European Public Administration Country Knowledge

Waking up a Sleeping beauty?
Towards a Quality Protocol for Indicator SDG 17.14.1 on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD)
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EUROPEAN COMMISSION
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APRM</td>
<td>African Peer Review Mechanism (African Union)</td>
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<td>CEPA</td>
<td>United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONCORD</td>
<td>European Confederation of NGOs working on SD and international cooperation</td>
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<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee (OECD)</td>
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<td>DG REFORM</td>
<td>Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (European Commission)</td>
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<td>DPIDG</td>
<td>Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government (UNDESA)</td>
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<td>EUPACK</td>
<td>European Public Administration Country Knowledge (DG REFORM)</td>
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<td>EUROSTAT</td>
<td>Statistical office of the European Union</td>
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<td>HLPF</td>
<td>High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development</td>
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<td>IAEG-SDGs</td>
<td>Inter-Agency and Expert group on the SDGs</td>
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<td>IREG</td>
<td>Indicators on Regulatory Policy and Governance</td>
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<td>JRC</td>
<td>Joint Research Centre (European Commission)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PAAF</td>
<td>Public Administration and Governance Framework (European Commission)</td>
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<td>PCD</td>
<td>Policy Coherence for Development</td>
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<td>PCSD</td>
<td>Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development</td>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFEU</td>
<td>Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union</td>
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<td>TSI</td>
<td>Technical Support Instrument (European Commission)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDESA</td>
<td>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNITAR</td>
<td>United Nations Institute for Training and Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSTAT</td>
<td>United Nations Statistics Division (UNDESA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VNR</td>
<td>Voluntary National Review (on the SDGs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VUCA</td>
<td>Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous</td>
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Executive summary

Calling a non-functioning SDG indicator a sleeping beauty may sound exaggerated, but it is a good metaphor for the state of play around indicator 17.14.1 on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD). This indicator has eight sub indicators that together represent key aspects of sustainability governance. The indicator has not been sleeping for 100 years, but seven years after its establishment in 2015 and three years after its promotion to a ‘Tier II’ indicator by the UN’s Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG-SDGs)\(^1\) on the SDG indicators in February 2020, not much has happened to make it generate reliable and comparable data to measure progress on the governance of the SDGs.

Why is this important?

The eight PCSD dimensions - covering among others cross-sectoral coordination, multilevel coordination, stakeholder engagement and long-term orientation - constitute key elements of the governance ecosystem governments need to navigate through the ‘VUCA’ (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, and attain the SDGs by 2030.

To promote PCSD, two approaches have been developed that are mutually reinforcing and only slightly different in structure and composition, but with a different objective: one focuses on measuring progress, the other on capacity building.

Firstly, on behalf of the United Nations, UNEP has developed a composite, qualitative indicator on PCSD with a self-assessment tool, with the aim to measure and monitor progress (UNEP 2020).\(^2\) The indicator has achieved a Tier II status in the official SDG indicator methodology, which means that countries are encouraged to use and test the indicator.

Secondly, in parallel and in good collaboration with UNEP, the OECD has developed PCSD principles, guidance, tools and an online Toolkit, including a self-assessment tool, with the aim to promote PCSD in practice. This approach has become successful as guide for government reforms. A growing number of countries has made Action plans and training programmes, and taken other measures, making PCSD an important driver of change. In addition, UNITAR and UNDESA have developed a Toolkit "Integrated policies and policy coherence for SDGs", and the UN System Staff College has developed an online training course on PCSD.

The first use of PCSD as indicator to measure, monitor and compare progress across countries, is lagging behind. This report summarises the state of play on the indicator and calls for a joined-up effort of national governments, UN bodies and think tanks, to get the indicator shaped as statistically relevant measuring rod with which data are generated that can be compared and used in peer reviews and peer learning between countries.

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\(^1\) Tier I: The indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology, standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of the countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant. Tier II: The indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries. Tier III: No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested. Source: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/ (accessed 17.02.2023).

This is meanwhile urgent, firstly in order to give PCSD political visibility: as long as no robust and comparable data are generated on PCSD, this indicator does not appear in SDG progress reports, including Voluntary National or Local Reviews, or in general government reform programmes. That implies that PCSD has no political visibility, and that weak performance on the SDGs cannot be linked to a possible weak performance on PCSD.

It is important because policy incoherence between policy sectors is a major cause of policy failure. Policy incoherence is responsible for huge societal (environmental, social and economic) costs. Of course, incoherence may be the result of legitimate political decisions that are informed about the negative consequences. But beyond this, there are institutions, mechanisms and tools that should be used to understand better how to deal with trade-offs and how to create synergies, and thus save societal costs caused by incoherent policy choices.

The cost-saving dimension of promoting policy coherence requires that policy coherence is linked to concrete policy challenges. Policy coherence for development (PCD) is the best example; it has become a key principle in development policy and has even been enshrined in the European Treaty. Since the adoption in 2015 of the UN 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable development Goals which constitute a holistic and comprehensive policy framework to steer all economic, social, environmental and governance policies of all countries, policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) (SDG 17.14) has become the politically broadest accepted framing of policy coherence.

Last but not least, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSTAT) will start reviewing of all SDG indicators end of 2023, with priority on the weakly performing ones – including indicator 17.14.1 on PCSD. This exercise should result in a full review by 2025. Indicators which are still not generating relevant data by then may be taken off the official indicators list.

What is the problem?

Some have argued that the PCSD indicator is too broad and too qualitative to be used in a statistical context. However, it is a fact that similar qualitative, perception-based and composite SDG indicators are already being used.

The largest problem seems to be the self-assessment tool that has been developed by UNEP as the ‘custodian agency’ for the indicator (and by OECD in a slightly different form). Self-assessments tend to produce too rosy pictures and are therefore not easily accepted by statistical offices. Generally, the data they generate are not robust, reliable and comparable enough. However, 17.14.1 is not the only SDG indicator that uses a self-assessment. For example, indicator 12.7.1 on sustainable public procurement also uses such a tool, was also promoted to the Tier II category in February 2020, and has six sub themes. This indicator uses peer review as a quality-enhancing requirement. Data are collected and published two-yearly, with a first group of 40 countries participating in 2020; the 2022 review is not yet published.

Joined-up expert exchange

A recent study for the European Commission on ‘Management of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Towards Measuring Progress’ (Meuleman et al. 2022) already concluded that the official self-assessment tool for SDG indicator 17.14.1 prepared and

managed by UNEP cannot generate sufficiently reliable and comparable data to consider the use of such data in statistical monitoring exercises. The current report represents a follow-up to this study. To gather insights, an online workshop was held on 3 March 2023. Experts from most of the main actors involved in the indicators gathered in an interactive online workshop and in their personal capacity, while others have been interviewed separately.

This report thus brings together expert views from within five EU countries (Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Poland and Romania) the European Commission (DG REFORM, JRC), UNEP, UNDP, UNDESA (DPIDG and UNSTAT), the think tanks OECD and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and the civil society organisation CONCORD. The objective was to explore a common understanding of the challenges and the best way forward on the use of the SDG indicator 17.14.1 to measure and monitor progress on policy coherence for sustainable development as a key indicator for the effectiveness of public administration and governance in general.

