

MONITORING AGENDA 2030 IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE EU

In today's increasingly interconnected world, it is important that coordinated worldwide efforts are made to achieve the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This includes the EU and its Member States. As we celebrate the 2030 Agenda's second anniversary, it is time to take stock of where Europe stands in turning the goals and principles into reality for all.

CONCORD members are monitoring closely to what extent EU institutions and Member States have set up the necessary governance structures to take this holistic agenda forward, whether strategies have been adopted with clear plans for implementation, whether robust monitoring accountability mechanisms have been set up and whether civil society is being engaged and has been building cross-sectoral alliances along the way. To this end, 26 of CONCORD's national platforms across the EU have answered 30 questions about the situation in their countries.¹ Brussels-based network members have done the same for the EU institutions. From the survey results this paper distills trends, good practices and recommendations for the future. Through this paper, CONCORD aims to hold governments to account and inspire more ambitious actions from all actors involved.

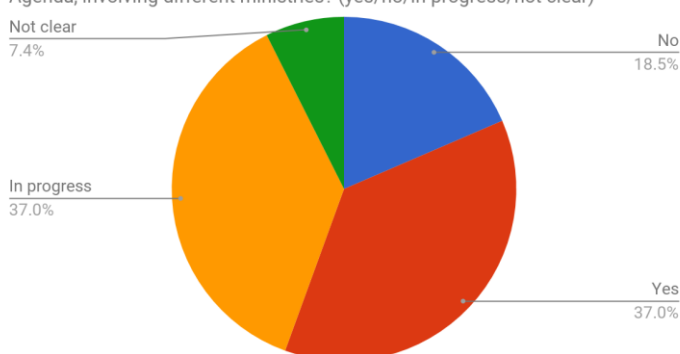
Governance

All European countries and the EU institutions have to deliver on universal, interlinked objectives, regardless of their political system or national wealth. Reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require new approaches to monitoring and implementation, and can only be possible if all actors within society are mobilised. This requires a level of political appropriation and leadership that remains, to date, a huge challenge for most.

Indeed, political leadership for implementation and the distribution of powers vary widely from one State to another. The political lead should hold the power to drive home such cross-sectoral ambitions. Yet who is put in charge varies greatly across the EU. Only 5 reviewed countries and the EU institutions have put their Prime Minister, Chancellor or First Vice-President in charge, in close collaboration with a few specific ministries. 4 other countries have decided on shared leadership of 2 or more ministers for this sustainable development process. It remains to be seen to what extent the ministers or coordinators that have been appointed to lead this process in other countries, often still the environment or development ministers but in one country also the finance or economic development

minister, will manage to lead the other ministries in this collective effort.

Is there a structured and clear governmental process to implement 2030 Agenda, involving different ministries? (yes/no/in progress/not clear)



To look a bit further into the way governments have organised themselves, 10 reviewed EU countries have officially set up an interministerial dialogue and/or structure to mobilize and include all relevant ministries, 10 countries are still reflecting on the best way to organize at governmental level and the 5 remaining countries have not taken any steps. In one country and at EU institutional level, due to

lack of communication, it remains unclear whether such an interministerial structure is operational. Are you reading this and thinking that mobilising many ministers around the same table to discuss such a broad agenda sounds unrealistic? Well, that's what Cyprus, Finland and the Netherlands are already doing with structures in place to mandate individual relevant ministries to mobilise, implement and

¹ National platforms from Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

monitor one or more SDG(s) depending on their respective competences and missions. At decentralised level, we see promising examples in cities such as Copenhagen - having decided to develop its own action plan - and regions in Spain such as Navarra, Valencia, Basque Country and Catalonia - a group of regions organising the implementation and monitoring framework at the regional level - or in the United Kingdom countries such as Wales - having implemented the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which requires public bodies in Wales to carry out their activities in a sustainable way and Scotland - having committed to implement the SDGs through its National Planning Framework, and National Action Plan for Human Rights.

