



Peer 2 Peer for Mainstreaming the SDGs in Regulatory Impact Assessment

Project report – 14 July 2022
Part 1. Main report



PEER TO PEER FOR SIA

Peer 2 Peer for Mainstreaming the SDGs in Regulatory Impact Assessment - Project Report

14 July 2022

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Colophon

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Acknowledgments / The authors would like to thank all the participants of the peer learning workshops and the concluding event, and the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic for hosting the concluding event. A special thanks also goes to Isaac Caiger-Smith, intern at ps4sd during the first months of the projects.

Disclaimer / The content of this report is largely based on informal discussions between experts from EU Member States, European Commission, OECD and other organisations, acting in their personal capacities. We have integrated the comments received on the draft report, and every effort was made to be accurate. Still, the content of the report is solely the responsibility of PS4SD and we apologize for any errors that may remain.

Recommended citation / Meuleman, L., Versmann, A., Niestroy, I and Valentini, F. 2022. *Peer 2 Peer for Mainstreaming the SDGs in Regulatory Impact Assessment. Part I. Main Report*. Brussels: PS4SD, 14 July 2022.

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Executive Summary

Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires that they are integrated ('mainstreamed') in an early stage of the preparation of laws, regulations and strategic policies, and in all policy areas. Only then, policy options will be well-informed about their impacts on long-term sustainability, and unsustainable legislation and policies may be prevented.

A growing number of EU member states has begun integrating the SDGs in their mechanisms for ex-ante assessments of the impacts of policies or laws, usually called Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). The European Commission already has an Impact Assessment in place since 2002 that covers the three basic dimensions of sustainability. In 2021, the Commission has integrated the SDGs and updated the online Toolbox on Better Regulation and Impact Assessment accordingly. The OECD has published extensive guidance and good practice collections – originally on RIA in strict sense, but meanwhile also with a view to integrating sustainability (see e.g. OECD 2021).

This report contains the results of a dynamic and highly interactive project aiming at supporting the mainstreaming of the SDGs into RIA procedures – and with this bringing sustainability aspects or practice of Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) into RIA. A crucial part of the project has been peer-to-peer learning between experts from different countries, and between SDG experts and RIA experts, who even in the same country sometimes work in different 'silos'. The project was financed with a grant from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection, and ran from December 2021 until June 2022.

After a survey with responses from eighteen EU member states, thirteen countries¹ participated in three peer learning workshops on key challenges identified through the survey: (1) the framework conditions for SDG mainstreaming in RIA schemes, (2) methodologies and process design, and (3) embedding sustainability impact assessment in inclusive policymaking. The project succeeded in bringing together national experts from both the sustainability/SDG and the RIA world and providing a frame for a peer exchange on practices and experiences. The European Commission and OECD actively participated in the workshops and shared their guidance and research findings, as did speakers from civil society organisations and academia.

The project showed that there is great interest among the national SDG and RIA experts to continue with this promising approach and addressing the identified challenges and obstacles. The following recommendations emerged as key for improvement and collaboration:

1. Strengthen leadership and increase resources for mainstreaming SDGs in national RIAs.
 - a. Clear leadership from the top of the administration is needed for the organisational and institutional implications for the mainstreaming approach.
 - b. Making sufficient human and financial resources available as investment in mainstreaming sustainability in RIA. This is particularly important because the project has revealed that SDG and RIA experts usually work in separated 'silos' with insufficient tradition and incentives for collaboration.
2. Continue with peer learning workshops, supported by a moderated network and political involvement.
 - a. Peer learning workshops help connecting the SDG and RIA experts within countries and between countries and accelerate the integration. The peer-to-peer exchange approach with multi-country workshops and several external experts (including OECD and European Commission) seems to be an effective and efficient way to learn. Most of the participants

¹ In the concluding event on 14.06.2022, 17 countries participated.

- would appreciate a follow-up of the peer learning workshop series after the project with peer exchanges in various formats. Several countries which could not attend the peer learning workshops, also expressed their interest.
- b. Continuation of the series of peer learning workshops would require a lightly moderated network structure that organizes follow-up workshops on key challenges and serves as a source of information for ‘newcomers’. Host of the network could be the OECD (joint work of the PCSD and RIA Units), one country (e.g., the rotating EU Presidency), and the informal European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN). The Commission’s [TAIEX-EIR P2P](#) mechanism could help financing further peer to peer exchanges after the current project.
 - c. Besides the more informal exchanges in the context of workshops and a network, it remains important to create and maintain the involvement of the political level: i.e., putting SDG mainstreaming in RIA on the agenda on a regular basis, inform about progress and obstacles, and ask for steer where necessary. The formal EU Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda and the OECD Regulatory Policy Committee could play a vital role. In addition, this should be a regular topic for the European Commission Expert groups on Public Administration and on Greening the European Semester.
3. Develop and organize training for policy officers about how to mainstream the SDGs in the RIAs they are responsible for:
 - a. RIA procedures are usually conducted by the ministry responsible for the policy area where an initiative is under development, for example on SDG themes like transport and mobility, energy, climate, food, health or education. This means that really applying sustainability objectives and its systemic relations in RIA requires the involvement and commitment of many policy officers, in all ministries. The peer learning workshops cannot reach that many people.
 - b. Therefore, training should be developed that makes policy officers understand the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, and how and with what methods and tool this can be integrated in their national RIA procedures. The OECD’s trainings for the SDGs in the framework of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) are a useful starting point. National schools of public administration should take the lead and integrate this in their curricula.
 4. The European Commission could support the national mainstreaming of SDGs in RIA with existing instruments.
 - a. Currently, the European Commission Better Regulation Toolbox, combined with the tools on the JRC KnowSDGs platform provide the best up-to-date compendium in the EU for RIA methods integrating SDGs. These tools should be used also by EU Member States as a source of knowledge for mainstreaming SDGs in RIA schemes. To mobilise this potential the Commission could help disseminating these tools to Member States’ governments through communication and training.
 - b. The European Commission could financially support development and implementation of trainings of Member States’ government staff, because of the long-term positive impacts on the attainment of the SDGs (who are “at the heart of EU’s policymaking and action”²), the European Green Deal and other major EU initiatives.
 - c. The EU’s [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\)](#) managed by DG REFORM of the European Commission could finance structural reforms by member states to mainstream SDGs in their RIA systems as innovation of public governance, contributing to policy coherence for sustainable development.

² European Commission 2019. [Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020](#). COM(2019) 650 final.

In the concluding project event on 14 June 2022 panellists from 17 EU Member States, the Commission and OECD expressed their appreciation with the results and supported the recommendations. With the project, the peer exchange on mainstreaming sustainability in regulatory policies has gained momentum that should be kept and continued with further exchanges in various formats and on new aspects. It is planned to discuss project results and further activities in the EU Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda. The Commission's TAIEX EIR-P2P tool is available to support further multi- and bilateral peer exchanges. The OECD could help taking the project recommendations and the peer learning approach forward if countries are interested and funding is available. The OECD is setting up a collection of country cases on mainstreaming sustainability in regulatory policy tools and is also preparing a proposal for a project under the EU's Technical Support Instrument in that thematic area.

Currently, PS4SD is exploring options to extend the project in order to facilitate the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations.

1. Introduction

This is the report of the project 'Peer to Peer for Sustainable Impact Assessment' (P2P for SIA), aimed at stimulating mainstreaming sustainability³ and in particular the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in national Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) systems, using a peer-to-peer learning approach between EU Member States. The project is financed with a grant by the European Environment Initiative (EURENI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection and was implemented between November 2021 and June 2022.

The history of the relations between sustainable development and RIA (section 2) shows why, at this moment in time, and around twenty years after the EU introduced its own impact assessment (IA) system which was already based on the three sustainability (environmental, social, and economic), mainstreaming and integration are also recognised as important at the national level.

That the EU Member States understand the importance of the topic became also clear when they requested in their Council Conclusions of 27.02.2020⁴ to mainstream sustainability in RIA at EU level. The European Commission replied to this request with a 2021 Communication on Better Regulation⁵ which fully integrates the SDGs in its Impact Assessment system, Guidelines and Toolbox.

Besides the political interest, there is a growing body of knowledge. OECD reports of the past decade have supported the feasibility of making RIA more sustainable through the sharing of good practices.⁶ In addition, several EU countries have started making action plans on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD; SDG target 17.14) or have integrated PCSD in their SDG Action Plans. At the moment of completing of this report (July 2022), Italy was finalizing its PCSD Action Plan, to be submitted for approval to the Interministerial Committee for Ecological Transition, together with the updated National Sustainable Development Strategy.

In both the UN SDG indicator on PCSD⁷ and the OECD Recommendation and guidance documents on PCSD⁸ RIA is considered as an essential tool to support policy coherence.

³ In this report, the terms *sustainable development* and *sustainability* are used as synonyms, although the former usually points more at processes and the latter at the aimed end situation. Both terms are about balancing environmental, social and economic interests with a view to future generations.

⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/42759/sto6232-en20.pdf>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2021:219:FIN>

⁶ see e.g. Jacob et al. 2011; OECD 2009, 2010, 2019b, 2019a

⁷ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-17-14-01.pdf>

⁸ OECD 2019b

With the willingness and the knowledge, there is now a great opportunity to raise the bar and pick up the pace at national level and improve the sustainability of national IAs. Some EU Member States have already established advanced practices for integrating aspects of sustainability into their RIA systems. In doing this, countries are better able to judge the environmental, economic, and social impacts of various policy options, allowing for improved decision-making and better societal outcomes. Using ex ante RIA in the development of new laws, policies or programmes is an excellent way to mainstream environmental sustainability and the SDGs all policymaking. This is a much broader scope than minimising burdens for businesses, which is what classical 'Regulatory Impact Assessments' (RIA) were used for originally. However, in many Member States, RIAs still lack a thorough environmental dimension, and social impacts are usually also considered to a weaker extent than economic impacts.

Against this backdrop, the aim of the project was to stimulate the mainstreaming of (environmental) sustainability, and in particular the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) systems/schemes of EU Member States, through peer-to-peer support.

The project started with the preparation of a stocktaking report detailing the current state of the integration of environmental sustainability in RIAs in all EU Member States with regards to basic features such as: What mechanisms are in place? Who does what? How/what approaches? Points of excellence? The stocktaking was based on previous studies and a survey and was also complemented by interviews with experts from the Member States, European Commission and OECD.

This was followed by a series of three peer-learning workshops with government experts from Member States in February, March, and April 2022.

Originally, the aim was to find 6 countries to participate in the peer-2-peer workshops. However, replies to the survey were submitted by experts from 18 Member States and the three workshops had participants (SDG coordinators, RIA coordinators and environment coordinators) from 13 Member States, and observers and speakers from the European Commission, the OECD, and academia.

This report summarises the stocktaking and the findings of the peer learning process, together with recommendations about how to further enhance the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability in RIAs. The draft report was presented at a concluding event in June 2022. After a round of comments from the participating countries, the report was finalised and published online.

2. A Short History of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Impact Assessment

Sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland et al. 1987), and comprising economic, environmental and social development and interlinkages, gradually became an overarching objective of governments during the 1990s and early 2000s. This was often preceded by an expansion of environmental legislation and policy, which gradually reached its limits because of economic and social policies and practice. Eight European countries adopted a national sustainable development strategy in 2002 or 2003 as a result of the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development: Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Austria, Slovakia, Lithuania and the Netherlands. Others followed and adopted such strategies between the years 2004 and 2007: Finland, Estonia, Czechia, Malta, Portugal, and Spain (Niestroy et al. 2019).

In 2001, also the EU adopted a [European Sustainable Development Strategy \(COM\(2001\) 264\)](#). The Strategy aimed, among others, at anchoring sustainable development in the Union’s policymaking by looking at economic, social and environmental impacts together in a “sustainability impact assessment”, as it was then stated in the [European Council Conclusions on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy](#) (2001).

In the same year, the European Commission published a [White Paper on European Governance \(COM\(2001\) 428\) promoting five principles of good governance](#): openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence, reinforcing those of proportionality and subsidiarity (p. 7-8), and respective proposals, including on "better policies, regulation and delivery". The latter was very much in the spirit of improving quality, effectiveness, and simplicity of regulatory acts (in a wider sense). It proposed ex-ante regulatory impact assessments for assessing whether EU level intervention is appropriate, and if so, [assessing the potential economic, social, and environmental impacts, as well as the costs and benefits of any particular approach \(p. 16\)](#).

The result was a 'marriage' of regulatory impact assessment (RIA) and sustainability impact assessment (SIA), laid out in the [Communication on Impact Assessment \(COM\(2002\) 276 final\)](#) which contained first guidance on impact assessment (IA; this became the short name for RIA), and the [Action Plan "Simplifying and Improving the Regulatory Environment" \(COM\(2002\) 278 final\)](#) on simplifying and improving EU legislation. It introduced obligatory impact assessments for all new initiatives proposed by the Commission, in which impacts on the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environment) were to be assessed, and stakeholder consultations to be held.

Since then, at the EU level, sustainable development and IA practice had many 'close encounters' but were in practice never fully integrated. IA maintained its original financial-economic focus from the 'better regulation' movement. A review article in 2012 by IA experts suggested optimism ("Rapid expansion of Sustainability Assessment is now taking off"), but this was merely based on developments in the Anglo-Saxon world, and it was generally criticized that the focus seemed to be on 'minimising unsustainability' instead of focusing on delivering the change of direction needed (Bond, Morrison-Saunders, and Pope 2012).

In EU member states, RIA was usually introduced as a tool for Ministries of Finance or Economic Affairs to assess budgetary impacts and administrative costs/burdens for businesses, and officials responsible for RIA were often not in contact with officials coordinating sustainable development (and, since 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Goals). Nevertheless, gradually the integration of environmental and social impacts in RIA became politically feasible – with a great variation across EU member states. A [study](#) for the European Commission, in the context of the European Semester, showed that environmental integration in RIA still met many challenges (RPA & EPRD 2015).

The adoption in September 2015 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Figure 1) could have given a boost to integrate the SDGs in RIA systems. The SDGs address all big societal challenges, and they require effective public administration and governance for



their implementation. The SDGs – also called the Global Goals – and their 167 targets connect the big problems of our times and offer a framework for sustainable development worldwide.

Figure 1. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by all EU member states in 2015 (Source: United Nations)

At the EU level, such a boost did not immediately happen. A discussion paper by the think tank CEPS criticised this and proposed improvements (Renda 2017). In April 2019, the Commission adopted a Communication on ‘Better Regulation: Taking Stock and Sustaining our Commitment’ (COM(2019) 178 final) with a more detailed background document (SWD(2019) 156 final). It includes for the first time, in the context of BR, a reference to the SDGs (“Meeting our climate targets and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals is ever more pressing”).

With the adoption of the [European Green Deal \(COM\(2019\) 640 final\)](#) (EGD) and the [Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020 \(COM\(2019\) 650 final\)](#) (ASGS) in December 2019, the Commission led by President Von der Leyen has marked a paradigm change with regard to the economy: “Economic growth is not an end in itself. An economy must work for the people and the planet” (ASGS 2020, p.1). Moreover, the Commission is now “putting the SDGs at the centre of the Union’s policymaking and action” (ASGS 2020, p.4).

Supported by a [European Parliament Resolution \(2019/2956\(RSP\)\)](#) and European [Council Conclusions](#) (Competitiveness Council, 27. February 2020), this paved the way for the announcement to fully mainstream the SDGs in the Commission’s Better Regulation and Impact Assessment practice, in a Communication of 29 April 2021 on [“Better regulation: Joining forces to make better laws“ \(COM\(2021\) 219 final\)](#).

In November 2021, the [Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox](#) were revised, among others to include instructions on how to mainstream the SDGs in IA:

The Commission “will identify relevant UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) for each proposal and examine how the initiative will support their achievement. Links to the SDGs will be included throughout evaluations and impact assessments”.

