

OECD Network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government

OECD Survey on Planning and Co-ordinating the Implementation of the SDGs:

First results and key issues



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Background¹

The role of the centre of government in implementing the SDGs: Governance challenges and opportunities

Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed and adopted by world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, are not only a comprehensive policy agenda, but also a strategic one. The universal, integrated and transformational changes embedded in Agenda 2030 present a historic opportunity for OECD and non-OECD countries alike to move to a stage where these goals are no longer only aspirational but also actionable.

Given the breadth and complexity as well as the long-term nature of the SDGs, the key question faced by governments is how best to align policies in practice towards a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. Given the mixed track record of most governments in working horizontally, and the need to include an unprecedented range of public and private actors, “a-whole-government” and “a-whole-of-society” approach to priority-setting, policy formulation and implementation is becoming more relevant and pressing than ever.

To address rapidly evolving challenges, but also create new opportunities, countries are currently looking at ways to better steer and co-ordinate long-term strategies and implementation actions, such as the SDGs. In this context, the centre of government has an important role to play when addressing governance challenges, in terms of clear leadership, stronger policy coherence and efficient implementation. The centre of government means different things in different countries, with varying structures and functions depending on country-specific contexts. In general, the centre of government is the body or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to heads of government and the council of ministers, or cabinet. From their traditional role of serving the executive from an administrative perspective, centres of government are now playing a more active role in policy development. As highlighted by the OECD *Centre Stage* report (2014), centres of government are frequently leading cross-cutting initiatives, many of which focus on improving governance processes. As concluded in OECD’s *Delivering from the Centre* report (2015), most OECD countries are well set up to support reactive and process-driven policy implementation, with a clear understanding of the role of the centre of government within this process. However, the increasingly urgent challenge is how to strengthen a *pro-active* role of the centre of government when facilitating effective and innovative performance delivery.

Given that implementing Agenda 2030 will be a key strategic and long-term policy agenda for the governments of the OECD countries and beyond, there is a clear interest in reviewing and assessing the capacity of governments to steer and co-ordinate the implementation of the SDGs among the members of the OECD Centres of Government Network.

¹ This paper was prepared by Dr. Nannan Lundin, previously of the Office for Strategic Development, Prime Minister’s Office and currently at the Global Agenda Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden and Dr. Sylvia Schwaag Seger, Sweden’s Innovation Agency (VINNOVA), in collaboration with the OECD Secretariat. Research assistance provided by Ebba Heselius, intern at Global Agenda Department, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, is kindly acknowledged.

Methodology

In response to a request from its Network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government, and to contribute to the OECD Action Plan on the SDGs, the OECD has collected and analysed information on the emerging and planned governance mechanisms and processes for supporting the implementation of the SDGs in OECD member and partner countries. This is a timely exercise, as governments are being called upon to provide both their strategic thinking on and practical approach to how they will implement the SDGs by 2030.

The “centre of government”

The term centre of government (CoG) refers to the organisations and units that serve the Chief Executive (President or Prime Minister, and the Cabinet collectively) and perform certain cross-cutting functions (strategic management, policy coordination, monitoring and improving performance, managing the politics of policies, and communications and accountability). The CoG includes a great variety of units across countries, such as General Secretariat, Cabinet Office, Office/Ministry of the Presidency, Council of Ministers Office, etc.

Information collection

The information collection was carried out among OECD networks including the Senior Officials from Centres of Government Network in the form of a dedicated survey. The survey questionnaire was sent in July 2016 to 43 countries, including OECD members, non-OECD partners and the European Commission. As of 6 July 2017, 34 countries and the European Commission responded to the survey (See Table 1 below for details).

Table 1: Responding countries – OECD countries and non-OECD countries

(35 responses, out of 43, response rate: 81%)

	OECD member countries	Non-OECD partner countries
Asia and Oceania	Japan, Korea, Australia	Malaysia
Europe	Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom, the EU	Lithuania
North and South America	United States, Chile, Mexico	Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru,
Subtotal	31	4
Total	35	

Key questions addressed in the Survey

The overall objectives and the scope of the survey are to:

