



# 2<sup>nd</sup> ESDN Young Civil Servants Workshop

## Discussion Paper

Bringing Sustainable Development and  
the SDGs further in Public  
Administrations: Empowering Young  
Civil Servants

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# Table of Contents

- Introduction** ..... 3
- Chapter 1: Initiatives furthering Sustainable Development – Bridging Silos and Gaps** ..... 5
  - Paris Climate Agreement, the Science-Policy-Interface, and their Effects on the Civil Service ..... 5
  - Holistic Sustainability Assessment and Technical Support Instrument ..... 5
  - Creating Experts of Sustainable Development in Public Administration ..... 6
  - Luxembourg Sovereign Sustainability Bond ..... 6
- Chapter 2: Exchange Spaces 1 & 2 - Good practices in young civil servants having an impact within public administration** ..... 7
  - Day 1: Exchange Space 1 ..... 7
    - Table 1: Austria – Working Across Levels: Austria’s Sustainability Coordination Model** ..... 7
    - Table 2: Luxembourg - Social Climate Plan & National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Poverty** ..... 7
    - Table 3: Wales: Well-being of Future Generations Act** ..... 8
  - Day 2: Exchange Space 2 ..... 8
    - Table 1: Germany - Crimes that Affect the Environment: Threats to a Sustainable Future** ..... 8
    - Table 2: Luxembourg - Connecting the Dots: Navigating Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategies for the Future** ..... 9
    - Table 3: Luxembourg - ‘Once Only’ as a Driver for Administrative Simplification - Proactive, Data Driven Public Services for Sustainable Governance** ..... 9
- Chapter 3: Panel Discussions and Participant Answers to Registration Questions** ..... 11
  - Day 1 Panel Discussion ..... 11
  - Day 2 Panel Discussion ..... 11
  - Participant Answers to Registration Questions ..... 11
    - What questions do you have on the topics being addressed? What are you hoping to learn from this workshop?** ..... 11
    - Do you, as a young civil servant, have any challenges with which you are confronted that you might like to have discussed at the Workshop? If so, what challenges are you facing?** ..... 13

## Introduction

This Discussion Paper will provide participants taking part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> ESDN Young Civil Servants Workshop with some background information on the workshop's focus, the topics that will be covered by speakers and presenters, as well as how the workshop's interactive parts will be run.

The Young Civil Servants Workshop will focus on "Bringing Sustainable Development and the SDGs further in Public Administrations: Empowering Young Civil Servants". The workshop is taking place in Luxembourg on 18-19 March 2026 and is being organized by the European Sustainable Development Network together with the Luxembourgish Ministry for the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity.

The workshop will bring together 36 participants from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom/Wales.

The overarching purpose of this workshop is to provide a platform and space for young civil servants to exchange knowledge with their peers from other ministries and from the ministries of other countries and promote learning from one another, the sharing of ideas and good practice cases when it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and sustainable development, more broadly. The ESDN wants to help in building up the capacities of young civil servants when it comes to addressing challenges within public administration when it comes to sustainable development and its successful implementation.

Given the complex geopolitical challenges taking place, and the rapid approach of 2030, the need to push for increased attention on sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda, and the SDGs, has never been greater. With this workshop, the ESDN hopes to bring together inspiring examples of governments continuing to take actions for sustainability and the SDGs and pair that with concrete examples of young civil servants affecting change and having an impact within their government.

The format of the workshop will be a mixture of keynote presentations, two panel discussions, an intervention from the Minister of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity and for the Civil Service, two Exchange Spaces, as well as the main takeaways that participants gained from this event.

Chapter 1 will focus on the four keynote presentations from civil servant colleagues from Luxembourg, Finland, and Romania. The purpose of this session is to look at initiatives that have been implemented and their effects on sustainable development and serve as inspiration, which shows that despite the current geopolitical tensions and the crises Europe has been through there is progress being made on sustainable development. This chapter will feature short introductions to the keynote speeches and should help to familiarize participants with the topics and initiatives that will be presented.

Chapter 2 focuses on the two Exchange Spaces that will be taking place during the workshop, one on Day 1 and the other on Day 2. The purpose of the exchange spaces is to allow participants the chance to exchange with their peers from other countries on good practice cases where young civil servants have had an impact. Table leads will present their cases for 10-15 minutes, leaving about 30 minutes for more in-depth discussions with the participants around their table.