**Recommendations**

The discussions at the workshop showed that there is broad support for the observation that the self-assessment tool designed for the indicator SDG 17.14.1 on PCSD alone is not sufficient to develop reliable and comparable statistical data, and that agreement on a quality protocol to strengthen the tool would be important to start using the indicator in a statistical way. Five recommendations followed, addressed to national governments and their statistical offices, UN agencies, think tanks including OECD and APRM, and the relevant societal stakeholders such as CONCORD. They are meant to inform and support decision-makers who are able to influence the practice of PCSD and in particular to promote the use of the indicator in a statistically relevant way. They were widely supported by the participants of the expert workshop.

**On the two functions of PCSD self-assessment:**

**Recommendation 1. Apply the PCSD self-assessment tool in a dual way:** to measure and monitor progress, and to build capacity and prepare, plan and implement concrete actions to increase policy coherence.

**On the support for a quality protocol to support the self-assessment:**

**Recommendation 2. The self-assessment tool for the indicator on PCSD needs a commonly agreed protocol with quality requirements,** to strengthen the reliability and comparability of the data it generates. The self-assessment tool designed for the indicator SDG 17.14.1 on PCSD alone is not sufficient to develop reliable and comparable statistical data. Self-assessment needs to be accompanied by supporting measures. An (informal) agreement among countries to use the same or similar set of quality requirements (a kind of protocol) to ensure the reliability and comparability of the results of the PCSD self-assessment could pave the road to acceptance of the indicator by statistical offices and to the start of generating meaningful and comparable data.

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On the content of the protocol:

**Recommendation 3. Take the following 15 ingredients as basis for working out an agreement on a quality protocol** on the PCSD indicator, and decide how many and which of the requirements would be needed to fulfil the minimum quality level for the self-assessment process, to generate statistically relevant data:

1. Appoint a PCSD indicator focal point, e.g., the SDG coordinating team (which is often in the Prime Minister’s Office.
2. Ensure government-wide participation and ownership.
3. Ensure participation of subnational authorities.
4. Ensure participation of societal stakeholders.
5. Organise peer review.
6. Clarify the scoring method and the detailed questions.
7. Consider an independent external assessment.
8. Present results both as dashboard and as total score.
9. Take interlinkages, including spill-over and transboundary effects into account.
10. Make the results of the assessment publicly available.
11. Commit to re-assess annually.
13. Add an explanatory memorandum.
14. Ensure sufficient financial and human resources.
15. Set up a training on PCSD.

On the adoption of the protocol:

**Recommendation 4. Promote the adoption of the proposed PCSD Protocol by countries,** to enable collecting comparable data which can be used for monitoring progress and to establish a culture of peer learning between countries about how to improve PCSD.

On the use of the indicator with a quality protocol

As countries are half-way the implementation time of the SDGs by 2030, and policy incoherence is still abundant, the next steps to implement the application of the indicator and its protocol should not be taken consequently but in parallel.

**Recommendation 5. Kick-start the broad use of the PCSD self-assessment accompanied by its protocol,** by carrying out a number of supporting actions at the same time, including the following:

a) **Put the draft protocol on the agenda in various platforms,** including the European Commission Expert group on Public Administration and Governance; the EU Council Working party on the 2030 Agenda; the OECD network of national PCSD focal points; the OECD Regulatory Policy Committee; and last but not least the UNEP global Community of Practice on the PCSD indicator.

b) **Create a forerunners group of countries** who agree to start applying indicator and protocol;
c) **Invite a wide range of countries and other actors** to participate at the global Community of Practice on the indicator, established in 2022 under UNEP’s leadership.

d) **Start a coordinated discussion with national statistical offices**, including Eurostat and UNSTAT, to achieve agreement on the statistical quality requirements of the indicator as soon as possible.

e) **Consider (co-)organising a side event on indicator 17.14.1 and its protocol** at the 2030 Agenda High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), and/or other relevant events.

f) **Form a coalition to implement the above actions**, with UNEP as custodian agency, possibly UNDP and/or OECD as co-custodians, and other actors as partners (European Commission, APRM, CONCORD, individual countries). Most of these parties have already interest to be involved in next steps to support implementation of the indicator. UNEP will keep the workshop participants informed about activities in the context of the global Community of Practice on the indicator.

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<th>Member State coverage</th>
<th>Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Poland, Romania</th>
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<td>Key words</td>
<td>Sustainable Development goals, indicators, policy coherence for sustainable development</td>
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1. CONTEXT, OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

This report has been prepared for DG REFORM’s Competence Centre on Public Administration and Governance at the European Commission, within the frame of the European Union Public Administration Country Knowledge (EUPACK) 2022 project. EUPACK is a multi-annual initiative of the Commission that aims to develop its knowledge of EU Member State public administrations’ functioning and reforms, to enable more pertinent country analysis, help to identify reform priorities, and facilitate the effective delivery of EU support for improving governance and state capacity in Member States, including the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

The objective of the study is to explore the feasibility of a common protocol for generating (data for) the UN indicator 17.14.1 on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD), by describing a few minimum (procedural) quality requirements for countries. This should, if fulfilled, sufficiently ensure that the result is a reliable and comparable PCSD dashboard (with its eight sub-indicators), and an overall indicator/index. The study is a follow-up of a 2021 study on the application of the PCSD indicator.

The report has been produced based on desk research, an international online peer learning workshop, and some interviews. The objectives of the workshop were:

- First, to define a commonly agreed approach for a quality protocol that would make it possible that the indicator on PCSD becomes a statistical indicator in the context of SDG implementation monitoring.
- Second, to suggest a roadmap towards a broad agreement on the protocol, for use both (a) at EU level, and (b) at UN level.

The objective of this study is not to test the indicator itself, or the questions/sub-indicators. The focus is on the question of what is needed to make the results of the indicator more robust, reliable and comparable.

After a short literature desk study (on e.g., similar protocols), the key elements of a PCSD indicator protocol have been critically discussed at an online peer-to-peer workshop. For the workshop process of co-creating a protocol, the design thinking approach for complex questions has been used. The 5 steps of this method were merged into three sessions:

**Session 1 (Steps 1-2). Getting to an agreement on the problem.** Rather than accepting the problem as given, the robustness, reliability and comparability of the PCSD indicator will be discussed in its context; this might lead to re-interpreting or restructuring the given problem in order to reach a particular framing of the problem that suggests a route to a solution.

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6 [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en)
Session 2 (Step 3). Idea generation. Brainstorming process of "thinking outside the box", leading to an overview of potential elements of a protocol.

Session 3 (Steps 4-5). Selecting the best ideas and testing a prototype of the protocol. Critically ‘testing’ the prototype will be done from the perspective of different actors (Ministries, stakeholders, others).

Experts from various countries and organisations participated in the workshop (see Annex 3 for participants):

- The European Commission (DG REFORM and Joint Research Centre).
- Five EU Member States (PCSD contacts/focal points / SDG coordinators / public administration experts): the three countries participating in a preceding 2021 study (Finland, Italy, Romania), and two other countries which have already invested in PCSD through EU-financed projects: Cyprus and Poland).
- UNEP (as the custodian UN Agency for the PCSD indicator).
- OECD (Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development team in the Public Governance Directorate).
- CONCORD Europe.

Other experts were consulted after the workshop, as they could not participate: UNStat (as the coordinating body for the UN SDG indicators), UNDESA and UNDP, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Eurostat was not able to react.

