National Policy of Black Sea Region Countries Towards Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The authors consider the integration of the concept of sustainability in the member countries of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). The concept of sustainable development is viewed through the prism of economic, social and environmental approaches. The **subject** of the study is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the BSEC countries. The **purpose** of the research is to study the integration of the goals and indicators of sustainable development in the national policies of the BSEC countries. The **relevance** lies in the international community's growing attention to forming a vector for balanced socio-economic development, taking into account current social, demographic and environmental factors. The **scientific novelty** lies in the analysis of the advancement of the concept of sustainable development in the BSEC countries, as well as the level of integration of the SDGs in the national policies of states. As part of the study, the authors used the **methods** of institutional analysis, system analysis, analysis of statistical data and official documents. Based on the **results** of the analysis, it was revealed that despite the high level of integration of the SDGs within the framework of the BSEC, not all goals and indicators of sustainable development formed by the United Nations (UN) are tracked in countries. The authors **concluded** that the national characteristics of the economy, the social sphere and the environmental situation push states to adapt individual indicators to national specifics.

Keywords: sustainable development; Black Sea region; socio-economic development; interregional cooperation; national policy; monitoring

Национальная политика стран Черноморского региона в отношении устойчивого развития

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Авторы рассматривают интеграцию концепции устойчивости в странах — членах Организации черноморского экономического сотрудничества (ОЧЭС). Концепция устойчивого развития рассматривается через призму экономического, социального и экологического подходов. **Предметом** исследования являются цели устойчивого развития (ЦУР) в странах ОЧЭС. **Цель** исследования — исследование интегрированности целей и показателей устойчивого развития в национальной политике стран ОЧЭС. **Актуальность** заключается в растущем внимании международного сообщества к формированию вектора на сбалансированное социально-экономическое развитие с учетом актуальных социальных, демографических и экологических факторов. **Научная новизна** состоит в анализе развития концепции устойчивого развития в странах ОЧЭС, а также уровня интеграции ЦУР в национальной политике государств. В рамках исследования авторами использовались **методы** институционального анализа, системного анализа, анализа статистических данных и официальных документов. По **результатам** проведенного анализа было выявлено, что несмотря на

высокий уровень интегрированности ЦУР в рамках ОЧЕС, не все цели и показатели устойчивого развития, формируемые Организацией Объединенных Наций (ООН), отслеживаются в странах. Авторами сделан **вывод** о том, что национальные особенности экономики, социальной сферы и экологической ситуации подталкивают государства к адаптации отдельных показателей к национальной специфике.

Ключевые слова: устойчивое развитие; Черноморский регион; социально-экономическое развитие; межрегиональное сотрудничество; национальная политика; мониторинг

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015 to end poverty and set the world on a path of peace, prosperity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a transformation of the financial, economic and political systems that govern our societies today to guarantee the human rights of all. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) prepares every year a "Sustainable Development Goals Report", which depicts the overall progress made by the UN member-states in the achievement of the 17 SDGs.[1]

A mix of data sources is used to assess each country's progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Five criteria are used to determine suitable metrics for inclusion in the report:

1. Global relevance and applicability to a broad range of country settings (indicators must be internationally comparable).

2. Statistical adequacy (indicators need to represent valid and reliable measures).

3. Timeliness (indicators should be up to date).

4. Data quality (national statistical offices, international organizations, reputable sources).

5. Coverage (must be available for at least 80% of the UN member states with a national population greater than 1 million).

The 2030 Agenda encourages member states to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which could be published for the general public in the form of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). Nowadays, each member state of the Black Sea region has a focal point responsible for its VNRs which are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Baseline study

Albania

The Albanian government has affirmed its full commitment to Agenda 2030. The coordination and leadership of the process is provided by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on the SDGs, chaired by the deputy prime minister of Albania and comprising key government institutions, as well as other stakeholders from the business community, civil society, academia and international organizations, including the technical support provided by the Department of Development and Good Governance in the Prime Minister's Office, the SDG Inter-Ministerial Technical Working Group and the contribution of the United Nations (UN) agencies in the country through their direct support, and the accelerators from the MAPS (mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support) mission. Albania's Parliament has unanimously approved a resolution confirming the country's commitment to Agenda 2030, as it plays an important role in monitoring the achievement of the SDGs.

To support the implementation of Agenda 2030, Albania has prepared a VNR,[2] which indicates that 140 SDG targets (83%) are directly tied to specific components of the National Strategy for Development and Integration and NSDI 2015–2020 pillars. The linkages between Albania's policy goals and the SDG targets in the national strategies and policy documents depict 134 SDG targets (79%) linked to the spe-

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[1] The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, United Nations, 2020. URL: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/

[2] Voluntary National Review, Albania, 2018. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20257ALBANIA_VNR_2018_FINAL2.pdf

cific objectives of the national strategic policy framework. This framework is mostly harmonised with the SDG targets in Goal 3: Good health and well-being, Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy, Goal 8: Good jobs and economic growth, and Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure, while the least harmonisation is with Goal 14: Life below water [1].

The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) is the coordinator of the National Statistical System composed of INSTAT, the Bank of Albania and the Ministry of Finance and Economy.

INSTAT is a member of the Inter-Institutional Working Group established in 2017 with representatives from ministries and led by the Prime Minister's Office. It began work on the SDGs with an approach of aligning the process with the European Union (EU) integration of Albania. The institute volunteered to prepare a statistical annex, which contains a set of 30 indicators, monitoring Albania's progress towards the SDGs as part of the first attempt to gain an overall SDG picture for the country. The annex has been circulated and discussed with the Inter-Institutional Working Group for comments, presented to Civil Society, and made available for public consultation as a part of the VNR for Albania.

Selection criteria

The SDG indicators are selected based on the following criteria:

• Utilize indicators that are relevant for Albania, starting with those already available in the country or at Eurostat.

• Indicators should be independent of each other.

• Indicators should be as close as possible to those on the list proposed by the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) to monitor progress towards the SDGs.

• Each indicator should have a clear and quantified target, whenever possible related to a strategic document of the country.

• Each indicator should follow the criteria of statistical quality approved by the UNSC.

• Wherever possible, preference should be given to indicators that can be disaggregated by sex, age, income and education level (as requested by UNSC).

• Wherever possible, a comparison should be possible with the European level.

• Wherever possible, preference should be given to indicators that can be disaggregated by region at a later stage.

Armenia

Armenia is a landlocked country with a population of 3 million and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita $ 3,872 in 2017. It is bordered by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, and Turkey.

Armenia started a participatory process of SDG nationalization and implementation in 2015 by forming a Post-2015 Task Force in collaboration with stakeholders and the international community.

Armenia, in 2018, the date of publication of the VNR,[3] was in the process of designing Armenia Development Strategy (ADS), an overarching strategy document that will benefit from the SDG framework, which provides a comprehensive set of targets and indicators necessary for effective planning and monitoring of development objectives. In this context, the VNR in Armenia was undertaken as a natural and necessary effort and step for pursuing the sustainable development agenda.

