

## *Personal angle*

# **How to regionalise the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Agenda 2030?**

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How to regionalise the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Agenda 2030? In the absence of an international methodology, the [South East Europe \(SEE\) 2030 Strategy](#) could be deemed a successful case.

Would the SEE 2030 Strategy be a pioneer for other regional initiatives with its successful implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2030 at the regional level?

Adoption of the UN Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on 25 September 2015 is one of the significant joint actions of humanity vowing to combine their efforts for a better world. All UN members pledged to prepare, some of them with international technical assistance and some not, national roadmaps to determine their trajectories of reaching these goals.

In this aspect, the methodology countries are advised to follow in drawing their national strategies and ways in which national-level reviews of these strategies are to be made is called the UN Handbook for the preparation of National Voluntary Reviews. Additionally, to support countries' efforts in preparing their national strategies and reviews many toolkits, databases and instruments have been made available by various international organisations.

In addition to these tools, localising the implementation of SDGs and the Agenda 2030 in each country emerges as a key catch-all policy message globally.

How to regionalise SDGs and the Agenda 2030 is a fair question. It is certainly not to compete with national agendas or localisation of SDGs but should complement them and create synergies.

An international methodology suggesting standardising regional efforts to extend and promote the implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2030 in a multi-country setting is absent. So far no internationally agreed solution has been designed which we may refer to in discussing ways in which we may regionalise the implementation of SDGs and the Agenda 2030.

In the absence of such an international methodology, the South East Europe (SEE) 2030 Strategy could be deemed a successful case. The concept of the SEE 2030 Strategy has been built on the following six principles:

- ✓ Bottom-up
- ✓ Open public consultation and transparency
- ✓ Accountability
- ✓ Aid effectiveness
- ✓ Subsidiarity

✓ Relevance

And on top of all the above, the SEE 2030 Strategy is designed to include all thirteen economies of SEE (SEE 13)<sup>1</sup> and reach a common denominator between all in the implementation of UN SDGs and Agenda 2030.

Let's recall our main discussion topic - how to regionalise the implementation of SDGs in the absence of an international methodology. Adoption of the SEE 2030 Strategy by consensus during the SEECP Summit is not only a success and a strong proof of the political will behind it but also confirms that the SEE 2030 Strategy will be one of the pioneers in regionalisation of SDGs and the Agenda 2030.

Now another challenge emerges - how to implement SEE 2030 as a regional strategy based on UN SDGs and the Agenda 2030. The SEE 2030 Strategy would probably take another pioneering role for other regional initiatives worldwide through its successful implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2030 at the regional level.

**All-inclusiveness and bottom-up is the key for political ownership of the SEE2030 Strategy - a regional effort for SDGs and Agenda 2030**

Needless to say that all-inclusiveness of the SEE2030 process and employing a bottom-up approach go hand-in-hand. The Strategy excludes no economy in SEE. Thus, it is not only one part of the SEE region included but all SEECP economies participated in the preparation of SEE 2030 and adopted it. Furthermore, the implementation of the Strategy will include all thirteen economies as the whole process has been defined by them and not imposed on them.

The SEE 13 are in the driving seat of the SEE 2030 Strategy. They have led its preparation and will steer its implementation.

Similarly, the content margins of the Strategy have not been pre-determined. No predefined priorities were proposed during the preparation of SEE 2030. The entire text of SEE 2030 builds on the national strategic priorities for implementing the SDGs and Agenda 2030. Nothing has been added to the Strategy without having cross-cutting relevance to the national levels. Thus, SEE 2030 does not have any implicit aim to manipulate, shape, steer or direct national strategies but quite the contrary. National SDG related strategies of SEE 13 have shaped the SEE 2030 and will steer its activities throughout the next decade.

Thus, all SEE 13 strategies and priority policy areas for their sustainable development were screened to come up with a list of joint actions that are regionally justifiable and worth combining the thirteen efforts.

