

Country: Spain

IPU geopolitical group: Twelve Plus Group

Congress of Deputies

Focus area: Active engagement of specialized parliamentary committees in the formulation and priority-setting of the national development framework contextualizing the implementation of the global SDG commitments.

Key highlights

- Joint bicameral parliamentary SDG committees can play an important role in ensuring integrated governance, policy coherence and SDG integration in national development planning, monitoring and reporting frameworks.
- Specialized SDG committees can support the formulation of national development strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) with complementary assessments, providing specific knowledge on how to localize the SDGs to address national and sub-national priorities.

Context

Under the initiative of the Spanish Senate, a joint permanent parliamentary committee for the 2030 Agenda (SDG Committee), involving members from both the Congress of Deputies and the Senate, was established in 2020. The SDG Committee was established following deliberations on and the endorsement of Spain's 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS). Already in 2017, the Congress of Deputies had adopted a non-legislative motion urging the government to prepare and approve a national sustainable development strategy to advance SDG implementation in Spain. Consequently, one of the first tasks for the SDG Committee was to prepare a specialized study on the scope and definition of the 2030 SDS and provide an in-depth analysis of Spain's SDG implementation gaps in order to support the contextual identification of priorities for the national strategy. The assessment involved consultations with a number of experts, state authorities and other stakeholders, whose conclusions and recommendations were incorporated in a final report. The report was shared with the government, which, in turn, reflected the proposed recommendations in the final version of the 2030 SDS submitted for endorsement by the Council of Ministers.

As requested by the Congress of Deputies, the government is required to periodically inform the SDG Committee on the progress of SDG implementation. The government submits annually a comprehensive report on the fulfilment of the SDG commitments envisaged in the 2030 SDS. The reports are also debated and commented by the relevant parliamentary consultation bodies and committees. The reports include an assessment of policy coherence with the SDGs from the perspective of their impact on other countries.

SDG integration into parliament's core functions

The specialized study requested both the government and Parliament to take all necessary actions to align their respective initiatives with the goals of the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the government was advised to undertake a comprehensive impact assessment of legislation at the national level as well as that of laws with international reach to understand how the legal framework contributed to SDG implementation domestically and globally. Moreover, an impact inventory was established to identify how proposed draft laws impact SDG achievement. As a result, each legislation presented by the government must include an impact report regarding the legislation's compliance with the 2030 Agenda, taking into account the nationally defined priorities for Spain and their indicators.

The study also urged the government to prepare and present on an annual basis a report on the alignment of the general state budgets with the SDGs. This was done for the 2021 general state budget bill. Regular reporting on SDG budget integration is an opportunity for individual members of parliament (MPs) to share detailed feedback and express their concerns on specific funding lines and planned expenditures.

In addition to regular expert consultations, workshops and seminars with relevant stakeholders, the Congress of Deputies MPs participate and engage in many events organized by regional administrations and local entities, civil society, academia, and in trade union networks, and gather feedback from and inputs by citizens which the MPs convey to those responsible for the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda. The thematic parliamentary committees often organize plenary sessions to review progress towards the SDGs and debate how government programmes and policies affect this progress.

Innovative approaches to enable progress towards:

(i) Achieving universal health coverage for all, and improving access to quality healthcare (including to sexual and reproductive health services) for vulnerable and marginalized populations:

The Royal Decree-Law of 2018 recognized access to the National Health System as a fundamental right of every person in Spain. The law specifically modified previous legal provisions which excluded immigrants in irregular situations from the National Health System. The law eliminated the requirement for Social Security contributions, thus ensuring that all migrants, including those in irregular situations, in Spain have the right to healthcare under the same conditions as people with Spanish nationality.

The Law of General State Budgets (PGE) for 2021 envisages increased funding and specific measures to improve access to quality healthcare services and medicines.