The VNR was a good chance for the government to assess work done in the scope of the SDGs and shape opportunities for innovative and impactful solutions towards achieving the vision of "New Armenia".

As indicated, Armenia has had mixed results in implementing the SDGs.

In many areas, Armenia has made good progress towards achieving SDG targets such as:

(i) health protection in terms of child and maternal health;

(ii) access to safe and reliable water supply in urban and rural areas;

(iii) improved sanitation in urban areas;

(iv) universal access to reliable energy;

(v) promotion of renewable energy;

(vi) environmental protection, in terms of enlargement of protected areas and biodiversity.

Nevertheless, there are areas where Armenia has shown slow or mixed progress. These include, particularly:

(i) poverty, i.e., despite ending extreme poverty;

(ii) education, due to the high dropout rate from high school;

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[3] Voluntary National Review, Armenia, 2018. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19586Armenia_VNR_2018.pdf

(iii) gender equality;

(iv) inefficient use of water;

(v) environment, due to deforestation risks, land degradation;

(vi) low access to sanitation in rural areas;

(vii) inefficiencies in governance;

(viii) lack of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) practices.

The VNR helped also highlight the fact that there is still a number of key areas and SDG targets/indicators that are lacking effective monitoring and/or control. These are particularly the indicators related to community-level actions or data, and to private businesses' performance or practices. Certainly, these are areas requiring multiplied government efforts to bring positive changes.

Not surprisingly, the data effort was one of the main challenging exercises. The data effort included compiling and analyzing accurate sex, age and diversity-disaggregated data from various sources, including:

• national official statistics;

• sector-specific data and information from ministries and other authorities;

• data from sector-specific strategy documents which involved specific performance indicators;

• information from businesses and other stakeholders through meetings and discussions: this was important, especially for obtaining not only quantitative but also qualitative information, which is often necessary for better understanding of underlying issues.

• data from relevant specialized international organizations, particularly the World Bank; various agencies and organizations and data sources of the United Nations (such as the Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database (FAO STAT), FAO's Global Information System on Water and Agriculture (FAO AQUASTAT), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) database, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), etc.).

Crucial support and an effective solution to the data challenge was the establishment of the National SDG Statistical Platform in Armenia, with a structure and content based on SDG targets and indicators.

The Platform was developed by the Statistical Committee of Armenia (SCA) with the support of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Armenia Country Office. It is maintained by the SCA in close cooperation with relevant state agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. It conforms with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

Efforts were also dedicated to improving sectorial data, for example, related to migration and development [2]. This way, priorities of Armenia on Migration and Development (M&D) were identified via broad-based discussions among governmental, civic and international stakeholders. Methodology for data collection was developed and discussions were initiated by State Migration Service, SCA and Prime Minister's Office. UNICEF and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) jointly with the SCA have supported the development of child-related SDG baseline indicators (both international and nationalized) with appropriate levels of disaggregation. The dataset identifies gaps in data on children and identifies ways of data collection to make up for these gaps (both through survey and administrative data), thus creating a monitoring system for child rights in the context of SDGs.

Azerbaijan

The Government of Azerbaijan, through its published VNR in 2019,[4] is committed to taking lessons learned into account for the planned next phases of SDG localization as well as implementation at large. Azerbaijan called upon the international community to support these efforts through direct SDG funding mecha-

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[4] Voluntary National Review, Azerbaijan, 2019. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23411AZERBAIJAN_VNR_Report.pdf

nisms, sharing best international practices, building effective partnerships, addressing challenges, developing capacities and platforms of significant importance for the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The VNR highlighted progress concerning:
• the enabling environment, including national ownership of SDGs;
• participation and awareness raising;
• nationalization of global SDGs and prioritizing relevant targets and indicators thereof;
• mainstreaming of SDGs into the national development agenda;
• integration of three dimensions of sustainable development;
• "Leaving no one behind" principle;
• institutional mechanisms;
• structural issues and implementation tools and resources.

In the frame of the VNR, Azerbaijan nationalized SDGs and prioritized 17 SDG goals, 88 targets and 119 indicators based on joint work with public institutions as well as a series of consultations with the civil society, business community, youth and international organizations.

The preparation of the VNR was led by the Ministry of Economy (MoE) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which also serves as the secretariat of the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development (NCCSD) (*Fig. 1*). The review was conducted in close collaboration with NCCSD SDG Working Groups composed of technical experts and representatives of various state institutions, as well as academia, civil society organizations, the private sector, youth organizations, international partners and think tanks.

Also, four thematic Working Groups were established under the umbrella of the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD) and have formed a collective approach to not only holding extensive discussions on SDGs but also ensuring the alignment of the state socioeconomic programs and strategies with the SDGs. These four SDG Working Groups: (i) social, (ii) economic, (iii) environment, and (iv) monitoring, are also responsible for providing policy advice to decision makers to better mainstream, implement, monitor and report on the progress made on SDGs. Azerbaijan also identified SDG accelerators with the assistance of the United

Fig. 1. **Interaction towards achieving the SDGs**

Source: compiled by the authors.

Nations Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) mission led by UNDP.

On February 14, 2018, a broad consultation workshop was conducted on the nationalization of SDGs with the participation of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the UNDP office in Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Economy, the heads of the UN specialized agencies' country offices in Azerbaijan, as well as the head and representatives of the working groups on SDGs [3].

In addition, a letter of agreement was signed between the FAO and the Centre for Development Research of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU) for the implementation of the project "Supporting capacity development in implementing Sustainable Development Goals in Azerbaijan" in December 2017 as part of the FAO's support to the Government of Azerbaijan for implementation of the SDGs.

Other players identified through the VNR are the IDEA Public Union, the UNICEF Office in Azerbaijan and the State Statistics Committee (SSC) of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

It is worth noting that in the frame of the VNR, there is a call for establishing a UN Database of National SDG Focal Points to facilitate direct contact and dialogue at a national, regional and global level. The launch of this database was

planned for the" 2019 high-level political forum", where countries would be presenting VNRs.

Bulgaria

The VNR published in 2020,[5] analyzes and identifies the areas of progress and challenges and proposes possible solutions for all 17 Goals, taking into account economic, social and environmental indicators of particular importance to Bulgaria.

Based on the VNR, the country has to find strong competitive advantages in order to promote sustainable economic growth and, at the same time, prevent leaving behind certain social groups. In order to make progress by 2030, a balance, integration and synergy are sought between a high value-added economy, a circular economy and a social/solidarity economy, as well as the appropriate integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in Bulgaria.

The VNR outlines the progress on the most important indicators related to poverty and inequality reduction, as well as the care for the most vulnerable in the fields of education, health and social protection. It also presents various examples that in Bulgaria, all stakeholders who have declared the UN SDGs as their commitment are working to achieve them at the local, national, regional and global levels.

