

## **Regional Survey on Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals**

### **Summary of replies**

1. This document summarizes the results of a survey sent to the Governments of 56 UNECE member States and the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (under Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)) to collect inputs on three crucial topics:

- The plans and approaches of governments to integrate the SDGs and targets in their national strategies and to implement them in their countries.
- The plans of governments to build and conduct monitoring and review at the national level for the SDGs and targets.
- The expectations of governments towards the regional UN system in view of SDG implementation and follow-up.

2. The survey was jointly conducted by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia. The questionnaire was circulated in December 2015 (English) and January 2016 (Russian). Participants were asked to provide their responses by 15 February 2016, although a few answers were received after this date.

3. A total of 39 member States provided answers to the survey<sup>1</sup>, including 11 countries with UN (country) presence (marked with \*). These are listed as follows: Albania\*, Armenia\*, Austria, Azerbaijan\*, Belarus\*, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia\*, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova\*, Montenegro\*, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia\*, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkmenistan\*, Ukraine\*, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan\*.

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<sup>1</sup> Replies are posted at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42256>.

4. The summary is divided in two parts. It presents first the initial steps undertaken by member States in the planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the SDGs and their future plans, before introducing their expectations regarding the support that the regional UN system could provide to them in their efforts to advance Agenda 2030.

## **1. Initial steps in planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the SDGs: initiatives and approaches by member States**

### *Updating strategies and mainstreaming SDGs*

5. Efforts to implement Agenda 2030 in member States seek to build on existing policy frameworks. Many countries had in place development strategies, notably national sustainable development strategies, which are being adapted to the needs of the SDGs. However, there are differences in the degree of readiness and the progress made so far in incorporating SDGs in existing frameworks. In some cases, this depends on the timing of the cycle for developing or updating these development strategies. In a few countries, new strategies were developed around the time SDGs were adopted and this facilitated a fuller incorporation of the SDGs. In others, updating and revisions of existing strategies are required and will take place, in many cases, in accordance with already planned schedules. In countries that are seeking EU accession, sustainable development strategies seek complementarity with the European integration agenda.

6. Some countries emphasized that planned interventions should be not only sectoral but have a comprehensive character. Existing policy actions need to be integrated into a long-term framework to ensure continuity. In this context, some countries expressed their intention to follow a mainstreaming approach that aligns various sectoral national policy frameworks with SDGs and engages different implementation structures. While in general respondents indicated that they will work on the basing of existing structures, a few member States indicated that they may be introducing new planning tools. In some cases, new working groups to facilitate implementation may be set up under existing structures. In some countries with UN presence, the implementation of SDGs is also seen as a continuation of the work carried out under the MDGs, so mechanisms and tools used for MDGs implementation will be updated to support the advancement of the SDGs.

### *A complex work in progress*

7. Many member States stressed the complexity and far-reaching character of the new Agenda 2030, which will require a significant effort to ensure that strategies and policies support its implementation. Others emphasised that these ongoing processes will take some time because of the depth and breadth of the domestic and international engagements and commitments. Integration of Agenda 2030 therefore creates significant policy-making challenges, which may be influenced by the distribution of competencies and responsibilities among the different levels of the state (national, subnational, local). Integration into national plans is seen by others as requiring wide awareness of the content and implications of Agenda 2030, in order to encourage the participation of different stakeholders can be involved. In some cases, outreach programmes have preceded or are associated with implementation plans.

### *Some unknowns remain*

8. A fuller elaboration of national plans for implementation of Agenda 2030 is prevented by some elements that were missing at the time the survey was conducted. Respondents mentioned, in particular, that they were unable to fully incorporate the system of indicators, as these had not been yet adopted by the UN Statistical Commission. Work previously conducted in this area would need to be revised and SDG indicators will need to be included in national measurement frameworks that are currently under review. Some EU countries remarked that they are waiting for decisions taken at the EU level for the application of Agenda 2030. The resolution of these unknowns will allow a full integration of SDGs into sustainable development strategies, in some cases as part of planned mid-term reviews.

