

ESDN Policy Brief 3

September 2020

Recommendations for Achieving a Sustainable Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis

European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is a network of national policymakers and other sustainable development (SD) experts working on SD policies and strategies. The ESDN's main aim is to advance SD and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the European, national and sub-national level by bringing together government representatives and expert stakeholders. The ESDN is the largest policy network on SD in Europe that facilitates the exchange of good practices and experiences across Europe by publishing Reports, organizing flagship Annual Conferences, Workshops, and Peer Learning Platforms. ESDN events cover topics in sustainable development, with a particular focus on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 18th ESDN Workshop

The following suggestions are based on discussions and reflections by participants of the 18th ESDN Workshop, which was held virtually on 24 June 2020 under the title "**Achieving the SDGs through a Sustainable and Just Transition: Challenges and responses to COVID-19**". They represent a set of preliminary ideas on how to respond to the emerging economic crisis following the Covid-19 outbreak in Europe in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable manner.

This Workshop was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Department for Sustainable Development at the Romanian Prime Minister's Office, and hosted about 100 participants from 22 European countries. The participants consisted mostly of high-level policymakers from

different European national governments dealing with sustainable development. Additionally, over 3,000 people watched the livestream of the Workshop on Facebook. There was a number of keynote speakers, as well as discussions between the participants.

This ESDN Policy Brief summarizes important suggestions made in the presentations and discussions of the Workshop. It also takes into account the results of a survey about European governments' plans for a sustainable recovery that was conducted by the ESDN Office in June 2020.

Policy Suggestions

The following policy suggestions were generated as a result of the 18th ESDN Workshop:

1. **Use the SDGs as a guideline for recovery from Covid-19;**
2. **Focus on increasing policy coherence;**
3. **Take advantage of Covid-19 recovery for making long-term systemic changes;**
4. **Aim for green recovery; and**
5. **Look across borders: International cooperation.**

1. Use the SDGs as a guideline for recovery from Covid-19

Workshop participants agreed that it was important to **integrate the SDGs into a sustainable recovery from Covid-19**. It can be argued that recovery packages and policies that have been revealed so far already contain many policies that will forward sustainable development, e.g. subsidies for public transport, investment in efficient housing, support for the healthcare system, and subsidies for research in health. At the Workshop, it was suggested to **develop a toolbox with concrete measures for governments to integrate the SDGs into policies**.

Policy Suggestions

1. Evaluate all policies against a set of commonly agreed sustainability criteria to avoid harming progress on the SDGs.
2. Develop a toolbox for governments with concrete measures on how to integrate SDGs into policies.

2. Focus on increasing policy coherence

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak has led to unprecedented political cooperation in many countries. Often, **line ministries across policy areas worked together to develop a coherent response**. Policy coherence has been a guiding principle of sustainable development for decades. Accordingly, Workshop participants mentioned it as the most important aspect for a sustainable recovery in a word cloud exercise.

Policy Suggestion

1. Establish interinstitutional and inter-ministerial working groups for sustainable development related challenges.

3. Take advantage of Covid-19 recovery for making long-term systemic changes

At the Workshop, it was suggested that **the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to implement systemic changes**. It was pointed out that policy-making changed from reacting to market forces to proactive and science- and evidence based policy-making. Most of the measures trying to contain the spread of the virus were based on recommendations of virologists or epidemiologists and adapted according to new evidence. Applying this mechanism to other areas of governance would be conducive to achieving sustainability-related challenges.

Policy Suggestions

1. Ensure that long-term systemic changes are discussed and understood as part of recovery debate

4. Aim for green recovery

As the Covid-19 pandemic hit Europe at a time of heightened awareness for the climate and ecological crises, many countries have indicated their motivation to make the recovery 'green'.

Many international organizations have suggested a variety of policies on how to **combine a socially just economic recovery to mitigate climate change**. A key strategy is to **create green jobs**, especially in green infrastructure, housing renovation, and in renewable energy.

Another important topic is **green finance**. The EU has recently released a report as the basis for a Green Finance Taxonomy. A major aspect is the 'do-no-significant-harm' principle for investments, where no harm can be done to any of the six objectives of the taxonomy: climate change mitigation; climate change adaptation; sustainable water and protection of marine resources; transition to a circular economy; pollution prevention and control; protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.

Policy Suggestions

1. Focus on creating jobs in sustainable sectors, such as renewable energy.
2. Apply the 'do-no-significant-harm' principle, or other green evaluation criteria, to all policies in order to prevent counter-acting green policies.
3. Invest in green sectors, such as public transport, renewable energy, recycling, etc.

5. Look across borders: International cooperation

Both the survey respondents and the Workshop participants pointed towards the importance of international agreements and European cooperation. The European Union's Covid-19 recovery plan can serve as a guideline for countries in Europe, and European cooperation can also be seen as a role model outside of Europe.

Policy Suggestions

1. **Design Covid-19 recovery policies in line with international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement.**
2. **Strengthen cooperation with European partners and within the EU.**

Contact

ESDN Office: esdn-office@sd-network.eu

ESDN Website: www.sd-network.eu