



Brief ¹

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an **ambitious global framework** to guide the efforts of all actors towards a more inclusive and sustainable world. In addition to its comprehensiveness and complexity that are both a strength and a weakness, the Agenda also entails several limitations, incoherencies and risks that should be taken into account in its implementation.

Civil society's contribution to achieving and accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' implementation goes well beyond direct action and realisation of the goals, including its role in representation (e.g. of voiceless groups), regulation (as watchdogs), transmission (of ideas and information between decision-makers and wider audiences), as partnerships' drivers and in pursuing new approaches and responses. On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda provides civil society with a roadmap for integrating its actions in a global development perspective, a useful instrument for advocacy and political influence, a common language for dialogue and mobilisation around shared goals, a tool for reinforcing citizenship towards inclusive and sustainable development, an instrument to facilitate communication of the work carried out, and a way of boosting new partnerships and financing opportunities. Civil society's role in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda is increasingly relevant in a global context where its **space is particularly threatened**, and when the **impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic** are especially harmful and disproportionate for the poorer and more vulnerable countries and population groups, reversing progresses and therefore undermining development goals and aspirations.

The principles of SDG's universality, interdependence and indivisibility stress the need for an integrated approach of internal (regional/national/local) and external dimensions (foreign policy/development cooperation policy and contribution to global development). In this context, the **European Union** (EU) has shown a lack of leadership and effectiveness in integrating the 2030 Agenda in EU sectoral policies, in the existing policy instruments (such as the European Semester), and in monitoring the existing commitments (which has been focused on statistical reporting, without analysing the role of EU policies and budget in achieving the SDGs). There is no EU strategy or implementation plan focused on the 2030 Agenda, despite repeated calls and recommendations by the European Council and European Parliament. This adds to a weak leverage of this issue in European political agendas, as it is still largely regarded as the sphere of action of development policy and actors, besides some institutional and leadership issues, which do not encourage intersectoral coordination or an effective interlinkage between domestic and external dimensions. The current European Commission (2019-2024) has affirmed sustainability as a priority in its mandate and states in its 2020 work programme that the 2030 Agenda will be put at the heart of policymaking, guiding EC work across all sectors, both in internal and external action. This will however entail concrete actions and changes at strategic and institutional level, in mechanisms and instruments, which the EU has not been able to deliver since 2015.



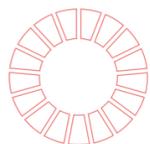
¹ This Brief presents a summary of the study “Portugal and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and was elaborated by Patrícia Magalhães Ferreira for the Portuguese NGDO Platform, in the framework of the European project “[Make Europe Sustainable for All](#)”.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for mainstreaming and implementing the 2030 Agenda at national level, as each framework should be created, applied and adapted accordingly with national contexts, institutional structures and capacities, political, economic and social dynamics, as well as the lessons learned from other processes. The state of play in **EU Member States** is mixed and diverse, partially because the starting points are also quite different regarding sustainable development, even before the 2030 Agenda approval and implementation.

At **strategic level**, most EU countries have chosen one of two paths: to reformulate their Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), by updating it in line with 2030 Agenda or converting it in a national SDG implementation strategy; and/or to adopt a specific action plan/roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda (either as an instrument for operationalising the SDS or as a parallel/additional document to the existing strategy). Portugal is the only EU country lacking a strategic framework for sustainable development and/or the 2030 Agenda. At **institutional level**, in many European countries the leadership for implementing the 2030 Agenda rests with the head of government, although in only a few countries is this issue prominently featured as a political priority, expressed in institutional terms. Most European countries have created inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, often under the Prime Minister's leadership. More important than the chosen format for inter-ministerial coordination, however, are the effective conditions provided to these mechanisms - an adequate mandate, competencies and decision-making power, representativeness, etc. Regarding **monitoring**, all EU Member States presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) between 2016 and 2020, and many of them also produce regular progress

reports. Most countries monitor their performance through a set of indicators, frequently combining the global UN indicators with complementary or adapted national indicators. The assessment of whether the “leaving no one behind” principle is being implemented, or the impact of sectoral policies at external level (in other countries and in global development – the so-called spill over effects, linked to policy coherence for development) is particularly challenging in all countries. Impact evaluations or the incorporation of SDGs in state budgets are still weak or at an early stage, but there have been some recent encouraging developments in some cases. In a few countries, independent reviews have been commissioned, and evaluations by Supreme Audit Institutions and/or Parliamentary inquiries have been carried out. The debate and submission of official reports on the 2030 Agenda to National Parliaments is common practice in several countries, but “sustainable development proofing” of national legislation is still rare.