### *Implementation structures and the need for coordination*

9. Overall, there is a common approach to refrain from the creation of new structures but to rather focus on ensuring that the existing ones are supporting implementation in a meaningful way, through the necessary adjustments if required. The inter-sectoral character of the SDGs is emphasised by many respondents and this is reflected in the extensive use of inter-ministerial coordination structures. These are most often under the oversight of the highest level of government (office of the Prime Minister/Head of Government), although in a few cases, the Ministries of Economy, Environment or International Development are given a particular role in monitoring or coordinating implementation. While some countries mentioned that their “whole of government” approach is well suited for the implementation of Agenda 2030, others remarked that this Agenda will provide further impetus to enhance the coherence of government actions.

10. Some countries mentioned the need to develop partnerships with subnational and local levels of government (regions, municipalities) to advance implementation. A number of countries stated that coordination and an integrated policy approach will not be in conflict with the responsibility and autonomy of particular ministries and agencies in making progress and meeting targets under their areas. Some respondents stressed the importance of implementation at the local and regional level, where territorial authorities interact with the local business community, social partners and civil society.

#### *Building understanding of needs*

11. Some countries referred to ongoing mapping exercises that would establish the degree to which existing strategies and policy initiatives incorporate 2030 Agenda goals, targets and indicators. These mapping exercises will serve to define the gaps that need to be filled. Some countries mentioned that existing mechanisms will be complemented by a dedicated implementation plan to broaden existing policy commitments. Mapping exercises are most often conducted by coordinating structures, line ministries and, in some cases, draw on the expertise of a wider range of stakeholders.

#### *Priority setting and the integrated character of Agenda 2030*

12. Many countries stressed the integrated nature of the SDGs and, in some cases, urged some caution regarding the definition of priorities which could be seen as privileging some targets over others. A few countries, mainly from the EU, expressed a strong position against “cherry-picking” SDGs – both nationally and internationally. All goals are horizontal and intrinsically linked, so an integrated approach is necessary for implementation.

13. However, this is not incompatible with the identification of areas that could receive particular policy attention. Countries showed different approaches and criteria to identify these priorities. While a few countries are already in a position to name these priorities, most of them are engaged in different processes that would eventually identify them. These identification processes are often linked to the work of inter-ministerial working groups or similar structures. Some countries emphasised the importance of using a multi-stakeholder approach while seeking to identify priorities.

14. A few countries described a stocktaking exercise of the situation in different areas which would serve to develop baselines from which progress can be assessed and to provide the basis for a gap analysis. Areas in which the distance between targets and the current situation is larger are those that may require stronger efforts. Line ministries and different agencies are involved in this exercise. In addition to this analytical approach, a few countries mentioned that some areas are of particular interest because they are closer to their general policy priorities. A few countries mentioned the importance they attach to SDG 16. There are also ongoing attempts to understand how particular targets relate to country-specific socio-economic contexts.

#### *No changes in budgeting mechanisms*

15. Practically all countries do not envisage changes in budgeting processes in connection with the implementation of the SDGs. However, there are a few instances, in particular in countries with UN presence, where SDG implementation is seen as an opportunity to improve existing procedures, for example, encouraging a shift towards medium-term budget planning or reinforcing the orientation towards programme budgeting. In some cases, strategies incorporate provisions for sustainable financing mechanisms, resulting in an improvement of the existing financing for sustainable development. Medium-term action plans are linked to the budget preparation process.

#### *Stakeholders involvement to be widened*

16. All countries plan to involve stakeholders in the implementation of SDGs. Some respondents, in particular, also drew attention to the role of dynamic and varied coalitions that bring together governments, civil society and business to accelerate implementation and supplement country-led approaches. Many respondents envisage using particular institutional structures for this engagement and, in some cases, developing specific strategies for stakeholder involvement. In some cases, there are already existing multi-stakeholder advisory groups, with a general scope or in particular policy areas, which will be used for mainstreaming SDGs.

17. In some countries, in particular in those that have sustainable development strategies in place, there are National Councils for Sustainable Development (or similar structures), with the participation of civil society, private sector and academics. These Councils are expected to contribute to implementation, with a few countries indicating that there are plans to widen their remit and membership or even to use them as platform to develop broader partnerships. Some countries have also stressed that in the course of the negotiations on the SDGs, there were channels for the involvement of stakeholders that will continue to be used regarding

implementation. A few countries distinguished between the involvement of stakeholders on the domestic and international aspects of Agenda 2030 and expressed their intention to expand stakeholder involvement to both, filling existing gaps. However, there were also warnings on singling out partnerships with specific organisations, as this could be seen as excluding others.

