherlands).
 - 6 out of the 11 answers which addressed the role of **collaboration with youth groups also stated the important aspect of supporting youth delegations' representation in international forums** e.g. HLPF, as well as the role of representation.
- 3) 6 out of 20 countries⁷⁰ stated in their answers that **existing strategies on the 2030 Agenda implementation addressed the role of including youth in the implementation.** One country in specific stated that the country's long-term vision even took 'future generations' into account (Belgium).
- 4) 5 out of 20 countries⁷¹ responded that an **important aspect of including future generations in the 2030 Agenda implementation concerned introducing sustainable development in education and curricula** through e.g. national policy or guidance documents.

One clear observation regarding the responses to: **'How do you approach and deal with the 'future generation' aspect of Sustainable Development?'** Is that the majority of answers linked this to the role of involving younger generations and youth in the process of achieving the SDGs. This shows that the current work of considering 'future generations' is linked to efforts of ensuring continuity and longevity by 'passing the torch' onto younger generations. An interesting mechanism was mentioned by NFPs from Malta and Wales where a specific mandate of Ombudsman was initiated to observe the rights of future generations. Similar to the responses to the follow-up question, the collaboration with youth organizations was highlighted as crucial, as well as the importance of introducing topics of sustainable development in national curricula.

Future Activities for Youth

NFPs from 21 countries answered second question, **'What specific activities for youth do you foresee or that would be important in your opinion?'** The answers to this questions generated responses related to four trends. Primarily, the answers showed a strong focus on the involvement of youth in national decision-making processes as well as a focus on communication strategies, the use of social media channels as well as increased funding for projects aimed at increasing youth involvement in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Some answers indicated more than one trend, hence a few countries are counted in more than one trend below. The four main trends are listed below:

1. 14 out of the 21 surveyed countries⁷² responded to this question with answers that related to efforts of **'increasing collaboration with youth organizations and networks'** as well as the

⁶⁹ BE, BG, CY, EE, DE, IS, IT, LU, RO, ES, NL

⁷⁰ BE, GR, HU, LT, SK, UK

⁷¹ GR, IT, LT, SE, UK

⁷² HR, DE, HU, IS, LT, LU, MT, RO, SK, ES, SE, CH, NL, UK

continued presence and involvement of youth organizations in national decision-making processes. The answers often indicated that **youth organizations were currently involved in national policy processes**, e.g. in the form of ‘youth councils’ or advisory boards, and that this presence and role should be further strengthened. The answers expressed the **importance of collaborating with civil society, non-governmental, and youth organizations** and a crucial aspects of increasing space for “youth participation in all areas of the implementation process” (Sweden).

2. 14 out of the 21 surveyed countries⁷³ also addressed the aspect of **communication strategies to ‘increase outreach’ as well as to ensure awareness and empowerment of youth** within the 2030 Agenda implementation. The answers which addressed communication strategies mentioned different types of media to increase involvement of youth and understanding of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs such as social media campaigns, events, workshops and promotion activities. For example, one answer described a campaign where high school students took part in a video contest organized by the ministry of environment surrounding the topic of sustainable development, with the primary aim of increasing popularity of the concept within the younger generations (Czech Republic).
 - a. 4 out of these answers⁷⁴ also specifically mentioned the importance of supporting, and allocating funding for, youth-focused projects.
3. 7 out of 21 countries⁷⁵ mentioned a **strong focus on education** in their responses. This was primarily **linked to raising awareness on the importance of sustainable development in early ages**, introducing SD into curricula and increasing ownership and engagement of younger generations, a few answers, however, addressed the need to focus on education to increase attendance rates as an effort to strengthen the capacity of younger generations.
4. The final trend that could be discerned from the 21 submitted answers regarded the mentioning of a **specific or forthcoming strategy intended to increase collaboration** with and inclusion of younger generations and youth organizations in national work to implement the 2030 Agenda. This was reported by 4 countries⁷⁶ and included strategies that encompassed rights of the child, but also national visions of increased spaces for participation in implementation processes.

A strong majority of answers to the question ‘**What specific activities for youth do you foresee or that would be important in your opinion?**’, mentioned the role of youth in achieving sustainable development as important and needed. Primarily, the answers listed the importance of collaborating with youth organizations, but also the need for increased awareness and ownership of sustainable development amongst younger generations, through utilizing more creative means, such as social media outreach and interactive campaigns.