To ensure inclusivity and accountability towards sustainable development, national parliaments have a crucial role to play in enacting legislation, adopting budgets, monitoring implementation and holding governments to account. However, it seems that most parliaments are still struggling to take up their role in implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Agenda. Out of the 26 reviewed countries, only 3 (!) national parliaments have actively or passively done so: Denmark, with Members of Parliament from all represented political parties taking the initiative to create an SDG-dedicated parliamentary working group. The Danish government delivers a short statement report on the implementation of the SDGs to the Parliament, and every four years it submits a longer progress report. In Finland, the government will include sustainable development in its annual reporting to the parliament and deliver every four years a 2030 Agenda progress report, thus allowing all sectorial committees to express their views and formulate policy recommendations on the Finnish sustainable development policy. And in the German Bundestag, the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development deals with issues regarding sustainable legislation. It is supposed to ensure that procedures contributing to sustainable legislation such as a sustainability analysis are followed and to see that the National Sustainability Strategy, which is one of the government instruments to implement the Agenda 2030, is taken into account in legislation.

Implementation

There seems to be a common understanding by the EU Member States that the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda has to be guided by an overall implementation strategy. In its Council Conclusions from June 20th 2017, the Member States urge the Commission “to elaborate, by mid-2018, an implementation strategy outlining timelines, objectives and concrete measures”. CSOs have called for overarching implementation strategies ever since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The majority of EU Member States either already have an overall strategy for sustainable development or are currently working on one, but there are still almost 40% who seem to have no intention of developing such a strategy and/or an implementation plan, covering both domestic and international policies. Furthermore, many of the strategies which are in place or foreseen are based on existing policies and measures. While CSOs have also called for bringing together existing initiative [reference CONCORD report 2016], it is often unclear to what extent the integration of SDGs in existing policies bring actual change or whether it is continuing business as usual with a slight change of language.

To develop a comprehensive overall strategy, there must be an honest and thorough gap analysis, identifying clearly what is still missing to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. Of the 26 countries analysed, only three have so far conducted a gap analysis. The Netherlands is updating its gap analysis every six months. In Finland, the government commissioned an external gap analysis before the HLPF in 2016. And Estonia has conducted a gap analysis prior to the 2016 HLPF. In five Member States there is still work in progress, while 18 countries either don't provide information or are not basing their implementation on an initial gap analysis.

A crucial element of implementing the 2030 Agenda is to ensure coherence between policies, by aligning all policy areas to contributing (or at least not harming) sustainable development. Not only is there an SDG target 17.14 to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), the whole 2030 agenda is integrated, interdependent and indivisible. Most of the Member States have not yet taken

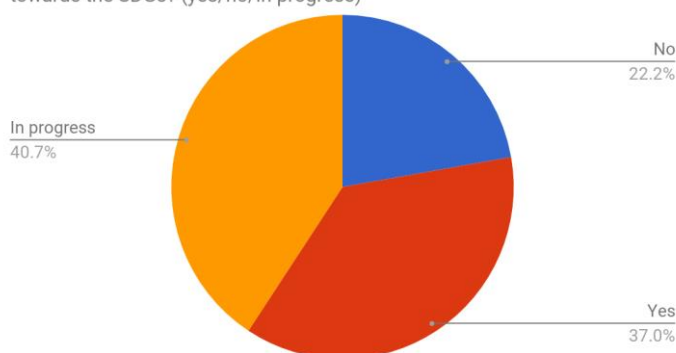
any steps towards more coherent policy making, while those few which have some sort of an idea or a plan - whether clear or not - have not yet managed to turn them into practice. In the Czech Republic, a discussion is ongoing to build capacities in the government for monitoring policy coherence. In Finland, the 2030 Agenda implementation plan introduced new PCSD mechanisms, such as impact assessments for sustainable development. They will carry out a PCD exercise in planning to carry out a Comprehensive assessment of how Finland's external policies promote the 2030 Agenda and achieve SDGs beyond Finland's borders. In Sweden, the Swedish Policy for Global Development is said to be one of the key tools for achieving the 2030 Agenda. At EU level, several PCSD mechanisms exist - such as the ex-ante impact assessments or the bi-annual PCD reports - but they should be strengthened at all levels and in all policy areas, and they should be complemented by new ones.