The focus will be on public policies on education, poverty, integrated regional development, better management of the agricultural sector and natural resources, enhancing the competitiveness of the economy and strengthening the institutional environment, energy security and better transport connectivity [4, 5]. The priorities formulated within this period are related to the potential for economic growth and the necessity for the effective functioning of public sector safeguards in terms of social inclusion and combating poverty.

The three main strategic goals are: accelerated economic development, demographic upswing and reduction of inequalities. The National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030 outlines 13 national priorities in five development areas (axes). Their implementation will contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs. The Re-

view also outlines the relation between some of the key priorities set out in the Government's Programme for the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017–2021 and the UN SDGs.

For the purpose of tracking and reviewing individual Goals, the VNR uses data from the National Statistical Institute and statistical bodies, other public institutions and agencies (Social Assistance Agency, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, etc.), international organizations and agencies, as well as by informal surveys of young people, business and the private sector. The VNR uses the statistical information available as of January 31, 2020.

It is worth noting that the National Statistical Institute launched Monitorstat — a web-based platform for tracking SDG progress, containing all indicators of the Eurostat SDG framework and multiple indicators from the global SDG framework.

Moreover, for the purpose of the VNR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria has taken action to collect relevant information from governmental institutions and other stakeholders on policies and activities related to the implementation of the UN SDGs, as well as on individual indicators. Also, a wide range of stakeholders was consulted: an online survey of non-governmental organizations through the database of the Bulgarian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) Information Portal; focus groups with business representatives; individual interviews with trade union representatives. The VNR also contains the results of an online survey of Bulgarian Youth Delegates to the UN.

Georgia

In 2020 Georgia published the 2nd VNR[6] on the implementation of SDGs and expressed commitment to further advance the 2030 Agenda.

The SDGs are of utmost importance for Georgia as they are for the people worldwide. The Government of Georgia has adopted a National Document on the Implementation of the SDGs outlining targets and milestones for each of the 17 Goals. Furthermore, the country managed to strongly embed Agenda 2030 goals, targets, and indicators into the national policy planning sys-

[5] Voluntary National Review, Bulgaria, 2020. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26290VNR_2020_Bulgaria_Report.pdf

[6] Voluntary National Review, Georgia, 2020. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26390VNR_2020_Georgia_Report.pdf

tem as well as to ensure that the government's policies and priorities are designed to fulfill the core pledge — "to leave no one behind".

Over the past years, Georgia has made significant socio-economic progress. As a result, Georgia has been elevated from lower-middle to upper-middle income countries by the World Bank classification. Despite regional economic shocks, the country managed to sustain stable economic development with an average annual GDP growth rate of 5% during the last three years.

Georgia pays special attention to the increasing quality and accessibility of education, healthcare and social services, which are the key components for achieving sustainable development and improving the well-being of citizens [6]. Education is one of the key priorities, and the country has made significant progress in reforming general education and developing demand-based higher and professional education to reduce the existing skills-mismatch problem in the labor market. To improve health and well-being of the citizens, the ground-breaking Universal Health Care (UNC) program was introduced, enabling full access to healthcare services for each citizen. The Government of Georgia attaches the highest importance to building strong, transparent, and accountable state institutions — the foundation and pre-requisite for sustainable development.

Despite all this progress, it is well recognized that there are still social, economic, environmental, and institutional challenges, and effort is needed to find the best possible solutions based on evidence and analysis.

The key coordination body for implementing the national SDG targets is the Sustainable Development Goals Inter-Agency Council (SDG Council), chaired by the Head of the Administration of the Government of Georgia. Since 2015, the Administration of Government of Georgia has led the nationalization and coordination process of the SDGs. The Council has four thematic working groups:
- Social Inclusion;
- Economic Development;
- Sustainable Energy and Environmental Protection;
- Democratic Governance.

The Council engages stakeholders from the public, civil, international, academic and private sectors in its working groups. The Policy Planning Unit of the Policy Planning and Coordination Department at the Administration of Government of Georgia serves as the secretariat to the SDG Council. That unit also monitors the implementation of the national SDGs through a special electronic system.

Greece

Greece published the latest VNR in 2018.[7] The eight Greek National Priorities for the SDGs encompass all 17 SDGs, and reflect, in a balanced and integrated manner, the three dimensions of sustainable development [7]. They include:
- Fostering competitive, innovative and sustainable economic growth (linked to SDGs 8, 9);
- Promoting full employment and decent work for all (linked to SDG 8);
- Addressing poverty and social exclusion and providing universal access to quality health care services (linked to SDGs 1, 2, 3);
- Reducing social and regional inequalities and ensuring equal opportunities for all (linked to SDGs 5, 10);
- Providing high-quality and inclusive education (linked to SDG 4);
- Strengthening the protection and sustainable management of natural capital as a base for social prosperity and transition to a low-carbon economy (linked to SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15);
- Building effective, accountable and transparent institutions (linked to SDGs 16, 17). Enhancing open, participatory, democratic processes and promoting partnerships (linked to SDGs 16, 17).

The General Secretariat of the Government (GSG) and its Office of Coordination, Institutional, International and European Affairs (OCIIEA), in particular, is responsible for monitoring and coordinating the national implementation of the SDGs (*Fig. 2*).

The Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), as coordinator of the Hellenic Statistical System (ELSS) aims at the production on a regular basis of official statistics with the target of ensuring and continuously improving their quality. ELSTAT is also responsible for certifying the statistics of the ELSS authorities and organiza-