Short texts of the Exchange Space interventions are also provided. To make the discussions more fruitful when it comes to the 30-minute discussions, please think about potential questions to ask the table leads, and bring any relevant ideas or examples you might have from your own country or context to share at

the table. Everyone will be able to visit each of the Exchange Space tables, so no one will miss out on the information being presented, nor on the discussions.

Chapter three will briefly outline the two panel discussions that will be taking place on Day 1 and on Day 2. Additionally, this chapter will also feature the collective answers of participants to the questions that were posed when registering for the workshop, namely:

- What questions do you have on the topics being addressed? What are you hoping to learn from this workshop?
- Do you, as a young civil servant, have any challenges with which you are confronted that you might like to have discussed at the Workshop? If so, what challenges are you facing?

After the workshop, all presentations will be shared with participants, as well as uploaded to the ESDN website. Furthermore, an ESDN Policy Note will be published that will highlight the main outcomes, ideas, and recommendations that come out of the presentations, the panel discussions, and from the Exchange Spaces. The ESDN will publish this as soon as possible.

# Chapter 1: Initiatives furthering Sustainable Development – Bridging Silos and Gaps

This chapter offers brief introductions to the keynote presentations in the workshop's Session 1: Initiatives furthering Sustainable Development – Bridging Silos and Gaps.

## Paris Climate Agreement, the Science-Policy-Interface, and their Effects on the Civil Service

**Andrew Ferrone**, *Director for International and European Affairs, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, Luxembourg*

This presentation will focus on the effects of sustainability policy on public administration since the Paris Climate Agreement and put the current geopolitical realities in a broader context. Having taken part in the Paris Climate Agreement negotiations, Andrew offers a unique opportunity for participants to hear first-hand how such multilateral agreements can have far-reaching effects.

The keynote will also focus on the science-policy-interface and how science can be used to steer more robust and sustainable policies.

## Holistic Sustainability Assessment and Technical Support Instrument

**Saara Tamminen**, *Chief Specialist, Sustainability Evaluations, Strategy Department, Prime Minister's Office, Finland*

Saara Tamminen from the Finnish Prime Minister's Office presented the new holistic sustainability assessment model of Finland and its first full report. In the sustainability assessment, societal sustainability is evaluated using a new five-dimensional sustainability framework covering: 1) sustainability of security, democracy and the rule of law, 2) social and health-related sustainability, 3) economic sustainability, 4) ecological sustainability and 5) human capital and cultural sustainability. In addition to evaluating development trends in different areas of the Finnish society over the past decade, the report provides insight into possible development trajectories over the next 5-10 years and proposes directions for solutions.

The report concludes that, in Finland, development has been in line with the objectives or clearly improving in only six out of the 35 assessed sub-areas during the past decade and moving away from the targets or otherwise deteriorating 15 sub-areas. Challenges concern especially ecological and economic sustainability. Saara also summarized some of the key lessons learned from the process, including importance of strong collaboration models and systemic and multidisciplinary approach for the work. In addition, organizational design and ways the work can impact decision-making need to be carefully considered.

## Creating Experts of Sustainable Development in Public Administration

*Adriana Mincă, Councilor, Department of Sustainable Development – Prime Minister's Office, Romania*

This keynote presentation will take a closer look at the role of the Sustainable Development Expert in public administration and the importance of education and capacity building for a sustainable transition. The presentation will outline the postgraduate training program structured around the official occupational standard which the Department of Sustainable Development has developed, covering four core modules—public management and administration, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development - addressing key topics such as climate change, circular economy, sustainable rural and urban ecosystems, strengthening institutional capacity for implementing the SDGs, and attracting funding for sustainable development projects. The presentation will emphasize how these trained experts can act as change agents within institutions, contributing to policy coherence and supporting the implementation of sustainable development strategies at local and national levels.

## Luxembourg Sovereign Sustainability Bond

*Lara Jacoby, Advisor for Sustainable Finance, Ministry of Finance, Luxembourg*

The keynote will focus on Luxembourg's inaugural EUR 1.5 billion Sovereign Sustainability Bond, issued in 2020 as the first of its kind in Europe and among AAA-rated sovereigns. The bond financed projects across three environmental categories (low carbon transport, water treatment, and environmental protection) and four social categories (education, healthcare, affordable housing, and social inclusion). It is aligned with 11 SDGs (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 15).

The presentation will offer a detailed look at the full issuance process, from developing the framework to producing the allocation and impact report. It will cover the eligible categories, illustrative impact metrics and KPIs, an overview of how proceeds were allocated, as well as a case study drawing on practical experience.

