

The role of the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU Recovery in 2023



**European Committee
of the Regions**

Integration of SDGs: overview

The EU gradually included the SDGs in the European Semester and the study found a better integration in the NRP 2023 than in previous years' documents. Some limitations:

- Lack of a **comprehensive strategy** addressing the gaps to the EU's achievement of the SDGs;
- The **SDGs are not seen as a distinct framework** for guiding the elaboration of actions and policies for sustainable development uniformly across all Member States;
- Weaknesses of the SDG indicator set and **monitoring methodology**;
- Very **limited consideration for the territorial dimension** in the design of the NRPs;
- **Insufficient consideration for LRAs** in the implementation of the NRPs;
- The analysis of the NRP may be adequate to assess the level of implementation of the SDGs and the commitment shown by MSs to the 2030 Agenda. **Additional documents**, directly related to the SDGs (e.g. NVRs, LVRs and Eurostat publications) should be used to complement the analysis.

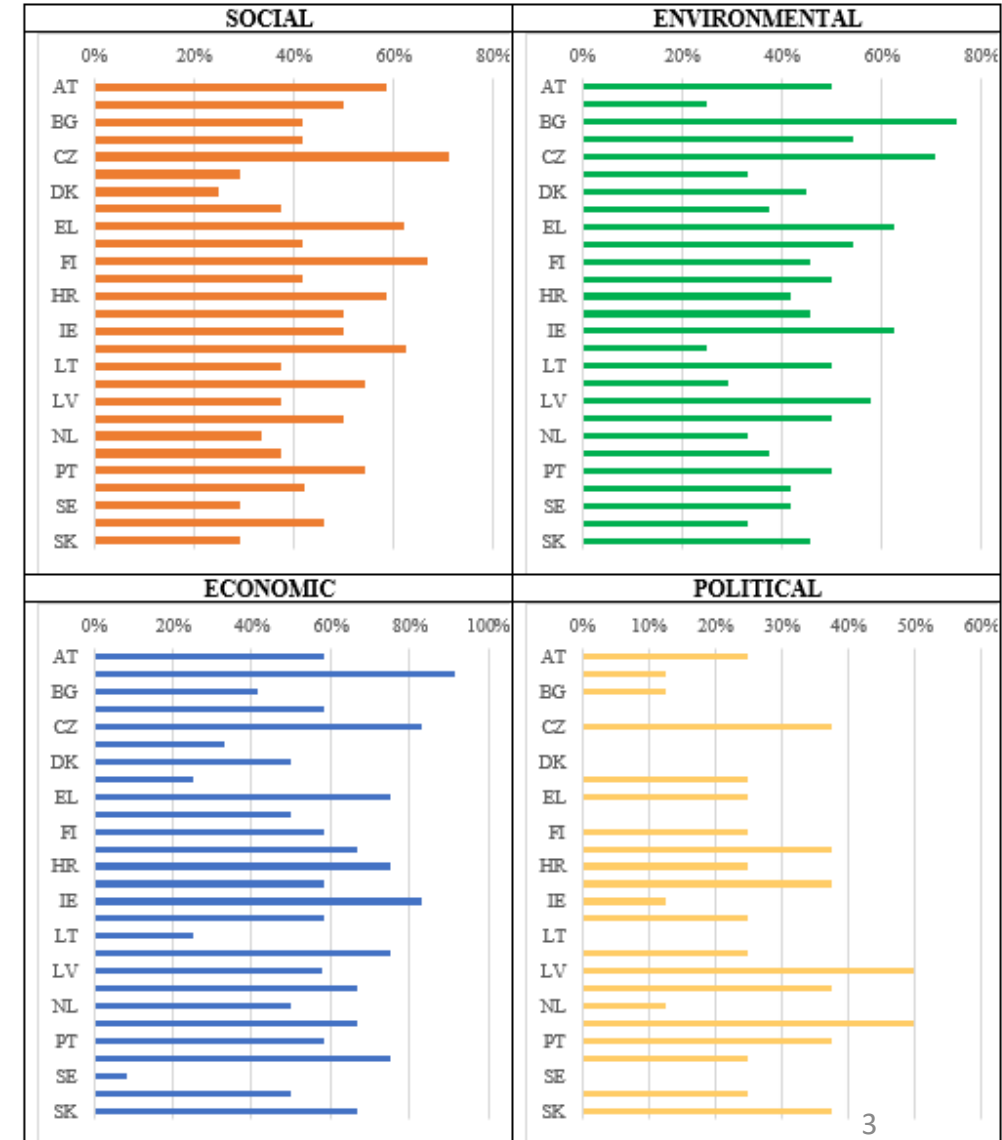
Overview of EU progress towards the SDGs over the past 5 years, 2023 (Eurostat, 2023)