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[7] Voluntary National Review, Greece, 2018. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19378Greece_VNR_Greece_2018_pdf_FINAL_140618.pdf
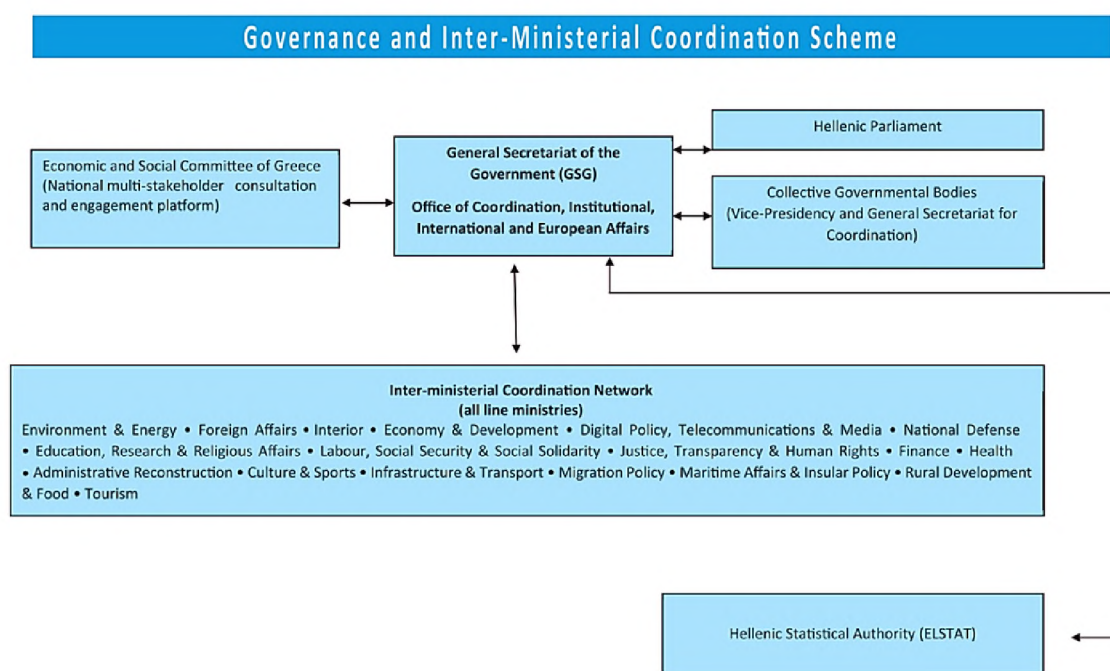
Fig. 2. **Governance and inter-Ministerial Coordination Scheme in Greece for achieving the SDGs**

Source: compiled by the authors.

tions. This delivers more direct coordination and ensures the quality of official statistics in the country. ELSTAT has conducted three rounds to identify the data required for the SDGs. At the same time, the ELSS is in close cooperation with the custodian agencies either to provide data or to validate the proposed methodology and data.

According to the VNR, priority is given to the development of an Entrepreneurship Observatory that will collect, process and analyze data on the business economy and will allow for a more systematic and effective control of the market, as well as the assessment of proposed and applied legislative and non-legislative interventions, in order to achieve the required coordination among services of different ministries.

Moldova

In its first VNR, published in 2020,[8] the Republic of Moldova aimed to map progress, challenges, and opportunities with regard to the implementation of the SDGs. At the same time, assessing to what extent implementation of the SDGs is on track will enable possible solutions

[8] Voluntary National Review, Moldova, 2020. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26346VNR_2020_Moldova_Report_English.pdf

to be identified, thereby accelerating progress in the areas that have fallen behind.

In the course of implementing the 2030 Agenda, the Republic of Moldova was one of the first countries to nationalize (in 2016) and then revise (in 2019) a national set of SDG indicators [8]. Both processes were designed to assess the relevance of each indicator and then to classify them. The criteria considered when mapping the global indicators and identifying national ones that are relevant for the nationalized SDG targets include:

a. the relevance of the indicator in the context of the nationalized target;

b. the existence of a reliable primary data source;

c. the indicator is clearly formulated and does not create ambiguities;

d. the indicator meets quality criteria such as coherence, accessibility, accuracy and availability of methodology for calculation.

In 2019, specialists from the National Bureau of Statistics revised the SDG indicators in consultation with national data providers to assess the degree of availability of the nationalized SDG indicators and their level of compliance with the global list of SDG indicators and the proposed international calculation methodologies.

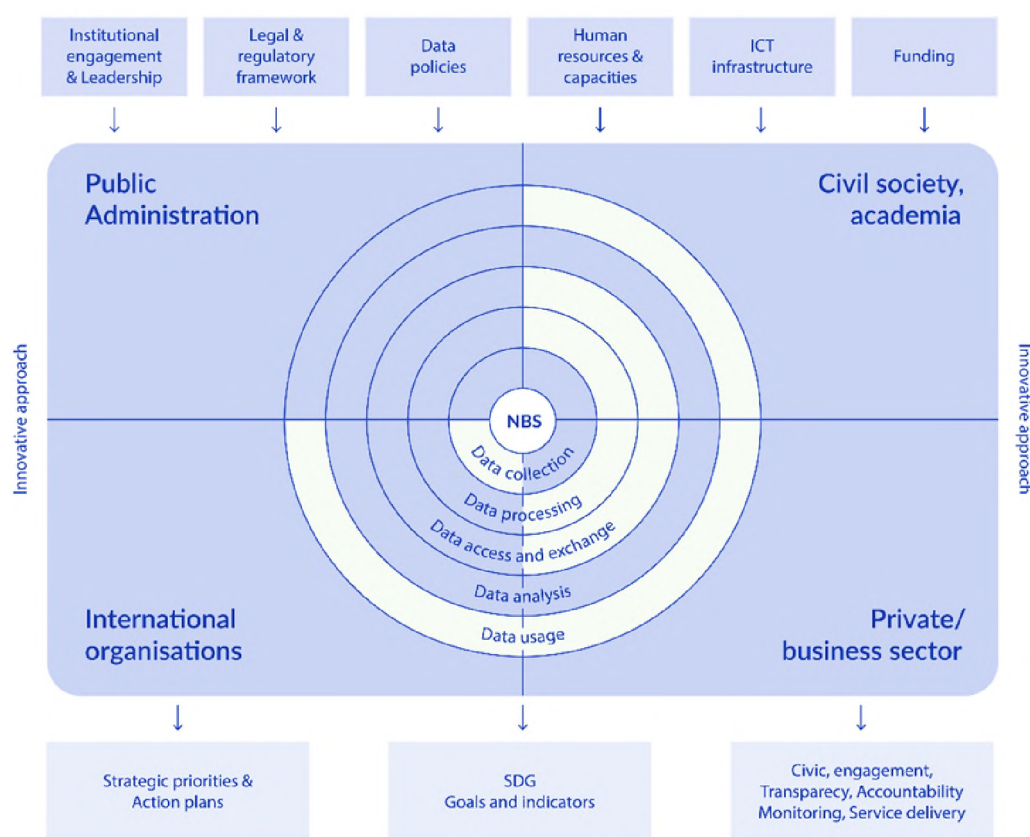*Fig. 3.* **The data eco-system model of Moldova**

The VNR was conducted following an Action Plan approved by the Government of the Republic of Moldova under the supervision of a Joint Steering Committee, including representatives from the presidency, parliament, government, central and local public authorities, civil society, private sector, press and academia.

The VNR was drafted with analytical and informational support from the ministries and other public authorities, United Nations agencies and the National Bureau of Statistics, with the later supplying the statistics needed to assess progress. The State Chancellery coordinated the process.

In 2018, after a round of complex consultations with policymakers, line ministries, public institutions, private organizations, civil society and development partners, and an online questionnaire, a national report was developed to inventorize the data system in the country. Its overall objective was to assess the availability of data and the institutional modernization capacity needed to implement the 2030 Development Agenda.