The **level and modalities of civil society's engagement** are also truly diverse in EU countries, ranging from a structured and systematic dialogue to a total absence of consultation and involvement of civil society in decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes of the 2030 Agenda. The number of countries that include civil society organisations and/or networks in the government implementation structures and dialogue mechanisms is unsurprisingly lower than the countries where specific coordination mechanisms were created for multi-stakeholder dialogue (civil society being one amongst other actors). In some countries, governments have grasped the opportunity provided by specific processes or moments to boost a more structured and systematic engagement of CSOs in coordination and implementation mechanisms, such as the definition



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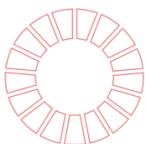
of SDG national strategies/plans or the elaboration of a VNR (including examples where civil society jointly drafted the report). The drafting of shadow reports and the creation of civil society coalitions or alliances for the 2030 Agenda in several EU countries has been crucial for increasing awareness, advocacy, knowledge and debate on the SDGs, having become recognised counterparts on this issue and achieving very relevant results in some countries.

From the analysed cases and experiences, some **common factors that favour a more straightforward, concrete and effective implementation** of the SDGs in national frameworks can be identified. It is therefore paramount: to recognise the 2030 Agenda as a national priority in political agendas, translated into a centralised institutional mechanism (e.g. under the Prime Minister); to have a clear vision on SDGs' implementation, including goals and targets, responsibilities and task division; to implement a multisectoral and multidimensional approach, namely in the structure and functioning of the existing mechanisms, through a whole-of-government approach and providing effective operating conditions (an adequate mandate and competences, decision-making power, representativeness, etc.); to actively promote the engagement of an encompassing group of stakeholders in the processes of implementing and monitoring the Agenda; to create mutually reinforcing monitoring and reporting systems; and to carry out comprehensive communication and awareness-raising efforts on the 2030 Agenda, including its adaptation to local and national contexts.

In **Portugal**, the process of integrating the SDGs as a new global development framework have mainly included the presentation of a Voluntary National

Review (VNR) to the United Nations in 2017, the definition of a national implementation structure at institutional level, and the monitoring through statistical data collection and analysis. This study shows that the dynamics initiated in 2016-2017, which may have indicated possible further developments in integrating the SDGs in strategic, policy, institutional and monitoring frameworks, have lacked continuity and a consistent follow-up in the last few years. At **strategic level**, Portugal had a relevant role in the negotiations of a post-2015 development framework, but the subsequent national transposition proved to be more complicated and not prioritised – Portugal has not adopted any strategy or roadmap for implementing the SDGs. The definition of a concrete action plan, which could provide strategic guidance, clarify priorities and related policies, tangible measures and national targets, the role of several stakeholders and existing resources would be important to boost the 2030 Agenda's implementation, particularly in a matter that requires a concerted effort by a wide range of sectors and actors.

While some sectoral strategies mention or integrate the contribution towards the SDGs (e.g. the Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030), the lack of visibility of the 2030 Agenda and its absence in political discourse at national level do not favour a timely translation of commitments in real redefinition and realignment of public policies. The 2030 Agenda is primarily visible in foreign policy issues, including the participation in international forums and/or Portuguese positions regarding external and global action. The existing **institutional model** for SDGs' implementation – with overall coordination of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in articulation with the Ministry of Planning, the definition of focal points in sectoral ministries for each SDG, and two inter-ministerial



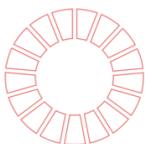
coordination mechanisms - ends up not enabling, in practice, an interlinkage between internal and external dimensions, not providing for a structured dialogue and coordination for multi-level governance, nor including systematic dialogue mechanisms with the Parliament or civil society.

In addition, the presentation of regular public reports on the progresses in implementing the 2030 Agenda should not be limited to the VNR, as this should be an integral part of a domestic/national debate process that incorporates a regular and systematic **monitoring and follow-up system**. Monitoring SDGs' implementation is currently carried out only at statistical level, through the quantitative analysis of the applicable UN indicators, with no defined national indicators or a more qualitative analysis of the effective policy contribution towards the SDGs. While the efforts of some public institutions in promoting the debate and exchange of experiences about the 2030 Agenda is worth mentioning, much remains to be done to ensure public access to all relevant information, as well as regarding mobilisation and communication both on the Agenda itself and on what has been done until now.

