



18th ESDN Workshop

**Achieving the SDGs through a Sustainable
and Just Transition: Challenges and
responses to COVID-19**

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**Workshop
Report**

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Introduction

This Workshop Report provides information and documentation of the inputs, discussions, and outcomes of the 18th ESDN Workshop, entitled “Achieving the SDGs through a Sustainable and Just Transition: Challenges and responses to COVID-19”. The Workshop took place virtually on 24 June 2020 and was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Department of Sustainable Development at the Prime Minister’s Office of Romania.

The Covid-19 pandemic has not only severely affected health sectors all over Europe and the world, but the subsequent shutdowns of the economy have led to a severe economic crisis. At the time of the Workshop, policymakers had been working on or, in some cases, have already started implementing their country’s recovery plans out of the economic crisis. These plans often include massive stimuli for the economy. As the world is also facing challenges in different aspects of sustainable development, such as inequality, the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, there are strong calls from various parts of society and stakeholder groups for a sustainable recovery. The objective of this ESDN Workshop was to investigate how European policymakers can strengthen sustainable development (SD) policy-making in times of Covid-19 and how to prevent SD from becoming marginalized in the different recovery approaches.

Due to Covid-19 and related travel restrictions throughout Europe, the Workshop could not be held in Bucharest, as originally planned, but was hosted virtually – and was thus the first-ever virtual event organized by the ESDN. 92 participants attended the Workshop, from 22 countries. Out of these participants, around two-thirds were ESDN veterans and for one third it was the first ESDN event that they attended.

Additionally 3,000 viewers watched the live stream via the Facebook page of the Department of Sustainable Development at the Romanian Prime Minister’s Office.

Apart from the Opening and Welcome, there were two main sessions:

Session 1 focused on Covid-19’s foreseen impact on SD, in general, and the European Green Deal, in particular. Various policy approaches and proposals were presented by the featured speakers from different international organisations and the European Commission. In Session 2, several policymakers from different European countries presented how they are integrating, or planning to integrate, SD into their Covid-19 recovery strategies.

The full documentation of the 18th ESDN Workshop can be accessed via [the ESDN Website](#), where the following documents are available for download: 1) Workshop Agenda; 2) Workshop Discussion Paper; 3) PowerPoint presentations of all the keynote speakers; and 4) the full video recording of the 18th ESDN Workshop.

Opening Session

The Opening Session included a welcome address from Ionel Dancă, Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Romania; Annika Lindblom, President of the ESDN Association and Secretary General of the Finnish National Commission on SD, Ministry of the Environment; and László Borbély from the Prime Minister's Office – Department of Sustainable Development of Romania.

Ionel Dancă welcomed all Workshop participants and stated that Romania is an active supporter of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, Romania recently updated its National Sustainable Development Strategy, which includes measures for both the national and the local level. This new SD strategy is also addressing the challenges posed by the Covid-19 outbreak. Ionel Dancă emphasised that the Romanian Department for Sustainable Development, which co-hosted this Workshop, is very dedicated to successfully implementing SD in practice. He argued that it is important for Romania to be involved in the ESDN. Through exchanging experiences with other member countries in the ESDN, he believes that Romania will achieve serious progress concerning the SDGs.

Annika Lindblom welcomed the participants on behalf of the ESDN by stating that this is one of the happiest days this spring for her. She informed everyone that the ESDN Executive Committee and Advisory Board were worried about the role that the ESDN could play in this time of crisis. However, this Workshop shows that the ESDN is “alive and kicking” and is able to provide exchange, ideas and solutions to achieve SD in practice. Annika informed the participants that the ESDN has become an association at the end of 2019. However, the main tasks of the ESDN have remained the same: The ESDN is fostering a pan-European dialogue on SD at the national and sub-national level in various events throughout the year, and provides the most comprehensive information and knowledge hub on SD in Europe on its [homepage](#) at. Annika said that the main objective of the Workshop was to explore strategies to “build back better and greener” from the Covid-19 crisis and to manage the recovery process along SD criteria and the SDGs. The key challenge, she argued, is to find solutions to build back better and avoid quick fixes. She mentioned that we could only do this recovery process once, so we should do it in a sustainable way. In order to do so successfully, we need a toolbox to ensure that the recovery is operationalised in a sustainable way.

From the Romanian host team, **László Borbély** welcomed the participants by expressing his regret that they were not able to showcase Romanian hospitality to the participants in a physical meeting. He thanked the Romanian Government for enabling Romania to become a regular member of the ESDN six months ago. He stated that it is important to share experiences from their part of Europe. László reminded the participants that the Charter of the UN was signed 75 years ago and now there are over 200 member states. He argued that in this time of the pandemic, we need to remember that we are not alone. To address the challenges, we need more dialogue, solidarity and appropriate inter-institutional frameworks. László argued that in his region (Eastern Europe), everyone is strongly working towards the 2030 Agenda. He is hoping that Romania is considered a regional hub for the 2030 Agenda, because it has the tools and the concepts. The Romanian Government will discuss the Green Deal and the new Action Plan for SD in the next few weeks. László also emphasised that we need to share best practices in Europe. He welcomed the fact that European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, has committed to basing the European Semester, starting next year, on the 17 SDGs.

