



PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

First Belgian National Voluntary
Review on the Implementation
of the 2030 Agenda

United Nations High Level Political Forum
New York, 18 July 2017

INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the 2030 Agenda adoption two years ago, Belgium – in its various institutional dimensions – pledged to spare no effort in working towards realizing the SDGs. Sharing our experiences with the UN membership is part of that commitment. Our first national voluntary review report provides a first comprehensive overview of actions undertaken so far on the SDGs and their targets. In the course of this exercise, scores of people in Belgium – civil servants and their political masters, researchers, civil society and business organizations – all put their minds around how the actions they oversee or carry out are relevant to reaching these globally set aspirations. They have bundled their diverse, recent experiences and plans in a common narrative written in the SDG alphabet. The full report, with a statistical annex providing the baseline for two relevant indicators per global goal (with further progress to be followed on indicators.be), can be found on the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform of the UN.

This brochure is an even more succinct portrait of the same endeavor, a snapshot providing no more than a short teaser per SDG in terms of internally and externally focused initiatives listed, and some context. With many advocacy efforts (from corporate and local government training programs to global citizenship education initiatives) under way to bring Agenda 2030 to an ever larger share of the Belgian population, live updates of the pathways to sustainable development being charted can be found on the sdgs.be website.

To .be continued!

Charles Michel.

Charles Michel,
Prime Minister



THE BELGIAN CONTEXT

For a full decade now, Sustainable Development has been anchored in the Belgian Constitution as a general policy objective to which the federal state, the communities and the regions should all contribute. Overarching plans and strategies to ensure coherence between their endeavors in the various dimensions of sustainable development are the instrument of choice, and a tailored institutional framework enables cooperation, consultation and coordination between the actors involved.



The implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Belgium relies first and foremost on strategies adopted by the respective levels of power: the sustainable development plans of Flanders and Wallonia, the regional development plans of Brussels and the German-speaking Community, and the Federal Long-Term Vision (2013) and sustainable development plans.

A first National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) was approved in Spring 2017. This 'umbrella document' focuses on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Belgium and aims to create the basis for a coherent approach to sustainable development policies. It lists a series of priority themes - food, housing, procurement, advocacy - for joint action among the various authorities, and entails joint reporting on progress twice per government term.

A profound overhaul of the Belgian development policies was initiated, thereby fully embracing the new reality of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Transversal lines running through all Belgian development related efforts henceforth include a commitment to 'leave no-one behind' by applying a rights based approach with a special focus on the rights of women and children; a commitment to reach out to those countries farthest behind by committing to spend at least 50% of Belgian ODA in the LDCs and fragile states by mid-2019; special emphasis on the potential of enhanced domestic resources mobilization, the promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and the transformative potential of digital leap-frogging and the private sector.





GOALS & TARGETS



SDG1

Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere is of key importance to Belgium. Contributing to the achievement of this goal takes place in various forms:

- overarching poverty eradication strategies as the instrument of choice at all levels of government regarding implementation in Belgium,
- high quality Belgian social protection systems, whose quasi-universal scope is recognized by many international experts,

- external action guided by a rights-based approach and support for inclusive and sustainable economic growth, e.g. empowering marginalized groups through increased income opportunities,
- support for the ILO-World Bank Universal Social Protection Initiative.

0,9%
of Belgians are over-indebted

GOALS & TARGETS



SDG2

Belgium focuses on integrated solutions, innovative value chains and systemic innovations in the food system. At stake here is the relationship between diet, health and ecosystem sustainability.

Actions include:

- the Federal Action Plan on Nutrition and Health,
- the Brussels Good Food Strategy, focusing on urban agriculture and 'farm to fork' measures,
- Wallonia's efforts to making production and consumption more sustainable along the food supply chains Flemish action labs to spur the innovation potential of the agro-food industry,
- 15% of Belgian ODA dedicated to actions aimed at ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture.

15%
of Belgian ODA spent
on food security



SDG3

Government priorities relate to addressing non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and mental illness. Accessibility of quality care is another priority.

Belgium has been at the very cutting-edge of pharmaceutical innovation and is also the largest provider of vaccines and medicines to the UN system.

