

Building a coherent response for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery

Preliminary version

Updated 13 July 2020





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Towards a Policy Coherence Roadmap (Preliminary version)

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The world is facing an unprecedented multidimensional crisis that demands coherent policy responses. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are even more relevant today than ever before as they aim to transform the systems that undermine well-being and perpetuate vulnerabilities. The devastating human, social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world may reverse by decades the progress made in achieving the SDGs in all countries. As the situation unfolds, and given the immediate priority to ensure a rapid recovery there is a risk that plans for a “decade of action” advancing the SDGs are side-tracked. This brief aims to present a policy coherence roadmap, which can support governments in ensuring that recovery from the COVID-19 crisis does not come at the expense of their efforts to achieve the SDGs at home and abroad. It calls for coherent responses that help accelerate progress towards the SDGs and build resilience to future outbreaks.



The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is an unprecedented multidimensional global crisis that demands coherent policy responses. It has further highlighted the vulnerability of some of our basic systems – healthcare, value chains, production networks, financial markets – as well as the close links between biodiversity degradation and the transmission of infectious diseases (OECD, 2020^[1]). Such interlinkages are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, which also stresses the need “to protect the planet from degradation, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations” (UNGA, 2015^[2]).

Responding to this global crisis and building resilience against future outbreaks requires significantly changing the scale and the way our economies and societies consume and produce. It also requires transformative and integrated economic, social and environmental policies to address the underlying causes of vulnerability, including: inequalities; injustice and discrimination; weak governance and institutions; inadequate public services and infrastructure, depletion of natural resources and the degradation of biodiversity and climate. It is this context that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) become even more relevant today, given that they aim to precisely address such vulnerabilities.

The implementation of this agenda represents a formidable governance challenge to most countries however. It calls for enhancing policy coherence to effectively work across sectors and levels of government to co-ordinate long-term recovery and implementation actions, and overcome obstacles such as immediate economic and social pressures crowding out longer-term recovery initiatives. This policy brief aims to present a Policy Coherence Roadmap, which can support governments in making the necessary trade-offs and policy choices through strengthening institutional mechanisms and capacities for policy coherence in organising a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis – one that leaves no one and no country behind.

As the crisis unfolds, recent experiences in OECD countries in promoting policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) can offer lessons to address the multidimensional challenges and cross-cutting issues brought on by the pandemic. The brief draws the attention to the main obstacles to overcome at the domestic level in order to address the institutional challenges raised by the need to ensure that government responses to recover from the crisis do not come at the expense of their efforts to achieve the SDGs at home and abroad. It highlights key mechanisms and processes that can help shape sustainable policy decisions and actions in response to the pandemic.

Accelerating progress on the SDGs through COVID-19 recovery can strengthen resilience against future shocks

The SDGs envisage a world free of poverty, hunger and inequality; where good quality education, health care and decent work are available to all; and where economic growth is not at the expense of the environment. **The SDGs could provide a roadmap for building resilience against future shocks**, as they aim to transform systems that undermine well-being and perpetuate vulnerabilities. The SDGs focus on major components of the economic, social and natural asset base from which human well-being is derived. For instance the goals on water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), land, forest and ecosystems (SDG 15) and oceans (SDG 14) are essential to life and a major foundation of economic activity. Policy decisions made on each of these sectors can have significant impacts on the others, and at the same time these policy areas can be affected by how countries address climate change (SDG13). Similarly several goals are essential to address a range of deprivations and disadvantages that are still experienced by many people in access to health and social protection (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and decent and good quality jobs (SDG 8).



The post-crisis recovery responses present an opportunity to more closely align public policies with SDGs. There are four main reasons for this:

- The scale of the COVID-19 shock entails historic levels of public expenditures with more **flexible fiscal frameworks**.
- The general public is today more aware of the strong **impact of our lifestyle on the environment**. While before the crisis the effects of climate change were perceived as distant and not urgent (Romano, 2020^[3]), there is emerging evidence that the public might now be more ready for bold measures to fight the impact of the global warming. For example, according to an IPSOS opinion poll conducted across 29 countries, 65% of the surveyed agreed that climate change must be prioritised in the economic recovery (IPSOS, 2020^[4]).
- Societies showed their **ability to act** in alignment with public health measures, and **adapt** and change their habits, for instance through social isolation (road traffic fell temporarily by 70% in the UK). There is potential that some of these behavioural changes could remain past the emergency.
- The crisis showed that **no individual country is immune to global risks** nor can fight them alone. Coordinated and coherent actions at all levels of government (international, national and sub-national) and between all countries, supported by international organisations, is needed to foster public trust and meet the most immediate needs while maintaining political and economic stability as well as social cohesion. Voices are rising in favour of ‘a coordinated global partnership to support the most vulnerable countries in dealing with a crisis’ (Siwisa, 2020^[5]).

And indeed the majority of the respondents (80%) to a 2020 OECD questionnaire on policy coherence mechanisms for aligning post-COVID-19 recovery plans with the SDGs (2020 OECD Questionnaire hereafter) agree or strongly agree that the SDGs can be used as a roadmap to guide the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.¹ Yet, they also stresses a high risk that short-term economic consequences of the pandemic can side-track sustainable development and well-being priorities.

Enhancing policy coherence will be essential to recover sustainably and get back on track to achieve the SDGs

COVID-19 has triggered the most severe economic recession in nearly a century and is causing enormous damage to people’s health, jobs and well-being. Even if a second wave of infections is avoided, global economic activity is expected to fall by 6% in 2020, and the consequences will be severe and long-lasting (OECD, 2020^[6]). Millions of people have already lost their jobs and women, young people and workers on low incomes are being hit hardest (OECD, 2020^[7]). Developing countries are among those hit hardest, with the health, economic, and social shocks of the crisis adding to existing development challenges, including extreme poverty, violent conflicts, food shortages, and climate-related emergencies. While governments in developing countries have responded to the crisis, their capacity is tightly constrained. Many lack the resources to scale-up health interventions and the fiscal space to implement support measures with the risk of disproportionate impacts for poor people and socially marginalised and excluded groups (OECD, 2020^[8]).