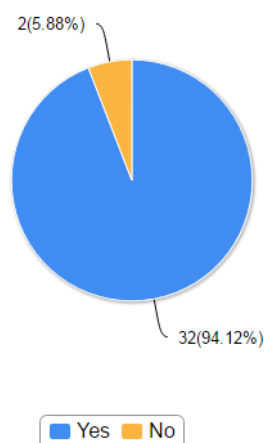
- Identify the formal and practical institutional mechanisms that are currently in place to support governments in their efforts to plan, steer and co-ordinate the implementation of SDGs. A particular focus is given to the role of the centre of government and the structures and mechanisms through which its interaction and collaboration with line ministries, as well as with external stakeholders, are organised and implemented.
- Highlight areas where potential challenges as well as new opportunities may arise in promoting a coordinated, coherent and efficient approach across the government in the implementation of the SDGs.
- Highlight areas where current innovations, processes and tools support the planning and implementation of strategies related to the SDGs, through the role of the center of government and its interaction and collaboration with line ministries and wider stakeholder.

How are governments getting organised? Results from the survey

1. Institutional mechanisms or processes to guide the implementation of the SDGs

Figure 1. Institutional mechanisms and processes for SDG-implementation

Has the government established an institutional mechanism or process to guide the implementation of the SDGs? (34 responses)



Key observations:

- In total, 31 responding countries and the EU-Commission have established institutional mechanisms and work processes to guide and support the implementation of SDGs.
- In terms of the specific institutional set-up and co-ordination mechanisms for guiding the implementation of the SDGs:
 - Some countries have established or are planning to set up new committees or mechanisms to be an advisory body or guide the implementation of the SDGs.
 - Other countries use existing coordinating committees or mechanisms to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the SDGs.
 - Most countries are involving their national bureaus of statistics in developing indicators to monitor implementation of the SDGs.
 - Some countries have done some kind of stock-taking or gap analysis of their national context and status regarding implementation of SDGs (for instance, to what extent agencies and ministries are already working with issues addressing some of the SDGs).

In short, countries differ mainly in the following aspects, such as:

- Whether they have set up new committees or mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs or whether they rely on existing institutions;
- Who runs these committees, councils or working groups and whom they report to, and the membership of these committees or councils – only ministries and government agencies or wider participation by relevant stakeholders (NGOs, industry, academia, etc).

2. Leadership/ co-leadership of the implementation of the SDGs - the role of the centre of government

Table 2: Leadership of CoG and co-leadership with and without CoG (35 responses)

Have one or more lead department(s) or agency(ies) been identified for the implementation of the SDGs?

	Leadership by the CoG	Co-leadership b/w CoG and line ministries	Leadership/Co-leadership without CoG
Subtotal	11 (31%)	13 (37%)	11 (31%)
Prime Minister's/ President's office	Colombia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland Greece, Japan Malaysia, Mexico, Slovenia, EU, United States		
Ministry of Foreign Affairs		Australia, Austria, Iceland Peru	Belgium, Hungary Netherland
Ministry of Development			Turkey, UK
Ministry of Environment		Italy, Lithuania, Slovak Republic	
Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Finance			Denmark, Sweden, Norway
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Environment		France, Ireland, Korea	Luxembourg, Chile**, Switzerland
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Planning		Costa Rica* Latvia	
Ministry of Environment & Ministry of Development		Germany	

* Ministry of Environment is also included for Costa Rica.

** Ministry of Social development is also included for Chile.

Key observations:

- In total, 34 responding countries and the EU-Commission have selected one or more lead departments/agencies for the implementation of SDGs.
- In more than half of the countries (and at the EU level), i.e. 23 responding countries and the EU commission, the centre of government, i.e. the Prime Minister's or President's Office is leading the implementation of the SDGs either on its own or with one or several line ministries.
- In the remaining 11 countries, the centre of government does not take the leading role. Instead, the leadership or shared leadership of the implementation is assigned to one or several line ministries, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs being the most common line ministry involved in the leadership, followed by the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Finance.
- Some countries have cross-sectoral co-ordination committees that have the overall responsibility for implementation of SDGs.

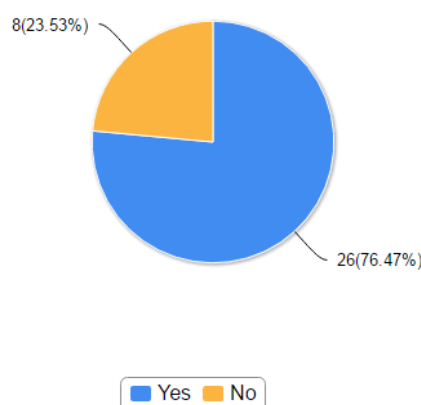
Questions for further research:

- What are the key underlying motivations and strategic considerations when designing the institutional set-up, leadership and co-ordination mechanisms for the implementation of SDGs, particularly in terms of the role of the centre of government?
- What are the potential implications for the future implementation work - in terms of both weaknesses and strengths associated with the different features of institutional set-up, leadership and co-ordination mechanisms?

