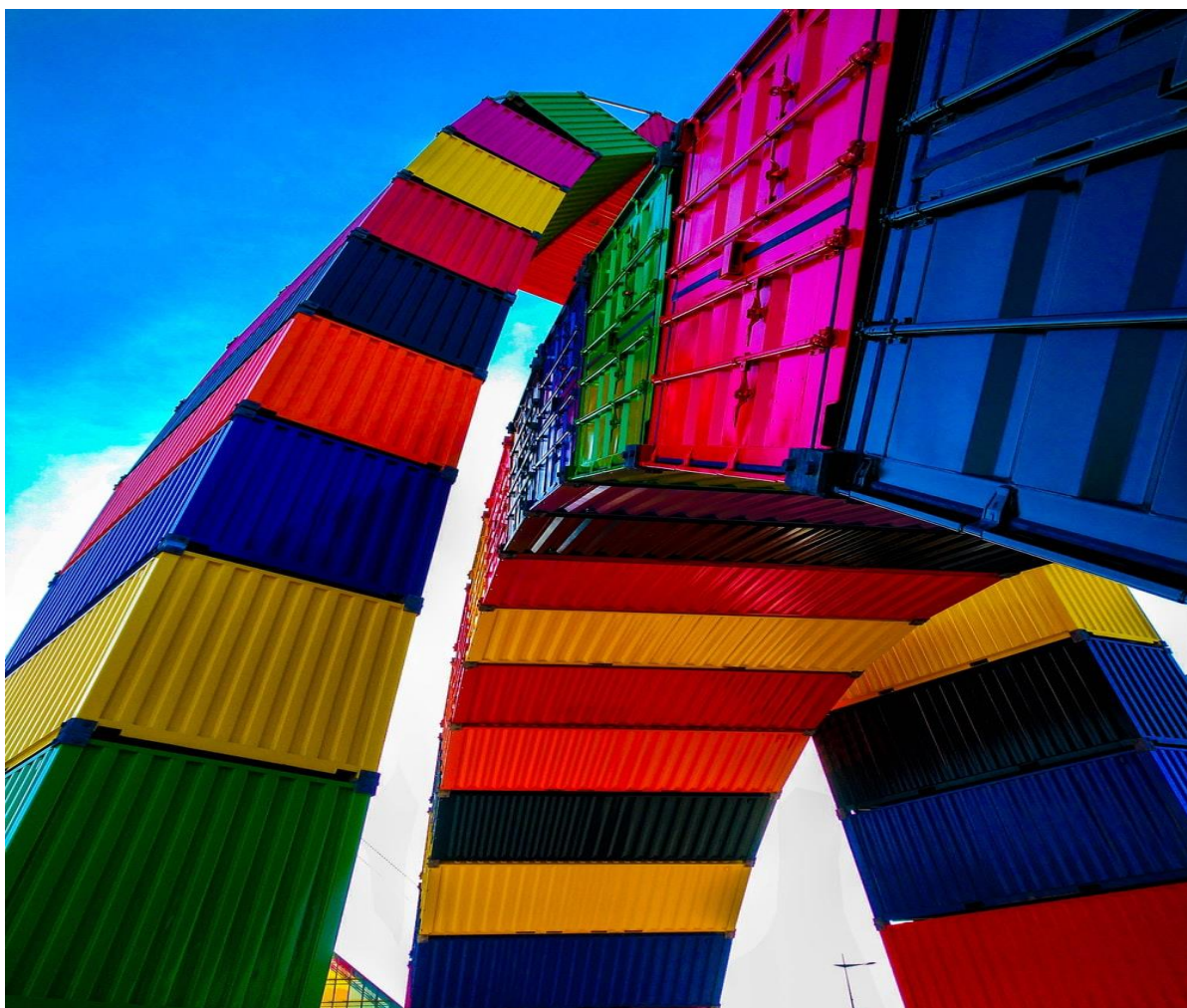# Sustainable Development Goals and the environment in Europe: a cross-country analysis and 39 country profiles

Cover photo by Antoine Petitteville on Unsplash

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Identifiers

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union did not affect the production of this report. Data reported by the United Kingdom are included in all analyses and assessments contained herein, unless otherwise indicated.

Acknowledgements

Background

At the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Summit on 25-26 September 2015, world leaders adopted the global framework 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', which included 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The 2030 Agenda builds on the Millennium Development Goals and aims to eradicate poverty, leaving no one behind, and to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path.

The SDGs are clustered into five areas, which are also known as the '5Ps' of the 2030 Agenda: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. The planet cluster covers SDGs with an environmental focus and aims, *inter alia*, to protect the planet from degradation by promoting sustainable consumption and production, the sustainable management of natural resources, and taking urgent action on climate change.

To track progress towards the SDGs, the UN adopted a revised set of global indicators in July 2017, which includes 232 indicators covering all 169 targets. Throughout 2019, a comprehensive review was conducted to improve the global monitoring framework and facilitate global monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. As a result, the global set now includes 231 indicators with the available methodology. At the European level, Eurostat leads the development and review of the EU SDG indicator set, which was first published on 31 May 2017 and subsequently updated each year (latest update was 16 January 2020). Based on this set of indicators, Eurostat is responsible for publishing annual EU SDG monitoring reports, the latest of which was published in June 2020.

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has produced a global SDG Index since 2016, and in 2019, published two flagship reports assessing global and country progress in implementing the SDGs. The first report ([1]), published in June 2019, considered progress in all UN member states, while the second report ([2]), published in November 2019, focused on progress in EU Member States. The 2019 Europe Sustainable Development Report is the first independent quantitative report on the progress of the EU and its Member States towards the SDGs. Each report includes quantitative SDG indices showing countries' progress against SDG indicators and indicating that European countries are leading globally in the progress towards achieving the SDGs (SDSN, 2019).

Most recently, the European Sustainable Development Network´s (ESDN) Quarterly Report 'The Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at the National Level in Europe – Taking stock of governance mechanisms' ([3]), published in December 2019, provides an overview of the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level in Europe by surveying ESDN national focal points in around 30 European countries (ESDN, 2020).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report 'Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets: An Assessment of Where OECD Countries Stand' also provides country-level information on SDGs. The report compares countries' relative compliance with the

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([1]) Sachs et al., 2019.
([2]) SDSN and IEEP, 2019.
([3]) ESDN, 2019.

SDGs in OECD countries, 27 of which are EEA members. However, it has a strong data focus, like the Eurostat-led EU SDG monitoring report, which is not the focus of this report.

At the EU level, the European Commission (EC) published a package on European action for sustainability on 22 November 2016. As part of this package, the EC presented a mapping of the existing European actions with the SDGs and stated that all 17 SDGs were being addressed through European action. However, it added that stronger implementation and further focused action in all areas would be required to implement the full Agenda by 2030 (EC, 2016).

In Europe, 2019 marked an important year for tracking country-level SDG progress. In order to catalyse further action to implement the SDGs in Europe, the EC published a non-legislative initiative in the form of a reflection paper, 'Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030', on 30 January 2019 (EC, 2019). The Reflection Paper is part of the debate on the future of Europe which was launched through the Commission's White Paper on the future of Europe on 1 March 2017 (EC, 2017).

In February 2019, the European Parliament's study on 'Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Good practices and the way forward' was published. Its purpose was to capture the two-level character of SDG implementation at the EU and Member State level, to contribute to a joint voluntary EU report at the HLPF 2019, and to examine governance frameworks in place for the implementation of SDGs in EU Member States through 28 country fact sheets. As the first comprehensive comparative overview of SDG governance in the EU, it also provides an overview of the activities and policy developments at the EU level (EP, 2019).

In April 2019, the EC published the second Environment Implementation Review (EIR) ([4]), an overview of how EU environmental policies and laws are applied on the ground. It comprises a communication with policy findings and an annex with the priority actions for the EU Member States, a policy background document as well as 28 country reports. The report emphasises that sustainable development links environmental, social and economic policies in a coherent framework and acknowledges that it helps to implement environmental legislation and policies. The second EIR dedicates a section to sustainable development and implementation of the UN SDGs at the end of each country report (EC, 2019).

The European Semester Autumn Package, adopted in December 2019, includes an 'Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy' that reflects the Commission's focus on a sustainable and inclusive economic model. This new economic agenda reflects the ambition of the European Green Deal and rests on four dimensions: environmental sustainability, productivity gains, fairness, and macroeconomic stability. Published in February 2020, the European Semester Country Reports present a thorough analysis of the key socio-economic challenges of macro-economic relevance facing each Member State. The 2020 country reports feature a reinforced analysis and monitoring of the SDGs, including the contribution of macro-economic policies to their delivery.

The European Semester 2020 Country Reports feature a section on SDGs and an annex with the EU SDG indicators. These reports emphasise the challenges and opportunities for our economies arising from the green transition. Each country report now includes a summary assessment of Member State progress towards achieving the SDGs as well as a dedicated annex setting out

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([4]) https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index_en.htm

individual Member State's SDG performance and the trend over the past five years, both based on the set of EU SDG indicators developed by Eurostat.

From a sustainability perspective, it is promising to see that SDG knowledge in support of informed policymaking is continuing to expand, particularly in Europe. Similarly, the SOER 2020 stressed that this comprehensive set of sustainability goals and its targets are expected to be increasingly integrated throughout future EU policy frameworks. For an integrated knowledge base on SDG progress, it is also important to apply a combination of qualitative and quantitative SDG assessment approaches ([5]).

Purpose

Against the backdrop of these recent EU-wide developments, this EEA publication stands out through its **environmental lens**. The objective of this analysis is to equip its readers with up-to-date cross-country analysis as well as individual country profiles which give insight into the focus and prioritisation of environmental action across Europe, as well as country-by-country insights. It shows both the convergences and divergences towards environmental sustainability in Europe. The converging environmental focus points to the overall environmental challenges that persist in Europe, whereas diversification indicates emerging challenges or different geographical needs and political priorities in countries. Innovative approaches and good practices in the country profiles reflected here may also be inspirational.

Secondly, the **geographical scope** of this publication includes 33 EEA member countries ([6]) and 6 cooperating countries ([7]). It is useful for non-EU countries to compare their SDG processes against those of EU Member States as well for the EC to gain insights into environmental actions across Europe.

Methodology

Since 2016, the European Environment Agency (EEA) has performed several mapping activities in relation to the SDGs — for example, the preliminary mapping of the SDGs and global SDG indicators across EEA reports, indicators and data flows (2016).

More recently, in support of the SOER 2020 integrated assessment, the EEA partnered with the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) to build on their methodology and illustrate the importance of considering SDG interactions — i.e. synergies and trade-offs occurring when pursuing the SDG framework as a whole, in a publication entitled 'SDGs and the environment in the EU: A systems view to improve coherence' ([8]). This approach is also developed, although with a different focus, by the Joint Research Centre, the UN, the OECD and key research organisations (e.g. IIASA).

([5]) OECD, 2019; SEI, 2019; SOER 2020.

([6]) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom* (*The withdrawal of the UK from the EU did not affect the content of this publication. Data reported by the UK to the UN are included in all analyses and assessments contained herein, unless otherwise indicated.)

([7]) Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

([8]) https://www.sei.org/publications/sdg-synergies-environment-eu/

Figure 1: Cross-impact matrix with interactions between 21 targets and goals
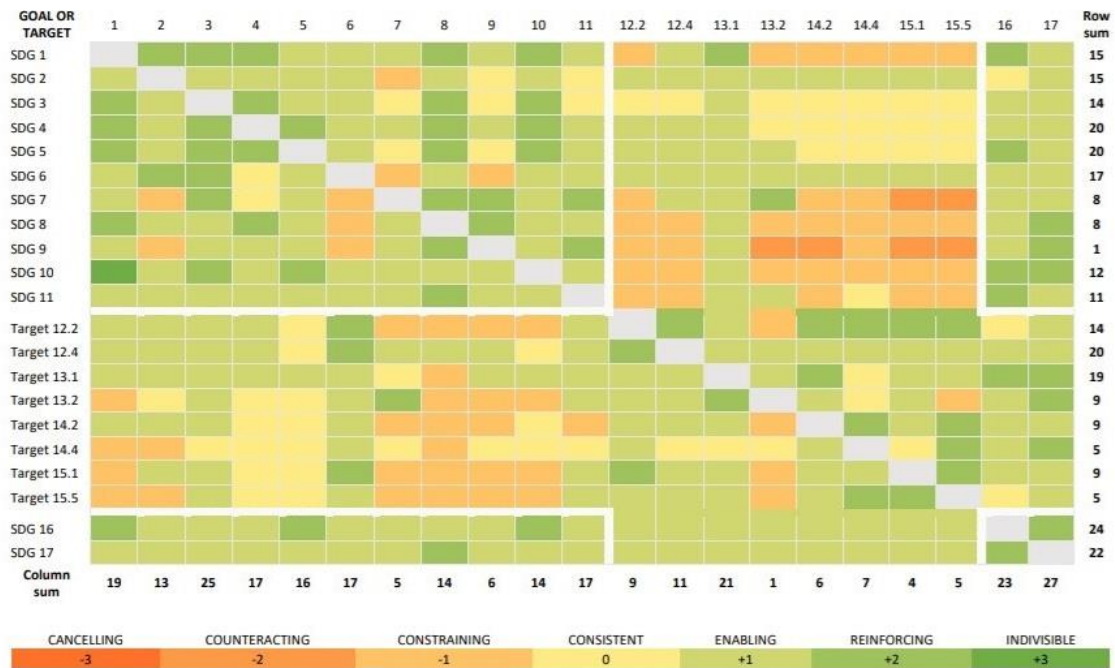
Source: [SDGs and the environment in the EU: A systems view to improve coherence, SEI Project Report](), p. 15, 2019.

By complementing the EEA's contribution to the EU SDG monitoring report and the abovementioned report on SDG interactions, this web publication aims to support the knowledge base on SDGs, particularly in light of the EC's new priorities and the Green New Deal for Europe. In this context, this publication is based on a three-year mapping and analysis of ([9]) environmental SDG actions and processes by EEA member and cooperating countries. It was informed by publications on Europe's SDG actions, a wider NFP/Eionet consultation conducted between February and April 2020, and the UN Voluntary National Reviews published between 2016-2020.

This publication covers country profiles and an accompanying cross-country analysis. The profiles sum up the ways in which countries prioritise or identify the focus of action for those SDGs with an environmental dimension. **SDGs with environmental dimension are defined** in accordance with the approach taken in SOER 2020 (EEA, 2019) (Figure 2). Based on this, the Agency identified 11 SDGs with both direct and indirect environmental dimensions (SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15). These SDGs relate to 7th Environment Action Programme (7EAP) objectives as follows:

- 7EAP Priority Objective 1: To protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital (SDGs 6, 14, 15).

([9]) The cut-off date for information provided for this publication is 15 June 2020.

- 7EAP Priority Objective 2: To turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy (SDGs 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13).

- 7EAP Priority Objective 3: To safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing (SDGs 2, 3).

However, it is important to mention that SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships) are also very important in achieving effective environmental governance and finance.

Figure 2: SDGs with an environmental dimension
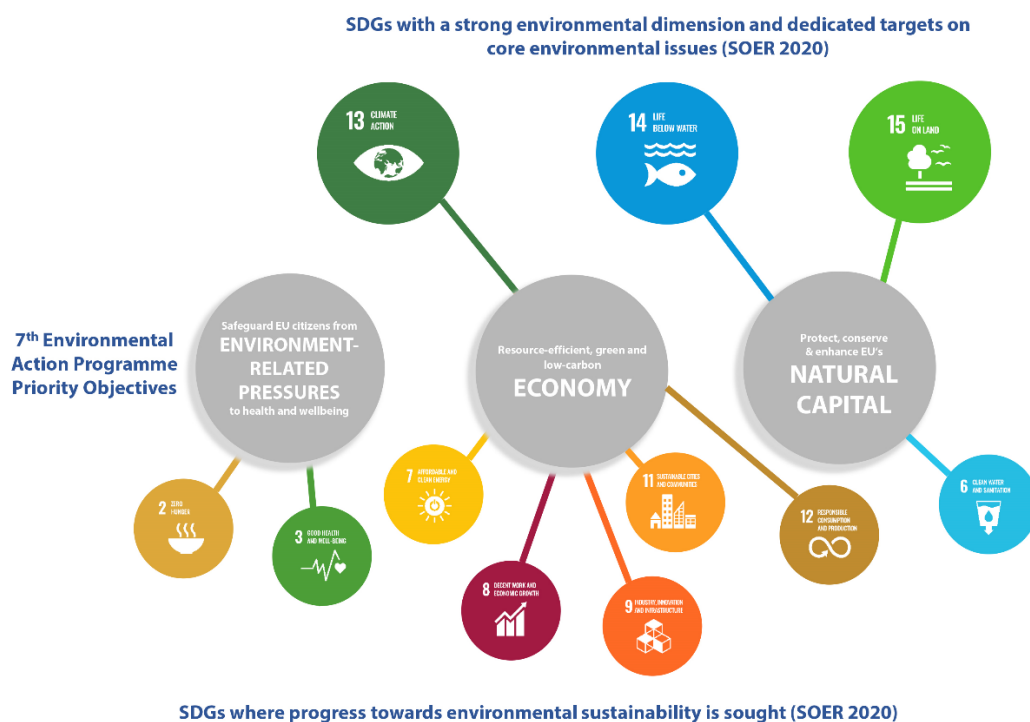
Source: EEA compilation based on SOER 2020 (SOER 2020, p.58, 2019).

The EEA report SOER 2020 ([10]) also highlights that some SDGs embed a strong environmental dimension, particularly SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 14 on conservation of marine ecosystems, and SDG 15 on the conservation of terrestrial ecosystems and the sustainable use of their resources. Environmental sustainability is also sought in relation to agriculture (SDG 2), health (SDG 3), water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), infrastructure and industry (SDG 9), tourism (SDG 8), cities (SDG 11), and consumption and production patterns (SDG 12).

In addition to their environmental lens, the country profiles give brief accounts of national plans, strategies and initiatives, governance, and processes as well as stakeholder engagement specifically set up for SDG actions. The information provided for this purpose was gathered mainly from the UN Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) ([11]) submitted to the UN High-level

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([10]) SOER 2020, 2019, p. 58
([11]) Not all of these sources were available for all countries.

Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development between 2016-2020. Acknowledging that VNRs have their own limitations and not all countries have available or recently published VNRs, the EEA also gathered information from other sources listed below, which explore the SDG actions and environmental focus of these 39 countries:

- Information gathered from the Eionet countries via the wider EEA NFP/Eionet consultation process and questionnaire during February-April 2020.

- Responses from 18 EEA member countries to the 'Regional Survey on Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals', carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in 2016 (UNECE, 2016).

- 'Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Good practices and the way forward' study requested by the European Parliament DEVE committee and published in February 2019 (EU EP, 2019).

- The Second Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) published by the European Commission in April 2019 (EC, 2019).

- 2019 Europe Sustainable Development Report published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Institution for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) in November 2019.

- ESDN Quarterly Report: 'The Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at the National Level in Europe – Taking stock of governance mechanisms', published in December 2019.

To give an overall picture on SDG actions across Europe, the country profiles are accompanied by a cross-country analysis on SDGs in Europe. The EEA cross-country analysis gives an insight on how countries deal with the environmental dimensions of various SDGs.

For the environmental analysis, **EEA mapped key words such as 'action areas, focus, priority(ies)' regarding those SDGs with an environmental dimension** (Figure 2). For example, in terms of food systems, some countries focused on agriculture whereas others focused on food labelling and food waste. The cross-country analysis also gives a snapshot of Europe as regards delivering Agenda 2030 from an environmental lens.

The methodology for both country profiles and the cross-country analysis is qualitative and uses the mapping of country-level information on the SDGs.

