

About CEEweb for Biodiversity

Representing a network of nature conservation organizations in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), CEEweb for Biodiversity's mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development. We carry out wide-ranging policy work and projects in collaboration with other stakeholders. Our vision is a CEE region where social goals, ecosystem health, and economic prosperity reinforce and do not undermine one another.

We work with governments, businesses, municipalities, research organisations and other stakeholders on the local, national, EU- and international level to achieve our goals.



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Rolling On Towards Sustainability

How civil society organisations can engage in the implementation and monitoring of the **Sustainable Development Goals**



The Sustainable Development Goals and civil society organisations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 ambitious objectives for a greener, healthier, more peaceful, prosperous and equal planet. Adopted in 2015 by the 193 member states of the United Nations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision for realizing sustainable development worldwide. Since the framework intends to have a profound impact on the lives of citizens in all countries; actors of civil society, like CSOs (civil society organisations) should be contributing to its implementation and monitoring. The principle

of public participation is enshrined in the Agenda both in the Declaration and in one of its goals as well (*SDG 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions*).

Like the reasons why CSOs could and should engage in SDG implementation, the actual ways of engagement may also be manifold. This brochure discusses potential actions CSOs might take mainly in relation to the process of implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The proposed actions are relevant to all sectors, whether they are environmental, social or economic.

Why should CSOs get involved in SDG implementation and monitoring?

Awareness raising

Since in many countries neither the Agenda nor the goals are widely known, CSO engagement could help raise the profile of the SDGs among wider civil society, government departments and the general public.

Other stakeholders and the public may not be aware of the role CSOs can play in contributing to the SDG progress either.

Enhancing accountability

CSO activities can direct more attention to the accountability of the state towards its citizens and its global partners.

Directly influencing policies

CSOs quite often advocate for policy change within their specific sector. Doing so in the framework of the SDGs might not only increase the chances of success due to the global legitimacy of the Agenda, but may also enable CSOs to approach their focal SDGs holistically, as building blocks of a much larger, interconnected system.

Not only could this lead to being able to influence policies, but also to influencing them in the right way.

Channelling citizen input into official processes

CSOs could accumulate data, survey the perspectives of citizens and transmit messages from the general public to decision makers.

Fostering cooperation

CSOs could play an important role in stimulating and maintaining cooperation among the various stakeholders during the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

Knowledge generation

CSO actions can provide useful entry points for knowledge generation and sharing across different contexts.

Forms of CSO engagement

Prerequisite for any further action: mapping the state-of-play

Specifically, in the case of advocacy actions, it is essential to have a good understanding of the actual situation in order to be able to exert influence over it. To that end, the political, legal, planning, implementing and financial environment

of the SDGs should be thoroughly examined, even if a CSO would like to focus on particular, selected areas of the goals. In that case, both the overall SDG and the sector-specific frameworks need mapping.

During the mapping process, the following questions could be covered:

Is there genuine political interest and will to implement the goals?

Is there a key government actor responsible for leading the SDG implementation?

Has there been an honest gap analysis or baseline study conducted before the start of the SDG implementation?

Does the country have a sustainable development and/or SDG implementation strategy and related action plans?

Apart from or in place of central strategies, have the SDGs and the basic principles of the Agenda been incorporated into vision documents, development plans, policies, legislation, programmes and budgets at all levels of governance (national, sub-national, local)?

Do the official documents cover both domestic and international policies of the country?

Are the national objectives in coherence with one another and the domestic and international goals of the country harmonized to avoid the conflicting objectives undermining the success of the Agenda?

What is the governmental structure responsible for implementation?

Are there government bodies appointed for being responsible and mechanisms set up for coordination, implementation, data gathering, analysis and reporting?

Are specialized institutions responsible for certain areas of implementation or specific SDGs?

Are the parliament, regional and local level municipalities involved?

Where do political parties stand on questions regarding SDG implementation?

Are non-state actors included in official SDG implementation governing structures or involved in other ways?

Does an open, functioning, multistakeholder forum exist for social dialogue and stakeholder engagement?