3. CoG's current role in leading SDG-related initiatives

Figure 2. CoG's current role and the SDGs (34 responses)

Does the CoG currently lead initiatives that could support the achievement of SDGs such as equality, poverty reduction, resource efficiency, climate action, and well-being, etc.?



Key observations:

- Centres of government in a rather large number of responding countries, i.e. 26 out of 34 (including the EU commission), are currently leading various initiatives that could support the implementation of SDGs such as equality, poverty reduction, resource efficiency, climate action, and well-being, etc.
- A closer look at the initiatives led by the centres of government points to following common features:
 - They are of *cross-cutting/horizontal in nature*, addressing the key environmental and/or social dimensions of the sustainable development.
 - They are *key elements of structural reforms* in the domestic development strategy at both the national and the sectoral level.
 - There is clear overlapping/synergy with the SDGs

Questions for further research:

- Is there any linkage/causality between the experiences of CoG-led initiatives and the future success of the implementation of SDGs?
- How can the ground work and the synergies from the current initiatives led by the Centres of government be effectively utilised and further developed in the process of SDG-implementation?

4. Integrating implementation of SDGs with national strategies and priority setting

Figure 3: SDGs and National/sectoral development strategies (35 responses)

Are the SDGs already integrated into an existing national or sectorial development strategy?

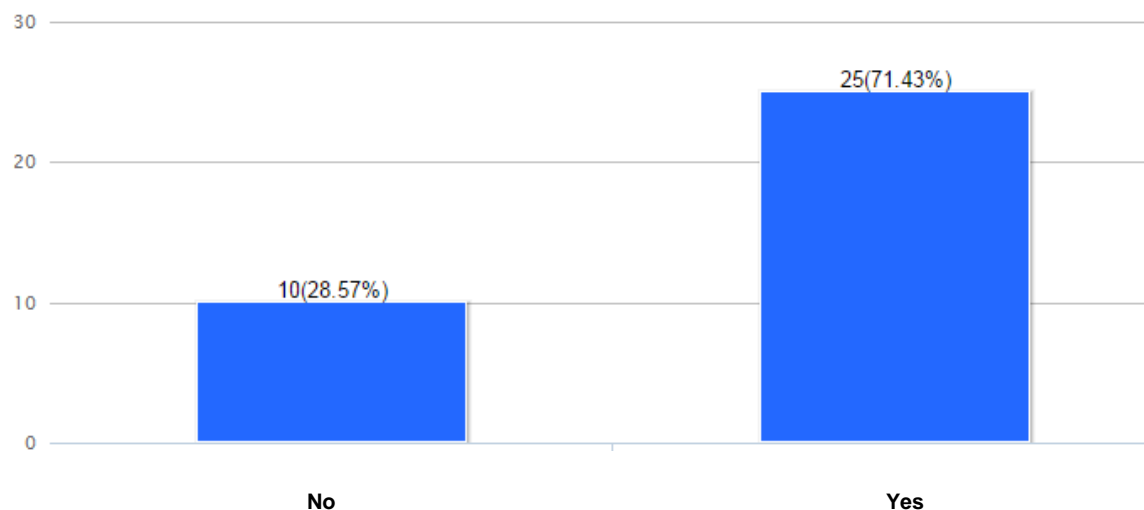


Figure 4: SDGs and National/sectoral development strategies – Specification

Are the SDGs already integrated into an existing national or sectorial development strategy?