The produced document recommends that actions are taken at national level to achieve data revolution. Citizens and civil society need to be empowered with more responsibility and to be involved in decision-making processes. In addition, the number of official statistics data producers should be increased. At the same time, formal and professional education and data literacy are absolutely necessary to enable the development of skills and allow efficient and full use of data (*Fig. 3*).

Republic of North Macedonia
Since its independence in 1991, the Republic of North Macedonia has made significant progress towards sustainable development and the rational use of natural resources. This process was guided by the fundamental values enshrined in its constitution, legal framework and strategic policy documents such as the National Development Plan 2007–2009, National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2009–2030, Strategy for Regional Development 2009–2019, etc. In 2015, the government reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable development by pledging "to leave no one behind" and agreeing to implement the 2030 Agenda.

In 2018, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, through the National Council for Sustainable Development, reaffirmed the commitment to implement the United Nations Agenda 2030. The National Council for Sustainable Development identified SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 13 and SDG 16 as five priority goals for the period 2018–2020, based on priority activities and measures defined in the government programme (2017–2020) and the five pillars of the United Nations Development Assistance Plan (UNDAF) for the period 2016–2020.

North Macedonia's existing policy framework addresses a number of aspects of sustainable development, while the Rapid Integrated Assessment conducted in 2019 assessed the alignment of 83% with the overall Agenda.

The first Voluntary National Review for North Macedonia, presented in 2020, is an important document prepared with joint effort and fruitful collaboration of multiple stakeholders. It evaluates the performance of the country in terms of the Agenda 2030. Some of the entities involved and the collaborations that were put forward towards the production of the first VNR for the Republic of North Macedonia are:
- Civil Society Organizations (CSO)
- Representatives from the academia, chambers of commerce, civil society and government
- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Swedish Embassy
- The Youth Forum/Consultation.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda and address challenges, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia will continue strengthening its institutions and partnerships, thus creating the enabling conditions for prosperity and sustainability for the present and future generations.

The Statistical Office, specifically the Unit for Business Registry and Structured Business Statistics, is the focal point for the country. Moreover, the UNDP-North Macedonia supports the government in building an inclusive society — where everyone has access to services and can participate in making decisions that affect their lives. Support involves developing human and institutional capacities, providing knowledge, demonstrating solutions, building partnerships, and raising funds for development.

Romania

Romania published its VNR in 2018,[9] focusing on SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 15 and SDG 17.

Romania has been a very active member of the UN Open Ended Working Group on elaborating the SDGs, as well as member of the Board of the 10-Year Framework of Programs on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (for two mandates).

Sustainable Development in Romania is a shared responsibility between the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Integration of Environmental Protection into Sectoral Policies and Strategies at the National Level (Inter-ministerial Committee) led by the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Environment and the Department for Sustainable Development, led by a State Counsellor, under the Prime-Minister's Office.

In September 2017, the Inter-ministerial Committee decided that the VNR is conducted by the Secretariat of the Inter-ministerial Committee (Unit for Sustainable Development of the Ministry of Environment), establishing a drafting open working group, that comprises all ministries and institutions, civil society representatives and academia.

The Government of Romania, through the Government Decision No. 313/2017, established a Department for Sustainable Development that coordinates all activities on the implementation of the 17 SDGs at national level.

In breaking the silo approach and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, the ownership of SDGs is not dealing with one person or organization. All ministries and institutions, all civil servants from central and local governments, decision makers, and members of parliament should be part of the implementation process [9].

Romania has passed through the process of updating its Sustainable Development indicator set — an essential part of both the National Sustainable Development Strategy and the Action Plan, which seeks to build upon the former by having a more specific, in-depth, character. To achieve this, the Department collaborates closely

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[9] Voluntary National Review, Romania, 2018. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19952Voluntary_National_Review_ROMANIA_with_Cover.pdf

with the National Institute of Statistics by bridging both the United Nations', and the European Union's indicator sets to choose the right indicators to address Romania's specificities.

There are three issues that the Department encountered while revising Romania's National Sustainable Development Strategy, which presents a learning experience for other countries which are currently considering ways of incorporating the SDGs in their respective national frameworks. These are: involving all segments of society, having experts and a robust monitoring system.

As stated in the VNR, the elaboration of the Third Environmental Performance Review (3rd EPR) of Romania would start in 2019, carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) experts' mission in Romania. This process will substantially contribute to the localization of the SDGs, focusing on the environmental dimension of sustainable development. The 3rd EPR was estimated to be completed in 2020. Thus, future submissions of the Voluntary National Reviews of Romania are expected in 2023 and 2029.

Russian Federation
The Russian Federation submitted its first Voluntary National Review (VNR)[10] on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2020.

The VNR was the first official document designed to evaluate the state and the progress in the achievement of SDGs in Russia. The Review was carried out by the Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian Federation by establishing 17 thematic working groups — one for each SDG. These groups included representatives of the legislative branch, federal and regional executive bodies, municipal authorities, the Central Bank of Russia, development institutions, civil society organizations, research organizations, as well as representatives from the business community. More than 200 experts and more than 100 organizations have participated in the preparation of the VNR. The draft Review as well as its chapters have been subject to open public expert discussions. Furthermore, most SDGs are currently present in the main strategic and program documents adopted in Russia. The ongoing 12 national projects have an actual focus on achieving the SDGs [10, 11].

The preparation of the VNR made it possible:
• to involve a wide range of stakeholders in the process of discussion on the document;
• to establish a fruitful dialogue between the state, civil society, business and academia;
• to study and take on board different opinions on the SDGs, ensure the broad public interest in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs;
• to conduct in-depth analysis of the consistency between national goals and the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and evaluate the interim results of the progress in their implementation.

According to the VNR, Russia focuses its efforts on four aspects:
(i) support for the poor (economic aspect);
(ii) support for people with disabilities (social aspect);
(iii) elimination of inequality between different regions (territorial aspect);
(iv) support for indigenous and small peoples (national dimension).

Moreover, the Russian Federation has shown tangible progress for each of the individual SDGs. Among the most successful are: SDG 1 "Poverty Eradication", SDG 4 "Quality Education", SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth". At the same time, a number of targets in certain areas have yet to be achieved by the joint efforts of the state, business and the public.

In order to monitor SDGs, the Federal State Statistic Service processes statistical information on SDGs in the Russian Federation, and the complete database is available on the web portal[11] in the subsection "Sustainable Development Goals".

The Russian Federation has shown positive results for each SGD in recent years:
• SDG 1 "No Poverty": In 2018, the share of the population with an income below the poverty line amounted to 12.6%.
• SDG 2 "Zero Hunger": In 2018, the prevalence of malnutrition fell to 1.6%. Meanwhile, acute food insecurity touched only 0.3% of the Russian population.