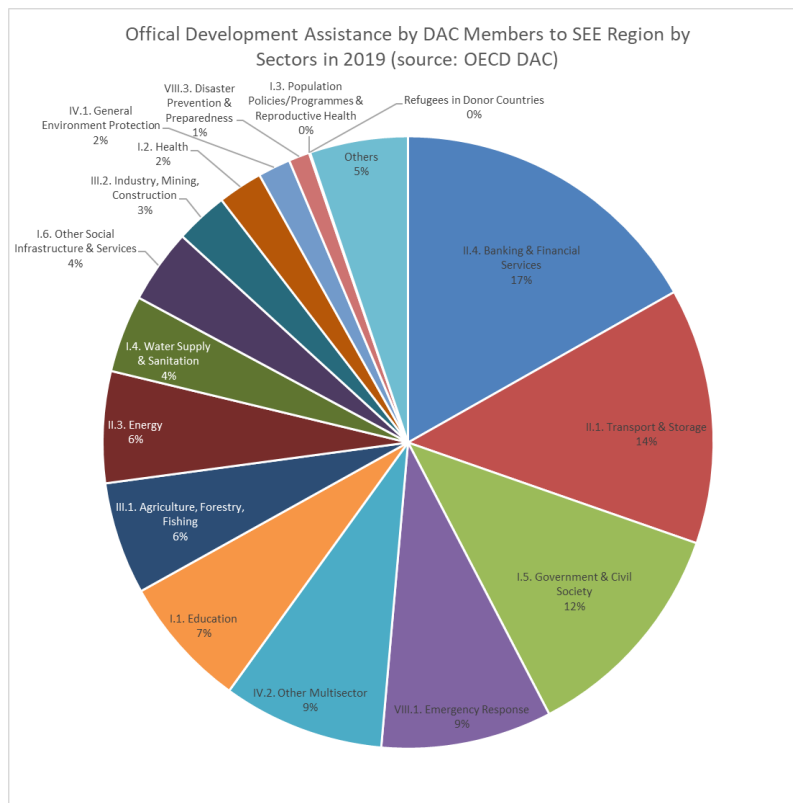
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<sup>1</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey.

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

In this regard, national priorities regarding SDGs and Agenda 2030 were crosschecked with the policy areas in which donors are active.

The reason for employing such a check is to verify the relevance of donor financed policy areas to the SDG related priorities of SEE, particularly the non-EU SEE economies as the top Official Development Assistance (ODA) recipient economies per capita in the world. And if necessary, to prioritise the policy areas directly relevant to the national SDG strategies, justifiable for regional action but neglected by the donors. The total ODA of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members to SEE by policy areas saw 43% of official development assistance funds in 2019 (approximately 13 Billion USD) being committed to Banking and Financial Services, Transport, and Government and Civil Society compared to the areas directly related to the quality of life in the SEE region and prioritised by the SEE 2030 such as Education, Water Supply and Sanitation, Health, Disaster Prevention Preparedness, and Population Policies, which received 4 billion USD (14% of the total).



If referred to the procedural steps taken during the preparation of SEE 2030 in respect to the bottom-up approach, the following could be a good summary of it.

The first Concept Note of the SEE 2030 Strategy was accepted by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Board in May 2020, having been developed within a structured process of consultations with relevant regional initiatives and organisations on the basis of their experience with SEE 2020 implementation and recommendations. In particular, they flagged the potential

socio-economic and political repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising the importance of political visibility and outreach of the SEE 2030 Strategy, the political commitment of SEE economies, coordination among regional organisations in light of many cross-cutting areas and organisations' institutional memory and expertise, and the engagement of local implementers in Strategy execution.

Subsequently, the Substantiated Outline presented to the SEECP Political Directors in January 2021 served as the basis for intensive in-depth bilateral consultations with each of the participants' representatives, including representatives of public authorities and respective SDG Coordinators. The priority thematic areas of intervention of the Strategy were selected on the basis of National Voluntary Reviews of SDG implementation of SEECP participants. On this basis, 13 SDGs were selected (SDG1, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG6, SDG7, SDG8, SDG9, SDG10, SDG11, SDG13, SDG16, SDG17).

To ensure all-inclusiveness of the process and promote a bottom-up approach as another principle of the Strategy, two workshops with representatives of the region's private sector, civil society, academia and think tanks were organised in May 2021, led by TEPAV and ELIAMEP from the current and incoming SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office capitals, Ankara and Athens, respectively.

More than 15 regional organisations in the SEE were invited to the consultations during the preparation of SEE 2030, as well as the European Commission and WHO. The written comments and contributions were received from ILO, UNECE, World Bank, IRENA, OECD, European Training Foundations, Energy Community, DPPI, CEF, and SEEHN.

The final approval and endorsement was granted by the RCC Annual Meeting and the SEECP at the June 2021 Summit, respectively.