See [Annex 1](#) for other key messages in that Communication, and [Annex 2](#) for the new (Nov. 2021) SDG Tool in the revised Better Regulation Toolbox.

3. Methodology

The project design included a stock-taking survey among all EU Member States, three (online) peer learning workshops, a concluding event (hybrid) and a project report.

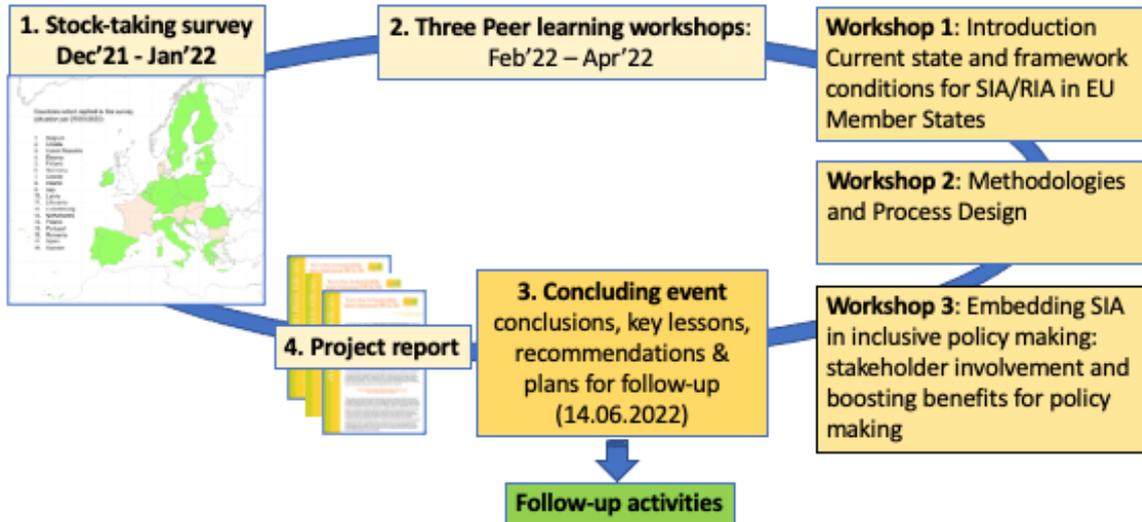


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the project design.

3.1 The stock-taking survey

In December 2021, a survey was composed and sent to policy officers in all EU member states. The idea was to take stock of the current level, and challenges, with regard to mainstreaming the SDGs in RIA. The aim was to reach out to officials responsible for SDG coordination, RIA coordination, and environmental policy coordination.

The survey questions followed largely the questions addressed and surveyed in the 2015 study in environmental integration in RIA (RPA & EPRD 2015), in order to help understanding progress made. To keep the burden as low as possible for the national experts, the project team pre-filled the query based on the 2015 data, a 2019 study (Niestroy et al. 2019) and where available, recent Voluntary National Reviews on the SDGs. Member States were asked to summarise the situation now, and formulate main challenges, good practice and lessons learned.

The questions were clustered into 9 groups, in order to concentrate during the three workshops on the main themes. [Annex 3](#) contains the clustering of the survey questions.

Ultimately, 18 countries have returned the survey (Figure 3). Among them, Ireland informed that the text provided for the 2015 survey for their country continued to be accurate but incorporating the SDGs as part of the RIA is a key action currently under consideration. Several countries, including France reported that they were not able to submit a survey reply due to high work pressure. Since the countries participating in the survey cover a selection of countries that is balanced as regards geographical location and size, the results of the survey can be seen as sufficiently representative for all EU countries.



Figure 3. Countries who submitted a reply to the stocktaking survey

As a way of assessing progress (from less to more advanced), we distinguished 4 levels of implementation on all issues, resulting in a qualitative assessment framework mainly which was inspired by the methodology developed in a study for the European Parliament on SDG implementation (Niestroy et al. 2019). This could be presented graphically as shown for an example in Figure 4.

	1. Absent	2. Planned	3. In place	4. Fully functioning
1. Institutionalisation, Capacity and Skills				
2. Focus on sustainability & climate				
3. Impact Assessment methodology				
4. Long-term & trade-offs				
5. Transparency & participation				
6. Integration with policy process				
7. Data & knowledge				
8. Quality assurance				
9. Digitalisation				

Figure 4. Example of qualitative assessment of the situation in one country

Without wanting to make rankings of ‘good’ and ‘less’ performing countries, in a later phase the survey results were presented at the workshops a more comparative way, to illustrate learning opportunities between countries (see Figure 5 as example).

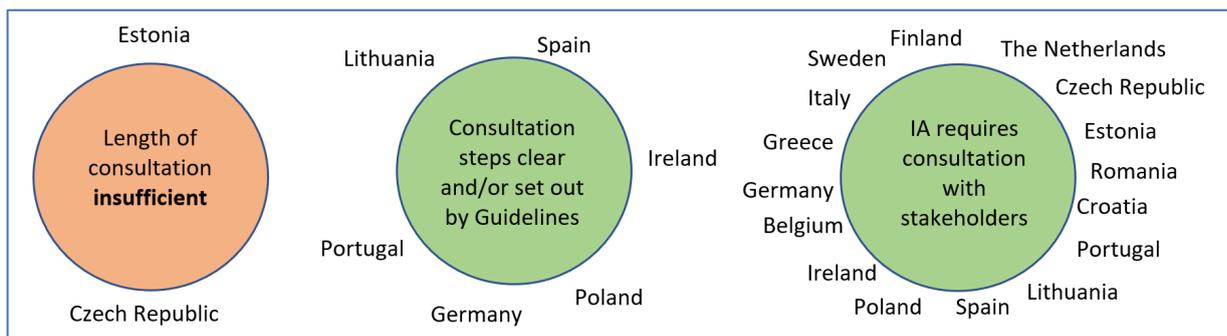


Figure 5. Example of the survey results presented at the workshops as comparative 'bubbles' (topic: stakeholder consultation)

With 18 out of 27 countries having submitted a response to the survey, representing different country types in terms of administrative organisation, the survey results can be called representative. However, as most questions are of a qualitative nature, it is not possible to draw far-reaching conclusions. This is not a problem, because the survey results mainly served as input for the core part of the project, namely the three peer learning workshops. Therefore, the stocktaking results are presented in this report in chapters 4 - 6 under the main peer learning themes.

3.2 Three peer learning workshops

The project title 'Peer to Peer for Sustainable Impact Assessment' (P2P for SIA) indicates that the *objective* of the project is to stimulate integration of sustainability and the SDGs in Regulatory Impact Assessment schemes of the EU Member States, by *means* of peer-2-peer learning workshops between government experts from EU countries. Peer learning was chosen as the logical means because it is voluntary, informal, flexible, and at the same time powerful. Rules, incentives and guidance alone are not sufficient and sometimes abundant. We need to recognise that mainstreaming sustainability in RIA also requires the skills and a mindset to work in an integrated way, to take the holistic perspective of the SDGs, and to accept the challenge of better regulation and the necessity of regulatory impact assessments. It is about bringing together in a collaboration those in national governments who coordinate the implementation of sustainable development strategies and the SDGs, those responsible for environmental protection and climate action, and those responsible for better regulation and RIA. In other words, this requires bringing the three 'silos' together, or in a metaphor: "[teaching silos to dance](#)" (Niestroy and Meuleman 2016).

As a governance tool, peer learning belongs to the *network governance* style. Peer learning is informal and requires trust and an open mindset, and this is not an obvious mindset in ministries and agencies who have a strong hierarchical internal culture and governance practice (Meuleman 2018).

In 2020, Belgium and the ESDN organised a peer learning [workshop](#) on integrating SDGs in the Regulatory Impact Assessment with five EU countries. The current project builds among others on the 2020 workshop.

Three peer to peer learning workshops were held in February, March and April 2022, respectively, with a closing event in June 2022. The workshops were attended by on average 40 participants including the ps4sd team⁹, with the number of EU member states represented gradually increasing from 12 in the first workshop, to 17 countries in the closing event,

⁹ Andreas Versmann, Louis Meuleman, Francesca Valentini and Ingeborg Niestroy

As the discussions were informal and under Chatham House Rule, it was agreed that participants were free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, should be revealed. This implies for this report, that information, reflections and observations about individual Member States cannot be linked to individual participants from these countries, or from European Commission or OECD.

Participants from the EU Member States were Sustainable Development Goals coordinators, Regulatory Impact Assessment coordinators, and several came from Environment Ministries.

In the session on stakeholder involvement in SIAs in the third workshop, also representatives from NGOs have participated and shared their perspective on the subject.

Table 1. Participants of the three workshops

Event	Date	Member States	Observers/ speakers	Participants, incl. speakers
Workshop 1 (online)	24.02.2022	BE, CY, CZ, DE, ES, FI, IT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO (12)	Eur. Commission (INTPA, SG*), OECD	38
Workshop 2 (online)	29.03.2022	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, IT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO (13)	Eur. Commission (JRC, INTPA), OECD Central European University (CEU)	40
Workshop 3 (online)	28.04.2022	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, IT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO (13)	Eur. Commission, OECD Representatives from NGOs (WWF, ETUC)	44
Concluding event (hybrid)	14.06.2022	BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LU, LV, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI (17)	Eur. Commission, OECD	45

How did the 3 workshops deliver on the objective of peer learning in general? The main achievements and constraints of the peer learning process can be summarized as follows:

- With an outreach to participants from governments of 13 Member States the interest in joining the peer learning process has been much larger than expected. The participating countries are in different stages of the implementation of RIA schemes as well as in the mainstreaming of sustainability, including very advanced countries and others still at the beginning. However, regardless of the state all the countries were aiming to improve the situation. This composition of the participating governments was a good basis for mutual peer exchange.
- The workshops were successfully involving the relevant peer target groups. Nearly all participants were experts who are responsible in governmental institutions for the implementation and development RIA systems and for sustainable development implementation and coordination as well as – to a minor extent for environmental and climate policies. Most participants came from head of unit/sector or policy officer level – thus enabling a discussion between peers with a similar profile of responsibility within governments. It was a major success that we managed – probably for the first time - to bring together several peer groups from different backgrounds, in particular experts from sustainable development and environment and regulatory policy experts. This mixed composition enabled a unique peer exchange across countries and sectors and ‘silos’.

- Based on the stock-taking exercise the relevant themes for the workshops have been identified. While the 1st workshop introduced into the subject and discussed the current situation and framework conditions for RIA and sustainability mainstreaming, the 2nd workshop went into the process design of RIA and SIA, methodologies as well as the use of digital tools and other approaches to make RIAs and SIAs lean and effective. The 3rd workshop on Embedding SIA in inclusive policy making discussed stakeholder involvement and strategies to enhance political ownership for RIAs/SIAs at the level of government leaders and parliamentarians – as this had turned out to be one of the main obstacles for sustainability mainstreaming in RIA. Based on the ‘Slido’ feedback of participants the workshops covered topics that are relevant for their practice. However, participants made no use of our invitation before the workshops to suggest themes for the agenda and co-design the workshops.
- Largely, the workshop format delivered the peer learning experience the project was aiming for. In a Slido survey at the end of the 3rd workshop the participants agreed that the workshop series helped to improve their capacity for mainstreaming sustainability into RIAs (score 3.9 at a scale of 1 – 5) and they were satisfied the peer learning workshops (score 4.5 at a scale of 1 – 5). The workshop agendas used a combination of input from external ‘non-peer’ experts from the OECD, the European Commission, academia, and NGOs with presentations of good practice examples from the participating peers, with 13 peers volunteering to share their experiences and challenges in an open discussion. This was accompanied by discussions in smaller breakout groups based on guiding questions and peer rapporteurs summarizing the results for the plenary. Overall, this format allowed a basic peer exchange with substantial opportunities for active learning. This is confirmed by the high number of experts participating throughout all three workshops. However, the online format has turned out to be a limiting factor in this as well as time constraints. In the Slido feedback rounds at the end of the 2nd and the 3rd workshop participants expressed their desire to use more case examples in the peer learning process and more in-depth peer exchange in ‘in-person’ meetings.

3.3 Concluding event

In the concluding project event on 14 June 2022 panellists from 17 EU Member States, the Commission and OECD expressed their appreciation with the project results and supported the project recommendations. With the project, the peer exchange on mainstreaming sustainability in regulatory policies has gained momentum that should be kept and continued with further exchanges in various formats and on new aspects. The Czech Republic plans to discuss project results and possible further activities under its presidency of the Council of the EU in the Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda. The European Sustainable Development Network – of which several members very actively participated in the project – discusses how peer learning activities in that area could be promoted in future. The European Commission is interested to explore how regulatory policy tools from the EU and the national level could be used in a complementary way, e.g. by mutually providing input to assessments in order to improve regulatory policy performance at both levels. The Commission’s TAIEX EIR-P2P instrument is available to support further peer learning workshops or bilateral exchanges. The OECD could help taking the project recommendations and the peer learning approach forward if countries are interested and funding is available. Accordingly, in its work on regulatory policy the OECD has recently set up two new workstreams on the social and the environmental aspects and is now looking for countries that are interested to participate in a collection of case studies. In addition, the OECD is exploring whether a project could be financed under the EU’s Technical Support Instrument, to support capacity building on mainstreaming sustainability in regulatory policy instruments. This could cover e.g. the implementation of pilot projects in countries or the funding of national regulatory policy schemes with regard to the integration of the sustainability dimension.

4. Theme 1. Current State and Framework Conditions in the EU

The first peer to peer workshop on 24 February 2022, concentrated on the current state and framework conditions in the EU (and its Member States), as regards mainstreaming the sustainability and more specifically the SDGs in national regulatory impact assessments (RIA). The discussion covered three clusters of survey questions, (1) Institutionalisation, capacity and skills, (2) Focus of RIA on SDGs and climate action, and (3) Quality assurance.

4.1 Institutionalisation, capacity and skills

The first cluster of issues addressed in the survey and workshops is about the way how IA is institutionalised, systematically used, and whether there are sufficient resources to apply the instrument fully. Besides the results of the survey in the context of the current project, the literature about this includes comparative OECD studies (e.g. Jacob et al. 2011b), a 2015 comparative study commissioned by the European Commission on environment in RIA ([European Commission study](#)), and a 2019 study commissioned by the European Parliament on institutionalisation of sustainability in general, including RIA ([European Parliament study 2019](#)).

Cluster 1 contains the following survey questions:

- Q1. Is there a legal requirement to carry out an IA in the development/revision of policies and legislation?*
- Q2. Are IAs systematically/routinely used in the development/revision of policies and legislation?*
- Q3. Do IAs receive sufficient time, resources and expertise?*
- Q4. Does the Member State in question have a guidance document setting out the methodologies, scope and procedures to be followed when elaborating IAs?*

What is this about?

Regulatory impact assessment is, like environmental impact assessments, usually regulated in the sense that it is obligatory for all new initiatives, or only for certain categories of initiatives. The legal requirement can be more, or less detailed. RIA started in most countries with a focus on reducing administrative burden of new legal or policy initiatives for economic operators, but the scope has gradually widened, and with this also the level of detail of the legislation. Sustainable development is one of the typical “add-ons”, but countries have also added more specific topics to be assessed during an IA procedure. An example is gender equality (i.e. SDG 5). In 2015, virtually all EU Member States had legislation to apply RIA at the national level (RPA & EPRD 2015).