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[10] Voluntary National Review, Russia, 2020. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26421VNR_2020_Russia_Report_Russian.pdf

[11] Sustainable Development Goals. URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/sdg

• SDG 3 "Good Health and Well-Being": In 2019, the mortality rate decreased to 12.3 (per 1,000 people) compared to 2015 (13.0) and 2010 (14.2). Life expectancy at birth has a steady upward trend (72.91 years in 2018 compared to 71.39 in 2015).

• SDG 4 "Quality Education": In 2018, gross enrolment ratio in preparatory, secondary and higher education programmers in Russia was 99.9%.

• SDG 5 "Gender Equality": In 2019, labor-force participation among women reached 55.45% (among men — 70.6%), the employment rate was 52.9% (67.3% — for men), the unemployment rate was 4.4% (4.8% — for men). According to the assessment of United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Russia has a very high Human Development index rate, wherein the human development index for women was equal to or higher than the index for men (0.823 against 0.808 in 2017).

• SDG 6 "Clean Water and Sanitation": In 2018, 90.3% of households had a centralized water supply (+3.6% against 2014), 77.4% of the population had access to centralized or individual sewerage (+4.4 against 2014).

• SDG 7 "Affordable and Clean Energy": In 2018, 100% of the population had access to electricity, 86% of the households were provided with heating. By 2018, energy intensity decreased by 12% with Russia's GDP growing by 14%.

• SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth": During the reporting period, an acceleration of GDP growth rate (from 0.2% in 2016 to 2.3% in 2018) and an increase in the population income (real average monthly wages of employees increased by 0.8% in 2016) were observed.

• SDG 9 "Industrialization, Innovation and Infrastructure": Freight turnover for all transport modes in Russia increased by 10.3% in 2015–2018 (to 5,635 billion ton-km). Passenger turnover for all types of public transport also rose by 12.1% to 593.6 passenger-km.

• SDG 10 "Reduced Inequalities": In 2018, the Gini coefficient (income concentration index) for Russia was 0.413 (0.421 in 2010; 0.412 in 2015).

• SDG 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities": The Housing Affordability Index increased in 2006–2018 by 128% in Russia. Moreover, the average concentration of main pollutants in Russian cities decreased by 2018.

• SDG 12 "Responsible Consumption and Production": In 82% of the Russian cities in which the population exceeds 100,000 people, the infrastructure for separate collection facilities has been created, and in 2019, 18.5% of the country's citizens had access to this infrastructure (2.5 times more than in 2018).

• SDG 13 "Climate Action": The Government of the Russian Federation approved a resolution on adopting the Paris Agreement on September 21, 2019. Green financing is still developing; Russia became one of the countries, whose companies issued green bonds in 2018.

• SDG 14 "Life Below Water": Russia increased the total surface area of specially protected natural territories of federal significance that belong to the maritime space (from 10.9 million hectares in 2016 to 18.9 million hectares in 2018). The biodiversity of fish found in coastal marine waters has increased significantly (from 400 species in 2015 to 1,500 species in 2018).

• SDG 15 "Life on Land": The surface of specially protected natural territories (without considering marine areas) of federal, regional and local significance increased to 218.2 million hectares in 2015–2018.

• SDG 16 "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions": From 2015 to 2018, the number of crimes involving violent acts decreased by 33.1% in the Russian Federation, and the number of registered crimes against the person decreased by 1.4 times.

• SDG 17 "Partnership for the Goals": Federal budget expenditure classified by OECD methodology as official development assistance reached almost $ 1 billion in 2018.

The 2030 Agenda implementation is continuing even in emergency times. Russia makes every effort to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and provides medical assistance and healthcare for those who need it in the country as well as abroad. The government implements a wide range of measures to minimize the negative impact of the quarantine on the population and business.

Serbia

Serbia published its VNR in 2019.[12] The Serbian government established six strategic pathways for growing into sustainability:

* Connect, partner and integrate Serbia in Europe and the world;
* Achieve faster, inclusive and sustainable growth based on economic, scientific and innovation resources;
* Render efficient and effective public services;
* Promote human rights and security;
* Education for the twenty-first century;
* Transformative digitalization.

In growing into sustainability, Serbia needs assistance through an increased scope of investments, knowledge and skills, technologies and special partnerships for the development of a generically sustainable, carbon-neutral circular agriculture and industry of sustainable materials, technological processes, products and services, including services in the financial sector, especially encouraging individual entrepreneurship and multiplication of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in these two fundamental productive sectors of the future for which opportunities have already been created through the digitalization of the necessary activities and strengthened connectivity of the country through the rehabilitated transport, energy, and communications infrastructure [12].

The Inter-Ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (IMWG) coordinates the work of all ministries and state institutions. The partnering endeavor of the Secretariat for Public Policy in mapping the National Strategic Framework against the SDGs resulted in the Serbia and the 2030 Agenda document. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia diligently maps, produces or collects relevant national indicators to measure SDG progress credibly.

Since the beginning of implementation of the Agenda 2030, the UN Country Team, European Union and the World Bank in the Republic of Serbia cooperated with the government and the IMWG, providing support ''in policy planning, monitoring and evaluation''.

The key obligation taken over by the UN Country Team to Serbia under the agreement to support the Government of the Republic of Serbia in ''policy planning, monitoring and evaluation'' for Agenda 2030 was delivered by the actions of the UN Country Team in Serbia on planning, preparation and organizing the implementation and reporting. The mission consisted of 21 international experts from UN agencies, funds and programs (UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNECE, UNFPA, ILO, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNHCR, WHO), and regional offices, including also the Delegation of the EU to Serbia and the World Bank Office in the Republic of Serbia.

Moreover, the "SDGs for All" Platform has been supported by the Swiss and German governments and is being implemented by the German organization for international cooperation — GIZ, within the project "Public Finance Reform — 2030 Agenda" is directly coordinated by six prominent Serbian civil society organizations selected through a competitive process.

Turkey

In 2019, the country published its 2nd VNR report.[15] The VNR determines areas to be focused on for each goal and examines the targets in a systematic approach. The analysis reveals that most targets have directly or indirectly been incorporated in policy documents, and the legislation provides an adequate framework for implementing SDGs. Furthermore, on an institutional scale, it has been determined that the responsibilities of the institutions in Turkey, which were specified in policies and legislation, have been fully aligned with SDGs [13]. Upon reviewing the projects, the gaps and challenges in implementation have been determined.

In the overall context of SDGs, Turkey stands at an advanced level, particularly in respect of policies, strategies and legislation, while there is room for improvement in practices and projects. To monitor progress, Turkey has assigned responsibilities for 218 SDG indicators to different Ministries, and a Sustainable Development Indicators Set comprised of 83 indicators was published by the Turkish Statistical Institute

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[12] Voluntary National Review, Serbia, 2020. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23471Serbia_VNR_Report_2019_final.pdf

[15] Voluntary National Review, Turkey, 2019. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23862Turkey_VNR_110719.pdf

(TURKSTAT) in 2019. An overview of progress in this VNR proposes that SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 9 and SDG 11 stand out as goals towards which significant progress has been achieved. While there is progress on other SDGs, it is required to accelerate efforts to address gaps in implementation and increase quality. In this respect, there is a need to enhance financial and technical capacities for some of the goals.

