REPORT

On the preliminary implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Baltic Sea States

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Executive summary

The present report analyses the status of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Acknowledging that countries and stakeholders are in the preliminary phases, the results of this study should serve as a reflective perspective on the country-level plans for the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their national and international policies. The report compares the outputs of existing work on the matter, and accounts for the national reports submitted by BSR countries to the UN ECE in February 2016, for the voluntary reports to the HLPF in June 2016, and for other expert reviews on global, European and macro-regional level.

The results show that all countries are in the process of reviewing current strategies and action plans in light of the new global framework, and share the view that 2030 Agenda implementation should be accomplished through existing structures, financial mechanisms and should avoid duplication and overlaps. Macro-regional institutions such as the EU or the UNECE are seen as fundamental providers for macro-regional monitoring, follow-up and guidance. There is however no common view with regard to who shall hold responsibility for implementation, since each government is entrusting different ministries. Stakeholder involvement is also rather diversified, and while NGOs and civil society are considered on front line for an effective implementation, sub-regional and local engagement continues to be less acknowledged, and the BSR does not receive particular attention as such.

With regard to indicators performance, preliminary studies highlight that the BSR is performing rather well on some targets such as poverty rate, share of renewable energy, air pollution, employment and corruption, whilst performance is generally low for other indicators, such as domestic material consumption, energy intensity. Moreover, there are areas where the region is displays variability of both high and low performance, for example when it comes to SDG 6 on water and SDG 13 on climate.

Finally, it is evident that the region needs to improve performance on the monitoring and follow up on the SDGs, and this is indeed one of the main challenges claimed by all countries. Macro-regional cooperation and coordination can and should, in this sense, be promoted not only with the aim to exchange best practices and successful policies, but also for accomplishing the objectives on SDGs and 2030 Agenda in the whole region and, consequentially, in every BSR country.

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Introduction

On 25 September 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted 17 new global goals – Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replacing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs have 169 targets set to be achieved by 2030. UN has also provided an extensive list of indicators (230) that help to monitor the progress of this process both country-wise and globally. Thus, no doubt, this is a tremendous challenge for the authorities, at local, regional and national level. All signatories to the SDGs and Agenda 2030, need to critically review the comparability of the global goals with national ones, and commit resources to accomplish the ambitious goals.

Bertelsmann Foundation and Sustainable Development Solutions Network were the first to provide a short overview of achieving the SDGs by 34 OECD countries in September 2015. UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was the first international organisation to launch a brief survey to understand the status and further steps of action by the members of the organisation in December 2015. In addition to that, UN High Level Political Forum (UN HLPF) selected 22 member countries to deliver a voluntary report on the implementation of SDGs in July 2016. In October 2016, the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) took a closer look at voluntary reports by seven European countries, including Estonia, Finland, Germany and Norway.

The current study draws an overview of the results of the aforementioned reports of the Baltic Sea region (BSR) and concludes on the steps that the 11 countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden) envisage to implement the Agenda 2030.

The study was performed by Dr Kaja Peterson, Stockholm Environment Institute Tallinn centre, and Olga Zuin, Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS).

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Methodology

The objective of the study is to draw conclusions on the status of implementation of Agenda 2030 and plans of action by the Baltic Sea region countries by October 2016. The study is based on document review, supplemented by comparative analysis of country data.

For the purposes of the study four sources have been used:

1) Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2015). Sustainable Development Goals: are the rich countries ready? https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/sustainable-development-goals-are-the-rich-countries-ready/

2) UN ECE (2016). Planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional survey by UNECE and the Regional UN Development Group for Europe and Central Asia. Geneva and New York, 2 December 2015 https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Regional_SDG_survey_final.pdf

3) VR HLPF (2016). National voluntary reviews to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf

4) ESDN (2016). Analysis of the voluntary national review at the HLPF2016 by Umberto Pisano, Eric Mulholland and Gerald Berger. Background paper to the 1st ESDN Peer Learning Platform, 13 October 2016.

In addition to the aforementioned sources, also the report to CBSS "Assessing the status of sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region: a macro-regional perspective" (December 2015) (CBSS, 2015) was used to compare the data on sustainable development strategies and responsible institutions in the BSR countries. The review was needed for validation of the statements made in the regional surveys and voluntary national reviews and in the respective analysis, e.g. ESDN (2016).

The eleven countries surveyed are: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. Due to the different scope of the aforementioned reports the survey of these countries is based on the following sources:

BSR Country	Bertelsmann&SDSN (2015)	UN ECE (2016)	VR HLPF (2016)	ESDN (2016)
Denmark	X	X	NA	NA
Estonia	X	X	X	X
Finland	X	X	X	X
Germany	X	X	X	X
Iceland	X	X*	NA	NA
Latvia	NA	X	NA	NA
Lithuania	NA	X	NA	NA
Norway	X	X	X	X
Poland	X	X**	NA	NA
Russia*	NA	X***	NA	NA
Sweden	X	X	NA	NA

**- Not available on UN ECE homepage. Information has been provided to CBSS by national governmental representatives.*
***- The report has been submitted but is not available on UN ECE homepage. National governmental representatives provided CBSS with the documentation.*
****Due to lack of data, Russia was not included in the study*

Four countries out of eleven are surveyed in all four sources: Estonia, Finland, Germany and Norway. Three countries are surveyed in two sources: Denmark, Poland and Sweden, Iceland is represented in two sources and three countries are surveyed in one of the sources only: Latvia, Lithuania and Russia.

Although, the only source that covers all BSR countries is the UN ECE survey, it should be noted that the reports by the Russian Federation, Iceland and Poland were not publicly available at the onset of the current survey. CBSS secretariat made a special request to the national representatives of these countries in the Expert Group on Sustainable Development (EGSD) to provide these reports directly to CBSS or, where the reports had not been prepared, to provide information on the basis of the questions formulated in the UN ECE survey.