The main trends arising from responses to the questions show that youth organizations and younger generations are crucial and integral stakeholders in the work to ensure alignment of SD policy and the 2030 Agenda to the **needs of future generations**. This indeed shows the need for involvement of younger generations early on in the decision-making and policy processes to ensure decisions that contribute to longevity and continuity. A few examples also addressed the establishment of an ‘ombudsman’ for future generations; this again hints towards the intricateness of the task at hand – namely considering unforeseeable interests and needs of ‘unknown’ populations.

⁷³ HR, CZ, DE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, RO, SI, ES, SE, CH, UK

⁷⁴ HR, SI, CH, UK

⁷⁵ BG, HR, EE, FR, IT, LV, ES,

⁷⁶ BG, HU, SK, SE

Conclusions

This conclusions section attempts to consolidate the findings from the trends that were discovered over the course of the research and presented in the 9 chapters of this report.

National Implementation: NSDS and National Priorities

A very large majority of the countries surveyed either have a NSDS/strategic document for implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, or are currently in the process of establishing such a document. Out of the countries that reported having a strategic document, all of them indicated that this document was directly aligned with the SDGs and 2030 Agenda. It can be argued, therefore, that **the majority of European countries are taking the SDGs very seriously and trying to implement them into their national contexts through the use of NSDSs, action plans and sectoral strategies, or at least are planning to do so.**

The two distinct conclusions that can be drawn from the trends is that countries either define national priorities and link them to the SDGs, or they link their National Sustainable Development Strategies to the SDGs and plan how they will attempt to meet the individual goals.

Future research on these trends could be continued in an effort to determine whether having national priorities aligned with the SDGs is more effective at reaching the SDGs compared to those countries who embed them in their NSDS.

Parliament

As a whole, it appears that national parliaments in Europe are actively involved (i.e. they 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.**⁷⁷ 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 to be 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 reach the targets by 2030 in an effective and efficient manner.

It is not surprising, therefore, that **high-level political will and attention was the good leadership aspect that was mentioned as second highest by NFPs**, 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 the importance of the topic at hand. The government is not the only institution that can have an impact on the SDGs, as businesses, investment institutions, and other

⁷⁷ Niestroy et al., [Europe's Approach to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals](#). p. 86.

organizations also greatly contribute to the SDGs and they sometimes 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 highlights 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 CO₂ 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 minuscule 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.

Many of the National Focal Points, on answering the questions regarding the political commitment they would need to be better 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.

The role of parliament cuts across many streams when it comes to implementing the SDGs, which reinforces how vital elected officials are in moving the 2030 Agenda forward and reaching the SDGs.

Crucial Achievements in Implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Once again, a vast majority of the countries surveyed thought **it was a huge achievement that the 2030 Agenda provided a means to anchor sustainable development within their 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, which, 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.

Anchoring the SDGs in National Governments

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 an 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.

This is an interesting trend to focus on, as, **in the past, it has overwhelmingly been the case that National Sustainable Development Strategies were predominantly the responsibility of Ministries for Environment**, which can be explained by the perceived notion by some that sustainable development is a very environment-centered 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 SDGs by 2030.

Horizontal Policy Integration

It can be concluded 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 some countries may not involve all ministries, that should not suggest that their methods and reasoning for doing so make them any less effective at addressing, implementing and reaching the SDGs.

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.

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.

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.

Vertical Policy Integration

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

Supranational Collaboration

The answers show that rather than addressing experiences with EU collaboration on implementing the 2030 Agenda, the NFPs reported various initiatives, networks and groups with whom their respective countries were involved. This may indicate that efforts are still in early stages. For example, the European Council’s **Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** was only established in 2017 and it may still be early days in terms of concrete outcomes and experiences of the collaboration. The Working Party however, was often mentioned as important, as its establishment signaled both EU support for the SDGs as well as a chance to ensure “focused discussions within the Council”.