Although the human, societal, financial and economic impacts of the pandemic and containment measures worldwide are yet to be assessed, as the situation remains highly uncertain with possibilities of a double-hit scenario (OECD, 2020^[10]), **this global crisis may significantly reverse the progress made so far in**

¹ The questionnaire was completed in May 2020 by 31 respondents from 24 different countries including from governments (53%), civil society organisations (19%), international organisations (10%), academia (9%); private sector (3%) and other (2%).



achieving national well-being and the SDGs, particularly in developing countries. According to the UN SDGs Report 2020, the COVID-19 crisis is reversing decades of progress on poverty, healthcare and education. An estimated 71 million people are expected to be pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020, the first rise in global poverty since 1998 (UN, 2020^[9]), threatening the achievement of a core goal of the 2030 Agenda: ending extreme poverty by 2030 (SDG 1). Drops in remittances to developing countries will also have an immediate impact on household incomes and informal social safety nets. The UN Report also finds that 1.6 billion already vulnerable workers in the informal economy – half the global workforce – may be significantly affected, with their incomes estimated to have fallen by 60 per cent in the first month of the crisis; and that more than one billion slum dwellers worldwide are acutely at risk from the effects of COVID-19, suffering from a lack of adequate housing, no running water at home, shared toilets, little or no waste management systems, overcrowded public transport and limited access to formal health care facilities (UN, 2020^[9]).

The slowing economy and restrictions on business and travel activity related to COVID-19 has led to significant reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions with some positive effects on environment-related SDGs (e.g. Goals 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, and 17).² However, this decline in emission levels is not only transitory, but also insufficient.³ Overall, global CO₂ emissions are likely to decline by only about 5.5% this year (Evans, 2020^[11]), which is still far from the UN target (UNEP, 2019^[12]) of an annual 7.6% cut in emission for the next decade in order to avoid an increase in global temperature of 1.5C or more, pushing the planet beyond the ‘safe level’.⁴ This reveals the magnitude of the challenge ahead, but also the opportunity for governments to enact policies that steer the economy away from carbon. Several proposals for recovery plans, notably from the EU, are going in this direction and considering ways of securing jobs while curbing polluting activities. 13 EU Ministers of Environment wrote an Op-ed affirming that the Green Deal “must be central to a resilient recovery after COVID-19” (Climate Home News, 2020^[13]) and all 27 EU leaders have endorsed the principle that recovery packages should promote sustainable growth “integrating inter alia the green transition⁵ and the digital transformation”.⁶

Yet, that the recovery will be sustainable is not to be taken for granted. Indeed 72% of the respondents to the 2020 OECD questionnaire, agree that COVID-19 will impact their countries’ capacities to achieve the SDGs. At domestic level, creating new jobs and relaunching economic activity is tied to stark policy trade-offs in terms of sustainability. In some countries, there is pressure to weaken standards or to delay the introduction of planned climate policies (OECD, 2020^[14]). The crisis also emphasised the trend towards trade and movement restrictions and showed the consequences that such measures could have if

² The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2020^[44]) forecasts that energy-related carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, from power plants, cars and other sources in the U.S., will decrease by 7.5% in 2020. In the EU, a 58 per cent decline in carbon emissions per day of lockdown is expected, according to calculations by Sia Partners, a French consultancy specialising in energy: <https://energie.sia-partners.com/20200406/reduction-des-rejets-de-co2-en-europe-durant-le-confinement-plusieurs-medias-citent-sia>

³ The EIA forecasts that already in 2021, energy-related CO₂ emissions will increase by 3.6%.

⁴ The “safe level” is the limit above which some areas in the tropics would become too hot and dry to be habitable, many coastal cities might sink below sea level and millions could be pushed to mass migrations. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/27/weatherwatch-after-coronavirus-climate-future>.

⁵ Proposals for a structural green change include, for instance, to direct stimulus packages towards the necessary cuts to CO₂ emissions through renewable energy, zero- or low-carbon infrastructure and transport, by reducing the use of resources and the impact of waste disposal

⁶ EURACTIV, “EU leaders back ‘green transition’ in pandemic recovery plan”, 8 April 2020: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-leaders-back-green-transition-in-pandemic-recovery-plan/>



enlarged, generating supply-chain disruptions in food or other essential goods and services. For instance in countries that are not in a position to stockpile supplies or add surge capacity in their health workforce, supply disruptions might increase their vulnerability to a second wave of the pandemic, undermining global efforts to prevent it (OECD, 2020^[15]). A number of OECD countries are highly dependent on foreign-trained health workers which can contribute to the brain drain of qualified health workers from developing countries. Thus the importance of coherent recovery responses that take into account cross-sectoral spillovers and potential transboundary impacts to reduce the risk of a deeper and longer-lasting recession, aggravating the global effects of the crisis and reversing progress on SDGs.

Lock-downs have also exposed the limits of individual actions, showing that in the absence of sustained policy actions and global agreements, such as the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, will not be achieved. The governments of all 58 fragile contexts have implemented some measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, including partial or full lockdowns in 19 fragile contexts (ACAPS, 2020^[16]). However, standard guidance from the World Health Organisation and national governments on staying at home, social distancing, handwashing and seeking healthcare is difficult, or even impossible, for vulnerable people in slums, refugee situations or situations of poverty and conflict to follow. As such, the numerous impacts⁷ caused by recent lock-downs and public health and social measures (WHO, 2020^[16]), and the need to develop responses that address the immediate consequences of the pandemic while contributing to global agendas, call for a comprehensive and integrated policy roadmap for sustainable recovery.

At this turning point, the UN 2030 Agenda can serve as a roadmap to guide sustainable recovery and structural change in partnership with the private sector, civil society and other key stakeholders. It is vital to consider the long-term implications of the COVID-19 crisis and ensure that the responses to tackle the consequences of the pandemic and the lock-downs support progress towards the SDGs. This requires, on the supply side, that ensuing stimulus packages and policies for recovery adopt a sustainable development lens that orient investments towards transformative areas that can accelerate the transition and progress towards the SDGs. On the demand side, this can be leveraged through public procurement policies.