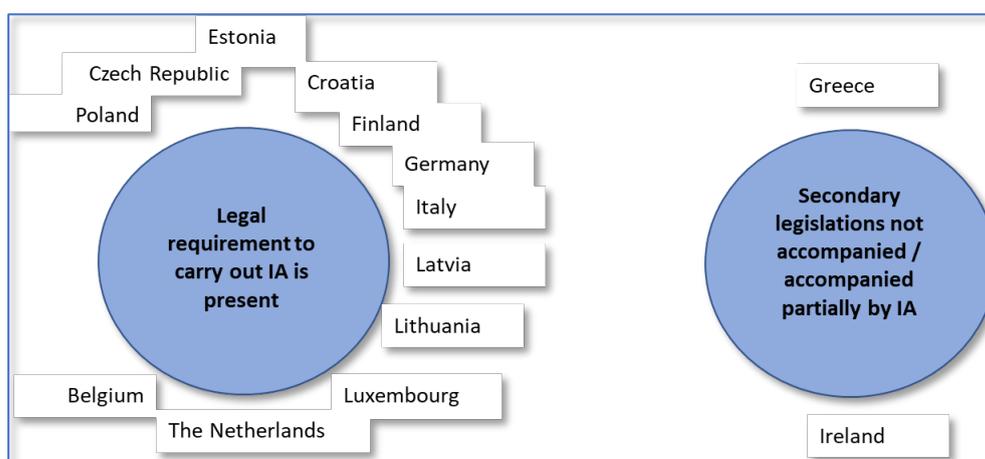


Figure 6. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

Are IAs systematically / routinely used in the development / revision of policies and legislation?

It is important to embed RIAs in the process of law making with clear rules and mandatory requirements. Figure 6 shows that most countries have a legal requirement to carry out RIA; Figure 7 suggests that this is in most countries systematically implemented. However, many countries introduced some flexibility and exceptions. E.g., RIAs may be done for all policy and legal initiatives above a certain threshold, or only for the economically most impactful initiatives. Another option is to prescribe RIA for only legislative initiatives and not for strategic policy initiatives, for example.

Some RIA systems only cover the largest, most impactful government initiatives. This leaves an ‘escape route’ for governments who consider doing a full RIA procedure too time- and/or resource intensive, or too much a risk for plans already informally agreed: the approach known in e.g. environmental impact assessments as ‘salami-slicing’, where smaller projects are defined which separately remain below a threshold of ‘major initiatives’.

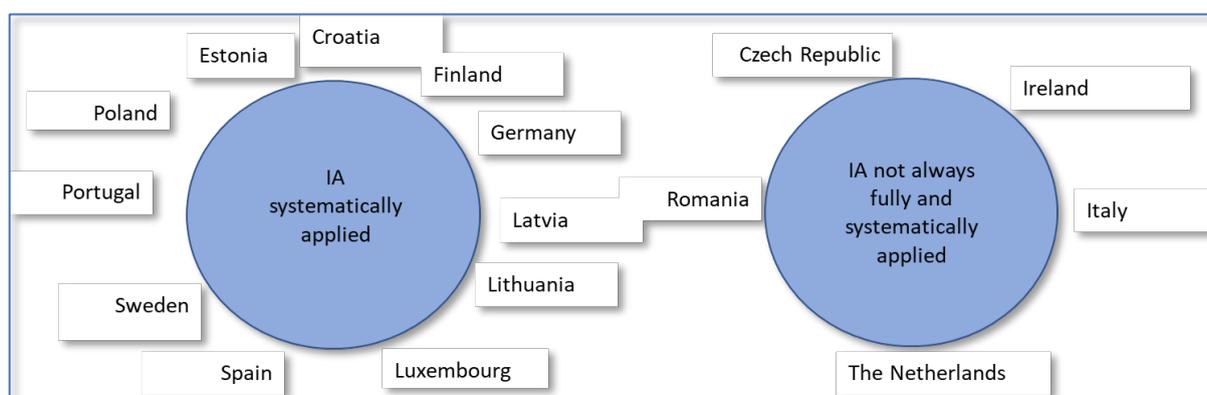


Figure 7. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

Some examples of the various ways the scope of IA is defined:

In Latvia, IA procedures are consistently applied to all legislations and policies.

In Estonia, since 2014, an initial IA is required in all Legislative Intent documents, and a more thorough IA should accompany all draft laws and all EU-related matters submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for deciding on Estonia's position. An initial IA is required in all Requests for Developing a Strategic Plan submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval, and more thorough IA should accompany all draft Strategic Plans.

In Finland, IAs are systematically carried out in all development and revision of regulation and mandatory part of law proposal. In case of policy proposals, it is used less systematically.

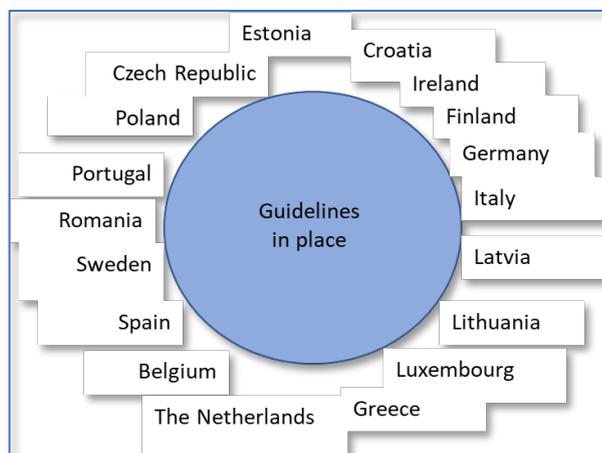
In Belgium (at federal level), RIA is done on legal proposals and not on policies.

Guidance document setting out the methodologies, scope and procedures to be followed when elaborating IAs?

Guidance documents are among the best tools to stimulate that IAs are applied the way they were meant to. However, they are not the only conditions for effective IA implementation. Having sufficient time, resources and expertise (see Q3) is also essential. The political will to make major decisions evidence-informed is another precondition. The fact that during this project, we frequently heard that the project should not result in additional guidance, suggests that the availability of guidance is not one of the most important bottlenecks for good IA implementation. Indeed, Figure 8 suggests that sufficient guidelines are in place in most countries.

Nevertheless, guidance should be tailored to the needs of IA practitioners and policymakers who need to interpret the IA reports, as well as tailored to the specific themes to be covered. The [EU IA Guidance and Toolbox](#)¹⁰ is a very rich source of information. It is meant for EU officials but is also available – and overall applicable – for national officials. Other sources include the work done in the past under the EU-funded research project LIAISE¹¹ (Jacob et al. 2013) and for OECD (Jacob et al. 2011).

Figure 8. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)



Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

Regulatory impact assessment is one of the most effective means to ensure that major new legislative and policy initiatives are sufficiently *evidence-informed*. It does not ensure that the final decisions are fully *evidence-based*: in a political democratic process there can be other (strategic, tactical, operational) reasons to take a decision which is not primarily based on scientific evidence. Without RIA, it is likely that decisions are not taking into account all relevant impacts on society, which can have result in huge costs.¹² An OECD study by Jacob et al. (2011b) observes a ‘lack of institutional demand’ which originates from political processes (see below under ‘challenges’).

Mainstreaming the SDGs in RIA only strengthens the quality of decision-making if the practice of RIA is convincing and credible. When in reality initiatives with potentially severe impacts on social and/or environmental values can escape from a full RIA, this may undermine citizens’ trust that the SDGs are being implemented.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

Lack of institutional/political demand

As Jacob et al. (2011) observed, because RIA studies “analyse the pros and cons of legislative proposals they may limit the room for manoeuvre for political actors to pursue their goals.” The study considers this a reason why IA studies are often performed in a superficial and a non-transparent manner, and why issues that are more difficult to assess because they are about intangible values and long-term benefits may not be taken into consideration.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox_en

¹¹ Linking Impact Assessment Instruments to Sustainability Expertise

¹² A large number of convincing examples of the costs of ignoring scientific evidence are given in the reports on “Late lessons on early warnings” (EEA 2001, 2013)

Measures addressing this challenge, mentioned in the 2011 study, include

- having institutions for quality control (see cluster 8, section 5.3 in this concept note);
- methodological rigidity and standardisation (see cluster 3 in chapter 5.1).

The anti-burden tool RIA can become itself a burden

In the Belgian Region of Flanders, the mandatory character of RIAs for decrees and orders issued by the Flemish government was withdrawn in 2019. They can now be conducted voluntarily. The reason was the perception that the effort to make up a RIA was not proportional with respect to the added value. There are no plans to make RIAs mandatory again in the foreseeable future, but currently a proposal is in preparation to establish a new efficient RIA procedure or ex-ante screening, to ensure better quality of regulation making.

Guidance needs to be part of a comprehensive RIA implementation structure

The workshop discussion underlined that guidelines are only helpful for a good implementation of RIA if they are accompanied by training for policy officers implementing RIAs and promoting both, skills and motivation. Guidance documents must avoid overcomplexity and too rigid regulation. They should allow flexibility to focus the impact assessment on relevant aspects and possibly consider also new types of impacts. A possible solution to find the right balance could be to make only the guideline's core requirements mandatory and provide toolboxes with non-mandatory instruments for flexible use.

In the case of outsourcing, the terms of reference of the contract with the consultant should be very clear about how to integrate the SDGs (e.g. explicit reference to the EU's BR #19 Tool on the SDGs).

In several countries, training seminars are provided on better regulation, including on RIAs, explanatory reports and ex-post evaluations. Examples of challenges as regards a lack of expertise within government include:

Croatia mentions challenges in analytical area of expertise of civil servants, resulting among others in a poor analytical background of ex-ante and ex-post RIA reports.

Czechia mentions that RIA is often processed by legislative units instead of analytical units and expert units equipped with better data and experience. In addition, the collaboration among ministries/agencies, e.g. for sharing relevant data, would need improvement.

In Italy, trainings on RIA are being offered by the National School of Administration, in order to improve the expertise among policymakers.

In Portugal, IAs are developed by each governmental area with their own resources, but a Technical Unit for Legislative Impact Assessment (UTAIL) with a reinforced team of experts gives technical support.

A clear lesson from the first peer learning workshop is that an effective implementation of an RIA scheme needs a comprehensive governance approach integrating legal RIA requirements, suitable guidance tools, a central RIA helpdesk, staff capacity building and training as well as a functioning quality control.

The Czech Republic has established an integrated support system for the RIA implementation (Figure 9.): The support system for implementation is based on 3 main pillars: The methodological help pillar, which offers training, consultation and revises RIA reports before they go to further scrutiny. The scrutiny, transparency & monitoring Pillar, where the RIA board is responsible for independent review of RIAs. This pillar is tasked with public control of RIA performance, and it carries out surveys on RIA activities among different ministerial departments. Finally, the fostering awareness & public relations pillar is responsible for managing the information website, which provides for important resources for RIA analysts.

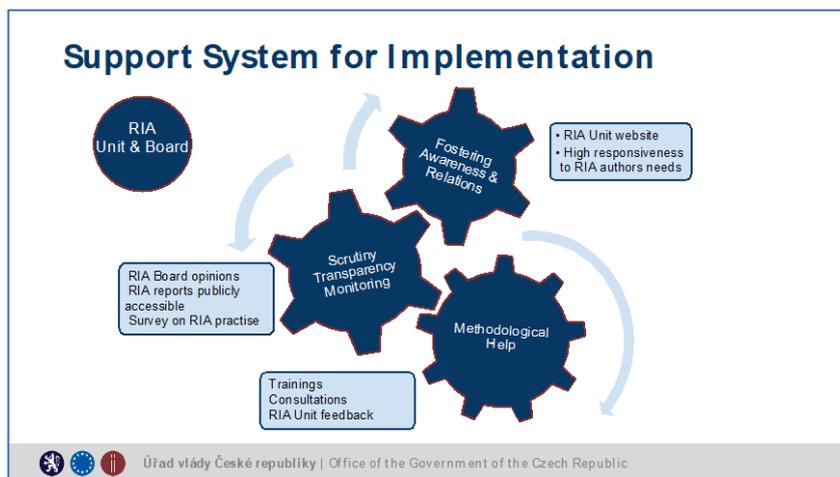


Figure 9. (source: Kristyna Hodlikova, Office of the Government, Czech Republic, presentation in the first workshop)

Sufficient resources?

Legal requirements to do a RIA, and guidance on how to do it, are together not sufficient if there is not the right level of human and other resources.

The results of the survey suggest that this is certainly an issue to be followed up (Figure 10).

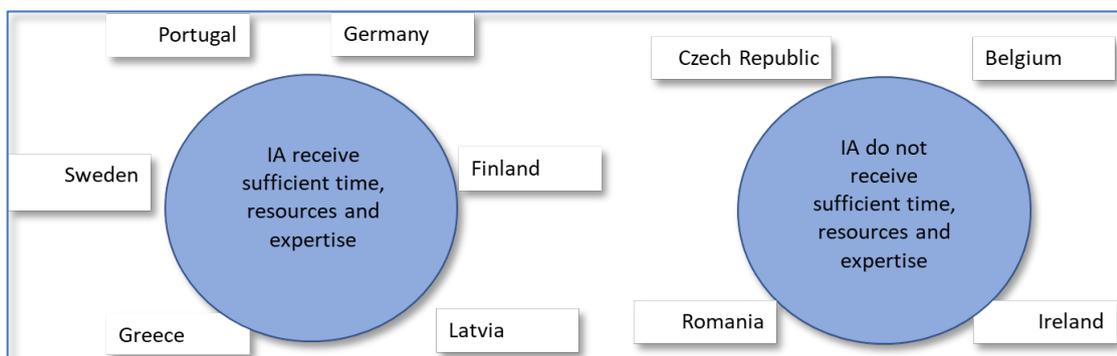


Figure 10. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

4.2 Focus of RIA on SDGs and climate action

The second cluster contains the following survey questions, which will be treated here together:

- Q7. Do IAs consider environmental, economic and social impacts and are these taken into account in their conclusions?
 Q7a. Is the problem defined in terms of lack of progress in the area covered by one or more SDGs (and linked targets)?
 Q7b. Objectives of initiative linked to SDG implementation?
 Q7c. Impacts of initiative on GHG emission reduction targets?
 Q16c. Description of impacts on climate mitigation & adapt. targets?

What is this about?

Attempts and concrete measures to integrate *environmental impacts* into RIA requirements have been more abundant and extensive in the past decades than mainstreaming the wider concept of sustainable development, and it can be assumed that lessons learned from environmental mainstreaming can be useful to stimulate mainstreaming of the SDGs.

Broadening the scope of RIA beyond an analysis of economic costs and taking environmental concerns into account can:

improve policy coherence as it is a powerful tool to integrate environmental concerns in policy domains like agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and transport;
help avoiding policy conflicts (Jacob et al. 2011) – also conflicts downstream, i.e. in the implementation phase of policies;
reduce and prevent societal and economic costs of neglecting environmental impacts. Against this backdrop, the comparative study for the European Commission on the capacity of national IA systems to support environmental goals (RPA & EPRD 2015) aimed at contributing to the avoidance of costs in the Member States for which the Commission had proposed Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in the context of its European Semester process. The study identified a number of case studies that clearly illustrate the cost avoidance potential of IA in policy areas relevant to environmental CSRs.

Figures 11 and 12 indicate that, overall, the three sustainability dimensions are covered in most countries, but not yet explicitly linked to the SDGs. This also applies to climate action.