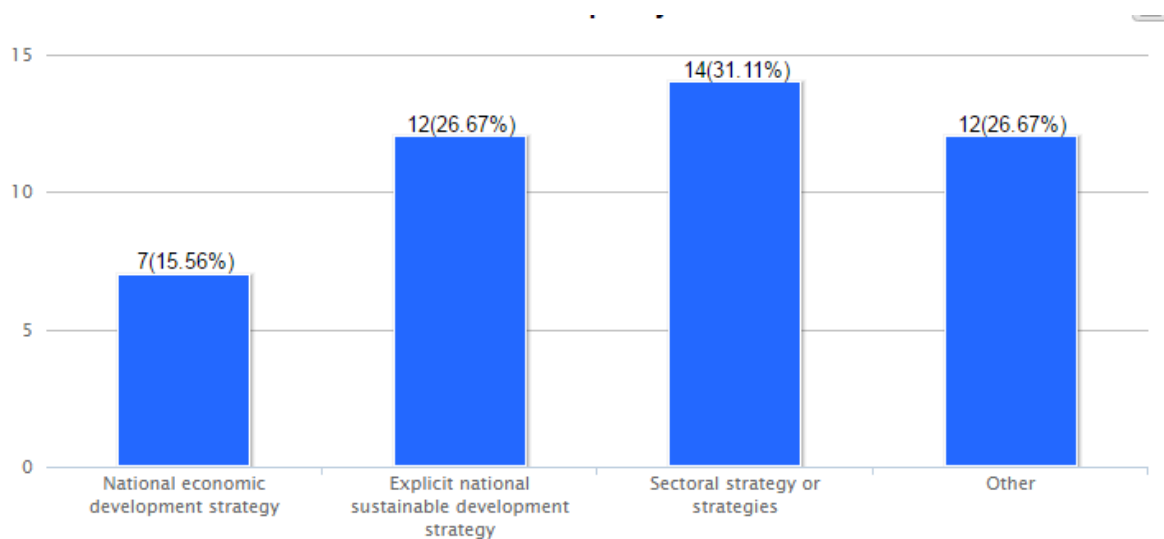
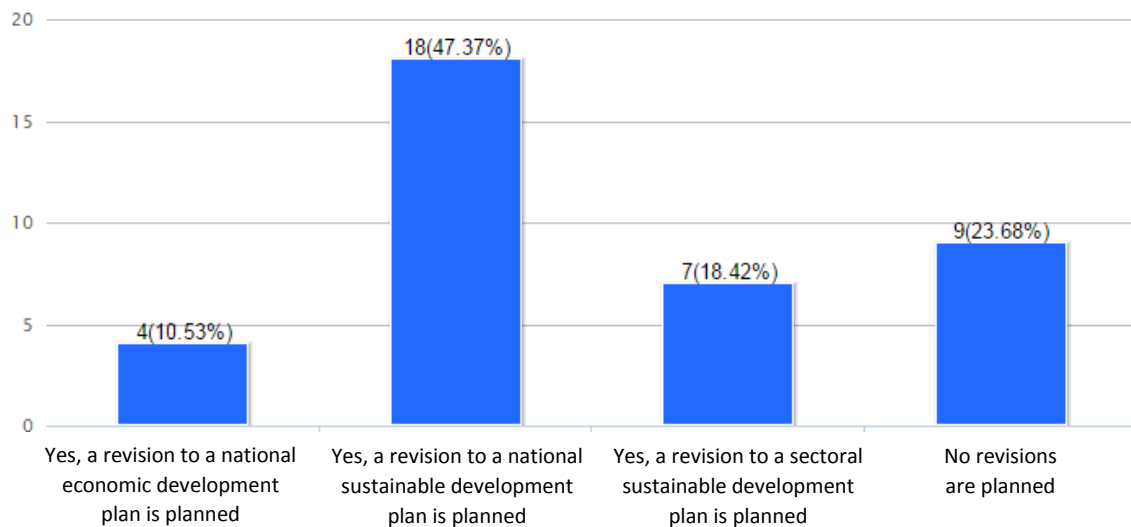


Figure 5: SDGs and National/sectoral development strategies – Envisaged revision (28 responses)

Is a revision of a national or sectoral development plan envisaged to take account of the SDGs?