Towards a policy coherence roadmap for a sustainable and inclusive recovery

Evidence suggests that a significant obstacle to advance sustainable development is the extent of regulatory and policy frameworks that are not aligned or coherent with sustainable development objectives. Identifying and addressing these incoherencies systematically will help to enhance the responsiveness of recovery strategies to the SDGs. Policy coherence in this context entails strengthening governance mechanisms and capacities to identify and manage trade-offs. For instance: how to keep social distances while continuing using public rather than private transport? How to support companies while maintaining a level playing field where more efficient and sustainable business can succeed and avoiding distortions to global competition, in particular within the interdependent market of the EU?⁸ How to ensure that women, who make up almost 70% of the healthcare workforce, are not disproportionately exposed to the virus while staying in their jobs? How to support ‘future-proofing’ companies through a rapid shift of their business models towards sustainability while safeguarding jobs? How to ensure supply of critical health goods and services including water for healthcare facilities and sanitation services; energy to power health facility equipment? How to reconcile travel and other health restrictions, with labour migration and remittance flows which have been reduced drastically, resulting in declining economic activity? For

⁷ On economic impacts, please see <https://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/june-2020/> ; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects#overview>

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_20_479



instance, seasonal migrant labour force gaps are observed in key sectors such as agriculture,⁹ as well as in a range of areas related to family and food security issues¹⁰ in countries of origin (IOM and EURASYLUM, 2020_[17]). How to ensure that policies and stimulus measures in OECD countries do not further disadvantage developing countries' economies, societies and opportunities?

The OECD Council Recommendation on PCSD provides a comprehensive framework to help countries equip policy-makers and key stakeholders with the necessary institutional mechanisms and policy tools to break out of policy silos, address integrated economic, social and environmental goals, and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. In other words, it can provide a policy coherence roadmap for a sustainable and inclusive recovery that leaves no one behind. The Recommendation presents a set of eight principles for promoting PCSD (Figure 1). While all eight principles need to be considered as an integrated set to ensure a coherent response for a sustainable recovery, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to enhancing policy coherence. Each country must determine its own institutional mechanisms and sequencing of actions according to their different national realities, capacities, and specific contexts. This is evidenced in the following sections, which draw on good PCSD practices observed in OECD countries and responses to the 2020 OECD questionnaire.

Figure 1. Guiding principles for policy coherence for sustainable development



Source: OECD Council Recommendation on PCSD: <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0381>

1. Build political commitment and leadership at the highest level

Effective leadership has been critical for taking whole-of-society approaches to respond to the multiple dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis. It has also been crucial in securing support from affected sectors and in mobilising the public's co-operation for enforcing stringent measures, which were vital to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19.

⁹ [https://asvis.it/home/46-5413/alta-sostenibilita-manodopera-in-agricoltura-carente-regolarizzare-gli-immigrati-;](https://asvis.it/home/46-5413/alta-sostenibilita-manodopera-in-agricoltura-carente-regolarizzare-gli-immigrati-)
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/03/farmers-across-europe-bank-on-improvised-armies-of-pickers-to-save-harvest>

¹⁰ World Bank predicts that global remittances could decline by 20 percent due to the economic crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>



It appears that the emergency institutional arrangements put in place to manage the pandemic in most OECD member countries report directly to the Prime Minister or the President. As such, Centres of Government, as the body or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to Heads of Government and the Council of Ministers, or Cabinet have played a key role in coordinating government operations during the crisis (OECD, forthcoming^[11]). In addition to these emergency committees and structures, many countries have opted to appoint a coordinator or single point of contact to better articulate the national response horizontally across different ministries, sectors and jurisdictions (OECD, forthcoming^[11]). In **Korea**, for example, crisis management was led directly by the Prime Minister and coordinated by the Office for Government Co-ordination within the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Implementation and roll-out of decisions is the responsibility of a cross-departmental crisis team (the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters), which allocates departmental roles and responsibilities (OECD, 2020^[18]).

Given the potential for conflict among various interests and priorities both in the public and private sectors, strong political leadership is needed to shape the national debate and support recovery strategies aligned with long-term sustainable development goals. The OECD Recommendation on PCSD calls for building a strong political commitment and leadership at the highest political level to foster whole-of-government action for enhancing PCSD (OECD, 2019^[19]). Clear government commitment to the SDGs and to policy coherence and effective communication of these commitments will be essential to steer integrated and long-term policy responses to the COVID-19 and subsequent action across the government.

2. Consider the long-term implications of recovery

Ensuring a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis demands a long-term strategic vision to support present needs and those of future generations in a balanced manner. It entails making informed choices and considering the consequences of today's decisions, and building resilience against the long-term shocks that will affect the economy, society, and environment. In fact, OECD evidence demonstrates that the recovery measures adopted by governments are mobilising considerable resources, while also creating long-lasting effects on society and the economy (OECD, 2020^[20]). Managing potential trade-offs between short and long-term priorities is a key element for enhancing PCSD. Governments around the world have adopted long-term perspectives in developing strategies and implementation plans for the SDGs. **Slovenia, Finland and Belgium**, for example, have used long-term visions with a timeline up to 2050 to design their national sustainable development strategy.

However, with countries' circumstances and priorities now shifting, at least in the short-term, such existing strategies risk being side-lined by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, to exit from the crisis, some governments may be pressured to stimulate the economy by boosting traditional industry, e.g. through authorising more coal plants or reducing car efficiency standards. While this could have positive impacts on the economy or employment in the short-term, it goes counter to long-term efforts to halt climate change. Not only is this incoherent, it is also costly as one set of policies undermine another set of policies. Governments and tax payers get less value for money.

As such, there is an opportunity for governments to build "forward" better, find ways to update and adapt – not undermine – their strategic plans for SDG implementation, so that these take into account emerging and new challenges facing countries in a post-COVID-19 world and avoid that young people and future generations shoulder the burdens of the crisis disproportionately. Governments can take into account youth and intergenerational considerations in designing inclusive recovery measures through national budgeting, performance reporting, and fiscal sustainability analysis more widely, also leveraging the expertise present in independent fiscal institutions (OECD, 2020^[13])

The crisis has also made visible *countries' vulnerabilities in preparedness*: critical stockpiles of facial masks and other personal protection equipment, diagnostic testing equipment, etc., were not large enough to deal



with the sudden onset of the pandemic. Health systems also showed different levels of resilience. While the stress on health systems was unprecedented in modern times, the crisis revealed that the insufficient response capacities also resulted from past low levels of investments in health infrastructure, personnel and research. The situation might not have worsened so rapidly had governments adopted and implemented more and better public governance tools to foster resilience and anticipate risks. In that regard, this crisis has reinforced the need to strengthen the *strategic role played by Centres of Government*, beyond response coordination, in mobilising the administration to develop capacities for anticipation and planning (OECD, forthcoming^[11]).

Strategic foresight offers one approach to assist vision-building and decision-making in the face of uncertainty. Better anticipating future risks and opportunities on countries' SDG implementation requires strategic and integrated planning across sectors and population groups. Governments can avail of a number of strategic foresight tools to this end. Applying a PCSD lens would require ensuring that these tools also contribute to anticipating policy interactions and transboundary impacts to the extent possible.