László finally stated that he is very happy that so many high level representatives will be speaking at the Workshop, including the European Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean, from Romania, as well as representatives from the European Commission, the OECD and UNECE, and of course from various European countries. He ended his welcome remarks with stressing that we are all together in

this challenging period, and he hopes that we will prove today that we are able to have a more sustainable world despite the pandemic.

Session 1: Covid-19's Foreseen Impact on Sustainable Development and European Green Deal

Session 1 featured keynote speakers from several international organisations and the European Commission. Emmanuel Buttin is an expert on Sustainable Finance in the European Commission and talked about the contribution of sustainable finance to the recovery, as well as some details about the EU recovery plan. Tatyana Teplova from the OECD, where she heads the Division on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, presented a recent survey of governments on how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the achievement of the SDGs. Adina Vălean is the European Commissioner for Transport and elaborated on the recovery plan *Next Generation EU*. Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary and Under-Secretary-General presented the effects of the crisis on the SDG implementation and progress in Europe. In the plenary discussion, which followed the keynote presentations, participants discussed important aspects of the impacts of Covid-19 on SD policy and the European Green Deal.

Emmanuel Buttin, an expert on sustainable Finance at the **European Commission (DG FISMA)**, held the first presentation in Session 1 on “Contribution of Sustainable Finance and the Renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy to the EU’s green, equitable and resilient economic recovery following the COVID-19 outbreak”. He started by arguing that the Covid-19 crisis underscores the interaction between biodiversity loss, soil erosion, climate change, environmental degradation and human activity. It is estimated that the warming climate may encourage even higher disease transmission rates. Furthermore, the world, in general, faces a higher systemic risk through the combination of multiple crises, like the climate crisis, socioeconomic crisis and biodiversity loss. Emmanuel argued that sustainability is the ultimate way out of these systemic crises. He said that postponing the carbon neutrality goal of 2050 is not an option and there can be no trade-offs between a quick and a sustainable recovery. Otherwise, the world will be exposed to even higher risks. Emmanuel then stressed the importance of a sustainable finance sector. A sustainable finance sector will be more resilient, which is important, as we expect more shocks from the climate crisis, such as more wildfires. On the other hand, the recovery also needs to create more jobs and employment opportunities to address the socioeconomic challenges of the crisis.

Emmanuel presented several aspects of the Recovery Package proposal of the European Commission. The “Next Generation EU” plan has the ambition of accelerating the green and digital transition in the EU and is aimed at reinforcing the Green Deal that was presented earlier in 2020. The investments taken in the framework of the recovery package should be in line with the principles of sustainable finance. One aspect of the recovery plan is the flagship investment programme, “InvestEU”, which will amount for €15.3 billion. The fund will focus on projects in sustainable infrastructure and, in particular, clean energy, building renovation and clean mobility. All investments will be subject to sustainability proofing to ensure that they align with the Green Deal and make appropriate use of the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy.

Emmanuel then argued that the financial system, in general, is not yet transitioning fast enough, so the Green Deal includes a renewed sustainable finance strategy. This is a comprehensive strategy that not only involves financial institutions, but also citizens and public authorities. The foundations for sustainable investment need to be strengthened, he argued. A sustainable investment approach is based on three pillars: Firstly, the foundations for sustainable investment need to be strengthened. Secondly, there will be increased opportunities for citizens to act as responsible investors. Another question is what the EU can do to scale up sustainable finance globally. Thirdly, the financial system needs to manage climate and environmental risks.

The European Commission, according to Emmanuel Buttin, believes that sustainable finance can play a key role in three areas: (a) Socio-economic issues need to be integrated more prominently; (b) in addition, resilience towards climate and ecological risks needs to be increased; and finally, (c) sustainable finance tools should be used to guide a green recovery, to jumpstart economies and to adhere to the Paris Agreement.

In the **Question & Answer (Q&A)** session that followed the presentation, one participant wanted to know when the taxonomy rules will be fully operational. Emmanuel Buttin answered that there will be different phases. Firstly, the European Commission is currently working on identifying a first set of activities that align with the objectives of climate mitigation. These will be published at the end of 2020. Secondly, his team is working on identifying delegated acts that align with other sustainable objectives, such as clean water or circular economy. These will be published by the end of 2021. Finally, the taxonomy will be applied to corporations and investors by 2022.

A second question from the participants concerned the role of the SDGs in sustainable finance. Emmanuel Buttin answered that the taxonomy will not be able to cover all of them, but the aim is to contribute as much as possible to achieving the SDGs.

Tatyana Teplova, Head of Division for Policy Coherence for SDGs at the OECD, talked about “Building a Coherent Response for a Sustainable Post-COVID-19 Recovery: Evidence from a recent OECD survey”. According to the survey, 79% of policy practitioners are struggling with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and 77% perceive challenges to be those related to governance or leadership. Tatyana argued that since Covid-19 has exacerbated certain challenges, effective governance and policy coherence are now needed more than ever. The crisis has strong potential, however, to undermine policy coherence in sustainable development. For example, the World Bank estimates that up to 200 million people might be pushed into extreme poverty.

Tatyana then underlined the need to balance short-term recovery measures with international commitments to sustainability. While 80% of the surveyed policy practitioners answered that the SDGs can be a roadmap out of the Covid-19 crisis, there is a risk of trading off longer term sustainable recovery measures with giving short-term relief for the economy. The preliminary analysis conducted by the OECD on crisis responses has shown that most measures have around a one-year horizon.

