

Planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals



Regional survey by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia

Geneva and New York, 2 December 2015

Purpose

At the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York (25-27 September 2015), the Heads of State and Government adopted the 2030 Agenda, including the ambitious and far-reaching 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Entering into force on 1 January 2016, they will guide sustainable development efforts in all countries in the 15-year period until 2030.

In this context, this survey is sent to the Governments of 56 UNECE member States¹ to collect inputs on three crucial topics:

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

The survey is jointly conducted by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia. The information received will be summarized and shared by their secretariats. It will serve to share experiences and to provide a practical overview of the first steps on the path to achieving the SDGs. Once the results are available, it is further envisaged to organize dialogues with and among member States in Geneva and New York in early 2016 to discuss and take forward the results.

¹ The 56 UNECE member States are listed as follows. They include 17 countries in which the Regional UNDG (R-UNDG) works (marked with *). In addition, the R-UNDG is active in Kosovo (under UN Security Council resolution 1244). Albania*, Andorra, Armenia*, Austria, Azerbaijan*, Belarus*, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia*, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan*, Kyrgyzstan*, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova*, Monaco, Montenegro*, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia*, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Turkey*, Turkmenistan*, Ukraine*, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan*.

Questionnaire

Please complete

COUNTRY:	LATVIA
AUTHORITY:	MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
NAME OF FOCAL POINT:	MADARA SILINA
FUNCTION:	SENIOR DESK OFFICER AT THE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICY DIVISION, ECONOMIC RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICY DEPARTMENT
TELEPHONE:	00371 670 16 420
E-MAIL:	Madara.silina@mfa.gov.lv
REMARKS:*	

Please return the completed questionnaire by **MONDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2016** to:

UNECE, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit (SDGU)

E-Mail: sdgu@unece.org

*The electronic version of the questionnaire is available at:
www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/Regional_SDG_survey_final.docx*

*The completed questionnaires will be posted on the websites of UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia (ECA R-UNDG). Please indicate under "Remarks" above if you prefer your reply not to be posted.

For questions or assistance, please contact:
Mr. Michael KUNZ, UNECE secretariat, Geneva
(michael.kunz@unece.org; +41-22 917 24 45)

Ms. Liudmila BARCARI, R-UNDG secretariat, New York
(liudmila.barcari@undp.org; +1-212 906 5440)

Note: At the current stage and shortly after the adoption of the SDGs, there may be no consolidated government position yet on many issues raised in the questionnaire. You are therefore kindly encouraged to share any preliminary thinking or tentative considerations you may have that will help provide an informal insight into the state of planning and debate in your Government.

Overall planning

Planning is a key step to embark on the path of SDG implementation. This includes the formulation of national (sustainable) development strategies and the integration of the SDGs in policy measures.

Question 1:

What are the overall plans of your Government to translate the SDGs and targets into action and measures at the national and subnational level and integrate them in national strategies and other policy interventions? In addition, will new planning tools or processes be developed in support of the SDGs or will existing structures be used?

Latvia has a well-coordinated planning system. Its Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030, with indicators, targets and measures underpins the highest level medium-term planning document, the Latvian National Development Plan 2014-2020 (NDP2020). The NDP2020 has three levels of indicators and their targets – on a macro level, on a priority level and in twelve areas. The National Development Plan is supported by numerous policy framework documents and plans that elaborate on how the indicators are to be achieved. In addition, line ministries have their respective policy framework documents that cover areas not defined by the NDP2020. A subsequent medium-term national development plan will be created for the time period starting from 2021.

Any changes to the existing NDP as well as new targets, actions and measures for the next NDP will be introduced through mid-term reviews of the currently effective policy frameworks and plans. In Latvia, mid-term reviews include feedback from various stakeholders, involving the expertise of line ministries. It is during the mid-term reviews that new indicators and targets can be discussed, new actions considered and respective costs assessed.

No new planning tools or processes will be developed, since the existing processes are comprehensive, thorough and sufficient.

According to the Development Planning System Law, sustainable development strategies and development programs are developed at regional and local levels. Development planning documents are elaborated taking into account the sustainable development principle. The development planning documents in Latvia's planning regions and local governments are cross-sectoral and cover the planning functions and issues which are relevant for the development of the respective territory. Accordingly, actions intended at the regional and local levels contribute to the implementation of

national sustainable development goals. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development provides planning regions and local municipalities with the methodology of devising respective sustainable development strategies and development programs.

The development of new planning tools or processes at the regional and local level has not been envisaged in the near future, since the existing ones are comprehensive, extensive and sufficient.