SDGs and the environment in Europe: a cross-country analysis

Agreed by world leaders at the United Nations in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which address global challenges, including poverty, inequality, environmental degradation and climate change. The EU was instrumental in shaping the 2030 Agenda and, together with its Member States, has the ambition to play a leading role in the global action towards achieving the SDGs. The EU has adopted a strategic approach to integrating the SDGs in both internal and external policies, and has developed indicators and a stakeholder platform to support SDG actions. To help understand the progress and action on SDGs in Europe, the EEA has explored actions in 39 EEA member and cooperating countries (hereinafter referred as Eionet ([12]) countries) focused on SDGs with an environmental dimension, as well as their governance, stakeholder engagement, barriers and enabling factors at the national level. Many Eionet countries are leading the way in achieving the SDGs. However, by reflecting national characteristics and policy priorities, the focus of environmental action varies between countries and mechanisms to support SDG progress in Europe are diverse.

Source: UN High-level Platform on Sustainable Development, 2016.

Key messages

- Due to national priorities and context, there is **some overall divergence** in where countries put their SDG efforts.
- Approximately 90 % of Eionet countries have some form of **focused action** related to SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 15 (life on land) (Figure 2).
- **Type of environmental action**:
  - For some SDGs, there is **convergence** in the types of action within the individual SDGs adopted in Eionet countries. For example, in SDG 7, the type of action includes energy efficiency in 77 % of EEA and cooperating countries, whereas in

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([12]) The European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet) is a partnership network of the EEA and its 38 member and cooperating countries.

SDG 15, 87 % of countries reported action related to the preservation of biodiversity or halting its loss (see table in the Annex).

- o Other SDGs show a greater **divergenc**e in actions undertaken by countries, which is likely to reflect the influence of different contexts (e.g. geography and climate influencing water availability) and policy priorities on countries' choices about what to focus on (see table in the Annex).

- **Institutional structures:**
    - o **Multi-level governance** is commonly used for SDG actions in Eionet countries, with almost 70 % of countries adopting an approach that combines at least two spatial levels of governance.
    - o **Interministerial bodies, advisory councils, commissions or working groups** to coordinate SDG actions have been established in almost 75 % of Eionet countries, and **dialogue with stakeholders** and their participation in prioritisation, decision-making and SDG actions can be seen in more than 80 % of countries (Figure 4).

- **Tracking progress**
    - o Based on current reporting, 95 % of Eionet countries already have or are developing national SDG indicator sets to monitor SDG progress, and by the end of 2020 it is expected that all Eionet countries will have submitted at least one VNR to the UN.
    - o Based on an analysis by the UN SDSN, **the top 10 countries** in terms of progress towards the SDGs are all Eionet countries. **Eionet countries also represent 20 of the top 25 countries** globally progressing towards the SDGs (Figure 5).

Varied focus of environmental action and prioritisation in Eionet countries

Based on an analysis of the VNRs ([13]) ([14]) on SDG progress and action for those SDGs with an environmental dimension (Figure 1), 27 ([15]) of 39 Eionet countries declared some form of environmental emphasis related to the SDGs. Among these, the most frequently prioritised SDGs (each by 15 countries) are SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 14 (life below water). The **high proportion of countries focusing on climate action** reflects the common need for an urgent response to climate change. The UN's Ocean Conference ([16]) in July 2017 was identified as a key driver for countries' self-reflection and assessment on progress towards the protection of marine environment, which is the main objective of SDG 14, the third most prioritised SDG with an environmental dimension. SDG 15 (life on land) is also frequently prioritised, with 14 Eionet countries expressing a focus or emphasis on this SDG in their VNRs, indicating **the importance of habitats and biodiversity across Europe.**

While some countries have chosen to prioritise certain SDGs with an environmental dimension, **many are working towards achieving all SDGs, acknowledging the indivisibility of Agenda 2030**. However, as stipulated in the UNSDSN's 'Getting Started with the SDGs' guide ([17]),

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([13]) As stipulated in paragraphs 79 and 84 of the 2030 Agenda, VNRs are a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's follow-up and review mechanisms, which encourage Member States to 'conduct regular, inclusive, country-led and country-driven reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels'.

([14]) https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/

(15) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

([16]) https://oceanconference.un.org/about

([17]) UN SDSN, 2015.

identifying priorities does not mean favouring one SDG at the expense of another. Instead, prioritisation means identifying the areas lagging furthest behind to catalyse resources, awareness, and policy actions to spur rapid progress and to use those areas as entry points to the broader sustainability transformation.

Based on countries' VNR reporting, for each SDG there is a range of environmental action across countries. A review of the areas in which Eionet countries are focusing domestic environmental action (Figure 3) shows that at least 90 % of Eionet countries have some form of focused action related to **SDG 6** (water and sanitation), **SDG 7** (affordable and clean energy), **SDG 11** (sustainable cities and communities), **SDG 13** (climate action) and **SDG 15** (life on land). Where there are **differences in the focus of environmental action in Eionet countries**, this may reflect national contexts and policy priorities. For example, countries which do not have environmental actions focused on **SDG 14** (life below water) include those that are landlocked (e.g. Austria, Liechtenstein and Slovakia). Approximately 30 % of Eionet countries do not have environmental actions related to **SDG 3** (good health and wellbeing) and **SDG 9** (industry, innovation and infrastructure). This may indicate that many countries consider these SDGs to be only indirectly related to environmental action.

However, **for some SDGs, there is some convergence in actions with many countries** focusing efforts in similar areas. For example, on **SDG 7** (affordable and clean energy), 30 countries reported action related to energy efficiency, and for **SDG 15** (life on land), 34 countries reported action related to the preservation of biodiversity or halting its loss. **Other SDGs show a greater divergence** in actions by countries: for example, **SDG 6** (water and sanitation), where the most common focus of action is on wastewater management (13 countries) but a wide range of other actions, such as those related to drinking water quality, water efficiency and managing groundwater reserves, are reported by between 5 and 10 countries. Where there is a **diversity in approaches** across countries, this is likely to reflect the influence of **different natural conditions** (e.g. geography and climate influencing water availability) and **policy priorities** on countries' choices concerning what to focus on.

Some countries also adopt more **innovative approaches**. For instance, two countries are supporting **family farming** to help move towards zero hunger (**SDG 2**), three countries are encouraging the **use of recycled water and rain-water harvesting (SDG 6)**, and one country is establishing **'zero-waste territories'** to help move towards sustainable consumption and production (**SDG 12**).

In addition, currently, **the designated national focal points** (for reporting to the UN on SDGs) in **11 Eionet countries** ([18]) are their **Ministries of Environment**, whereas in **6 Eionet countries** ([19]), the responsibility of acting as the national focal point is **shared between Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, or their Permanent Missions to the UN**. In countries which have assigned their Ministries of Environment as the national focal points to the UN's 2030 Agenda, the significance of the environmental dimension of the SDGs could be considered more prominent.

Figure 3: Number of countries with actions focused on environmental SDGs

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(18) Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Serbia.
(19) Germany, Greece, North Macedonia, Romania, Spain and the UK.

SDG   Number of countries with environmental actions focused on each SDG
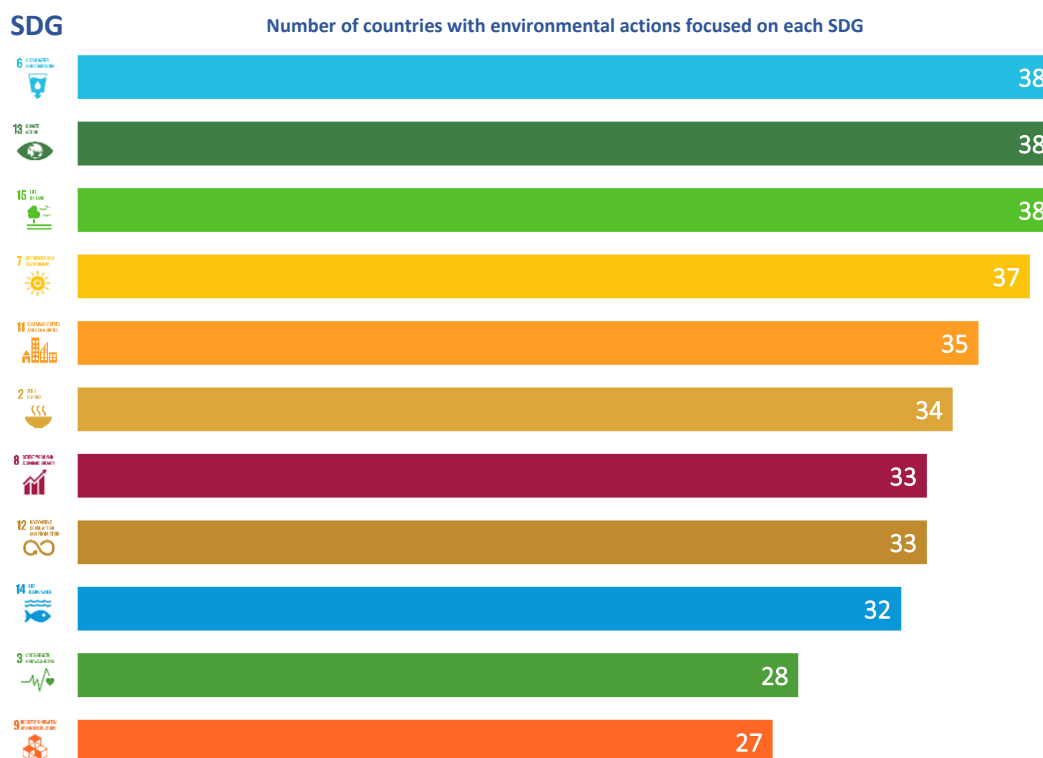
Source: EEA's own assessment.

What are the SDG-related structures and processes in Eionet countries?

Approaches to the governance of SDGs varies between Eionet countries (Figure 4). Combining geographic scales of governance is common in SDG actions: 27 out of 39 countries (69 %) have adopted an approach that combines at least two spatial levels of governance. Of these 27 countries, 15 (38 %) combine national, regional and local levels of governance; 10 (26 %) combine national and local governance scales; and 2 (5 %) national and regional levels. A national approach has been adopted by 12 countries (31 %).

Although there does not appear to be any correlation with the levels of SDG governance chosen by countries, there is **convergence among countries in relation to SDG coordination**, and mechanisms for tracking SDG progress.

Various working groups have responsibility for activities such as: priority setting, for example by exploring the challenges the SDGs pose at the national level and their applicability to national circumstances (e.g. Cyprus, Norway); working to integrate SDGs into national policy and to ensure national strategic frameworks comply with the 2030 Agenda (e.g. Austria, France, Switzerland); coordinating implementation with relevant institutions at a range of scales from national to local and ensuring involvement of and dialogue with stakeholders (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Latvia, Poland); setting up and updating SDG indicators, often through the inclusion of national statistical agencies (e.g. Estonia, Hungary); and national SDG reporting. Such groups are also important for providing leadership, high-level political support, and impetus, such as that provided by the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development. Other actions

noted in countries include designating lead ministries or institutions to coordinate the SDG process, and conducting gap analyses or mapping ([20]) related to SDG actions at the national level.

Figure 4: SDG processes in Eionet countries

Source: EEA's own analysis.

Most Eionet countries have made efforts to align their existing indicator sets and underlying data to the UN's Global SDG indicator set. Some of these global indicators generally do not have readily available equivalent indicators at the national level. As a result, some countries have performed a mapping exercise to compare existing national indicators relevant to the SDGs and the UN SDG indicators, identify indicator and data gaps, and prepare plans to develop new indicators and collect missing data. Based on current VNR reporting, 37 out of 39 (95 %) Eionet countries already have or are developing national SDG indicator sets. At the European level, Eurostat have developed an EU SDG indicator set (UN, 2017b) which includes time-series data for 99 indicators across all 17 SDGs for all EU Member States.

In relation to national progress reporting, 19 (49 %) Eionet countries ([21]) are already producing regular national reports on their progress towards the SDGs. Some countries report on an annual basis, whereas others do so less frequently. National SDG progress reports usually build on the national SDG indicator sets. In some cases, national SDG progress reports are produced at the same time as the VNRs. Despite shortcomings in the availability of data, some countries ([22]) acknowledged that the VNR process provided an important opportunity to reassess their existing national sustainable development priorities against the SDGs and to critically evaluate the current state of SDG actions.

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(20) Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Romania, Switzerland and Turkey.
(21) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Germany, Hungary and Turkey.
(22) Belgium and Switzerland.

There has been increased interest and steady progress in the number of Eionet countries submitting VNRs to the UN. To date, 37 countries have submitted a VNR: 8 countries ([23]) submitted their VNRs in 2016; 10 ([24]) in 2017; 12 ([25]) countries in 2018; and 7 countries ([26]) in 2019. Austria and Bulgaria submitted a VNR in 2020, whereas Switzerland (2016 and 2018) and Turkey (2016 and 2019) submitted two VNRs. Finland and Germany have also committed to submitting second VNRs in the future.

Many countries explicitly include stakeholders from outside government within Agenda 2030 working and advisory groups. Based on Eionet countries' VNRs, dialogue with stakeholders and their participation in prioritisation, decision-making and the implementation of SDGs is noted in 32 of the 39 countries analysed (82 %). It is likely that all countries are engaging stakeholders in some way even if this is not formally reported. Stakeholders consulted on SDG policies and strategies include civil society, the private sector and public and academic institutions. Online stakeholder consultation platforms, to collect feedback from the public, and web-based SDG monitoring platforms, to disseminate information on progress towards the SDGs, have been developed in eight countries (21 % of the 39 analysed) ([27]).

Stakeholders are also important in the implementation of SDGs. Examples include voluntary commitments from civil society and businesses to support actions towards achieving the Czech Republic 2030 framework (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017), and emphasis in Norway on scaling-up implementation and financing for Agenda 2030 through the active participation of the private sector.

Of the 39 countries analysed, 29 ([28]) (74 %) have set up interministerial bodies, advisory councils, commissions or working groups to coordinate SDG actions among their relevant institutions. In addition to government ministries and agencies, these groups often include other relevant stakeholders, such as regional and local governments, civil society and business associations. The remaining countries have established governance coordination within a specific national government department or agency.

European countries lead the way on global SDG action

For the purpose of providing country-level ranking and information for all 39 countries, the SDSN SDG Index for all UN member states (Sachs et al., 2019) is used as a reference as it provides the broadest country coverage. Based on this index, the top 10 countries in terms of progress to achieve the SDGs are all Eionet countries. In addition, Eionet countries represent 20 of the top 25 globally.

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(23) Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.
(24) Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden.
(25) Albania, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain and Switzerland.
(26) Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.
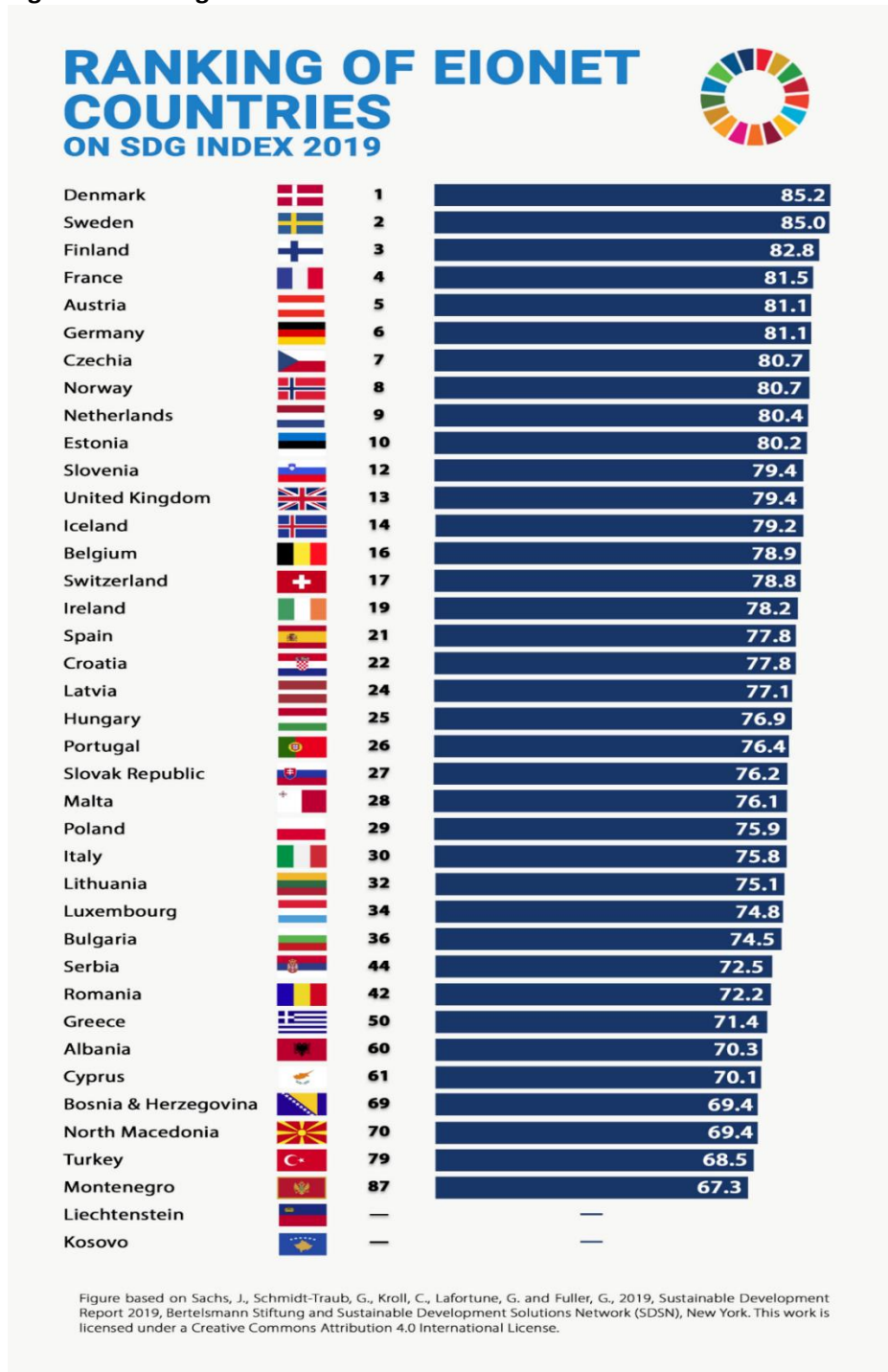([27]) Cyprus, Czechia, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland.
(28) EEA member countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. EEA cooperating countries: Albania and Serbia.

Figure 5: Ranking of Eionet countries on SDG Index 2019

RANKING OF EIONET COUNTRIES ON SDG INDEX 2019

Country		Rank	Score
Denmark		1	85.2
Sweden		2	85.0
Finland		3	82.8
France		4	81.5
Austria		5	81.1
Germany		6	81.1
Czechia		7	80.7
Norway		8	80.7
Netherlands		9	80.4
Estonia		10	80.2
Slovenia		12	79.4
United Kingdom		13	79.4
Iceland		14	79.2
Belgium		16	78.9
Switzerland		17	78.8
Ireland		19	78.2
Spain		21	77.8
Croatia		22	77.8
Latvia		24	77.1
Hungary		25	76.9
Portugal		26	76.4
Slovak Republic		27	76.2
Malta		28	76.1
Poland		29	75.9
Italy		30	75.8
Lithuania		32	75.1
Luxembourg		34	74.8
Bulgaria		36	74.5
Serbia		44	72.5
Romania		42	72.2
Greece		50	71.4
Albania		60	70.3
Cyprus		61	70.1
Bosnia & Herzegovina		69	69.4
North Macedonia		70	69.4
Turkey		79	68.5
Montenegro		87	67.3
Liechtenstein		—	—
Kosovo		—	—

Figure based on Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G. and Fuller, G., 2019, Sustainable Development Report 2019, Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), New York. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Source: EEA compilation based on 2019 SDG Index from SDSN and the Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation.