Immediately after the adoption of Agenda 2030, Turkey designated the responsible and relevant institutions for the 218 indicators that apply to Turkey, and in February 2019, the Turkish Statistical Institute published the SDG Indicators Set, comprised of 83 indicators. While the ratio of produced indicators is higher for SDG 3, SDG 7 and SDG 9, further work is needed for SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 12, SDG 13 and SDG 14 indicators. The VNR preparation, the current situation and gaps were identified under the supervision of the Presidency of Strategy and Budget (PSB) under the Presidency as the coordinating institution, and future steps and recommendations were elicited in a transparent procedure by local administrations, the private sector, NGOs and academia.

In addition, a National Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Best Practices database was developed as a continuous application. With the system, 400 practices by public and private sectors, academia, NGOs and municipalities were collected in the first phase.

Moreover, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) formed a working group named the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments with a view to transpose SDGs at a local level and integrate them into policies. The Working Group aims to build a bridge between the UN and the local administrations. UCLG brings together all local administrations across the world under the same umbrella. One of nine sections of UCLG, namely the Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MEWA), is headquartered in Istanbul.

Ukraine
The country VNR was published in 2020.[14]

An inclusive process of the SDGs adaptation, which was tailored to the national development

context, resulted in a national SDGs system consisting of 86 national targets with 183 monitoring indicators.

The Ministry for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine (MDETA) initiated the establishment of an Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on SDGs and four expert groups for the VNR preparation (for four main thematic areas — economic, environmental, social and institutional).

The groups included leading experts from ministries, executive authorities, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, M.V. Ptukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Ukraine, UNICEF in Ukraine, UNIDO, UN Women, WHO, and other UN agencies in Ukraine, members of the UN Global Compact Network in Ukraine, specialists from analytical centres and NGOs, including the Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms, O. Yaremenko Ukrainian Institute for Social Research, etc. The groups were working publicly, which enabled consideration of a broad range of public opinions. MDETA performed functions of the technical secretariat of the VNR preparation, including as a coordinator of the consultation process.

The Inter-Agency Working Group on the SDGs performed the functions of coordination, quality control, and approval of decisions (MDETA acted as the technical secretariat and main implementer) [14]. MDETA initiated the establishment of expanded thematic work (expert) groups for four main areas: economic (SDG 2, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 12); environmental (SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15); social (SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 10); and institutional (SDG 5, SDG 11, SDG 16, SDG 17) [15].

The SDG targets have been incorporated in 162 governmental regulatory legal acts (4,300 planned actions). In March 2020, the new Cabinet of Ministers adopted its Programme, reaffirming the commitment to the SDGs [16].

Results and discussion
Analytic presentation of the SDGs reported by the UN
The UN provides an overview of the world's implementation efforts to achieve the 17 Sustainability Development Goals, highlighting

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[14] Voluntary National Review, Ukraine, 2020. URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26295VNR_2020_Ukraine_Report.pdf
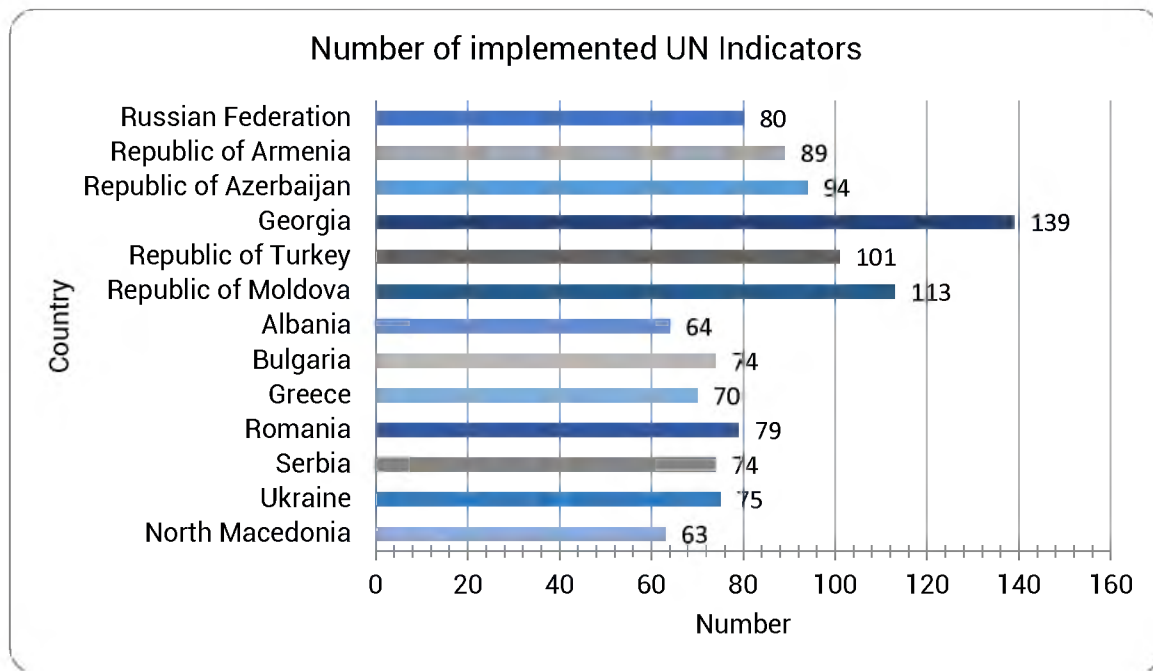
Number of implemented UN Indicators

Fig. 4. **Number of implemented UN indicators per country**

the main areas of progress and where more actions are required. In our analysis, we provide an overview of the reporting efforts according to the UN and based on the proposed indicators since in official statistics, countries track indicators of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and national indicators. Specifically, as seen in *Fig. 4*, the number of implemented UN indicators is described for each country.

According to *Fig. 4*, on average, 81% of all indicators monitored by countries in official statistics coincide with the indicators formed by the UN. The average level of standard deviation between the set of monitored indicators of different countries under each SDG is about 15%, which indicates a predominant identity in the sets of core SDG indicators that are calculated by countries. *Fig. 5* describes the standard deviation (alignment index) for the different SDGs, while *Table* provides the specific percentages of UN SDGs indicators reported by each country. As seen in *Fig. 4*, Georgia is reporting the largest number of UN indicators while North Macedonia the lowest. Most countries report less than 100 indicators, while their reporting patterns seem to be aligned (*Fig. 5* and *Table*) mostly for SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

SDGs according to the National Statistic Authorities

At the same time, in some cases, indicators differ; most often, there are differences in levels of detailing (disaggregation), which can complicate the creation of a consolidated database. For example, the indicator declared by the UN implies the calculation of data disaggregated by sex, age and persons with disabilities; in turn, a similar indicator can be calculated by one of the countries e.g., only by sex, etc. Predominantly typical for the indicators of the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Moldova. A significant number of UN indicators are not tracked by countries when calculating official statistics. Armenia has the smallest share of UN indicators that are not counted (*Fig. 5*).