Key observations:

- Among 35 responding countries and the EU Commission, 25 (or 70%) of them have already integrated the SDGs into their national and/or sectoral strategies'
- Given that the SDGs were adopted in September 2015, many of the responding countries have acted both quickly and decisively with their integration or mainstreaming process both at the national and sectoral level.
- For most of the responding countries, an explicit National Sustainable Development Strategy and/or sectoral strategies serve as common and natural starting points to integrate SDGs into the national and the sectoral context as well as to identify the linkage between the national and the international dimensions of the implementation work.
- The key component of the integration and/or mainstreaming process is a mapping exercise or gap analysis that is conducted in different forms across different countries. The underlying and common objectives of the analytical work are:
 - To identify and highlight *the relevance and synergies* of SDGs with the ongoing national and sectoral development strategies;
 - To identify and highlight *the priorities, the value-added and new development needs* when integrating SDGs with the national and the sectoral strategies;
 - To develop and strengthen *the monitoring and the evaluation of implementation* of sustainable development by developing indicators for SDGs and its targets.
 - To strengthen *the development co-operation* associated with SDGs as well as to broaden *the strategic and global dimensions of the national and sectoral development* and moving beyond development co-operation.

- For countries who have not yet integrated their existing national or sectoral plans with SDGs, the government strategic planning documents reflect the topics of all 17 SDGs or there is a clear intention to revise strategic planning at the national and/or sectoral levels in the near future.

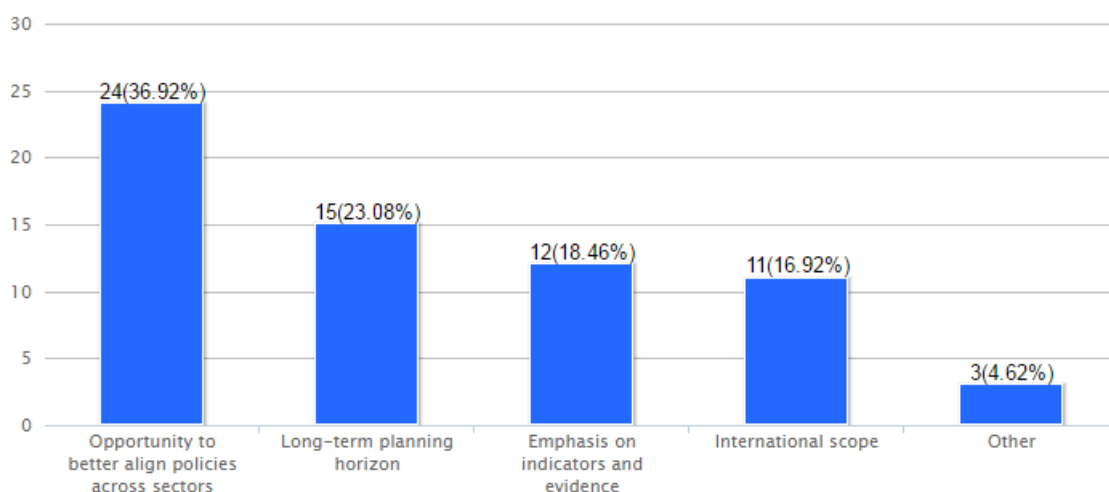
Questions for further research:

- Why have some countries not integrated their national and sectoral strategies with SDGs? What are the underlying considerations/key barriers?
- When integrated, how can coherence and effectiveness of the integration be ensured? What are the key challenges and value-added with the integration?

5. Key opportunities for the implementation of the SDGs - from the perspective of the centre of government

Figure 6: Key opportunities (34 responses)

What do you see as the 2 most positive aspects of the process of organising the planning for implementing SDGs from the perspective of the centre of government?