The trends show that **cooperation efforts take place and seem valued** (20 out of 23 countries reporting their involvement in one or more EU-level or cross-Member State initiatives for collaboration on implementing the 2030 Agenda). Interestingly, NFPs reported that their countries had contributed to establishing their own initiatives for cooperation, which further hints to both the international nature of achieving the SDGs, as well as the willingness and perceived benefit of collaborating across borders.

Moreover, a number of answers also indicated the **usefulness of ESDN in promoting cooperation and collaboration across European countries**, one answer stated: “We have experienced the understanding of having a collective view about the importance of the issue as well as the need for common action. We have found that many [Member States] [feel] the same although they have their own specialties and circumstances.”⁷⁸

Unsurprisingly, the answers on the **role of global policy actors, such as the UN and the OECD** generated more elaborate responses on initiatives and experiences compared to the previous question on European policy collaboration. As the 2030 Agenda was established by the United Nations in September 2015, collaboration with UN bodies and initiatives should be prevalent. Interestingly, the important role of OECD was even more prominent in the answers given. The OECD states: “as a long-standing partner with the UN, the OECD is supporting its Members and Partners as they work to achieve this ambitious Agenda. It is adapting its expertise by applying a ‘SDG lens’ to its multi-disciplinary and sectoral work, and has adopted a strategic response to the SDGs, in the form of an Action Plan.”⁷⁹ The answers addressing the role of the OECD mentioned how the OECD provided a positive example of strong integration of the SDGs. Very often, the answers also concerned OECD’s work in Policy Coherence as useful in providing support for implementing the SDGs. Moreover, the answers showed the need for, and positive outcome of, international events. Not only the High-Level Political Forum but also various other international events and conferences. This shows that there is a need for, and benefit of, forums for collaboration, perhaps also so in settings where both formal and informal exchange is premised, as answers indicated a positive experience from participating in and presenting at international events. Furthermore, the answers also highlighted the important role of G7/G20 in facilitating international policy dialogue on Sustainable Development, showing the importance of global actors showing initiative and ownership of the SDGs and paving the way for a sustainable future.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The vast **majority of European countries have adapted their national indicator systems** to be able to provide coverage of the SDGs and the 169 targets. It was frequently seen that countries sought to match their national contexts, priority areas, existing indicators, etc. to the UN’s 169 sub-targets. Many countries also perform regular monitoring reports and impact assessments to be able to determine the country’s progress towards attaining the SDGs.

Some countries have even started to include well-being indicators into their reporting, as there is a recognition that some measure of prosperity, such as GDP, are insufficient at measuring the well-being of society.

Although many countries have taken concrete steps in aligning their indicators with the 169 SDG sub-targets, there are still challenges that countries are facing when it comes to evaluation and monitoring. Some countries feel that more work needs to be done to identify indicators that may be relevant for measuring the SDGs within their own country. Data gathering and the availability of data is also a challenge for some countries.

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⁷⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/sdgs/>

Stakeholder Participation in Implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs

The answers and trends above show that **stakeholder participation and integration are key aspects of implementing the 2030 Agenda**. All countries reported having at least one type of mechanism in place for stakeholder consultation, and positively, 28 countries indicated they had mechanisms in place for the sole purpose of increasing participation in relation to the 2030 Agenda. The forms that these mechanisms take, whether they are institutionalized or ad-hoc, suggest a flexible approach in integrating stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda process, with some countries reporting on-demand mechanisms for a specific purpose (e.g. VNRs and strategies), whereas some reported having formalized structures of continuous stakeholder involvement in various formats.

The success factors and challenges that NFPs listed reaffirm the assessment that **more institutionalized mechanisms of stakeholder participation are desired by countries** when it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Ad-hoc participation systems are fine, but do not instill a sense of continuity of consultation when it comes to implementation. Since the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs require a whole-of-society approach, it makes sense that societal actors are included in dialogues that determine the direction countries head towards concerning the SDGs.

It should be noted that on-demand stakeholder processes can be fit for purpose when it comes to specific strategies and reports, such as the VNR, as such ad-hoc mechanisms could allow for broader stakeholder participation than more formalized mechanisms (which often have reoccurring participants). This further speaks for the potential in having a mix of mechanisms for participation.