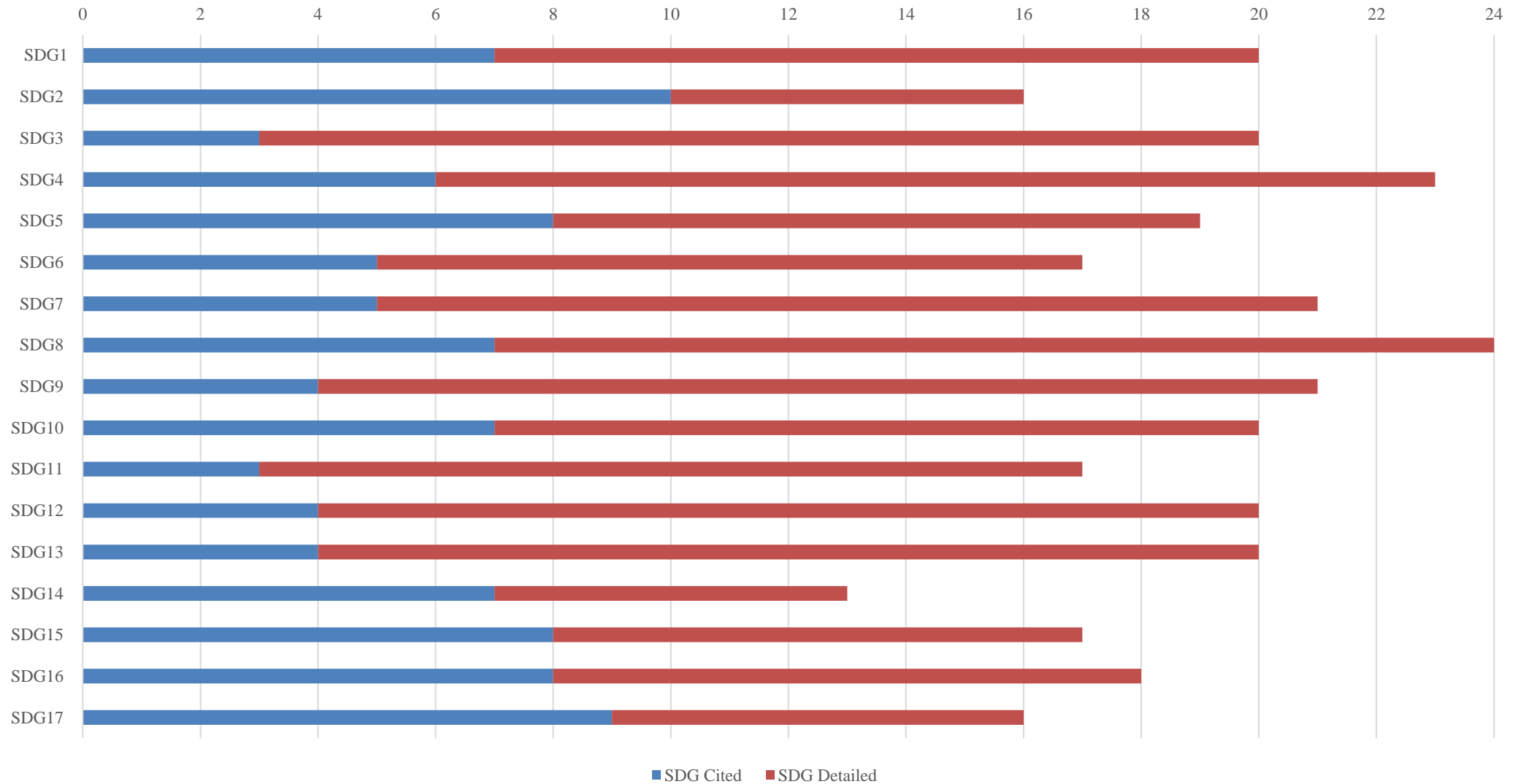
Integration of SDGs: key study findings, national level

- MSs report implementation progress of **the SDGs in the NRPs**, although **not all SDGs** are always mentioned and often **not in sufficient details**;
- The overall level of SDGs integration is **rather good**, with the highest score achieved in the economic SDGs and the lowest in the two political SDGs;
- The true measure of the SDGs' integration in the NRP 2023 is given by the **level of detail presented**. The **most precise NRPs** are those that extensively **cover most or all of the SDGs, outlining actions for their effective implementation**;
- The **SDGs are beginning** to be perceived in the NRPs as a **coherent framework** for sustainable recovery at the national level.