Are there adequate financial resources dedicated to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels of governance?

Is there a comprehensive national indicator set to monitor progress towards the SDGs?

Are there reporting mechanisms in place both for domestic and international monitoring?

What has the government or any other actor done for raising awareness about the SDGs?

Joining or establishing cross-sector or sector specific CSO coalitions

The impact of any CSO action is greater when CSOs act jointly instead of pursuing individual initiatives. Cross-sector collaboration also helps CSOs to come out of their “policy silos”. It is possible to join already existing coalitions monitoring SDG implementation at global, regional and national levels. Check if such coalition has already been established in your country (e.g. [SDGWatch Austria](#), [Network 2030](#) in Germany) and consider becoming a member. Some countries have established multistakeholder forums rather than purely CSO coalitions (e.g. the [Estonian Coalition for Sustainable Development](#)

or the Lithuanian [Experts’ network on SDGs](#)). In case your country does not have such a network, your action might address exactly this shortcoming. In Europe, the CSO alliance of [SDG Watch Europe](#) is the platform of national and thematic networks to follow SDG implementation both at national and European levels. Globally, there are several initiatives you might consider becoming the part of, such as the [Action for Sustainable Development](#), the [CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness](#), [Civicus](#), [Forus](#) and other, more sector-specific networks (e.g. the [TAP Network](#) focusing on SDG16).

Participating in social dialogue, stakeholder engagement

In some countries, governments have also established or use already existing multistakeholder forums for ensuring the participation of a diverse range of stakeholders (e.g. in Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany). However, these are generally only consultative bodies, not functioning as participatory policy- and decision-making arrangements.

In some cases, multistakeholder councils, advisory boards on sustainable development are set up linked to parliaments (e.g. the National Council for Sustainable Development in Hungary). In countries where such mechanisms do not yet exist, CSOs can proactively engage SDG coordination units, government departments responsible for the 2030 Agenda or for the realization of specific SDGs. More technical, sector-specific working groups could also exist, which would be worth targeting for CSOs.

At EU and global levels, it is easier to get involved through participating in national and European coalitions’ work. However, there are UN mechanisms and forums, in which individual CSOs could also engage. An organization might be a registered consultative partner of the UN’s [ECOSOC](#) (Economic and Social Council) and as

such, can participate in the [UN Major Groups’](#) work as well.

It is possible to get involved without registration by connecting to the so called [Voluntary National Review \(VNR\)](#) process, in which UN members states report about their national SDG-related achievements to the UN at a [high-level forum](#) usually held in July each year. The UN encourages the countries to prepare the report through a genuinely inclusive multistakeholder process but if a government does not set up such a procedure, CSOs are welcome to submit their written inputs as well.

Leading up to the global UN level event, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) organizes [Regional Forums for Sustainable Development](#), which also provide an opportunity for CSOs to input. A platform with official status of a stakeholder group to the UN, called [ECE Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism](#) enables CSOs from the ECE region to participate in the follow-up and review of the SDG implementation.



Verifying and generating data

CSOs could contribute substantially to the monitoring of the goals by either cross-examining the official data or by gathering, generating data themselves as well. For several of the official SDG indicators datasets are not available, adequate or it may even be questionable whether certain indicators fully grasp the complexity of the target itself.

Facilitating feedback from citizens

In addition to statistical data, CSOs are well positioned to initiate citizen deliberations and multistakeholder consultations. These could provide important feedback to the official follow-up processes, especially if no mechanism is in place otherwise in the country. This line of action provides a good opportunity to engage municipal and local governments as well. Participatory exercises could take many forms, from online consultations, surveys to organising citizen assemblies.

Policy inputs, shadow reports

Both the findings of data analysis and the results of citizen deliberations could be presented to diverse audiences from government institutions to the general public in the forms of policy inputs and papers, statements, shadow or spotlight reports. These publications and the actions to promote them could draw attention to the SDGs in general, highlight success or problem areas of SDG implementation and outline recommendations for the successful implementation of the SDGs. Such reports are usually prepared by CSOs and other stakeholders linked

CSO- and citizen-generated data and analysis can effectively complement the information presented by governments and could bring the perspective and experiences of marginalised groups of society to the forefront as well. While working on data, CSOs could also initiate some form of cooperation with national statistical offices.