The positive response received by the Polish focal point enabled this study to include Poland and analyse its report together with the other BSR countries' on an equal basis. Iceland has also shown interest in providing background information for this study, despite the lack of documentation with regard to the UN ECE survey. Although the document is not conformed to the set of questions posed in the survey, indications concerning the national SDGs implementation can still help creating a picture on the state of the work.

Russia responded as well to the call for contribution and provided a document which was not following the standard of the survey questions, but which reiterated the general commitment to the global process.

Firstly, the study provides an overview of the sources used, highlighting the scope and method of analysis. Then a comparative overview of the BSR countries by each of the four sources follows.

1. Review of studies on SDG Implementation in BSR

Herewith a short overview of the sources used in this study is provided.

1.1. Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2015). Sustainable Development Goals: are the rich countries ready?

The report, released shortly before the UN General Assembly in September 2015, provided the first overview on the status of implementation of the 17 SDGs in the 34 OECD countries, including 7 BSR countries. The authors had chosen two indicators per SDG to compare the countries. The total points ranged from 1 to 10. Four of the BSR countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland) ranked the highest in the whole list, taking the first four places (7,86; 7,79; 7,55 and 7,52, respectively). Germany placed in the sixth position (7,08), while Estonia (6,42) and Poland (6,42) came to be the 21st on the final list.

The status of progress of 7 OECD countries in the BSR in two selected indicator areas is however rather different (Table 1).

Table 1. Status of 17 SDGs by two selected indicators in seven BSR countries among 34 OECD countries (source: Bertelsmann&SDSN, 2015)

Rank 1-5	Rank 6-13	Rank 14-20	Rank 21-27	Rank 28-34

17 SDGs:	2 selected indicators	Denmark (7,55)*	Estonia (6,42)	Finland (7,52)	Germany (7,08)	Iceland (6,97)	Norway (7,79)	Poland (6,42)	Sweden (7,86)	Average (7,20)
SDG1. Poverty	1.1. Poverty rate									
	1.2. Poverty gap									
SDG2. Agriculture and nutrition	2.1. Gross agricultural nutrient balances									
	2.2. Obesity rate									
SDG3. Health	3.1. Healthy life expectancy									
	3.2. Life satisfaction									
SDG4. Education	4.1. Upper secondary attainment									
	4.2. PISA results									
SDG5. Gender equality	5.1. Share of women in national parliament									
	5.2. Gender pay gap									
SDG6. Water	6.1. Freshwater withdrawal as % of total internal resources									
	6.2. Population connected to waste water treatment									
SDG7. Energy	7.1. Energy intensity									
	7.2. Share of renewable energy in TFEC									
SDG8. Economy and labour	8.1.GNI per capita									
	8.2.Employment - to-population ratio									
SDG9. Infrastructure and innovation	9.1.Gross fixed capital formation									
	9.2.R&D expenditure									
SDG10. Inequality	10.1. Palma ratio									
	10.2. PISA Social Justice Index									
SDG11. Cities	11.1.Particulate matter air pollution									
	11.2. Rooms per person									

17 SDGs:	2 selected indicators	Denmark (7,55)*	Estonia (6,42)	Finland (7,52)	Germany (7,08)	Iceland (6,97)	Norway (7,79)	Poland (6,42)	Sweden (7,86)	Average (7,20)
SDG12. Consumption and production	12.1. Municipal waste generated									
	12.2. Domestic material consumption (DMC)									
SDG13. Climate	13.1. Production based energy-related CO_2 emissions									
	13.2. GHG emissions per GDP									
SDG14. Oceans	14.1. Ocean Health Index									
	14.2. Over-exploited fish stocks									
SDG15. Bio-diversity	15.1. Terrestrial protected areas									
	15.2. Red List Index for birds									
SDG16. Institu-tions	16.1. Homicides									
	16.2. Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index									
SDG17. Global partner-ship	17.1. Official Development Assistance (ODA)									
	17.2. Capacity to monitor the SDGS									

**number in brackets: total points between min1,0 and max10,0*

While all the indicators across the BSR countries demonstrate a high variability (from leading to lagging-behind ranks), there is a single indicator **"12.2. Domestic material consumption" (DMC)** that has equally low rate across the countries of the BSR (ranking varies from 14 to 34). According to the Eurostat, domestic material consumption (DMC) measures the total amount of materials directly used by an economy and is defined as the annual quantity of raw materials extracted from the domestic territory of the focal economy, plus all physical imports minus all physical exports. The indicator Domestic Material Consumption (DMC) is based on the Economy-wide Material Flow Accounts (EW-MFA). The theory of Economy-wide material flow accounts (EW-MFA) includes compilations of the overall material inputs into national economy, the changes of material stock within the economy and the material outputs to other economies or to the environment. EW-MFA covers all solid, gaseous, and liquid materials, except water and air. Water incorporated in products is included in the analysis.

Given that the indicator for Norway and Finland is 35,6 and 34,3 tons per capita, respectively, it becomes clear that the high domestic material consumption represents a major policy challenge for these countries, as argued in the Bertelsmann&SDSN (2015) report.

Indicator **"11.1.Particulate matter air pollution"** appears to deliver the best result among the 34 indicators across the BSR countries, since five countries out of seven ranked from 1 to 5 in this indicator. European Environment Agency defines particulate matter as "A collective name for fine solid or liquid particles added to the atmosphere by processes at the earth's surface. Particulate matter includes dust, smoke, soot, pollen and soil particles."

Another indicator that demonstrates a positive status is **"14.1 Ocean Health Index"** that scores the highest ranks (rank 1-5) in four BSR countries. The Ocean Health Index is a framework to comprehensively assess ocean socio-ecological marine systems. Developed by an interdisciplinary team, this framework assesses how healthy oceans are around the world with a shared definition: A healthy ocean sustainably delivers a range of benefits to people now and in the future. Using this framework, assessments have been completed in different contexts and spatial scales, including assessing countries and territories globally and smaller scales within a single country. The Ocean Health Index is based on ten components: 1) Artisanal Fishing Opportunities; 2) Biodiversity; 3) Carbon Storage; 4) Clean Waters; 5) Coastal Livelihoods and Economies; 6) Coastal Protection; 7) Food Provision; 8) Natural Products; 9) Sense of Place and 10) Tourism and Recreation.