Conclusion

As the results of the study show, there are significant deviations between the reporting patterns by each country, not only when it comes to the indicators promoted by the UN but also when it comes to nationally promoted indicators.

Despite the fact that a significant part of the indicators presented by each of the countries coincides with the indicators formed by the UN, even among them, there may be differences, due

Table

Share of UN indicators monitored by countries, by SDGs, %

Goals / Indicators	Russian Federation	Republic of Armenia	Republic of Azerbaijan	Georgia	Republic of Turkey	Republic of Moldova	Albania	Bulgaria	Greece	Romania	Serbia	Ukraine	North Macedonia
1	30.77	46.15	38.46	69.23	38.46	76.92	7.69	23.08	23.08	23.08	38.46	46.15	7.69
2	14.29	35.71	7.14	71.43	42.86	14.29	28.57	28.57	28.57	28.57	28.57	28.57	28.57
3	57.14	75.00	57.14	89.29	71.43	50.00	17.86	32.14	21.43	35.71	25.00	25.00	25.00
4	8.33	8.33	25.00	91.67	50.00	33.33	8.33	8.33	8.33	16.67	0.00	8.33	8.33
5	35.71	35.71	42.86	78.57	42.86	64.29	35.71	35.71	42.86	50.00	35.71	28.57	42.86
6	27.27	45.45	36.36	27.27	45.45	72.73	36.36	36.36	36.36	45.45	36.36	36.36	36.36
7	17.65	23.53	17.65	23.53	17.65	29.41	11.76	11.76	11.76	11.76	5.88	5.88	11.76
8	70.59	52.94	41.18	70.59	58.82	88.24	29.41	29.41	29.41	47.06	35.29	29.41	35.29
9	75.00	66.67	75.00	50.00	75.00	75.00	33.33	33.33	41.67	33.33	33.33	41.67	41.67
10	14.29	21.43	35.71	42.86	42.86	35.71	35.71	42.86	42.86	35.71	42.86	35.71	35.71
11	13.33	13.33	20.00	20.00	26.67	20.00	6.67	20.00	13.33	20.00	33.33	33.33	6.67
12	0.00	30.77	15.38	7.69	7.69	23.08	30.77	38.46	23.08	30.77	30.77	30.77	15.38
13	0.00	11.11	22.22	22.22	11.11	0.00	0.00	11.11	11.11	11.11	33.33	33.33	0.00
14	20.00	10.00	10.00	20.00	20.00	10.00	40.00	40.00	40.00	20.00	40.00	40.00	20.00
15	28.57	7.14	14.29	42.86	35.71	42.86	57.14	57.14	57.14	57.14	42.86	50.00	57.14
16	8.33	12.50	41.67	91.67	25.00	58.33	12.50	8.33	12.50	12.50	8.33	8.33	16.67
17	48.15	37.04	55.56	22.22	22.22	18.52	29.63	29.63	25.93	29.63	29.63	29.63	18.52

Source: compiled by the authors.
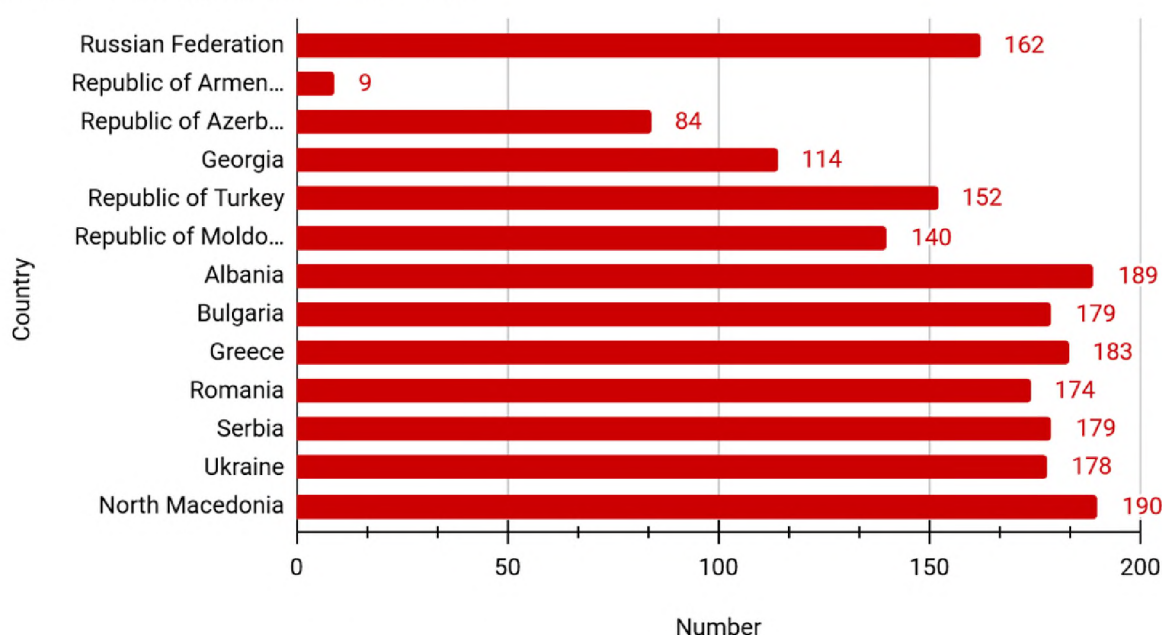
Number of non implemented UN Indicators

Fig. 5. **Number of non-implemented UN indicators**

Source: compiled by the authors.

to which the comparison of data will be significantly complicated or even impossible. As noted above, one of the most common type of differences is the discrepancy between the levels of detailing (disaggregation) of the indicator, as a result of which systematization of data for the corresponding indicator will possibly be presented only by the level of detailing (disaggregation) for all countries [17].

Also, a feature of the system of goals and indicators of sustainable development is that a number of indicators in the UN system are for-

mulated in relation to the international (global) level; subsequently, such indicators are localized by each country at its national level. This feature mainly does not lead to the emergence of different variations of a single indicator and differences in its calculation [18].

A problem for conducting a deeper analysis will be that national indicators practically cannot be correlated and/or systematized with each other due to the fact that such indicators are introduced by countries to reflect a specific situation (i.e., they are not presented among the indicators of other countries) [19, 20].

The differences in the lists and sets of monitored indicators of the 13 countries, as well as the differences in the monitoring of official statistics on the Sustainable Development Goals, create a number of potential risks and problems that may arise in the process of conducting a comprehensive analysis.

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