

# ESDN Policy Note

## Governance Transformations for More Effective SDG Implementation

### Introduction

In 2024, the world finds itself past the implementation halfway mark and, although many efforts have been undertaken and activities set in motion, **meeting the SDGs has not been achieved yet**: only 15 % of the SDG targets are on track, and several previous gains have been reversed. As the time left is limited, there is an **urgent need to boost governance mechanisms that result in more effective SDG implementation and truly transformative policies**.

On 26-27 March 2024, the [European Sustainable Development Network \(ESDN\)](#) organized its 22<sup>nd</sup> Workshop, which took place in Budva, Montenegro. The event was hosted by the [Office for Sustainable Development at the Secretariat General of the Government of Montenegro](#) and [UNDP Montenegro](#), and supported by the [Regional School of Public Administration \(ReSPA\)](#). More than 60 policymakers and experts from across Europe, with a strong presence of colleagues from the Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), met to discuss **how to develop and enable governance transformation for a more effective implementation of the SDGs**. The workshop participants jointly developed a **Toolbox for Effective SDG Governance for the Future** as well as **messages to the UN Summit of the Future 2024**.



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### Current shortcomings & areas where change is needed

Before addressing future effective governance and messages for the UN Summit, the participants identified areas that currently do not work well and where change is needed:

- **Lack of capacities in SDG implementation and its related complexities at the level of civil servants and among stakeholders:** Practical experiences in many countries show that although there is commitment for SDG implementation, there is still limited capacity for effective implementation.
- **Lack of financial resources and budget tagging:** Currently, SDG budget tagging is largely missing, as is SDG priority setting in state budgets.
- **Lack of political will:** There is still more lip service than creating strategic policy frameworks with clear implementation goals.
- **Shortage of horizontal and vertical integration:** The cross-sectoral coordination of line ministries on all policy levels is still a challenge in practice as is the cooperation between the national and sub-national levels.
- **Insufficient data collection and lack of data:** Data availability and collection to measure progress on individual goals is still not sufficiently achieved.
- **Dealing with unexpected crises:** The various recent crises (e.g. Covid-19, climate change, energy crises, etc.) have shown that managing them is challenging due to their complexity and long-term impacts.

To address the above-mentioned challenges and shortcomings, the workshop participants jointly developed a toolbox for effective SDG

governance with various ingredients. The **four main ingredients of the toolbox** are:

- 1) **Develop effective governance frameworks & institutions**
- 2) **Engage stakeholders & build partnerships**
- 3) **Strengthen capacity-building in public administrations**
- 4) **Financing of SDG implementation**



## Toolbox for Effective SDG Governance

### 1) **Develop effective governance frameworks & institutions**

- Develop measures for strategic planning and policy management, like linking institutional mid- and short-term work plans, SDG budgeting, and monitoring.
- Design and implement policy strategies, roadmaps, action plans, etc., to ensure long-term strategic orientation, paired with mid- and short-term goals.

#### Just Transition Roadmap in Montenegro

The Just Transition Roadmap to achieve climate neutrality in Montenegro has been developed by the Office for Sustainable Development at the Secretariat General of the Government, with the involvement of the Working Group for Just Transition of the National Council for Sustainable Development, and the support of UNDP Montenegro. It includes long-term objectives and medium- and short-term goals to offer clear guidance as well as to enable positive results and to offer motivation for all actors involved.

- Ensure that SDGs are integrated in and harmonized with sectoral policy strategies and frameworks to guarantee compliance of policy measures across sectors with the SDGs.

#### Strategic framework to integrate SDGs in sectoral policies in North Macedonia

North Macedonia has established a strategic framework for integrating and harmonizing the SDGs in national development policies and strategies which ensures a current compliance rate with the SDGs of 83%.

- Establish horizontal coordination mechanisms, like inter-ministerial committees or coordination bodies which coordinate SDG implementation among sectoral ministries and foster harmonizing public policies with the SDGs.
- Create centers of excellence on SDGs in the public administration to establish and further develop expertise for SDG implementation in all line ministries.
- Ensure continuity of institutional bodies beyond the term of individual governments to develop “institutional memory” for expertise and knowledge on SDGs.
- Foster digitalization as an important support tool in policymaking, e.g. monitoring SDG indicator on a digital platform as a central tool of providing sustainability information for public policymaking.