While looking at the average ranks across the indicators (last column in Table 1), then three indicators stand out as of the poorest performance (rank 21-27) among the eight countries. These are **SDG3.1. (healthy life expectancy)**, **SDG7.1. (energy intensity)** and **SDG12.2 (domestic material consumption)**. On average the countries are performing the best in ten indicators analysed by Bertelsmann&SDSN (rank 6-13), while improvement is needed for other 21 indicators.

Despite the lack of data concerning some of the countries such as Latvia, Lithuania and Russia, which would enrich the regional picture, some conclusions can be drawn by this analysis on the BSR state of the work when it comes to the SDGs and their implementation. First of all there is a lot of variability, and although some countries seem to be generally performing better than the others, each actor in the region presents important strengths and weaknesses.

There are some areas where the region is generally displaying good results, such as in terms of poverty, share of renewable energy, air pollution, oceans, transparency and corruption.

Other areas, instead, are in need of general improvement. In terms of consumption and production, none of the countries ranks among the first 13 for Domestic material consumption. When it comes to energy, the situation seems to be almost paradoxical; despite good results with regard to the share of renewable energies, several countries struggle in terms of energy intensity rates. This is a reminder of the importance to maintain a comprehensive view of each goal and to consider the general performance in all the targets, in order to understand whether one country or, in this case, one region is indeed achieving a goal as a whole.

There are then some areas where the region displays a high variability, and these areas cover very diverse sets of goals and targets. If we take a look at specific targets, it is possible to notice that there is high variability with regard to agricultural nutrient balances, with high peak in Iceland and low peak in Norway. In terms of life satisfaction there are very positive results in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, but less in Estonia and Poland. Municipal waste generation is also rather varied, where Poland, Estonia and Iceland are doing best and Germany and Denmark worst.

Also in the more environmental-related targets there is variation, for example with regard to the Red List Index for Birds, where Estonia and Poland are among the highest and Iceland and Germany among the lowest.

The region is very much varied also when it comes to social sustainability. Education, for example, shows high diversity, with Estonia and Finland scoring high in PISA index and Sweden ranking quite low. In terms of gender pay gap, Norway performs best and Estonia worst, while the other countries are also presenting mixed results.

There are then some goals that show inherent general variation. Energy has been already highlighted as one of the areas where the region is having both very high and very low performances among the 34 OECD selected countries. It is worthwhile to add here goal 6 "Clean Water and Sanitation", and goal 13 "Climate Action". There are differences in performance both within the region and within the countries themselves when one looks at different targets within the same goal.

Finally, a closer attention should be directed to the last indicator that is presented in this analysis within SDG 17 "Partnerships for the goals": **Capacity to monitor the SDGs.** None of the BSR countries is placed among the first five and four of them are located in the last 13 positions among 34. This data reveals that a lot of work needs to be done and that countries can support each other by sharing good practices and knowledge when it comes to the establishment of effective monitoring systems.

1.2. UN ECE regional survey (February 2016)

UN ECE launched a survey among member countries in December 2015. UN ECE aimed to collect inputs on three crucial topics:

1. The plans and approaches of governments to integrate the SDGs and targets in their national strategies and to implement them in their countries. (6 questions)
2. The plans of governments to build and conduct monitoring and review at the national level for the SDGs and targets. (3 questions)
3. The expectations of governments towards the regional UN system in view of SDG implementation and follow-up. (2 questions)

11 short questions in total were posed to 56 members of UN ECE and short answers were expected by 15 February 2016.

Three reports (by Poland, Iceland and Russian Federation) were not uploaded to the respective UN ECE homepage. In order to fill these gaps, CBSS approached the focal points of respective countries, which were responsive and provided an overview on their national state of the play with regard to the implementation of the SDGs directly to CBSS. Thus eventually the analysis covers ten BSR countries, although the Icelandic overview does not reflect the structure of the UN ECE survey. As for Russia, its contribution is rather a declaration of commitment to the global agenda and does not provide concrete information on its plans for implementation.

The responses of the ten BSR countries are provided in the Annex 2 of the current report. It should be noted that these responses were due in February 2016, amidst a very early stage of the implementation of Agenda 2030. By October 2016, the progress of implementation has obviously advanced and the regional survey reports in February 2016 could be regarded as reference points or points of departure in the Agenda 2030 process.

Based on the responses by the 10 BSR countries, the following conclusion could be drawn:

1. Gap analysis of current national SD policies in the context of SDGs: in process (6 countries), in planning process (1) or systems in place (2);
2. Priority areas not identified yet, but planning to do analysis (3) or work in progress (3)
3. Integrating SDGs into national policies: variety of activities foreseen, but within the current administrative arrangement;
4. Budgeting of SDGs: none of the countries envisage change in budgeting system;
5. Partnerships with stakeholders: all countries will utilise current mechanism of stakeholder engagement, with a few countries to stress the need for strengthening the partnership
6. Expectations towards the UN: either the continuation of the current mechanism is preferred or further technical support is expected, particularly with regard to regional synthesis processes.
7. On data: all countries would rely on the national statistical bureaus;
8. Drivers of satisfactory and unsatisfactory SDG progress: would be identified via current system of planning, monitoring and reporting;
9. As to the constraints to reporting: the countries stress that current systems should be maintained, and that regular regional report to HLPF would be important
10. As to the expectations of the countries towards UN: the technical support is valued, but all countries emphasize that the duplication of reporting should be avoided, and that UN is expected to provide synthesis and oversight on the implementation process;
11. As to the regional platform: the countries are positive about regional meetings and a common regional input to the HLPF.