As regards development cooperation policy, Latvia is in the final stages of developing its new mid-term policy planning document entitled “The Development Co-operation Policy Guidelines for the time period of 2016-2020”. Contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the developing countries will be recognized as the overarching goal in the document.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for Development Cooperation and planning. It implements and reviews the policy in close cooperation with the Consultative Council in Development Cooperation (established by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2005). The regular meetings of the Council constitute the main coordination mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Council includes expert representatives from all line ministries, as well as The Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (LAPAS), the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Latvian Confederation of Employers, the Latvian Rectors’ Council, the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian Parliament, the State Chancellery, and the Latvian School of Public Administration.

Latvia is not planning to develop new mechanisms to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals [in development cooperation]. Instead, there are plans to strengthen the Council, expand its membership and establish new working groups where necessary.

Prioritization

One distinctive feature of the SDGs is their universality, i.e. the entire SDG agenda should be implemented by all countries of the world. Nevertheless, particular topics and targets will be of higher priority than others given a country’s specific circumstances.

Question 2:

What is your Government’s approach to identify SDGs and targets that have priority for your particular country context?

The sub-goals will be divided into three main groups: 1) those that could apply to Latvia's positions on global issues; 2) those that could apply to Latvian development cooperation; 3) those that could apply domestically; 4) those that do not apply to Latvia and will not be tracked in Latvia. The MFA will have a decision making prerogative in the cases of 1) and 2).

Regarding 3), once the UN Statistical Commission approves the indicators, Latvia will do a mapping of the 169 sub-goals that "could apply domestically" to identify whether these or similar indicators can already be found in Latvia's planning documents. Ministries will be informed of these indicators and will further decide whether to consider them in their mid-term reviews of planning documents.

The remaining indicators will be identified and a decision will be made about moving forward once the indicators are approved at the UN level. These will be examined based on several criteria: 1) what national issue/problem those resolve; 2) whether there are obstacles for development unless the specific targets are set at the national level; 3) whether there are stakeholders that perceive the specific issue as a priority.

Another condition for determining the Latvian national priorities is the amount of financing needed for achieving the target. Given the limited fiscal space in Latvia, decisions to act that involve costs will need to include decisions on what other activities in Latvia will be stopped, whether targets can be met through structural reforms or whether incremental changes can be made in existing actions and measures to achieve the goals.

Results will be included in the 2017 mid-term review of Latvia's National Development Plan 2014-2020 in the form of options for the next development plan, and, if additional fiscal space can be allocated to the current NDP, some activities could still take place in the current period.

The Prime Minister will announce the proposals to the Parliament when presenting the mid-term review. The Prime Minister may convene the National Development Council to discuss the topics before or after presenting the mid-term review.

In regard to 2) "could apply to Latvian development cooperation", Latvia will continue to put particular emphasis on fostering the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals:

- Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls";
- Goal 8 "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all";
- Goal 16 "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

Adaptation

When devising national and local policies, experience suggests that global goals and targets may be adapted to national circumstances and that objectives, targets and indicators are developed and chosen that are in addition or complementary to the global agenda.

Question 3:

How does your Government foresee to transform global SDGs and targets into local objectives, targets and indicators (“localization” or “nationalization”)?

A preliminary comparison of the Agenda 2030 sub-goals to targets and performance indicators in current Latvian policy documents reveals that Latvia already has many domestic level indicators with targets that match global SDGs. Achievable targets are always identified in the policy planning process, and the level of ambition is determined by the available capacity and indicative financing.

Governance and budgeting

The SDGs are widely seen as an integrated agenda that encourages holistic policy-making and cross-sectoral cooperation. As such, they may have an impact on institutional and governance structures as well as on processes for resource allocation.

Question 4:

Does your Government envisage any changes in the budgeting processes and governance structures due to the SDGs, and which institution in your Government will oversee SDG implementation in your country?

There will be no changes in the budgeting processes for the SDGs. Latvia will continue mainstreaming its priorities through medium-term national development plans (NDPs). Each year the Medium Term Budget Framework Law sets the budget objectives for three years and priority development areas. If there is additional financing available and the NDP targets have not been achieved, new political initiatives are submitted to the government yearly and ranked according to whether they address NDP targets or national security targets, are covered by measures in robust policy documents and are deemed efficient and economic by the Ministry of Finance.

The Cross Sectoral Coordination Centre is responsible for long-term and medium-term planning in the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for development cooperation priorities, and Latvia’s positions on global issues are determined by the relevant ministries.

Stakeholder involvement

SDG implementation will require forging partnerships and collaboration between a range of actors. This will also have a bearing on the work of governments with other stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector and academia.

Question 5:

How does your Government envisage to strengthen existing and build new partnerships with other stakeholders for the purpose of SDG implementation?