The report has the following structure. After the introduction in section 1:

- Section 2 describes how policy coherence (PC) has developed into an important feature of effective public administration and governance, gaining political relevance as it was linked to concrete policies. Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) was the first of such linkages. Its political relevance was expressed by the fact that it is incorporated in EU law by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), and further reinforced by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.
- Section 3 introduces the emergence of the concept of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) in parallel with the preparation of the UN 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It points at the guidance reports and tools developed by the OECD and the preparation by UNEP of the official SDG indicator on PCSD. It shows how PC gained political relevance with PCD and then even more through PCSD. Section 3 also presents the current situation where two different streams of work on PCSD – the change process approach by OECD and the indicator-focused approach by UNEP, are mutually reinforcing. They both use a self-assessment tool, and these tools are very similar. Finally, the SDG indicator 17.14.1 on PCSD is introduced.
- Section 4 presents the SDG indicator 17.14.1 on PCSD in more detail, first experiences, and challenges that hamper the implementation of the indicator. The section also discusses whether and how the eight PCSD sub indicators can be supported by existing public administration and governance indicators.

• Section 5 argues that a commonly used quality protocol could make the indicator 17.14.1 more robust, reliable and comparable. It presents an overview of suggested elements of such a quality protocol, partially generated by and discussed at the peer learning workshop on 3 March 2023.

2. Policy Coherence as Key Feature of Effective Public Administration and Governance

2.1. The societal imperative to prevent and mitigate policy incoherence

The European Commission has argued that sustainable public policy calls for a systemic, long-term approach where administrations pool their resources and expertise to develop common solutions. Such an approach “can bring policy coherence for the implementation of the SDGs to reduce economic, social and environmental costs caused by conflicting policies or delayed action, and to avoid being locked into unsustainable practices, while also increasing the credibility of public administration in the eyes of citizens” (European Commission 2021).

Full policy coherence implies that there are no conflicts, dilemmas, or difficult trade-offs between public policies in different areas such as environmental protection, social equality, agriculture, nature protection, energy generation and mobility. This may be a policymaker’s dream or an authoritarian ruler’s perceived reality but is far from real-life experience and complexity. Even if it were technically possible to reconcile all competing policy claims, the dynamic reality of politics and the influence of pressure groups and other stakeholders will in most countries lead to suboptimal results in terms of policy coherence. How coherent a government’s policy will be depends therefore also on the political economy of powers and interests.

Although full policy coherence may not be achievable, striving for this and investing serious resources and thinking capacity to get as far as possible is a societal imperative because it helps making public policies successful and save the societal costs and obstacles induced by incoherence between policies.

According to the OECD,

“policy coherence is needed to balance short-term economic growth objectives and long-term sustainability and resilience goals. A sustainable recovery requires a strategic vision and policies that orient investments and support behavioural changes to reduce vulnerabilities and the likelihood of future shocks. This involves incorporating transboundary and long-term perspectives to assess, for example, whether or not economic recovery measures or stimulus leads to investment in long-lived high-emitting activities and infrastructure that may lock-in greenhouse gas emissions far into the future, undermining efforts in achieving SDGs and climate change goals.” In addition, the strategic vision “needs to be supported by a professional and capable public service that is responsive to today’s fast-changing world and equipped to cope with unexpected global challenges” (OECD 2021).

Policy coherence is therefore an important measure of how well a government administration performs. As an output indicator for effective government interventions, one could imagine using it as a proxy for at least the governance part of the complex mechanisms of public administration and governance, depending, of course, on how we define ‘governance’. The World Bank definition is a usefully broad one:
“Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them”.10

This can be complemented with a more relational definition, inspired by Mayntz (2004):

“Governance is the totality of interactions, in which government, other public bodies, private sector and civil society participate, aiming at solving societal problems or creating societal opportunities” (Meuleman 2008).

In this approach to governance, policy (What? When?) and governance (How? Who?) are two sides of the same coin. However, indicators to assess how governments perform against their policy objectives tend to be dominated by policy indicators (see Box 1). This seems logical at first sight, but it isn’t. It is as if we drive a car with a steering wheel (direction) and gas pedal (speed, timelines) but without the wheels to conquer the tracks and the engine to mobilise motion.

Box 1. Where is the governance?

An illustrative example that policy tends to dominate governance is the UN and EU’s main overarching policy framework, the UN 2030 Agenda.11 Only two of the 17 Sustainable development Goals are primarily on governance, compared to the 15 mainly policy Goals. This is also reflected in Eurostat’s SDG Monitoring Reports, where SDGs 16 and 17 only figure with 6 indicators each. The SDG 16.6 target on “effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions” is not represented with an indicator. The indicator for target SDG 17.14 on “policy coherence for sustainable development” is also not mentioned (Figure 1). Policy coherence is not mentioned once in the 380 pages of the Eurostat SDGs Monitoring report.

Figure 1 - Indicators measuring progress towards SDG 16 and 17, EU (Source: Eurostat 2022)

Eurostat also does not mention the UN governance indicator on policy coherence for sustainable development, based on Target SDG 17.14.

10 https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/
11 This applies at least to the 2019-2024 European Commission which positions the Sustainable development Goals “in the heart of EU policies” and makes each Commissioner responsible for the implementation of one or more SDGs. The SDGs are also fully integrated in the Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox, including in the Commission’s Impact Assessments.
This means that a large part of governance and public administration quality is not addressed in the annual Eurostat reports on the 2030 Agenda. The result of this is underrepresentation of the governance dimension of the SDGs in the media and in political priorities. This is problematic because the success of the SDGs highly depends on the quality of its governance. As formulated by the European Commission’s First Vice-President Timmermans in 2015 when he spoke about the SDGs at the UN General Assembly:12

“Ultimately, this is all about governance. About inclusiveness: societies will only accept transformation if people feel their voices have been heard. And it's about breaking out of silos. Sustainable development is not just an economic or social challenge, or an environmental problem: it's all three – and our efforts on each need to reinforce rather than undermine one another”.

At quick glance the absence of such crucial governance indicators could be seen as negligence. However, Eurostat has a strong case for not including governance indicators such as on SDG Targets 16.6 and 17.14: there is no commonly agreed indicator (16.6) or the accepted indicator (17.14.1) is not yet fully tested and does not yet generate usable data.

Returning to the discussion on specific governance indicators, it can be observed that policy coherence does not play a significant role. The World Bank’s Government Effectiveness Indicators Report covers on six broad dimensions of governance.13 One of the key indicators, and related to part of policy coherence, is an indicator on ‘Quality of bureaucracy / institutional effectiveness’ for which the World Bank refers to the magazine ‘The Economist’ as its source. It remains opaque, however, how the assessment of institutional effectiveness is carried out.

Although the European Semester has evolved to the central governance mechanism of the EU on stimulating implementation of the SDGs, the SDGs 16 and 17 governance targets are not measured beyond what is included in Eurostat’s annual monitoring report (as was shown in Box 1).

The European Commission’s Public Administration and Governance Framework (PAAF) is an indicator-based assessment framework that is being developed for the European Semester. This Framework provides for a systematic and coherent overview of the Member States’ performance in areas with a direct link to economic efficiencies and their ability to implement reforms.14 The framework covers five performance areas: (1) policy planning, development and coordination; (2) civil service and human resource management; (3) accountability; (4) service delivery and (5) public financial management. The PAAF Framework could integrate policy coherence under the first performance area: policy planning, development and coordination.