### 2) **Engage stakeholders & build partnerships**

- Develop a stakeholder mapping system which outlines which stakeholders need to be involved in the policymaking process.
- Establish an open and transparent multi-stakeholder cooperation process.
- Involve National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSD) more actively in the SDG policy process by using the knowledge and expertise of their stakeholder members.
- Create opportunities for business transformations towards sustainability, for

instance by supporting SDG-driven start-ups, e.g. the UNDP SDG Impact Lab connects entrepreneurs with resources and mentorship to address global challenges through their businesses.

- Foster a culture of engagement and providing support tools for stakeholders.

#### Sustainability Code in Romania

The Department of Sustainable Development in Romania developed the “Sustainability Code”, which aims to enhance business contributions to sustainable development and includes an [online platform](#) for companies to transparently report non-financial data, which is officially acknowledged by the Ministry of Finance as voluntary sustainability reporting.

### 3) Strengthen capacity-building in public administrations

- Appoint a unit within the central government which is responsible for SDG implementation and the main “government hub” for all policies and activities related to the SDGs.

#### Office for Sustainable Development in Montenegro

The Office for Sustainable Development in the Secretariat General of the Montenegrin Government is the central source of knowledge and expertise in the government on SDG policy and provides advice on implementation and cross-sectoral coordination.

- Offer trainings and education on SDGs for civil servants to increase knowledge and enable comprehensive implementation measures.

#### Sustainability Check in Luxembourg

Luxembourg developed the [“Sustainability Check”](#) for supporting and self-assessing draft laws in relation to their impact on sustainable development. For civil servants to use this tool, a training was developed which focuses on the international and national sustainable development framework and the actual use of the Sustainability Check.

- Ensure a stronger vertical integration and coordination on SDG implementation at the sub-national level.

#### Toolbox 2030 Agenda for the sub-national level in Switzerland

The Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) developed the [“Toolbox 2030 Agenda”](#). The toolbox provides a collection of measures and examples of how cantons and municipalities are already implementing the 2030 Agenda to achieve the SDGs. In addition, it provides numerous innovative management tools to strengthen sustainability.

- Actively participate in good practice exchange programs for civil servants with their peers from other European countries and collaborate with research institutions and projects.

### 4) Financing of SDG implementation

- Develop an SDG financing framework which outlines funding and investment needs and options for realizing the SDGs in practice.

#### SDG Financing Framework is developed in Bosnia & Herzegovina

Currently, Bosnia & Herzegovina are in the process of adopting an SDG financing framework by also elaborating on innovative SDG financial instruments.

- Switch from line budgets to program budgets and set clear budget priorities in line with the SDGs. This could be complimented with SDG budget tagging on a digital platform which shows budget spending per SDG.
- Establish a platform for exchange on financing the SDGs to enable exchange with different line ministries and stakeholders, including the cooperation with banks to provide information on sustainability criteria for loans, further developing green business ideas, etc.

## Messages to the Summit of the Future 2024

As a key international meeting on the SDGs at UN level, the **“Summit of the Future” in September 2024** will bring together world leaders to forge a new international consensus on how to deliver a better present and safeguard the future.



The workshop participants jointly worked on **five messages that should be conveyed at the Summit**:

- 1) Clear and continuous commitment of governments for SDG implementation, including the sub-national level, that comprises the prioritizing of the SDGs on government agendas; increased efforts in raising awareness for SDGs; and an institutional framework for SDG implementation and policy coherence that enables transformative actions for effective implementation.
- 2) Address financing for SDGs more thoroughly by making financial frameworks for SDGs more functional and accessible. This includes more dedicated support for emerging and developing countries in their efforts to realize the SDGs.
- 3) Further develop data collection and monitor SDG implementation with quantifiable data to inform decision-making and the direction of political action for evidence-based policymaking.
- 4) Increase efforts on education for the SDGs with targeted education and training programs for decision-makers and civil servants and integrate the SDGs into school curricula.
- 5) Foster broad stakeholder partnerships by increasing the involvement of local governments, the private sector, youth, women, and vulnerable groups.

**The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)** is a non-profit, pan- European peer-learning, networking, knowledge, and advocacy platform for sustainability professionals in the public sector working in collaboration with other organisations and institutions dealing with sustainable development issues. It is based on the transparent and trustful cooperation of these actors. It collects, compiles and shares information on sustainability policies, strategies, and practises, and provides expertise to political decision-makers at European, national, and sub-national levels. The ESDN also fosters sustainable development through active communication and continued cooperation with other stakeholders and civil society.