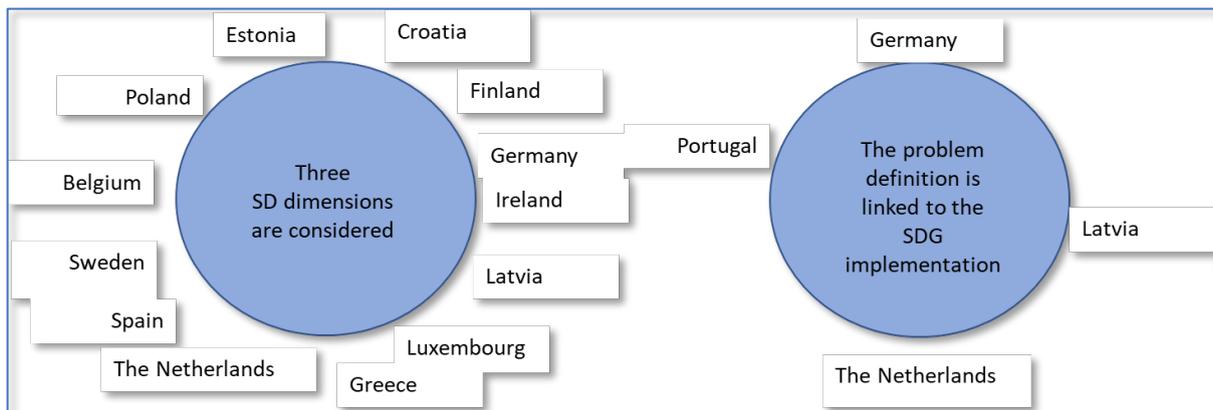


Figure 11. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

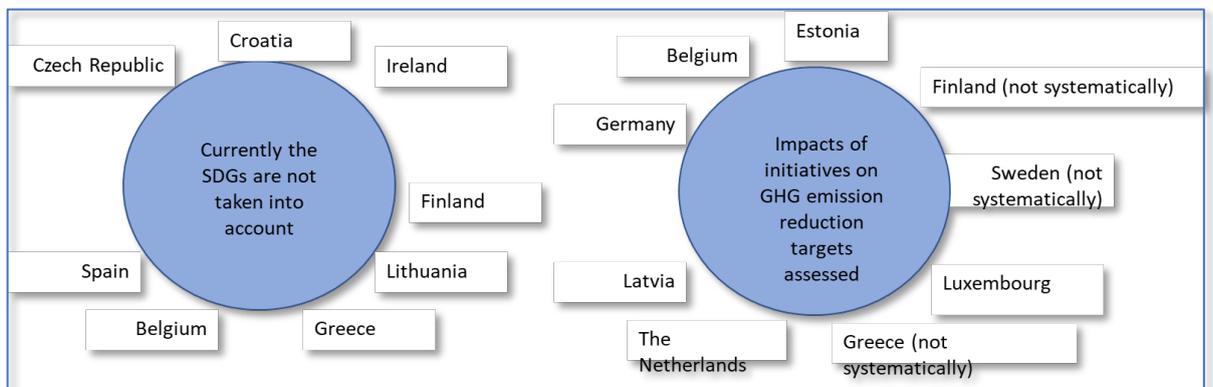


Figure 12. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

Integrating environmental impacts in RIA was facilitated by the experience in most countries (and in the EU as regulated practice) of environmental impact assessments for public and private projects ([Environmental Impact Assessment](#), with an EU Directive since 1985), and for government plans and programmes ([Strategic Environmental Assessment](#), with an EU Directive since 2001).

Mainstreaming social impacts has been developed later, with meanwhile good examples in various countries. Originally, social impact assessment was regarded as a technique for predicting social impacts as part of an environmental impact assessment (EIA) (Esteves, Franks, and Vanclay 2012).

In 2015, only a small number of countries had introduced the obligation to cover (some) environmental and social impacts, in addition to economic (and financial) impacts (RPA & EPRD 2015). Examples of partial mainstreaming from around 2018 include Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Finland, Latvia. At that moment, several countries were working on mainstreaming sustainability in their RIA systems (e.g. Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Netherlands, Romania, Spain) (Niestroy et al. 2019).

The EU's own IA system has formalised that economic, environmental and social impacts of new initiatives should be assessed in an integrated way, and since April 2021 also explicitly requires mainstreaming the SDGs in IA, "to help ensure that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 sustainable development agenda; and ensure that the 'do no significant harm' principle is applied across all policies in line with the European Green Deal oath" (RPA & EPRD 2015).

At the workshop, OECD and the European Commission presented, respectively, insights on integrating SDGs in RIA, and the current rules and guidance at the European Commission.

The SDGs in the Better Regulation Guidelines (3 November 2021)

- **Key concepts and principles**
 - A comprehensive approach: covering all relevant economic, social and environmental impacts.
 - A coherent approach: consistency with high-level and long-term policy objectives, by incorporating the SDGs.
- **Impact assessments**
 - The Commission's impact assessment system follows an integrated approach that assesses the environmental, social and economic impacts of a range of policy options thereby mainstreaming sustainability into Union policy-making and the implementation of the SDGs.
 - Key questions: impacts: The analysis will involve identifying relevant SDGs and – if feasible – how the initiative contributes to their implementation.
 - Final IA report must contain: assessment of the impacts on the relevant SDGs.
- **Legislative initiatives:** The explanatory memorandum will include a summary of the IA process, including: Assessment of the contribution to progress towards relevant SDGs,
- **Evaluations:** Expected outcomes: Wherever possible, it should include a reference to the SDGs that the intervention aimed to address.

European Commission

Figure 13. (source: Carlos Berrozpe Garcia, European Commission, presentation in the first workshop)

The Commission's impact assessment system since 2021 includes a comprehensive and consistent approach, covering all 3 areas of sustainable developments and incorporating SDGs in long-term and high-level policy objectives (Figure 13). The revised Better Regulation Toolbox (2021), contains 69 tools, most with references to the SDGs, and Tool #19 on sustainable development goals. The discussion in the first workshop demonstrated that the integration of SDGs into Better Regulation agenda at the EU level is an inspiring example for Member States pursuing similar objectives. Tools from the Better Regulation Toolbox are publicly accessible and can be also used by MS governments when creating their own tools. However, differences between EU and national level in the process of law making, political context and capacities need to be considered.

Germany and Belgium represent good practice examples for a full integration of SDGs, based on the national SD Strategy into RIA. The German digital system eNAP guides policy officers responsible for RIA through an assessment based on the targets and indicators of the national SD strategy and strengthening policy coherence and evidence base of law making.

Romania used its National Recovery and Resilience Plan to announce a reform on "Enhancing the predictability and efficiency of decision-making processes by strengthening the capacity for policy coordination and impact analysis at the level of the government and coordinating ministries, as well as by strengthening the tools to increase the quality of public consultations at all levels of the administration". End of March 2022, the relevant methodologies and procedures entered into force, with clear references to the integration of SDG into the RIA.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

The discussion on the first workshop demonstrated significant synergies between the mainstreaming of SDGs and improving RIA systems. RIAs are well suited to help mainstreaming SDGs in various policy areas. On the other hand, integrating the sustainability dimension also helps to improve RIAs through the consideration of impact areas that previously have been neglected, through a better consideration of long-term effects and trade-offs and by ensuring a more consistent and integrated assessment of impacts. However, the survey and the workshops also revealed important challenges and obstacles for the mainstreaming of SDGs in RIAs.

Most countries mention that RIAs should look at economic, social and environmental impacts, but in some, economic impacts still have the priority in weighing different impacts.

In many countries the mainstreaming of SDGs in RIA system is lacking political support. Experts from countries that are more advanced in that process underlined that 'Christmas tree' approaches that are burdening RIAs with too extensive SDG checks must be avoided. Instead, focusing on the most relevant impacts and SDGs should be encouraged in SIAs. Though a significant number of countries have included SDGs in RIAs providing wholistic and integrated assessments is still an important challenge.

The OECD presented a number of mechanisms and tools that should help integrating the SDGs in RIA (Figure 14).

Figure 14. OECD recommendations for successfully integrating SDGs in RIA, source: Anna Piccinni, Yola Thuerer, OECD, Directorate for Public Governance, presentation at the first workshop)

The slide features a title 'Successfully integrating SDGs in RIA' at the top, accompanied by a green double-arrow icon on the left and the 17-color SDG wheel on the right. Below the title, a box contains the text: 'Make use of institutional mechanisms and tools for policy coherence to "translate" SDGs into country context and assess country specific SDGs in existing RIA system'. The main content is a list of five numbered recommendations, each with a sub-bullet point. To the left of the list is a small image of stacked stones on a beach, with the text 'OECD Best Practice Principles for Regulatory Policy' and 'Regulatory Impact Assessment' above it. The OECD logo is at the bottom left of the slide, and the number '5' is in the bottom right corner.

Successfully integrating SDGs in RIA

Make use of institutional mechanisms and tools for policy coherence to "translate" SDGs into country context and assess country specific SDGs in existing RIA system

1. Ensure commitment and buy-in
— Governments should express political support for SDG assessment, securing stakeholder support is essential

2. Set up effective regulatory oversight
— Provide advice and quality control of SDG impact assessment and ensure policy coherence (e.g. OIRA, US)

3. Strengthen capacities
— Provide training and guidance for new SDG impacts

4. Introduce proportionate approach to RIA
— Target RIA resources to the most burdensome regulations

5. Monitor and evaluate sustainability assessments
— Conduct systematic evaluation of RIA system

OECD

5

The following recommendations for countries endeavouring the integration of SDGs in RIA can be concluded from the workshop:

- Ensure support from political leaders;
- Work in a team of innovators (core team and wider network);
- Carefully analyse the current RIA system in order to find the right approach for sustainability mainstreaming;
- Approach SDG integration in RIA from an overarching policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development (PCSD) perspective;
- Involve policy officers in development of tools and rules: co-designing, create prototypes and explore/improve functionality in pilot testing and
- Continue the process of evaluation and adaptation after introduction.

4.3 Quality assurance

Cluster 8 contains the following survey questions, which will be discussed together:

Q14. Are effective procedures for quality control and oversight in place?
Q14a. Is there an independent oversight body for the quality of IAs?
Q15. Are IA reports clear about methodology and assumptions used; is sensitivity analysis done?

What is this about?

The effectiveness of RIA depends strongly on the quality of the process and the results. Quality assurance of IA procedures can be achieved in many ways, as questions 14, 14a and 15 suggest.

First and foremost, effective procedures for quality control and oversight should be in place. This may differ across countries. In some countries, stakeholders might be involved in quality assurance mechanisms, in others a central role is for an oversight body which is independent or semi-independent. Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in regulatory impact assessment?

Quality assurance helps ensuring the quality of the evidence that is used, and can improve the credibility of the IA procedure in the eyes of stakeholders and citizens. It is an important part of the condition of accountability formulated in SDG 16 for public institutions.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

It is useful to compare different national quality assurance models and understand how and why they are considered to be effective against the governance culture and traditions of a country. This could create a kind of 'choice menu' for countries that are interested in making their system more effective.

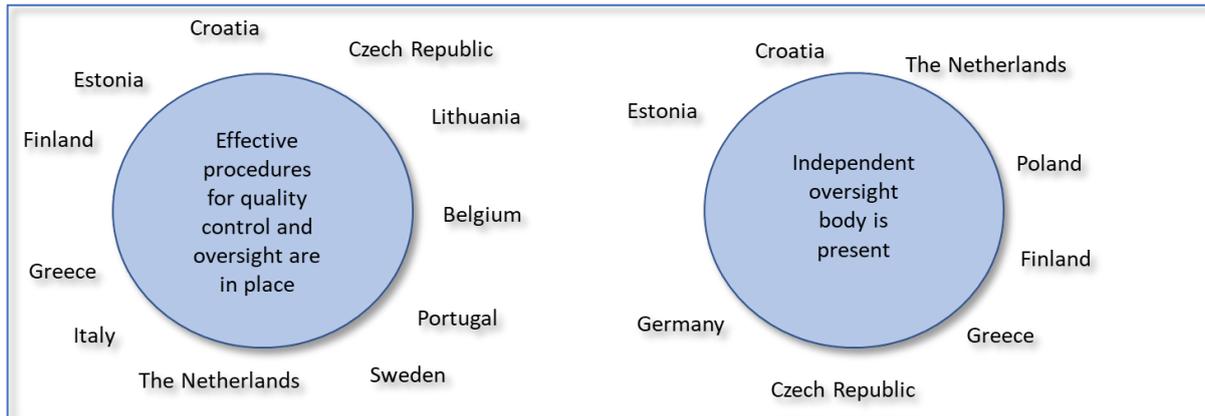


Figure 15. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

For example, in the Netherlands, while there is no independent oversight for the quality of all aspects of IAs, the legislative quality division at the Ministry of Justice and Security is responsible for scrutiny of IA's for draft legislation. Furthermore, the Netherlands has the independent and external advisory body Actal, as well as parliamentary control as a form of oversight.. Czechia has with a RIA Board an independent body which issues written opinions on particular IAs. Finland has, since 2016, the Finnish Council of Regulatory Impact Analysis. In Sweden, each government agency has the responsibility to control its own IAs. The Swedish Better Regulation Council, as an independent oversight body, controls the quality of IAs in the fields impacts on business. In Spain, the Regulatory coordination and quality office, established in 2017, is the permanent body responsible for promoting the coordination and quality of the government's normative activity. In Poland, the Government Centre of Analysis in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister is responsible for controlling the quality of RIAs. In Luxembourg, RIAs are part of the proposal assessment that undergoes the review of the Parliament and Council. In Greece, the Committee for evaluation of the law-making procedure is responsible for assessing the quality of the legal draft. In Estonia, the Legislative Quality Division at the Ministry of Justice of Estonia is responsible for reviewing IAs of draft legislation, and the Strategy Unit in the strategic planning and EU Secretariat for EU matters. In Romania, the "Better Regulation" Government Decision (2022) indicates the establishment of an Advisory Council for assessing the impact of normative acts, an independent body, whose members are elected in a transparent manner..

In Germany, the parliamentary advisory council for sustainable development is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the sustainability assessment, but there is a separate independent institution for the quality of RIA as a whole (the National Regulatory Control Council ([Normenkontrollrat](#))), which is not tasked to scrutinise how sustainability/SDGs are integrated in RIAs.

5. Theme 2. Methodologies and Process Design

While the 1st workshop discussed framework conditions for the mainstreaming of sustainability in Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), the second workshop, on 29th March 2022, concentrated on methodologies for Sustainability Impact Assessments, with a background introduction by Prof. László Pintér, Central European University (CEU), Vienna, and some first insights in the first European Commission IA with full SDG integration. The second part of the workshop focused on the process of Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIA) in RIA schemes, with good practice examples to make RIA "lean and effective".

5.1 Methodologies

What is this about?

The success of RIA depends strongly on the quality and appropriateness of the methods that are used to assess the impacts of a legislative or policy initiative, and of various options to design and implement the initiative. Methods are rarely fully objective and neutral. They contain assumptions and values which are not always made explicit. For example, who believes that environmental policy investments should have the same discount rate as business investments, will assess impacts through a cost-benefit analysis that makes such investments look less attractive, than who takes a low discount rate for environmental investments (see e.g. De Zeeuw et al. 2008). In addition, it has been shown that each model or method in some way expresses the values of its developer (Hofstede 1984).

Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

Most countries use standardised (national) methods, a diversity of methods, comparison of options, monetisation of impacts, and include the costs of enforcement. Some European standardisation or at least comparability of RIA methods could support sustainability targets, because many sustainable development challenges do not stop at national borders. Transboundary and spill-over effects appear in most, if not all policy sectors. A good basis for this is the Better Regulation Toolbox¹³ which the European Commission updated to integrate the SDGs, in November 2021. This is a very rich methodology, developed for the EU's own impact assessment system. Since the EU's IA covers the three dimensions of sustainable development and explicitly now also the SDGs, this is a good model to compare national methodologies with. The Toolbox is known for being practical, understandable and user-friendly. It contains 69 "tools", each of which describes a specific topic within 5-6 pages of text.:

The Tools are clustered in 8 chapters:

1. General principles of 'better regulation' (tools 1-6)
2. How to carry out an impact assessment (tools 7-17)
3. Identifying impacts in evaluations, fitness checks and impact assessments (tools 18-37)
4. Compliance, implementation and preparing proposal (tools 38-42)
5. Monitoring the application of an intervention (tools 43-44)
6. How to carry out an evaluation and fitness check (tools 45-50)
7. Stakeholder consultation (tools 51-55)
8. Methodologies for analysing impacts in impact assessments, evaluations and fitness checks (tools 56-69).