In our international development efforts, preference is given to integrating health services within an effective, strengthened system that enhances the quality and the resilience of these services. Major policy priorities in this context are the fight against communicable and non-communicable diseases, including neglected tropical diseases such as sleeping disease, as well as the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

**In the World Happiness Report,
Belgium ranks**

17th



SDG4

Belgium is recognized for its high quality educational system, committed teachers, renowned research institutions and talented researchers. Major school reforms are underway to stay abreast of new evolutions such as rapid technological progress, which demands the development of new skills sets, as well as to the need to foster intercultural understanding and tolerance in a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural and multiethnic. Lifelong learning and reconversion of the labor force to meet new requirements is still an area of concern. Belgium supports the global efforts of delivering high quality education to all girls and boys, notably through:

- the provision of multi-year un-earmarked federal funding to UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education,
- a Flemish partnership with UNESCO,
- support for teacher training,
- the distribution of scholarships to southern partner institutions.

7%

Belgians currently involved in lifelong learning (EU: 11%)



SDG5

Belgium has established a solid legal and policy framework for combating gender-based discrimination and is working towards gender equality in the spheres of economic, social, cultural and political life. Gender mainstreaming remains another cross-cutting priority and the various Belgian policy levels have adopted specific legislation to this extent.

Notable actions include:

- a national action plan for combating gender-based violence (2015-2019),
- a new gender strategy and action plan for the Belgian Development Cooperation,
- support to UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and UN Women,
- the Global Fundraising Initiative She Decides.

41.7%

of Belgian parliamentarians are women

GOALS & TARGETS



SDG6

Belgian water use efficiency is lower or close to that of its immediate neighbors. However, due to the intensity of habitat, industry and agriculture, most water systems are heavily used and face multiple pressures including a risk of future water shortages. Belgium delivers on its objective to ensure availability and sustainable management of water through a variety of local and regional actors, at home and abroad. Actions range from interventions in terms of pricing policy, integrated river basin management, support for the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of safe drinking water and sanitation, and support to partner countries.



SDG7

Energy use is relatively high in Belgium. Energy intensity is decreasing but remains above the EU-28 average. Renewable energy types are on the rise, though the share of renewables, also because of Belgian geography, remains relatively low compared to many other EU countries.

Actions in this area include:

- the development of an inter-federal energy pact with energy targets for 2030 and 2050,
- the Brussels Air-Climate-Energy Plan; the Walloon Air-Climate-Energy Plan, the Flemish Energy Policy,
- development of a modular off-shore grid,
- renovation and energy efficiency of buildings,
- the Affordable Renewable Energy for All multi-stakeholder network.

2 times

as many nitrates in Belgian compared to European river waters

8%

renewables share in final energy consumption (2015)



SDG8

Belgium is among the top-ten of ILO member states in terms of ratified labor standards. Its system of collective bargaining prevents the rise of low paying jobs, job insecurity and rising inequalities. Against a background of a transition towards a more sustainable economy, which will entail major transformations in the way we work, measures include

- economic redeployment and industrial policy focusing on innovation and growth, circular economy and digital innovation, including support for SMEs
- a 'flexible and workable work act'
- the Belgian Charter on Decent Work for All
- partnering in the Global Deal: Enhanced Social Dialogue for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth.



SDG9

Belgian businesses are strong in process and product innovation; our research centers are highly regarded and occupy an enviable position in the innovation landscape. There is a tradition of relatively high public and private investment in education, research, development and innovation. Specific actions include:

- Green Economy Covenants in support of greening industry and economy
- support for digital development: Digital Belgium, Digital Belgium Skills Fund, Digital Wallonia Platform, Digital for Development Strategy: use smart digital technologies as a lever to optimize the impact of our international development interventions
- strategic research centers: imec, iMinds, Flanders Make, EnergyVille
- Brain-be: Research Action through Interdisciplinary Networks
- the Global Science, Technology and Innovation Conference Series (G-STIC).