Future Generations

Many countries linked the ‘future generations’ concept to the **role of involving younger generations and youth in the process of achieving the SDGs**. This shows that the current work of considering ‘future generations’ is linked to efforts of ensuring continuity and longevity by ‘passing the torch’ onto younger generations. An interesting mechanism was mentioned by NFPs from Malta and Wales, where a specific mandate of Ombudsman was initiated to observe the rights of future generations. The collaboration with youth organizations was highlighted as crucial, as well as the importance of introducing topics of sustainable development in national curricula.

The main trends show that **youth organizations and younger generations are crucial and integral stakeholders** in the work to ensure alignment of SD policy and the 2030 Agenda to the needs of future generations. This indeed shows the need for involvement of younger generations early on in the decision-making and policy processes to ensure decisions that contribute to longevity and continuity. A few examples also addressed the establishment of an ‘ombudsman’ for future generations; this again hints towards the intricateness of the task at hand – namely considering unforeseeable interests and needs of ‘unknown’ populations.

Annex: Questionnaire

| ESDN Questionnaire Template | | |
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| Topic | Question | Response |
| National level implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs | | |
| Question 1.1 | Is there a dedicated strategy specifically for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs? | |
| Question 1.2 | How comprehensive is this strategy? | |
| Question 1.3 | Does the strategy cover all 17 SDGs, or are there SDGs that are prioritized? | |
| Question 1.4 | Does this strategy differ from your National Sustainable Development Strategy, or does it replace the National Sustainable Development Strategy? | |
| Question 1.5 | Are the SDGs and 2030 Agenda being discussed in national parliaments? If yes, what has been discussed in your country? | |
| Question 1.6 | What has your country achieved since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015? (Please provide us with the 3 most important/crucial achievements and why it is so important that your country has achieved them?) | |
| Leadership, responsibility, and budgets | | |
| Question 2.1 | Which ministry and department are responsible for the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs? | |
| Question 2.2 | Which ministries are involved? | |
| Question 2.3 | What budgetary provisions/alignment are foreseen for the SDGs, if any? | |
| Question 2.4 | How much value/commitment is being placed by your government on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs? (Parliaments and heads of state) | |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Question 2.5 | What do you consider good leadership aspects of governments for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? | |
| Question 2.6 | What kind of political commitment would you need that would support the government's activities in the implementation process? | |
| Horizontal Policy Integration | | |
| Question 3.1 | What kind of institutionalized mechanisms are in place for horizontal policy integration (between ministries) regarding the implementation of the SDGs? | |
| Question 3.2 | 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? | |
| Vertical Policy Integration | | |
| Question 4.1 | What mechanisms are in place to foster vertical policy integration (between different levels of government)? | |
| Question 4.2 | What are the major success factors and challenges of these mechanisms? | |
| Participation | | |
| Question 5.1 | Which mechanisms or processes are in place for integrating stakeholders into the 2030 Agenda implementation process? | |
| Question 5.2 | What are the major success factors and challenges? | |
| Question 5.3 | What role does Parliament, businesses, CSOs/NGOs, research and academia have, or is foreseen as having, in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs? | |
| Evaluation and Monitoring | | |
| Question 6.1 | What is in place right now? (indicators, checks/audits, peer reviews and external evaluations) | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Question 6.2 | What are the major success factors and challenges? | |
| Future Generations | | |
| Question 7.1 | How do you approach and deal with the 'future generations' aspect of SD? | |
| Question 7.2 | What specific activities for youth do you foresee or that would be important in your opinion? | |
| European Policy Cooperation | | |
| Question 8.1 | What have your country's experiences been with discussing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs with the European Parliament, the European Commission, as well as other EU Member States? | |
| Question 8.2 | What has your country's experiences been with other global policy actors, like the OECD and the UN, etc.? | |
| Overall Governance for SD | | |
| Question 9.1 | What were the major governance innovations/highlights in your country or overall (UN and European) since the SDGs? What do you think the major shortcomings of SD Governance are? | |
| Reality check of the implementation of that 2030 Agenda and the SDGs | | |
| Question 10.1 | Are the governance mechanisms that are in place functioning as they are meant to function? | |
| Question 10.2 | Are these mechanisms bringing about progress towards achieving the SDGs? | |
| Question 10.3 | How much does economic reality in your country dictate the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the end of the day? | |