The PAAF makes use of the OECD set of indicators on regulatory policy and governance (IREG15). These indicators have also been used by the OECD during the preparation of the Recommendation on PCSD, as examples of indicators that could inform PCSD work or feed the development of PCSD indicators. Further exploring the possible synergies between the IREG indicators and the PCSD indicator was beyond the scope of this project but seems worthwhile to investigate further.

12 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/SPEECH_15_5726
13 https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/
2.2. PC as PCD: focus on mainstreaming development policy

The first comprehensive linkage between policy coherence and a specific policy area came about when EU and OECD countries identified policy coherence as a priority for development policy in the early 1990s. Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) “seeks to minimise the negative impact of EU policies on developing countries, promoting synergies between policies and thereby increasing the effectiveness of development cooperation”.16 PCD constitutes a key pillar of European Union (EU) efforts to enhance the positive impact and increase effectiveness of development cooperation. The concept was introduced in EU fundamental law in 1992 with the Treaty of Maastricht and was further reinforced in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.17

The legal commitment states that “The Union shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in the policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries” (Article 208 TFEU). This commitment to promote PCD in EU policies was reaffirmed at the highest political level by the EU and its Member States in June 2017 in the European consensus on development, which recognises PCD as a fundamental part of the EU’s contribution to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS ACCELERATOR OF POLICY COHERENCE: TOWARDS PCSD

3.1. From PCD to PCSD: back to over-arching and in support of sustainability transitions

During the preparation of the 2030 Agenda, the idea emerged that PCD should be brought more in line with the broader approach of sustainable development as reflected in the SDGs. There was some cautiousness on the side of the development community (see e.g., Knoll 2014),18 because broadening the concept from PCD to PCSD could reduce the original focus of PCD on benefits for developing countries. Meanwhile, PCSD has been widely accepted, among others because the OECD with its series of good practice reports on PCSD helped connecting the SDG and development communities.19

PCSD is target 14 of SDG 17: “Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development”. It is about integrating the dimensions of sustainable development throughout domestic and international policymaking. It is an approach for governance (how and who?) to support policies (what and when?) (Figure 2). PCSD demonstrates that policy and governance are two sides of the same coin and should be addressed at the same time and with the same ambition.

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17 ibidem
19 See https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/
Figure 2 - Governance and policy are inseparable (Meuleman 2022)

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs in September 2015, it was felt that incorporating the SDGs in PCD would strengthen the concept. Others believed that it could weaken PCD. With the OECD as maybe the frontrunner, PCSD was developed as a separate track, only partly replacing PCD and mainly adding to it. Still, all countries have adopted the SDGs and their targets, including 17.14, and are expected to work on this target.

The OECD has added to its already elaborate series of reports on PCD a new series of publications on PCSD, a dedicated website and an online toolkit and knowledge platform. It also helps countries with the development of a PCSD Action Plan, such as in Italy.

The PCSD concept can support governments in many ways, including:

- It helps governments to navigate in a ‘VUCA’ (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world.
- Measuring and improving PCSD helps applying the 11 Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development (UNDESA/CEPA).
- It helps creating a mindset of collaboration across horizontal and vertical ‘silos’ in government and with society.
- It helps tackling unsustainable trade-offs between policy areas like production & consumption, food, environment, energy.
- PCSD is a buffer against short-termism & framing every problem as a crisis (which undermines effectiveness, accountability & inclusiveness).
- PCSD promotes foresight mechanisms and actions.

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21 https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda
22 https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/
23 https://www.oecd.org/governance/pcsd/toolkit/
25 Meuleman, L. (2022). Keynote presentation at the launch of the Community of Practice on PCSD, UNEP, 15 November 2022 (online).
Using the PCSD indicator as an index conceals information on where exactly the strengths and weaknesses are, which is unfortunate; using it as dashboard reveals learning options.

Promoting PCSD creates new allies for the SDGs among departments so far not involved (e.g., Ministry of Interior / Public Administration).

3.2. Two complementary objectives: organising change and measuring progress

The substance of the UNEP and OECD approaches to PCSD overlaps, and they have both a self-assessment as key tool, but they have a different objective. Whereas (1) UNEP focuses on the use of the self-assessment tool in order to measure progress on PCSD, and to help countries to learn from each other based on comparable data, (2) the OECD self-assessment tool concentrates on supporting the necessary structures and processes for policy coherence. To put it short: UNEP focuses on measuring, and OECD on change.

Both objectives are complementary and equally important. To ensure that the indicator is assessed on a broad scale and can become a Tier I indicator, it is important to combine the measuring approach with capacity building efforts such as those from OECD and UNDESA. UNDESA/DPI DG have developed a Curriculum on Governance for Sustainable Development, with among others one on Institutional arrangements for policy coherence, and one (developed with the UN training and research institute UNITAR) on Integrated strategic planning and policy coherence. The strategy guidance note on Promotion of coherent policymaking, published by UNDESA, has a similar focus on capacity building and only briefly mentions the official indicator 17.14.1 (Nilsson 2021). It seems therefore that the focus so far has been on capacity building as reform approach to improve policy coherence. This remains important to lay a foundation for PCSD. Capacity building should among others focus on systems thinking, to avoid unwanted trade-offs. An analysis of policy (in)coherence action in African countries showed that systems thinking, and analysis of policy synergies and trade-offs are not the norm but rather the exemption (Lobos-Alva 2022).

This report, however, concentrates on the measuring approach, as this is necessary to increase the visibility and political support for PCSD as a good proxy for the governance dimension (of SDGs 16 and 17 combined), in SDG progress reports such as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), and at the EU level, the annual Eurostat reports on “Sustainable Development in the European Union”. In addition to these reasons, it can give substance for the capacity building mentioned above, and measure the impact of capacity building in practice, by measuring performance. UNEP has collected good practice examples to illustrate the questions in the self-assessment tool, in a Handbook that should be published in 2023. The OECD has published a range of reports with good practice on PCSD.

A thematic study under the EUPACK 2021 programme of the European Commission has explored the applicability of the SDG indicator 17.14.1 on PCSD with case studies on Finland, Italy and Romania, and with involvement of European Commission, OECD and UNEP. The report “Management of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Towards Measuring Progress” was published by the European Commission end of 2022. It contains 10

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29 https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcesd/
recommendations (see Annex 1). The current report is a follow-up of the 2021 report, and in particular on the 3rd recommendation:

“3. The existing UN and OECD self-assessment tools for PCSD should be used in combination with other tools, to prevent bias and improve robustness and comparability. Self-assessment tools are susceptible to influence from internal interests, which makes the results less reliable. Therefore, they should be used to start a conversation, and be complemented by an external assessment and peer review.”

3.3. The SDG indicator 17.14.1: “Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development”

To develop indicators for the SDG targets, UNSTAT works with national statistical offices to elaborate SDG indicators. For each indicator, a ‘custodian agency’ was found among the UN bodies. For indicator 17.14.1, this is the UN Environment Programme UNEP. The process is summarised in Figure 3.

*Figure 3 - UN process around the indicator on PCSD*

UNEP started with a group of experts, with representatives of United Nations entities and international organisations, including OECD, Governments, academia, think tanks and nongovernmental organisations. It was concluded that the indicator covers so many different themes and mechanisms, that it should be a composite indicator with 8 themes (‘domains’).