Ratified ILO
labor standards:
Belgium ranks
in the global

top 10

2.5%

of GDP spent on research
and development

GOALS & TARGETS



SDG10

Belgium counts with a long-standing and well-developed social security system and enjoys one of the highest redistribution standards in Europe.

Leaving no one behind: the fight against discrimination is an explicit objective throughout the actions of the various governments and is translated, for example, through the Flemish Integration Decree, Social Cohesion Plans in Wallonia, or the activities of the Institute for Equality between Women and Men or the Interfederal Center for Equal Opportunities.

In the realm of external action, in view of the need to 'leave no country behind', Belgium pledged that by 2019 at least 50% of its ODA should be allocated to LDCs and fragile states.

26.2%

Belgium's low Gini coefficient



SDG11

Challenges related to ensuring safe, sustainable and resilient cities are manifold: homelessness, poor housing, urban air quality, traffic congestion, transport accessibility, energy saving, public spaces, suburbanization problems.

Addressing these issues, governments, cities and civil society are engaged in a broad range of initiatives and actions, including:

- The *Housing first* model supported by the federal government, linking housing policy and poverty reduction.
- Efforts to encourage soft mobility through comprehensive mobility plans.
- Promotion of technology and innovation in sustainable urban development through smart city approaches.
- Action abroad focusing on support for urban planning and training for local authorities.

40%

in excess of WHO's proposed particulate matter exposure maxima



SDG12

Belgium is the European champion when it comes to recycling of packaging materials, and has been commended by the European Commission for the progress made in improving recycling rates, in promoting circular economy and in showing leadership to public and private stakeholders.

Specific actions include:

- reducing food waste at all levels of the food chain, including through a vibrant zero-waste community,
- the Flemish Materials Program, awarded the Circularity Award at the 2016 World Economic Forum,
- a hands-on guide for sustainable public procurement,
- the attempt to be designated a 'Fair Trade Country' by 2020,
- a charter with Go4Circle, the umbrella association for private companies who put the circular economy at the heart of their operations.



SDG13

Belgium is fully committed to turn the implementation of the Paris Agreement into a success. Elaborating and implementing the Low Carbon Belgium by 2050 gives a long term perspective to a multitude of efforts at different government levels and by many stakeholders. The Belgian governments are working in a coordinated matter and an internal burden sharing of Belgium's climate and energy objectives for 2021-2030 will be one of the next major steps.

Belgium contributes, among others, to the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility, the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Adaptation Fund, totaling at least 50 million EUR annually. Belgium also provided support to partner countries in the development of the NDCs and has also committed support to Fiji in the organization of COP23.

80%

recycling rate of packaging materials
(EU average: 64%)

10 ton

of CO₂ equivalent emissions of
greenhouse gases per inhabitant (2015)

GOALS & TARGETS



SDG14

Oceans, seas and marine resources are crucial for global food security and human health. They contribute to poverty eradication, sustainable livelihoods and employment. 22 Belgian commitments in this field were registered during the recent Ocean Conference.

Actions include:

- the revision of our Marine Spatial Plan,
- action plans to combat marine litter, including action on ghost fishing gear and targets to reduce the leakage of both sea and land based litter to the marine environment,
- sustainable fisheries measures for the North Sea,
- support for UNESCO's International Oceanographic Commission.

Belgium also strives for the protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and the establishment of a new UN Convention on this subject, and has been working with the Small Island Developing States in this area.

22

Belgian commitments made at the 2017 Ocean Conference, and counting



SDG15

Efforts to halt biodiversity loss include:

- multi-stakeholder efforts to protect, develop and recover valuable plants and animals and their habitats under the EU Natura 2000 program or the European Birds and Habitats Directive,
- Belgium's membership of the global Coalition of the Willing on Pollinators in view of protecting pollinators and their habitats. Bee protection actions concurrently take place in all Belgian regions,
- the BeBiodiversity Strategy, a partnership with private sector to move markets towards more biodiversity friendly products,
- the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, a tailored platform for interdisciplinary work among researchers, policy makers and stakeholders.

Abroad, action includes sustainable forest management, desertification-related action and scientific capacity building work with partners.