Monitoring, accountability and review

Already during the post-2015 negotiations, civil society organisations started to voice the need for robust monitoring, accountability and review frameworks (MAR) to be set up for the 2030 Agenda. Indeed the EU itself called for an effective MAR framework during the international negotiations.² What made these three technical words – monitoring, accountability and review – so important when we had big and catchy topics such as the root causes of inequality and curbing climate change to focus on? In short, the answer is first that MAR makes goals tangible and second that it extends the ownership of the Agenda from states to citizens. Just imagine, for example, the difference between saying that our government has adopted a new set of policies to tackle inequality and saying that our GINI coefficient - a statistical dispersion for the wealth distribution of a nation's residents - indicates a clear inequality reduction. With clear indicators and a transparent framework, citizens will know if and when their governments have reached their objectives and kept their promises, will know whose views have been taken into account when declaring progress, and can thus trust that the system is reliable.

In our view, a robust monitoring MAR framework consists of a comprehensive set of indicators, regular quantitative and qualitative progress reports, self-critical and participatory stocktaking, and inclusive and regular dialogue with all stakeholders.³ Good examples for each emerge from all over Europe, but very few countries have ticked all the boxes (Finland being perhaps the only exception). Overall, best progress has been made in developing indicator sets, with 10 Member States and the EU having agreed a national indicator set and another 11 in the process of doing so. Regarding plans for progress reports and stocktaking, development has been modest at best. In less than 25% of the Member States, CSOs are aware of such plans with the majority reporting the situation to be unclear. It is thus not surprising then that a clear monitoring, accountability and review framework has so far been set up in only 5 countries (Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands). In our view, both the EU and the Member States have a lot to do in this respect.

Did your government agree on a national indicators set to monitor progress towards the SDGs? (yes/no/in progress)



Eurostat published a preliminary “teaser” progress report in 2016 and aims to publish every two years statistical reports covering a list of 100 indicators starting from November 2017 - even in the absence of an actual implementation plan at EU level. These indicators will include indicators from both the UN list and others that are especially relevant for the EU. The Eurostat's 2030 Agenda report is adjusted

² Council conclusions on a transformative post-2015 agenda, December 2014, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/workarea/downloadasset.aspx?id=40802190987>

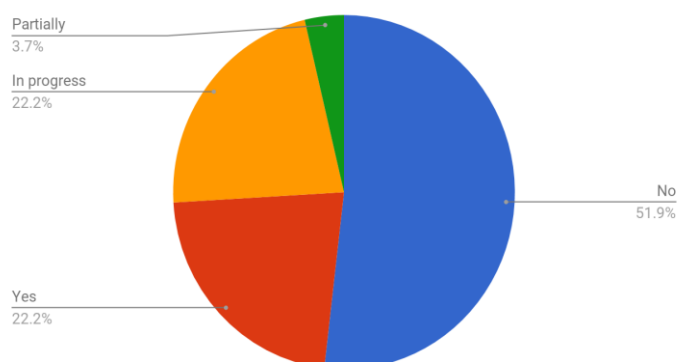
³ https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SustainableDevelopment_publication_2016_web.pdf?1fdb40

from former sustainable development reports, and thus shows that monitoring the 2030 Agenda does not necessarily require everything to be crafted from scratch but can build on existing practices. Yet, we did hope for a more inclusive process for selecting those 100 indicators and would like to see them complemented by a more in-depth qualitative analysis from the Commission's side which should jointly be submitted to the Parliament for review.

