

Belgium

Renewed political commitment at all levels and a long tradition towards sustainable development facilitate horizontal and vertical coherence. The commitment to sustainable development (SD) is enshrined in the Belgian constitution since 2007, to which the federal state, communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking) and regions (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels-Capital) must contribute. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda relies on a variety of existing SD strategies adopted by respective levels of government. At the federal level, a 2050-time horizon Vision for SD was adopted in 2013 encompassing 55 long-term objectives, a set of indicators and federal plans. The federal strategy has been implemented through a five-year policy learning cycle (“report-plan-do-check-act”) since 1997. At the regional level, key strategic frameworks include: the second Walloon Strategy for SD, approved in 2016; Flemish Vision 2050 – a long-term strategy for Flanders; the Regional SD plan adopted by the Brussels-Capital Region; and the second regional development plan of the German-speaking Community. Reflections are underway to adapt existing commitments and the institutional architecture for policy coherence for development to the new realities of the 2030 Agenda.

A new overarching strategic framework serves as a platform for the Belgian federal system to pursue the 2030 Agenda and SDGs coherently. The first National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), approved in 2017, provides the umbrella for the main governmental actors at both federal and federated levels to combine their efforts to achieve the SDGs in a Belgian context. Priority themes include: sustainable food, sustainable building and housing, sustainable public procurement, means of implementation, awareness-raising and contributions to follow-up and review. There is a common understanding among the NSDS signatories of the need for strengthened forms of co-ordination. The NSDS envisages a national 2030 Agenda implementation report to be issued jointly to all parliaments twice per government term.

An institutional framework promoting transversal work and participation at all levels enhances policy coherence. The Interministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD) – composed of federal, regional and community ministers responsible for SD and development co-operation – has been revitalised as the central co-ordination mechanism for SDG implementation. The Inter-departmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD), chaired by the Federal Institute for SD, provides for co-ordination between federal government departments. Different mechanisms also support co-ordination within each level of power and help engage different societal groups, such as the multi-stakeholder advisory Federal Council for Sustainable Development and the Advisory Council for Policy Coherence for Development (PCD). The institutional framework should enable the country to ensure an effective interface between local, sub-national, national and international implementation, and honour its commitment to PCSD, provided that it allows for cross-sectoral action and enhanced capacities to assess the transboundary impact of domestic policies.

Table 3.2. Institutional mechanisms for PCSD in Belgium

Building Block	Belgium
Political commitment	The legal and strategic frameworks across the different federal entities reflect Belgium’s commitment to policy coherence. The 2013 Law on Development Cooperation refers to policy coherence for development, and an intergovernmental declaration (both federal and federated governments) regarding adherence to PCD was signed in 2014. Reflections are underway to adapt PCD institutional architecture to the new realities of the 2030 Agenda.
Policy integration	At the federal level, integration is promoted through the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable

	Development (ICSD). The Public Service for SD was granted permanent status as the Federal Institute on SD (FISD) in 2013, and supports ministries and other stakeholders in integrating SD into their core business. The Task Force on Sustainable Development (TFSD) of the Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) reports on the current situation and makes policy evaluations and forecasts, supporting policy integration. A key instrument is the Long-Term Vision Statement for the Belgian 2030 outlook, which focusses on enhancing social cohesion, adapting the economy to economic, social and environmental challenges, protecting the environment and taking societal responsibility. In Wallonia an independent SD advisory unit was set up in 2013 within the Walloon administration. It is responsible for delivering "sustainable development advisories" at the request of government, the administrations, or on their own initiative, based on the principles of SD and the SDGs. In Flanders a specific working group on sustainable development is guiding the translation of the SDGs into goals relevant for Flemish policy and to further their implementation. In the Brussels-Capital Region, new legislation concerning development aid was adopted in the summer of 2017 with the goal of enabling a structural dialogue between the several regional services to improve PCSD.
Intergenerational timeframe	The strong legal base for sustainable development provides stability. The federal level vision is based on a horizon of 2050, going well beyond the electoral cycle. The Interministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD) has no end date.
Policy effects	The federal long-term vision for sustainable development (2013) gave structure to a new ex-ante impact assessment tool. The Sustainable Impact Assessment (SIA) tool was integrated into the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in January 2014. The RIA aims for policy coherence by assessing the possible effects of the preliminary draft regulations on the dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and the public services.
Co-ordination	The IMCSD, composed of federal, regional and community ministers responsible for SD and development co-operation is the central co-ordination mechanism. Some representatives attend both the IMCSD and ICSD. Additional co-ordination platforms exist between different ministries on themes such as gender, poverty, and sustainable peace or the link between peace and climate. Federal and regional actors gather in multilateral co-ordination meetings where trade-offs and synergies among economic, social and environmental but also political policy objectives are identified and discussed.
Local involvement	The IMCSD invites representatives from provinces and local governments to participate in advocacy and awareness-raising events. Cities and municipalities were also involved in preparations for the first Belgian VNR. The actions undertaken in the provinces and local governments, as well as other actors, are collected on the website www.SDGs.be .
Stakeholder participation	Belgium strives for a participative process at all levels of policy making, including stakeholders inside and outside of the government. Advisory councils consisting of civil society and academia such as the Federal Council for Sustainable Development or the Advisory Council for Policy Coherence for Development contribute to PCSD.
Monitoring and reporting	The Federal Planning Bureau publishes a report on the implementation of the SDGs in Belgium twice per government term. The indicators are currently being updated. The NSDS also envisions reporting to the general public twice per legislature. At the Federal level, within ICSD there is an annual reporting of the administrations that contribute to sustainable development. Indicators for the 2050-time horizon Vision for SD are available online: www.indicators.be .

Note: According to Belgium's institutional set-up, the Federal State, Communities and Regions are all considered equal from a legal viewpoint. They have powers and responsibilities for different fields, but without any hierarchy between them. Thus, the term "local involvement" applies only to provinces and local authorities (cities and municipalities).

Box 3.1. Breaking down policy silos in Belgium

At the federal level

The **new Comprehensive Approach** strategy note, designed jointly by the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry for Development Cooperation and the Ministry of Defence, sets out a coherent approach to Belgian foreign policy. Conscious that complex situations generally raise challenges of very different natures (political, social, ecological, economic, military, security), the Comprehensive Approach embeds development with in diplomacy, defence and the rule of law. The strategy note builds on the approach already developed for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (SDG

16 in particular), and helps to progressively break down the different policy silos. Recent examples include Belgian contributions to peace and stability in Iraq and in the Sahel, where permanent dialogue, evaluation and adjustment of Belgium's approach requires all departments concerned to collectively set the overarching priorities and adjust mutual efforts.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has adjusted its internal organisational structure in light of synergies and created a department competent for environment and climate that covers both development and multilateral aspects of this theme.

At the regional level

Vision 2050 in Flanders has identified seven transition priorities as flagship initiatives cutting across policy areas and requiring involvement of different ministers: the circular economy; smart living; industry 4.0; lifelong learning and a dynamic professional career; healthcare and living together in 2050; transport and mobility; and energy. The focus is on addressing regional challenges and achieving significant progress in key opportunity areas rather than trying to implement an all-encompassing approach. This makes the transition towards a sustainable path more manageable and concrete for stakeholders and public opinion while facilitating co-operation amongst departments and, ultimately, faster and better results. It also facilitates continuous learning amongst all stakeholders, although respective responsibilities for results could be clearer.

Source: OECD (2018), "Country profiles: Institutional mechanisms for policy coherence", in *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2018: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264301061-6-en>.