40%

or more of animal and plant species are affected very unfavorably



SDG16

Belgium ranks above the average concerning civic engagement and personal security. The promotion of human rights remains a top priority, including in the fight against violent extremism. Belgium deploys measures to reduce illicit financial flows, corruption and fraud, both at home and abroad.

Other notable measures under this goal include:

- national plans to combat child poverty and dedicated children's rights commissions,
- sustainability reporting by and 'SDG proofing' of government agencies and administrations,
- the development of e-government applications and participation and consultation mechanisms,
- support to international criminal justice, the fight against impunity and security sector reform,
- support for the rule of law worldwide through the OHCHR and civil society actors.



SDG17

Belgium subscribed to the effort to reach the 0.7% ODA/GDP target by 2030, it has multiplied its score on the Aid Transparency Index almost threefold between 2014 and 2016 and focuses on LDCs and fragile states where continued ODA engagement is most crucial.

The notion of partnership also takes the shape of:

- multi-actor networks and charters on sustainable entrepreneurship or SDGs and international development,
- developing 'impact bonds', and ways to foster domestic resources mobilization in partner countries,
- regulatory impact analysis tools integrating dimensions such as policy coherence, administrative simplification, gender or SME focus,
- developing indicators complementary to GDP, and addressing data gaps abroad.

9

Belgium's rank in the World Press Freedom Index

50%

of Belgian ODA to be directed to LDCs and fragile states by 2019

LESSONS LEARNED

Many institutional anchors and thorough experience in virtually all policy fields corresponding to the 2030 Agenda's goals and targets provide Belgium with a good starting point for implementation. Further accelerations and adaptations to the existing mechanisms in terms of policy-making, institutional functioning and staffing are however necessary in view of incorporating the SDGs and targets into all of our internal and external policy frameworks in the best and most coherent manner possible.

This process is ongoing, and the national voluntary review has so far played a pedagogical and instrumental role, ensuring a much-needed high-level political impetus and maximizing the peer learning potential inherent to the Belgian federal system. It has intensified reflections, set in motion working methods whereby sustainable development is no longer just a matter of SD focal points or specialists but rather a whole-of-government affair, allowed progress on a Belgian SDG indicator framework, emphasized the need to ensure all relevant actors are truly on board in a comprehensive approach to external action, and given a renewed impulse to collaboration with civil society stakeholders and the private sector.

NVR findings underscore the commitment of the Belgian authorities to implementing the SDGs as a whole, addressing interlinkages while leaving no single SDG behind in the effort of aligning sectoral and thematic policy plans at national, subnational and local levels to the 2030 Agenda. All 17 SDGs as well as a large majority of the 169 targets are currently being addressed in one way or another, with many actions being reported on the SDGs related

to, inter alia, health, gender, decent work, terrestrial biodiversity and peaceful societies. Themes such as the fight against inequalities are not confined to reporting under one goal, but instead offer a strongly woven subtext to Belgian efforts in a number of areas spread out over several goals.

This first review also allows to identify a number of areas where further efforts will be required. Scale matters, too, in terms of the extent to which various governments were able to systematically incorporate SDGs in their work streams. Civil society, consulted in the context of this NVR, expects additional attention for issues pertaining to, inter alia, lifelong learning, water and air quality (including particulate matter), energy intensity and renewable energy, greenhouse gas emissions, people at risk of poverty as well as means of implementation. External studies largely concur in this respect, further confirm Belgium's outperforming of its peers on goals such as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and notice our relative successes at tackling poverty and inequality (SDGs 1,5 and 10).

The 2017 Belgian NVR on the 2030 Agenda primarily provided a partial baseline, and a benchmark: for guiding further action in a federal context with multiple decision-makers hence multiple priorities per policy area; for future gap analysis, progress monitoring and impact assessment; for improving collaboration with civil society in implementation and review; and for strengthening accountability towards parliaments, civil society and the Belgian population at large.

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The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have inspired a broad and versatile dynamic. Policymakers, civil society, private sector, universities and many others are all actively working to achieve the goals. I too am wholeheartedly committed to promoting these goals, along with the other Advocates appointed by the UN Secretary-General.”

HM Queen Mathilde of the Belgians, SDG Advocate





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