Limitations and future deliberations

The country profiles highlight the diversity of action happening in Eionet countries to achieve the SDGs at the national level. While information from UN VNRs is readily accessible, this analysis has also relied on the review of publicly available (online) information to gain an overview of SDG actions and mechanisms. Thus, this approach reflects the level of information available in VNRs and the varied nature and extent of information available online among countries as well

as the frequency with which information is updated. Any inaccuracies in relation to national actions on SDGs are therefore the result of this approach rather than deliberate omission. However, the feedback and inputs received during the wider NFP/Eionet consultation during February-April 2020 enabled the country profiles to be improved with complementary and updated information.

By the end of 2020, all EEA member countries will have submitted at least one VNR, with further progress in national SDG indicator development and reporting expected in the coming years. 2023 marks the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda (2015-2030).

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PART I: EEA member countries

1 Austria

In May 2020, Austria submitted an SDG VNR to the UN. Climate action is one of the top five highlights in the main messages of Austria's VNR. In addressing those SDGs with an environmental dimension, Austria also focuses on water management (SDG 6), energy efficiency (SDG 7), sustainable agriculture (SDG 2) and forestry (SDG 15) (BKA, 2020).

In addressing SDGs with an environmental dimension, Austria focuses primarily on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 13 and 15.

On the one hand, the VNR covers measures already taken in Austria, while and on the other hand, it provides an overview of current and upcoming challenges (Republic of Austria, 2020). SDGs are anchored in nationwide Austrian strategy documents: Climate and Energy Strategy, Three-Year Programme on Development Policy, Health Targets, Youth Strategy, and Foreign Trade Strategy. SDG references are also included in federal states' strategies.

In Austria, sustainable development is a constitutional state goal. It launched its SDG actions with a Decision of the Austrian Council of Ministers on January 2016, based on a national stocktaking exercise (UNECE 2016). In line with the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda, the Decision of the Council of Ministers emphasised a mainstream approach: aligning regular national policy frameworks at the sectoral level with the SDGs (taking an 'SDG lens') (Republic of Austria, 2020).

Austria addresses the SDGs through its federal ministries in their respective areas of responsibility by integrating the SDGs into their ministerial jurisdiction of policy and administration (BKA, 2016). The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the 2030 Agenda (IMAG) handles the general coordination and communication of SDG actions. It is chaired by the Federal Chancellery and the Ministry of Foreign affairs and involves line ministries that may be associated with SDG actions (UNECE, 2016). Following a multi-stakeholder approach, representatives of federal states, cities, municipalities, social partners, stakeholders from civil society, business and the scientific community interact with the IMAG and are committed to SDG implementation (Republic of Austria, 2020).

The Austrian Court of Auditors is committed to making an active contribution to the SDGs through its audits. The SDGs have been incorporated into most auditing activities under the 'sustainability and intergenerational equity' theme (BKA, 2016). In addition, all major public policies and projects are now subject to an annual impact assessment in which ministries evaluate whether their measures and individual projects will make a significant contribution to achieving the SDGs (BKA, 2016).

Austria submitted a VNR to the UN in 2020.

Austria`s national statistical agency, Statistik Austria, developed a national SDG indicator set, in close consultation with the EU (BKA, 2016). Based on Statistik Austria's 2017 National Indicator Set , the preliminary final version of the National Indicator Report was presented in March 2020.

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2 Belgium

Belgium focuses on all SDGs, working through overarching strategies and initiatives to address interlinkages and enhance cooperation within and between the various governments (De Croo, 2017a). In Belgium, SDG actions are a shared responsibility between the federal state, the communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking) and the regions (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels-Capital). The Belgian Constitution lays down that every federal entity should pursue sustainable development objectives in its social, economic and environmental dimensions, taking into account solidarity between the generations. The federal entities are on an equal footing but have powers and responsibilities in different fields.

Progress towards the 2030 Agenda relies on a variety of existing sustainable development strategies adopted by the respective levels of government. At the federal level, the strategy encompasses a Long-term Vision (LTV, approved in 2013) and the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development

Belgium is focusing on all SDGs, working through overarching strategies to address interlinkages. The country's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension lies primarily in SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14 and 16.

(approved in 2008). At the regional level, key strategic frameworks include: the 2nd Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy (approved in 2016); the Flemish Vision 2050 (a long-term strategy for Flanders, approved in 2016), and Focus 2030 (Flanders' goals for 2030, preliminarily approved in 2018); the Brussels-Capital Region's Regional Sustainable Development plan (approved in 2013); and the German-speaking Community's second regional development plan (approved in 2014).

To achieve the NSDS and promote coherence for sustainable development policy in Belgium, an Interministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD) was established in 2012 and revitalised in 2015. The IMCSD is mandated to follow up on action towards achieving Agenda 2030 in Belgium (UN DESA, 2017). The updated NSDS was approved in 2017, following a civil consultation process with the relevant stakeholders. It provides the umbrella framework for the main government stakeholders at both federal and federated levels to combine their efforts to achieve the SDGs. The NSDS sets out how the various authorities in Belgium should cooperate and link their strategies to ensure they are coherent with the SDGs (UN DESA, 2017).

The Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (FIDO-IFDD) is the main institution with responsibility for SDG actions. In collaboration with the Ministry for Sustainable Development, FIDO-IFDD has developed several pathways for SDG implementation.

Flanders adopted a decree for sustainable development in September 2008. The first Flemish strategy for sustainable development was developed in 2006, largely based on the thematic priorities of the European Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS). The second Flemish strategy for sustainable development was adopted on 29 April 2011. In March 2016, the Flemish government presented its new strategic outlook for the future: 'Vision 2050: A long-term strategy for Flanders'. Vision 2050 is designed around seven transition processes: the circular economy, smart living, Industry 4.0, lifelong learning and a dynamic professional career, caring and living together in 2050, transport and mobility, and energy. Implementation of these

transition priorities will be cross-sectoral and undertaken in collaboration with innovators, entrepreneurs and stakeholders. A new governance model was developed, inspired by transition management principles. In 2018, a preliminary set of 49 Flemish goals — based on the SDGs — was agreed by the Flemish government. This set of 2030 goals for Flanders, called 'Focus 2030', will be measured by a set of region-specific indicators.

In 2013, the Walloon government adopted a decree on the Walloon sustainable development strategy which foresees the development of such a strategy and determines its key elements. Based on the decree — and following a first strategy adopted in October 2013 — the second Walloon sustainable development strategy was adopted on 7 July 2016. This aims to put some transition paths in place and contribute to implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. A public consultation on the LTV and action plan (first and fourth chapters of the strategy) was undertaken in 2016. In parallel, the public was invited to post commitments on the website or to identify projects that contribute to the action plan priorities and thus to the transition to sustainable development in Wallonia.

The Brussels-Capital Region has undergone profound changes and is now facing new challenges, such as rapid demographic growth, employment, training and education, poverty, environment, mobility and internationalisation. Between 13 January and 13 March 2017, the Brussels government held a public inquiry into the new draft of the Regional Sustainable Development Plan. It sets priorities to make the Brussels-Capital Region more attractive, more inclusive both socially and economically, more competitive, more creative in research, and greener and more efficient in its use of energy and resources. Since 2007, through its 'Agenda Iris 21' programme, Brussels Environment (the environmental administration in Brussels-Capital) has provided financial and methodological support to municipalities and public centres for social assistance (CPAS) implementing local Agenda 21 projects.

In the German-speaking Community, the Regional Development Concept was conceived as a long-term strategy for the German-speaking government. The process was initiated in May 2008 with a comprehensive stocktaking and regional analysis to examine the Community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. The mission statement was published as REK (the Development Concept) volumes 1 and 2. In April 2011, the third volume detailed the initial implementation phase of the REK, comprising 16 main projects and 48 sub-projects (Living East Belgium – 2025).

Belgium launched the 'SDG Charter for International Development' to unite the private sector, civil society and the public sector around the SDGs and international development. More than 100 companies and organisations have signed up to the Charter. Civil society made a significant contribution to Belgium's VNR, issuing coordinated advisory opinions on the draft review (UN DESA, 2017).

The Interfederal Statistical Institute (IIS) is responsible for systematically tracking progress made on SDG actions. As a first step, the IIS selected the two most relevant, measurable, and available indicators per SDG ([29]). The SDG indicators database will be upgraded to include more indicators from the list defined at the UN level. The NSDS established a reporting mechanism on the SDGs, with reports made to the parliament and civil society twice per government term. Civil society was also invited to report its own 2030 Agenda initiatives (UN DESA, 2017).

([29]) These 34 indicators were published in the statistical annex of the VNR and are available online at www.indicators.be

The Belgian NSDS action plan identified several priority themes, including sustainable food (SDG 2), sustainable building and housing (SDG 11), and sustainable public procurement (SDG 16) (De Croo, 2017b).

Submitted to the UN in 2017, the Belgian VNR also highlights areas of further action, including water (SDGs 6 and 14) and air quality (SDG 3), energy intensity and renewable energy (SDG 7) and reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (SDG 13). The Belgian government is now looking into ways to address these areas (De Croo, 2017b).

Belgium has identified the need for a detailed mapping of all gaps in SDG action at all levels of its federal system. Furthermore, the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) uses the Federal Sustainable Development Reports to evaluate federal policies on sustainable development, as well as presenting foresight scenarios (FPB, 2017). At the regional level, Wallonia has published its first SDGs implementation report, adopted by the Walloon government in April 2017. It includes an inventory of the Walloon strategies and plans that contribute to achieving the SDGs, an analysis of 70 selected indicators and a set of good practices by Walloon public institutions, civil society and the private sector. Flanders is currently developing a framework of indicators for its 'Focus 2030: A 2030 objectives framework for Flanders'.

Belgium submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

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3 Bulgaria

Sustainable development is an important priority for the government of Bulgaria. Ahead of its EU Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2018, Bulgaria identified sustainable development as an integral element of its Presidency agenda (Ministry of Tourism, 2017). Former President Rosen Plevneliev called for the adoption of a Bulgarian 2030 Agenda based on the UN SDGs and the 'EC Communication on Next steps for a sustainable European future' (Plevneliev, 2016).

Bulgaria's focus on progressing towards the SDGs with environmental action mainly lies in air quality (SDGs 3 and 11), water management (SDG 6), marine protection (SDG 14) and protection of nature and biodiversity (SDG 15). The country is also focusing on establishing a green and energy-efficient economy (SDG 7) (BGRF, 2016) (Plevneliev, 2016).

Bulgaria adopted an approach for the whole government which takes into account the interlinkages between the SDGs. In advancing its SDG actions, Bulgaria focuses on SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 with an environmental dimension.

Bulgaria's first VNR in 2020 outlines some of the initiatives undertaken towards achieving the SDGs. By the end of 2020, the Council of Ministers will adopt the National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 which will address three main strategic goals: accelerated economic development, demographic upswing, and a reduction in inequalities. The Programme will outline 13 national priorities in five development areas. A 'Green and Sustainable Bulgaria' is among these development areas, in which a circular and low-carbon economy (SDGs 7, 8, 12), clean air and biodiversity (SDGs 3, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), and sustainable agriculture (SDGs 2, 14, 15) will be addressed (UN DESA, 2020). The Programme reflects the approach of the whole government approach to sustainable development and considers the interlinkages between the SDGs (Republic of Bulgaria, 2020).

In drafting the VNR, the Bulgarian government involved multi-stakeholders from civil society, marginalised groups, business and academia. Wider public feedback was also sought through an online consultation process (UN DESA, 2019).

The VNR also states that the biggest challenge to successfully integrating the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of Bulgaria's sustainable development policies is the coal sector which still has a significant share of the country's energy balance. The reasons for this are related to job retention and greater energy security for the country. A solution to this problem is being sought through *Bulgaria submitted a VNR to the UN in 2020.* preparation of the Integrated national energy and climate plan. This covers the five dimensions of the Energy Union for Europe: decarbonisation, energy efficiency, energy security, Internal Energy Market and research, innovation, and competitiveness (Republic of Bulgaria, 2020).

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4 Croatia

Croatia plans greater investment to reduce exposure of the population to environmental pollution (water, air and soil) and to reinforce the environmental factors health impact (SDG 3) assessment associated with industrial facility construction and other potential environmental polluters. The government acknowledges that a healthy environment is essential for a healthy life and that building a green infrastructure plays a major role (SDG 9). It has therefore set itself the goal of the 'Development of Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions' under its 2030 national development strategy (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2019).

Croatia's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 3, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Croatia also aims to implement measures to prevent water pollution (SDGs 6, 14) and to shut down landfill by 2024 by phasing in modern waste-treatment facilities (SDG 12). The country will also invest EUR 4 to 6 billion in renewable energy (SDG 7) by 2030 (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2019).

According to an EEA report, Croatia is one of three countries with the highest cumulative share of damage to GDP from extreme weather and climate events. It has therefore recognised the need to take a strategic approach to climate change adaptation (SDG 13) and to develop innovative solutions (SDG 9) for sustainable development. This awareness saw Croatia develop its first climate change adaptation strategy (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2019).

Since sustainable tourism is vital, Croatia is prioritising preservation of its natural environment (SDG 15) to ensure long-term sustainable growth. In recent years, marine tourism has become a fast-growing sector and the Croatian government has focused on regulating the maritime sector to ensure the highest environmental and maritime safety standards (SDG 14) (Kostelac, 2017). Safe and environmentally sustainable maritime transport, infrastructure and the maritime domain is another strategic goal (UN DESA, 2018). Croatia also plans to transition towards the use of alternative fuels for transport connections to its islands, thereby contributing to the reduction of emissions from marine transport (SDG 13) (Kostelac, 2017).

Croatia designated the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs as its national coordinator for SDG actions. The Ministry established a working group on SDGs, followed by an 'Environment Action Plan 2016-2024' in line with the goals of the environmental SDGs. In May 2016, Croatia launched a project to develop its national climate adaptation strategy (ESDN, 2017). The government is receiving increasing levels of interest and cooperation from its major national stakeholder groups towards achieving the 2030 Agenda (Kostelac, 2017).

In early 2019, Croatia established the Information System for Strategic Planning and Development Management to effectively track the progress on SDG actions. The Croatian Bureau of Statistics designed an internet portal (modelled on the UN portal Sustainable

Croatia submitted a VNR to the UN in 2019.

Development Knowledge Platform) to share results and the status of SDG key indicators with the wider public (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2019).

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5 Cyprus

Through the country's National Reform Programme, key horizontal and sector-specific policy actions aim to address key economic challenges and achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Cyprus initiated SDG actions in 2016 by mapping the relevant national sustainable development policies against the SDGs. This exercise identified relevant stakeholders, existing national and/or EU policies and strategies, and the available national SDG indicators. Another outcome of the mapping was identification of the need to develop a new sustainable development strategy that covers all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental (Republic of Cyprus, 2017).

To achieve the SDGs, Cyprus is giving specific attention and support to certain priority areas, including the promotion of green development and the creation of green jobs (SDG 8). Investing in waste management and recycling (SDG 12), reducing GHG emissions and adaptation to climate change (SDG 13) are the other priorities. As regards SDGs with an environmental dimension, the country focuses primarily on good health and well-being (SDG 3); affordable and clean energy (SDG 7); decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9); and life below water (SDG 14) (Republic of Cyprus, 2017).

In addressing SDGs with an environmental dimension, Cyprus focuses primarily on SDGs 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13 and 14.

Cyprus assigned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate relevant line ministries and other governmental institutions (e.g. the Statistical Service of Cyprus) to oversee the alignment of future national strategies with the 2030 Agenda. The Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development engages with the private sector, in cooperation with many other stakeholders (Republic of Cyprus, 2017).

The country established an Interministerial Committee to prepare a strategic policy framework on the applicability of the SDGs in Cyprus. The Committee investigated possible interlinkages with existing initiatives and identified national priorities within the 2030 Agenda. Cyprus now has implementation plans in place for most of the SDGs (UNECE, 2016).

To reinforce cooperation among all stakeholders, Cyprus conducted a nationwide online survey on SDG priorities. An extensive public information campaign will follow in the coming years (UNECE, 2016). Cyprus notes the importance of engaging with local authorities to create ownership of and involvement in the 2030 Agenda. Further activities are planned in all areas of cooperation, including engagement with local authorities in implementing the 2030 Agenda (Republic of Cyprus, 2017).

The Statistical Service of Cyprus identified a maximum of five to six indicators for each SDG, which are primarily in line with the selected EU SDG indicators. The final set of national SDG indicators is yet to be agreed but will eventually

Cyprus submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

enable Cyprus to monitor progress towards the SDGs, through national progress reports (Republic of Cyprus, 2017).

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6 Czechia

Czechia adopted the Framework for SDG action through a Government Resolution in January 2016. The government followed this framework with 'Czech Republic 2030' which was published in April 2017. Czech Republic 2030 serves as an overarching strategic framework for sustainable development policy at the national, regional and local level, while the country's VNR provides the main roadmap for achieving the SDGs. This will be complemented by the framework of voluntary commitments by civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

The 'Czech Republic 2030' strategic framework organises national SDG action into six national priority areas: social (people and society), economic (economy) and environmental (resilient ecosystems). Resilient ecosystems prioritises SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15. Besides the goals for the planet, SDGs 2, 11, 12 are also addressed in this key area. For SDG 7, Czechia points to an increase in the use of renewable energy and recognises the need to improve its energy efficiency in consumption and production processes (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

Czechia's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

The government office's Sustainable Development Department is designated to lead the SDG actions. Furthermore, the Government Council for Sustainable Development, chaired by the prime minister, serves as a coordination body to ensure that all key ministries, institutions and stakeholders are involved and informed about the process (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

Czechia has 97 national SDG targets and 192 indicators designed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The compatibility of national strategies with the SDGs is measured through the regularly updated national database of strategies, which is an online platform. In addition, the compliance of sectoral and regional strategic documents, programmes and measures with the 2030 Agenda will be monitored by the Sustainable Development Department every two years, in the form of analytical reports (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

Czechia submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

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7 Denmark

Denmark considers the implementation of the 2030 Agenda key to accelerating its economic and societal transformation for a sustainable future.

The country initiated its SDG implementation by setting up an Interministerial Group on Sustainable Development to ensure coordination among all relevant institutions and stakeholders. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for coordinating the national implementation of the SDGs, while line ministries are responsible for designing policies that address the SDGs, as appropriate. The Ministry of Finance is also responsible for EU follow-up to maintain a holistic approach and create linkages to the national follow-up, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the SDGs in the context of the UN and other international forums. Both Ministries coordinate their efforts closely (Danish Government, 2017).

The government recognises the importance of making the SDGs concrete and actionable. In 2017, the country adopted its Action Plan on the implementation and follow up of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The Plan is centred on the 5ps: prosperity, people, planet, peace and partnerships and was formulated according to the need to adapt SDG targets to national circumstances. It reflects the government's ambition to prioritise SDG actions (Danish Government, 2017).