1.3. Voluntary national reviews to HLPF (July 2016)

Altogether 22 countries were volunteering to provide the first round of overview on the implementation of Agenda 2030 by the High-level Political Forum held in July 2016 in New York. There were four BSR countries among the 22: Estonia, Finland, Germany and Norway.

The format of the report was intended to be relatively flexible, however, certain issues were asked to be covered. The guidelines suggested broad themes that reviews could consider. These were indicative, they aimed at suggesting a broad structure, and countries were not expected to report on all of them. In the Secretary-general's report, the themes were presented as sections or blocks of the report. The main blocks were: national priorities for sustainable development and their relations to the SDGs, critical challenges; methodology and process used for the for preparation of the review; creating ownership of the SDGs; incorporation of the SDGs in national frameworks; integration of the three dimensions; progress on goals and targets; thematic analysis; institutional mechanisms; means of implementation; and next steps. The voluntary reviews at the HLPF were expected to cover the level of national implementation for the whole 2030 Agenda. Since the implementation of the Agenda 2030 only started on 1 January 2016, countries were not expected to already be able to report on the review of 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Rather, they could have chosen to focus on strategies and policies that are being put in place to facilitate implementation. Nevertheless, countries may have also decided to share any progress and accomplishments related to activities supporting the Agenda 2030 and whether a baseline for the SDGs had been defined. The voluntary reviews were also expected to touch upon „critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level". The guidelines suggested that the information could be grouped around findings, good practices, challenges, lessons learned, areas that needed support and shared experiences.

Since all the national reviews to the HLPF, including the four from BSR countries, demonstrate a high variability in content, scope and style of presentation, the following question was posed to the comparative study: what are the key challenges for the four BSR countries in terms of SDGs, their implementation and monitoring (Table 2)?

Table 2. Key SDGs addressed by four BSR countries as highlighted in the voluntary national review to the HLPF (VR) (source: VR HLPF, 2016)

BSR country	Have the key SDGs from the country perspective been listed in the VR?	What are the key SDGs (or SDG-related issues) to be addressed by the country? (quote from the VR)	If the key challenges are transformed/interpreted into SDGs and relevant targets, what are the key SDGs that need attention
Estonia	Not directly, but key challenges have been listed	The main challenges include achieving productivity growth, developing an energy- and resource efficient economy, lowering CO_2 emissions per capita, an improvement in the subsistence of low income people and tackling the gender pay gap.	SDG8.4; SDG7.3; SDG9.4; SDG10.1; SDG4.7. and SDG5
Finland	Yes, SDG 13 and SDG8	The gap analysis identified combating climate change and the use of natural resources (Goal 13 in particular), and economic development and employment trends (Goal 8 in particular) as Finnish challenges.	SDG13; SDG8
Germany	VR refers that all 17 SDGs are important	Avoidance of food losses in Germany, consideration of sustainability criteria in public procurement with a focus on government agencies and facilities of the federal administration, education for sustainable development, soil protection	SDG12.3; SDG12.7; SDG12.8; SDG2.4.
Norway	Not directly, but VR refers that all 17 SDGs are important, and the key challenges have been listed also	Priority areas on vulnerable and marginalised groups, health, education, gender equality, employment, infrastructure, urban air quality, waste, biodiversity, combating crime and violence	SDG5; SDG3.8; SDG4.1; SDG8b; SDG9; SDG10.1; SDG11.6; SDG12.3; SDG15.8; SDG16.1

Further to the Table 2, the four BSR countries regard different SDGs as key challenges. Thus it is not possible to find any specifically shared priority areas.

In addition, although Sweden does not appear among the voluntary national reviews, the special study by Weitz and colleagues (2015) provides an analysis on the critical SDGs for Sweden, and proposed six SDGs that need to be addressed by the domestic Agenda 2030. These were SDG4 (education); SDG8 (employment), SDG10 (inequality), SDG12 (sustainable consumption and production), SDG13 (climate) and SDG14 (oceans and seas). While the importance of SDGs 4, 8, 10, 12 and 13 have been highlighted by the BSR countries belonging to the selected countries of VRs, the SDG14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development) was not in their priority list of goals. Weitz and colleagues (2015) argue that since the levels of phosphorus and nitrogen in the Baltic Sea are not decreasing, the current policy measures to curb the eutrophication of the sea are not enough and Sweden should address the SDG14 as a critical goal.

1.4. ESDN analysis of the voluntary national review at the HLPF2016 (October 2016)

European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) published a background paper for the 1st ESDN Peer Learning Platform "Analysis of the Voluntary National Review at the HLPF2016" on 13 October 2016. The study group (Umberto Pisano, Eric Mulholland and Gerald Berger) had addressed four topics in the VR-s: 1) basic information, such as title, length of the report, responsible authority/authorities of the report; 2) VR rationale and involvement; 3) means of implementation of the Agenda 2030 and SDGs; 4) monitoring and evaluation. Seven European countries out of 9 were selected in this study: Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Montenegro, Norway and Switzerland. Georgia and Turkey were left out of the analysis.

The analysis concludes that in terms of the authority or authorities in charge of drafting the VR, each country followed a different way. Some assigned the responsibility to their ministries, such as the one for Sustainable Development and Tourism (Montenegro) or Foreign Affairs (Norway); Switzerland and France used an inter-ministerial working group; in Finland and Estonia there was an involvement of governmental and prime minister's office.

With respect to which institution is in charge, leads, or coordinates the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the analysis also concludes about a variety of approaches used. Four countries, (Estonia, Finland, Germany and Switzerland), have established a type of coordination mechanism at the inter-ministerial level.

Regarding the involvement of the subnational level, the overview is not clear. In fact, only three countries (Finland, Germany and Switzerland) specifically mentioned the subnational level in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, argue the authors of the analysis. All countries declared that they involve and intend to keep involving stakeholders, although there is variety in the ways this engagement should be accomplished. Some countries foresee consultations; others propose more institutionalised and structured types of involvement. For instance, in France, consultative workshops on the implementation of the SDGs are organised whilst a committee of international experts was set up to inform government thinking. In Germany, citizen and various interest groups are involved especially through the updating of the NSDS i.e. via Internet and through hearings.