Tatyana also stressed the need for a stronger coordination to build the long-term recovery. Different ministries need to cooperate across their “sectoral silos” within their national governments. A lack of coordination mechanisms, according to Tatyana, undermines the capacity of governments. The OECD survey also found that the involvement of the private sector and civil society has been very limited. She argued that there is strong potential of integrating public policies, but there is also a need for awareness raising campaigns by non-state actors.

Another challenge is the absence of readily available data on the impacts of Covid-19 and on recovery mechanisms on the achievement of the SDGs.

Finally, Tatyana introduced the ways in which the OECD can help to facilitate national and international efforts to ensure a sustainable recovery: It can give recommendations on policy coherence and work with countries bilaterally to help them align with international agreements; the OECD is also working on establishing an online portal with practical tools to strengthen capacities and institutional mechanisms.

During the **Q&A session** after the presentation, one participant asked whether the OECD will be developing specific recommendations on how the SDGs can be included in recovery programmes. Tatyana answered that the OECD believes that the general recommendations for policy coherence for sustainable development are sufficient to serve as a guideline. Nevertheless, since the OECD

acknowledges that the challenges are now greater due to the current crisis, they are ready to work with individual member states and support specific needs.

For the PowerPoint Presentation, please visit the [ESDN website](#).

Adina Vălean, European Commissioner for Transport from Romania, started her talk on “COVID-19 and the European Green Deal” by stating that the travel restrictions and border closures within the EU were one of the most visible aspects of the shutdown. The long-term losses in growth and development will be hard to reverse.

Adina Vălean presented the recovery plan, “Next Generation EU”, as an additional tool to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This objective had already been embedded in all proposals before the Covid-19 outbreak. This will be part of a twin transition of digitalisation and sustainability in the EU. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Commission brought forward three layers of proposals: Firstly, it ensured that the economy was kept running. Secondly, there was the challenge of structuring a coordinated exit strategy from the lockdown and border closures. Finally, the European Commission had to develop a recovery plan based on the assessment of needs.

Adina Vălean’s own sector, transport, was one of the hardest hit. There were substantial supply chain disruptions due to border closures, a 90% decline of domestic and international travel, and overall reduced connectivity throughout Europe.

The recovery plan proposed by the European Commission, “Next Generation EU”, builds on the €1.1 trillion Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) by adding an additional €750 billion. Adina pointed out that this recovery package is unprecedented in many ways: Firstly, it mobilises the entire EU budget. Secondly, it also raises capital on the market. Finally, there is a clear purpose – setting the economy on a recovery path while simultaneously pursuing the green and digital agenda. Adina argued that even though there is no ear-marked funding, it is clear that those economic sectors that have suffered the most, such as tourism and transport, will benefit.

Adina then presented the different mechanisms of the “Next Generation EU” recovery package. The Recovery and Resilience facility provides €560 billion that will be beneficial for all sectors as long as they align with the European Semester. The strategic investment facility is focused on critical infrastructure and supply chains. Its goal is to stimulate sustainable infrastructure investment also from the private sector. Overall, all funds from the MFF and “Next Generation EU” will continue to support the goals of sustainability and digitalisation.

Concerning her own sector, transport, Adina Vălean said that the crisis had changed a lot, indeed, but not the need for smart and sustainable mobility. A total of 80% of the budget for transport is already targeted towards climate action, while in the Multiannual Financial Framework and the recovery package only 25% are earmarked for climate action. She hopes to present the strategy on smart and sustainable transport by the end of 2020. This strategy will outline how transport will commit to achieving the 2030 Agenda and will guarantee connectivity all over Europe.

Overall, the goal of the recovery plan is to become more sustainable, while also remaining sustainable at the global stage. This is evident in many policy areas, such as agriculture and circular economy. All policies need to create resilience in the wake of future crises that are sure to come.

Adina Vălean also pointed out that the recovery plan is firmly embedded in the Green Deal and she hopes that the EU Member States will agree to it. She ended her presentation by reiterating that sustainable development needs increased investment and full support. Governments need to focus on sustainability, also in their budgets.

There were several questions in the **Q&A session** for Adina Vălean. One participant asked how the 2030 Agenda is mainstreamed in the portfolios of all the different sectoral Commissioners? Adina answered by reiterating that 25% of the entire budget will be mainstreamed for the sustainability and green agenda. Additionally, policies will have to be fine-tuned with companies and national governments, as well as the European Investment Bank. All areas that provide financing will be streamlined along climate commitments and environmental standards. Adina admitted that this is an ongoing process, but that the commitment is there.

The next question concerned Adina Vălean's experience in the Commission during the crisis. She was asked what her most remarkable experience was. She firstly stated that the whole experience in itself was remarkable and unprecedented. In the beginning of March 2020, the European Commission created a task force of Commissioners, including the health and transport sectors. According to Adina Vălean, this task force was in 'war mode' every day trying to come up with proposals for coordination at the European level. With regard to transport, there were no more flights and long queues of trucks at the borders. She had the idea to build green lines for trucks to ensure that important supply chains were kept intact. She also found it impressive how all the different line ministers coordinated amongst each other and tried to unblock the policy silos. Currently, the taskforce is no longer in 'war mode', because money and regulations are in place now to coordinate the situation. However, of course, the health challenge remains severe. Adina said that the lessons learned from the crisis are going to be in a chapter in the new transport strategy, so that the experiences are taken up for the future. One of the most important lessons learned was the need to work together more closely.