Under the 'planet' cluster, Denmark considers itself as a front-runner in the transition to a green economy (SDG 8) and the sustainable use of natural resources and energy efficiency (SDG 7). The government is dedicated to continuing an ambitious and efficient green transition while, at the same time, ensuring jobs and competitiveness (SDG 8). It acknowledges the

Denmark's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses on SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

need to further reduce GHG emissions (SDG 13). Denmark also aims to continue to prevent and limit the spread of contaminating agents that are harmful to human health (SDG 3), and to maintain a strong agriculture and food industry (SDG 2) that continues to focus on sustainability and resource efficiency (SDG 15). Having a rich biodiversity, the country aims to promote opportunities to enjoy nature, to prioritise the protection of marine life (SDG 14) and to stop the regression of biological diversity (SDG 15). In this context, the government has set out 10 concrete national targets on biological diversity; the protection of the marine environment; preventing and limiting contamination with harmful agents; sustainable cities; a circular economy; sustainable companies and products; sustainable food; a reduction in GHG emissions; and renewable energy (Danish Government, 2017).

Denmark has also selected water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), a green economy, green growth, and resource efficiency (SDG 12) as its priority areas for sustainable development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2017).

The government is working on legislative proposals on the SDGs and plans to establish an SDG fund on external action. Denmark also recognises the need for all civil society actors to contribute to achieving the SDGs (Danish Government, 2017).

The Danish Action Plan is complemented by 37 national targets and measurable, quantifiable national SDG indicators. The Interministerial Group on Sustainable Development explores possible modalities and constraints in the national follow-up and reporting mechanisms (Danish Government, 2017).

Denmark submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

Since 2018, Denmark has produced an annual progress report on the Action Plan and its 37 national targets. This gives a summary of SDG implementation and identifies the necessary adjustments to the existing implementation plans. The progress report is publicly available and is submitted to the Danish Parliament. In addition, the government will present a status report every four years. This report will include the same elements as the progress report but may also contain information on existing and potential initiatives to achieve the SDGs (Danish Government, 2017).

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8 Estonia

Estonia initiated SDG action through its 2016 VNR preparations. As a basis for the VNR, the government conducted a preliminary gap analysis of government policies concerning the SDGs. The Commission for Sustainable Development also launched a review of the 'Sustainable Estonia 21' strategy to determine whether its national strategy is delivering on the 2030 Agenda (Republic of Estonia, 2016).

Under the inclusive and sustainable development priority, Estonia set out to rethink production and consumption processes in an eco-innovative manner (SDG 12). The country prioritises circular use as well as smart and innovative solutions that sustain the environment (SDGs 7, 9). Open information about chemicals in products is considered necessary to phase out hazardous substances and reduce the negative impact on health and the environment, as well as the planned recycling of the material (SDGs 3, 7) (Lõhmus, 2017).

Estonia's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 3, 7, 9, 12, 13 and 15.

In the first half of 2018, Estonia held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Ahead of this, it set out priorities based on four themes, two of which are related to the environment: a 'safe and secure environment' and 'inclusive and sustainable development' (Republic of Estonia, 2016).

To ensure coordination among the relevant line ministries, the country established an Inter-ministerial Sustainable Development Working Group which works on an ad hoc basis and is composed of representatives from each ministry and Statistics Estonia.

Estonia tracks progress on SDG actions through a set of sustainable development indicators which are regularly reviewed. According to Statistics Estonia, of the 231 global SDG indicators, 32 are currently measurable by Estonia´s national sustainable development indicators. Gathering information on the remaining indicators requires further effort and the development of a set of national SDG indicators (Republic of Estonia, 2016).

Estonia submitted two VNRs to the UN in 2016 and 2020.

A gap analysis, a mapping exercise and indicator-based analyses indicate that Estonia is successful in several SDGs, including SDG 7, by achieving a high proportion of renewable energy in overall energy consumption, and SDG 15, thanks to rich biodiversity protection. The analyses also show that Estonia's main challenges lie in developing an energy- and resource-efficient economy and reducing carbon dioxide emissions per capita, which require continued efforts toward SDG action in those areas (UN DESA, 2020).

Sources:

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9 Finland

According to the updated national sustainable development strategy *The Finland We Want by 2050 – Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development* (2016), Finland's environmental sustainability challenges include high carbon dioxide emissions relative to the population (SDG 13), the protection of biodiversity (SDG 15), and the sustainable, fair and efficient use of natural resources (SDG 15).

Finland's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus on SDGs 2, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

In general, Finland sees the need to transform today's linear economies into circular economies, where virgin materials are used sparingly, and recycling and reuse are the norm (SDG 12). A circular economy is viewed as a solution to job creation and environmental protection. Therefore, the country aims to transform its energy systems and develop ways to account for the environmental costs of economic activities (SDG 7) (Pokka, 2017). Finland held the chairmanship of the Arctic Council during 2017-2019. As the Arctic is warming twice as rapidly as the globe, it has called for urgent measures to achieve the targets of the Paris Climate Agreement and SDG 13 (Pokka, 2017).

According to the SDSN SDG Index and Dashboard 2019 and the analysis conducted in the context of Finland's sustainable development policy evaluation (PATH2030), the greatest long-term challenges in Finland arise from high levels of consumption of materials (SDG 12) and energy (SDG 7). Key themes that should be addressed by sustainability-oriented policies include the energy system (SDG 7), forest use (SDG 15), aquatic ecosystems (SDG 14), and food systems (SDG 2) (Berg et al., 2019; Finnish Environment Institute, 2020). Thus, the Finnish government is focusing on two themes for SDG action: a 'carbon-neutral and resource-wise Finland' and a 'non-discriminating, equal and competent Finland', which cover all SDGs in an integrated manner (Prime Minister`s Office, 2020).

The Finnish parliament first discussed the 2030 Agenda and the parliament's role in December 2016 and since then has received the government's yearly progress reports and has made recommendations to the government. The Committee for the Future is responsible for the 2030 Agenda in the Finnish parliament (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2016).

The latest strategy for sustainable development 'Finland We Want, 2050' was adopted in December 2013 and updated in April 2016 in line with the 2030 Agenda. It has eight aspirational objectives. In addition to the strategy, in February 2017, the government adopted its Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda. Sustainable development has also been integrated into the state budget since 2018. Special focus has been on budgetary allocations to measures supporting carbon neutrality and resource wisdom (Prime Minister`s Office Finland, 2020).

The Finnish national network for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda was launched in October 2016. The network is composed of members from various ministries, research institutions and other stakeholder organisations. It has defined national follow-up and review mechanisms for Finland, including around 50 national sustainable development indicators. An interactive and participatory online follow-up mechanism enables multi-stakeholder discussions on the progress made and on gaps and prospects for future development. This mechanism is an

opportunity to bring sustainable-development-related data, trends and challenges into wider public debate and knowledge (Prime Minister`s Office Finland, 2016).

Finland has a long tradition of engaging civil society and other stakeholders in its sustainable development work. The key mechanism on SDG action has been the multi-stakeholder National Commission for Sustainable Development. A multidisciplinary Expert Panel for Sustainable Development, comprising 10 eminent scientists and professors, and the Agenda 2030 Youth Group of 20 young sustainable development ambassadors have challenged and supported the work of the government and the National Commission. The national Citizens' Panel for Sustainable Development, composed of 500 citizens from all walks of life, was first established in 2018 and renewed in 2019 through a public call. Each panellist was tasked with assessing the current state and recent development of sustainable development in Finland by using an online assessment tool. The assessment was made individually for each of Finland's 50 national sustainable development indicators, based on indicator data, specific expert analyses, and citizens' comments on indicators and analysis (Prime Minister`s Office Finland, 2020).

Commitment2050.fi — an online tool — is one of the most important instruments in Finland for boosting participation in and concrete action on sustainable development. There are currently over 2 000 operational measurable commitments from all spheres of society. A sustainable lifestyle service for citizens enables Finns to pursue a more sustainable everyday life. With the renewed service, users can first calculate their personal carbon footprint and then draw up a personal plan to reduce it by choosing suitable actions from a selection of recommended smart choices. Every individual plan contributes to the national emissions reduction target (Prime Minister`s Office Finland, 2016).

Finland provides regular national reports on its progress towards achieving the SDGs. An external independent evaluation was published in March 2019 to assess the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, both in domestic and international policies (Berg et al., 2019).

Finland recognises one of the top barriers to progress on SDGs with an environmental dimension as the gap between current action and the need for radical transformation. It acknowledges that although some measures have been taken, they have not been ambitious enough. For example, an analysis of the Finnish

Finland submitted two VNRs to the UN in 2016 and 2020.

state budget has shown that those budgetary items which are counterproductive to carbon neutrality and resource wisdom still account for almost double the amount that is conducive to SDG action. The country acknowledges that the use of indicators to track progress is insufficient because many spillover effects are still unknown as they are difficult to measure based on indicators. Another barrier for the country has been the conflict of interest between different stakeholders, especially between economic and environmental objectives, and insufficiency in the systematic use of indicators and research data in decision-making and societal learning.

The enabling factors included long-term national work on environmental and nature protection through legislation, economic instruments, voluntary measures, and environmental institutions and governance. Sustainable development is a widely shared and mainstreamed aim in Finland and nature is a highly valued ecosystem service, including the public's right of access to it.

International environmental agreements and EU legislation also provide a solid and binding framework for national policies and measures.

For further progress, Finland aims to create more knowledge on the externalities of its consumption and production to better understand and measure the environmental impact (footprint and handprint) in other countries. It also recognises that the work towards environmental goals must be coupled with work to combat inequality to achieve a just transformation. To this end, the country acknowledges the need for integrated impact assessment tools for national legislation, strategies and action plans.

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10 France

France recognises that social inequalities go hand in hand with environmental inequalities.

France's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 3, 7, 11, 13, 14 and 15.

Therefore, public policies in France are designed to reduce exposure to risks and hazards such as pollution, extreme weather events and natural disasters (SDGs 3, 13), tackle fuel poverty (SDG 7) and facilitate access to nature for all (SDGs 3, 14 and 15). As regards environmental protection, other areas of action include combatting climate change (SDG 13), achieving green energy transition (SDG 7), and sustainable urbanisation (SDG 11) (Republic of France, 2016).

Acknowledging that further work remains to be done, especially in terms of maintaining healthy ecosystems and the sustainable management of natural resources, France will increase the funding for the French Development Agency for sustainable development by EUR 4 billion by 2020, EUR 2 billion of which will be dedicated to climate change mitigation and adaptation (UN DESA, 2016).

France launched SDG actions by designating an Interministerial Representative for Sustainable Development and General Commissioner for Sustainable Development, who led the preparation of the country's first report on the SDGs. Subsequently, a national action plan was developed, underpinned by the following elements: a shared vision; government measures and public policy guidelines for sustainable development; assistance to economic players; and citizens' ownership of the SDGs (Republic of France, 2016).

France engaged stakeholders through an online public consultation on its national action plan to ensure citizen involvement. The country also set up a committee of international experts to act as a knowledge source for developing the plan (Republic of France, 2016).

The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) is responsible for the production and coordination of data with the statistical departments of the various French ministries. To produce national SDG indicators, the INSEE conducted a feasibility study involving all relevant ministries. The resulting

France submitted a VNR to the UN in 2016.

list of 109 national SDG indicators was published in March 2017. The National Reform Programme, which reflects the goals of the 2030 Agenda ([30]), is consistent with these indicators (INSEE, 2017). The process involves a government assessment report to be submitted to the parliament each October (Republic of France, 2016).

Sources:

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11 Germany

Germany focuses on promoting responsible supply chains (SDG 12), optimum social and environmental standards (SDG 3), climate change mitigation and adaptation (SDG 13) and the conservation of natural resources (SDG 15) (Federal Republic of Germany, 2016). Life below water (SDG 14) is another priority area for the country.

In 2016, the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development launched a plan of action for marine conservation and sustainable fisheries, together with an allocation of over EUR 180 million. The new initiatives are a further step in the Ministry's implementation of its 10-point Plan of Action for Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries. Based on the need to implement the 2030 Agenda and especially SDG 14 (life below water), Germany launched a federal research and development funding programme, MAREN, where the 'N' stands for sustainability (*Nachhaltigkeit*) (Federal Republic of Germany, 2016).

Germany's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 3, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

In Germany, stakeholders and citizens have played an important role in planning and progressing towards those SDGs with an environmental dimension. Germany's National Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS) emphasises that broad societal consensus on the SDGs is a precondition for achieving them. The varied and numerous activities of the 'Fridays for Future' initiatives in Germany have increased the pressure on the government to be more active on environmental protection issues. The example of the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment shows that stakeholders play an important role in Germany's efforts to find sustainable answers to structural change questions. In June 2018, the Commission was convened by the federal government to develop a social consensus around structural changes to energy and climate policy in Germany. The Commission comprised members from industry and the economy, science, environmental associations and unions as well as representatives of the lignite mining regions. In January 2019, the Commission presented its final report which includes recommendations for measures to promote the social and structural development of lignite mining regions. The federal government has stated that it intends to implement the Commission's results.

The country experienced several barriers to action on SDGs with an environmental dimension, including the challenge of ensuring policy coherence. This requires the coherent, coordinated deployment of all policy instruments to advance the SDGs. Furthermore, cooperation between the federal government and the *Länder* is challenging. The German *Länder* play a crucial role in SDG action as they have legislative and administrative powers in vital areas of sustainable development (Federal Republic of Germany, 2016). Even though regularly collected and representative data on environmental awareness in Germany shows a high level of awareness of issues relevant to sustainable development, only around 10 % of people in the country were aware of the SDGs in 2018. Because the population's support is vital for making environmental SDGs a success, the German federal government initiated a campaign to make them better known.

The most important enabling factor for implementing the SDGs in Germany is the institutional architecture for the G National Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS) and the fact that the

Germany submitted a VNR to the UN in 2016.

primary responsibility for the GSDS lies with the Federal Chancellery. The GSDS outlines how the guiding principle of sustainability is to be implemented in the federal government's current and future work. The Committee of State Secretaries on Sustainable Development steers progress on the GSDS and oversees its revision (Thomson, 2017). The work and interaction of the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development (StA NHK), the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (PBnE) and the Sustainable Development Council (RNE) have proven to be effective and will be continued. The aim of the StA NHK is to focus cooperation between the ministries' various policy areas on common sustainable development through implementation of the GSDS and the SDGs. The PBnE plays an important role at the interface between society and politics. The RNE has a dual function: it is a stakeholder in the social dialogue on sustainability and an advisor to the federal government.

In 2018, the federal chancellery initiated a process to revise the GSDS and align it with the 2030 Agenda. The process involved all ministries, the parliament, the federal state, authorities at the regional and local level, civil society, the private sector and academia (Federal Republic of Germany, 2016). The updated GSDS constitutes a framework for tracking Germany's progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Tools include biannual monitoring reports by the Federal Statistical Office as well as four-year progress reports on the GSDS (Thomson, 2017). In June 2018, all members of the public, associations and organisations were once again — as was the case when the 2016 German Sustainable Development Strategy was drafted — invited to contribute their own ideas to the process of compiling the updated GSDS. Currently, updating the GSDS also takes place in dialogue with the population. Around 1 500 citizens took part in dialogue conferences nationwide from October 2019 to February 2020.

The GSDS highlights the need to strengthen the involvement of societal stakeholders. In recent years, for example, the Sustainability Forum and the Science Platform Sustainability 2030 were established. The Forum is held annually and helps the federal government to communicate with key stakeholders about the status and future of implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy and the 2030 Agenda. The platform is intended as an interface between academia, society and policy to support implementation of the GSDS and the SDGs with scientific expertise (Federal Republic of Germany, 2016).

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12 Greece

Greece hosts a unique ecological treasury and is a remarkable EU Member State in terms of its ecological wealth. It was one of the first countries worldwide to endorse a framework law on the protection of the environment (Law 1650/1986), and the principles of environmental protection are embedded in the constitution.

Greece identified and endorsed eight national priorities for SDG action, on which the country's 2018 VNR was based. The sixth national priority is 'strengthening the protection and sustainable management of natural capital as a base for social prosperity and transition to a low-carbon economy'. The policies and measures to achieve this priority include:

Greece prioritises actions towards SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 with an environmental dimension.

- transition to a circular economy model for sustainable production and consumption patterns (SDGs 12, 8 and 9);
- development of an integrated environmental framework to support economic development and investment, while safeguarding and protecting natural capital and biodiversity, in particular:
    o sustainable water resources management (SDG 6);
    o inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities (SDGs 6, 11);
    o sustainable use of seas and marine resources (SDG 14);
    o protection, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15);
- transition to a low-carbon economy and adaptation to the impacts of climate change (SDGs 7, 13) (Hellenic Republic, 2018).

The priority given to SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 with an environmental dimension is based on the notion that Greece's natural environment constitutes not only the identity of the country but is also a key asset for development. Thus, environmental protection is regarded as the basis for ensuring sustainable economic growth — for example, through quality tourism and the production of quality agricultural products and food, as these two sectors are the backbone of the Greek economy and rely on the quality of the natural environment. This is also the basis for social well-being as it safeguards human health and access to high-quality environmental and ecosystem services for citizens (Hellenic Republic, 2018).

As Greece is a maritime nation and a coastal state, shipping, fishing, development of offshore energy sources, port and transportation facilities, recreation and tourism are vital economic activities (SDG 14). The country also recognises the interlinkage between SDG 14 and SDG 3 (good health and well-being), because the health and well-being of coastal populations — especially of island communities, which are sometimes wholly dependent upon fishing and tourism — are linked to the quality of the marine environment (Kalamvrezos, 2017).

Greece aims to revisit its overall development through an 'SDGs lens', hoping to boost the economy, stimulate decent employment, strengthen social protection and inclusion, and protect the environment and natural capital. The SDGs offer the country a new vision for sustainable development, ensuring the spread of prosperity and protection of the most vulnerable and fostering economic stability founded on a sound ecological basis. It also approaches SDGs through a long-term institutional mechanism that takes an approach

supported by the whole government. This includes an Interministerial Coordination Network comprising representatives from line ministries and steered by the presidency of the government which has undertaken the role of coordinating national efforts to achieve the SDGs from a long-term perspective (Hellenic Republic, 2018).

To enhance transparency, partnership and accountability, actions and activities have been carried out with non-state actors. The Economic and Social Council of Greece (ESC) is the institution constitutionally responsible for conducting social dialogue among major social partners and stakeholders. Within this context, in 2017, on the request of the General Secretariat of the Government, the ESC issued an opinion entitled 'UN 2030 Agenda - Priority Objectives for Greece'. This presented its views on the national prioritisation of the SDGs, submitting a comprehensive set of proposals regarding effective SDG actions on key economic, social and environmental aspects of

Greece submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

the SDGs at different levels and sectors (i.e. economic growth, employment and social protection, sustainable energy, industrialization, and innovation that would create positive spillover effects for all other SDGs (Hellenic Republic, 2018).

The Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS) is the set of rules, tasks and competent bodies responsible for the execution of statistical assignments, with the aim of developing, producing and disseminating official statistics. The Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) coordinates the system and is responsible for certifying the statistics of the ELSS authorities and organisations. By 2019, line ministries together with ELSTAT had carried out three rounds of consultations and mapping to identify and select the most adequate indicators for tracking progress at the national level. A list of around 160 indicators (90 selected from the global SDGs indicator framework and 70 from Eurostat adapted to national priorities and circumstances) were selected for quantitative tracking of progress towards the SDGs. At the same time, this emphasis made for more active involvement by the national parliament from a more political and qualitative perspective in the future, allowing for political input and the 'fine-tuning' of priorities and a focus on any potential gaps (Hellenic Republic, 2018).

Sources:

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13 Hungary

Hungary considers universal access to clean water and sanitation an important element of sustainable development, which is why it highlights SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) as a standalone goal. The country's other main environmental goals are combatting climate change (SDG 13), increasing biodiversity (SDG 15), protecting renewable natural resources and ensuring the responsible management of non-renewable resources (SDGs 7, 12) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2018).