Strategic foresight for anticipating future risks and crises

Benefits of strategic foresight:

- **Stress testing and future proofing policy advice and recommendations.** Asking how well current or proposed policies would perform under different future conditions can help make policies more robust and adaptive.
- **Identifying unseen challenges and opportunities.** Considering possible future developments in advance allows work to begin on strategies to prevent or mitigate new challenges or seize new opportunities that could be generated by the COVID-19 crisis and its cascading impacts.
- **Designing innovative and forward-looking policy actions and strategies.** Foresight can help to generate new thinking and directions on how best to advance societal goals and global well-being by challenging and expanding our perceptions of what is possible in the future.

Strategic foresight tools:

- **Horizon scanning:** seeking and researching signals of change in the present and their potential future impacts.
- **Megatrends analysis:** exploring and reviewing of large-scale changes building in the present at the intersection of multiple policy domains, with complex and multidimensional impacts in the future.
- **Scenario planning:** developing multiple stories or images of how the future could look in order to explore and learn from them in terms of implications for the present.
- **Visioning and back-casting:** developing an image of an ideal (or undesirable) future state, and working backwards to identify what steps to take (or avoid).

Sources: Strategic Foresight for Better Policies Building Effective Governance in the Face of Uncertain Futures, OECD, October 2019; Strategic Foresight for the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond: Using futures-thinking to design better public policies, OECD, June 2020. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=134_134395-2n53o8sh0y&title=Strategic-foresight-for-the-COVID-19-crisis-and-beyond-Using-futures-thinking-to-design-better-public-policies.

COVID-19 could also mean that *previously long-term visions are accelerated* – including as they relate to SDG implementation – and that reforms happen faster than they would otherwise have done. We are



already seeing barriers (e.g. antiquated laws, political disagreement) to digitalisation that have been argued over for years or even decades dissolve in days. For example, telemedicine has been controversial but has become the norm almost overnight. While this digital transformation is giving countries new avenues to better detect, prevent, respond to and recover from COVID-19, it also raises a number of risks such as diversion of resources to potentially ineffective digital tools, exacerbation of inequalities, and violation of privacy, both during and after the outbreak. This calls for improved health data governance frameworks to safeguard privacy, including having systems for secure data exchange, automatic data extraction from clinical records, and secure data access mechanisms for research. Health systems must also be strengthened to become capable of providing national and global data that are useable and available in near real-time for surveillance and emergency response, across national and regional borders (OECD, 2020^[21]).

3. Strengthen policy integration to capitalise on synergies across economic, social and environmental goals

Integration is essential to balancing often divergent economic, social and environmental priorities, and to maximising synergies and minimising trade-offs at all stages of the policy-making process. The SDGs were not designed as isolated targets but to be mutually supportive. This means that progress on one goal – or lack thereof – has repercussions for other Goals. An assessment of current knowledge about the interactions between the SDG targets highlights that addressing interactions can provide policy-makers with different pathways to sustainable development, and offer multiple solutions and drivers, across different sectors and jurisdictions (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019^[22]).

On the one hand, COVID-19 has confirmed some well-known SDG interlinkages and might trigger new regulative or institutional mechanisms to address them: For instance:

- The importance of providing good and quality housing for improving mental and physical health as well as to reduce exposure to close-contact infectious diseases (SDGs 3 and 11) (Howden-Chapman, 2017^[23]), became ever so apparent during long confinement periods, new criteria might emerge from this experience for defining quality housing standards for private and public housing.
- The COVID-19, as a zoonotic disease, has illustrated how the interaction between environmental and habitat changes induced by human agricultural activity can lead to ecosystems shifts, which in turn may intensify communicable disease transmission (SDG 3 and SDG 2) (Howden-Chapman, 2017^[23]), the need to slow habitat transformation might be more impellent after the COVID-19 crisis. However, habitat transformation has to be balanced against agricultural needs. This, in turn, raises the question of increasing agricultural productivity through ecological practices (SDG 2.4).

On the other hand, COVID-19 might change the directionality of some SDG interlinkages:

- In the short-term, achieving SDG 11.2 to “provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all”¹¹ by expanding public transport might be at odds with efforts to combat communicable diseases (SDG 3.3) and improve health outcomes as passengers might be more exposed to contagion. However, sustainable transport can be encouraged also by improving road infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists in context where conditions allow. Pedestrian and bicycles transport will have an impact on health targets by encouraging physical activity and reducing road injuries and deaths (SDG 3.6), while contributing to the reduction in

¹¹ SDG Indicator 11.2.1 is the proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.



transport emissions (SDG 13). This new scenario could reshape urban plans and national-urban strategies (SDG 11.3).¹²

- Investing in a low-carbon recovery might entail job losses in some industries, with consequences in terms of unemployment and indirect health and social care costs (interaction between target 13.2 and SDG 8, 9 and 10). These counteracting linkages need to be measured and addressed carefully in the post-COVID scenario. Policies investing in renewable energies and supporting retraining of workers must be adequately financed through recovery funds so that the public opinion can trust them as viable alternatives.

As the examples demonstrate, the consequences of the pandemics made clearer the linkages among sectors such as public transports, job market, health, housing, etc., and call for strengthened mechanisms and tools that can enhance policy integration. As such when considering specific measures in some sectors, there is a strong need to understand their impacts on others, so that to ensure coherence.

Governments have a range of strategic tools to advance sustainable recovery in alignment with SDGs, such as budgets, laws, regulatory policies and public procurement systems which could apply SDG/PCSD lens. Indeed, the OECD Recommendation on PCSD (OECD, 2019_[19]) calls for making strategic use of *budget process* as it constitutes an effective incentive for considering potential impacts that actions in one area of policy have on other policy domains (OECD, 2019_[24]). There are several degrees for applying **SDGs budgeting** that offer opportunities to chart financial flows against long term development goals. During COVID-19 the exceptional financial emergency and recovery measures have occurred as rapidly as their design and announcements (OECD, 2020_[25]). Under these circumstances there has been little time to assess the impact of recovery on future generations' perspectives and social and economic sustainability. However, the long-term impact of the multi-channelled recovery expenditures to support economic activity, applied to business, employees, households and industries should be identified, assessed and managed prudently to avoid longer-term sustainability shocks (OECD, 2015_[26]).