The last question was about the main obstacles to making transport in the EU more sustainable. Adina Vălean said that there were many factors, for example pricing, technologies or finance. She reiterated that there was no silver bullet to solve all challenges, but rather the need to look at each mode of transport individually to come up with a basket full of measures. Those measures will make use of digital technologies, and aim to make transport more accessible and more efficient. The key challenge, however, remains the question of investment. There also needs to be more private investment, because the needs are huge.

Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary and Under-Secretary-General, started her presentation on "COVID-19's Effect on SDG Implementation" by stating that the Covid-19 crisis has affected almost all of the SDGs, and most consequences have been negative. Most directly, health, gender equality, and the economy have been worsened, and poverty is worsening, while inequality is rising. She also mentioned that the crisis has exposed pre-existing weaknesses in all these areas. On a more positive note, some indicators related to the planet have improved, as economic activity has been dramatically reduced. However, Olga Algayerova warned that this is only a temporary respite and that there is a serious danger that the responses to the economic crisis will undermine improvements on climate action.

Olga further said that governments face a triple challenge: they need to respond to the immediate socioeconomic effects of the crisis; try to reverse negative impacts; and need to align the recovery measures with the 2030 Agenda.

Europe has been greatly hit by Covid-19, also because it is highly interconnected and urbanised. Now, the situation is improving, but with great differences across the regions. Some of the most prominent impacts have been a "supply shock" resulting from forced closures of existing businesses and the disruption of supply chains. Now there is a "demand shock" due to the economic consequences for many workers. Middle-income countries are struggling with reduced remittances, which have contributed to their economic downturn. All economies also face financing shocks from liquidity pressures of companies. Now, the initial impacts are fading as lockdown measures are slowly being eased. However, as Olga stated, the capacity of countries to implement recovery measures greatly varies across the different regions, which she views as a substantial limitation to recovery.

Olga Algayerova also presented an economic outlook for the UNECE region. All countries will experience negative growth. A recovery is not expected until 2021, but it will likely be insufficient to offset the losses of this year. Therefore, we need active labour policies, also because low-skilled workers are among the most affected workers.

Olga then talked about the UN framework that shaped the UN's response in the past months. It is built on five pillars: health; protecting people; economic response and recovery; a macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration; and building social cohesion and community resilience. All 30 UN Agencies need to coordinate under this framework in the UNECE region.

In order to go forward, Olga Algayerova stressed the necessity to “build back better” and to exploit the opportunity for SDG implementation to be accelerated. It is imperative that government responses to economic support be aligned with the 2030 Agenda. A particular focus should be on climate change mitigation, with a focus on clean energy and infrastructure and reducing the dependence on fossil fuels. According to a study by the International Energy Agency (IEA), if the right investments are made right now, global greenhouse gas emissions will have peaked in 2019. The International Labour Organisation also states that the appropriate policies can achieve synergy effects on multiple SDGs, for example by investing in public transport.

The UNECE proposes policy tools on three main areas: Firstly, connectivity should be facilitated, for example through enhancing cooperation of a harmonised regulatory framework for border crossings. Secondly, transboundary and other risks should be addressed through promoting the use of existing multilateral environmental agreements to deal with various risks for informed decision-making. Finally, stakeholders should support a green and resilient recovery, in particular improved resource use, promotion of the circular economy, and tapping into the potential of cities.

Olga Algayerova then presented five aspects of what needs to be done next: Firstly, uncertainty should be reduced. The 2030 Agenda can be a blueprint for concerted action in support of sustainable development. Secondly, we need to rebuild. This needs to happen in alignment with the SDGs. Thirdly, we need to reconnect through addressing the disruptions to trade and transport. Here, digital tools can be especially helpful. Fourthly, we need to rethink new approaches for resilience and efficiency, with a particular focus on circularity. Finally, Olga stressed the importance of regionalisation. As globalisation is slowly being eroded, the importance of regional level policy-making is going to increase. Therefore, concerted regional action should be reinforced as a building block for multilateral cooperation.

In the **Q&A session** after the presentation, one participant asked for practical advice for implementing the SDGs at a time when we are already struggling with a very complex situation. Olga Algayerova again pointed to the potential and strength of the 2030 Agenda. 193 member states agreed on, and adopted, the SDGs. This is the best blueprint for development that humanity has ever had available as of today. She argued that the SDGs are more relevant than ever before. Multilateral cooperation and solidarity are crucial, as we cannot achieve anything if we close ourselves off from the rest of the world. She ended her statement by saying that she is optimistic that if we work together, we can achieve many positive things.

The **Plenary Discussion** on “Creating a more sustainable world after COVID-19 – What is needed to strengthen SD policy?” started with a word cloud exercise (Figure 1, see next page), during which participants were asked to submit three aspects that they thought were necessary to strengthen SD policy.