National strategies and programmes supporting actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension (National Environmental Programme, National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development, etc., and their implementation reports) are being developed through strong stakeholder involvement and consultation. Stakeholder representatives are members of the National Environmental Council and the National Council on Sustainable Development.

To strengthen its commitment to environmental sustainability, Hungary established a new Directorate for Environmental Sustainability within the Office of the President in 2015. The Directorate maintains contact with national and international bodies, educational institutions, and organisations, prepares background information and supports the President's Office in issues pertaining to sustainable development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2018).

Hungary's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 15.

Hungary deems environmental education and education on sustainability (including awareness raising among decision-makers) essential as environmental awareness is the basis for behaviour change. For this reason, the country initiated the Green Kindergarten Network, the Eco-School Network and several environmental sustainability programmes.

In Hungary, line ministries are responsible for SDG action within their respective domains. An Interministerial Coordination Mechanism was established in 2017 and is made up of representatives from each line ministry, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, civil society, academia and the private sector. The National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development (NFSSD) 2012-2024 also assigns responsibilities to municipalities in terms of the sustainable development of cities. Civil society organisations were invited to participate in the development and adoption of the NFSSD. The Business Council for Sustainable Development in Hungary also participated in the SDG national adaptation process, including the review of the VNR (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2018).

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office has published sustainable development indicators every two years since 2007, most recently in 2015, in English (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2018), and in 2019, in Hungarian ([31]). Currently, data are available in Hungary for approximately 75 % of the SDG indicators.

([31]) http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/fenntartfejl/fenntartfejl18.pdf

Many of Hungary's SDG actions have faced financial barriers as it is a great challenge to find and allocate the appropriate sources. Improved sectoral integration and coordination would better facilitate the country's actions on SDGs with an environmental dimension (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2018).

The Hungarian government tries to involve the broad spectrum of stakeholders (civil society, businesses, scientific community, etc.) in planning and implementing the SDGs. For example, in 2018, the Hungarian VNR was the result of a comprehensive public consultation in cooperation with the Civil Roundtable for Sustainable Development Goals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2018).

The Climate and Environmental Protection Action Plan was announced on 16 January 2020 by the prime minister. It proposes eight action points, including waste management, environmentally friendly technologies for companies, renewable and carbon-neutral energy production, energy efficiency, reforestation on the basis of new-born babies (10 trees/baby), wider availability and use of affordable electric cars and the launch of the green bus programme, and the introduction of green government bonds.

Hungary submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

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14 Iceland

Iceland`s SDG priorities build on the sustainable management of natural resources (SDG 15) as the key to eradicating poverty and hunger (SDGs 1, 2), ensuring healthy lives (SDG 3) and promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (SDG 12) (Gunnarsdottir, 2017). The country's priority targets reflect the government's emphasis on SDG action. They include: improved resource efficiency in consumption and production and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation (SDG 8); reducing the adverse per-capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management (SDG 11); restructuring taxation and phasing out fossil fuel subsidies to reflect their environmental impacts (SDG 12); and integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning (SDG 13) (Prime Minister's Office, 2019).

The Interministerial Working Group mapped Iceland's position on all 169 targets and specified 65 priority targets which include conservation of the natural environment and combatting climate change. With respect to climate change (SDG 13), the government aims to build partnerships to address the large environmental footprint of modern lifestyles. Iceland is still a net contributor to climate change but is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2040 (Prime Minister's Office, 2019).

The government will also undertake actions to further develop the bioeconomy, green solutions, and methods to reduce the environmental impact of food production by means of incentives and support for carbon offsetting (among others) in the sector (SDG 2). Other actions include strengthening organic farming and highlighting the uniqueness of Icelandic raw materials cultivated under sustainable conditions (Prime Minister's Office, 2019).

Iceland attaches vital importance to life below water (SDG 14) and prioritises its actions. To protect the marine environment, it has made voluntary commitments to reduce marine litter in its waters. Iceland held the co-chairmanship of the 'Increasing Scientific Knowledge and Developing Research Capacity and Transfer of Marine Technology' partnership at the UN Ocean Conference in June 2017. It has also committed to implementing a harvest control rule to manage commercially important fish stocks in Icelandic waters (Gunnarsdottir, 2017).

Iceland's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses primarily on SDGs 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

The government's fiscal strategy focuses on sustainable productivity, a reduction in GHG emissions, monitoring risk factors, and green solutions for the environment. In recent years, Iceland has paid special attention to integrating gender perspectives into environmental and climate issues and is committed to supporting specific measures to promote the position of women in this field. In particular, the Icelandic government has supported the SEforALL's People-Centered Accelerator platform which is intended to promote gender equality and emphasises the social participation and promotion of women in the energy sector globally (SDG 7) (Prime Minister's Office, 2019).

Iceland initiated SDG action in 2016 through a gap analysis on available information on sustainable development. It subsequently issued a status report on the SDGs, including

extensive work on the analysis and prioritisation of SDGs, targets and indicators. This report served as the basis for Iceland's National Action Plan for Sustainable Development (NORDEN, 2017).

In March 2017, the government appointed a working group represented by the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, and Statistics Iceland. This Interministerial Working Group manages the analysis, action, and promotion of the SDGs. To ensure the involvement of all ministries, a contact group was also formed, comprising representatives of other ministries and an observer from the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (Prime Minister's Office, 2019).

The Group mapped Iceland's position on all 169 targets and specified 65 priority targets to guide authorities for SDG action. In 2019, the SDG Working Group launched an information portal, offering citizens, NGOs, companies, institutions, municipalities and others the opportunity to present projects that contribute to the promotion of the SDGs (Prime Minister's Office, 2019).

Iceland submitted a VNR to the UN in 2019.

Sources:

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15 Ireland

Ireland's SDG action takes place within the framework of Project Ireland 2040, which identifies the country's overarching policy goals and values and sets out 10 strategic objectives. The SDG priority areas include: health and well-being (SDG 3); energy (SDG 7); climate action (SDG 13); smart and sustainable food production (SDG 3); and transitioning to sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) (Government of Ireland, 2018).

Ireland acknowledges that the detrimental effects of climate change are most acutely felt by the most vulnerable in society by undermining their well-being and ability to cope (SDGs 13, 3) (Doyle, 2017). As a small island nation with a relatively large marine territory, Ireland considers its relationship with the marine environment critical to social, environmental, and economic activities (Doyle, 2017). It therefore prioritises SDG 14 (life below water) and has put in place a National Integrated Maritime Plan to manage its marine resources to integrate economic, environmental and social priorities with the SDGs (Breen, 2017).

The National Development Plan 2018-2027 provides for EUR 116 billion in capital investment over 10 years. Of this, EUR 21.8 billion is allocated to SDG-related projects, including those on renewable energy and energy security (SDG 7) (Government of Ireland, 2018).

Ireland's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 3, 7, 12, 13 and 14.

In 2017, the government established the National Sustainable Development Unit to carry out those responsibilities. The SDG-specific government entity, the Senior Officials' Group on the SDGs was established to provide support, oversee SDG action and report to the Cabinet. Chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, it is made up of assistant secretaries from all government departments and receives support from the National Sustainable Development Unit and the SDG Interdepartmental Working Group. Each ministry is responsible for the SDG targets in its field of action (Government of Ireland, 2018).

Ireland established a national SDG Stakeholder Forum, chaired by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, to facilitate dialogue among representatives from government entities, civil society, NGOs, the private sector, trade unions and academia. Other networks have also facilitated collaboration on the SDGs, such as Coalition 2030, an alliance of over 100 civil society organisations, and Business in the Community Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2018).

In 2018, Ireland adopted its first SDG National Implementation Plan for the period 2018-2020 (Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 2018). The Plan integrates the 2030 Agenda into national policies and identifies the government ministries and agencies responsible for each of the SDG targets. The SDG National Implementation Plan builds on Ireland's current national sustainable development strategy, 'Our Sustainable Future' and its policy for international development, 'One World, One Future', and commits Ireland to mainstreaming the SDGs across national policy (UN DESA, 2018).

The government has mandated the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to lead tracking progress towards the SDGs. It is responsible for data collection, analysis and publication.

Ireland submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

Ireland has a national web-based system ([32]) for the dissemination of information on the SDGs. The Geohive is its public platform for exploring, downloading and combining publicly available data relating to the UN and the EU SDGs

. Developed as part of a collaborative project between the CSO and Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Geohive utilises state-of-the-art geospatial technology, made available by Esri Ireland, to map Ireland's progress against each goal, using a set of globally and EU-agreed Indicators. This new approach for tracking SDG progress was presented to the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN, on 18 July 2018 (UN DESA, 2018).

Sources:

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Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, 'National Implementation Plan 2018 – 2020', Republic of Ireland (https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/sustainable-development/sustainable-development-goals/Pages/National-Implementation-Plan-2018---2020.aspx) accessed 6 April 2020.

Doyle, A., 2017, *Statement by Mr. Andrew Doyle, T.D., Minister of State for Food, Forestry and Horticulture,* Republic of Ireland (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25918ireland.pdf) accessed 15 September 2017.

Government of Ireland, 2018, *Ireland: Voluntary National Review 2018 Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*, Republic of Ireland*.*

UN DESA, 2017, 'Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – Documents and Reports,' United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, USA (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/ireland) accessed 20 November 2017.

([32]) https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/

16 Italy

Organised into five core areas (people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership), Italy has identified priorities in each to deliver the SDGs. For 'planet', the country has prioritised SDGs 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, with three themes and 17 national strategic goals (UN DESA, 2017). The strategic goals include halting the loss of biodiversity (SDGs 2, 6, 12, 14 and 15) by safeguarding the conservation status of species and habitats in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems; halting the spread of invasive alien species; increasing terrestrial and maritime protected areas and ensuring their effective management; protecting and restoring genetic resources and natural ecosystems linked to farming, forestry and aquaculture; and mainstreaming natural capital accounting in planning, programming and national accounting (Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea - IMELS, 2017).

Italy's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension prioritise SDGs 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Italy's strategic goal to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources (SDGs 6, 11, 12, 13 and 15) includes providing biologically diverse and dynamic seas and preventing impacts on maritime and coastal environments; halting soil consumption and combatting desertification; minimising pollutant loads in soils, water bodies and aquifers; considering the good ecological status of natural systems; implementing integrated water-resource management at all levels; maximising water efficiency and adjusting withdrawals to water scarcity; minimising emissions and reducing concentrations of air pollutants; and ensuring sustainable forest management and combatting forest abandonment and degradation (IMELS, 2017).

To create resilient communities and territories, protect landscapes and cultural heritage (SDGs 2, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 15), the country aims to prevent anthropogenic and environmental risk and to strengthen urban and territorial resilience; to guarantee high environmental performances of buildings, infrastructures and open spaces; to boost urban regeneration; ensure sustainable urban accessibility and mobility; to ensure ecosystem restoration and defragmentation; strengthen ecological urban-rural connections, as well as developing their potential; and the sustainable management of territories, landscapes and cultural heritage (IMELS).

Italy started to align its development policies to the 2030 Agenda by preparing a harmonious 'National Sustainable Development Strategy 2017-2030' (NSDS). The NSDS was approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2017 and adopted by the Interministerial Committee for Economic Programming (CIPE) in late December of the same year (IMELS, 2017a) (CIPE, 2017). Preparation of a specific action plan is ongoing.

The International Development Cooperation (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, AICS) adopted the content and structure of the 2030 Agenda as an activity framework, as confirmed in the 'Three-Year Programming and Policy Planning Document 2017-2019' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2018).

Italy has put civil society engagement and consultation with public/private institutions at the core of its NSDS process, with more than 200 NGOs involved in reflecting the vision of the 2030 Agenda in the NSDS (IMELS, 2017). The IMELS established a Sustainable Development Forum which involves civil society, local authorities and experts on the various themes related to

progress towards the NSDS (IMELS, 2017b). The Forum's activities started in December 2019. In addition, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile, ASviS), established in 2016, brings together a large number of civil society institutions and networks, universities and research institutions to raise awareness and mobilise Italian society in order to implement the Agenda 2030 and to achieve the SDGs; it regularly reports on them (IMELS, 2017).

Italy submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017).

In May 2019, the Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) and the Regional and Provincial Environmental Agencies Network launched the Agenda 2030 Task Force which aims to coordinate and harmonise their activities related to supporting regional and provincial strategies. In June 2019, the Italian Council of Ministers Presidency established a coordination body — Cabina di regia 'Benessere Italia' — to strengthen and coordinate policies and initiatives for fair and sustainable wellness and implementation of the NSDS (Governo Italiano-Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2019).

In 20018, the IMELS launched a working group (of relevant ministries, ISPRA and Italian National Institute of Statistics, ISTAT) to select a core set of indicators for tracking progress on the NSDS. The final report was submitted to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for their follow-up in July 2019. ISTAT is responsible for collecting the indicators proposed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs. In 2017, it began interinstitutional comparative work, in the framework of National Statistical System, to produce a methodologically consistent, integrated and shared mapping and assessment of the overall availability of indicators for SDGs (ISTAT, 2019).

Sources:

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IMELS, 2017d, *Voluntary National Review Italy: National Sustainable Development Strategy*, Ministry for the Environment Land and Sea, Rome, Italy (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16341Italy.pdf) accessed 23 October 2017.

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17 Latvia

For SDG action, Latvia has set seven priority areas, including an innovative and eco-efficient economy (SDGs 8, 9) and nature as its future capital (SDGs 14, 15). With regard to an innovative and eco-efficient economy, it aims to preserve biological diversity, together with the services of eco-systems and renewable energy resources (SDG 7) used in innovative ways. As regards nature as its future capital, Latvia prioritises the use of location as capital, together with creating its image as a green country (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre - CSCC, 2018).

In Latvia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Consultative Council for Cooperation on Development are responsible for sustainable development cooperation and planning. Regular Council meetings constitute the main platform for implementation of the 2030 Agenda (CSCC, 2018). The CSCC is the primary body for development planning in Latvia and

Latvia's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses primarily on SDGs 7, 8, 9, 14 and 15.

the focal point for the SDGs. It is overseen by the prime minister (CSCC, 2018) and includes representatives from all line ministries, the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (LAPAS), the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Latvian Rectors' Council, the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian Parliament, the State Chancellery, and the Latvian School of Public Administration. There are plans to strengthen the Council, expand its membership, and establish new working groups, as appropriate (UNECE, 2016).

The CSCC created an informal advisory working group for the SDGs, comprising representatives from relevant line ministries, local governments, civil society associations, international partners, and other relevant stakeholders. In Latvia, planning and policy are decentralised which means that local authorities are critical to SDG actions. All local governments in Latvia have adopted sustainable development strategies which identify key issues, goals and plans. Many efforts at the local level are organised by the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments. The largest NGO umbrella organisation in Latvia is Alliance-Latvia which brings together organisations working on implementing the SDGs (CSCC, 2018).

Latvia submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018).

The Latvian National Development Plan 2014-2020 (NDP2020) is the overarching planning document for SDG action. The NDP2020 is supported by several policy frameworks and plans that set out how to achieve the SDGs (CSCC, 2018). In 2017, Latvia launched a public discussion on tracking progress towards the NDP2020 to promote the development and engagement of non-profits and civil society (Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs (PKC, 2017). The Central Statistical Bureau oversees the gathering and publication of national data indicators. It estimates that data are available for approximately 37 % of the SDG indicators. In the first half of 2017, a full SDG mapping was conducted, in collaboration with the CSCC (CSCC, 2018).

Sources:

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UNECE, 2016, *Planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals*, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva, Switzerland (http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/Latvia_Regional_SDG_Survey.pdf) accessed 20 November 2017.

18 Liechtenstein

In its VNR in 2019, Liechtenstein highlights the areas that require further action. These include reversing the high dependence on fossil fuels (SDG 7); decreasing the resource-intensity of consumption and production (SDG 12); meeting GHG emission reduction objectives (SDG 13); addressing high-levels of motorised private transport (SDGs 9, 11); and reversing the endangered biodiversity (SDG 15) (Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019).

Liechtenstein's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15.

The Liechtenstein government is committed to an environmentally friendly approach to agriculture, as climate change is likely to pose the greatest risk to Liechtenstein's agricultural sector. The country has committed to reducing its carbon emissions to 40 % compared to 1990 levels (SDG 13). It recognises that an active climate policy can create the right incentives for the development and use of climate-friendly, sustainable, and innovative technologies (Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019).

Access to clean, modern and affordable energy is a priority for Liechtenstein (SDG 8) and a 2050 Energy Vision is currently being drawn up to achieve this goal. The government has also created stronger incentives for more efficient and less environmentally harmful resource management. Environmental taxes have increased and appear to have had some effect on consumption and production patterns (SDG 12) (Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019).

The country is committed to global environmental protection and nature conservation and participates in close regional cooperation within Europe. Measures on the conservation of biodiversity (SDG 15) have either been implemented or are planned for the future. In 2017, the country launched 'Waterfootprint Liechtenstein', the rationale of which is 'drink tap water; donate drinking water' (SDG 6). The project aims to provide access to high-quality water for every resident of the Principality of Liechtenstein — i.e. to improve the living conditions of around 38 000 people in need. To date, a total of 22 009 'water footprints' have been activated in Liechtenstein (Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019).

The government established an Interdisciplinary Working Group led by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture. The Group is tasked with performing a gap analysis of the level of SDG action to ensure implementation and reviewing the availability of data for tracking progress (UN HLPF, 2019). The government also decided to define the SDGs together with the 2017-2021 Government Programme as one of the strategic guidelines for its work. It aims to ensure SDG action is as broad as possible (Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019).

The National Statistical Office (Amt für Statistik) maintains a national indicator system for sustainable development comprising a total of 55 indicators; it is published annually. Currently, the system is not based directly on the SDGs (Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019).

Liechtenstein submitted a VNR to the UN in 2019.

Sources:

Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, 2019, *Sustainability in Liechtenstein: Report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Government of the Principality of Liechtenstein, Vaduz, Liechtenstein (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23369Full_VNR_Liechtenstein_June_2019.pdf), accessed 24 July 2019.

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19 Lithuania

The Lithuanian government acknowledges that a sustainable environment plays an important role in eradicating poverty, addressing hunger, ensuring economic growth, and promoting health (Treciokas, 2016). Lithuania has identified combatting climate change (SDG 13), protecting oceans (SDG 14) and water resources (SDG 6), ecosystems and biodiversity (SDG 15), reducing pollution and waste (SDGs 3, 11), and increasing resource efficiency (SDG 7) as its key priority areas for environmental sustainability (Treciokas, 2016).

The country considers climate change (SDG 13) a major threat to sustainable development. Its climate change mitigation policy is based on the sustainable development of energy from renewable resources and energy efficiency (SDG 7). In 2016, it announced that its energy production from renewable sources accounted for more than half of the total electricity and heat production (Trečiokas, 2016). In October 2013, Lithuania approved the priorities for research and experimental development and innovation, with a breakthrough expected in 2022. The priorities cover the areas of energy,

Lithuania's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 13, 14 and 15. [problem with the formatting here prevents the corrections being made]

agri-innovation, biotechnology, transport, information and communication technology, new production processes, and a creative society (Government of Lithuania, 2018).

Lithuania prioritises the sustainable development of cities and communities (SDG 11). It is currently developing a new general territory plan that will integrate the SDGs. This plan will become the key instrument for ensuring inclusive and sustainable urban development, reducing the socio-economic exclusion of cities and the negative impact of built-up territories on the environment, and securing the protection of natural and cultural heritage (Government of Lithuania, 2018).