In February 2020, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG Indicators approved the indicator methodology. The indicator has reached the stage of ‘Tier II indicator’ in the UNSD/UNSTA classification, which means that “The indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries.”

The methodology goes beyond simply answering the question of whether there are policy coherence mechanisms in place and includes more detailed questions about different types of

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32 Tier I: The indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology, standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of the countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant. Tier II: The indicator is conceptually clear and has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries. Tier III: No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested. Source: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/ (accessed 17.02.2023).
mechanisms and how they are applied in practice. Annex 2 contains the detailed questions and scoring approach for the 8 domains and sub-indicators.

The eight dimensions of the indicator are in line with the eight principles of PCSD developed by OECD (Table 1).

**Table 1 - The PCSD indicator domains by UNEP (in bold) and the corresponding OECD principles**

| 1. Institutionalised Political Commitment / Political Commitment & Leadership |
| 2. Long-term considerations / Strategic Long-term Vision |
| 3. Interministerial and cross-sectoral coordination / Whole-of-Government Coordination |
| 4. Participatory processes / Stakeholder Engagement |
| 5. Integration of the three dimensions of sust. development, assessment of policy effects and linkages / Policy Integration |
| 6. Consultation and coordination across government levels / Sub-national Engagement |
| 7. Monitoring and reporting for policy coherence / Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation |
| 8. Financial resources and tools / Policy and Financing Impacts |

In Figure 4, the SDGs and the PCSD domains are mapped on the graph representing the linkage between policy and governance.

**Figure 4 - Policy coherence for sustainable development to support the SDGs.**
4. **FIRST EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES WITH THE SDG INDICATOR 17.14.1 ON PCSD**

Because each of the eight PCSD domains is assessed separately with the self-assessment tools, the results can be presented as a dashboard, in addition to an aggregated figure (index) (Figure 5). Each of the eight sets of bars represents one domain/principle. The dashboard format makes it easier for countries to see what their relative strengths and weaknesses are and from which countries they could learn most.

*Figure 5 - Example of PCSD dashboard comparing Finland, Italy and Romania, based on their self-assessment, and using the UNEP domains titles (data not validated, informal test presentation)*

The self-assessment tool has been used meanwhile in a number of countries, following a request of UNEP in 2021. Around 30 countries have replied to this request so far, but data have not yet been published. The UNSTAT metadata report on the indicator states that a two-yearly reporting and publication cycle is foreseen.

In the EU, the OECD has supported Italy, Luxembourg, Poland and Romania on PCSD. In Cyprus, UNITAR has applied the self-assessment in the context of a training to support the SDG Action Plan. Finland tested the UNEP self-assessment.

One conclusion of the thematic study under the EUPACK 2021 was that the self-assessment approach is a valuable tool for stimulating conversations. It was also concluded that it currently is not able to deliver ‘statistical data’. This is not a problem when the self-assessment is only used to stimulate conversations between policymakers and between them and stakeholders. However, in order to make the PCSD indicator statistically relevant enough to use it in regular reporting on progress on all SDGs (such as in the annual Eurostat publication), the self-assessment process needs to be more robust and the results reliable and comparable across countries.

The urgency of strengthening the self-assessment tool is high, because:

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Governance indicators for the SDGs are generally weak compared to policy indicators, whereas a balance between measuring policy and governance objectives is crucial;

PCSD goes beyond SDG 17: it relates also to the quality of public institutions (SDG 16.6);

Absence of 17.14.1 in SDG indicator sets means less political attention for PCSD – also in EU Member States.

In 2023, UNSTAT starts a full review of the SDG indicators, aiming at conclusions in 2025, in particular on the ‘weak’ indicators such as 17.14.1 on PCSD, which could potentially result in abolishment of such indicators.

It is important that the indicator will be moved as soon as possible to Tier I, as there is very little time left before we reach 2030.

One of the three main principles of the SDG 2030 Agenda is the interconnectedness of the SDGs. It could be argued that tracking progress in the practice of interconnecting SDGs/policies in national development planning should be mandatory to ensure long-term resilient and future proof policymaking, while at the same time addressing and responding to short-term emergencies or short-term planning, mindful of the electoral cycle.

Integrating the PCSD indicator as statistical indicator in SDG monitoring seems difficult because it is a qualitative, compositie, perception indicator. However, the Eurobarometer, for example, has many of them (e.g. “trust in government”). Indeed, indicator 17.14.1 is a mainly qualitative composite indicator, but this is like many other indicators in use by statistical offices. Examples of composite indicators can be found in many areas: GDP, Human Development Index, Doing Business Index, Natural Capital Index. The PCSD indicator is also a perception indicator, like the ones used by the European Commission, on trust in government, trust in public administration, trust in the judiciary, for example.

5. **TOWARDS A QUALITY PROTOCOL FOR THE INDICATOR**

5.1. **Problem setting**

The implementation of the SDGs is a priority of the European Commission. The Commission states on the webpage introducing its Staff Working Document on Supporting public administrations in EU Member States to deliver reforms and prepare for the future: 34

> “Public administrations are the bodies that at national, regional and local level, deliver crisis response, provide services and substantially contribute building the resilience needed for the sustainable development of the European economy”.

Moreover, political decisions were taken to fully integrate the SDGs in the EU’s Impact Assessments and Evaluations, and in the Economic Semester of economic governance. The UN target and indicator for SDG 17.14 (PCSD) is also fully congruent with the PCSD principles adopted by the OECD countries.

The PCSD indicator can be used:

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34 [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/7c3239f4-8957-4266-8ec3-cf872b05d02a_en?filename=supporting_public_administrations_in_eu_ms_to_deliver_reforms_0.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/7c3239f4-8957-4266-8ec3-cf872b05d02a_en?filename=supporting_public_administrations_in_eu_ms_to_deliver_reforms_0.pdf)
Towards a Quality Protocol for Indicator SDG 17.14.1 on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

(Final Draft)

- By the European Commission, as part of measuring SDG progress ([Eurostat SDG reports](https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/)); and in the context of the EU’s Public Administration Assessment Framework (PAAF).

- By EU Member States, and the UN (UNEP, UNDP, UNDESA) and their Member States as part of SDG progress monitoring and reporting.

- By the OECD, to support its PCSD approach and toolkit for countries;[35](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-guide-to-pcsd/)

Currently, SDG progress reports (e.g., Voluntary National Reviews) are dominated by policy indicators, while governance indicators are underrepresented. This undermines the necessary (political) attention for actions to improve SDG governance. As was mentioned before, an elaborate composite indicator 17.14.1 for PCSD exists but no data are collected systematically. Data that are collected in the context of piloting are not comparable because there is no agreement on how to ensure the quality and comparability of applying the self-assessment tool: the indicator is not yet qualified as ‘statistical’.

Another observation is that the eight self-assessment domains by UNEP tend to focus more on having mechanisms in place (which is literally what the official indicator requires), whereas it will be more telling whether a mechanism works in practice.[36](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-test-of-the-eus-integrity-towards-the-2030-agenda-the-status-of-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development/) Another comment is that the eight domains do not really include transboundary impacts and spillovers. Only in the review of the first PCSD domain (policy linkages between the different dimensions of sustainable development), the identification of how domestic policies affect third countries is explicitly stated. This assessment (as part of PCSD) is particularly crucial for the EU, because many domestic policies implemented have negative consequences on the sustainable development of countries in the Global South.