Latvia's policy-making process is inclusive, and cooperation is ongoing at many different levels. When ministries begin work on policy documents, they usually inform the public via their web-sites; they also have working groups and standing committees on issues dealing with development. All policy documents are published on the Cabinet of Minister's website before being accepted and are open to comments from interested stakeholders in an inclusive negotiation process. A monthly meeting takes place between the Prime Minister and the interested NGOs. Latvia's plans of mainstreaming the SDGs in the planning process were presented and discussed at these meetings. The Cross- Sectoral Coordination Centre and line ministries respond to requests from NGOs, the UNESCO Latvian National Committee and other non-state actors about future plans. NGOs will be providing information on their roles in implementing the NDP2020, which already includes many targets in line with the SDGs. Data and analysis is shared by the academic sector. The Employers' Confederation and the Confederation of Trade Unions participate regularly in policy discussions, and they are also members, together with representatives of the academia, in the National Development Council.

No formal partnerships will be signed, since this would rather exclude stakeholders than guarantee inclusivity.

As indicated in the reply to Question 1 on development cooperation mechanisms, Latvia will strengthen the existing mechanism to broaden its scope, if necessary.

UN role in planning and implementation

As recognized in inter-governmental fora, the UN will play a critical role in support of SDG planning and implementation. Some key UN functions and services include providing fora for policy dialogue and exchange; international legal instruments, norms, regulations and standards; policy advice and expertise; capacity-building and technical cooperation. Based on the feedback from its member States, the UN system at the regional level will

work towards strengthening and improving regional UN structures and processes and inter-agency cooperation to provide the most 'fit for purpose' SDG-related services.

Question 6:

What are the expectations and needs of your Government regarding the role of the UN system in the region² in assisting with SDG planning and implementation? Please highlight possible areas of improvement as well as any suggestions you may have.

In development cooperation the UNECE has a particular role in serving as a the best practice exchange mechanism. The exchange of best practice, policy initiatives based on the reviews could be one of the core tasks for the Global (and regional) Partnership where the UN ECE could play a central part.

It has to be noted that also the global and regional forums today are sooner parallel than connected – and therefore, synthesis and broad based knowledge sharing should be widely fostered.

Capacity building to foster institutional and policy change should be in place or even a step before the peer reviews.

Avoiding overlapping data gathering efforts and multiple reviews should be strongly promoted.

The UN system should take the lead in conducting the reviews and analysing the data – being the main oversight, alongside other actors. Methodology and data quality review should be monitored by the UN as a neutral party. A central role should be assigned to non-state actors, especially the academia and civil society to 'translate' the quantitative data into qualitative terms and provide the country contexts for the progress or lack thereof.

Data and Monitoring

While the development of statistical indicators for the SDGs is ongoing, there are many calls for a “data revolution” to ensure that high-quality data will be available to monitor progress under the SDGs. This may involve more and better data, disaggregated data, new data sources, and building and strengthening statistical capacities on the ground.

Question 7:

How does your Government envisage to address the need for data, to strengthen statistical capacities and to monitor SDG progress?

² UNECE, R-UNDG, regional or subregional offices or units of UN entities, specialized agencies, funds and programmes, UN Country Teams active in the region.

After the final draft list of indicators is approved by the UN Statistical Commission, the decision at the national level will be made on the indicators which do not apply to Latvia, and mapping will be done to see if these or similar indicators are already available in Latvia or new indicators have to be introduced.

Data, both on existing and new indicators, will play a major role in monitoring the progress under the SDGs, and a strong coordination role of the National Statistical Institute will be essential. Demand for data must go hand in hand with the development of the statistical capacity.

Further new data requests will be evaluated in the frame of preparation of the Official Statistics Programme, where appropriate, in accordance with procedures as set out in the Statistics Law. While planning the Official Statistics Programme, new data needs will be assessed against the available resources and the need for additional financing will be indicated where necessary.

Assessment of progress

Based on a solid data foundation, it will be crucial to identify the reasons for SDG progress and shortcomings as well as to derive appropriate policy interventions and corrections.

Question 8:

How does your Government envisage to identify the drivers of satisfactory or unsatisfactory SDG progress and to draw the related policy conclusions?

Both the localized SDG targets and the assessment thereof will be integrated into the medium term planning system. Every other year, the Prime Minister reports on progress toward the medium-term national development plan and the sustainable development strategy. The report includes indicators and an assessment (from -2 to +2) of achieving the targets. The body of the report includes policy assessments derived from academic studies, surveys, expert commentaries, media etc., line ministry assessment and other relevant information, as well as recommendations.