Civil society space and engagement

Civil society space within the EU cannot be taken for granted. Time and time again, it has been threatened, including by EU institutions and governments. Here we ask more specifically: to what extent has civil society been invited to participate in the EU implementation of the 2030 Agenda? Are there any positive and innovative examples of structured participation processes between EU governments and CSOs? In the future, how can EU Member States better involve civil society in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

Is there a structured participation process for CSOs to engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? (yes/no/in progress/unclear)



Of the 26 reviewed countries, only 6 have set up a structured participation process for CSOs to engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. More than half of the 26 have still not taken any steps to do so. This is especially worrying as we are celebrating the two-year anniversary of the 2030 Agenda.

Yet CSOs have demonstrated that building structured cross-sectoral alliances with other stakeholders on the 2030 Agenda is not only possible but also has positive

impact. In more than half of the countries reviewed, CSOs have been building such alliances together. The Portuguese NGDO Platform, for example, has been coordinating a national coalition of different Portuguese umbrella CSOs (on youth, gender, local development, trade unions, etc). Kopin and SKOP, the National Platform of Maltese development NGOs, have been facilitating the Agenda 2030 National Coalition that includes private sector networks, cooperatives, trade unions, environmental networks and civil society organisations. The Irish Coalition 2030 was established, forming a cross sectoral coalition of domestic, community, environmental, trade union and international NGOs and platforms. ASVIS is the umbrella organisation in Italy representing practically all CSOs, with trade unions, universities and also private sector (enterprises). In Denmark the 2030-panel has been created, consisting of 16 people from civil society, the private sector, the national human rights institute, private companies, trade unions, the local government association and from an international environmental city-coalition (C40). Its mandate is to support the work of the cross-political network in the Danish Parliament as well as making own initiatives such as reports, roundtables and advocacy work. Similar initiatives were carried out in other countries, including Finland, Belgium, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. At the EU level, SDG Watch Europe was created as a cross-sectoral alliance of CSOs from development, environment, social, human rights and other sectors, with the goal to hold the EU to account for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

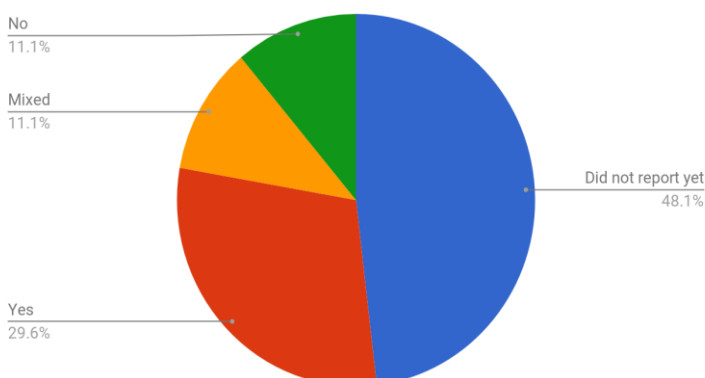
Of course, the absence of a *permanent, cross-sectoral and structured* participation process allowing CSOs to engage in their government's implementation of the 2030 Agenda does not necessarily mean there is no dialogue with civil society at all. CONCORD welcomes the efforts made by various EU Member States to promote a participatory process for their national voluntary reviews (VNRs) in the run-up to previous UN High Level Political Forums (HLPF). Of those who reported to the HLPF in 2016 or 2017, especially positive examples include Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden. In some cases, civil

society was given the opportunity to input in and/or comment on their government's report, to join their delegation in New York and to take the floor during the VNR presentation. We encourage all EU Member States – whether or not they are reporting to the next HLPF – to follow in their footsteps.

Nevertheless, in too many cases have such participatory processes with civil society been limited to specific events such as the UN HLPF. The EU and its Member States should promote a participatory process for CSOs to engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that goes beyond New York – one that is *permanent, cross-sectoral, structured and institutionalized*.