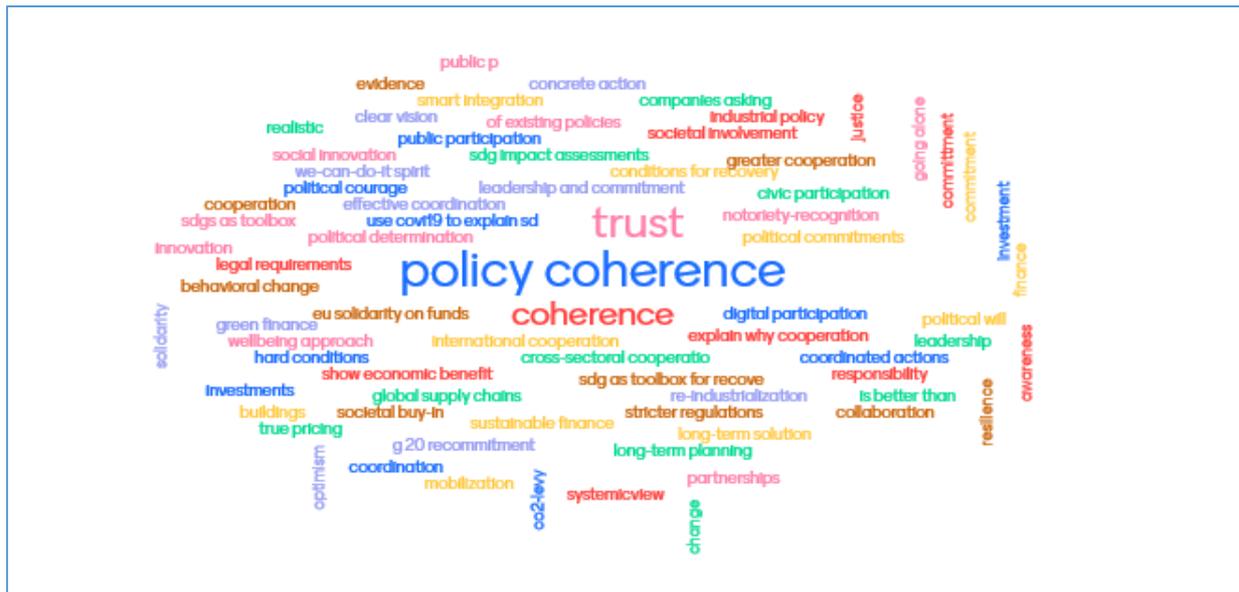


Figure 1: Word Cloud: Creating a more sustainable world after Covid-19 – what is needed to strengthen SD policy?

A clear favourite was **policy coherence**, its relative size indicating that many people submitted this answer. Another important word was **trust**. Other suggestions were related to **societal cohesion** and **involvement**, using the SDGs as a toolbox, and **cooperation**.

In the following discussion, one participant suggested to **be more practical**. There is huge buy-in for the SDGs on a theoretical level, but it is not clear how it can translate into actual policy-making. Therefore, a toolbox would be useful on how to integrate the SDGs. There is a clear need to continue making the SDGs more practical and proving what the benefits are. For this, the participant also called for more research. Overall, the concepts should be less theoretical and more practical.

Another participant suggested **changing the power dynamics**. In the decade preceding Covid-19, we have experienced a weakening of policy-making compared to the power of markets. Policy-making has been more reactive to markets and was not based on science. This has led to a decrease in trust in science and evidence-based policymaking. This trust in science has been revived in the past few months and policy has been very clearly based on science. While this has so far only been applied to virology, there is now a short window of opportunity for proactive policymaking. Therefore, we should not continue as before, but rather think about fundamental new approaches to design new systems. The participant concluded by stating that in his opinion, sustainability is a design issue and that this is our chance for a new design.

A third participant stressed the importance of **policy coherence on the EU level**. The different Commissioners need to align their strategies and there needs to be better crisis management. Finally, the European Semester should be based on the 17 SDGs to achieve better policy coherence.

Session 2: COVID-19 recovery and its effects on national implementation of the SDGs

Session 2 was comprised of four national level presentations (Romania, Germany, France, and Austria) and their Covid-19 recovery strategies and how they have integrated SD into these strategies. As a direct response to these presentations, three more countries (Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) gave shorter inputs, comparing their country's experience to what had been presented by the other countries.

Romania

Luminița Bălăău, from the Department of Sustainable Development at the Romanian Prime Minister's Office presented the Romanian response to the Covid-19 crisis. Overall, Romania has made progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda on all goals in recent years. However, the COVID-19 crisis will influence the country's performance in achieving the SDGs by 2030.

SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), for which Romania has made significant progress, are in danger of stagnation or significant setbacks. The UN 2030 Agenda was translated into the Romanian Sustainable Development Strategy and will be used as a roadmap for a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. For this, the Romanian Government is preparing a consolidated economic recovery package. The post Covid-19 recovery plan will be designed based on the 2020 National Reform Programme, and investment and reform priorities are identified as part of the European Semester.

Luminița then outlined the potential financial sources for the package: the national budget, loans on the international and domestic markets, bonds for citizens or corona bonds -between 1,000 and 2,000 billion Euros, grants or loans to Member States offered by the EC, other European programs or IFI (SURE program -employment measures; EIB, IBRD, IMF resources).

