

Country: Serbia

IPU geographical area: Twelve Plus Group

National Assembly of Serbia

Focus area: The role of informal cross-party parliamentary groups in overseeing SDG implementation.

Key highlights

- Informal cross-party parliamentary groups dedicated to promoting the principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) can have an important impact on strengthening the oversight mechanisms on SDG achievement through the work of existing committees.
- Active participation, direct analytical and information-sharing support in advancing SDG implementation and regular engagement with relevant state institutions and other stakeholders, are a solid base on which informal SDG groups can request parliament to endorse a formal parliamentary body to promote and support parliamentary engagement on the SDGs.

Summary

The informal Focus Group of the National Assembly of Serbia for the development of oversight mechanisms on SDG implementation (SDG Focus Group) was established in 2017 and consists of 15 members from different political parties and parliamentary committees. The SDG Focus Group members coordinate the SDG-related work of standing committees, such as the drafting of relevant legislative proposals and amendments, budget allocations and any other major decisions to be taken by the committees. It advocates the creation of a parliamentary institutionalized framework that would ensure information and documents from the government are obtained on a regular basis and are reviewed as to how the government is fulfilling their commitments towards the population with regard to the 2030 Agenda. The SDG Focus Group also supports individual members of parliament (MPs) and committees with information materials, studies and analyses on the SDGs to ensure evidence-based decision-making.

The SDG Focus Group holds regular hearings with public officials, civil society, academia and other relevant stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability in the follow-up and review of SDG implementation. Thematic workshops and seminars, including field visits to local communities, and discussions with representatives of local self-governments and associations and youth groups are also regularly organized to advance SDG achievement at the local levels. SDG Focus Group members take part in various public initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns and engage in dialogue with a range of state institutions and stakeholders to identify key tools and methods on how best to coordinate efforts and leverage expertise for more effective SDG implementation.

In addition, the SDG Focus Group assists parliament in overseeing the work of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on SDG implementation, and advocates – as a priority – the funding of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups. In cooperation with other committees, it supported the

organization of the “Regional Seminar on the SDGs for Parliaments of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia” in 2018. Parliament was actively consulted during the 2019 Voluntary National Review (VNR) process, and the Chair of the SDG Focus Group co-presented the VNR at the High-Level Political Forum in New York. The SDG Focus Group also facilitated in-depth collaboration with the national supreme audit and statistical institutions, and partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to strengthen parliamentary capacities and disseminate among MPs relevant publications and knowledge products on the 2030 Agenda.

Results and impact

As a result of the activities conducted by the SDG Focus Group, a legislation has recently been introduced that sets quotas for women in parliament. Another achievement has been the creation by the Environmental Protection Committee of the “Green Chair” mechanism that enables representatives of civil society and other relevant non-state actors to participate in the work of the committee. As a first step, the SDG Focus Group carried out a compatibility assessment of 12 legislative initiatives to see how these laws enable and contribute to the achievement of SDG environmental targets. The SDG Focus Group played an important role in facilitating public consultations and stakeholder engagement that resulted in the adoption of the new Climate Change Law in Serbia (March 2021) which regulates greenhouse gas emissions through specific reduction adaptation measures. The law meets the obligations set out in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement and harmonizes domestic legislation with European Union regulations.

Recently, the SDG Focus Group prepared a draft declaration to be submitted for consideration by parliament, upgrading its status to a permanent parliamentary body and expanding its responsibilities to include a more institutionalized approach to mainstreaming the SDGs across the work of the thematic committees. This will ensure that relevant tools and methods adopted by the SDG Focus Group aimed at aligning national legislation and budget allocations with the SDGs will be a mandatory reference for other committees and in parliamentary acts. The declaration will be tabled and discussed by the National Assembly in early 2022.

Challenges

Limited resources for additional expert staff, and the regular holding of public hearings and consultations outside parliament’s premises, including field visits and discussions with local authorities and communities, pose significant challenges. This is often further complicated by the lack of sufficient funding to address the multitude of critical issues, especially in the areas of environmental degradation identified during field visits and consultations. Proper priority setting and the identification of country-specific targets for SDG planning, implementation and reviewing are additional challenges which require targeted support in the development of practical tools. Finally, due to electoral cycles, there is a need for continued training of MPs on the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the creation of formalized mechanisms that integrate the SDGs in the core functions of parliament.

Sources and links

The SDG activities of the National Assembly of Serbia: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/national-assembly.468.html?SearchText=SDG>.

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