Tools that are of particular relevance for Sustainability Impact Assessments include:

Tool #11 guides the user through a standardized Format of the Impact Assessment Report, including the necessary Annex with an overview of the relevant SDGs.

Tool #19 links the user to the SDGs, explaining how to identify the associated indicators while preparing the IA report. Tool #19 recommends the use of the JRC [KnowSDG](#) platform for a better integration of SDGs into IAs.

Tool #20 introduces the strategic foresight for IAs. In other words, it helps the user to embed a long-term dimension into RIAs. It offers 4 different specific tools to implement this: 1) *Horizon scanning* for identifying early signs of change; 2) Consideration of *Megatrends*; 3) Use of possible future *Scenarios* for stress-test policies; 4) Use of *Visioning* tools for a shared vision of the future.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/br_toolbox-nov_2021_en_o.pdf

Tool #36 introduces the topic of Environmental Impacts and the trade-offs to be considered in the fields of human health, economic activity and social aspects. Here is important to make trade-offs as transparent as possible.

Tools #56-69 tackle the topic of Methodologies. An important take-away message here is that the Toolbox promotes combining different methods, as they all have their strengths and weaknesses.

Tool #63 deals with Cost-Benefit Analysis. It is important to notice, that CBA is based on the assumption that all impacts of a policy can be monetized and efficiency is the only relevant policy objective. However, the downside of this method is that not all impact can or should be monetised.

Tool #62 introduces the Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis, which allows taking into account a wide range of assessment criteria, comparing different factors. Such approach is promoted by the guidelines.

Tool #69 on Emerging Methods and Policy Instruments presents *regulatory sandboxes*, which are schemes to test innovations in a controlled real-world environment, as well as *behavioural insights*, which show that human are often not rational (nudging).

Luisa Marelli from the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission presented during the workshop a 7-step process for carrying out an Impact Assessment. The BR Toolbox gives methods for each of the steps:

- i. Provide relevant evidence to substantiate problem definition*
- ii. Evidence relevant SDGs and how the initiative contributes to their implementation*
- iii. Define sustainability framework and requirements*
- iv. Identify existing sustainability efforts in the EU food system and globally*
- v. Identify policy options*
- vi. Define a methodology for the analysis of impacts*
- vii. Analyse quantitative and qualitative impacts on the economy, society and environment*

Recommendations based on experience at the European Commission include:

- Ensure that your problem is properly framed before starting any IA, by*
- o Identifying the right questions*
 - o Identifying the right boundaries*
- The BR Toolbox lists methods available to the different stages of the policy cycle:*
- o The choice of methods is never neutral*
 - o Methodological choices and choices of tools may also affect outcomes*
- The update of the BR puts a stronger emphasis on the implementation of the SDGs and sustainability assessments in all stages of the policy cycle.*

The Better Regulation Toolbox combined with tools on the JRC KnowSDGs platform provide the best up-to-date compendium for RIA methods integrating SIA, and it is available for use also by EU Member States. To use this potential there is the Commission could help disseminating these tools to Member States government staff through communication and training.

In addition to the European Commission's Toolbox, the OECD has abundant guidance and tools available online and in reports with good practice examples.

However, Member States should also take into account certain constraints of the Better Regulation agenda (ETUC 2020; ETUC and WWF 2021; Ten Brink 2022):

- Caution must be taken to not scrutinize new legislation in RIA predominantly under the aspect of potential administrative burden, simplification and short-term cost effects on businesses. Truly integrating the sustainability perspective in IA requires to consider also the burden from economic developments on citizens social situation and health, human rights/values as well as on environment (climate/biodiversity). Policy measures (legislation/intervention) are

important to take responsibility for long-term sustainable development (socially inclusive and within planetary boundaries) and short-term costs need to be assessed versus mid-term and long-term benefits – even if those frequently cannot be fully quantified. Tools for SIA need to reflect the complexity of long-term sustainable development.

- The Commission ‘one-in-one-out’ principle represents an approach regarding legislative measures mainly under the aspect of reducing short-term costs and administrative burden instead of assessing it against long-term sustainability impacts.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points.

The stocktaking survey contained several questions on the methodology of regulatory impact assessment in an SDG mainstreaming context:

Cluster 3. Impact Assessment methodology

Q5. Are there standardised IA methods?
 Q4a. Diversity of assessment methods, e.g., CBA/CEA /MCA ?
 Q4b. Behavioural science (e.g. nudging) used?
 Q10. IAs have comparative analysis of several scenarios/ options, incl. baseline?
 Q13. Monetisation of impacts carried out for all options?
 Q13a. Costs of enforcement and compliance assessed for all options?

The following graphs present the tentative position of the surveyed countries on these questions. Most countries have standardised methodologies for IA in place, while around half of the countries emphasise diversity in the use of methods and tools during IA (Figure 16).

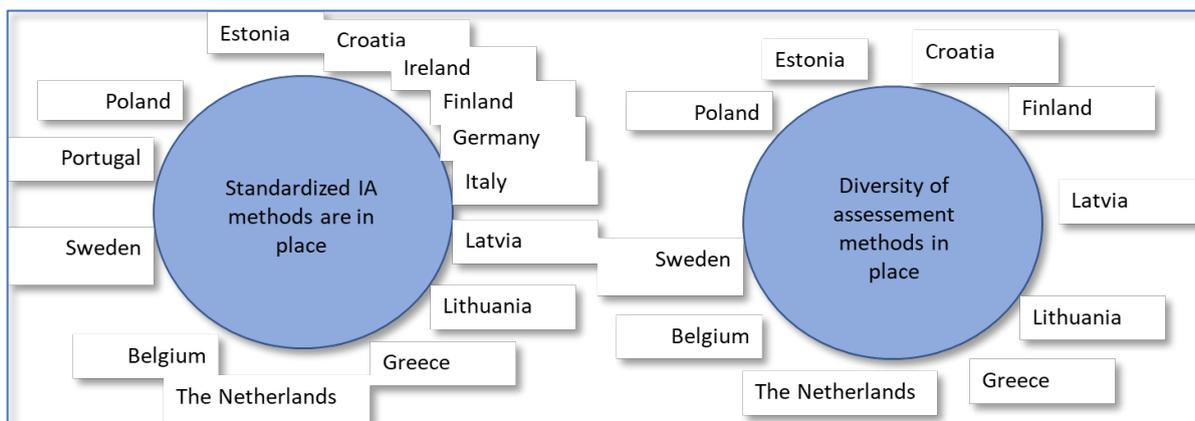


Figure 16. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

The use of scenarios to understand the impacts in different possible situations, is not overall common practice (Figure 17).

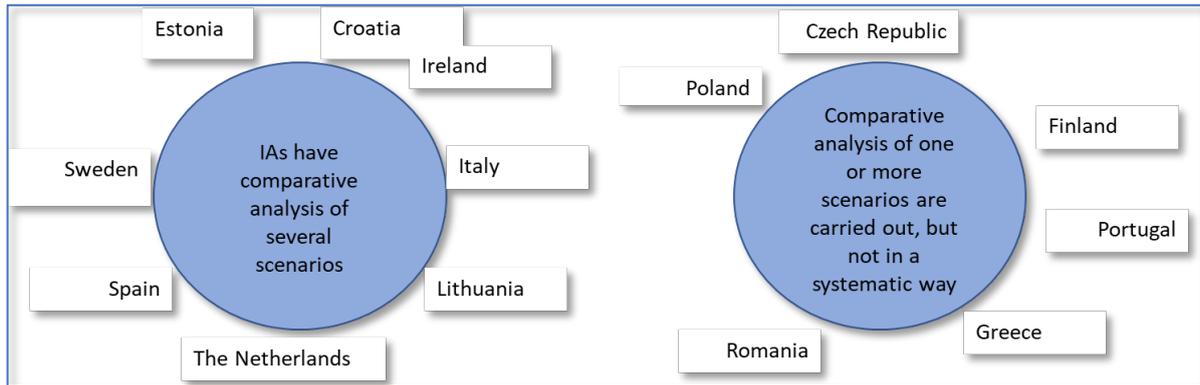


Figure 17. (source: survey project P2P for SIA)

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

Mainstreaming sustainability into RIA is more than adding some SDG goals/targets/indicators to RIA (SDG check as an add-on to existing RIA; Such as in many MS RIA has been extended to certain impact areas, such as gender-check, climate-check etc.). It needs a critical overhaul/revision of RIA methodology from the perspective of SIA and principles used in sustainability assessment and monitoring.

Example applying the BellagioSTAMP principles to sustainability assessment procedures

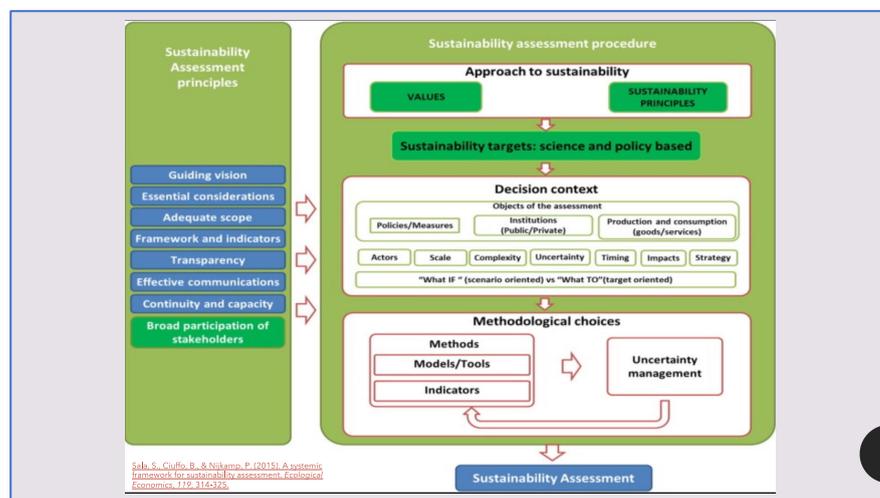


Figure 18. Presentation of László Pintér, Central European University (CEU), Vienna, in the workshop 2

To provide a good basis for political decision-making RIAs need to comprise an assessment of a baseline scenario and an assessment of several different policy options. Only a comparative analysis of the baseline scenario with the impacts of different policy options enables an evidence-based selection of the best performing solution. The contribution of RIAs to the process of law making is hampered by the fact that – according to the survey - in many Member States RIAs are not providing a comparative analysis of several policy options.

With respect to strengthening capacities and methodology, the OECD (presentation of Yola Thuerer, Directorate for Public Governance, OECD) suggests that it is important to provide training and guidance on how to identify appropriate data sources. Important topics to take into consideration are:

- the number of regulated parties affected by the regulation → *who is affected and how many?*
- the importance of having internal *and* external data + sharing such information across country (the example of Estonia and Finland was made, which share data on e.g. health and education).
- involvement of stakeholders in the process through surveys or consultations
- with respect to methodology, the presentation outlined the problem of quantifying sustainable impacts - as methods are available, but not everything can be quantified and encouraged to use innovative ways of quantification.

With respect to the principle of proportionality, the OECD expert in the workshop recalled to pay attention to the first stage of RIA: here it is decided which approach or methodology to use, the qualitative threshold, the scope and the width of the assessment. This can have a major impact of the results.

5.2 Long-term and trade-offs

What is this about?

From the perspective of sustainability, it is essential that not only short- and medium-term impacts are assessed in RIA, but also long-term impacts, and that trade-offs are made transparent.

For long-term assessment of options, various foresight methods can be used (e.g. scenarios, horizon scanning, visions). The European Commission has integration of foresight in its IAs made mandatory in 2021.

Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

The definition of sustainable development points at the long-term dimension: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland et al. 1987). If the long-term is not considered explicitly, there is a risk that initiatives will fail, and/or result in high costs in the course of time, which could have been prevented with consideration during the IA procedure.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

The survey results suggest that the long term is taken into account in RIA in most countries. Trade-offs between competing interests are less explicitly addressed, apparently (Figure 19).

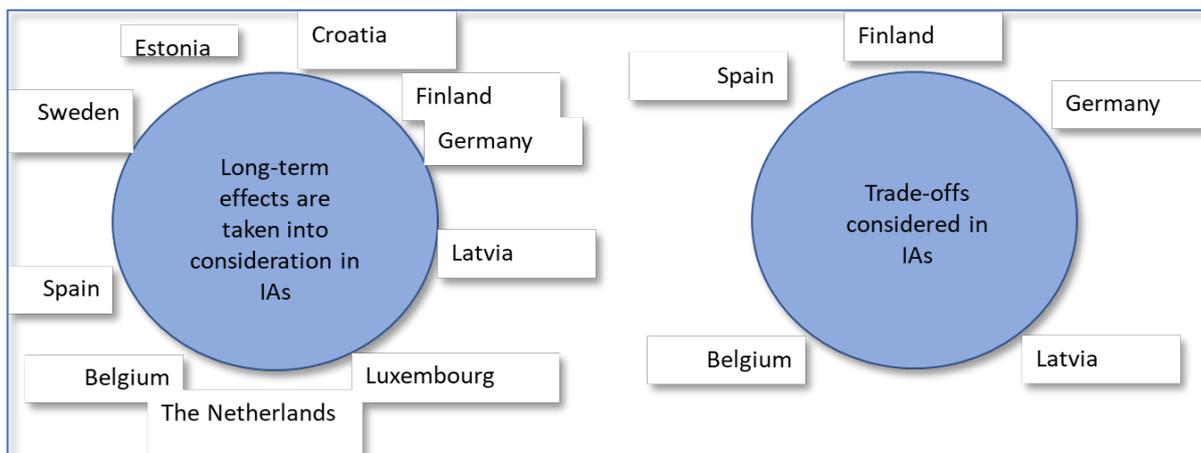


Figure 19. source: survey project P2P for SIA)

5.3 Data and knowledge

What is this about?

Good data quality and adequate mechanisms to use data, through indicators, and monitoring mechanisms, to assess impacts in different situations, are important aspects of a RIA system. Although this topic was not extensively addressed in the workshop, some results of the survey are worthwhile mentioning here.

Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

Good data quality and reliable knowledge are important for the credibility of a RIA procedure and can prevent delays and opposition in a late stage of the decision making.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

The survey questions on monitoring, evaluation and data sources did not present a sufficient basis for analysis (Figure 20). This could be a topic to further discuss in future peer learning workshops.

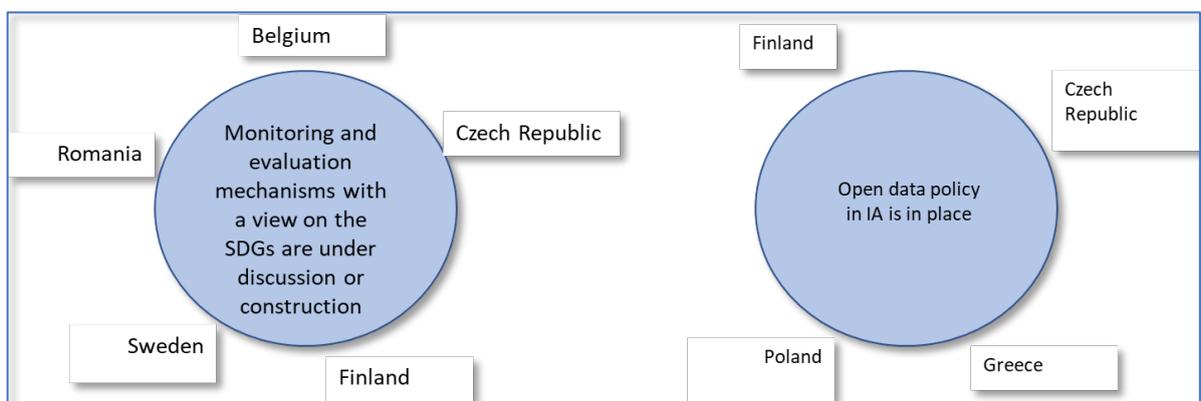


Figure 20. source: survey project P2P for SIA)

5.4 Process design

As discussed in workshop 2, making RIA, including SIA, lean and effective is a continuous challenge. These two objectives can also even be conflicting. The challenge is to find the right balance. Only RIA schemes that are lean and effective have the chance of being accepted and supported by policy makers and stakeholders. This requires continuous monitoring and evaluation of the regulatory policy tools in order to identify areas for improvement and revision. In many EU Member States RIA schemes have undergone a revision or are currently under revision. Member States' governments can use external support to facilitate the RIA revision, e.g. the *OECD Reviews of Regulatory Reform*. These OECD reviews are comprehensive multidisciplinary exercises that focus on regulatory policy, including the administrative and institutional arrangements for ensuring that regulations are effective and efficient. The peer reviews are based on the principles expressed in the Recommendation of the OECD Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance (OECD, 2020, P. 3).