#### *Adaptation efforts reaching out to local governments and other stakeholders*

18. Respondents to the survey stressed the importance of adaptation to national and local realities and presented different criteria that would be informing this process. Some countries mentioned that adaptation is already explicitly considered as part of action plans to develop existing strategies. Some countries indicated that adaptation should be the result of two converging processes: top down and bottom up. Engaging all of society in implementation will be crucial for adaptation. A number of respondents drew attention to the importance of mobilizing and strengthening local authorities and other stakeholders for adaptation at the local level (localization). In particular, some respondents stressed the substantial interest from local governments to engage in the implementation of the agenda.

#### *More and better data required for effective monitoring*

19. Answers to the survey show a general agreement on the importance of suitable data for the implementation of Agenda 2030, which will provide the basis for effective monitoring in a transparent way. Respondents put particular emphasis on data disaggregation to ensure that statistical averages do not mask inequalities. This will be a challenge for all. Statistical offices occupy a central role in the efforts to upgrade the capacity to develop appropriate indicators and collect the necessary data in all countries. In some of them, ministries and other agencies are also identified as sources of data that can be gathered in the course of policy implementation. Some respondents made also references to the importance of “big data” and the need for a data revolution, tapping into new sources of data. As necessary data would come from different sources, some respondents drew attention to the importance of coordination.

20. Some countries have already in place a well-developed system of sustainable development indicators or datasets that are collected to monitor existing policy actions. A few countries mentioned national initiatives to capture particular aspects of sustainable development or produce aggregate indexes. In some cases, reports on sustainable development indicators are already produced, most often every two years. Respondents also stressed the importance of engaging stakeholders in these monitoring efforts.

21. Many respondents described ongoing exercises to examine to what extent existing statistical capacities and indicators are well suited to the needs of Agenda 2030. In some cases, this question has emerged in connection with the preparation or updating of national strategies for sustainable development. When necessary, upgrading existing procedures is preferred to developing new ones, according to some countries. Monitoring on the basis of collected data would be done by using or broadening existing policy monitoring mechanisms, in some cases under the coordination structures overseeing Agenda 2030.

*Mechanisms for progress assessment are yet to be defined fully*

22. Broadly speaking, this is an area where the intentions of respondents are comparatively less defined, as some countries feel that it is too early to provide detailed answers or state that work is very much in progress. Countries that are less advanced in putting in place mechanisms for implementation are naturally less advanced in this area as well. Assessment of progress will be based on indicators and many countries relate their efforts in this area to the strength of their statistical systems.

23. Sustainable development strategies that are in place or are being developed incorporate most often indicators and mechanisms to evaluate progress. These will be updated to integrate more fully the requirements of Agenda 2030. In particular, a few countries have expressed dissatisfaction with existing procedures and are taking this opportunity to review them. In some cases, while the strategy is already in place, measurement frameworks are still being developed. A few countries place particular emphasis on analytical aspects, going beyond purely statistical reporting to address issues regarding policy coherence and interlinkages between targets. Some respondents also mentioned that, while sectoral policies may provide the channel for implementation, evaluation will take place at the level of the overall sustainable development strategy. Overall, in many countries, the assessment of progress in the implementation of Agenda 2030 will be carried out largely with the existing tools for policy monitoring and evaluation.

24. There are differences regarding the frequency of progress evaluation. In most cases, reports are issued typically every two years, but there is also some variation regarding the type of reports, which may cover only statistical indicators or incorporate also analytical insights, including sometimes from external sources. A combination of both types of reports, with different frequencies, is also possible.

25. Some countries stressed the role of the multi-stakeholder institutions involved in overseeing sustainable development initiatives in monitoring progress and, more broadly, the importance of a transparent, inclusive and participatory follow-up and review process.