One of the most ambitious of these initiatives is the [Global Week of Action](#) coordinated by global CSO networks in every September around the time of the anniversary of adopting the SDGs by the UN. During the week of action CSOs and other actors all around the world can join the campaign and organise people’s assemblies and other mobilizing actions drawing attention to important messages, experiences, recommendations arriving from local communities.

either to national or regional level monitoring and reporting processes or in connection to the UN voluntary national reviews (see ‘Regional V4 recommendations’). In some cases, CSO reporting has fed into official government VNRs; in others, CSO reports have been published separately as ‘shadow’, ‘parallel’ or ‘alternative reports’ (see ‘CSO reporting in Slovenia’). These CSO reviews often underline aspects of the SDGs, which are left out of official reports. They can address all 17 SDGs or only specific focus areas in the form of spotlight reports.



Regional V4 recommendations

The V4 SDG network proposed 15 points of action to reimagine sustainability in the four countries of the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), in short, the V4 region and to address the cross-border character of the issues the region is facing.

CSO reporting in Slovenia

In 2020 Slovenia had its second VNR presented at the UN. In connection to the [official government report](#), Slovenian CSOs published a [shadow report on all SDGs](#) and a [spotlight report on SDG12](#).

SDG reporting is not – and should not be – solely a government process. The 2030 Agenda calls on all sectors of society to report on their contribution to implementing the SDGs. CSOs could also report on the role civil society plays in the realization of the SDGs, even more so, if the government does not take into consideration other stakeholders' activities when reporting.

Enhancing capacities for NGO engagement

Surveys show that CSOs which are not capital-based or lack the financial means and connections are not well equipped to follow and monitor the SDG implementation in their countries. Monitoring and reporting on the SDGs is a challenge even for governments, let alone CSOs. Organizations with greater resources could target their CSO counterparts by actions enhancing their capacities, creating opportunities for engagement, peer-learning

and also for joint fundraising. The lack of consistent availability of resources results in irregular engagement of CSOs in the SDG processes. A united approach to funding would help the sector to overcome this limitation. Lack of capacity on the responsible officials' side could also hinder civil society engagement; therefore, CSOs could address this issue as well with their actions.

Awareness raising, campaigning

In this respect, CSOs can do instrumental work since governments often do not pay enough attention to this area. Milestones of the SDG implementation process, regional or global mobilization actions, relevant international days, etc. all offer good opportunities to act and address broader audiences.

In this regard too, taking harmonized action in the framework of well-established or less formal coalitions could be crucial for successful outreach.

Additional resources:

[Checklist - Is your NGO ready to monitor and implement SDGs](#) - Forus
[Advocacy Toolkit on Post-2015 Agenda](#) – Civicus and partners
[A guide to engaging with your government on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) – Civicus
<https://www.sdgaccountability.org/>
[Transformative action to realize the 2030 Agenda through effective coalitions](#) – BCCIC & CCIC
[Guidelines for CSO shadow reports monitoring the implementation of Agenda 2030 at national level](#) – Forus
[Everything you need to know about the VNR process](#) - Forus

CEEweb's contribution to the SDGs

CEEweb's work cover many areas of the Goals but primarily focuses on the achievement of the following SDGs:



GOAL 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Protecting and restoring nature and habitats is at the heart of our work at CEEweb and of our members in the wider region. We focus on combating the main drivers of biodiversity loss and degradation, and on promoting sustainable use of natural resources. We work to protect habitats, to combat desertification, to enforce the protection of threatened plant and animal species. We advocate the integration of biodiversity into policies as well as adequate financial resources for biodiversity protection.



GOAL 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

We advocate the proper protection of fundamental freedoms, public access to information, and effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels. We work in all member countries and at the EU level towards responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.