The Ministry of Environment is the focal point for progressing towards the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) and the 2030 Agenda. An Interinstitutional Working Group on Sustainable Development was established by the ministry, bringing together experts from various line ministries and civil society organisations. This Group, in cooperation with other national authorities, supports the Ministry of Environment in preparing NSSD progress reviews for presentation to the National Commission on Sustainable Development (NCSD). The NCSD is chaired by the prime minister and includes representatives from line ministries, as well as civil society, academia and the private sector (Government of Lithuania, 2018; Statistics Lithuania (LS), 2017a). There is also a commitment to further strengthen dialogue with the private sector and local stakeholders to achieve policy coherence at all levels.

The Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (ALAL) is involved in the national adaptation of the 2030 Agenda. Civil society and the private sector are represented in both the NCSD and the Interinstitutional Working Group on Sustainable Development (Government of Lithuania, 2018). Lithuania aims to align its sectoral strategies with the SDGs and has begun to assess the coherence of its NSSD with the 2030 Agenda. After the assessment, a public discussion will take place between the relevant institutions and non-governmental stakeholders to identify the priority areas and relevant SDG targets (UNECE, 2016). The NSSD is operationalised through four-year government action programmes, the current covering the period 2017-2020. A 2016-

2017 mapping of the SDGs showed very close alignment between the 2030 Agenda and the NSSD. In addition, Lithuania will update its National Progress Strategy Lithuania 2030 to better reflect the SDGs (Government of Lithuania, 2018)

LS collects national data indicators related to sustainable development. A dedicated working group was established to analyse the official SDG indicators and map their correlation with nationally available data (LS, 2017a).

Lithuania submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

Lithuania's NSSD identified a set of 84 national sustainable development indicators. LS then updated this list in August 2017, in cooperation with other ministries and institutions. The national list of SDG indicators will be updated annually (LS, 2017b). In addition, the biennial NSSD reports will analyse the sustainable development data and provide relevant policy recommendations (UNECE, 2016).

Sources:

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UN DESA, 2018, 'Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – Documents and Reports', United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, USA (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/lithuania) accessed 29 November 2019.

![European Environment Agency]

20 Luxembourg

Luxembourg prioritises the following five areas related to the environmental SDGs (Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2017):

- transition towards an inclusive and carbon-neutral economy (SDG 8);
- sustainable mobility, to ensure positive impact on the environment, air quality and GHG emissions (SDGs 3, 11, 13);
- sustainable land use for the preservation of nature and the protection of natural resources and biodiversity (SDG 15);
- prevention of the loss and deterioration of natural habitats, the expansion of urban areas, and the drainage and conversion of wetlands and water courses (SDGs 15, 11, 6, 14);
- tackling the global challenge of climate change (SDG 13).

Luxembourg created a High Council of Sustainable Development (HCSD) to coordinate national policy on sustainable development and civil society involvement for SDG action. One of the HCSD's tasks is to act as a platform for new partnerships for sustainable development (UNECE, 2016). Luxembourg's main tools for achieving sustainable development are its National Plan for Sustainable Development (PNDD) and the Report on the Implementation of Sustainable Development (RNDD). The current PNDD was adopted by the government in 2010 and was followed by the adoption of the RNDD in 2015. The HCSD has evaluated the latest PNDD and RNDD in terms of their coherence with the 2030 Agenda (UNECE, 2016).

Luxembourg prioritises SDGs 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14 and 15 with an environmental dimension.

Luxembourg has several sustainable development platforms for stakeholder participation, such as www.mengaktioun.lu. It also cooperates with the 'Cercle de Coopération', a group of NGOs working on sustainable development (UN DESA, 2017).

In 2018, in the context of the preparations for its third PNDD, Luxembourg undertook a stocktaking exercise and gap analysis for the development of its national SDG indicators. An expert working group was set up under the supervision of an Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development for the selection of the national SDG indicators. The group's work has led to the initial selection of 130 national SDG indicators. As a next step, it will conduct a technical evaluation of the indicators to develop the final list of Luxembourg's national SDG indicators (Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2017).

Luxembourg submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

Sources:

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21 Malta

The Maltese Sustainable Development Strategy identifies 20 priority areas, all of which are accompanied by targets and indicators. These areas include the environment, the economy, society, and cross-cutting issues (Government of Malta, 2018).

Malta is currently revising its NSDS to incorporate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. For this purpose, the Maltese government has been working on developing a national Vision 2050which aims to provide guidelines towards long-term sustainable development in Malta whilst integrating the 2030 Agenda into sustainable development policies across all levels of government. As part of its efforts to identify the steps needed for SDG action, the country launched the process of interministerial consultations (UNECE, 2016). The aim is to have a long-term objective that integrates the 2030 Agenda while, at the same time, defining sustainable development guidelines based on maximising the three pillars of sustainable development across all levels of government.

From a purely environmental perspective, this vision contemplates the development of a policy that is aimed at the following critical targets: fostering the sustainability of farming activities by adapting to the local geo-climatic conditions and organic farming (SDG 2); better managing the supply of improved water quality and ensuring an adequate supply of good-quality drinking water, treating wastewater and harvesting rainwater (SDG 6); reducing the country's carbon footprint and GHG emissions through energy efficiency and replacing heavy fuel oil with natural gas and gas oil, and renewable sources (SDG 7); improving resource efficiency in production (SDG 8); promoting greener enterprises (SDG 9); promoting energy efficiency and green spaces in cities (SDG 11); sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources (SDG 12); climate action (SDG 13); marine litter, eutrophication, exclusive economic zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches, minimising and addressing the impacts of ocean acidification, maintaining fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels and marine protected areas (SDG 14); and supporting afforestation, as well as safeguarding ecosystems and biodiversity (SDG 15) (Government of Malta, 2018).

Malta's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses primarily on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Since 2013, the Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change (MESDC) has been mandated by the prime minister as the lead agency for sustainable development matters, as set out in Malta`s Sustainable Development Act. The Act provides for the establishment of three structures to promote the sustainable development agenda: 1) the competent authority, which is responsible for a number of functions, as defined by the Act (currently the MESDC); 2) the Guardian of Future Generations, which is entrusted with promoting sustainable development principles and safeguarding the interests of future generations; and 3) the Sustainable Development Network (UN DESA, 2018).

The NSDS will be accompanied by an action plan which will outline the implementation timeline and structure of the sustainable development actions (Government of Malta, 2018). It will be the overarching umbrella for existing and future policy and strategy drafted

Malta submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

by the Maltese government. Civil society, the private sector, academia and the public will be invited to provide feedback on the SDG actions at regular intervals (UNECE, 2016). SDG-related data collection and monitoring is managed jointly by the MESDC and the National Statistics Office (Government of Malta, 2018).

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22 The Netherlands

Since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, the Netherlands has worked on its SDGs action in an integrated manner for all 17 goals. From an environmental perspective, the country's national priorities include energy transition, climate action, enhancing environmental protection and biodiversity whilst tackling present and future environmental pressures (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

As regards SDG 2, the country focuses on reducing phosphate, nitrogen, and ammonia emissions and ensuring sustainable food production, facilitating a conversion to organic farming as well as promoting research and innovation in other forms of sustainable agriculture, such as permaculture and environmentally friendly farming (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

The Netherland's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses primarily on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15. [formatting problem with the corrections]

On SG 6, the Netherlands aims to establish fair, efficient and sustainable water supply and sanitation services. The Kingdom anticipates that the high quality of drinking water may come under pressure due to climate change or water contamination. To meet future challenges for drinking water and groundwater quality, over 30 parties have signed a declaration of intent to jointly improve water quality further (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

On SDG 7, the Netherlands has one of the lowest rates of renewable energy production in Europe. Thus, this SDG remains a challenge for the country. Measures and policies are being developed to find innovative ways to reduce industry's energy use (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

As regards SDG 9, the Netherlands is promoting sustainable innovation and investment, particularly green innovations, such as a bio-based, the circular economy and electric transport.

For SDG 11, the Kingdom focuses on 12 priorities, including air quality, the circular economy, climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable land use and nature-based solutions. On SDG 12, tackling food waste and hazardous waste are identified as priority areas. The Netherlands gives high importance to reducing GHG emissions and achieving climate change adaptation (SDG 13) (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

For SDG 14, the Kingdom is focusing on reducing marine pollution, toxic substances, marine litter and microplastics to acceptable levels as well as safeguarding marine biodiversity and achieving sustainable fisheries. On SDG 15, conservation, restoration and the sustainable management of nature still pose challenges. Thus, the government has introduced additional measures, in particular to protect meadow birds and promote environmentally friendly agriculture (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

Although the Kingdom of the Netherlands' starting position is promising, it has also identified certain gaps in terms of SDG achievement. The most challenging areas of action point to the circular economy (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), low-carbon energy transition (SDG 7), sustainable food and agriculture (SDGs 2, 15), and sustainable fisheries (SDG 14) (PBL

Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2016). The Netherlands consumes large quantities of fossil fuels and has high per-capita GHG emissions. The share of renewable energy in the total energy supply is low compared to other European countries. The quality of groundwater, surface water and coastal waters, fisheries, as well as natural habitats and biodiversity are under considerable pressure across the country. It promotes sustainable economic growth (SDG 8) by paying extra attention to climate change (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

In the Netherlands, responsibility for performing SDG actions have been assigned to all the ministries concerned, coordinated by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation which is the coordinating cabinet member for SDG action. An Interministerial Network of SDG Focal Points formulates and stimulates government action by proposing SDG-related strategies to the Council of Ministers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented its Action Plan in 2016, advising on national coordination on a permanent basis. In 2016, the government reported progress on the Action Plan to the parliament (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017).

The Netherlands has integrated tracking its SDG progress into the regular policy cycles. Every year, the government submits a report to the parliament, outlining national SDG progress. In May 2019, the third report (in Dutch) on SDG progress was presented to the parliament via the regular budget and reporting cycle. Five umbrella organisations representing the private sector, knowledge institutions, NGOs, local governments, and youth each contributed a chapter to the reports. Since 2019, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights has also contributed to the report on an annual basis.

Statistics Netherlands (CBS) publishes regular reports on SDGs in the Netherlands. In 2016, it was the first national statistical office in the world to provide a statistical measurement on SDG indicators. The second report was published in March 2018. Between the two reports, the CBS increased data coverage from 37 % of SDG indicators to 51 %. In 2018, it introduced a new monitoring system — the Welfare Monitoring System (Monitor Brede Welvaart) — to measure citizens' prosperity by using a broad set of indicators, such as environmental impacts, rather than GDP. The thematic discussions around the system are intended to address the SDGs (CBS, 2017b).

The Netherlands submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017 and plans to present a second one in 2022-2023.

The Netherlands believes that national and local governments, the private sector (including the financial sector), civil society organisations, knowledge institutions and young people are all key partners in implementing the SDGs (Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2017). Thus, the country works closely with stakeholders to promote SDG implementation in partnership. For example, the SDG Charter is a growing multi-stakeholder platform with over 500 Dutch companies, NGOs, knowledge institutions and philanthropists who have declared their intention to contribute to the SDGs in partnership. The SDG Community is an online community of active stakeholders across sectors where partners can create profiles and showcase their work on the SDGs. In September 2017, the Kingdom launched the first SDG Action Day, during which the stakeholders discussed the SDGs with Members of Parliament and opened the first Dutch SDG House in Amsterdam, creating a meeting point for SDG partners. This event also initiated the 'Adopt an SDG campaign' by the NGO-coalition Building Change in which 25 Members of Parliament declared their commitment to one or more SDGs.

Since 2019, the national assessment framework for new laws and policies has become 'SDG-proof', requiring law- and policymakers to assess the effects of their legislation on SDG progress. These adjustments will create more transparency on the contributions of new laws and policies to achieving the SDGs.

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23 Norway

Sustainable natural resource management and climate change mitigation and adaptation are priority areas for Norway. It has identified several targets that pose challenges, including sustainable consumption and production; improving urban air quality (SDG 11); halving food waste and reducing waste generation (SDGs 12, 3); and reducing the impact of invasive alien species (SDG 15) (UN DESA, 2016).

As for the crucial area of climate change, a national follow-up of the Paris Agreement will constitute the main basis for action to fulfil SDG 13. Addressing the responsible use and protection of oceans and marine environments is particularly pressing. This is important for Norway and other coastal states whose livelihoods and welfare depend on the sea (UN DESA, 2016). Recently, Norway adopted an action plan for biodiversity as a tool for achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (SDG 15) (UN DESA, 2016).

Norway's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses primarily on SDGs 3, 7, 11, 13, 14 and 15.

After the adoption of the SDGs in September 2015, the Norwegian government developed a national plan for their implementation and follow-up. To ensure policy coherence and coordination, the Minister of Foreign Affairs established a project on the post-2015 development agenda and an Interministerial Contact Group which analysed the SDGs in terms of their potential consequences and challenges for the country (UN DESA, 2016).

Responsibility for each of the 17 SDGs has been given to a coordinating ministry which consults with other ministries to follow up various targets under the goal concerned. In each ministry, targets have been assigned to individual units, thereby distributing the responsibility for the implementation of the SDGs across all levels of government (NORDEN, 2017).

Norway views civil society engagement as vital to national ownership of the 2030 Agenda. The government conducts consultations with stakeholders on SDG implementation and places emphasis on the private sector and business to achieve scaled-up implementation and financing for the 2030 Agenda (UN-DESA, 2016). Norway regards participatory, inclusive and representative decision-making as fundamental for a well-functioning society. Participation is vital for ensuring the national ownership necessary for an effective and transparent follow-up of the SDGs. As far as spreading knowledge about them is concerned, the recommendation by the Ministry of Education to include the SDGs as part of the curriculum in schools is valuable (UN DESA, 2016).

Norway has begun to incorporate the global SDG indicators in its national context. It will define additional national SDG indicators, where necessary, to ensure comprehensive monitoring at the national level (UN DESA, 2016).

Norway submitted a VNR to the UN in 2016

Norway has a reporting system in place for its national targets. Each year, the ministries will report their progress toward the SDGs to the Norwegian parliament (Storting) in their budget

proposals. This is a vital as the annual budgets are key political documents for policymaking (UN DESA, 2016).

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24 Poland

Poland`s SDG actions focus on the '5ps' in the 2030 Agenda (people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership). Across the country, SDG action is supported by national strategies, with a formal procedure for concluding and adopting them. From an environmental perspective, the country strives to improve the state of the environment and sustainable management of resources.

Under the planet cluster, improving air quality in Polish cities remains a priority (SDGs 3, 11). Objectives also include achieving high water quality (SDG 6); protecting the soil against degradation (SDG 15); reducing the impact of noise and electromagnetic fields on society (SDG 3); as well as increasing available water resources (SDG 6); the sustainable management of terrestrial resources (SDG 15); and ensuring efficient waste management (SDG 12) (Government of Poland, 2018).

In achieving SDGs with an environmental dimension, Poland focuses primarily on SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 15.

A boost for the implementation of the environmental SDGs was the agreement on and adoption of the 2030 National Environmental Policy – the Development Strategy in the Area of the Environment and Water Management, which set out several environmental priorities. Moreover, citizens have become more environmentally conscious in recent years, and protecting air quality and climate change have been gaining interest. In addition, a new Ministry of Climate (MoC) was established to operate independently of the Ministry of Environment. The MoC is responsible for climate action and sustainable development issues. Sustainable water management was also transferred from the Ministry of Environment to the Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation.

Poland has also identified areas which require further action. For example, since its energy policy has yet to be updated, this has become a priority for the current MoC (SDG 7). SDGs' visibility and their recognition tends to be limited to experts. As regards sustainable cities (SDG 11), the main objective is to improve the quality of life and support cities in their transition towards sustainability and climate neutrality. Air quality remains another priority. The clean air programme is being amended to boost the number of investments across the country. Moreover, actions have been undertaken to improve the waste-management system and support the e-mobility sector. A reduction in GHG emissions will be pursued within financial instruments such as 'My electricity', 'Agro-energy' and 'Polish Geothermy Plus'. New regulations to improve and harmonise the process of preparing the acoustic maps and environmental protection plans have also been introduced, although better coordination is needed at both the national and local level to consolidate all noise data and decisions.

Business, private institutions, scientific and research institutions, and non-governmental organisations were included in activities aimed at developing various government strategies on SDG action with an environmental dimension. Stakeholder engagement activities included mainly consultations and workshops. For example, for the purpose of developing the 2030 National Environmental Policy, a consultation conference was organised, and an online questionnaire launched. The consultation proved popular among civil society organisations. In 2017, the Ministry of Economic Development initiated the Partnership for the SDGs, inviting all stakeholders to share their experiences and activities on SDGs. Signatories to the partnership undertake and communicate a number of initiatives, including in the area of the environment, such as striving for the highest standards of environmental protection; innovative ways of

introducing principles of the circular economy; reducing the consumption of water and other resources; environmentally safe processing and transport of raw materials; projects aiming to reduce pollution, waste and the consumption of raw materials; support for school and educational institutions in the field of environmental education; as well as the development of vehicles based on clean energy, and fuel-saving practices.

Within the Urban Agenda (SDG11), the MoC has planned to organise 16 regional workshops to discuss how to create greener cities, bringing together stakeholders from civil society organisations, academia and local governments. Social participation played a significant role in the development of 'Urban Adaptation Plans for cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants in Poland' project (SDGs 11, 13). The project's main aim, in partnership with the 44 major Polish cities, was to assess their sensitivity and vulnerability to climate change and to develop priority adaptation measures adequate for the risks identified in each city (Government of Poland, 2018).

Other partnerships have also been created and developed, including the UNEP/GRID-Warsaw Centre SDG Partnership 'Together for the environment'. It initiates and implements projects addressing those SDGs with an environmental dimension. It was created to exchange ideas, experiences and good practices and to build broad cooperation to achieve the SDGs. Partnership activities focus on education and raising awareness. Many different stakeholders are involved, including companies, associations of companies and chambers of commerce, research and development institutions, public administration, central and local government, non-governmental organisations, and informal initiatives as well as individuals (GRID-Warsaw in Partnership with UN Environment, 2018).

Poland not only prioritises the achievement of individual goals, but also the interactions between them. To increase the effectiveness of achieving the SDGs, the country recognises the importance of education for sustainable development, effective monitoring systems, and policy coherence. It also considers that more clarity is required as regards the role of different international and European institutions in the SDGs process along with streamlining their actions (Government of Poland, 2018).

The Council of Ministers sets out the overall sustainable development objectives and policies. Sector-specific bodies coordinate different aspects of Poland's development strategy, including the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers (economic policy) and the Social Committee of the Council of Ministers (social issues). The Ministry of Economic Development is responsible for coordination of the 2030 Agenda. An important body under the institutional mechanism is the Coordination Committee for Development Policy, one of the prime minister's advisory bodies. Line ministries are involved in SDG actions within their relevant areas of competence. A special Task Force for Coherence between the Strategy for Responsible Development and the 2030 Agenda was created within the Coordination Committee to prioritise the SDG targets, and facilitate dialogue and collaboration related to the 2030 Agenda and the VNR (Government of Poland, 2018).

Poland submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

Statistics Poland oversees data collection and both the provision and creation of indicators to track SDG progress. To assess progress towards the SDGs on the global level, it coordinates the provision of data for the official UN indicators. It developed SDG indicators to track the

realisation of national SDG priorities, defined by the Polish government in 2018. To complement the VNR report submitted to the UN in 2018, Statistics Poland prepared the publication 'A picture of Poland: Statistics for SDGs', introducing foreign readers to Poland and its role in achieving the SDGs (Statistics Poland, 2018).

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25 Portugal

Portugal incorporates the 2030 Agenda into its national strategies, plans and policies around the '5ps' (people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership). It identifies its priorities for SDG actions with an environmental dimension as climate change (SDG 13) and life below water (SDG 14). As it considers economic growth, social development and climate change adaptation and mitigation to be interlinked with sustainable industry and technological progress, it also prioritises SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure). Portugal's 'Action Plan for a Circular Economy' is key to the necessary new sustainable society model (SDG 12) (Republic of Portugal).