At least three countries seem to use a more structured way to involve stakeholders: in Switzerland, stakeholders are included through implementation partnerships between the Confederation, sub-national level and representatives of business, civil society, politics and academia. In Estonia, NGOs are included in Estonia's Commission for SD, and the so-called "Code of Good Engagement" works to involve interest groups and the general public on decisions that would affect them. In Finland, broad-based participation of stakeholder groups in preparing the implementation plan and then implementing 2030 Agenda is a key objective through i.e. creation of partnerships, institutional arrangements, open internet surveys, mobilisation of private sector resources, long-term and integrated approach to SD in early education/schools/universities, involvement of a broad spectrum of Finnish citizens.

Awareness raising initiatives and outreach activities were also specifically mentioned: for instance, in Estonia, the report talks about the biannual SD Forum.

All countries but Norway linked the implementation of 2030 Agenda and SDGs to existing SD policy-strategy documents in a clear direct way. Most countries have revised or about to revise their national SD strategy to incorporate 2030 Agenda.

In general, we can see that the majority of countries considered all the SDGs, and went a step further by showing in their reports how each SDG was individually addressed and broken down into specific issues within the national context and how to work on these issues. Some countries even performed gap analyses to understand how the country could relate to all SDGs and targets.

Regarding the challenges, the majority of countries identified SDG-specific related challenges. The most common relate to **the use of natural resources, resource efficiency, economic development**, **inequality, and unemployment**.

Four out of seven countries reported about general implementation challenges, the most common being in:

1) **Increasing awareness and ownership**

2) **Development of indicators for SDGs, measuring and reporting on progress**

3) **Consideration of the Agenda 2030 as a new paradigm, and therefore adapting it into national policies and strategies**

4) **Inter-linkages between SDG areas**

In terms of the quantitative aspect of SD monitoring, indicators and monitoring are approached with strong interest. Each country has already in place a system or framework of SD indicators which has been developed through the years. For example the Swiss SD monitoring system known as MONET, which was recently amended in May 2016 with approximately 75 indicators, or the Finnish FINDICATOR, with its 39 sustainable development indicators, or the Estonian statistics covering 76 indicators divided between four overall SD goals.

In sum, the analysis provided in the background paper does not draw conclusions, but rather provides a descriptive overview of the selected European voluntary reviews to HLPF in 2016 (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparative data on some aspects of VR in selected countries, including 4 BSR countries (Source: ESDN, 2016)

Aspect of review	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Montenegro	Norway	Switzerland
Authority drafting VR	Strategy Unit of Government Office	National Commission on SD, Prime Min. Office, Min. of Foreign Affairs	Inter-ministerial, general commissioner for SD	NA	Min. for SD and Tourism	Min. Foreign Affairs	Inter-ministerial working group
Leadership in SDGs implementation	Strategy Unit of Government Office	Prime Min. Office	Min. of Environment, Energy and the Sea	State Secretaries Committee for SD	Min. for SD and Tourism	Individual Min.	Federal Council
Involvement of subnational level	Governmental level	Regions and municipalities will play key role	Governmental level	Federal Government dialogues with Federal States	Participatory processes with institutions and local governments	Governmental level	Partnerships between confederations, cantons, communes
Involvement of stakeholders	NGOs in commission for SD, social engagement, awareness raising	Broad-based Stakeholder participation in planning and implementation	Consultative workshop and international expertise	Citizens and interest groups involved in update of NSDS	Experts, academia, CSOs and business involved in draft of NSDS	Constructive dialogue between stakeholders and government on implementation and follow up	Implementation partnership between Confederation, sub-national level, business, civil society, academia
Update of existing strategies	Review of NSDS	Society's commitment to SD; national plan to implement 2030 Agenda	Plan of how to incorporate SDGs; national action plan	Revision NSDS, link to Federal budget	NSDS	Plan for national follow up of SDGs	Action plan NSDS 2016-2019; transition in 2016-2017 to align it to 2030 Agenda
Challenges	SDGs and targets; general implementation	SDG-specific challenges; general implementation	SDGs and targets	Challenges for each SDGs and possible solutions	SDGs and targets	General implementation; SDG-specific challenges	General implementation
Monitoring	Overview of 231 indicators, 14% already measurable and adjustment of existing ones	Revise existing indicators and definition of governmental monitoring responsibility in national plan	National statistics conducts feasibility study on SDGs indicators	Develop indicators to correspond to SDGs; report in 2018	Establish platform to translate SDGs and indicators, and link them to NSDS	Begin with indicators most relevant for national context and later define the others for ensuring comprehensive follow up	National SD monitoring system, 75 indicators

1.5. Key conclusions from the CBSS BSR Report (2015)

It should be noted that the institutional aspects of implementing, motoring and evaluating the SDG was first analysed in the report to CBSS "Assessing the status of sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region: a macro-regional perspective" (December 2015). The authors of the report have described the national sustainable development strategies, the institutions in charge of the implementation, the monitoring and evaluation of the strategies. It is worthwhile to summarise their findings. The report concludes that:

1. ***Sustainable development is largely interpreted as economic growth.***
   BSR countries commonly articulate inclusive growth (providing that social and environmental concerns are included) as a main goal of every national government in the region. It is by and large categorized by pursing goals which aspire to fundamentally transform the energy sector in the region, either via energy efficiency or energy savings measures, or by developing the field of renewable energy. These are expected to support the creation of jobs in the environmental sectors, via e.g. new innovations enabling the emergence of 'green' technologies.
2. ***Energy sector needs fundamental transformation.***
   It is by and large categorized by pursing goals which aspire to fundamentally transform the energy sector in the region, either via energy efficiency or energy savings measures, or by developing the field of renewable energy. These are expected to support the creation of jobs in the environmental sectors, via e.g. new innovations enabling the emergence of 'green' technologies. The relative cohesive nature of the transformation of the energy sector derives largely from EU initiatives, which constitute a significant macro-regional influence in the BSR. The overarching EU policy initiative, the EU 2020 Growth Strategy, represents the main influence in relation to the transformation of the energy sector in the BSR.