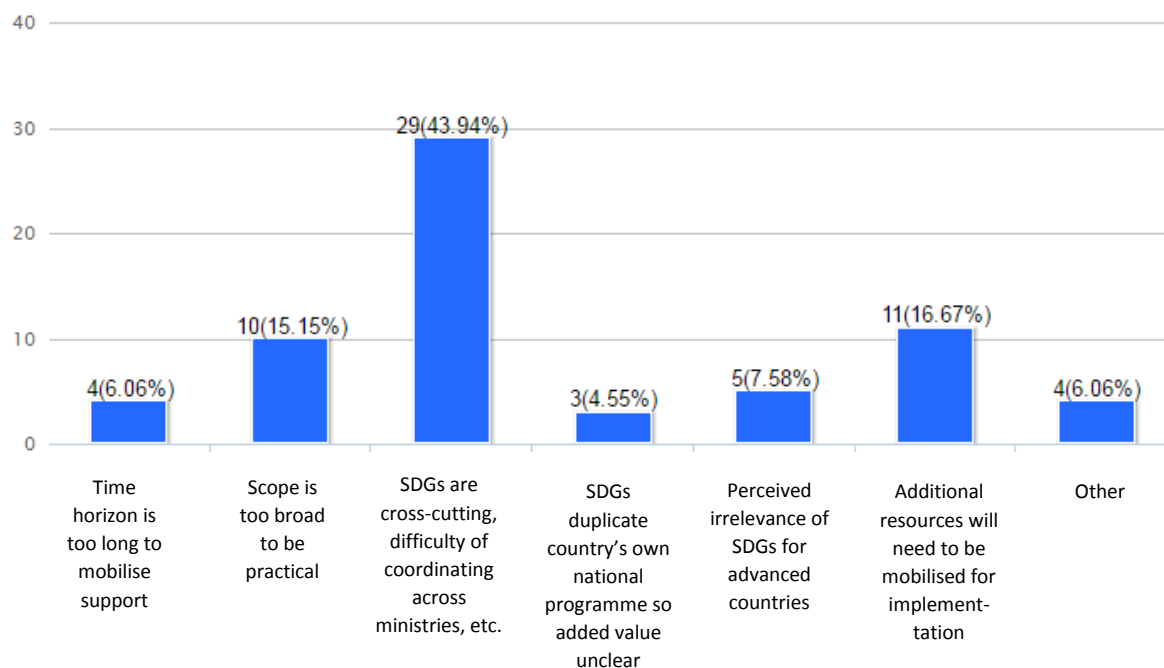
Key observations:

- From the perspective of the centre of government “opportunity to better align policies across sectors” is identified by 24 out of 34 survey respondents as the most important positive aspect of the process of organizing the planning for implementing SDGs. It is followed by “long-term planning horizon” and “international scope”, which are given as the most positive aspect by 15 and 11, respectively, out of 34 survey respondents.
- This result confirms that the comprehensiveness and the cross-sectoral nature of SDGs requires a clear role and an “aligning” or co-ordinating mandate of the centre of government.
- It is also telling that the involvement of the centre of government is considered helpful for ensuring the long-term planning horizon.
- Implementation of SDGs also thus also seen as providing an opportunity for making domestic and foreign actions and policies more coherent.

6. Key challenges for the implementation of the SDGs - from the perspective of the centre of government

Figure 7: Key challenges (34 responses)

What do you see as the 2 main challenges of organising the planning for implementing the SDGs from the perspective of the centre of government?



Key observations:

- 29 out of 34 survey respondents identified the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs and the difficulty of co-ordinating across ministries and areas of responsibility as the most important challenge in implementing the SDGs.
- At the same time, only 5 out of 34 survey respondents saw the SDGs as irrelevant for advanced countries and no countries felt that the SDGs duplicate national programs and therefore had unclear added value.
- It is also interesting to note that the three factors identified by most countries as the 'most positive aspects' associated with the implementation of the SDGs – better horizontal policy co-ordination, the long-term planning horizon and the international scope – overlap very much with some of the key challenges for policymaking today in general.

Questions for further research:

- The vast majority of countries listed the fact that 'SDGs are cross-cutting and the difficulty of co-ordinating across ministries or areas of responsibility' as a principal challenge in organizing the planning for implementation of the SDGs. How are countries working to address this challenge and what issues are they encountering along the way?

7. Important tools for an effective implementation of the SDGs

Table 3: Supporting tools and actions for SDG implementation (33 responses)

What tools or actions could help make the SDG implementation more effective?

	Most important (1)	Also important (2)	Quite important (3)	N/A	Subtotal
Adapting or prioritizing SDGs to fit national priorities/ context	24 (77.42%)	3 (9.68%)	3 (9.68%)	1 (3.23%)	31 (100%)
Providing additional resources to motivate department/agency engagement	9 (40.91%)	5 (22.73%)	5 (22.73%)	3 (13.64%)	22 (100%)
Strengthening citizen/civil society engagement and consultation	11 (44%)	5 (20%)	7 (28%)	2 (8%)	25 (100%)
Strengthening business sector engagement and consultation	12 (46.15%)	6 (23.08%)	4 (15.38%)	4 (15.38%)	26 (100%)
Strengthening scientific /analytical support for better understanding of SDGs	7 (31.82%)	7 (31.82%)	6 (27.27%)	2 (9.09%)	22 (100%)
Communicating the global nature of SDGs	12 (52.17%)	6 (26.09%)	3 (13.04%)	2 (8.70%)	23 (100%)

Key observations:

- 30 out of 33 countries list adapting or prioritizing SDGs to fit national priorities and contexts as an important tool for making the implementation of the SDGs more effective. The majority of them, i.e. 24, consider it *most important*. It is followed by strengthening business sector engagement and consultation which 22 out of 33 respondents list as important to various degrees. Similarly, strengthening citizen/civil society engagement and consultation is seen to be of almost the same importance.
- Also, 20 countries list strengthening scientific /analytical support for better understanding of SDGs as important and 20 countries list providing additional resources to motivate department/agency engagement as important to various degrees.