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Action defined its action strategy based on three key pillars: promoting the circularity of the economy (SDG 12); while respecting life on land (SDG 15); and being on track to carbon neutrality (SDG 13). The Ministry reinforced the intersectoral and cross-cutting environmental

Portugal identifies SDGs 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17 as environmental priority areas.

public policy with a permanent dialogue with all stakeholders and several levels of the administration, enabling a continuous evaluation to better optimise the appropriate level of SDG actions. Therefore, the country also considers partnerships (SDG17) are essential and key for environmental action.

Portugal attaches importance to breaking the silos within and among government and other public institutions, at both the national and local level, as well as engaging with civil society in this process. The important level of public awareness, namely with NGOs, academia or local authorities' interventions, oblige complete transparency in actions and guarantees permanent public evaluation by the media. Pre-existing social and political structures and processes on sustainable development as well as strong political support and active civil society engagement have enabled Portugal to respond to most of the SDG targets.

In 2016, the Portuguese Council of Ministers adopted Intra-Governmental Guidelines for the 2030 Agenda and established the Focal Point Network comprising representatives from different public institutions. Within this structure, each ministry was designated as being responsible for the relevant SDGs. In 2016, when this coordination mechanism was created, the Ministry of Environment was appointed as responsible for SDGs 6, 11, 12 and 13. A public consultation on SDG action at the national and local level also took place that year, along with an online survey intended to reach a wider audience and provide an opportunity for every citizen to participate (Republic of Portugal, 2017).

Portugal submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

In line with existing practice in the Ministry of Environment and Climate Action, the 2030 Agenda adoption has improved all the ministry's partners awareness of the interdependency of sectorial and regional policies, smoothing the necessary common decision-making processes. The main environmental instruments have benefitted from this new vision, allowing for more extensive intersectoral and public discussions and improved ownership of the Roadmap for Carbon Neutrality, the Action Plan for a Circular Economy, the National Plan for Energy and Climate, the

National Programme for Spatial Planning, and the National Strategy for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity.

The country's baseline analysis on SDG progress began with the collection of data and information in relation to the SDGs (Republic of Portugal, 2017). As a result, the National Statistical Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estatística) mapped the available information and identified the most appropriate sources of indicators for tracking SDG progress. The next step for the government includes consolidation of this work, improving the robustness of the existing indicators, developing calculation methods for the missing indicators, and the possibility of introducing qualitative indicators (Republic of Portugal, 2017).

Sources:

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26 Romania

Even though we are still facing many of the traditional water-supply challenges, sewerage and water-quality protection, new challenges such as the adaptation to climate change, rising food and energy prices, and obsolete and insufficient infrastructures are now increasing, which are also increasing the complexity and financial burden of water management. Romania has also undertaken other actions to improve water quality and access to water-supply infrastructure. Its environmental priorities centre on the transition from biomass to renewable energy for household heating (SDG 7); the management of natural protected areas; and sustainable forest management and forest ecosystems (SDG 15) (Ministry of Environment of Romania, 2018).

Romania, as the largest country in the Danube basin, also contributes to developing and updating the Danube River Basin Management Plan. The purpose is to enhance the quality of life and avoid environmental decline by using smart technologies to ensure the sustainable development of communities. Romania focuses its attention on reducing the discharge

Romania prioritises SDGs 6, 7, 11 and 12 with an environmental dimension.

of nutrient loads into the Danube basin and the Black Sea (SDG 14)(Petcu, 2017). The country has also explored synergies between the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement (SDG 13) and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (Gavrilescu, 2017).

In Romania, oversight of sustainable development is shared between two entities. The first is the Department for Sustainable Development, under the prime minister's office, which was created in April 2017 and has been assigned primary responsibility for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The second is the Interministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Integration of Environmental Protection into Sectoral Policies and Strategies (Interministerial Committee), which has managed sustainable development initiatives in Romania, led by the Minister of Environment (Ministry of Environment of Romania, 2018).

In November 2008, Romania adopted its National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), 'Horizon 2013-2020-2030'. The country is currently mapping the SDGs and determining how best to achieve synergies for appropriate SDG action (Ministry of Environment, 2018). The NSDS proposes to establish a Coalition for Sustainable Development which would act as an NGO and advocate for the SDGs (Ministry of Environment, 2018).

The Department for Sustainable Development is collaborating closely with the National Institute of Statistics to monitor Romania's progress on the SDGs. Romania is currently updating its sustainable development indicator set, as part of both the revised NSDS and the forthcoming National Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) (Ministry of Environment of Romania, 2018).

Romania submitted a Voluntary National Review to the UN in 2018.

Romania recognises the SDG action should respond directly to citizens' needs at the local level. Local communities' needs will be addressed by formulating local and national development strategies (Dulceata, 2017). In 2017 and 2018, Romania organised a series of conferences and seminars to raise awareness of the SDGs and promote participation. Some events were

specifically designed to include civil society organisations. Approximately 33 communities have completed Local Sustainable Development Strategies (Ministry of Environment of Romania, 2018).

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27 Slovak Republic

In its VNR, the Slovak Republic introduces six national priorities for SDG actions, including transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy (SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10, 12); sustainable settlements, regions and countryside in the face of climate change (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 13, 15); and good health (SDGs 3) (Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Investments and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic, 2018).

The Slovak Republic is taking an approach supported by the whole government to implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The country has set up a Council for Sustainable Development and plans to revise its previous National Strategy on Sustainable Development and create new legislation, if necessary, to

The Slovak Republic's national SDG priorities include SDGs 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15 with an environmental dimension.

ensure SDG action (UNECE, 2016). The Council is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatisation. It includes representatives of line ministries and government institutions at the national and regional level, civil society, the private sector, academia and other relevant bodies. It is supported by the Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and preparation of the National Investment Plan of the Slovak Republic for the years 2018-2030 (Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Investments and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, 2018).

The country is committed to integrating the 2030 Agenda into all public policies, including at the local level. The government promotes voluntary engagement, for instance, by creating a micro-grant scheme to support sustainable development projects for local communities (Deputy Prime Minister's Office for Investments and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic, 2018). The Slovak Republic encourages businesses to engage with sustainable development principles — for example, by creating a new SDG-specific category of the Via Bona Slovakia Award for responsible businesses (UN DESA, 2018).

In 2017, the Slovak Republic adopted a roadmap for SDG action, which serves as the basis for a new NDS and overarching policy framework. The Slovak Republic Government Office, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, have been tasked with developing the

The Slovak Republic submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

concept for the 2030 Agenda and ensuring that its ongoing implementation is a shared responsibility among all stakeholders (Slovak Republic, 2017a).

Whilst the Slovak Republic Statistical Office is responsible for the production of national sustainable development indicators, which are in line with the global UN and EU SDG indicators (Slovak Republic, 2017a; 2017b), the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is responsible for tracking SDG progress (UN DESA, 2018).

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28 Slovenia

Slovenia prioritises transition to a low-carbon and circular economy (SDGs 8, 9, 12, 13) for its SDG actions (Government of Slovenia, 2017; 2020). In this context, it has defined priority areas, including raising awareness of all aspects of the transition and a comprehensive approach to reducing GHG emissions (SDG 13); the use of renewable energy sources (SDG 7); and the development of sustainable mobility (SDG 9) (Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

Slovenia's priority areas in SDGs with an environmental dimension are SDGs 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

Statistics place Slovenia below the EU average when it comes to three types of productivity — material, energy and emissions — as well as monitoring circularity in the use of resources (EU + the UK: 11.7, Slovenia: 8.5 – in 2017). In the long run, this makes Slovenia vulnerable because of its dependency on imported raw materials. Therefore, one of its four priority areas is the transition to a low-carbon economy (Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

In cooperation with the European Institutes of Innovation and Technology (EIT Climate-KIC and EIT Raw Materials) and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), Slovenia has prepared a comprehensive programme for its transition to a carbon-free society, which represents a model example at the EU level. The connection between transitioning to a circular economy and achieving climate neutrality is partly included in the National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of Slovenia and will also play an important role in developing new strategies for industrial climate neutrality and amending the Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Slovenia also considers SDG 14 as a priority area for preserving the biodiversity of land, marine and inland aquatic ecosystems. Its Spatial Development Strategy until 2050 puts the spotlight on the new role of cities, including green city systems and sustainable mobility systems and a healthy urban life (SDG 11) (Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

The Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 is the country's umbrella development framework proposing a high quality of life for all. Slovenia incorporated the SDGs into its Development Strategy 2030 with the active participation of relevant stakeholders and vulnerable groups from local, regional and national bodies, civil society and businesses. The country's National Development Strategy 2030 aims to strike a balance between a resilient, inclusive and responsible society, economic growth that is inclusive and green, and a well-preserved natural environment (Government of Slovenia, 2017).

Slovenia submitted two VNRs to the UN in 2017 and 2020.

Slovenia established an Interdepartmental Working Group for Development Policies which aims to link existing capacity on sustainable development and ensure horizontally integrated interdepartmental cooperation between ministries, government institutions and other key agencies (Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, 2017).

Sources:

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29 Spain

Spain is extremely vulnerable to climate change. The country aims to enhance consistency and create synergies between the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 and strives to ensure that the 2030 Agenda helps to address the challenges posed by climate change (UN DESA, 2017). The priorities for SDG action, in this respect, are to reduce the negative environmental impact of cities (SDG 11); to pay particular attention to air quality (SDG 3); and waste management (SDG 12); to become resilient to the negative effects of disasters (SDG 13); and to protect cultural and natural heritage (SDG 15)(Government of Spain, 2018).

Spain prioritises actions towards SDGs 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 with an environmental dimension.

Spain also supports initiatives relating to sustainable energy (SDG 7) and focuses on efficient and sustainable water management (SDG 6) (FCAS) (UN DESA, 2017). The country's other environmental priorities include the fight against desertification and protection of forests (SDG 15) as well as the sustainable management of marine resources and oceans (SDG 14) (Government of Spain, 2018).

It developed a National Action Plan for 2018-2020 for action towards Agenda 2030. The plan prioritises certain aspects of the 2030 Agenda. The High-Level Group (HLG) for the 2030 Agenda leads the coordination of all SDG-related issues in Spain with representatives from line ministries. Spain created the Office of High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda to oversee progress on sustainable development. The high commissioner reports directly to the president and receives technical support from the Office of the High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda (Government of Spain, 2018).

Civil society is actively involved in SDG actions, with representatives from the municipalities and regions forming part of the HLG. In addition, Futuro en Común is a cross-sectoral platform designed to bring together civil society organisations and facilitate advocacy, awareness-raising, and the influence of public policy pertaining to sustainable development (UN DESA, 2017).

Spain submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

The National Statistics Institute (Instituto nacional de estadísticas), in collaboration with the Interministerial Statistics Commission, oversees the expansion and updating of the set of indicators on SDGs (UN DESA, 2017).

Sources:

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30 Sweden

In June 2017, the national delegation to the UN HLPF submitted the report 'Towards sustainable welfare – the 2030 Agenda' to the Swedish government, which included proposals for an action plan for SDGs. Six priority areas were outlined in the action plan, including sustainable cities (SDG 11); the circular economy (SDG 12); as well as sustainable and healthy food (SDG 2) (Kingdom of Sweden, 2017a). The government adopted Sweden's Action Plan for the 2030 Agenda with the intention of reinforcing efforts to achieve the SDGs and indicating how government agencies and other actors in society can contribute (Kingdom of Sweden, 2017). The Action Plan includes key political measures for the years 2018-2020. It also highlights six cross-sectoral focus areas, including a socially beneficial, circular, and bio-based economy; corporate social responsibility; a sustainable and healthy food chain; and knowledge and innovation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018).

Sweden's environmental objectives have been decided by the Riksdag and constitute the national objectives that contribute to attaining the environmental dimension of the SDGs. At the same time, Agenda 2030 can also revitalise and provide new conditions to catalyse the achievement of the country's environmental objectives (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2020).

Sweden's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus on SDGs 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

The Swedish parliament has approved several of the government's communications and bills that have a bearing on the 2030 Agenda. All ministries produced action plans which provided the basis for the 2016 Government Communication on the Sustainable Development Goals (Kingdom of Sweden, 2017a).

In 2015, the government established the Scientific Council for Sustainable Development tasked with serving as a platform for dialogue between the government and the scientific community and helping to provide a sustainable development policy with a scientific basis (Kingdom of Sweden, 2017a). In addition, Sweden's budget proposal for 2018 indicated the contribution of fiscal policy to sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda is mentioned in the financial plan and in most of the 27 spending areas, showing an almost two-fold increase in areas compared to the 2017 budget (Kingdom of Sweden, 2017b).

Sweden submitted a VNR to the UN in 2017.

In 2017, the Swedish VNR identified several challenges, such as establishing sustainable energy (SDG 7); and climate resilient pathways (SDG 13); achieving the targets for sustainable seas and marine resources (SDG 14); and the transition towards sustainable consumption and production processes (SDG 12) (Kingdom of Sweden, 2017a).

The latest in-depth evaluation of the environmental quality objectives performed by the Swedish EPA (2019) emphasises that there is a negative trend in ecosystem recovery and biodiversity conservation (SDG 15). GHG emissions must be reduced at a faster rate, the

ecological links in the landscape need to be strengthened, and the dispersion of dangerous/hazardous substances must be reduced.

In 2018, Statistics Sweden was tasked by the government with setting up a national monitoring system by coordinating the development and production of statistics on Sweden's implementation of the 2030 Agenda and making these statistics available (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018).

In October 2019, Statistics Sweden carried out a statistical follow-up of the SDG actions, which includes proposals on the timing of national statistical reviews, on national indicators and on developing some statistical measures (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018).

Sources:

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31 Switzerland

In 2016, the Federal Council of Switzerland adopted the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) 2016-19 which underlines the need for sustainable development to feature in all policy areas. Well aligned with the SDGs, the Swiss SDS includes an action plan which is structured by thematic priority areas of action for the prioritised SDGs. The SDS is complemented by an action plan that lays out concrete actions and initiatives in nine target areas, including responsible consumption and production (SDG 12); urban development, mobility and infrastructure (SDGs 9, 11); energy and climate change (SDGs 7, 13); as well as protection of natural resources (SDGs 2, 6, 15) (Swiss Confederation, 2016).

Switzerland's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15.

The federal government's other environmental goals include the conservation status of the populations of national priority species by 2020 and improved conditions in endangered habitats (SDG 15), the limited impact of waste and closing materials' cycles (SDG 12) (Swiss Confederation, 2018).

Switzerland's VNRs recognise barriers and conflicts related to mainstreaming the economic, social and environmental dimensions of innovation, including 'conflicts of use' in environmental protection, human settlement, energy, and transport, as well as domestic policy spillovers. The 2018 VNR identified areas where additional efforts are needed to achieve the SDGs. For example, Switzerland's use of natural resources from within the country is declining but its use of natural resources from abroad is 'increasing in an unsustainable way', hindering the country's progress on SDG 12 (Swiss Confederation, 2018).

In Switzerland, the SDG action is pursued at the federal, regional and communal level. Its 16 regional governments (cantons) and 234 municipalities are strongly involved in sustainable development policies and many have adopted their own strategies. High-level supervision on SDG action is provided by the Federal Council of Switzerland. The federal government intends to intensify dialogue with the cantons and communes and support them on the 2030 Agenda, for example, through platforms for exchange and networks (Swiss Confederation, 2018). An Interdepartmental National 2030 Agenda Working Group was also created to coordinate national efforts and ensure that the SDGs are integrated within Switzerland's institutions. It is co-led by the Federal Office for Spatial Development and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (Swiss Confederation, 2018).

Switzerland works closely with civil society and the private sector to advance its SDG actions. All levels of government as well as the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the scientific community are engaged in the process at the federal, cantonal and communal level, according to relevant competencies, the established division of tasks and the principle of subsidiarity. Many cantons and communities have defined sustainability and coordination mechanisms for sustainable development and engage in dialogue with the federal government on SDG action. An advisory group of non-state actors has identified priority challenges for the country and provides a platform for dialogue with the federal government on issues related to achieving the SDGs (Swiss Confederation, 2018).

Switzerland submitted two VNRs to the UN in 2016 and in 2018.

To track its progress towards the SDGs, Switzerland uses its sustainable development monitoring and reporting system (MONET) which has been in place since 2003. In May 2016, MONET's reference framework was re-aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The system was expanded to enable the continuous monitoring of progress towards the goals and is currently tracking 85 SDG indicators. Federal offices are required to address sustainable development in their periodic reports on items of business or areas covered by their sectoral policies. Switzerland plans to publish a report on progress towards achieving the SDGs every four years, as from 2018. It will also draft a report in partnership with the cantons, communes and non-governmental actors which will be released to the public at the same time (Swiss Confederation, 2017b).

Sources:

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32 Turkey

Turkey takes a holistic approach to SDG actions, integrating them into NDPs and sectoral strategies. Therefore, the country pays due attention to considering the interlinkages between the SDGs, as well as to prioritising action for faster progress and to allocating the appropriate resources (Government of Turkey, 2019).

As regards SDGs with an environmental dimension, Turkey`s SDG actions focus primarily on preserving genetic resources and biodiversity (SDGs 2, 15); sustainable and climate-adapted agricultural production methods and technologies (SDG 2); ensuring sustainable water management which strikes a balance between nature conservation and resource development (SDG 6); energy efficiency in transport, buildings and industries (SDG 7); encouraging 'zero waste' at the industrial scale (SDGs 9, 12); promoting bioplastic and eco-labelling (SDG 9); raising the awareness of consumers and producers on sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12); ensuring GHG emission control through new technologies (SDGs 9, 13); climate adaptation (SDG 13); preventing and reducing marine litter (SDG 14); maximising the use of aquaculture resources in marine and inland waters, improving the protection of aquaculture stocks and aquaculture development (SDG 14); holistic planning and management of the terrestrial ecosystem, promoting high value-added forest ecosystems, developing holistic policies on gene, species, habitat, ecosystems, and scaling up the conservation and sustainable use of the terrestrial ecosystem (SDG 15) (Government of Turkey, 2019).

> *Turkey's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 2, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15. [formatting problem]*

Turkey was among the 22 countries that submitted their first VNR to the HLPF in 2016. The VNR process commenced with the highest-level political ownership on the Turkish president's call to all government entities (Government of Turkey, 2016).

Turkey`s second VNR, in 2019, focuses on progress towards the SDGs made between 2010-2018. The Presidency of Strategy and Budget, which is also responsible for preparing NDPs, is the national focal point for SDGs and coordinated the 2019 VNR preparations. The VNR process accelerated the steps to address policies from this perspective (Government of Turkey, 2019).

Turkey established a National Sustainable Development Commission to lead the concerted action by all relevant institutions to achieve the SDGs. The country also focuses on engagement with non-governmental stakeholders and aims to make SDG actions a shared responsibility among all relevant stakeholders (UN DESA, 2016). The Turkish Industry and Business Association, Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation, Business Council for Sustainable Development Turkey and the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey were selected as the coordinating institutions to represent the private sector. Civil society and all the relevant UN agencies are coordinated by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office to the Republic of Turkey, while the Union of Municipalities of Turkey was appointed as the coordinating institution for local administrations. As a result, a total of 2 962 representatives from government entities, 312 NGOs, 2 000 companies and 50 municipalities were consulted directly on VNR preparations (UN DESA, 2019).

Through the VNR process, the Turkish government developed an online 'National SDG Best Practices Database' which will be active throughout the period covering the 2030 Agenda. In the first phase, 400 practices were collected from public and private sectors, academia, NGOs and municipalities, and several of the best examples were included in the VNR (Government of Turkey, 2019).