*Streamlined reporting that avoids duplication*

26. Many countries deferred providing more details on this issue until there is more clarity at the global, and for some of them, EU levels. Respondents often emphasized the need to avoid duplicative processes and instead, using existing instruments and channels of reporting as much as possible. Many countries would welcome guidelines on common reporting that would facilitate fulfilling different obligations. In this context, the issue of how to reconcile national and international reporting cycles was also raised in the survey.

27. National reports prepared for assessing progress are expected to be used for meeting different reporting obligations. In some countries, there are reports under existing sustainable development strategies that could be merged with reports on SDGs. Pilot reporting could help to fine-tune envisaged mechanisms under well-developed sustainable development strategies. Coordination and multi-stakeholder structures involved in Agenda 2030 are also expected to play a role in reporting.

28. Some respondents also mentioned the use of national reports under different conventions and other international obligations in reporting on SDG progress. In this connection, some also raised the issue of contributions to the annual global SDG report.

29. There were few respondents that explicitly addressed the question of the channels used to share reports internationally, besides some references to the HLPF, UNECE, the EU (in some cases) and the dissemination through electronic means. Some countries underlined the importance of making these reports available to the public and well in advance of any discussions. Some respondents also showed their willingness to share reports at the regional level, including in the context of peer-reviews, to facilitate learning and the exchange of experiences.

## 2. The role of the UN in supporting SDG achievement

### Providing assistance and guidance for planning and implementation

30. In their replies, member States outlined a number of functions the UN could exercise in support of planning and implementation. More generally, the UN could provide political leadership to drive SDG implementation, building on its neutrality, legitimacy, normative role and convening power along with its ability to work across sectors.

31. Providing norms, standards, legal instruments, policy recommendations and expertise advice were referred to as key services. Countries should be able to draw from the knowledge and comparative advantages of the entire regional UN system, including funds, programmes and specialized agencies, which would require closer horizontal cooperation between different UN entities.

32. The normative work should be underpinned by well-coordinated technical cooperation, capacity-building and targeted support for institutional and policy change at the request of countries and according to their needs and national circumstances.

33. Many respondents stressed that for a successful translation of the agreed global agenda into national action, contributions from various stakeholders at national and sub-national levels need to be mobilized. The UN could be instrumental in helping to build and develop multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms for SDG implementation.

34. Some governments stressed that efforts to achieve the SDGs are primarily country-led and subject to national accountability. EU member states and other high-income countries do not see a direct role of the UN in planning and implementation at the national level.

### Further needs in countries with UN presence

35. This is a notable difference to the countries with UN presence. As confirmed by the survey replies, they expect the UN system to play a crucial role in the process of integrating the SDGs into national and local plans and strategies and in the adaptation of goals, targets and indicators to specific contexts. In addition, there is a

need for institutional capacity-building for implementation and support for resource mobilization and SDG advocacy.

36. Building on the existing active engagement between governments and their UN partners, assistance is expected from the UN Country Teams and other UN entities, using the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) as key instruments that set out the focus areas for SDG implementation and that facilitate coherent country programming. Involvement of the UN system in government working groups in charge of national SDG implementation was also suggested.

37. Countries with UN presence in particular would also benefit from subregional learning and sharing of experiences and knowledge, e.g. through pilot projects, information-sharing with other countries in the region or through South-South cooperation to learn how SDGs are implemented.

#### *Towards effective follow-up and review*

38. SDG achievement will rest on an effective, multi-layered follow-up and review mechanism that involves the sub-national, national, regional and global levels. A vast majority of member States point out in their replies that regional reviews need to have a vital connection to the national and global levels. They need to be anchored in national reviews and help prepare the global High-level Political Forum in a complementary manner. Moreover, high-quality statistics and monitoring are considered key to tracking SDG progress.

39. Member States underscored clearly that follow-up and review should be designed in a way that prevents duplications and parallel processes, minimizes reporting burdens and the need for additional structures and resources, synergizes existing mechanisms, integrates various actors, and increases cooperation and overall coordination of the UN entities participating in the process.

40. A key pillar of the overall system will be national accountability. To a considerable extent, follow-up and review will be rooted in national processes and mechanisms. National SDG reports could play a key role in the review process and provide important inputs into the regional review. In countries with UN presence, national SDG reports will be prepared by governments and supported by the UN Country Teams and other UN entities, as appropriate.