## Chapter 2: Exchange Spaces 1 & 2 - Good practices in young civil servants having an impact within public administration

This chapter focuses on the two Exchange Spaces that will be taking place during the workshop. The purpose of the exchange spaces is to allow participants the chance to exchange with their peers from other countries on good practice cases. Participants will be able to visit all three tables over three separate rounds on both days. At the end of the Exchange Spaces, a short summary from the table leads will be provided, which will highlight the main discussions that took place over the three rounds.

### Day 1: Exchange Space 1

#### Table 1: Austria – Working Across Levels: Austria’s Sustainability Coordination Model

*Hannah Jennewein, ESDN Advisory Board Member, Policy Officer for Sustainable Development, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management, Austria*

&

*Melina Matzawrakos, ESDN Advisory Board Member, Policy Officer for Sustainable Development and Participation, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management, Austria*

Ensuring the strategic coordination and impact-oriented implementation of the 2030 Agenda is indeed a difficult task. As young civil servants in the Austrian federal administration, we are confronted with a vast landscape of different silos, whether between federal and subnational levels, between disciplines and ministries, or between different stakeholders. In the Ministry of Climate and Environmental Protection, our unit assists in breaking down these silos and taking a whole-of-government, mainstreaming approach to implementing the SDGs at all levels.

In Austria, we have established a multi-layered network of institutional mechanisms and working groups that are collaborating, synergizing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda. These include the interministerial working group for SDGs at federal level, the sustainability coordinator's conference at provincial level, working groups on localizing the SDGs, as well as dialogue formats involving civil society, academia and various interest groups. We will present how this is all constructed, what works well and what does not yet work well, and hope to discuss and compare this with other participants across the ESDN.

#### Table 2: Luxembourg - Social Climate Plan & National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Poverty

*Louis Bleser, Climate Change Project Manager - Climate Social Plan, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, Luxembourg*

&

*Nicholas O’Connell, Project Manager, Ministry of Family Affairs, Solidarity, Living Together and Reception of Refugees, Luxembourg*

Luxembourg's Climate Social Plan is embedded in the sustainability framework advanced by the United Nations and operationalizes key objectives of different Sustainable Development Goals. With its focus on addressing energy poverty, cushioning vulnerable households against rising energy and mobility costs, and promoting socially balanced investments in renewable energy and building renovation, the plan reflects an understanding of the green transition as both an ecological and a distributive policy project.

In the context of steadily increasing rates of persons who are at risk of poverty, Luxembourg's national action plan for reducing and combatting poverty constitutes another major priority of public policy. As such, the plan adopts a holistic approach to combatting poverty and social exclusion in all its forms and was drafted following a broad consultation process that involved civil society stakeholders, human rights institutions, social partners and people experiencing poverty.

This highlights the dual positionality of young civil servants. As policy designers and implementers, they operate within institutional frameworks that structure priorities, resources, and timelines. Simultaneously, as members of a generation that will experience the long-term socio-economic and environmental consequences of current policy choices, they are directly implicated in the outcomes of the transition. This dual perspective may shape distinct sensitivities to intergenerational equity, social cohesion, and institutional legitimacy.

### **Table 3: Wales: Well-being of Future Generations Act**

*Philip Jillesjö Löf, Climate, Environment & Future Generations Policy Lead, Welsh Government, Wales*

This presentation will focus on the Well-being of Future Generations Act which made Wales the first country to legislate for the SDGs in 2015, elaborating on how the Act was created and how it is structured. Furthermore, it will also be explained how Wales ensures that the Act is implemented and the role of the Future Generations Commissioner.

As a young civil servant, the Act has had an impact on my career and the opportunity it gives other young civil servants in Wales. A personal story of how the Act helped secure a career working in the Welsh Government Brussels Office.

Additionally, the Act has shaped Wales's international strategy and has had a role after Brexit – as well as the doors it opened and wider international interest in the Act (EU creating a Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness and the UN Summit of the Future).

## **Day 2: Exchange Space 2**

### **Table 1: Germany - Crimes that Affect the Environment: Threats to a Sustainable Future**

*Tim Rauschenberg, Policy Officer, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany*

Environmental crime has emerged globally as the third most lucrative sector for international organized crime, posing a growing concern for many countries in the pursuit of sustainable development. Illicit activities, such as illegal forestry, fishing, wildlife trafficking, mining, as well as pollution and waste-related

crimes, pose a significant threat to natural resources, ecosystem functioning, biodiversity, human health, livelihoods, and local economies. These crimes have often severe impacts on several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are linked to other criminal activities, including corruption, drug trafficking and human trafficking, and contribute to political destabilization.