A few positive examples exist already. In the Czech Republic, CSOs take part in the National Council for Sustainable Development, where implementation processes are discussed, and have asked to prepare shadow reports. In Denmark, the NGO platform Global Focus has become the secretariat for a cross-political network on the 2030 Agenda in the parliament, where all political parties are represented with one or several members of parliament. In Germany, the government has set up the Sustainability Forum in which more than 70 organisations and networks of civil society are represented. Such examples should be expanded in other Member States but also at the EU level itself. We hope that the newly-created SDGs Multi-stakeholder Platform will match expectations.

In the run-up to the HLPF, has your government allowed and promoted a participatory process for the national voluntary reviews, including CSOs and other stakeholders?



Conclusion and recommendations

Having assessed progress across the EU, we learnt that there are some great examples out there we can all learn from. But more efforts are needed to be able to deliver on this ambition. It is time that all EU Member States and the EU institutions set up the necessary governance structures to take this holistic and universal agenda for sustainable development forward, adopt strategies with clear implementation plans to ensure no-one is left behind, to establish robust monitoring accountability mechanisms and engage civil society from the beginning.

To this end, CONCORD calls on all EU Member States and the EU institutions to:

- Appoint **political leaders** that have the **power and political will** to guide the whole-of-government approach to drive this holistic Agenda forward.
- Set up a **structured and clear governmental process** to implement the 2030 Agenda, involving different ministries.
- Parliaments should set up a **structured and clear parliamentary process** to engage in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, involving different political parties and parliamentary committees.
- Step up efforts to **localise the 2030 Agenda** and involve also regions, provinces, cities or communes.
- Carry out an **honest and thorough gap analysis**, identifying clearly what is still missing to fully implement the 2030 Agenda and where contradictions between policies exist
- Adopt a **sustainable development strategy and implementation plan** to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, covering both domestic and international policies.

- Make sure such as strategy takes into account the **four dimensions of sustainable development, and key principles** such as leave no one behind and the respect of planetary boundaries.
- Provide the **financial resources** for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and align monitoring and reporting timelines with government policy and budget design and planning cycles.
- Put in place new mechanisms to strengthen **Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development** and strengthen existing ones.
- Set up a **robust monitoring, accountability and review framework** to take the 2030 Agenda forward and which includes the following elements:
 - A **comprehensive national indicator set** to monitor progress towards the SDGs, in line with the globally agreed set of indicators but tailored to the national or EU context and developed in an inclusive and participatory way;
 - **Accessible, reliable and disaggregated data**, identifying SDG data gaps on the invisible population groups and the related need for investments in statistical capacity and research;
 - **Regular qualitative and quantitative progress reports**, developed in an inclusive and transparent way;
 - **Regular stock-taking moments** to review progress with all stakeholders involved (including the various ministries, the parliament and civil society) and to influence the next steps.
 - Ensure **public access to all relevant information** regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an easy and transparent way.
- Ensure a **structured participation process for civil society to engage** in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. Not only during the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews to the High-level Political Forum in New York, but permanently and continuously, as an actor in its own right. This should happen both sectorally and cross-sectorally to make sure we mainstream the goals and look at the interlinkages.
- **Support the creation of SDG multi-stakeholders platforms** to mobilise actors and resources towards SDG implementation and monitoring as a means to ensure the success of the 2030 Agenda.

To ensure a coordinated and coherent approach across the EU and to learn from one another, it is important that Member States can exchange, streamline and jointly agree on their approaches to implement and monitor the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To this end, CONCORD calls on...

- The **European Council** to dedicate the political responsibility for the 2030 Agenda to a high-level Council formation, to which the First Vice President should be accountable, to set up a high-level working party or Friends of the Presidency group dedicated to the 2030 Agenda and to mainstream the 2030 Agenda in all its other working parties.
- The **European Commission**, to develop an EU Sustainable Development Strategy and concrete action plans for the EU institutions and Member States, respecting the exclusive, shared and supportive competences of the EU.
- The **European Parliament** to organise debates related to the 2030 Agenda in all its committees and to set up a group of dedicated Members of the European Parliament, representing a wide spectrum of committees and political parties, in order to hold EU leaders to account.