The level of integration of the SDGs in the 2023 NRPs by dimensions



Quality of information on SDGs, all Member States



Territorial dimension: key study findings, national level

- The **planning of the NRPs** seems to remain a **centralised exercise**, usually under the responsibility of the Ministries with little involvement of the lower level of government;
- Very **few NPRs report specific territorial challenges and disparities**. Mostly are left **implicit**;
- **Lack of involvement of LRAs in the planning of the NRRPs** which seems to include also subsequent revisions of the Plans;
- Several MSs rely on the **substantial allocation of funds from Cohesion Policy**, which envisions a more direct involvement of LRAs, both in the planning and implementation of the programmes
- **No NRP details a strategy for the ‘localisation’ of SDGs**

Score of territorial dimension in the 2023 NRPs by cluster

Figure 9 – Score: involvement of LRAs in the NRPs

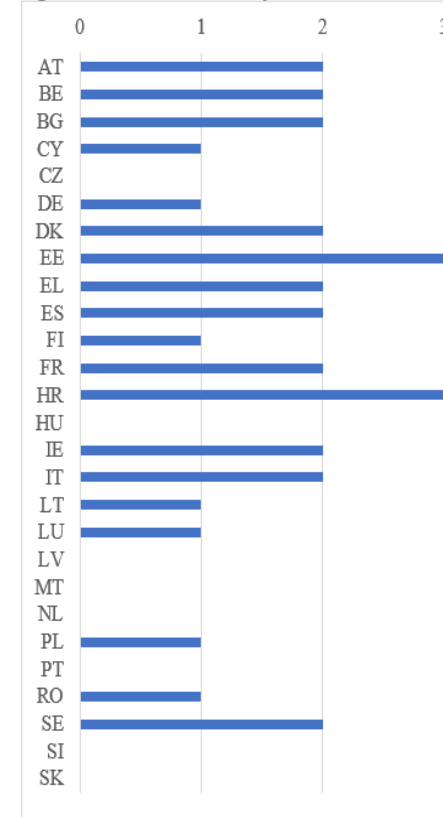
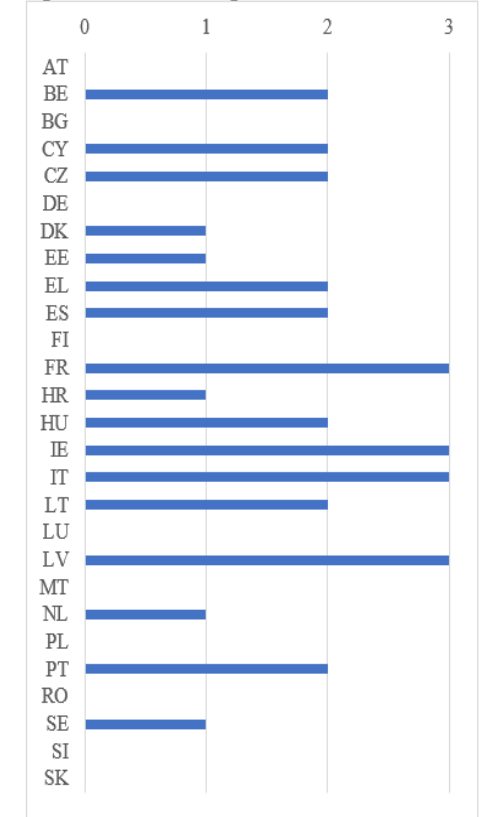


Figure 10 – Score: challenges and solution at local level



Recommendations

- The **EC** should persist in formulating a **well-structured strategy** for implementing the SDGs, encompassing definitive, quantifiable, and time-bound targets at the EU level (**monitoring system should be improved**);
- More **concrete actions** are necessary to **encourage MSs to actively involve LRAs in the implementation** phases of the NRPs;
- The **EU** should provide new and more **clear guidelines on the content of the NRPs**, by explicitly requiring MSs to provide a greater level of detail regarding the SDGs implementation and the impact of the measures planned in the programme on the Agenda 2030. The **MSs** should also be encouraged to **provide information on LRAs' consultation during the planning of the NRP**;
- The EC should renew the **High-level SDG multi-stakeholder Platform** or establish an alternative dialogue platform.
- The **CoR** and the **EC** should jointly encourage a **two-way dialogue** where European and national strategies would involve LRAs, while **local feedback** would allow higher levels of government to assess implementation obstacles and scale up best practices, including grassroots initiatives;
- LRAs should strive to '**localise the SDGs**', by using the Agenda 2030 as a framework, encouraging each policy actor to identify how strategies and actions would benefit sustainability in other policy areas within the competence of the local government.