A report published in 2022 by CONCORD Europe ([CONCORD 2022](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-test-of-the-eus-integrity-towards-the-2030-agenda-the-status-of-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development/)) showed that PCSD mechanisms in nine EU member states could not really be compared because these countries all had different administrative bodies and traditions of governance.[38](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-test-of-the-eus-integrity-towards-the-2030-agenda-the-status-of-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development/) The national platforms of this civil society organisation made a quantitative self-assessment of the eight domains, but this was in the end omitted from the report because the results were too subjective. This should be seen as evidence for the need to have a more robust framework for the self-assessment.

On the discussion whether policy coherence can also be measured without the link to sustainable development, it could be argued that most governments have different frameworks for the SDG and for general policy making strategies. The national coordination of implementation of the SDGs often lays with the Prime Minister’s office, but in some cases with other Ministries (Foreign Affairs, Finance, Environment). Where the coordination of sustainable development and of other government strategy issues is in different hands, it is important to ensure collaboration on policy coherence. It doesn’t make much sense to make a PCSD action plan next to a general PC or a specific PCD action plan.

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35 [https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/](https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/)
36 [CONCORD Europe (2022) A Test of the EU’s Integrity Towards the 2030 Agenda: The Status of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (p. 24)](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-guide-to-pcsd/)
37 [https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-guide-to-pcsd/](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-guide-to-pcsd/)
38 [CONCORD Europe (2022) A Test of the EU’s Integrity Towards the 2030 Agenda: The Status of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (p. 23),](https://concordeurope.org/resource/a-test-of-the-eus-integrity-towards-the-2030-agenda-the-status-of-policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development/)
5.2. Why a quality protocol?

If the type of indicator is not a problem, we should focus on the quality of the data that can be generated with it. This brings us to the idea to try formulating a set of quality requirements for the process of data generation, to be agreed upon in a ‘PCSD protocol’.

The idea of adding a protocol to an agreement is not new. A protocol attached to an indicator is not more or less than a guide, a list of minimum quality requirements that make the indicator more comparable and robust. Many international and multilateral agreements have such protocols. They explain for example how the agreement should be interpreted and implemented. Also the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in numerous protocols on how to protect oneself and others.

From the civil society participants of the workshop, it was argued that monitoring the eight PCSD mechanisms based on self-assessment by countries may result in self-congratulatory and anecdotal reporting. Therefore, the idea of preparing a common quality protocol that should ensure stakeholder involvement, for example, should be supported. This should prevent the flaws happening with regard to PCD reporting, when countries have to fill in a questionnaire every four years. From the EU member states experience it was mentioned that improving policy coherence is fundamental and needs a system-based approach; a protocol for the indicator would be useful. Another comment was that it will be important to develop indicators for spill-over effects and integrate them in PCSD self-assessment.

All in all, the participants of the workshop generally supported the idea of a common quality protocol that would make comparison and exchange possible of successful practices and lessons learned. It was considered to be very important to measure PCSD and trying to find out where the bottlenecks are; a protocol could help.

6. Proposal for a Quality Protocol

Potential components of a PCSD indicator Protocol were discussed with the participants of the workshop. One of the sources of inspiration could be found in the six-step approach the OECD has developed for countries to conduct a self-assessment based on the eight OECD PCSD principles:

- Exploratory discussions between the national focal point and the OECD-PCD Unit to better understand the specific context, challenges, needs, level of ambition and actors to be involved (based also on PCD assessments in DAC peer reviews). Identification of next steps, including an eventual mapping of existing tools and mechanisms.
- Preparation of Terms of Reference to determine: purpose of the pilot; roadmap for testing the PCSD Framework/Modules; specific objectives; scope; deliverables; roles and responsibilities; resources and timeline.
- Kick-off workshop to promote engagement across the government and among key stakeholders; raise awareness and build common understanding on PCSD; and identify priority areas for PCSD.
- Targeted support to bring in OECD or other experts to: facilitate cross-government workshops; analytical work; and preparation of reports.

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• Presentation and publication of outcomes, experiences and lessons learnt and identification of ways to feed into SDG reporting, DAC peer reviews and other OECD reviews.

• Follow-up technical advice on PCSD implementation, monitoring and reporting, including the identification of national PCSD indicators and how best to adapt and apply them.

As mentioned earlier, the focus of the OECD approach is not measuring PCSD but stimulating dialogue to improve PCSD.

During the workshop discussions it was argued that promoting the self-assessment tool for PCSD should not lead to any form of ranking countries. Countries should choose themselves what they want to use the self-assessment for, be it for measuring progress and comparing with other countries, or to stimulate internal dialogue and change, or both.

The following is a collection of 15 requirements which together could constitute the Protocol. In the steps, all eight PCSD dimensions are visible. This is logical, because these dimensions/principles should also apply to doing the PCSD self-assessment. I could be considered to make the first five requirements mandatory, as well as 5 of the last 10, for example.

1. **Appoint a PCSD indicator focal point/responsible officer/Unit to ensure responsibility and accountability.** Appoint a PCSD indicator focal point/responsible officer e.g., in the SDG coordination team (which is often in the Prime Minister’s Office), with sufficient capacity, to coordinate and be accountable for the quality of the self-assessment process and follow-up. (Link to PCSD-1: Institutionalised political commitment).

2. **Ensure government-wide participation and ownership.** Involve all Ministries and relevant Agencies in the self-assessment (*multi-sector* dimension). It may be useful to involve besides the ministries also the national institute of statistics in the evaluation. Raise awareness and build common understanding on PCSD, identify priority areas up-front, and organise a kick-off meeting. (Link to PCSD-3: Interministerial and cross-sectoral coordination). The whole-of government approach would also stimulate taking the long-term into account; this temporal dimension is already part of PCSD (Link to PCSD-2: Long-term considerations).

It was mentioned that if would be inefficient (and ineffective) to have separate policy coherence mechanisms (such as a coordination committee) for the SDGs and for general government policy. The logic should be to have an integrated approach. Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution, integration of the PCSD coordinator with the SDG coordination team seems a good practice. Looking at interlinkages and consistency between the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda is already a priority, and the SDGs cover virtually all policy areas. In addition, the SDG coordination lies in most countries with the Prime Minister’s Office (e.g., Germany, Poland, Romania) where overall coordination takes place anyway. In other countries the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Netherlands), the Ministry of Finance (Cyprus, Denmark), the Environment Ministry (Finland, Italy) or another department (Spain: Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda) is in charge of the SDGs, and PCSD could require a tailor-made approach.

It is important to discuss and decide priorities among the Ministries and Agencies, and clearly establish who is in charge of what, who is going to take care of coordinating policy coordination across all, etc. One of the countries reported that it has a coordination network
for sustainable development with representatives (focal points) from all ministries, that the Prime Minister’s Office tries to coordinate. In practice it remains difficult for the focal points to keep track of what is happening in their ministry; a solution could be to support the focal points network with another coordinating body closer to the leadership of the ministries. Another solution could be to link the PCSD focal points to those in charge of the annual strategic planning and budgeting cycle of the government, as this is where policy inconsistency could be identified in an early stage.