The report also makes three recommendations:

1) **Facilitate cooperation in the region to respond coherently to SDGs by empowering macro-regional stakeholders;**
2) **Introduce regional monitoring of SDGs;**
3) **Establish regional platforms for mutual learning in the BSR;**

The CBSS (2015) report addresses several issues that were revealed also by the four sources studied in the current report, most notably the SDG 7 (energy) and SDG13 (climate), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production) and SDG10 (inequality).

To some surprise the eutrophication and the exhausted fish stocks of the Baltic Sea did not find closer attention (for example, in Bertelsmann&SDSN, 2015; VR HLPF, 2016).

2.Organisational issues in national implementation of SDGs

Implementation of SDGs depends on several aspects. Weitz and colleagues (2015) argue that current political environment and administrative structures play an important role. The Agenda 2030 posits that national level implementation should "build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate". The CBSS assessment (CBSS,

2015) demonstrated that national strategies are largely there, but at different level of coverage and update (e.g. the national development strategy in Poland dates back to 2000 and national sustainable development strategy in Estonia dates back to 2005).

According to the UN ECE regional survey (2016) (see Annex 2), the BSR countries are planning to use the existing administrative structures and budgets to accommodate the implementation of Agenda 2030. This would pose a great challenge for the countries since the SDGs are overarching and cross-sectoral and require the attention of all ministries, thus the Prime Ministers' Offices have a key role to play. So far, the foreign ministries have had the leading role in the preparation of the Agenda 2030 (OWG, Stakeholder Forum, budgetary issues) and continue to maintain their role in the development cooperation and international agreements, while the environmental ministries have held responsibility on the overall sustainable development action, resulting in limited capacities of cross-sectorial actions in the sustainability approaches.

Now the whole government needs to demonstrate leadership during the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Moreover, the Parliaments must step in and keep the SDGs implementation high on the government agenda, debating the issues and setting priorities for action, and ensuring democratic accountability in the process, stress Weitz and colleagues (2015). Among the Parliaments of the BSR countries, only the German Federal Parliament has sustainable development on its agenda, having a Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development that monitors the implementation of national sustainable development strategy (CBSS, 2015). In addition to high political levels, the sustainability agenda needs to be mobilised also at subnational and local levels.

While Agenda 2030 calls for strengthening national ownership and leadership, reporting exercise should not become a task allocated for statistical offices only, but a meaningful and energising action for the whole society. Weitz and colleagues (2015) argue that the implementation of Agenda 2030 anticipates among others also vertical and horizontal coherence of policies, finances and actions. Thus, the involvement and coordinated action of the whole governance system is crucial.

Conclusions

The current study assembled five sources of data on the implementation of Agenda 2030 in the Baltic Sea Region countries. For some of them it was possible to collect information from a variety of sources and develop therefore a preliminary picture of how the works for implementing the SDGs are proceeding. For the majority of the countries there is at least one document available, the UN ECE regional survey. Despite this survey being rather broad in content and scopes, it provides a point of departure that is comparable and can serve as a boost for discussions in terms of systems of governance for the achievement of the SDGs and for promoting macro-regional discussions and cooperation. However, the limited information currently available with regard to some countries, the Russian Federation in particular, invites all stakeholders to reflect on how to raise commitment for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and how to improve coordination within the region and include networks outside the European borders.

Further to the results of the current study, it was revealed that the institutions leading the sustainable development (SD) strategies in BSR countries are in place. The SD strategies, however, are in need of update in the context of Agenda 2030. The most demanding tasks appear to be the selection of appropriate indicators and statistical data gathering. In general, the BSR countries have

to adjust the current systems to accommodate the 169 SDGs targets and 230 indicators. However, the political leadership at Parliament and Government needs to be strengthened. At the same time, integration both at horizontal and vertical level needs to be increased and actions of cohesion, knowledge sharing and exchange of practices are of primary importance. These activities must not be limited within the national context, but should take into account also regional and macro-regional networks.

As revealed by the comparative analysis of the BSR countries members of the OECD by 34 indicators of SDGs, the BSR countries are revealing good performances in a certain number of areas, most notably in poverty rate, life satisfaction, share of women in Parliament, share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption, employment-to-population ration, Palma ratio, particulate matter pollution, ocean health index, corruption index and ODA. However, in three areas (healthy life expectancy, energy intensity, and domestic material consumption), the performance appeared to be the poorest (rank 21-27). Somewhat surprisingly, the SDG13 (oceans and seas) ranked fairly well, while it is widely known that the Baltic Sea is not in the good environmental status and with poor fish stocks. These data suggest once more that regional systems of monitoring are needed, and that national indicators cannot properly reflect an overall achievement of sustainable development on a regional or global scale.

As to the monitoring and reviewing of implementation of Agenda 2030, BSR countries welcome the support by UN ECE both at country level and regional (European) level, primarily in statistics and reporting, but also stressed the need to limit the number of required documents and to avoid duplication in reporting to EU, European and global UN level. Once again, it is important to underline that regional synthesis provided by UN ECE or other macro-regional institutions is fundamental for achieving a picture of sustainable development on a global scale. However, the juxtaposition of national results needs to be integrated through regional mechanisms. For this reason, knowledge sharing platforms, implantation tools and coordination mechanisms are fundamental for the national, as well as global, implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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Annex 1. BSR Country profiles: strengths and weaknesses (extracts from Bertelsmann&SDSN, 2015)

Denmark

Overall

Denmark ranks third out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. The country is among the top ten for over half of the 34 indicators in this study, appearing in the top five eight times. While Denmark's performance varies, it maintains a very high average. The country finds itself among the bottom third for five of the indicators, and in the bottom five for just one.