Questions for further research:

- Some countries are using existing co-ordination and consultation mechanisms for implementation of the SDGs while others have created new structures and committees. What are the advantages, disadvantages and potential dilemmas with each choice?

8. Stakeholder engagement for an effective implementation of SDGs

Figure 8: Stakeholder engagement (35 responses)

Are non-government stakeholders playing an active role in planning SDG implementation?

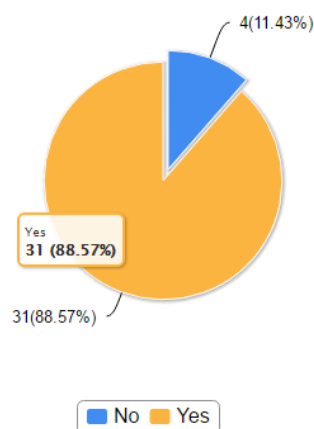
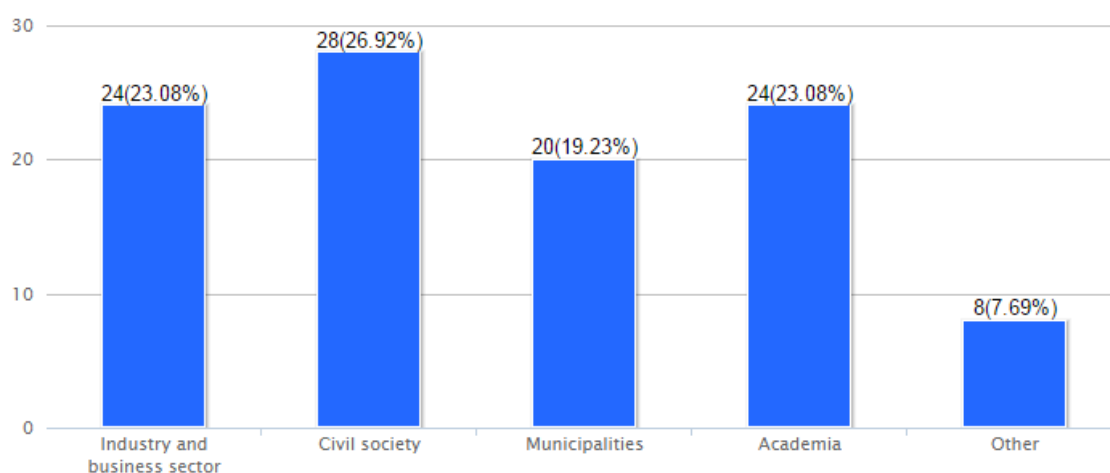


Figure 9: Stakeholder engagement - Who? (29 responses)

Which of the following stakeholders are involved in the planning for the national implementation process?



Key observations:

- Almost all the responding countries that replied to this question and the European Union involve the civil society, business sector and academia in the planning for the national implementation process.
- A relatively large number, i.e. 20 of the 29 countries (and the European Union) that responded to the survey involved municipalities.
- Only one country reports involving the financial sector in the planning for the national implementation process.
- Only one country reports involving the media in the planning for the national implementation process.

Figure 10: Stakeholder engagement – How? (29 responses)