Concerning SDG 1, Romania implemented many short-term relief measures. For example, education incentives for disadvantaged families that usually depend on school attendance by the children were continued to be paid out, irrespective of whether children participated in online school or went to kindergarten. In June, the Romanian Government started to deliver food and basic hygiene products and other supplies.

Regarding the implementation of SDG 3 (Good Health), Romania's national SDG targets include strengthening the resilience of the health system, including in the areas of health workers and medical products and improve access to health services for all. During the emergency, there was already no obligation to use the national health insurance card to access medical services and medications.

In order to ensure quality education (SDG 4), Romanian television has developed a TV learning programme. Furthermore, an openly accessible education website has been launched and operationalised. In the future, Romania plans to strengthen infrastructure, skills and digital learning in order to ensure equal access to education.

Like all other countries, Romania experienced an economic downturn and an increase in unemployment as a consequence of the Covid-19 shutdown. In order to mitigate immediate effects, parents who had to stay home with children were paid 75% of their salary by the state. In the future, Romania plans to develop flexible working arrangements to mitigate impacts of the crisis. Also, the employment of young graduates and older people will be supported.

To address the challenges related to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), an aid scheme for SMEs was rolled out during the height of the crisis. To achieve its 2030 targets, Romania plans to foster public investment projects and to promote private investment to foster the economic recovery. This investment should be focused on the green and digital transition, in particular on sustainable transport, digital service infrastructure, clean and efficient production and the use of environmental infrastructure, including in coal regions. Furthermore, the focus will be on a more resource efficient, circular manufacturing model.

During the emergency, public institutions have established strategic partnerships with specialists from the private sector to create tools that facilitate online interaction with citizens. In the long-term, the goal is to digitalise public administration and improve its quality and decision-making, including through the involvement of social partners. This is to improve achievement of SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Overall, the government is reshaping its priorities in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it needs to stick to its long-term sustainable objectives as set out in the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS). The realities and findings of the Covid-19 crisis will be taken into account in the National Action Plan for implementing the NSDS.

Luminița pointed out that Romania has initiated the adherence process at the OECD Recommendations on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development to better align policies across sectors with the SDGs. Furthermore, the government proactively promotes the alignment of the European Semester with the SDGs. Finally, with support from the OECD, the government is working on developing Romania's institutional capacity and leadership skills for policy coherence and SDG integration and coordination to trigger a more strategic and results-oriented management approach across the public administration in post-Covid recovery.

For the PowerPoint Presentation, please visit the [ESDN website](#).

Germany

Marie-Louise von Münchhausen from the German Federal Chancellery presented the German recovery strategy. She started by stating that the relevance of sustainable development for German politics has not been weakened by Covid-19, but has rather been strengthened. As a first step to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 in Germany, there were emergency measures to bolster the health system and to prevent job losses, bankruptcy and poverty.

In early June 2020, the German Government introduced its national Covid-19 recovery programme. Quite early in the public discussion preceding the recovery programme, there was a consensus that investments need to be directed towards sectors that move forward climate action, such as renewable energies, energy efficiency of buildings and mobility. These areas have now become important pillars for the recovery programme. The programme is designed to serve as a catalyst in the process of boosting renewable energy, with specific investments into wind energy and photovoltaics. Germany was lagging behind in energy efficiency of buildings, but the recovery programme will address this.

The car industry is crucial in Germany for providing jobs. Quite early on, there was pressure from industry representatives to include subsidies for combustion engine powered vehicles in the recovery programme. However, the German Government remained firm. Instead, incentives for electric vehicles and charging infrastructure has been improved. In addition, there are investments in hydrogen and public transport networks will be expanded.

Regarding social policy, each family will receive a one-time bonus of €300 for each child. Furthermore, the VAT has temporarily been lowered to boost domestic consumption. The recovery programme also intends to support municipalities, as their income has sharply declined. Here, the focus is particularly on health and, again, public transport.

Marie-Louise then drew comparisons with the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis. This time for Covid-19 recovery, there was a broad consensus on the importance of climate action and sustainability, whereas in 2008 the focus was merely on returning to pre-crisis growth rates. However, the current crisis also brought forward forces that challenged SD principles, particularly at the beginning of the debate around the recovery package. Business unions continuously argued that climate targets would dampen the economic recovery. However, the government argued that there was no time to loose regarding climate action. However, several business federations were advocating for directing funds towards a climate neutral economy, as there seems to be a growing understanding in the business community that sustainable development is also important for businesses.

Germany was in the middle of renewing its national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) when the crisis hit. The reviewed strategy will be presented in 2021 and is likely to be adjusted in light of Covid-19. For example, there are discussions about the meaning of resilience. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) has already developed some recommendations, including: SD should be a key principle for all measures out of the crisis; recovery should speed up necessary transitions; there should be a focus on social cohesion; and cooperation on the EU level and with the Global South should be strengthened.

Marie-Louise von Münchhausen concluded her presentation with a quote by German chancellor Angela Merkel, who said that the Agenda 2030 is our compass towards a more sustainable future.

To the question of what weaknesses were exposed during the crisis, Marie Louise answered in the **Q&A session** that so far, planning has often suffered from a short-term horizon. Therefore, this needs to be enhanced. She was also asked what resilience means in the context of sustainable development in Germany. She answered that this was still being discussed, but will be an important aspect of the SD policy approach. Finally, she answered a question about advancing Green and Brown Taxonomies during the German EU Presidency by referring to the earlier presentation by Emmanuel Buttin and confirmed that they will be working on delegated acts during their presidency.