(ii) Integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change measures into national laws, policies and strategies:

As a member of the European Union, Spain prepared and submitted to the European Commission the draft of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030, in compliance with the obligations imposed by the European Governance Regulation (2018/1999) and in line with the provisions of the Paris

Agreement. The Integrated Plan contains specific targets to be achieved in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to 1990, increasing the proportion of renewable energy in the final consumption and in electricity generation, and improving energy efficiency. In addition, the government committed, among 30 other climate-related priority lines, to prepare a comprehensive legal framework on climate change. In 2021, the Law on Climate Change and Energy Transition was submitted to parliament, setting measurable targets to reduce GHG emissions, promoting renewable energies and updating energy efficiency in line with EU regulations. The law envisages the establishment of a governance system and the utilization of different planning tools to facilitate the implementation of integrated national climate and energy plans.

The law also contains changes to specific sectoral regulations to ensure that climate change considerations are adequately mainstreamed across relevant legislation and policies, including the Hydrocarbons Sector Law, the Electricity Sector Law, the Water Law and the Coastal Law. It further includes a number of provisions aimed at promoting mobility without emissions and introduces adaptation measures to the effects of climate change and just transition.

Supplementary activities

The Congress of Deputies issued several important recommendations to the government to strengthen the 2030 Agenda governance and coordination structures as well as the monitoring and reporting frameworks, including: (i) to define the SDG indicator framework as soon as possible, including its data limitations and challenges, through an inclusive and participatory process involving different stakeholders; (ii) to reinvigorate representation in the High-Level Group to include different state institutions and stakeholders as well as various levels of government, with a strong emphasis on the inclusion of local authorities; (iii) to create the position of a High Commissioner and a new institutional office for the 2030 Agenda; (iv) to set-up a multi-stakeholder Sustainable Development Council; (v) to improve coordination in sectoral conferences with the assistance of active SDG focal points in the different ministries; and (vi) to establish an online SDG platform to promote transparency, the participation, dissemination and mobilization of stakeholders and citizens.

The Congress of Deputies and the Senate actively engaged in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) cycles, providing inputs not only in terms of content and recommendations but also engaging different stakeholders in the preparation process.

Challenges and lessons learnt

A number of challenges and opportunities have been identified to improve SDG integration in the national regulatory frameworks, including:

- A Regulatory Impact Report drafted by the government to accompany each bill and Royal Decree-Law must include in one of its sections the legislation's impact on the SDGs as is done in other regulatory impact reports on, for example, the environment, gender, family and minors. This

obligation should be enshrined in the legal provisions governing the government's regulatory activities and not left to the discretion of the government. The Chamber of Deputies has urged the government to include a regulatory impact on the SDGs in draft resolutions and has outlined specific recommendations in the last specialized report of the Joint Committee.

- It is also important that legislative initiatives of other legal subjects (other than the government) be accompanied by an assessment of the regulatory impact on the SDGs or specific thematic areas, which is not yet the case in Spain. Setting up a parliamentary office to deal with such issues can be a possible way forward for the Chamber of Deputies.
- The periodic reports submitted by the government to the Joint Committee, listing legislation that impacts the SDGs, should include a qualitative and quantitative assessment methodology based on relevant indicators. Such reports should be conveyed early enough for the Joint Committee to be able to submit resolution proposals to the legislation in question.

Considering the experiences and engagement of the Chamber of Deputies with the SDGs, two key lessons have been learnt:

- Although, Spain can be viewed as a leading example of how Parliament was engaged in the formulation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, by incorporating parliament's inputs and reflecting on its recommendations, the government had requested Parliament's cooperation in adopting the Strategy at a very short notice as a result of which there had been very little time to hold hearings and to study the draft document thoroughly.
- At the same time, Parliament and its Joint Committee did not have sufficient time to properly engage with the preparation of the 2021 VNR report. Therefore, it is advisable for the government inform Parliament on the content orientation and chapters of the VNR before drafting and finalizing the report to allow the Joint Committee to prepare specific proposals and provide concrete feedback on the draft versions prior to its finalization and presentation at the High-Level Political Forum.

Sources and links

Study on the Definition of the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy of Spain, prepared by the Joint SDG Committee (Congress-Senate) for the Coordination and Monitoring of the Spanish Strategy to Achieve the SDGs (in Spanish): https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CORT/BOCG/A/BOCG-14-CG-A-139.PDF

PGE Law 2021: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2020-17339>

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