This need for early-on, recovery budgetary policies assessments, might create an opportunity for updating or strengthening national frameworks for supporting public investments including in crisis and post-crisis situations, to ensure capital budgeting “meet national development needs in a cost-effective and coherent manner”. According to the third principle of the OECD Principles of Budgetary Governance (OECD, 2015_[26]) a national framework for supporting public investment should address a range of factors including: adequate institutional capacity to appraise, procure and manage large capital projects; a stable legal, administrative and regulatory framework; coordination of investment plans among levels of government; and integration of capital budgeting within the overall medium-term fiscal plan of the government. In addition the capital investment plans are grounded on appraisals of the economic capacity gaps, infrastructural development needs and social/sectoral policies. These frameworks need to be linked to assessment and coordination mechanisms that are aligned to PCSD principles (see section 4 and 7). In particular SDG budgeting (i.e. tagging budget measures, etc.) can support a prudent assessment of costs and benefits of capital investments in terms of sustainability, affordability, relative priority among various projects, and the impact on future generations.

Lessons learned from wellbeing budgeting are that early-on small changes to budgetary policies, can have the greatest impact on fiscal sustainability, the wellbeing of future generations, and resilience to future. For instance **New Zealand** orients its spending on measures that best encourages the “well-being” of

¹² SDG Indicator 11.3.2 is the proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically.



citizens. All new spending must advance one of the priorities related to well-being such as rising inequality, a mental health crisis and climate change.¹³

Public procurement systems can in turn help ensure that the implementation of the economic recovery packages considers the sustainability dimension. Indeed, the OECD Recommendation on PCSD (OECD, 2019_[19]) also identifies **strategic procurement** as an operational tool to integrate sustainable development into sectoral policies and supporting broader outcomes consistent with the SDGs. This tool can help highlighting where public expenditures might be in contradiction with sustainability principle and shift the public budget towards sustainable goods and services. Evidence compiled by the OECD since the COVID-19 crisis (OECD, 2020_[27]) shows that countries experienced gaps in anticipating the needs and ensuring timely supply of critical goods and services when an emergency erupts. In response, some countries, including the **United Kingdom, Japan, Ireland, France and Italy** issued procurement information notes or emergency procurement law to respond quickly while avoiding risks of corruption.

In the long term, countries are considering a number of updates to increase resilience of procurement systems and improve immediate response to emergency while not compromising transparency (i.e. remote access to procurement records for audit institutions, e-procurement platforms, training for emergency procedures). This is the opportunity for a more strategic use of procurement for inclusive and sustainable development. In this sense the OECD Framework to Promote the Strategic Use of Public Procurement for Innovation recommendation (OECD, 2017_[28]) could inspire the updates of procurement methods ensuring their contribution for achieving the SDGs. For instance, public spending can support environmentally sustainable business actors. More broadly SDGs targets related to procurement activities (SDG 9) contribute to promoting accountability and preventing corruption. The OECD has promoted¹⁴ the use of strategic procurement in the context of the EU Cohesion policies, mainstreaming green, social and innovative criteria and innovative solution from pre-commercial stages of the procurement process. These recommendations could be particularly relevant to orient the implementation of the 2021-2027 EU Multiyear Financial Framework (MFF).

At the European level, the EU funding for recovery will have green strings attached and provides an unprecedented opportunity to orient investments towards the long-term transformations needed to shift towards more sustainable and resilient economies and societies while advancing on the SDGs. In addition, the EU's decision to update and use the European Semester as an instrument to integrate the SDGs can steer further policy integration within EU member states.

¹³ <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/opinion/economic-growth-is-an-unnecessary-evil-jacinda-ardern-is-right-to-deprioritise-it/31/05/?fbclid=IwAR2M52KGxgyfZnHTsbi27jnGySwzHVwrh98UvkZCPmBnN0bpSoahwZX8-18>

¹⁴ See: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/public-procurement/country-projects/public-procurement-and-cohesion-policy-objectives/>



Concrete applications of policy integration capacities for post-COVID-19 strategic decision-making

In the post-COVID-19 scenario, strengthened policy integration capacities can improve the assessment of interlinkages between the SDGs and back strategic decisions such as:

- adopting a SDG methodology for the selection of green investments;
- identifying policy interlinkages while setting the conditionality for state support and bails-out of private companies: for instance by undertaking an SDG-screening of industries that contribute to increase resiliency, and identify the ones that will need to phase-out to reduce carbon emission. For instance: Norway's USD 1 trillion wealth fund has divested itself of companies that mine 20 million tonnes of coal/year or generate greater than 10 gigawatts of power from coal.¹
- incorporating policy interlinkages in developing tax tools that incentivise more green and social investments and behaviours;
- applying SDG-proofing in future infrastructure for health, transport, education and energy investments; and
- building public-private partnership that can help reconciling sustainable objectives with the needs of those on the ground. For instance France asked to all companies that benefit from state aid during the COVID-19 crisis to stop distribute dividends or redeem their shares in 2020.²

1. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-norway-swf/norway-wealth-fund-blacklists-glencore-other-commodity-giants-over-coal-idUSKBN22P05Y>

2. <https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/articles/2020/may/6/companies-that-benefit-from-french-state-covid-19-crisis>

4. Ensure whole-of-government coordination

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic go well beyond health; they spread across every sector of economy and society. Addressing the multidimensional nature of this pandemic demands coordinated action across the government. Coordination has been critical during the COVID-19 outbreak for bringing together the parts of the government that have a key role for containing the pandemic and protecting people. As with the SDGs, strong mechanisms for policy co-ordination at multiple levels are essential to consult, co-ordinate, negotiate and arbitrate policy decisions to manage the pandemic and address its consequences. In a number of countries the Centre of Government plays a key role in managing and coordinating government responses to the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, Centres of Government have taken the lead in terms of coordinating government operations during the crisis, governing the use of evidence to inform decision-making and communicating decisions to the public. This is reflected in the different “units” found in many of the emergency institutional structures put in place by states (OECD, forthcoming^[11]).