3. **Ensure participation of subnational authorities.** Subnational governments and agencies may have a major task in the implementation of national policies (multi-level dimension), from Europe and beyond. It is in their interest to be involved in activities to increase the quality of national public administration and governance, through a PCSD self-assessment. It is in the interest of the national government to listen to feedback subnational actors give about implementation challenges and emerging issues. (Link to PCSD-6: Interministerial and cross-sectoral coordination). In addition, multilevel PCSD is more than focusing on the national level and how subnational levels contribute to national goals and targets. The subnational level has a policy coherence by itself, to coordinate coherence between different subnational departments.

4. **Ensure participation of societal stakeholders.** Involve key stakeholders from civil society, business, academia and other sectors (multi-actor dimension), from Europe and beyond. Use where possible already existing mechanisms such as a national Sustainable Development Commission. Consider, in addition, direct involvement of citizens (e.g., citizens panels, etc.). (Link to PCSD-4: Participatory processes).

5. **Organise peer review.** Invite one or more other countries to peer-review the self-assessment process and results. This could be elaborated into several models (e.g., a light and a more elaborate version). Italy’s PCSD action plan approach was peer reviewed by Slovakia.

6. **Clarify the scoring method and the detailed questions.** It is important to make clear how the detailed questions in the self-assessment tool for SDG indicator 17.14.1 should be interpreted in each specific country. The UNEP and OECD handbooks with good practice examples may be sufficient, but there may also be a need to evaluate the UNEP questions more in-depth. The downside would be that more time will be lost before data collection can start based on an agreed set of questions and a protocol.

7. **Consider an independent external assessment.** It should be considered to complement the self-assessment with an independent external assessment, which could help validating the results. The European Commission uses such an approach to validate Member States’ reporting on specific pieces of EU environmental law, for example. Romania and Italy have worked on PCSD assisted by the OECD which functioned as an external expert to make the assessment on policy coherence more reliable.

8. **Present results both as dashboard and as total score.** Without the sub scores per PCSD dimension, it is difficult to understand what the total score means. Two countries with the same total score may have very different challenges. Presenting the results also in the form of a dashboard makes peer learning and exchange between countries possible.

9. **Take interlinkages, including spill-over and transboundary effects into account.** (Link to PCSD-5: Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development). For example, ensure that the team or committee that organises the self-assessment has also expertise on international, cross-border impacts of policies.
10. **Make the results of the assessment publicly available.** *(Link to PCSD-7: Monitoring and reporting for PCSD).* It would be good to communicate the results of the self-assessment and the commitment to improve certain aspects, to the general public.

11. **Commit to re-assess annually.** *(Link to PCSD-7: Monitoring and reporting for PCSD).* This is maybe the most difficult but probably one of the most useful discussions. It was asked whether there is a way to operationalise in the protocol the monitoring of policy coherence. Italy works on a PCSD monitoring framework together with territories and stakeholders. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) on the SDGs and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) where they are presented could also become pivotal elements for external evaluation of PCSD implementation. Finland has recently done an external evaluation of its Agenda 2030 implementation. This report addresses problems and potential challenges, and recommendations to be taken on board before the next evaluation. The evaluation report also focuses on the processes and structures of implementation from a PCSD angle. Such evaluations are made every four years.

12. **Ensure follow-up of the self-assessment.** An ex-ante commitment to address the challenges identified in the self-assessment, e.g., in an action plan, is crucial to make the exercise credible.

13. **Add an explanatory memorandum** to the self-assessment results, which provides any explanations that are useful to interpret the indicator score, including major differences in methodology across countries, and any further thoughts regarding the indicator, especially any caveats or conditions for interpreting the findings.

14. **Ensure sufficient financial and human resources** for PCSD. *(Link to PCSD-8: Financial resources and tools).*

15. **Set up a training on PCSD.** Training could include experience with the interpretation and use of the self-assessment questions and scoring mechanism. OECD and the European Commission’s JRC have trainings and tools available that can be used for PCSD. Training could help having a common understanding of what policy coherence means. It could include a repository of tools and best practices that would help not to start from zero. Not only the ministries but also agencies, including in particular the statistical offices, should be included in training sessions.

The draft protocol would need to be discussed broader, in the EU for example at the Public Administration and Governance expert group of the European Commission and the Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda; at the UN at the global Community of Practice on the indicator, and with OECD member states at a meeting of national PCSD focal points.

The idea of accelerating the use of the indicator 17.14.1, preferably also as a statistical indicator, through an agreement on a common protocol, was broadly supported at the workshop.

It would be useful to accompany the protocol with examples of how it can be applied. Existing guidance on PCSD from OECD and UNEP could provide a good basis. UNEP and OECD in collaboration with other participants of the Community of Practice on the indicator could develop light guidance document. Countries can then match their situation against the examples that are given. If developing such guidance takes into consideration the different national context, this gives the option of capturing the different national contexts. The guidance might already suggest areas where countries typically differ from each other, such as on the institutional design of the public administration, as well as on its cultural traditions. For the EU
countries, country reports produced by DG REFORM of the European Commission under the EUPACK programme should be useful for this.

Ultimately, the aim would be to:

- Integration of the indicator & protocol in the Eurostat SDG monitor.
- Integration of the protocol in the IAEG for the SDG indicators.

REFERENCES


Annexes

ANNEX 1. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REPORT “MANAGEMENT OF POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: TOWARDS MEASURING PROGRESS”

The following ten recommendations constitute an action agenda for PCSD.

1. Policy coherence for sustainable development deserves a dedicated national action plan with a monitoring and reporting mechanism, preferably as part of a national SD(G) Strategy or Action Plan. It is an essential lever for the 2030 Agenda and European and national plans such as the European Green Deal and the national Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRP) and the national energy and climate plans (NECP).

2. The eight dimensions of PCSD adopted by the UN member states in the SDG indicator and by the OECD member states in its Recommendation, are complementary and can and should be combined; the differences are relatively small. This report shows how this can be done.

3. The existing UN and OECD self-assessment tools for PCSD should be used in combination with other tools, to prevent bias and improve robustness and comparability. Self-assessment tools are susceptible to influence from internal interests, which makes the results less reliable. Therefore, they should be used to start a conversation, and be complemented by an external assessment and peer review.

4. Both the UN and OECD self-assessment tools include the option of merging partial scores into one index number, but keeping the dimensions apart in a dashboard is more meaningful. One reason for this is that the dimensions of PCSD - although they are mutually supportive and all elements need to be in place - are very different. Success in some of them does not imply a meaningful overall good’ performance.

5. Selecting one of the eight PCSD dimensions as a headline indicator would help communicating and comparing results from different countries. The dimension of horizontal coordination across departments might be a good proxy for the whole of PCSD, at all levels (EU, national, local). This is because effective horizontal coordination is a precondition for success on the other dimensions: without this, there is no policy coherence. The dimension of policy integration could be another option.

6. Measures to enhance PCSD and assess progress need a strong involvement of non-governmental stakeholders, as this can provide valuable alternative insights and perspectives. The SDG Mapper developed by the Commission’s Joint Research Centre could further strengthen the results, but its applicability to PCSD needs further testing.

7. To make PCSD a success in the EU, strong collaboration is needed between (1) the national SDG coordinators with their Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda (which could establish a special Taskforce on PCSD), and (2) the country coordinators on public administration and governance quality, in the soon to be established European

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Commission’s Expert group on public administration. A third group that could be involved is the Commission’s Expert group on Greening the European Semester. The international (transboundary) dimension of PCSD needs to be addressed in these groups and other places.