With regard to **participation of civil society** organisations and networks, the negotiation period for a post-2015 agenda – in which CSOs actively contributed to the definition of a Portuguese position paper – contrasts with the subsequent implementation and monitoring process, in which the engagement has been limited, both within the established institutional framework (no participation in the defined coordination mechanisms) and in monitoring and reporting (e.g. their positions were not integrated in the VNR preparation). The main dialogue mechanism with civil society and other actors is, in practice, the Development

Cooperation Forum that, for various reasons identified in the study, does not fulfil the function of multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism on the 2030 Agenda. Regarding coordination **within civil society**, the Civil Society SDG Forum is the main platform, with relevant work on public consultation and promotion of debate with decision-makers on the 2030 Agenda, although it would be useful to develop further reflection on how to ensure its sustainability and define more concrete objectives and outcomes for this decade. The advocacy efforts of the Portuguese NGDO Platform and its members have been primarily focused on the issues included in SDG 17, namely on partnerships and stakeholders' participation, on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and on policy coherence for development. It is necessary to find ways of fostering greater mobilisation of Portuguese civil society organisations and networks around the SDGs, both for ensuring a more concerted and joint action in this matter, and for achieving greater influence with official counterparts (in order to put this issue on the agendas and move forward in the implementation process).

The **Development Cooperation Policy** plays a crucial role in achieving the 2030 Agenda, as all SDGs include targets pertaining the support to developing countries and the contribution to global development. The drafting of a new strategic document for Portuguese Development Cooperation in the near future (for the post-2020 period) is an opportunity for a concrete and detailed alignment of development policy goals with the 2030 Agenda, as well as for further analysis and reflection on Portugal's contribution to global development. In general, the main development programming instruments have been adapted to the new global development framework, such as the pluriannual Strategic Cooperation Programmes at bilateral level. Within Development Education, besides an explicit

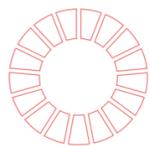


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link with the SDGs at strategic level – in the National Strategy for Development Education 2018-2022 -, the process of its drafting, the implementation structure and monitoring mechanism includes the concrete and systematic participation of various stakeholders, which is a good practice recognised at national and international level that could be replicated in other strategies and plans.

Several international processes related to development cooperation increasingly require detailed evidence and demonstration of each country's contribution for the SDGs. Regarding Portuguese development cooperation, the SDGs are already integrated in the annual calculations and reporting of ODA, in the OECD-DAC peer reviews of Portuguese development policy (the next to be carried out in 2021), or in the EC certification of delegated cooperation. Nevertheless, the mainstreaming and integration of the 2030 Agenda should not be limited to

the compliance with external requirements, but also include a concerted action to push for the Agenda within public policies. While Portugal's contribution to global development should be integrated in all SDGs, in practice the role of Camões I.P. (the Portuguese development cooperation agency) has been rather limited to SDG 17, which it leads in the established institutional framework. The scarcity of technical staff dedicated to this issue is perceived as a structural constrain at institutional level, which is reflected in a more reactive stance, in order to respond to the many reporting requests and demands. In addition, the difficulty of Camões I.P. in fully realise its role as the responsible organism for supervision, direction and coordination of Portuguese development policy, in a fragmented system in terms of players and financial resources, is also a factor to be taken into account – which makes the need for coordination and coherence even more relevant.



17 SDGs

17 Recommendations



To the European Union:

1. Define a **strategy or action plan/roadmap for implementing the 2030 Agenda** at European level, including a clear, comprehensive and integrated approach to guide EU action in this decade, therefore following the repeated pledges and recommendations from the Council and the European Parliament.
2. Establish an **integrated governance model** for implementing the 2030 Agenda, under the competence of the EC President or Vice-President and assisted by a specific team, with reporting at the annual State of the Union address, and with vertical (multilevel) and horizontal (multi-stakeholder and intersectoral) coordination.
3. Promote **the mainstreaming and concrete integration of SDGs in EU policies**, including an explicit link between the main EU priorities and sectoral strategies with sustainable development and the SDGs, namely the effective contribution towards achieving the SDGs and the definition of ambitious sectoral targets in accordance with the 2030 Agenda.
4. **Fully incorporate sustainable development in EU instruments** that are relevant for European policy definition, implementation, funding and monitoring, such as the European Semester (with the Annual Sustainability Review), the Better Regulation Guidelines and all instruments pertaining impact assessment, as well as the budgetary instruments, by reinforcing the importance of the 2030 Agenda in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (this includes the need to increase the relevance of Official Development Assistance, gender equality and climate action as the focus of financing instruments, introduce prior sustainability criteria for funding allocation, include more social and environmental indicators in structural and investment funds, or eliminating subsidies that contradict sustainable development outcomes).
5. Implement a **monitoring system** that includes common EU targets, and analysis of EU policies and budget contribution towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and existing gaps, an assessment of EU policies' negative impacts in other countries (spill-over effects), and joint mechanisms for dialogue and engagement with civil society and the European Parliament.