Coordination from the Centre of Government

- **Finland**, for instance, has set up a COVID-19 co-ordination group at the central government. The group is responsible for implementing government decisions to curb the pandemic, and for co-ordinating co-operation between the ministries. In addition, under the Prime Minister's office, three bodies (Operations Centre; Communications Co-ordination Centre; and Government Situation Centre) are responsible for monitoring the implementation of decisions taken by the COVID-19 co-ordination group; co-ordinating external and internal communication; and providing situation updates, respectively (OECD, 2020^[18]).
- In **France**, a crisis management process provides for the creation of an inter-ministerial Crisis Unit (Cellule Interministérielle de Crise -CIC). On 17 March, the Prime Minister activated the CIC, which is responsible for co-ordinating the action of all the ministries concerned in real time. It is made up of representatives of the ministries concerned as well as experts or operators and four units: "situation", "anticipation", "decision" and "communication". In the same process, two additional assessments are planned: one for the end of the crisis and a final one concerning the preparation of the next crises. In addition, different crisis units have been created at the level of each key ministry: interior, foreign affairs, health and national education¹. Additionally, the French government's National Plan to Prevent and Combat the "Influenza Pandemic", prepared in 2011, describes the State's response strategy, including a preparation phase that concerns all public authorities, health professionals and socio-economic actors, and elected officials from all local authorities who are all strongly involved, in particular mayors (OECD, 2020^[18]).
- At the **European level**, increasing coordinated action and collaboration among EU member states have facilitated regional responses to the COVID-19 crisis. These measures include: the enforcement of a coordinated temporary restriction of non-essential travel to the EU; the treatment of intensive-care patients in other Member States, the sending of doctors and nurses, the supply to other countries of protective suits and masks as well as ventilators; the organisation of flights, many of them facilitated and funded through the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism, to bring home European citizens of all nationalities that were stranded abroad. Moreover, a Joint European Roadmap towards lifting of COVID-19 containment measures sets out key principles and areas for action to guide the EU and its Member States. It provides a frame for ensuring EU-level and cross-border coordination while recognising the specific epidemiological situation, territorial organisation, healthcare service arrangements, population distribution or economic dynamics of each Member State (European Commission and European Council, 2020^[29]).

Addressing the multidimensional nature of the COVID-19 crisis and ensuring a sustainable recovery will require – as with the SDGs – that governments strengthen existing mechanisms for horizontal co-ordination (between entities of a particular tier) and vertical co-ordination (between international, national and subnational levels). It will require that coordination takes place at different stages in the policy making process – before (to identify and anticipate any potential conflicts or unintended consequences), during (to change course based on observations in case of potentially negative impacts), and after (to draw lessons with a view to change policy).

Whole-of-government co-ordination is a particularly relevant governance mechanism to identify and address policy divergences and conflicts between measures for recovery and achievement of the SDGs. Most OECD countries have established coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation that can play a key role for ensuring a sustainable recovery for the SDGs. Responses to the 2020 OECD questionnaire,



indicate that the SDG coordination mechanisms have been involved in organising the recovery from the COVID-19 as mechanisms for information sharing (31%); consultation (14%); joint decision-making (5%); assessing sustainability (14%) and facilitate dialogue with subnational levels of government (12%). Building greater resilience in the long-run will require to strengthen the strategic role played by the Centre of Government, not only in terms of coordination, but also in mobilising the public administration to develop capacities for anticipation and planning.¹⁵

5. Engage appropriately sub-national levels of government

Subnational governments are at the frontline of the COVID-19 response. Regional and local authorities are responsible for delivering critical short-term containment measures and more long-term recovery activity – from health and social care to economic development and public investment. They need to work actively together as well as in close collaboration with the national government. Evidence compiled by the OECD highlights that a coordinated response to COVID-19 by all levels of government can minimise crisis-management failures. Conversely, non-coordinated action in a crisis risks “passing the buck” to other levels of government, resulting in a disjointed response (OECD, 2020_[30]). According to the OECD 2020 questionnaire, close to half of the respondents note that sub-national levels of government have been engaged in the crisis management and recovery plans through dedicated multi-level mechanisms for immediate and mid-term recovery.

With regard to the SDGs, it has been estimated that 65% of the 169 targets will not be reached without proper engagement of, and coordination with, local and regional governments (SDSN, 2016_[31]).²⁸ This implies that sub-national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic will also have important implications for the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In this context, it will be important to promote PCSD at different levels of government and to support them in applying PCSD in their legal frameworks, plans and actions for localising the SDGs. It also encourages the promotion of synergies among national, regional and local policies to better align with and contribute to relevant economic, social and environmental goals (OECD, 2019_[19]).

Vertical coordination and coherence between levels of government is equally important in federal and unitary countries. Yet, more decentralised countries are at a bigger risk of fragmented policy responses in times of crisis and need to move swiftly to mobilise their coordination platforms to ensure policy coherence. But there is no one-size-fits all and countries around the world are setting up different mechanisms to this end. This is highlighted also by past experiences to promote PCSD between different levels of governments.

¹⁵ OECD (forthcoming) “Building resilience from the centre: the role of the Centres of Government in managing the COVID-19 crisis and preparing for the aftermath”.



Vertical coordination and coherence between levels of government

- In **Canada**, the Public Health Agency activated the Health Portfolio Operations Centre (HPOC) on 15 January 2020, and triggered the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Public Health Response Plan for the Biological Events to support the coordination of federal, provincial and territorial readiness and response to COVID-19. HPOC acts as the focal point for coordinating response activities and supporting emergency operations at different levels of government. Canada also developed a “whole-of-government action”, which calls on all levels of government and stakeholders to work in partnership to generate an effective and coordinated response.
- In the **United Kingdom**, the four nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales worked with the UK Government to develop a joint COVID-19 Action Plan. Furthermore, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced the creation of a taskforce to bring together senior experts from different sectors – including resilience, local government, public health and adult social care fields – who will assess Local Resilience Forum (LRF) plans and provide support and advice to ensure these plans are robust.
- In **Spain**, an inter-ministerial commission was introduced to ensure coordination within the government. Similarly, an inter-territorial commission to support cooperation among different levels of government to manage the COVID-19 crisis was established.¹

Source: (OECD, 2020_[30])

At the same time, it must be recognised that COVID-19 has a strong regional impact, calling for *differentiated governance and policy responses*. The regional and local impact of the crisis has been highly asymmetric. The medium-term economic impact will also differ across regions, thus risking to increase inequalities (SDG 10) further. Evidence from a number of countries shows that the virus has had disproportionately high impacts on poor and deprived areas. In Wales, for example, the most disadvantaged areas have registered around 45 COVID-19 deaths per 100 000 people, while areas with less deprivation have experienced close to 23 COVID-19 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants (Iacobucci, 2020_[32]). To prevent disproportionate impacts of future shocks – be they economic, social or environmental – governments need to fully understand and address the interrelated root causes of inequality, such as structural factors that limit people’s opportunities to benefit fully from economic assets and resources; or discriminatory laws, regulations and policies and regressive tax systems. These issues are all closely intertwined and require integrated policy approaches (OECD, 2019_[33]). PCSD analysis on SDG interactions offers important insights on how to identify and address linkages of this nature.