8. As the proposed collaboration on PCSD should result in reliable and comparative data on the PCSD indicator, national SDG data focal points should be involved in an advisory capacity, with their expertise and responsibility for data quality. The data could support the public administration indicator framework for the European Semester, which also integrates the SDGs. The involvement of SDG data focal points furthermore can facilitate consistency with national reporting to the UN SDG indicator 17.14.1.

9. The European Commission would ‘walk the talk’ if it developed a PCSD action plan and dashboard for the Commission Services. This would be in line with the 22 June 2021 Council Conclusions. the PCSD approach to the Commission’s own Work Programme will make its policy and legal proposals more coherent and easier to implement. In addition, the Commission should continue to financially support national efforts.

10. The European Commission should use the opportunity to partner up with the OECD and various UN bodies (UNEP, UNDESA, UNDP) to promote the availability and use of guidance on PCSD and training courses on how to overcome causes of policy incoherence, such as the silo mentality.
ANNEX 2. COMPOSITE INDICATOR 17.14.1 ON PCSD WITH EIGHT DOMAINS AND DETAILED SUBINDICATORS

This is the latest version of the list of sub indicators (Source: UNEP Handbook on 17.14.1, 2022, not yet widely disseminated).41

1. Institutionalized political commitment. The country has institutionalized its commitment to policy coherence for sustainable development at the highest central/federal political level (5 points, with additional points for the following, as indicated, up to a maximum of 5 points)

1.1 Set timelines for the achievement of policy coherence objectives (1 point)

1.2 A dedicated budget (1 point)

1.3 Defined roles and responsibilities (1 point)

1.4 A requirement and mechanism for regular reporting (1 point)

1.5 Explicit consideration of international commitments (1 point)

1.6 Another nationally relevant mechanism (1 point)

2. Long-term considerations. The country has mechanisms in place to ensure that long-term considerations are integrated into decision-making, policy development and planning (5 points, with additional points for the following, as indicated)

2.1 A commissioner, council or ombudsperson for future generations (1 point)

2.2 Other oversight mechanisms relating to the possible effects of policies or legislation on future generations (1 point)

2.3 Mechanisms for the regular appraisal of policies to ensure that unanticipated effects are addressed over time (1 point)

2.4 Impact assessment mechanisms that take into account the intergenerational effects of major infrastructure development (1 point)

2.5 Another nationally relevant mechanism (1 point)

3. Interministerial and cross-sectoral coordination. The country has an institutional mechanism in place that periodically brings together relevant ministries and government entities to enhance coherence across policies related to sustainable development, including sectoral policies (5 points, with additional points for the following, as indicated, up to a maximum of 5 points)

3.1 A mandate to make decisions regarding trade-offs (2 points)

3.2 A centralized government body, such as the Office of the Prime Minister or President or other central national government entity, responsible for convening the mechanism (1 point)

3.3 Representation and coordination at both the political/strategic level and the technical level to ensure that there is political commitment, that it is translated into action and that there is

alignment between the two levels (1 point) 3.4 A mandate to promote alignment of internal and external policies, including through the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or equivalent bodies) (1 point)

4. Participatory processes. The country has mechanisms in place to ensure that laws, policies, plans, programmes and major development projects at different levels of government, including at the overarching/general, sectoral and local levels, are developed through participatory processes that engage relevant stakeholders in a comprehensive manner (5 points)

4.1 Consultations mandated to take place in a comprehensive manner at various stages of the policy cycle, i.e., not only during policy development, but also during the implementation, evaluation, and revision stages (1 point)

4.2 Requirement for institutions to disclose their rationale for taking or not taking into account input from the consultations (2 points)

4.3 An accountability mechanism that allows public intervention, such as petitioning and subsequent review, regarding policies related to sustainable development (2 points)

5. Integration of the three dimension of sustainable development, assessment of policy effects and linkages. The country has mechanisms in place that allow relevant public institutions to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development into policy and planning processes and systematically to assess the wider effects of policies and cross-sectoral linkages (5 points, with additional points for the following, as indicated, up to a maximum of 5 points)

5.1 The application of the aforementioned mechanisms at all levels of government, from the national level to the subnational level (1 point)

5.2 An indicator framework related to the implementation of policies or plans that tracks progress in all three dimensions of sustainable development and the implementation of mitigation measures (1 point)

5.3 A full cost–benefit analysis of the impact of policies across all sectors conducted as part of ex-ante assessments related to new policies or plans (1 point)

5.4 The identification of measures to mitigate potentially negative effects and optimize synergies included in policymaking and planning (1 point)

5.5 Consideration of international spillover, such as the cross-border impact (1 point)

5.6 Another nationally relevant mechanism (1 point)

6. Consultation and coordination across government levels. The country has mechanisms in place for aligning priorities, policies and plans across the various levels of government (10 points in total; the existence of any two of the following mechanisms is sufficient to score the 10 points)

6.1 Consultation and coordination mechanisms for the systematic collection of input from subnational government entities and the consideration of their priorities in national policy, strategy formulation and planning processes and for the integration of national priorities into subnational policies, plans and programmes
6.2 Contractual or other institutional arrangements for regular formal exchange between the central and subnational levels of government for systematic consultation, collaboration and the alignment of efforts

6.3 Mechanisms to enhance substantive coherence, such as policy or planning and budgeting templates or checklists that require demonstration of alignment between policies at the subnational and national levels before validation and budget allocation

6.4 Planning-cycle time frames that facilitate the alignment of national and subnational plans or systems that allow for the regular review of plans, policies, regulations and programmes to facilitate such alignment

7. Monitoring and reporting for policy coherence. The country has mechanisms, including an institutional or regulatory framework, in place to monitor and evaluate systematically the effects of policies on the various dimensions of sustainable development and their impact across sectors and to produce reports to inform adaptive action (5 points, with additional points for the following, as indicated)

7.1 Requirement that aspects of policy coherence for sustainable development are integrated into the reporting done by government entities to the parliament and to the public (2 points)

7.2 Existence and use of tools and information management systems that facilitate the availability, accessibility and comparability of centralized and harmonized data on sustainable development (3 points)

8. Financial resources and tools. The country has mechanisms in place to promote the alignment of private and public financing with policy coherence objectives and to track related expenditure (5 points, plus one or more of the following for additional 5 points)

8.1 Checklists to ensure that plans and budgets reflect aspects of policy coherence for sustainable development before validation and budget allocation at all government levels

8.2 Integrated financial information systems, including the use of budget codes to facilitate tracking, reporting and informed decision-making with regard to resource allocation at all levels of government or public expenditure reviews that are tagged to the various dimensions of sustainable development

8.3 A mechanism to ensure that cooperation funds are aligned with national policies and the priorities of both donors and recipients.
ANNEX 3. PARTICIPANTS OF THE EXPERT WORKSHOP ON 3 MARCH 2023 AND OTHER INVOLVED EXPERTS

In order to make the development of a quality protocol for the SDG indicator 17.14.1 a joint, co-creation process, a half-day online workshop peer learning workshop was held on 3 March 2023. The participants discussed and shared ideas informally under Chatham House rules, and therefore have not been quoted individually in the report, but it should be clear that without their contribution this report could not have been written. The same applies to experts who could not attend the workshop and who commented bilaterally. The author would like to express their gratitude to all participants.

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