41. In this context, an issue that is stressed by a number of respondents is the need for harmonized reporting guidelines. The UN could facilitate the preparation of guidelines for national reports as well as for regional reports to the global level in order to ensure a certain degree of comparability.

#### *Making the “data revolution” happen*

42. A vast majority of governments replying to the survey see supporting SDG data and monitoring as a key role of the UN. At the global and regional level, this includes providing statistical guidance and developing standards and common methodologies. The UN will provide a forum for the continuing work on the global SDG indicator framework. In addition, assistance with data disaggregation, establishing baselines for SDG indicators and sharing experiences on monitoring are useful areas for UN support.

43. In building the SDG data and monitoring system, fragmentation into different institutions and databases should be avoided. The UN should capitalize on existing cooperation with organizations such as Eurostat, EEA and OECD and partnerships such as PARIS21.

44. Several respondents supported the development of regional SDG indicators.

#### *Strengthening statistical capacities in countries with UN presence*

45. Respondents from countries with UN presence pointed out that there is a wealth of experience from monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in this part of the region. The UN was called upon to help use these MDG lessons for SDG monitoring.

46. In particular, assistance is needed in identifying and addressing gaps in statistical capacities, developing adapted SDG indicators while ensuring comparability and harmonized methodologies, data gathering, innovative data sources, monitoring, and defining performance measures and benchmarks for sustainable development policies. Support should be targeted to the responsible national statistical offices. Some countries with UN presence have also expressed the need to involve UN entities in producing national SDG progress reports, building on the experiences gained from monitoring the MDGs.

### *Synthesizing various inputs at the regional level*

47. Governments requested that regional reviews build on and integrate inputs from various existing review mechanisms, e.g. national reports, intergovernmental or other UN reports, contributions from other international organizations or analysis from other stakeholders. Some respondents made concrete suggestions on how these inputs could be synthesized.

48. For instance, it was deemed useful if the UN system could engage in data analysis, synthesizing national inputs, identifying regional trends and challenges, and transforming them into a suitable and harmonized input for the global level.

49. This could take the form of periodic regional SDG progress reports or SDG-related thematic reports (for instance in line with the theme of the High-level Political Forum). Some respondents also pointed out that duplicative reporting exercises at the regional and the global level need to be avoided, and that some regional issues could be fed into the Global Sustainable Development Report and the global SDG progress report.

### *Building an inclusive regional review platform*

50. Many replies to the survey expressed interest in a regional review platform that brings together member States, the UN system and other relevant regional and subregional organizations, based on the provisions of Agenda 2030 (in particular paragraphs 80 and 81). It is perceived that UNECE could play a robust role in convening and coordinating the regional review platform, in close cooperation with the regional UN system and involving partners such as the European Union, regional development banks, OECD, or networks such as the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN), bringing in their expertise, avoiding duplication, connecting with their processes and ensuring coverage of the broad and complex SDG agenda.

51. The view was shared that the regional level should focus on peer learning and exchange of national best practices and challenges. In addition, regional reviews are best placed to identify shared goals, emerging regional trends and challenges and solutions for transboundary issues, including trade, infrastructure, and environment. A regional review platform could also facilitate exchange between advanced and countries with UN presence.

52. The results of this peer learning could also be made available at global level to enable knowledge exchange among countries also from different regions. As proposed by a few respondents, relevant

presentations and information could also be made available through online tools. The regional level could also help prepare countries to take part in the global review.

53. Several respondents suggested that the regional platform should develop a more structured mechanism of voluntary regional peer reviews, building on examples such as the UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews or OECD peer reviews. At the same time, some countries urged to avoid redundancies and create value-added through regional reviews.

54. Annual regional meetings arranged by UNECE would allow member States to share experiences and best practices in preparation of the HLPF. The summary of regional discussions could constitute an input to the HLPF.

55. A number of respondents emphasized that the regional review platform should have a multi-stakeholder character, providing an opportunity for civil society, the private sector, academia and others to express their views. More continuous involvement of stakeholders through online tools and consultative mechanisms should also be promoted. Existing UN system interfaces such as the Global Compact should be fully used.

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