As such, sub-national governments need to join forces and work together in partnerships. An example of cities sharing resources at the global level to counter the pandemic is the C40 Task Force. The C40 has established a COVID-19 Knowledge Hub¹⁶ to exchange best practices between mayors of the world’s largest cities around the critical issues they are facing during the immediate response period. Should this evolve into more long-term measures, it could be a useful resource for engaging in dialogue with national governments.

¹⁶ https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Cities-and-Coronavirus-COVID-19?language=en_US



6. Engage effectively key stakeholders

Experience shows that major barriers to policy coherence are strongly rooted in differing perceptions of stakeholders on the challenges and priorities for transitioning towards sustainable development. To ensure progress on the SDGs, it is therefore essential to establish mechanisms for dialogue and engagement through which governments and key stakeholders can come together to identify common challenges, set priorities, contribute to the development of laws and regulations, align policies and actions, and mobilise resources for sustainable development. The same is true for building a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. This is particularly relevant in a context where the COVID-19 crisis puts the ability of governments to act effectively under the public spotlight and where trade-offs have to be made to balance public health and economic priorities and to allocate large-scale stimulus packages across different sectors and beneficiaries.

Making *different voices in society heard* will be critical for ensuring an inclusive and sustainable recovery. Diverse stakeholders – including businesses and industry, civil society, science and academia and youth amongst other – will have essential roles to play, ranging from resource mobilisation, provision of evidence, solutions and innovations, changes in production patterns and lifestyles, and giving voice to the concerns and needs of under-represented communities. For instance, since the outbreak of the crisis, the youth sector, youth organisations and volunteers have swiftly stepped in to provide their support in mitigating the effects of the crisis and promote societal resilience through new initiatives, by providing supplies to the elderly; organising educational sessions through digital platforms; and disseminating relevant and trustworthy information about the crisis (OECD, 2020_[13]). Science advisory mechanisms at the national level have also been essential to support governments in taking informed decisions to deal with COVID-19 crisis (Box).

Several OECD countries, including **Estonia**, **Germany**, **Poland** and **Switzerland**, have launched e-participation initiatives to engage citizens in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, while Italy established a multi-stakeholder task force to address the spread of disinformation linked to the pandemic (OECD, 2020_[34]). On national and local levels, governments can also explore partnerships with organised and non-organised youth in order to promote resilience and anti-fragility measures (OECD, 2020_[13]). Countries could also rely on the multiple initiatives and mechanisms that they have put in place for engaging stakeholder in SDG implementation to organise recovery responses, including national councils, commissions, platforms and forums on sustainable development.



Science advisory mechanisms at the national level to deal with the COVID-19 crisis

- In **France**, since the beginning of the epidemic, a Scientific Council (Conseil scientifique) set up by the Minister of Health at the request of the President of the Republic, provides the Government with information on the evolution of the health situation in order to shed light on the management of the coronavirus crisis. The scientific council produces summary documents that are made public after each meeting (OECD, 2020^[18]).
- In **Germany**, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), which is the Government's central scientific institution in the field of biomedicine, continuously monitors the situation, evaluating all available information, estimating the risk for the population in Germany and providing health professionals with recommendations (OECD, 2020^[18]).
- In **Italy**, a new coronavirus Task Force (COVID-19) was established on 22 January 2020. A scientific technical committee was set up to deal with Covid-19 emergency by the Civil Protection Department in early February 2020 composed by the Ministry of Health, Infectious diseases experts and representatives from the regions with the mandate to advice the Civil Protection Department decisions .
- In **Belgium**, the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development is organizing a study by a diverse group of scientist with an economic focus, to produce an analysis of the Belgian support-measures and their ability to contribute to the SDG. This will provide concrete policy recommendations to help policy makers to make correct choices to use the recovery efforts in such a way that they contribute to a resilient and sustainable economy.

7. Analyse and assess policy impacts on other countries

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the interconnectedness of our societies and economies. It has also reminded us that in highly interconnected world, the transmission channels are numerous – for example through financial flows, imports and exports of goods and services, migration or knowledge transfers – and countries' policies necessarily impact on one another (OECD, 2018^[35]). In this context, a sustainable recovery will require considering the potential impacts of domestic policies on the sustainable development prospects of other countries. This is a key element of PCSD. Disruptions of global supply chains and limited movement of people across borders during the pandemic have triggered negative impacts at the national level, in particular in countries that are heavily dependent on tourism, such as small island developing states (SIDS); inflows of remittances; or official development assistance, with a risk of reversing these countries' progress in eradicating eradicate poverty (SDG 1).¹⁷

Even the simplest – albeit critical – measures to respond to the crisis, such as frequent handwashing, may generate transboundary effects that need managed in a coherent manner: as much as 60% of global freshwater flows comes from transboundary basins¹⁸. Countries should be aware of the need to avoid measures that might impact negatively on other countries' quantity and quality of water. Timely and sufficient availability of clean water is a prerequisite for the provision of drinking water, sanitation and

¹⁷ More data on country vulnerability to COVID 19 are available at <https://datastudio.google.com/reporting/abd4128c-7d8d-4411-b49a-ac04ab074e69/page/CJbLB>.

¹⁸ <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/water/envwater/covid-19-the-role-of-the-water-convention-and-the-protocol-on-water-and-health.html>



adequate hygiene, the reduction of waterborne diseases and for tackling possible impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, including poverty (SDG1), economic downturn (SDG8), food (SDG2) and energy (SDG7) insecurity and political instability (SDG16). Moreover, climate change may aggravate the consequences of the COVID-19 crises, increase water scarcity and make adaptation in transboundary basins even more vital.

Against this background, some important lessons emerge from the crisis: the complexity of its multidimensional and transnational aspects calls for *coordinated and coherent domestic and international policies*; and the magnitude of the financial effort set up internationally to manage the impacts of COVID-19 calls for a better alignment of financial investments with long-term and sustainable objectives aimed at strengthening resilience. The crisis has also made it clear that countries cannot prevent nor stop global challenges, nor can they determine quick outcomes for economic recovery without global partnerships and governance. While this could lead to the definition of bilateral agreements between countries for the management of transboundary impacts, the ideal situation would be one that leads to an international regulation of globalisation in full compliance with the 2030 Agenda.