How are stakeholders involved

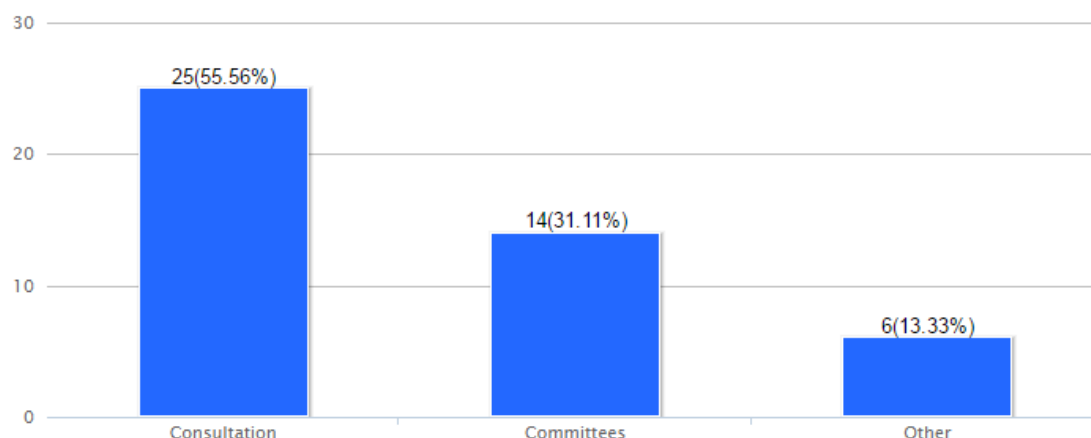
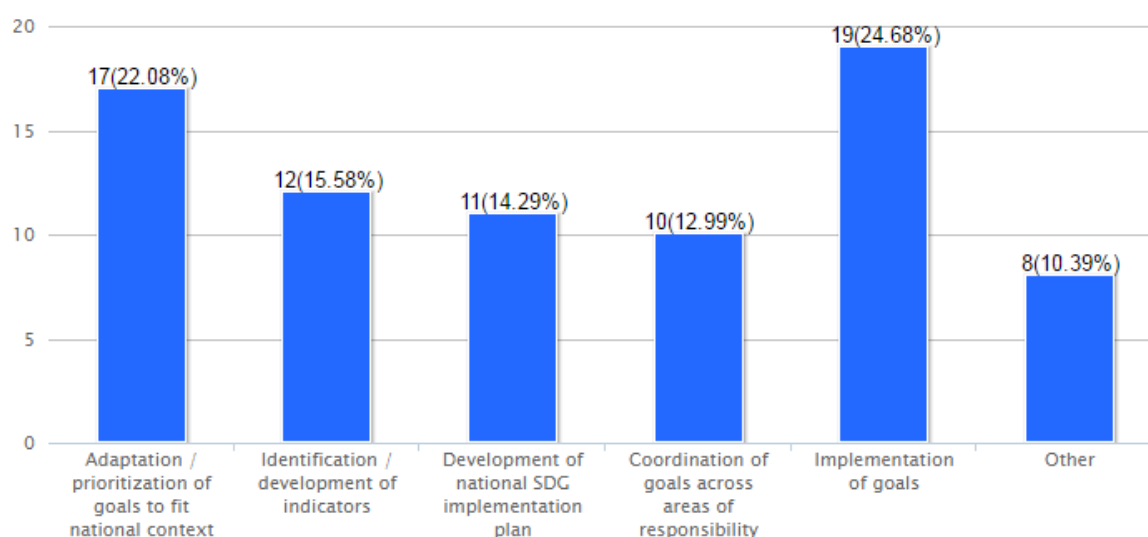


Figure 11: Stakeholder engagement – What? (28 responses)

At what stage in the process do you involve the stakeholders?



Key observations:

- The most common way of involving stakeholders is through consultation, indicated by 25 out of 29 responding countries. In about half of the countries and the European Union, i.e. 14 out of 29, stakeholders are involved through being members in committees set up to organize the implementation of the SDGs.
- Adaptation /prioritization of goals to fit national context and Implementation of goals are the two most common stages, at which external stakeholders are involved. At the same time, the external stakeholders are also involved rather frequently in identification of indicators, Development of national SDG implementation plan and co-ordination of goals across areas of responsibility.

- However, the external stakeholders are to a much lesser extent involved in Monitoring implementation and goals and Follow-up the implementation or outcomes.
- A cross-country comparison shows that a few countries engage external stakeholders in different, and even all, stages of the process while most countries are more selective/restrictive.

Questions for further research:

- Many countries see strengthening business and civil society engagement and consultation as an important tool for making SDG implementation more effective. How are countries working to strengthen such engagement? What mechanisms, partnerships or actions are emerging?
- Having gotten well on their way to planning for the implementation of the SDGs, what are some of the key insights and experiences from countries emerging in the process?
- Has planning for the implementation of the SDGs and the beginning implementation itself changed the way in which governments (and agencies?) work more generally? If so, how?