This exchange space table aims to familiarize participants with the challenges of combating environmental crimes and present potential solutions based on the work of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN). The GAIA project, implemented in collaboration with INTERPOL and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Germany, and funded by BMUKN, will serve as an exemplary case and a basis for open discussion on advancing sustainable development through public administration.

## **Table 2: Luxembourg - Connecting the Dots: Navigating Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategies for the Future**

*Elena Metzdorf, Project Manager, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity, Luxembourg*

This presentation explores the challenge of navigating and implementing multiple sustainability-related strategies within public administration in Luxembourg, using climate adaptation as a practical entry point. Although many national strategies are in place, their overlap, complexity, and technical language can make them difficult to align and communicate. This can create challenges for municipalities, stakeholders, and the citizens in understanding priorities and translating policy into effective local action.

The discussion will focus on how young civil servants can help improve coherence, clarity, and engagement across these strategies. Looking beyond 2030, it invites participants to reflect on how existing policies can be better linked, communicated, and implemented to support resilient and sustainable governance, ensuring that strategies are not only developed but also understood, accepted, and effectively applied at all levels.

## **Table 3: Luxembourg - ‘Once Only’ as a Driver for Administrative Simplification - Proactive, Data Driven Public Services for Sustainable Governance**

*Sven Oostvogels, Public Data Manager, Ministry for Digitalization, Luxembourg*

This session will present how the Once-Only principle (OOP) is being implemented in Luxembourg as a key lever for administrative simplification and more proactive, data-driven public services. It will briefly outline the national legal and organizational framework, show how interoperable data exchanges between public entities reduce burden for citizens and businesses, and illustrate how OOP enables administrations to notify people of rights and benefits proactively. Drawing on concrete examples from ongoing pilot projects across social security, taxation, immigration, enterprise support and other domains, the presentation will demonstrate the practical mechanisms and benefits of OOP in the Luxembourg context.

The session will then connect OOP to sustainable governance, with a specific focus on opportunities for the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Biodiversity. By streamlining permit procedures, supporting proactive access to environmental subsidies, reducing duplicated document checks, and improving the availability of high-quality data for environmental and climate reporting, OOP can substantially strengthen the public sector’s capacity to deliver on sustainability objectives. Participants will be invited to reflect on

additional opportunities and barriers and discuss how Once-Only approaches can help environmental administrations across Europe design more efficient, equitable and future-proof public services.

## Chapter 3: Panel Discussions and Participant Answers to Registration Questions

The workshop will offer participants two panel discussions, one on each day. Before the panel discussions begin, there will be a short question and answer part to allow participants the chance to ask the keynote presenters questions about their presentations. Then the panel discussion will begin. Brief descriptions of the panel discussions are included below.

Furthermore, everyone was asked upon registering for the workshop a couple of questions about what they hoped to get out of this workshop, as well as what some of the challenges are for young civil servants. These answers have been clustered around several themes and topics. The goal is for these topics and themes to be discussed throughout the two days, through discussions at the exchange spaces, as well as during breaks and networking parts of the program.

### Day 1 Panel Discussion

The panel discussion on Day 1 will be in relation to the keynote presentations. The format for the 45-minute slot will be about 10 minutes of direct questions to the panelists from the participants about their presentations. The remaining 30 minutes will be moderator-led discussions with the panelists on common issues and topics that are important in our current geopolitical context, such as communication, multilateralism and capacity building for sustainable development.

### Day 2 Panel Discussion

The panel discussion on Day 2 will take a bit of a different format from the panel discussion on Day 1. Firstly, the panelists will not have keynote presentations but will talk about their experiences over the years working in the civil service and how their impressions and experiences have changed over time. Pia, Saara, and Sébastien have the unique perspective of having been in the civil service for several years now and represent the transition from young civil servants to those with more experience. In addition to their experiences, they will also touch upon the effects the current geopolitical context is having on budgets in Europe, which has a direct impact on the civil service in many countries, as well as budgets for sustainable development.

## Participant Answers to Registration Questions

### What questions do you have on the topics being addressed? What are you hoping to learn from this workshop?

The answers to these two questions can be grouped along several themes:

#### 1. Empowerment & Effectiveness

- How can young civil servants be empowered to drive sustainable development more effectively within their ministries?

- What are the most effective actions a young civil servant can take to advance SDG implementation?

## 2. Implementation & Monitoring

- How is the 2030 Agenda implemented and monitored within public administrations across Europe, especially at the operational level?
- How can the real impact of sustainability actions be measured beyond standard reporting indicators?