Good practice example: the revision of the IAK in the Netherlands

Based on key findings and recommendations the NL government revises its ex-ante RIA (IAK), addressing among others the following weaknesses. Many countries are confronted with similar proceedings and challenges to overcome:

- *Monitoring needs to be strengthened, as there is currently a lack of public control;*
- *RIA is used late in the process;*
- *RIA does not always provide clear alternatives and consequences;*
- *Lack of strong coordination: there is no oversight body, only an inter-ministerial working group;*
- *The RIA process is seen as not user-friendly, time-consuming*

5.5 Digitalisation

What is this about?

Digital tools have a huge potential to facilitate lean RIA processes, to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation within the government, to simplify and structure the work of staff involved and to facilitate stakeholder involvement.

Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

Digital tools can help staff involved in RIAs to manage increased complexity due to the integration of SDGs in RIAs.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

Digitalisation is a popular approach to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of RIA processes, including on stakeholder consultation (Figure 21).

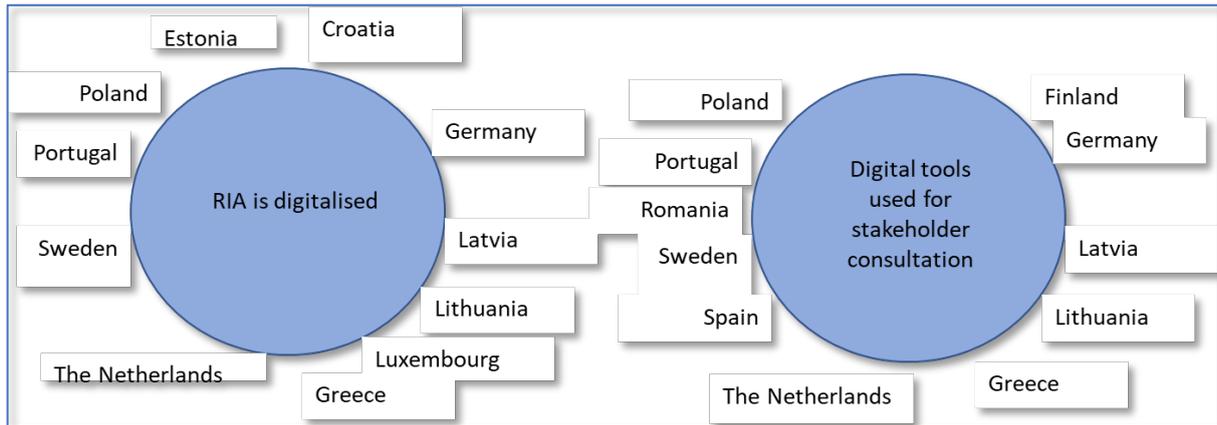


Figure 21. source: survey project P2P for SIA)

Many Member States already use digital tools for the practical the work on RIAs and to organize stakeholder consultations or are about to introduce such tools. However, there are large differences with regard to the intensity and stages of digitalisation.

Estonia is introducing a digital co-creation workspace within the government covering the entire process of the preparation of legislative proposals within the government, including also the RIA. This allows expert groups, departments, ministries to work together, also with stakeholders, with the purpose to cut unnecessary steps and make the assessment as transparent as possible. Users can work at the same time on documents and track changes, while the visualization features are enhanced. Comments or amendments can be left and replied to.

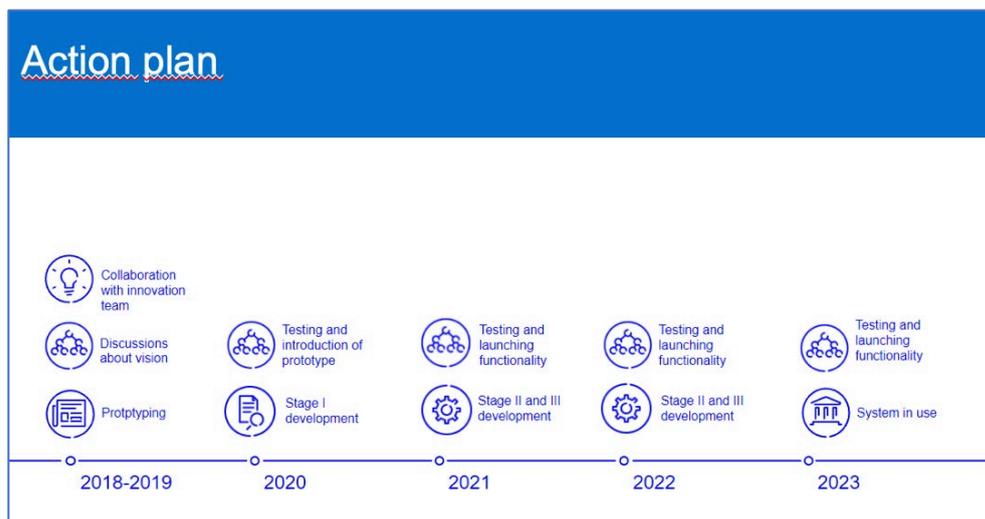


Figure 22. source: Presentation Laura Viilup, Government Office of Estonia, at the second workshop

Germany introduced an electronic SIA tool eNAP (eNachhaltigkeitsprüfung) which now became mandatory for all legislations and policies. eNAP is a very user-friendly and easy-to-use tool, in which many data, information – in particular related to SDGs – are given to the policy officer to help him or her make good assessments. eNAP has several helpful tools, gathering most of the available information into one place, thus strongly supporting policy officers in their efficiency and accuracy. For instance, eNAP connects policy officers to the relevant data sources for sustainable development indicators from the German Statistical Office.

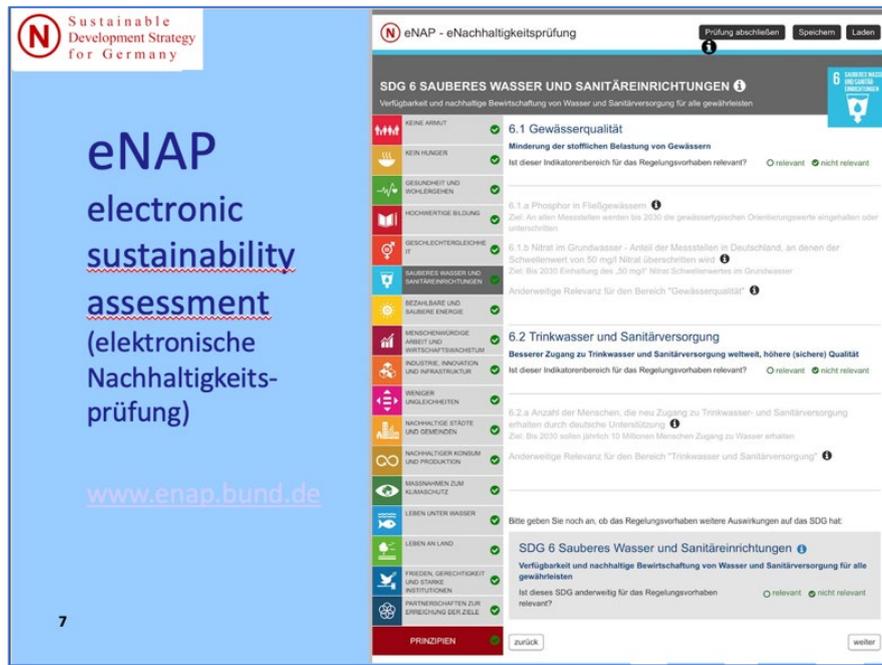


Figure 23 The electronic sustainability assessment tool of Germany (eNAP), source: Presentation Stefan Bauernfeind, Federal Chancellery, Germany, at the second workshop.

6. Theme 3. Embedding Sustainability Impact Assessment in Inclusive Policy Making

The third workshop focused on the theme ‘Embedding Sustainability Impact Assessment in Inclusive Policy Making’, with two sub themes:

- Stakeholder involvement in Regulatory Impact Assessment
- Boosting the benefits of Sustainability Impact Assessments for Policymaking

During the first part, several representatives from stakeholder groups were invited to present their views and discuss with the participants.¹⁴

6.1 Transparency and Participation: Stakeholder involvement in Regulatory IA

What is this about?

Transparency and participation are related concepts. Transparency is not only an important aspect of public institution’s accountability (which is part of SDG 16.6), but also necessary to enable stakeholders to give focused feedback and information. Participation cannot be done effectively without transparency.

Stakeholders can be involved for two different purposes or reasons. On the one hand, stakeholders can be involved in individual IA procedures to make sure that the impact on the interest they represent are

¹⁴ The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Eurocities.

taken into account. On the other hand, involving stakeholders can be done with the purpose of improving the RIA system overall, and thus the outcoming policies.

Effective engagement of stakeholders in government activities leads to better results through:

Realistic understanding of problems and issues
Recognition of the systemic nature of “the way things work” — inter-relations between economic, social and environmental aspects
Greater societal acceptance, support & reduced conflict
Potential for creative, equitable solutions

The Commission’s Better Regulation Toolbox contains a tool (#51) with suggestions on stakeholder consultation. The term ‘consultation’ suggests one-directional communication between government (i.c. the Commission) and stakeholders. That is indeed the tradition in many countries, and in the Commission as well, although in addition to consultation, more and more stakeholder workshops, platforms and other formats are being used.

Effective stakeholder involvement is a process that need to be well planned and focused.

Different levels of stakeholder engagement exist, in different RIA stages, with different formats, and requirements for governments and stakeholders (Figure 24).

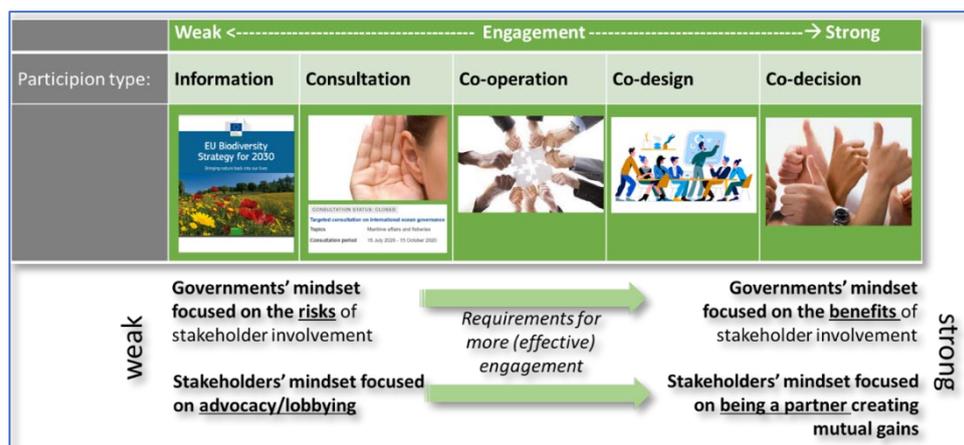


Figure 24. Source: Presentation ps4sd/Meuleman at the third workshop

Suitable formats for stakeholder inclusion depend on the purpose, level and stage of stakeholder participation, and on what works best in a country’s tradition. Figure 24 illustrates that between left (least engagement) and right (most engagement), there is also a different mindset needed, both within government and within stakeholder organisations.

In some countries, stakeholder involvement is limited to just giving information. But that means that government does not get feedback. In many countries, it is therefore mainly consultation: government asks opinion, ideas, factual inputs, from organised stakeholders (Unorganised stakeholders are usually not considered). In that case it is important for governments to give feedback to the stakeholders later on what has been done with their input. If not, next time stakeholders will be less motivated to engage.

In a growing number of countries, advanced formats of stakeholder involvement are used or tried out, that are more engaging:

Co-operation: certain stakeholders are asked to participate in a discussion/ workshop.

Co-design: certain stakeholders are asked to participate in working groups (with government officials) that prepare first drafts of a new policy or law.

Co-decision: This is the least used option. It happens for example between government and social partners (employers and labour unions). But new ways are also applied at local level and on sustainability: participatory budgeting is a growing practice, where citizens groups are asked to allocate part of the municipality/city budget.

What approach or combination of formats works best differs per situation and per country. Generally, as the 2030 Agenda says that no one should be left behind, all countries should try to increase the level of engagement.

Table 2 gives examples of different stakeholder engagement formats for different engagement levels and stages of RIA.

	Engagement				
	Weak <				> Strong
Participation type:	Information	Consultation	Co-operation	Co-design	Co-decision
Stages of IA:					
Call for evidence	Website Brochure Social media	Interactive website (Open) Survey			
Scoping, screening		Focus groups	Focus groups		
Problem definition		Focus groups	Workshops		
Developing options			(Scenario) workshops	Mutual gains workshop Design atelier	Mutual gains workshop
Selecting preferred option		(Panel) (expert group)	(Panel) (expert group)	Focus groups (Panel) (expert group)	Multistakeholder panel High-level expert group

Table 2. Source: Presentation ps4sd/Meuleman at the third workshop

Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

In RIA processes, but even more when sustainability is integrated, knowledge is key. Transparency and participation can support the availability and quality of the relevant knowledge. There are important mutual gains between mainstreaming sustainability in RIA and improved stakeholder involvement

- A better integration of the sustainability perspective in IAs makes it easier for stakeholders to engage in RIAs and contribute their views/positions on the multi-dimensional impacts of legislative initiatives
- And the other way round: a broad stakeholder consultation improves the knowledge base of SIAs since a larger diversity of stakeholders will possibly also reveal more hidden impacts.

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

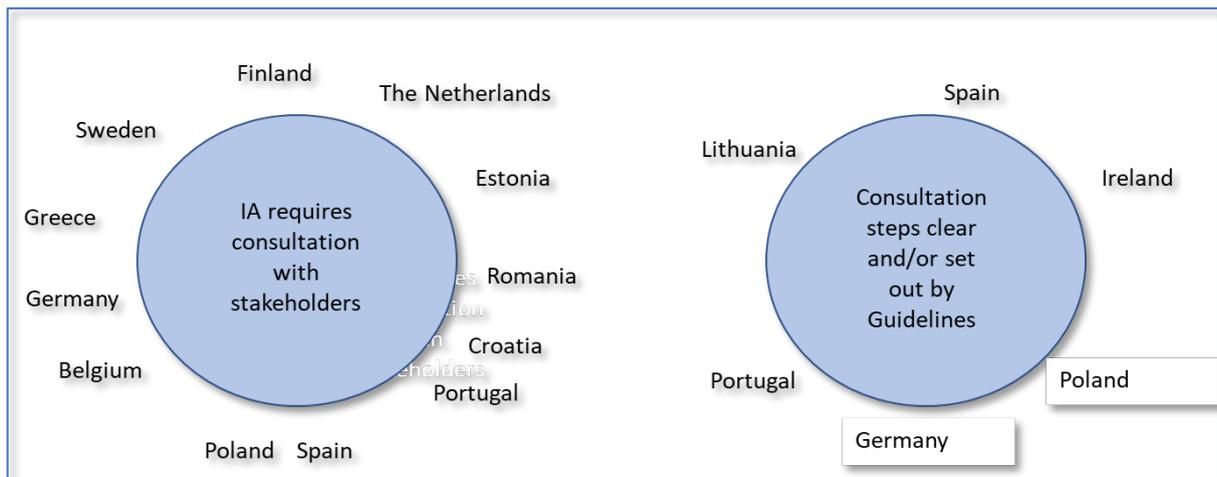


Figure 25. source: survey project P2P for SIA

At first sight, stakeholder consultation is overall well covered (Figure 25). But there are different views and experiences as regards the quality of the consultation process (Figure 26).