Strengths

Among the 34 OECD countries, Denmark has the least corrupt public sector. The country also ranks among the top ten for homicide rates: just 0.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. These indicators illustrate that Denmark is a leader in promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing equality of justice, and building accountable public institutions (goal 16). In addition, Denmark's poverty rate of 6 percent puts the country right behind the Czech Republic. Similarly, the Danes' narrow income gap between rich and poor puts it in fourth place and demonstrates its success at reducing inequality. Denmark also leads the way in citizens' satisfaction with life. The Danish government is at the same time among the five most generous in development assistance, giving 0.9 percent of GNI (nearly $3 billion in 2014). Significant financial contributions to developing countries are essential to sustainable development on a global scale. Also noteworthy: the country ranks third in the Ocean Health Index, behind Estonia and New Zealand. This high ranking indicates Denmark's sustainable use of marine ecosystems, ensuring that they are available not just now but also in the future.

Weaknesses

Despite its positive showing, Denmark is not without its challenges. Danes generate 751 kilograms of municipal waste per capita every year, one of the worst rates among OECD countries. By contrast, inhabitants in the five best-performing countries for this indicator generate between 293 and 347 kilograms per capita. And while it rates highly for income gap, the other indicator for goal 10 (which calls for reducing inequality) finds Denmark among the bottom ten on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status. Addressing this weakness will require policy action that ensures education opportunities are not limited by socioeconomic status.

Estonia

Overall

Estonia ranks 21st out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. For nine of the 34 indicators it is among the top five OECD countries and for five it tops the rankings. Estonia's performance, however, varies greatly. For 13 indicators the country is among the bottom third, and among the bottom five for eight.

Strengths

The country tops the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status. Educational opportunities are less limited by socioeconomic status in Estonia than any other country in the sample. Estonia is a leader among OECD countries when it comes to goal 15 (the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and the protection of biodiversity). The country is showing the way in protecting both its terrestrial bio es and animal species. For example, a comparatively low 10 percent of the country's bird species

are threatened, which puts the country at fourth. Similarly, Estonia leads the OECD countries in the Ocean Health Index (which assesses the condition of marine ecosystems). Estonians also generate the least municipal waste; the country's 293 kilograms per capita is far below the OECD average of 483 kilograms. Also of note: Estonia's particulate matter air pollution levels are below World Health Organization safety thresholds. In addition, Estonia's gross fixed capital formation (27.8 percent of GDP) puts the country in third place, with only South Korea and Norway performing better.

Weaknesses

For all of its impressive accomplishments, Estonia faces significant policy challenges. Estonia performs dismally in goal 13 (which calls for action to combat climate change and its impacts). The country ranks last among the 34 OECD countries for greenhouse gas emissions and 30th for CO2 emissions from energy production. With emissions per GDP of 680 tons per million, the country emits nearly double the OECD average and more than ten times the front-runner, Sweden (which emits 66.8 tons). Likewise, Estonia's fossil fuel energy production emits 12.3 tons of carbon dioxide emissions per capita; the top five countries each emit less than 5 tons per capita. Just as worrying: Estonia ranks among the three worst-performing on three diverse indicators: primary energy intensity, the gender pay gap, and homicide. Estonia's high primary energy intensity (9.1 petajoules per GDP) is more than double that of each of the top five countries. The country's 31.5 percent gender pay gap, is more than double the OECD average. Finally, with a homicide rate of 4.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, the country is surpassed only by Turkey and Mexico.

Finland

Overall

Finland ranks fourth out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. For more than half of the indicators the country ranks in the top ten and in the top five for 13 indicators. Finland's performance varies across the different indicators, but it skews above average. It finds itself among the bottom third for five indicators and notably in the bottom five for just two indicators.

Strengths

Finland has made commendable strides toward ending poverty in all its forms (goal 1). A relatively low 6.6 percent of Finns live below the poverty line, far better than the 11.5 percent OECD average. Even more impressively, Finland has the narrowest poverty gap (the percentage by which the mean income of the poor falls below the poverty line) of any OECD country. Finland is not only a champion when it comes to protecting marine resources, as illustrated by its good performance on the Ocean Health Index. Particulate matter air pollution is also below World Health Organization safety thresholds. Furthermore, the country ranks third for PISA results. It secures the same position in terms of public sector corruption, with only Denmark and New Zealand having lower perceptions of corruption third of Finland's energy comes from renewable sources, which is almost twice as much as the OECD average and the fourth-highest value of all countries. Finally, Finland's parliament is 42.5 percent female, second only to Sweden's.

Weaknesses

Finland's relatively high primary energy intensity (8.2 petajoules per GDP) puts it well toward the bottom of the table, with only Estonia and Iceland performing more poorly. Similarly alarming, the country's high domestic material consumption (34.3 tons per capita) puts it 31st; by comparison, the OECD average is around 19 tons per capita of materials in the economy. Despite its impressive female representation in parliament, Finland's performance in goal 5 is brought down by a disappointing average gender pay gap of 18.7 percent, below the OECD average of 15.5 percent, putting Finland 27th in the sample.

Germany

Overall

Germany ranks sixth out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. It is among the top ten for twelve of the 34 indicators in this study, but only twice manages a top five placing. Across the various indicators Germany's performance varies, although it hovers around the median. On seven indicators the country finds itself in the bottom third, yet only twice among the bottom five.

Strengths

As Europe's economic powerhouse, Germany ranks among the top countries in the sample for promoting economic growth and employment. With a GNI in 2014 of $46,840 per capita, the country ranks sixth (although it needs to do more to ensure that this growth is inclusive and sustainable, as goal 8 requires). In addition, 73.8 percent of working-age Germans are in employment, putting the country in sixth place. The country's narrow poverty gap (the percentage by which the mean income of the poor falls below the poverty line) puts it at fourth among the countries in the sample. Germany also excels in conservation, designating 17 percent or more of terrestrial biomes as protected areas, a distinction it shares with seven other OECD countries. This demonstrates the country's commitment to sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity (although tempered by a poor showing in the protection of animal species). Germany also has a relatively low homicide rate of 0.7 per 100,000 inhabitants, putting it in the top ten, and relatively high expenditure on research and development (2.9 percent of GDP).