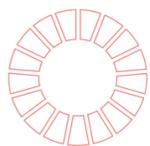
6. Create a **discussion forum that includes a multiplicity of relevant actors** (as a follow-up of the previously existing Multi-stakeholder Platform in place until 2019), therefore enabling a structured and systematic coordination, consultation and dialogue with various stakeholders engaged in the 2030 Agenda implementation, including civil society.

To the Portuguese Government and public entities:

7. Define a **roadmap or action plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda**, with a clear definition of priorities, targets, timeline, responsibilities and task division, monitoring mechanisms and means of implementation, in order to guide the action of all relevant stakeholders in this decade.

8. Improve **multisectoral engagement and the interlinkages between external and domestic dimensions of the Agenda in the institutional framework**, by (i) centralising the Agenda coordination under the Prime Minister, Council of Ministers or equivalent, therefore giving a clear political signal and enabling a more comprehensive and integrated approach; (ii) reinforcing the engagement of all relevant actors from the public sector in a **whole-of-government approach** that fosters increased policy coherence; (iii) implementing a **multi-level governance model**, which involves more clearly the local dimension; (iv) clarifying the responsibilities and goals to be achieved by the public entities/sectoral ministries engaged in the Agenda's implementation, and also including a clearly defined mandate, support and operating conditions for the established focal points; and (v) promoting the participation and engagement of development cooperation structures in implementing and monitoring all SDGs.

9. **Align the relevant national plans and strategies** with sustainable development and 2030 Agenda's goals, including the main strategies, official positions and measures at economic, social and environmental levels in the **domestic/sectoral dimensions**, as well as in the next Strategic Concept for Portuguese Development Policy (post-2020) and the resulting targets and measures, **in the external dimension**.



10. Start a **process of budgeting sustainable development**, taking into consideration the ongoing experiences in other EU countries to quantify the financial resources allocated to SDG implementation, and by identifying the contribute of public revenues and expenses for the 2030 Agenda in the State Budget.

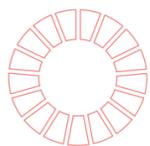
11. Implement a **comprehensive monitoring and review system** that encompasses, on the one hand, the adoption of **national indicators complementary to the United Nations** and a formal mandate for the National Statistics Institute and which, on the other hand, **goes beyond statistical reporting**, with a continuous and extensive process of follow-up and reporting, including the analysis of policy contribution, gaps, results and impacts, with a view to improving action in the future. This also implies a **timely, participated and inclusive process of preparing the next reporting to the UN**.

12. Define **multi-stakeholder mechanisms for coordination, implementation and ownership**, in order to foster and facilitate an effective and regular connection between central and local government structures, civil society platforms and networks, the private sector, academia, amongst others. At external level, this could entail an improvement in the functioning of the **Development Cooperation**

Forum in this area. It could also be useful to **take into account the lessons learned** in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring frameworks of other strategies, such as the National Strategy for Development Education or the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030.

13. Implement a **communication and public awareness-raising strategy** on the 2030 Agenda, therefore promoting transparency, accountability, accessibility of information and visibility of the SDGs and of Portugal's role in this context (e.g. through communication campaigns, provision of online resources and reliable information, integrating the 2030 Agenda in public entities and facilities; putting the SDGs in the agenda of relevant national debates, etc.)

14. Reinforce the **involvement of the Portuguese Parliament** in the debate and engagement on this issue, through measures that may include, amongst others, the establishment of a permanent (sub) committee or an ad-hoc parliamentary group focused in the 2030 Agenda and including the interlinkages between domestic and external dimensions.

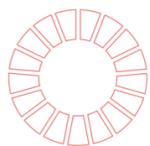


To the Portuguese Civil Society and NGDOs:

15. Reinforce the **role of the Civil Society SDG Forum**, by encouraging: a proactive and continued action for promoting the 2030 Agenda, the sustainability of its work beyond specific and time-limited projects, and the definition of more concrete objectives and results to be achieved in this Decade of Action for Sustainable Development.
16. Foster a **greater mobilisation of Portuguese civil society organisations and networks around the SDGs**, in a systematic way, both for ensuring a more concerted and joint action in this regard (partnerships and joint positions and actions, between NGDOs and with NGOs of various backgrounds), and for wielding greater influence with policy makers (in order to include this issue in discussion agendas and to progress in the Agenda's implementation). Namely, the participation of the Portuguese NGDOs Platform and its members in **European and international projects** can be used for multiplying funds, generating synergies, exchanging experiences and improving

capacity development and ownership of Portuguese civil society organisations on these issues, therefore reinforcing national action and mobilization around the SDGs.

17. Portuguese NGDOs should engage more on an **internal reflection and definition about the role of each organisation** – in its action, projects, objectives, strategic planning – in achieving the 2030 Agenda, both in the present and for future planning.



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