## 3. Models & Best Practices

- What are successful models from different countries for implementing sustainability, and how can these be adapted?
- How do different administrations integrate sustainable development into everyday procedures, internal coordination, and project implementation?

## 4. Political Resilience & Future Scenarios

- How can sustainable development remain politically resilient amid geopolitical tensions and shifting priorities?
- What are the scenarios for the post-2030 Agenda, and how can broad frameworks be made more operative and communicable?

## 5. Cross-Sectoral & Inclusive Approaches

- How can a cross-sectoral approach to sustainability be promoted, and what are good practice cases for increasing public understanding of the SDGs?
- How can sustainability be mainstreamed alongside equalities to ensure policy interventions do not disadvantage vulnerable groups?

## 6. Financial & Governance Integration

- How are sustainability, climate objectives, and SDGs being integrated into financial, regulatory, and governance frameworks?
- How can silos be bridged, and how are SDG targets embedded in evaluation and delivery?

## 7. Innovation & Evidence-Based Policy

- How can innovative, evidence-based policy interventions be designed to address the differential impacts of the climate crisis?
- What role can young civil servants play in advocating for better data collection, evidence review, and evaluation in sustainability policy?

The learning objectives and expectations are represented as follows:

- **Practical Exchange:** Participants seek concrete examples, practical tools, and peer learning—not just high-level discussions.

- **Networking:** Opportunities to connect with both young and experienced civil servants from across Europe.
- **Local & National Insights:** Interest in how specific countries are addressing challenges, especially regarding the EU's Social Climate Fund and national action plans.
- **Organizational Culture:** How to influence systems, governance structures, and organizational culture for long-term, preventative, and participatory work.
- **Citizen-Centric Approaches:** Putting citizens' wellbeing at the forefront and increasing public understanding of the SDGs.

## Do you, as a young civil servant, have any challenges with which you are confronted that you might like to have discussed at the Workshop? If so, what challenges are you facing?

Participant answers to this question are focused on the following themes:

### 1. Political & Institutional Barriers

- **Navigating political sensitivity:** Balancing policy ideals with political reality, especially when sustainable development is deprioritized or actively counteracted.
- **Lack of political backing:** SDGs and climate/environmental issues often lack political relevance, making it hard to secure support or resources.
- **Short-termism:** Geopolitical tensions and shifting priorities push long-term sustainability goals aside in favor of immediate concerns.
- **Communicating under pressure:** Political sensitivities shape how SDG commitments are communicated, sometimes limiting advocacy.

### 2. Bureaucracy & Administrative Hurdles

- **Complex procedures:** High bureaucracy, especially with EU-funded projects, slows down impact and innovation.
- **Siloed structures:** Difficulty coordinating across departments, institutions, and policy areas; lack of formal leverage to align different ministries.
- **Digital maturity gaps:** Varying levels of digital readiness hinder cross-institutional initiatives.

### 3. Professional & Personal Challenges

- **Limited influence:** High responsibility but low formal authority, especially as a young or junior civil servant.
- **Imposter syndrome:** Feeling out of place in high-level environments or when pushing for change.
- **Short-term contracts:** Lack of job security undermines long-term planning and commitment.
- **Career development:** Unclear paths for advancement in sustainable development roles.

### 4. Communication & Advocacy

- **Public perception:** SDGs are often misunderstood as purely environmental, ignoring social and economic dimensions.
- **Internal advocacy:** Difficulty communicating the broader significance of sustainability to senior leaders, especially its economic and strategic benefits.
- **Being heard:** Struggling to have young civil servants' voices and ideas taken seriously in decision-making.

## 5. Implementation & Impact

- **Translating strategy to action:** Breaking down broad SDG frameworks into practical, everyday tasks.
- **Measuring impact:** Moving beyond reporting indicators to show real-world change.
- **Securing funding:** Lack of resources for evidence-based policy and robust impact assessment.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Managing relationships with NGOs, other civil servants, and the public.

## 6. Innovation & Adaptation

- **Technological change:** Adapting to AI and new tools in policy-making and sustainable development.
- **Systemic change:** Influencing culture, encouraging collaboration, and embedding lived experience in policy.
- **Resilience:** Strengthening the SDGs' resilience beyond 2030, especially in uncertain political climates.

## 7. Intersectionality & Inclusion

- **Embedding equity:** Ensuring sustainability policies address racial, social, and economic inequalities.
- **Inclusive decision-making:** Bringing diverse perspectives and lived experiences into policy processes.