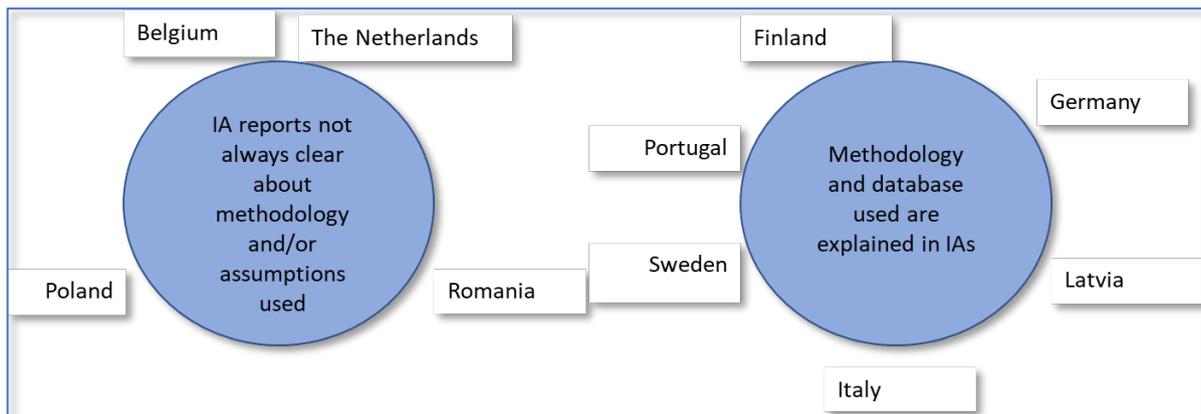


Figure 26. source: survey project P2P for SIA

The discussion at workshop 3 with peer learning experts and invited expert from NGOs created the following insights:

- A holistic, multi-stakeholder approach is an important take-away. This enables breaking the silos between ministries and various interest groups and making RIA effective for all.
- It is important to build trust between Governments and stakeholders. Governments should acknowledge how time and capacity consuming the exercise of public consultation is for non-governmental organisations. Governments should engage more in finding the relevant stakeholders (not always the louder or the richer), should take into account stakeholders’ feedbacks and communicate strategy and next steps, use stakeholders as a quality check and as a complementary ally or partner in raising awareness and implementing the law.
- Where appropriate we should move to increased levels of stakeholder involvement: from formal consultation towards co-designing and co-creation.

- It is also important to be aware of changes in the stakeholder area: e.g. youth climate activists have become a new voice contributing new perspectives to be taken into consideration.

6.2 Policy process: Boosting benefits of Sustainability Impact Assessment for Policy-making

What is this about?

It is not sufficient to have mainstreamed sustainability into Regulatory Impact Assessment procedures. The benefits will only be large if the content of the RIA reports is taken into account explicitly when the political decisions are taken. Therefore, political and management ownership for the new approach is essential.

Why is this important for the objective of mainstreaming SDGs in RIA?

In the survey and the previous workshops, the lack of ownership and political support from political leaders turned out to be one of the most important obstacles for making RIA more effective and mainstreaming sustainability into it. Therefore, important questions are: how to enhance the impact of SIA/RIA on political decision makers in government and parliament? How to get the support for sustainability mainstreaming from the level of political leaders?

Challenges, opportunities, discussion points

Political ownership for SIA in ex-ante RIA can be facilitated through

Good, concise and transparent information about SDG impact and contribution to implementation of the national SD strategy in RIA reports. It should be worked towards an IA that is readable not only for experts, but also for the wider public and policy makers. It was suggested to include visual elements in it, like the SDGs icons.

Combined submission of legal proposals to Cabinet and Parliament with summaries of RIA reports, including impact on national SD strategy

Improved knowledge base for political discussion through transparent evidence-based comparison of different policy options (selection of options should anticipate relevant political positions)

Increased value of RIA for policy makers through meaningful/comprehensive stakeholder involvement in RIAs. Through this RIA can help to build trust of policy makers that positions of all politically relevant stakeholders have been considered.

Ensure confidence of policy makers in RIA quality through independent quality control bodies .

However, – even if these measures can help to provide policy makers with better information about SIA of legal proposals – creating substantial political ownership and political support for SIA requires that SD and the implementation of SDGs is made an essential part of the government programme through cross-cutting integration of sustainable development into all sectors of government, structures and procedures that guide decision-makers to examine issues from a sustainability perspective, sustainability engagement of whole of society and a knowledge and evidence based policy-making approach. Only in this case it can be expected that policy makers are interested in the ex-ante assessment of policies with regards their impacts on sustainable development.

Finland gave an example of a strategic approach to win high level political support for mainstreaming sustainability (presentation in workshop 3), see Figure 27.

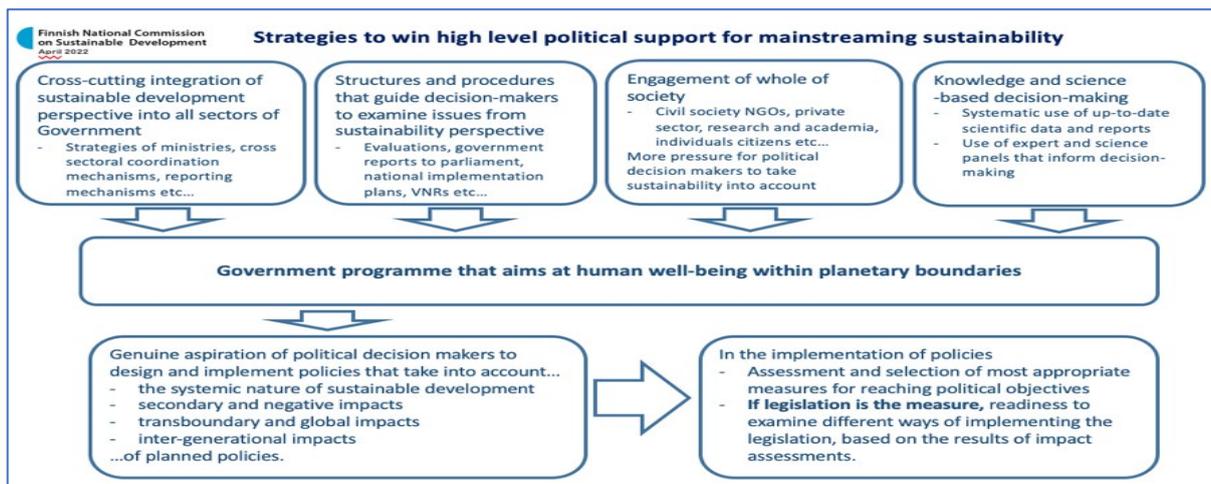


Figure 27. Strategies to win high level political support for mainstreaming sustainability; source: Sami Pirkkala, National Commission on Sustainable Development, Finland, presentation at the third workshop.

7. Conclusions, Recommendations and Way Forward

The project showed that there is great interest among the national SDG and RIA experts to continue with this promising approach and addressing the identified challenges and obstacles. The following three recommendations should be considered as key for improvement and collaboration:

1. Strengthen leadership and increase resources for mainstreaming SDGs in national RIAs.
 - a. Clear leadership from the top of the administration is needed for the organisational and institutional implications for the mainstreaming approach.
 - b. Making sufficient human and financial resources available as investment in mainstreaming sustainability in RIA. This is particularly important because the project has revealed that SDG and RIA experts usually work in separated 'silos' with insufficient tradition and incentives for collaboration.

The European Commission could support the mainstreaming among others by addressing the state of play in countries in the annual European Semester country reports.

2. Continue with peer learning workshops, supported by a moderated network and political involvement:
 - a. Peer learning workshops help connecting the SDG and RIA experts within countries and between countries and accelerate the integration. The peer-to-peer exchange approach with multi-country workshops and some external experts (including OECD and European Commission) has proven to be a highly effective and efficient way to learn. Most of the participants would appreciate a follow-up of the peer learning workshop series after the project and suggested the topics listed below. Several countries which could not attend the peer learning workshops, also expressed their interest.

Peer to peer learning between EU member states is a widely used successful instrument, inspired by the TAIEX mechanism which finances peer to peer exchanges between EU countries on regional development ([TAIEX-REGIO](#)) and environmental implementation ([TAIEX-EIR](#)). These P2P mechanisms could help financing further peer to peer exchanges after the current project, for example through:

- Multi-country workshop(s) with countries that have been active in the project and those that have not yet participated in the peer learning;
- Bilateral peer exchange between member states' government experts in the format of expert missions or study visits and possibly accompanied by online meetings; that could be either between countries with advanced experience and those planning to mainstream SDGs in RIAs or between countries that exchange experiences on ongoing processes on RIA revision and SDG mainstreaming or discuss case studies from their RIA practice.

Peer learning activities are also taking place organised by the European Sustainable Development Network of sustainability coordinators and professionals ([ESDN](#)), and by the EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law ([IMPEL](#)), for example.

- b. Continuation of the series of peer learning workshops would require a lightly moderated network structure that organizes follow-up workshops on key challenges and serves as a source of information for 'newcomers'. Host of the network could be the OECD (joint work of the PCSD and RIA Units), one country (e.g., the rotating EU Presidency), and the informal European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN). The Commission's [TAIEX-EIR P2P](#) mechanism could help financing further peer to peer exchanges after the current project.
 - c. Besides the more informal exchanges in the context of workshops and a network, it remains important to create and maintain the involvement of the political level: i.e., putting it on the agenda on a regular basis, inform about progress and obstacles, and ask for steer where necessary. Important roles could be played here by the formal EU Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda and the OECD Regulatory Policy Committee. In addition, this should be a regular topic for the European Commission Expert groups on Public Administration and on Greening the European Semester.
3. Develop and organize training for policy officers about how to mainstream the SDGs in the RIAs they are responsible for:
 - a. RIA procedures are usually carried out by the ministry responsible for the policy area where an initiative is under development, for example on SDG themes like transport and mobility, energy, climate, food, health or education. This means that really applying sustainability objectives and its systemic relations in RIA requires the involvement and commitment of many policy officers, in virtually all ministries. The peer learning workshops cannot reach that many people.
 - b. Therefore, training should be developed that makes policy officers understand the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, and how and with what methods and tool this can be integrated in their national RIA procedures. The OECD's trainings for the SDGs in the framework of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) are a useful starting point. National schools of public administration should take the lead and integrate this in their curricula.
4. The European Commission could support the national mainstreaming of SDGs in RIA with existing instruments.
 - a. Currently, the European Commission Better Regulation Toolbox, combined with the tools on the JRC KnowSDGs platform provide the best up-to-date compendium in the EU

for RIA methods integrating SDGs. These tools should be used also by EU Member States as a source of know-how when mainstreaming SDGs in RIA schemes. To mobilise this potential the Commission could help disseminating these tools to Member States' governments through communication and training.

- b. The European Commission could be asked to financially support development and implementation of trainings of Member States' government staff, because of the long-term positive impacts on the attainment of the SDGs (who are "at the heart of EU's policymaking and action"¹⁵), the European Green Deal and other major EU initiatives.
- c. The EU's [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\)](#) managed by DG REFORM of the European Commission could finance structural reforms by member states to mainstream SDGs in their RIA systems as innovation of public governance, contributing to policy coherence for sustainable development.

The three workshops resulted in many topics for further exchange and learning, including:

- a) Case studies from MS RIAs integrating the sustainability perspective (high demand in participant survey!)
- b) Linking SIA in RIAs to the national SDS
- c) The Use of IT-tools to facilitate lean and effective SIA/RIA
- d) Methodologies for SIA (in particular methods for the inclusion of long-term foresight, multi-criteria analysis; assessment of impacts on vulnerable groups and poverty; assessment of climate impacts)
- e) How to ensure meaningful and focused SIA/RIA (avoiding formal ticking-boxes exercise and Christmas-tree)
- f) The functioning of RIA helpdesks and guidance with respect to sustainability mainstreaming
- g) Improving the communication of SIA results to political decision makers (cabinets and parliaments)
- h) How to use RIA to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (experience from OECD reviews with EU MS, e.g. Italy could be shared with other MS).

In the concluding project event panellists from EU Member States, the Commission and OECD expressed their appreciation with the project results and supported the project recommendations. With the project, the peer exchange on mainstreaming sustainability in regulatory policies has gained momentum that should be kept and continued with further exchanges in various formats and on new aspects. The Czech Republic plans to discuss project results and possible further activities under its presidency of the Council of the EU in the Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda. The European Sustainable Development Network – of which several members very actively participated in the project – discusses how peer learning activities in that area could be promoted in future.

The European Commission is interested to explore how regulatory policy tools from the EU and the national level could be used in a complementary way, e.g. by mutually providing input to assessments in order to improve regulatory policy performance at both levels. The Commission's TAIEX EIR-P2P instrument is available to support further peer learning workshops or bilateral exchanges. The OECD could help taking the project recommendations and the peer leaning approach forward if countries are interested and funding is available. Accordingly, in its work on regulatory policy the OECD has recently set up two new workstreams on the social and the environmental aspects and is

¹⁵ European Commission 2019. [Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020](#). COM(2019) 650 final.

now looking for countries that are interested to participate in a collection of case studies. In addition, the OECD is exploring whether a project could be financed under the EU's Technical Support Instrument, for capacity building on mainstreaming sustainability in regulatory policy instruments. This could cover e.g. the implementation of pilot projects in countries or the funding of national regulatory policy schemes with regard to the integration of the sustainability dimension.

Currently, PS4SD is exploring options to prolong the project in order to facilitate the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations.

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Annex 1. Key SDG-related Statements in the 2021 Better Regulation Communication

The Commission “mainstream(s) the United Nations’ sustainable development goals (SDGs) to help ensure that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 sustainable development agenda”. Concretely, the Commission “will identify relevant UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) for each proposal and examine how the initiative will support their achievement. Links to the SDGs will be included throughout evaluations and impact assessments.” This is a potentially far-reaching announcement. It should ensure that links with individual SDGs become transparent in all major Commission proposals. Member States, Parliament and stakeholders will be able to monitor this and can ask the Commission to clarify when the relation with the SDGs remains opaque.

In addition, the Commission announces to improve analysis and reporting of some types of impact, e.g. green and digital transitions and their socially just and fair dimension; the gender equality dimension as well as equality for all; territorial impact assessments and rural proofing; the external implications of internal policies and their significant impacts on third countries.

The Commission will “ensure that the ‘do no significant harm’ principle [of the European Green Deal] is applied across all policies in line with the European Green Deal oath”. The principle, meanwhile also abbreviated as “DNSH”, may become very important for sustainable development. In February 2021, the Commission published [Guidance on DNSH](#).

The BR Guidelines have meanwhile been updated to match the commitments expressed in the Communication.

As strategic foresight informs major policy initiatives, it will become an integral part of the Commission’s better regulation agenda. Strategic and science-based foresight will play a key role in helping to ‘future-proof’ EU policymaking, by ensuring that decisions taken today are grounded in a longer-term perspective, including ensuring contribution to long-term commitments such as the SDGs.

Sustainable development connects the internal/domestic and external/international dimensions. The Commission recognises this and “will strive to better consider the external implications of internal policies and their significant impacts on third countries; its actors will be better considered. Where relevant, these impacts will be analysed in the impact assessments and presented in the explanatory memoranda accompanying Commission proposals.”