Applying a policy coherence lens (both ex-ante and ex-post) can support countries to design policies that account for the potential impacts from COVID-19 recovery measures, in line with the PCSD Recommendation.

Having to deal with multi-dimensional and transboundary effects from the pandemic might push countries towards a more integrated assessment of costs and benefits of recovery strategies that support policy coherence for sustainable development. 32% of the respondents to the 2020 OECD questionnaire would like more evidence based analysis on the transboundary and long-term impacts of policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Several countries and institutions have recently attempted to connect separated policy evaluations (Box) into a sustainability assessment and the OECD survey revealed that new practices are being introduced since COVID-19.



Impact Assessment Tools that consider sustainability and inclusiveness

- **Luxembourg** uses a Sustainability Check Tool “Nohaltegkeetscheck” (NHC) to assess legislative acts in relation to their impact against the ten sustainable development priorities that the government has committed to. Ministries have to answer specific questions on the effects of the proposed law on each of the ten priorities (i.e. how the draft bill contributes to creation of jobs for woman, youth and vulnerable groups, how does it impact income inequalities, etc.), and indicate what measures they consider to mitigate the negative effects of the proposed legislation. The Sustainability Check became part of the legislative cycle in 2020 and is presented to the Council, the Parliament and made available to the public. This online tool is mandatory for new legislation and encouraged for other policies.
- When preparing any proposal for the government, **Ireland’s** Government Departments are formally required to identify and address (potential) spill-overs related to that proposal under a range of headings. These headings include, inter alia, impacts on poverty, gender equality, employment and competitiveness, people with disabilities, as well as certain transboundary issues (OECD, 2018^[37]).
- In **Germany**, all proposals for new laws and regulations are subject to a Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA). The SIA is based on indicators, targets and management rules, which include intergenerational and transboundary dimensions. Since March 2018, laws and regulations can be checked against those through an online tool: www.enap.bund.de. The German Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted by the cabinet in January 2017 has introduced a sustainability impact assessment. In 2020¹⁹, the Parliamentary Advisory Council has called for an extension of the assessment on the impact of legislation on the achievement of the SDGs in, by and with Germany (triple approach), in order to also incorporate the international dimension
- Finally, the **Netherlands** have adapted an existing framework for integral assessment (IAK) to serve as an “SDG test” for new policy, law and regulations. The IAK includes an estimation of the impact of the new policy on reaching the SDGs. In particular this assessment screens policies’ effect on gender and on developing countries.

8. Strengthening monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems

Taking informed decisions on the measures needed to recover from the COVID-19 crisis while supporting progress on the SDGs require mechanisms and systems that help capture potential trade-offs and impacts. Albeit COVID-19 response calls for rigorous assessment of vulnerabilities to orient short and long term recovery measures (for instance to target emergency income support, SME’s transfers/loans, etc.), only a small proportion (27%) of respondents to the 2020 OECD questionnaire found that SDGs data collection in their country was used to anticipate COVID-19 impact in particular on most vulnerable groups and to inform decision-making during the formulation of crisis and post-crisis measures.

The 232 SDGs indicators, regularly updated by the UN Inter agency Expert Group on SDGs (UN-IAEG-SDGs) could provide a comprehensive and readily available source of data in every country that can help governments in assessing the impact of COVID and recovery policies. In particular SDGs indicators

¹⁹ <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/696590/a606842c3f207f89081f7899a2e92ffc/Impulspapier-des-PBnE-zur-Deutschen-Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie-Neuaufgabe-2020-data.pdf>



provide a comparable –at global, national and local level- holistic view of COVID-19 impact in terms of health, social and economic outcomes for the most vulnerable as well as for different age cohorts who have been affected disproportionately by the crisis. Some statistical authorities have used SDGs indicators to account COVID-19 impact. For instance, ISTAT (Italian Statistical Institute) included in the annual 2020 report a section on the interactions between the pandemic and the 17 SDGs (ISTAT, 2020^[38])

Several efforts have been made to track how progress are made towards policy coherence and how more coherent policy-making translates into progress on the SDGs enhancing sustainability.

Overall, if there is evidence that the co-benefits to maximise are higher than the trade-offs to mitigate while implementing SDGs strategies (Nilsson, 2018^[39]), it remains hard to measure which governance arrangements are fit for this purpose. Efforts in OECD countries to track progress on PCSD at national level grapple with the question of what needs to be measured: processes, policy changes or efforts, or policy impacts (Soria Morales and Lindberg, 2017^[40]). The global indicator to measure progress on this target, as proposed by the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators, aims to capture the “Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development”. A key question is: What is meant by “mechanisms” in the current proposal for a global PCSD indicator?

The OECD Framework for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (the PCSD Framework), highlights elements that need to be monitored in the context of the 2030 Agenda as they represent well documented institutional practices which are conducive to the promotion of more integrated approaches to the implementation of the SDGs. Different types of qualitative and quantitative indicators, many available at the OECD, could be used by countries – according to their own needs and specific circumstances – to assess key elements of the policy coherence cycle.

In times of COVID-19, the data landscape has quickly changed often increasing the potential of existing statistics and sometimes creating new ones. Governments needed an up-to-date knowledge of presence and movements of COVID patients to avoid spreading contagion and the phenomenon of hoarding. In some countries such as the Netherlands private and public data owners shared data with Statistics Netherlands –CBS-. Private data owners include Dutch Payments association, retail scanners, traffic loops, payment systems as well as the Schiphol Airport and ProRail. A single knowledge and coordination point has been set up at CBS for the increasing use of data scouting. By combining external data sources with administrative data new figures could be produced to rapidly support policy making. For instance local authorities could rapidly track the applications for the financial support to respond to COVID-19 crisis under the Temporary Bridging Measure for Self-Employed professional (Tozo)²⁰. This is a good example of a multi-stakeholder collaboration that broadens data available for improving measurement of policy impact and how progress in policy coherence influenced it. These updates in data landscape can greatly contribute in advancing also countries’ capacities to build and monitor early-warning indicators. Strategic foresight processes may reveal particular developments or disruptions which have not yet occurred, but which could significantly impact the country’s ability to make progress on the SDGs using the strategies it originally intended. By identifying and monitoring indicators of such developments and disruptions in advance, countries may gain the ability to respond and adapt their strategies faster for greater success.

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