



Implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals: contribution by Parliaments

Background document

UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: placing human rights at the heart

1. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by consensus by all UN member States in September 2015. [The UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1](#) that forms the basis of the UN 2030 Agenda specifies that it builds on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and completes what they did not achieve. The eight MDGs, which were adopted in 2000 and guided development action and galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest for 15 years, ranged from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. [The Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) seek to **realise the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls**. It is important to stress that the **SDGs are intrinsically linked to human rights, core value of the Council of Europe, and are therefore of direct concern to all its member States**. Furthermore, the SDGs are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. The SDGs cover more ground and are thus recognised as more comprehensive and complex and a springboard for continued progress for all UN member States.

2. The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets reflect one or several obligations of States parties to international human rights instruments. The 169 targets, as well as the global indicators set for each SDG, allow to measure progress towards these Goals. The indicators reflect core international norms and standards, including those of the Council of Europe. This is crucial, as to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda, there must be clear understanding as to what exactly is meant by each SDG, what are the targets to be achieved and how progress can be measured. However, it is important to point out that UN 2030 Agenda is a **political commitment** and not a legally binding document, while the international conventions, including those of the Council of Europe, contributing to the achieving of several SDGs and targets are legally binding.

3. The SDGs were conceptualised within a broad and comprehensive framework. They allow to focus and coordinate national policies while leaving flexibility for each State to identify its own priorities and indicators to correspond to the national situation. Country-specific national development plans and Voluntary National Reviews, which are presented at the annual High-Level Political Forum (July, UN New York) allow for scrutiny of measuring progress and possible redirecting of focus. These reports vary greatly in their approaches and level of information included. Regrettably some also remain silent on key human rights issues, such as gender equality and children's rights.

The Sustainable Development Goals: relevance to and of the Council of Europe

4. The SDGs are of direct relevance to the Council of Europe and all its member States because of their **human rights centered approach**, while the MDGs were rather focused on concerns in the developing countries, the SDGs have transcended the North/South and developed/developing divide. The Council of Europe is equally of relevance to the SDGs and can significantly contribute to their achievement. As the Europe's leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe provides its member States, as well as other stakeholders, with a unique **platform** to discuss achievements and to identify and address challenges in the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 in Europe, including by supporting the development of **indicators** at national level to measure progress. It allows for **sharing experience and promising practices** and thus learning from each other's experience how to best contribute to the achievement of the Goals at the national level.

5. The Council of Europe also allows for **promoting the implementation of European and global standards**, through changes to national legal frameworks and the adoption of integrated policies and other measures, as well as for providing **guidance and support for the implementation** of these standards, through recommendations, guidelines and resolutions of its various mechanisms and bodies. It supports member States in the **collection of data, information and good practice** for the promotion and review of progress towards the SDGs.

6. Most of the relevant Council of Europe standards provide States with a comprehensive **measurable normative framework** which can be used as indicators to measure progress on different SDGs. In addition, several legally-binding instruments are equipped with bodies that monitor compliance and implementation of these standards. This not only promotes accountability, but also allows for very valuable data to measure progress and guidance where further action should be invested.

7. In addition, the Council of Europe's **multi-stakeholder dimension**, including the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Conference of International NGOs, as well as the European Court of Human Rights and the case law of which covers almost all SDGs, and the intergovernmental committees bringing together experts from all member States, provides precious support to States in their efforts to **translate the global agenda into action at both national and local levels**.

8. A number of groundbreaking conventions of the Council of Europe are of particular relevance for the implementation of Agenda 2030. Although made in Europe, there are not just meant for Europe. They are open to accession also by States not members of the Council of Europe and any State around the world can use these standards as indicators and as inspiration when preparing their Voluntary National Reviews for the High-Level Political Forum.

9. The most relevant legally-binding Council of Europe instruments that include detailed provisions that can serve as benchmarks and indicators are [the European Social Charter](#), [the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#); [the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#); [the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#). In addition, their implementation is monitored and these reports gather valuable data and information that is closely related to the relevant SDGs. Member States should make better use of these monitoring reports and the process of providing information for them when reporting progress to the High-Level Political Forum through their Voluntary National Reviews.

Role of the Parliamentarians as legislators and guardians of accountability

10. The UN 2030 Agenda represents an ambitious set of goals to be achieved. Still at the first half of its course, improvements in the current way of reviewing progress can be made to ensure achievement of all 17 SDGs. Scrutiny and accountability that parliamentarians can introduce in this process can be only beneficial to all stakeholders.

11. The SDGs are a result of process that involved input from Governments, civil society, the private sector, various UN Agencies, regional Organisations, and in a limited number of cases also Parliaments. While the United Nations has played leading role in setting up the UN 2030 Agenda, as well as in coordinating and stimulating its implementation, the latter is primary responsibility of member States and national institutions, including Parliaments, all sectors of the society are needed for successful progress. Strengthening of partnerships is indeed also one of the global goals: *“A successful sustainable development agenda requires partnership between governments, the private sector and civil society. These partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision and shared goals that place people and the planet at the centre, are needed at the global, regional, national and local levels.”*

12. UNGA Resolution 70/1 also calls for the parliamentary involvement by encouraging Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country-driven. It stipulates that such reviews should draw on contributions from “indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. **National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.** “

13. In addition, while all SDGs call for parliamentary involvement, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions expressly refers to the specific role of Parliaments, namely through Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; and Target 16.7: ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Parliaments thus need to pay attention to their own institutional development in line with these two targets, and they need to engage in the implementation and oversight of national action on the whole SDG framework.

14. Translating the SDGs into tangible and measurable national policies and action requires the involvement of the Parliaments. The role of the Parliamentarians in **identifying national priorities and to provide guidance** in their implementation is important to ensure that the action reflects and addresses the specific national needs and circumstances.

15. The Parliamentarians can also play crucial role in **law-making**, by ensuring that legislation contributes towards achieving the SDGs and by being vigilant in the process of **approving budgets** that enough resources are allocated for that purpose.

16. In addition, in the period when **multilateralism** and values promoted both by the UN and the Council of Europe are being challenged, the involvement of Parliamentarians at the national level is needed to explain to their electorate the tangible benefits and improvements that SDGs bring to their daily lives.

17. Lastly, the Parliaments must play important **oversight role by monitoring progress** made towards achieving the SDGs. They should play a key role in reminding the government of the commitments entered, **supporting the establishment and work of national coordination** tasked with implementing and reviewing progress towards the SDGs and by contributing to the preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews.

➤ Questions for discussion:

- *Are public debates taking place in your country on UN 2030 Agenda and has your Parliament been involved in it? Is any specific action taking place in support of multilateralism and to raise awareness on the UN 2030 Agenda?*
- *How is your Parliament contributing towards achieving the SDGs? What are the structures set up at the national level?*
- *How is progress on SDGs being measured? How is your Parliament involved in it?*
- *What are the promising practices in your Parliament?*
- *What are the main challenges in achieving the SDGs?*