The Commission will step up efforts to publicise its public consultations to attract more participants and quality contributions. This is in line with the SDG Target 16.6 on having public institutions that are not only effective and accountable, but also inclusive. The consultation system is meant to become more focused, clearer and user-friendly. Public consultations will be consolidated into a single ‘call for evidence’ on the [Have Your Say web portal](#). Feedback on roadmaps / inception impact assessments and public consultations will be combined. As a rule, the Commission will publish a summary report on each public consultation within eight weeks of its closure.

The Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) will scrutinise IAs and evaluations on strategic foresight. This is an additional role which makes sense. However, it would have been desirable to give the RSB the explicit task of assessing whether the SDGs are fully mainstreamed in IAs and evaluations. In addition, the Commission could have decided that at least one member of the Board has expertise on sustainability transformations. That would have also increased the RSB’s independence regarding Commission expertise.

Annex 2. SDG Tool (#19) from the EU's Better Regulation Toolbox

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/br_toolbox-nov_2021_en_o.pdf (pp 165-169)

TOOL #19. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1. POLICY CONTEXT AND SDGS FRAMEWORK

The UN established its [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) in 2015. It sets out a framework to steer sustainable development globally via a [set of 17 sustainable development goals \(SDGs\) and 169 targets](#). The SDGs cover environmental, economic and social aspects, and are relevant for the Commission's system of better regulation that aims to mainstream the sustainable developments goals into the policymaking process, so that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 sustainable development agenda of the UN²⁰⁶.



The EU is committed to implement the 2030 Agenda. The 2016 [Communication 'Next steps for a sustainable European future'](#) announced detailed monitoring of the SDGs in the EU from 2017 onwards. This commitment by the Commission was taken further in the 2019 Reflection Paper ['Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030'](#)²⁰⁷, and the Commission work programme 2020 put the SDGs at the heart of its policymaking²⁰⁸. The Commission has given a central role to SDGs across policies, as highlighted in the Commission staff working document ['Delivering on the UN's SDGs – A comprehensive approach'](#)²⁰⁹. The OECD is also active in promoting policy coherence for sustainable development. In December 2019, the OECD published a recommendation to help equip policymakers with the necessary institutional mechanisms and policy tools to support and promote coherent policies for sustainable development and the universal commitments made under the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals²¹⁰.

²⁰⁶ For very technical initiatives, it might not be possible to make a link to SDGs. In this case, the report will indicate this transparently. In some cases, links to SDGs are only indirect, which should also be transparently reported.

²⁰⁷ COM(2019) 22 final

²⁰⁸ Commission Work Programme 2020, « A Union that strives for more », COM(2020) 37 final of 29.1.2020.

²⁰⁹ [SWD\(2020\) 400](#) final of 18.11.2020.

²¹⁰ OECD 2019, [Recommendation](#) of the Council on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, OECD/LEGAL/0381.

An [EU SDG indicator set](#) with 100 indicators to monitor the EU's progress towards the SDGs underpins the EU SDG monitoring report published annually by ESTAT. The EU SDG indicator set is open to regular reviews. It is closely related with, and complements the [UN's indicator list from July 2017](#) that includes 231 individual indicators to monitor the global progress towards the SDGs²¹¹. The Commission's [KnowSDGs](#) (Box 1) presents a full description of all the 17 goals and 169 targets, including the list of UN and EU SDG indicators.

Every impact assessment or evaluation process will involve a pragmatic identification of the significant environmental, social, and economic impacts that will be assessed and reported²¹². Tool#18 links the various impacts with the relevant SDGs. Each specific tool on impacts (tools #21 to #36) includes a table that helps to identify the relevant SDGs and includes a selection of the most relevant indicators. A number of tools also provide support to quantify the various impacts (and potentially changes in SDG-related indicators (see Chapter 8).

Since SDGs are universal, the EU commitment to support their implementation includes not only ensuring progress internally. For this reason, the assessment on progress towards the SDGs should keep into consideration the external effects, including in developing countries, which may call for applying in a complementary manner the tools relating to external impacts, in particular Tool #35 on impacts on developing countries and where relevant Tool

#27 on external trade and investment.

2. SDGS IN IMPACT ASSESSMENTS, EVALUATIONS, AND FINAL PROPOSALS

The indicators and monitoring arrangements underpinning the SDGs can be used to describe the status quo, policy objectives, expected impacts of policy options and the observed changes resulting from new policies. As such, the SDG framework is highly relevant for impact assessments and evaluations. In addition, the expected benefits/impacts related to the SDGs should be reported transparently in the proposals that the Commission makes²¹³. Given that the 2030 Agenda is universal and applies to the EU (across institutions) and within Member States, this is useful information for the Legislator, consultative bodies and national Parliaments in their respective treatment of the Commission's proposal.

Impact assessments

The relevant SDGs should be identified²¹⁴ and the associated indicators should be used (if available) when preparing the following sections of the impact assessment report²¹⁵:

- **Problem definition**²¹⁶: It will often be possible to define the problem as a lack of progress in the area covered by one or more SDGs (and linked targets) as evidenced by the available SDG indicators and monitoring data presented at EU and national levels. Even where the SDGs (or linked targets) are not directly relevant to a given initiative it is still possible that some of the monitoring data collected to report on the SDGs in the EU is still useful to describe the consequences of a given problem.

²¹¹ Currently, 56% of those indicators are classified as tier 1 by the UNSC, meaning that data is regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region, while for the others, data is not regularly produced. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/>

²¹² See Tool #18 (Identification of impacts)

²¹³ The principle of proportionate analysis applies; thus impacts will be quantified to the extent possible.

²¹⁴ See Tool#18 (*Identification of impacts*) and their link with SDGs.

²¹⁵ In addition, the same issues are relevant when preparing the 'call for evidence'.

²¹⁶ See Tool #13 (How to analyse problems)

- **Objectives²¹⁷**: It may often be possible to describe the aims of a given initiative in terms of contributing to the implementation of one or more SDGs. At the initial stage, one should identify the relevant SDGs for the initiative at stake. In many cases, this can be further specified as delivering a qualitative or quantitative improvement in one or more of the indicators linked to one or more SDGs. The same indicators can be used to report on the performance of the initiative once implemented.
- **Policy options – baseline**: The baseline describes how the current situation is expected to evolve over time (without any policy intervention)²¹⁸. Again, the SDG-related indicators can be used to describe important aspects of the baseline.
- **Impact analysis**: The significant environmental, social, and economic impacts of each policy option are assessed in the impact assessment report. Where the SDG-related indicators have been used in the baseline, it is possible to present impacts of policy options in terms of the changes expected in those indicators from a given policy option, particularly for the preferred option. Ideally, such an assessment should be quantitative in nature.
- **Monitoring arrangements**: Every impact assessment should describe how the performance of the intervention will be monitored as part of a future evaluation. There may be a role for the SDG-related indicators²¹⁹ particularly where these have been used to define the objectives to be achieved by the initiative.
- **Annex 3**: Every impact assessment has to report in a dedicated table identifying the relevant SDGs for a given initiative. In addition, for the preferred option, the table needs to assess the progress towards the identified SDG targets. For the cases, where the SDG targets are quantifiable and so is the progress to reach them, the table should present these estimates. When the progress cannot be quantified, the table should give an indicative direction in relation to the relevant SDG targets (whether the preferred option is likely to get the EU closer to the target/improve, stay neutral or get away from the target/ deteriorate). In view of interlinkages across the SDGs, the table should be accompanied by explanations describing possible synergies and trade-offs between specific SDGs and justifications for the proposed policy choices.

Include in the ‘call for evidence’ the above considerations on SDGs when preparing the documents to be published with the ‘call for evidence’ defining problems, objectives, policy options and a preliminary assessment of impacts.

For financial programmes and financial instruments²²⁰, reference to the SDGs should also be considered for ex-ante evaluations in an analogous manner as for impact assessments.

Evaluations and Fitness checks

The monitoring arrangements present the link between the evaluation, impact assessment and the relevant SDGs with their associated indicators and data collection activities.

When impact assessments pre-date the SDGs (and their associated indicators) or do not refer to the SDGs even though they may be relevant:

- In the latter case, the evaluation could still make reference to the contribution to the implementation of relevant SDGs.
- The evaluation can still make use of the SDG data sets and indicators when assessing the performance of the intervention so long as an appropriate baseline is used (complemented with the SDGs but consistent with the original impact assessment).
- The evaluation will then have to collect whatever relevant evidence exists to assess performance, linking it to the relevant SDG.

Commission proposals – Explanatory Memorandum

While it is important to mainstream the SDGs into policymaking processes, it is also important that the Commission reports transparently and effectively on its activities to make progress in the areas relevant to each SDG.

²¹⁷ See Tool #15 (How to set objectives)

²¹⁸ See Tool #16 (How to identify policy options) and Tool #60 (Baselines)

²¹⁹ SDG indicators may be broader than operational objectives of an initiative. It may be difficult to disentangle the effect of a particular measure from other measures also acting on a specific SDG objective.

²²⁰ See Tool #9 (Spending programmes, financial instruments, and budgetary guarantee)

- Therefore, when the Commission presents a new proposal (regulatory or financial) it will explain its objectives in terms of contribution to the implementation of the relevant SDGs at stake and expected impacts in terms of their associated indicators. This information will help inform the deliberations of the co-legislators. The explanatory memorandum²²¹ should summarise the key findings of the impact assessment (or ex-ante evaluation) relevant to the SDGs, based on the analysis presented in Annex 3 of the impact assessment (or the relevant analysis in ex-ante evaluation).

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES AND AVAILABLE TOOLS

The Commission's website [KnowSDGs](#) (box 1) presents a full description of all the 17 goals and 169 targets, including the list of UN and EU SDG indicators. All the information is organised by goal, and for each EU indicator there is a direct link to the ESTAT data browser, where the user can visualize the full description of the indicator and access the corresponding data by country and year.

The platform offers interactive tools to explore: 1) how EU policies relate to the SDGs, 2) what SDG interlinkages are and how they can be identified, and 3) modelling tools that can be used to look at the SDGs through a quantitative lens

Box 1: Tools for the analysis of SDGs - The KnowSDGs Platform

The [KnowSDGs](#) (Knowledge base for the Sustainable Development Goals) platform provides interactive and easy-to-use tools and organises knowledge on policies, indicators, methods, and data to support the evidence-based implementation of the SDGs. The following tools are available on the platform to support policy makers in contextualizing their policies within the SDG framework.

The SDG policy-mapping tool is designed to help policymakers to identify the SDGs that may potentially be impacted or linked to their policy. Utilising automatic text classification, the tool provides a semantic analysis of any policy document to identify the relevant SDGs (at goals and targets level) that are addressed in the text, based on a database of relevant keywords. The tool is applicable at different stages of the policy cycle and is a useful guidance for policymakers in bringing the complete picture of SDGs to their attention, along with their extent and the complexity of their interactions.

²²¹ See Tool #40 (Drafting the explanatory memorandum)

In its interactive version – the SDG Mapper – the user can upload any policy-related text to a secure portal, and immediately receive a preliminary analysis of the relevant SDGs and targets. It also facilitates the production of infographics on the relevant SDGs, for instance in a draft proposal, thereby making it particularly useful in the ‘better regulation’ context. Since data interpretation is crucial to assure correct assessment of the relevant SDGs and targets, the JRC can provide additional support for deeper analysis and interpretation of results.

In addition, the EnablingSDGs tool facilitates policymakers in the identification of interlinkages – synergies and trade-offs – and interactions between different SDGs, assessing impacts of different policy choices, highlighting second-order effects and potential unintended consequences of the policy proposal. This specific toolkit facilitates engagement of policymakers (and eventually also stakeholders, scientists etc.) in a dialogue to identify and characterise the relevant SDGs interactions. This can contribute in a more tangible manner to ensure a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Moreover, the SDGs modelling tool aims to facilitate the use of models for sustainability assessment in the SDGs framework, through the identification of appropriate model(s) for the assessment of specific policy options. The tool provides the list of all the models run or developed by the Commission and included in the Modelling Inventory and Knowledge Management System (MIDAS) and their contribution to the SDGs (at goal, target and indicators level). This tool offers a transparent mapping of how models’ outputs can be directly or indirectly linked to EU/UN SDGs indicators, therefore screening which models could be suitable to quantitatively evaluate the impacts of policy options on SDGs, targets and indicators.

Annex 3. Thematic Clustering of the survey questions

The clusters of survey questions are presented below under the thematic workshops in which they were primarily discussed.

Workshop/Theme 1. Current state and framework conditions in the EU

Cluster 1. Institutionalisation, capacity and skills

- Q1. Is there a legal requirement to carry out an IA in the development/revision of policies and legislation?*
Q2. Are IAs systematically/routinely used in the development/revision of policies and legislation?
Q3. Do IAs receive sufficient time, resources and expertise?
Q4. Does the Member State in question have a guidance document setting out the methodologies, scope and procedures to be followed when elaborating IAs?

Cluster 2. Focus of RIA on SDGs and climate action

- Q7. Do IAs consider environmental, economic and social impacts and are these taken into account in their conclusions?*
Q7a. Is the problem defined in terms of lack of progress in the area covered by one or more SDGs (and linked targets)?
Q7b. Objectives of initiative linked to SDG implementation?
Q7c. Impacts of initiative on GHG emission reduction targets?
Q16c. Description of impacts on climate mitigation & adapt. targets?

Cluster 8. Quality assurance

- Q14. Are effective procedures for quality control and oversight in place?*
Q14a. Is there an independent oversight body for the quality of IAs?
Q15. Are IA reports clear about methodology and assumptions used; is sensitivity analysis done?

Workshop/Theme 2. Methodologies and Process Design

Cluster 3. Impact Assessment methodology

- Q5. Are there standardised IA methods?*
Q4a. Diversity of assessment methods, e.g., CBA/CEA /MCA ?
Q4b. Behavioural science (e.g. nudging) used?
Q10. IAs have comparative analysis of several scenarios/ options, incl. baseline?
Q13. Monetisation of impacts carried out for all options?
Q13a. Costs of enforcement and compliance assessed for all options?

Cluster 4. Are long-term & trade-offs addressed?

- Q11. Are long-term effects taken into consideration in IAs?*
Q11a. Are long-term effects related to SDGs, incl. to external dimension?
Q12. Are trade-offs considered in IAs?
Q12a. Are trade-offs and synergies considered in relation to the SDGs?

Cluster 7. Data and knowledge

- Q5a. Monitoring/evaluation/data mechanisms with a view to SDGs used?*
Q9. Database used for IA?
Q9a. Database used for assessment environmental and climate impacts?
Q9b. Open data policy with regard to IA?
10a. Are SDG indicators used for assessing the scenarios/alternatives?

Cluster 9. Digitalisation

Q18. How has digitalisation modernised IAs?
Q18a. Are digital tools used for stakeholder consultation?
Q18b. Are digital tools used for data accessibility/ transparency?

Workshop/Theme 3. Embedding Sustainability Impact Assessment in Inclusive Policy Making

Cluster 5. Transparency and participation

Q6. Consultation with stakeholders & other ministries required?
Q16. Are IA reports published?
Q16a. Are IA reports published in an accessible and transparent way?
Q16b. Do IA reports have a dedicated table on the relevant SDGs and assessment of SDG progress?
Q16d. Do new regulatory, financial or policy proposals mention the key findings of SDG-relevant IAs in e.g. explanatory memorandum?

Cluster 9. Digitalisation (see above, also in workshop 2)

Cluster 6. Policy process: do RIA reports play the role they could/should play?

Q8. IA starting at begin, and in parallel to policymaking?
Q17. Are IA reports discussed by policy makers within government and/or with parliament, and/or with stakeholders?

Cluster 8. Quality assurance (also discussed in workshop 1).

Annex 4. Workshop Programmes and Reports: see Part 2 of the report