France

Stéphane Bernaudon from the French Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition presented the French strategy in response to the Covid-19 crisis. He began his presentation by outlining the six strategic priorities of the French SDG roadmap:

1. Leaving no one behind: fighting inequalities and discrimination
2. Renewing development and international solidarity policies
3. Local implementation: experimentation, innovation, participation
4. Low carbon and resource efficient patterns of consumption and production
5. Education and trainings to change behaviours
6. Access to healthcare, health environment and sustainable food and agriculture

Like most other countries, France set in place some immediate budgetary measures to support health, growth and jobs. Those were aligned with the EU Commission's communication on a coordinated economic response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Those measures included:

- The funding of partial unemployment scheme (for 1,1% of GDP);

- The strengthening of health care services, health insurance allowances and compensation of healthcare personnel (0,4% of GDP);
- The creation of a solidarity fund to provide direct support to small and very small enterprises, as well as those self-employed (0,3% of GDP);
- Tax and social charges deferrals for companies, accelerated refund of tax and VAT credit, creation of a dedicated reserve for direct support to strategic companies via equity investment and loan guarantees.

One feature of the French response directly related to SDG 3 is a broad, 300-stakeholder consultation gathered until mid-July 2002 to redefine public health policies according to four pillars.

1. Transforming jobs and upgrading healthcare workers;
2. Defining a new investment and funding policy in the service of care;
3. Radically simplifying hospital teams' organizations and day life;
4. Bringing together health actors at local level in the service of users

Furthermore, the "Citizens Convention for Climate" had already been launched before the crisis in October 2019. It concluded with 150 ambitious propositions from 150 citizens, some of which will be debated in parliament or might be brought to be voted on by citizens.

In terms of international solidarity, France will advocate for anti-Covid-19 immunisation to be a world public good. It will provide €1.2 billion to fight the COVID-19 transmission in the most vulnerable countries (a majority of which are located in Africa) It has also launched an international 18 European and African chiefs of state or government initiative to help Africa.

Concerning SDG 4 on education, France has launched internet platforms set to ensure pedagogical continuity during the lockdown. Furthermore, there is €15 million plan to fight the digital divide gap in underprivileged districts.

Bailouts for the car industry are linked to social and environmental conditions. The French car fleet will be renewed with incentives for clean vehicles. Innovation will be supported. However, companies who are facing difficulties to protect jobs will be supported. This is similar to the aviation industry. In the area of mobility, there will be an investment of €60 million to subsidize the repairing of used bikes, to help local authorities finance new infrastructures and to facilitate training for safe riding.

The government is in the process of discussing more measures. A complete recovery plan is expected by the end of August 2020. Stéphane Bernaudon concluded his presentation by emphasising the French commitment to international solidarity and cooperation.

For the PowerPoint Presentation, please visit the [ESDN website](#).

Austria

Erika Bernhard from the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs presented the Austrian strategy to mitigate the Covid-19 impacts on the country. Overall, the negotiation process for the Austrian recovery package is still ongoing. However, Erika emphasized that from the start, the Austrian response has been characterized by the spirit of leaving no one behind. This has also been applied to the three areas of SD, namely people, the economy, and the environment. From the beginning of the crisis, the measure of "Kurzarbeit" (the state continues to pay a large share of the salary while employees work reduced hours) has been employed to prevent unemployment. At one point, 1 million out of Austria's 9 million citizens were working reduced hours. There is an ongoing discussion about raising unemployment benefits in Austria. The government has provided an economic

relief fund comprising €50 billion, including investments for future growth and state sponsored guarantees.

Another focus of the Austrian Government has been the prevention of violence against women, which has been exacerbated by the crisis. This has been achieved through legal improvements, increased funding for associations fighting domestic violence and protecting survivors, and an information campaign. These measures are expected to continue after the immediate impacts of the crisis have been mitigated.

Erika Bernhard argued that the crisis is a moment for reflection and provides a chance to better integrate innovation into societal life. The Austrian Government is also committed to making the recovery green, for example through housing renovation, increased investment in renewable energy, improvement of public transport, increased funding for municipalities and for research. The bailout of the country's biggest airline, Austrian Airlines, was connected to green conditions.

Furthermore, Austria has strengthened its development cooperation and increased its budget for disaster relief and aid.

Discussion with inputs from Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland

In the following discussion, several countries were asked for short statements on their country's responses and their overall assessment of recovery measures.

Anna Bombonato from the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land, and the Sea started by presenting the emergency measures undertaken in **Italy**. These included the strengthening of the health sector, protecting the economy, and strengthening social protection systems. In the recently approved recovery plan, the focus is more on families, workers, employers, and companies. It also includes transformative measures, and is aimed at the green transition. Economic and fiscal measures are aimed at crucial fields, such as building infrastructure and transport.

Italy is currently reviewing its National Sustainable Development Strategy. Policy coherence is going to be one of the guiding tools. To this effect, Italy is cooperating with the OECD division on policy coherence for sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda continues to be the key vision for the revision process.