Reporting

National reports are recognized as important cornerstones in the future SDG follow-up process. Typically, they will be government-led and involve a range of other stakeholders. The format and content of national reports is expected to depend on data availability and other constraints. Sharing national reports for discussion and mutual learning could be beneficial for all stakeholders, including at the subregional and regional levels.

Question 9:

What is the current (even preliminary) thinking of your Government regarding possible modalities for reporting on SDG progress at the national level in your country, what are the constraints, and what should be the channels used to share these national reports internationally?

Latvia is a small country in which economies of scale are not positive regarding administrative burden. For this reason, Latvia would prefer not to produce additional reports in addition to the bi-annual report mentioned above.

Latvia could consider sharing information on common regional indicators, if those were collected at a regional level.

UN role in follow-up and review

In addition to providing a possible regional platform (see question 11), the role of the UN in SDG follow-up and review could include statistical support, synthesis of national reports, preparation of thematic reports and other services.

Question 10:

What are the expectations and needs of your Government regarding the role and services of the UN system in the region² in SDG follow-up and review?

The exchange of best practice and policy initiatives based on the reviews could be one of the core tasks for the Global (and regional) Partnership.

A regional level mechanism could have a particular role to play in addressing and measuring progress, fostering cooperation and best practice implementation for targets that require regional solutions. This would especially apply to the management of global public goods, environmental and climate issues and cross-border issues (trade, infrastructure, migration etc.).

It has to be noted that also the global and regional forums today are sooner parallel than connected – synthesis and broad based knowledge sharing should be widely fostered.

Moreover, since Latvia's main development cooperation partner countries are members of UNECE, coordination between all regional groupings (including the EU donors) have an important role to play in fostering synergies to support the implementation of goals and targets in the region. UN Regional Offices have a particular role in fostering the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 17 and implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Regional platform

The 2030 Agenda highlights the opportunities of follow-up and review at the regional level for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. Regional reviews should draw on national-level reviews and build on existing review mechanisms. Member States are encouraged to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage, supported by the Regional Commissions.³ Earlier, the General Assembly had invited the Regional Commissions to hold annual meetings in preparation of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).⁴

Question 11:

How could a regional platform for follow-up and review be designed that integrates national experiences and existing review mechanisms and channels the findings to the global level in a coherent manner?

The follow-up and review mechanisms should try as much as possible to pool all the data into one system and eradicate double accountability procedures (especially overlapping donor-recipient questionnaires).

Progress reports should be based on reliable, comparable data, which are gathered at the national level using the same methodology. Ideally, the UN system should be the one responsible for doing the progress reviews to foster unbiased data gathering.

A regional accountability mechanism needs to be part of a multi-layered structure with a strong national and global dimension. This requires regional reviews to be anchored at the national level and to feed into the global level. Reviews at the global level should be carried out by the High-level Political Forum. For example, the regional level could therefore provide a regional synthesis to the global deliberations and align its theme with the global review. It could also go beyond merely complementing the HLPF and be more systematic and ongoing, taking into account the regional priorities and particularly transboundary issues.

A key pillar of the overall system will be national accountability. National SDG reports, prepared by governments and supported by the UN Country Teams and the UNDG agencies as appropriate, could play a key role in the review process and provide important inputs into the regional review. National parliaments could also be involved. In addition, it will be critical to build on and integrate existing accountability mechanisms into the 2030 Agenda follow-up process, for example those under

³ See outcome document of UN Sustainable Development Summit “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, paras 80 and 81.

⁴ A/RES/67/290, para 13.

relevant existing legal instruments or programme activities or carried out in other fora.

Reviews should represent the current development system thereby covering all stakeholders that have responsibilities for achieving the SDGs. Data should be gathered on a bi-annual basis, but the reviews should be limited to certain selected SDGs or themes, with the most topical issues reappearing every 3 to 5 years. This would allow for better data gathering, analysis and best practice testing, thus making the report more valuable for tracking progress over time. Moreover, sustainability is not an issue that shows immediate success or failure when measured.

The reports have to address the wider audience –whereas publishing purely scientific research would overlap with the content of professional academic journals. The report should address the general public, raise awareness among policy communities and inform the decision making process. International organizations and think tanks already produce forecasts and analysis – thus current tools could be used to choose the most urgent ones.

The reviews should cover all SDG targets and be based on SMART indicators, with high quality and timely data gathered, disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

Such areas as inequality, governance and institutions, and the rule of law should be assessed at all governance levels.

A central role should be assigned to non-state actors, especially the academia and civil society to ‘translate’ the quantitative data into qualitative terms and provide the country contexts for the progress or lack thereof.

Open and unbiased data availability on all policy levels to everyone should be the main goal and should be fostered on the national and global level. The global partnership along with the UN, the WB and the OECD should play a central role in fostering and strengthening reliable data systems across the world.