Weaknesses

The sustainability of agriculture in Germany is severely threatened by nitrogen and phosphorous use, coming in at 26th for this indicator. A surplus of 94 kilograms per hectare of total agricultural land indicates a high risk of pollution soil and water. In addition, Germany is in 28th place for waste per capita: at 614 kilograms, far more than inhabitants in the top five countries, who generate between 293 and 347 kilograms per capita. Germany's use of total renewable freshwater resources, which it draws on at an annual rate of 30.2 percent, puts the country among the bottom five. In addition, the country ranks 29th among the 34 countries in the sample for protection of animal species; 36 percent of bird species are threatened, significantly higher than the 22 percent OECD average. Also worrying: many Germans are exposed to particulate matter air pollution exceeding WHO safety thresholds, ranking the country in 27th place in this indicator.

Norway

Overall

Norway ranks second out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. For 20 indicators Norway is in the top third, an impressive 16 of those in the top five. However, four of the measures fi nd the country among the bottom third, one of them in the bottom five.

Strengths

Norway ranks among the top three countries for promoting sustainable economic growth and productive employment (goal 8), with 75.3 percent of working-age Norwegians in employment in 2014. Norway is also one of the most generous OECD countries in financial contributions to developing countries, giving a laudable 1.1 percent of its GNI (approximately $5 billion in 2014). Also commendable: Norway is among the top five countries in a range of environmental measures. The country is second only to Sweden for greenhouse gas emissions. With emissions per GDP of just 109.3 tons per million USD, Norway performs far better than the OECD average of 352.1 tons. The

country also ranks second in renewable energy, behind Iceland, with an admirable 56.9 percent of gross energy consumption drawn from renewable sources (almost entirely hydro). It is also second only to Iceland, once again, when it comes to water, withdrawing just 0.8 percent of its total renewable freshwater resources and ranking fifth on the Ocean Health Index (which assesses the condition of marine ecosystems).

Weaknesses

At 35.6 tons per capita, Norway's high domestic material consumption represents a major policy challenge for Norway. Only Chile and Australia perform more poorly here, while the OECD average is 19 tons of material per capita. The country's winning performance on environmental indicators is offset by its excessive fertilizer use. With 108 kilograms per hectare of agricultural land surplus, this indicates levels of nitrogen and phosphorous use that pollute the environment, threatening ecosystems and water quality, and put Norway at 28th for this indicator.

Poland

Overall

Poland ranks 21st out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. The country is among the top third on ten of the 34 indicators in this study; for five of these, it ranks among the top five. On seven indicators the country finds itself among the bottom five nations.

Strengths

Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning to ensure that all members of society have the skills needed to achieve their potential; Poland performs well in both of the measures of this goal. In 2013, 90.1 percent of Poles had completed at least upper secondary education, putting the country in fifth place. High PISA results (sixth in the sample) point to the quality as well as the quantity of education. Also noteworthy: Poland ranks among the top ten for its narrow gender pay gap. Men in the country earn on average just 10.6 percent more than their female counterparts (around 5 percentage points over the OECD average). In addition, the country comes in second for its relatively low municipal waste (297 kilograms per capita) and among the leading countries in particulate matter air pollution. Also significant: Poland is second only to Turkey in protecting animal species, with just 8 percent of bird species under threat (compared to the 22 percent OECD average). A comparatively low 16.7 percent of the country's fish stocks are overexploited, putting the country tenth and ahead of the 17.8 percent OECD average, but there is still room for improvement.

Weaknesses

Poland faces challenges in a wide range of policy areas. Relatively few Polish households are connected to public or independent wastewater treatment (64 percent); only Mexico and Turkey fare worse for this indicator. Healthy life expectancies are among the shortest in the OECD, putting the country in the bottom fi ve. On average, Poles can expect 67 years of life in full health – eight years less than their Japanese counterparts. With a 2014 GNI of $24,090 per capita (based on PPP), the country performs worse than 29 other OECD nations, and over $13,000 below the OECD average. Poland's greenhouse gas emissions also require attention, offsetting its positive performance in other environmental indicators. With emissions of 520.7 tons per million USD as a percentage of GDP, Poland performs far worse than the 352.1 tons OECD average, coming in 30th.

Sweden

Overall

Sweden comes out on top of the 34 OECD countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index. For 21 of the 34 indicators, well over half, the country ranks among the top third, and in the top five for an admirable ten indicators. On five indicators the country can be found among the bottom ten, but never in the bottom five.

Strengths

The Swedish government can take pride in policy success on a number of fronts. It is among the top three countries for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (goal 13). The country also has lower greenhouse gas emissions per GDP than any other OECD country. Furthermore, its fossil fuel energy production causes just 4.3 tons of carbon dioxide emissions per capita (putting it third in the sample). Sweden also ranks third for renewable energy consumption, with the share of renewables in its energy mix rising by nearly 30 percent since 2004. These accomplishments should serve as a model for others. At the same time, a comparatively high 74.9 percent of working age Swedes were in employment, putting the country in fourth place. Earnings are also high, with a GNI in 2014 of $46,710 per capita (based on PPP), putting Sweden in seventh place Finally, Sweden leads the OECD in female representation in parliament: 45 percent.

Weaknesses

Although the country's renewable energy share is impressive, it doesn't use energy as efficiently as it could. With a primary energy intensity of 6.3 petajoules per billion in GDP, Sweden ranks 26th for energy efficiency. The country also ranks among the bottom five for terrestrial biome protection. Sweden protects just 8 percent, well below the 17 percent that eight OECD countries have designated as protected areas. Also requiring attention is the country's performance on the indicators that measure goal 4 (inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning). While Sweden's performance is average with regard to upper secondary completion, the country ranks only 28th on PISA results.