Anna Bombonato argued that a green recovery requires concerted action and global partnerships for the SDGs. The EU should lead by example in this area. Questioned about the revised NSDS, Anna Bombonato stated that it will maintain three pillars: vertical and horizontal integration, involvement of civil society, and the integration of policies and instruments to ensure the interlinkages. It will keep the overarching framework of the 2030 Agenda.

Sandra Pellegrom from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and national SDG advisor for all line ministries explained that after the initial emergency measures, which were quite similar to most other countries', **the Netherlands** are now entering a new phase with a more long-term outlook. In preparation, the government has asked several independent advisory bodies for input. Some advised to use the concept of well-being as an integrative concept for recovery policies. The government has also indicated that it intends to use the SDGs for recovery policies.

In general, there seems to be more awareness about the importance of an integrative view about sustainable development. This means focusing on green sustainability and inclusiveness and using the SDGs as a compass for the post-corona recovery.

In general, Sandra Pellegroni indicated her interest in exchanging tools to assess the crisis from an SDG lens and to transform the increased awareness for the SDGs into more concrete implementation. This would include assessing the consequences of the crisis and policy proposals through an SDG lens. This would also apply to proposals for a more integrative governance structure, which is not only important for the recovery from Covid-19, but also for the general transition. Finally, Sandra Pellegroni was interested in exchanging ideas about supporting businesses in using the SDGs as a framework to go forward.

In the chat, a colleague from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate of the Netherlands answered that GDP is perceived as being too narrow as an indicator for welfare and the government is moving towards looking at the broader picture, using well-being indicators and the SDGs. There is already a monitor of Well-being and SDGs, which can be found at www.cbs.nl.

Daniel Dubas from the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE) started his intervention by pointing out that despite all the emphasis on European cooperation, we should not forget that the initial response was very much focused on national issues. Every country was fighting on its own and even competing for crucial health goods. It is important to prevent that for future health crises, so international cooperation should be strengthened. Daniel Dubas is also not quite so optimistic about the potential of the crisis to lead into a sustainability transformation as many of the presenters earlier in the morning. There is the possibility, that there will be strong competition for financial means once the economic and debt crises hit. Then the priorities of public spending might no longer be on sustainability. He found it interesting to hear about the experiences from Germany and the strong political commitment for sustainable development and support from the economy. In Switzerland, the focus is still on the immediate crisis. Daniel Dubas also alluded to the French conditions for bailouts, by stating that in Switzerland only very few conditions have been applied so far.

Usually, **Switzerland** struggles with cooperation on the federal level, but this time the federal government almost completely took over and then had to coordinate with sub-federal authorities, which was challenging, but worked well in the end. The recovery in Switzerland has an economically liberal character. Liquidities to companies have been given out in forms of credits, for SMEs and large companies. These credits are backed by the federal government. Incentive programmes for a transition are rather small and so far there has been no big public investment programme. The focus is on maintaining the framework conditions for the economy.

Closing Remarks

Sami Pirkkala, one of the Vice Presidents of the ESDN Association, and László Borbély from the Romanian hosts addressed the participants to conclude the Workshop.

Sami Pirkkala encouraged all Workshop participants to contact him or the other Vice Presidents if they had any questions or feedback for the ESDN, as the ESDN wants to offer the best exchange possibilities for its members.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to human suffering and existing inequalities in societies have led to some groups suffering more than others. The response to the crisis has had severe economic impacts and as we are exiting the immediate health crisis, the question that needs to be addressed is how the economy can be recovered in a way that addresses the needs of a sustainable future.

As we have heard a lot about the challenges facing us in the coming months, Sami Pirkkala asked what ESDN members, most of which are government sustainability experts, could contribute while all of Europe is talking about a sustainable recovery. It is important to underline the importance of the 2030 Agenda, but government experts should also be able to provide decision-makers with something more concrete, such as tools for assessment. These should be as concrete as possible, which would also help to convince decision-makers to follow the 2030 Agenda.

He thanked all speakers and particularly highlighted the top speakers from the European Commission, the OECD and UNECE. He also thanked the contributions from the individual country cases. There is still a lot of uncertainty surrounding the recovery and how it will affect the SDGs.

He thanked all those who made the Workshop happen, including the participants who contributed to the discussions. These contributions are part of what made the virtual Workshop work so well. Nevertheless, the flagship event of the ESDN, the ESDN Conference 2020 can hopefully take place as a physical event in Berlin on 12-13 October 2020.

László Borbély concluded the Workshop on behalf of the Romanian hosts. He said that he hopes that it will soon be possible to show all participants Romanian hospitality. He referred to Daniel Dubas' point about the competition, which may arise regarding resources in the recovery process. László Borbély called for a society that is not built on fear and suspicion, but rather, we have to be brave and responsible. We have the 2030 Agenda to build a sustainable future.

The 2030 Agenda does not only provide the tools, but also the guideline for a new mentality and movement. We need more dialogue, we need to include the scientific aspects of the SDGs and we need to use the momentum for a new approach in the European Union. It needs to be based more on an inter-institutional framework and comprehensive strategies. Furthermore, there needs to be a new mentality of circular economy and we need to figure out ways to support companies on how to achieve that.

László Borbély concluded the Workshop with an appeal to all participants to remain strong for the SDGs.