Turkey submitted two VNRs to the UN in 2016 and 2019.

After the adoption of Agenda 2030, Turkey assigned the responsibility of tracking 218 indicators to relevant institutions. In 2019, the country published its SDG Indicators Set, comprising 83 indicators. While the ratio of indicators produced is higher for SDGs 3, 7, 9, further work is needed for indicators on SDGs 1, 2, 12, 13 and SDG 14 (Government of Turkey, 2019).

The Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) follows up on the international process for determining the global SDG indicators. After identification of the global SDG indicators list, in 2019, TURKSTAT issued an 'SDG Indicators Newsletter, 2010-2017'. Turkey plans to prepare its National SDG Review Reports periodically, in line with the Agenda of the UN HLPF. TURKSTAT will take on the central role of tracking progress on Agenda 2030. The country is also working on promoting voluntary stocktaking processes for the private sector (UN DESA, 2016).

Sources:

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33 United Kingdom (^{33})

The UK is committed to implementing the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda at home and around the world. Despite consideration of policy prioritisation, numerous sources highlight the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs. Thus, the United Kingdom intends to cover all 17 goals equally (UK, 2017a).

Conducting the UK's first VNR has yielded many lessons and insights. The UK recognises that the 17 SDGs represent a framework for addressing the cross-cutting challenges facing the country and the world today. They yield interlinkages which the government, business and civil society can collaborate on to develop holistic long-term solutions that benefit society as a whole and contribute to several SDGs simultaneously (HM Government, 2019).

The UK has a strong story to tell domestically on many of the SDGs, including progress made on climate and the environment. At the same time, it acknowledges that there are areas that require boosting the country's efforts further to address climate and environmental issues (HM Government, 2019).

The country is proud of its commitment to leave the environment in a better state than it inherited. Sustainable agriculture is at the heart of this commitment. On SDG 2, steps are being taken across the UK to improve the sustainability of farming and food production. For SDG 6, the UK government's 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a range of measures to achieve clean and plentiful water. There has been important progress in recent years. For example, England now has consistently high levels of clean bathing waters, serious pollution incidents are steadily declining, and rivers that were biologically dead are being revived (HM Government, 2019).

The UK adopts a holistic approach to all 17 SDGs. The country's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus mainly on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

On SDG 7, the UK is working on making energy affordable for all and to sustain improvements in energy efficiency. Its ambition is to meet its climate change commitments at the lowest possible cost to British taxpayers, consumers and businesses, while being at the forefront of clean technologies and maximising the social and economic benefits of the global shift to clean growth (HM Government, 2019). On SDG 11, the UK is focusing on building sustainable cities and infrastructure of the future to face the challenges of natural disasters, changing climates, and shifting populations (HM Government, 2019).

On SDG 12, the 'Greening Government Commitments' identified a set of actions for the UK government to reduce their impacts on the environment. Citizens and business are also encouraged to be responsible for their environmental impact. The UK is working to minimise waste, promote resource efficiency, and move towards a circular economy. The introduction of the carrier-bag charge and landfill tax are considered to have shown significant impacts on such behavioural shifts (HM Government, 2019). The government is working with its fishing industry and marine scientists to ensure sustainable fish stocks. The UK is a forerunner of global efforts

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(^{33}) The withdrawal of the UK from the EU has not affected the content of this publication. Data reported by the UK to the UN are included in all analyses and assessments contained herein, unless otherwise indicated.

to tackle marine plastic and has introduced a strict ban on microbeads. Further action will focus on the impacts of climate change on the ocean (SDG 14) (HM Government, 2019).

The condition of the country's land ecosystems (SDG 15) continues to be affected by land use, pollution, invasive alien species, and climate change. Although the decline in the number and distribution of certain species has slowed, action must continue. Therefore, the UK is focusing on better protection of ecosystems, improved management of protected sites, incentives for farming and woodland management, and funding for peatland restoration (HM Government, 2019).

In preparations for the VNR, the country conducted wide stakeholder engagement across the UK through case studies, events or by providing feedback electronically. The VNR outlined both good practices and key areas where further action is required (HM Government, 2019). Several charities have come together to establish the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD), a multi-stakeholder network aiming to inspire and support public, private and voluntary organisations. The work of the UKSSD has been complemented by the Bond SDGs Group, a civil society coalition of over 150 organisations advocating the full implementation of the SDGs (UK, 2017a). Project Everyone (a UK-based non-profit organisation that aims to 'mak[e]ing the SDGs famous'] has also pursued efforts to promote the SDGs at the international level (UK, 2017a).

In the UK, the Secretary of State for the Department for International Development (DFID) has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the SDGs, working closely with the Cabinet Office to ensure that they are incorporated throughout government structures (UK, 2017a). The role of the Cabinet Office is to ensure that the goals are integrated into departments' Single Departmental Plans (SDPs). The underlying aims of the SDGs are reflected in the UK government's work programme and, as such, are embedded in the SDPs. An interdepartmental group on the SDGs across the UK government, co-chaired by officials in the DFID and Cabinet Office, also provides governance for the overall process in the UK (UK, 2017a).

The UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) is committed to sourcing data that gives the clearest picture of the UK's contribution to the SDGs. As of June 2019, the ONS reports UK data on 180 (74 %) indicators of the total 244. The ONS has created a portal for gathering and disseminating the UK's national SDG indicators and relevant data (ONS, 2017a). This reporting platform has a dual purpose: to make national data on the SDGs publicly available and to provide a collection point for the relevant agencies who need UK data to prepare the clustered global figure reported to the UN (ONS, 2017b).

The UK submitted a VNR to the UN in 2019.

Sources:

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PART II: EEA cooperating countries

34 Albania

Accession to the EU is Albania's overarching priority and its most important strategic ambition. By building on the European integration process as the driving political and development goal, the Republic of Albania has moved towards achieving the SDGs (Republic of Albania, 2018).

To support SDG action, Albania has prepared an SDG baseline report to explore the specific components of the National Strategy on Development and Integration (NSDI) pillars. Albania's baseline report underscores that the national strategic policy framework is most harmonised with the SDG targets in SDG 3 (good health and well-being); SDG 7 (affordable

Albania's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus primarily on SDGs 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 15.

and clean energy); SDG 8 (good jobs and economic growth); and SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), while the least harmonisation is with SDG 14 (life below water) (Ciko, 2018).

Published in 2018, Albania`s VNR identifies six key priority areas, including energy (SDG 7), water (SDGs 6, 14) and integrated land management (SDGs 11, 15) (Republic of Albania, 2018).

The NSDI 2015-2020 draws up a plan for the 2030 Agenda by connecting the SDGs with its key components. Although the Albanian sustainable development agenda includes a variety of different domains, the main achievements are expected to be reforms in four main areas, including environmental protection, and a competitive economy (Republic of Albania, 2016).

The Albanian parliament formed an Interministerial Committee on the SDGs, chaired by the deputy prime minister. This Committee is responsible for ensuring dialogue between the government and stakeholders, as well as integration of the SDGs into Albania's strategic framework (Marika, 2016). The Official Statistical Programme for 2017-2021 was approved by the parliament in February 2017 and includes a set of national SDG indicators (Eurostat, 2017).

Albania submitted a VNR to the UN in 2018.

Sources:

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35 Bosnia and Herzegovina

At the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina's SDG action is the elaboration and adoption of its SDG Framework. Under the auspices of the SDG Framework in BiH Subgroup, which comprises representatives from relevant BiH institutions, at the entity and Brčko District level, extensive work has been carried out to design the SDG Framework, including consultations with stakeholders able to bring forward citizens' perspectives in terms of priority areas, Vision 2030, development pathways and development acceleration points. This document will inform all the strategic planning processes the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District embark upon in 2020 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019).

Bosnia and Herzegovina's actions towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focus on SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

The country's SDG Framework defines key priority areas and targets for reaching Agenda 2030. This vast analytical work has been synthesised into a situation analysis and three development pathways until 2030, along with corresponding accelerators and drivers (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019).

Bosnia and Herzegovina clusters its SDG implementation into the '5ps': people, prosperity, planet, peace, partnership. Under the 'planet' cluster, it aims to achieve protection from degradation, changes in consumption and production patterns, the sustainable management of natural resources and urgent action on climate change through implementation of SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15 (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019).

On SDG 6, Bosnia and Herzegovina is working towards the protection and sustainable use of water resources to ensure that drinking water is accessible to all. For SDG 12, it envisages activities focused on better use of environmental principles in business operations and respect for the principle of energy efficiency. On SDG 13, the emphasis is on taking urgent action to combat the impacts of climate change on the country. For SDG 14, Bosnia and Herzegovina aims to tackle the issue of ballast waters from maritime transport (recognised as the main vectors behind the spread of invasive species in the Adriatic Sea), as the introduction of invasive species and the loss of biodiversity further threaten tourism and fishing activities, including in coastal areas. On SDG 15, Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to implement activities aimed at the sustainable management of forests, combatting desertification, halting and reversing land degradation and halting biodiversity loss. The Directorate for Economic Planning is the leading body for implementation of the SDGs (Oprašić, 2016).

In October 2016, the UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina launched 'Imagine2030' (Zamisli 2030*)*, an umbrella initiative to advocate, promote and engage citizens with the SDGs and to create a consultation tool for them (Oprašić, 2016).

Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted a VNR to the UN in 2019.

Sources:

Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019, *Voluntary Review: Implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Bosnia and Herzegovina (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23345VNR_BiH_ENG_Final.pdf) accessed 20 July 2019.

Oprašić, S., 2017, *Zamisli 2030 – Sustainable Development Goals in Bosnia and Herzegovina,* Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, (https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/epr/meetings/28thMeeting/SDG_presentation_-_Mr_Oprasic_kraca_varijanta.pdf) accessed 24 November 2017.

Zamisli2030, 2017, 'Zamisli 2030 – About Us', Bosnia and Herzegovina (http://zamisli2030.ba/en/about/) accessed 24 November 2017.

36 Kosovo (³⁴)

As Kosovo is not a member of the UN, SDG actions are done mainly through the process of European integration. Nevertheless, the UN Kosovo Team (UNKT) has set up the management structures in Kosovar institutions that will facilitate SDG integration into a key strategic planning process guided by the UN Common Development Plan (CDP) for 2016-2020 (UNKT, 2017).

UN agencies are supporting Kosovar institutions in developing the indicators that will be used to track progress towards the SDGs in the coming years (UNKT, 2017).

Kosovo has undertaken some positive steps on Agenda 2030, notably the establishment of the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) which is responsible for coordinating SDG actions and preparation of the National Development Strategy 2016-2021. However, concrete actions remain rather limited.

Citizens take part in planning and implementing environmental SDGs in different ways, such as public participation in the development of environmental strategies, plans and programmes. In addition, NGOs are involved in the work of the NCSD, whilst non-governmental organisations and donors are active in implementing sustainable development projects.

Key challenges regarding SDG actions with an environmental dimension in Kosovo are the lack of specific strategies and programmes as well as a lack of finance and institutional capacities.

Sources:

INDEP, 2019, *KOSOVO AND 2030 AGENDA: From Political Rhetoric to Concrete Actions*, Institute for Development Policy, Prishtina, Kosovo (https://indep.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SDG_ENG.pdf) accessed 22 May 2020.

Republic of Kosovo, 2016, *National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021*, Office of the Prime Minister, Prishtina, Kosovo (http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/National_Development_Strategy_2016-2021_ENG.pdf) accessed 30 November 2017.

UNKT, 2017, *The Sustainable Development Goals in Kosovo: An Agenda for the Future of Kosovo*, United Nations Kosovo Team, Kosovo (http://unkt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Fact-sheet-SDGs-in-Kosovo-2017-Fin-.pdf) accessed 30 November 2017.

(³⁴) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

37 Montenegro

Based on the assessment of the state of national resources in the four-dimensional concept (human, social, natural and economic resources), as well as analysis of key unsustainable trends and the need for sustainable development by 2030, the country adopted a 'DPSIR' approach (i.e. driver, pressure, state, impact, response) and identified priority areas and strategic goals to advance SDG action (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, 2016).

In December 2015, the government of Montenegro adopted the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) until 2030. The NSSD considered national circumstances and commitments while defining the strategic goals and measures on SDG action and aligning sectoral policies to the SDGs. The Strategy structured the strategic objectives into five priority themes, including preservation of natural capital (SDGs 14, 15); and the introduction of a green economy, governance, and finance for sustainable development (SDGs 7, 8, 9, 12) (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, 2016).

Montenegro's priority areas on SDGs with an environmental dimension lie in SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

By participating in international dialogue on the SDGs and Agenda 2030, Montenegro expressed its full commitment to the priority issues of sustainable development, such as: the introduction of a green economy, strengthening the efficiency of use of natural resources (SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7); climate change (SDG 13); conservation of sensitive ecosystems and coastal areas (SDGs 14, 15); and sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12). Priority is also given to creating conditions to achieve progress on key determinants of sustainable development enshrined in the relevant EU policies, primarily the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, 2016).

Montenegro submitted a VNR to the UN in 2016.

In addition to the SDG indicators developed by the UN, Montenegro's NSSD 2030 includes selected national indicators, indicators of relevant international organisations and cumulative indicators from the programme activities of the UN Development Programme in Montenegro (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, 2016).

Sources:

Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, 2016, *Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF 2016*, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, Podgorica, Montenegro (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10695Montenegro%20-%20HLPF%20Report.pdf) accessed 17 February 2017.

38 North Macedonia

North Macedonia's Partnership for Sustainable Development UN Strategy positions environmental sustainability as one of four priority areas. The Strategy sets out that, by 2020, individuals, the private sector and state institutions will base their actions on the principles of sustainable development, and communities will be more resilient to disasters and environmental risks. Under the partnership, this prioritisation will involve nine SDGs (SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15), reflecting the importance of environmental protection and resilience as per the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2016).

North Macedonia embarked on mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into its National Sustainable Development Plan in December 2015. Its aim was to develop an SDG Plan 2016-2030, based on an assessment of needs and potential, as well as setting targets relevant to the national context (Spasenovska et al., 2017). The Plan is under

Environmental sustainability is one of four priority areas for North Macedonia. It involves SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

the overall responsibility of the vice-prime minister's cabinet and aims to mainstream the 2030 Agenda at the national level. The government will also integrate SDG implementation into a four-year government programme for the period of 2016-2020 and harmonise it with the relevant sector strategies, plans and programmes (Wiederkehr et al., 2016).

A multi-stakeholder process will be launched (including decision-makers and stakeholders at the national, regional and local level, as well as non-governmental stakeholders from academia, the private sector, donor agencies, NGOs, etc.), with the support of the UN Development Programme. The objective is to prioritise the SDGs, localise the targets, select local target indicators, develop a budgetary framework and review the relevant national sectoral strategies and the level of adjustment needed to align them with the SDG agenda (Wiederkehr et al., 2016).

To lay the foundations for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the government has undertaken a joint initiative with the UN to integrate the SDGs into the national planning process. This will start with the prioritisation of SDGs and the localisation of targets, as well as the selection of local indicators (Spasenovska et al., 2017). All resident UN agencies, together with the UNECE, will support North Macedonia to adapt the SDGs to local conditions and to establish a system for tracking progress. Similarly, all UN agencies will support its alignment with EU standards and legislation, including through peer-to-peer exchanges with EU Member States (UN, 2016).

Sources:

Spasenovska, M. and Chichevalieva S., 2017, *Challenges in Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into the National Sustainable Development Planning and the Role of the WHO*, United Nations Development Group, United Nations, New York, USA.

UN, 2016, *Partnership for Sustainable Development United Nations Strategy for 2016-2020*, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Country Team, Skopje, North Macedonia.

Wiederkehr, F., et al., 2016, *Macedonia –Draft SDG#6 Strategy,* Advancing the Human Right to Water and Sanitation through Inclusive Business Approaches (AGUASAN), Switzerland

(https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Water/resources/RsEAU%20Library/21%20Macedonia%20Draft%20SDG6%20Strategy.pdf) accessed 29 November 2019.

39 Serbia

Serbia has long been striving to integrate environmental protection and conservation objectives into several sectoral policies. The overall goal of all these activities is to support sustainable growth in Serbia, which will encourage innovation and competitiveness, protect the environment and health while ensuring that no one is left behind (Republic of Serbia, 2019).

Achieving the SDGs in Serbia is indivisible from the process of its accession to the EU. Set out in the National Plan for Adoption of the EU Acquis from 2018 to 2021, special attention is paid to harmonisation with the EU *acquis*, international standards, and implementation of agreements on six priority areas, including agriculture, environmental protection and climate change as well as energy and industry (Republic of Serbia, 2019).

According to a public survey, many young people in Serbia (80 %) believe that environmental protection should be among the government's key priorities. In discussions and the overall prioritisation process of the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) 2019 and 2020 programming, the key areas identified for support in the coming years are

Serbia's action towards SDGs with an environmental dimension focuses mainly on SDGs 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15.

environmental protection and climate change. Furthermore, there is a special focus on continuing investments in infrastructure for processing waste as well as those in the reconstruction and modernisation of public facilities as part of efforts to improve energy efficiency (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 9, 12 and 13). In addition, Serbia considers the preservation of biodiversity (SDG 15) as the most important SDGs with an environmental dimension as it poses an obligation towards both the present and future generations. The country also recognises that the circular economy plays
 a major role in supporting SDG action, particularly on SDGs 9, 11, 12 and 13 (Republic of Serbia, 2019).

At the local level, due to the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, emergency management and local resilience to natural disaster risk reduction are becoming a priority among the local communities (SDGs 11, 13). A possible mechanism for achieving greater sustainability in cities is 'local green councils' to help decision-makers in respect of local acts affecting environmental protection (Republic of Serbia, 2019).

Serbia submitted a VNR to the UN in 2019.

Serbia established an Interministerial Working Group with representatives from the relevant ministries and tasked with proposing guidelines and measures for achieving the 2030 Agenda (UNECE, 2016).

Sources:

Republic of Serbia, 2019, *Voluntary National Review of The Republic of Serbia on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Republic of Serbia (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23471Serbia_VNR_Report_2019_final.pdf) accessed 13 November 2019.

UN DESA, 2019, 'Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform – Documents and Reports', United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, USA (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/serbia) accessed 29 November 2019.

UNECE, 2016, *Planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals*, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva, Switzerland (http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/Serbia-Questionnaire.pdf) accessed 29 November 2017.

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Name	Reference
EC	European Commission	https://ec.europa.eu/info/index_en
EEA	European Environment Agency	www.eea.europa.eu
EIR	Environmental Implementation Review	https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index_en.htm
EPA	Environment Protection Agency	N/A
ESDN	European Sustainable Development Network	https://www.sd-network.eu/
EU	European Union	https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en
FIDO	Belgian Federal Institute for Sustainable Development	http://www.jci.be/fido/
GDP	Gross domestic product	N/A
GHG	Greenhouse gas	N/A
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum	https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf
IEEP	Institute for European Environmental Policy	https://ieep.eu/
MONET	Swiss Sustainable Development Monitoring & Reporting System	https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/sustainable-development/surveys/monet.html
NDS / NSDS / NSSD	National Development Strategy / National Sustainable Development Strategy / National Strategy for Sustainable Development	N/A
NDP	National development plan	N/A
NGO	Non-governmental organisation	N/A
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	http://www.oecd.org/denmark/

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals	http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network	http://unsdsn.org/
7EAP	7th Environment Action Programme	http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013D1386
UN	United Nations	http://www.un.org
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs	http://www.un.org/development/desa/en/
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home.html
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe	https://www.unece.org/info/ece-homepage.html
VNR	Voluntary National Review	https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/