

HIGHLIGHTS

Greece is strongly committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, as they provide an ambitious and transformative framework for a new, fair and sustainable development path, which ensures a balance between economic growth, social cohesion and justice as well as protection of the environment and of the country's unique ecological wealth. Ensuring that "no one is left behind" is a high political priority for Greece, which is now exiting a period of prolonged economic crisis.

Through an open dialogue within all government units and with a wide array of stakeholders, an in-depth stock-taking and mapping exercise has been carried out, in 2017, to define the country's starting point. The exercise resulted in the endorsement of eight National Priorities for adapting the 17 SDGs to national needs and circumstances, also in line with the recently adopted National Growth Strategy:

- Fostering a competitive, innovative and sustainable economic growth
- Promoting full employment and decent work for all
- Addressing poverty and social exclusion, and providing universal access to quality health care services
- Reducing social and regional inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for all
- Providing high-quality and inclusive education
- Strengthening the protection and sustainable management of natural capital as a base for social prosperity and transition to a low-carbon economy
- Building effective, accountable and transparent institutions
- Enhancing open, participatory, democratic processes and promoting partnerships

The country's first Sustainable Development Strategy dates back to 2002; however it is now that Greece has adopted a truly strategic approach, anchoring sustainable development at the highest political level and ensuring political ownership. For building a robust long-lasting institutional mechanism to coordinate national efforts for achieving the SDGs, Greece has successfully endorsed (i) a "whole-of-government" approach, with an active operational Inter-Ministerial Coordination Network, steered by the General Secretariat of the Government, a key centre-of-government entity, and (ii) a "whole-of-society" approach with a strong stakeholder engagement in the gap analysis and stock-taking process, enhancing transparency, partnership and accountability.

As detailed in the country's VNR Report, the unprecedented economic crisis forced a focus towards economic policies that often create divergence, rather than contributing to achieving sustainable development. Thus, the country had to balance out through measures for equitable growth by improving the business environment and encouraging investments, promoting social and solidarity economy, supporting human capital, research and innovation, and fostering sustainability in sectors such as agriculture, tourism and infrastructure.

On the social pillar, and with a particular outlook to regional cohesion, policy priorities have been focusing on addressing urgent gaps related to unemployment, particularly for youth and women, social inequalities and the inclusion of immigrants and vulnerable population groups. These have been implemented through a robust social security system, the establishment of a minimum guaranteed income for all, universal access to quality health care services, a reduced social residential electricity tariff, support for "energy communities", and free access to quality education for everyone at all education levels.

On the environmental pillar, progress has been achieved in all related SDGs. Key national priorities include the shift towards a low carbon circular economy and improvement in waste reduction, reuse and recycle for creating new jobs and increasing resource efficiency. Firmly committed to the Paris Agreement objectives, Greece is already in a good place to meet its national GHG reduction targets earlier than 2030. Successes also include the full application of Integrated Water Resources Management principles considering both social aspects and ecosystem needs, significant increase in RES penetration and progress towards the full

digitalization of land-uses (in land and sea), ensuring a high protection status of the country's ecological wealth.

Building effective, accountable and transparent institutions and enhancing participatory and democratic processes, is pursued in Greece by expanding e-governance tools, fighting corruption, protecting human rights and enhancing strong partnerships within borders, between all stakeholders, and beyond borders.

Capitalising on the VNR experience, next steps will include the elaboration, in 2019, of a National Implementation Plan for the SDGs, consistent with the National Growth Strategy, engaging all stakeholders at all stages, as well as the active involvement of the Hellenic Parliament in the overall follow-up and review process of the SDGs implementation.