

## Q&A

1) ***QUESTION (Lithuania):*** *Could you please highlight what measures that have been taken by the Government of Georgia in order to integrate global 2030 Agenda into national policies and the policies of local authorities, were the most effective.*

### **ANSWER:**

In the time that has elapsed since the first submission of the National Review, the Georgian Government, with support of the UN Country Office and external experts made a sequence of steps to organically integrate the SDGs into national policy documents. In 2019 UNDP Georgia supported MAPS (Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support for the 2030 Agenda) study in order to identify state of play of the SDGs in the country.

Taken together, the 36 national strategies plus the Georgia-EU Association Agreement cover 93 % of the country's nationalized SDG targets.

The EU-Georgia Association Agreement alone incorporates 63% of the country's nationalized SDG targets – by far the largest share of any Georgian strategy or planning document. This high degree of alignment shows the extent to which the European integration agenda and the 2030 Agenda are mutually reinforcing. Moreover, the Association Agreement includes targets missing from other national strategies.

A process of learning and reflection regarding the proper functioning of Georgia's policy framework, its alignment with international commitments on one side, and with country's budgetary planning cycle on the other led to realization on part of the Administration of the Government that further streamlining of the strategic objectives was needed.

To be effective, the SDGs need to be deeply integrated into the national policy process. Based on this reflection, the Administration of the Government worked with the line ministries, government agencies, local and international experts and its international partners to establish a new Policy Planning and Coordination System in Georgia. The system assures deep integration of the SDGs in a sector policy cycle – not only any of the newly adopted strategic documents must be drafted having in mind the linkage with the SDGs, but goals that are listed in the logical framework should be connected with the Agenda 2030 commitments. The logical frameworks required for the operationalization of the strategies, align these goals closer to the budgetary planning process.

Implementation of the SDGs at the local level is slightly lagging, as also identified in the State Audit Office report on national preparedness for implementation of SDGs. In this regard, the secretariat of the SDGs has already elaborated an action plan for effective localization of the SDGs, which is in line with the Decentralization Strategy of the Government, adopted in in 2019.

***And what good practices could be used by other countries which decide choosing to follow the way of sustainable development based on democratic values and principles?***

For ensuring a well-defined coordination process and whole of society approach corresponding four **Thematic Working Groups** (economic development; social inclusion; democratic governance; sustainable energy and environmental protection) have been established under the SDGs council. These working groups are responsible for strategic planning, integrated implementation and effective monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. The government acknowledges that implementation of the SDGs requires a holistic approach and the participation of all actors of society. Therefore all stakeholders from the public, civic, international, academic and private sectors are involved in the work of the Council and working groups and high-level platform for direct and sustained engagement is provided.

The statute of the council and the terms of references of the thematic working groups ensure proper participation as well as mechanisms for increasing of the ownership of the civil society of the process:

- Each working group has a chairperson (from governmental agencies) and two co-chairs:
  - 1 from civil society organization – elected by the member CSOs of the working group for 2-year period based on the rotation principle;
  - 1 from the relevant UN agency.
- Chairs and co-chairs are part of the inter-agency council participating in the decision- making process.
- Co-chairs are involved in agenda setting process of a working group and can draft and submit a motion to the council.
- Each member of the thematic working group can submit a motion to the chair and co-chairs to defer it to the council.

It is anticipated that the spirit of the whole-of-society in the SDGs coordination will be further improved through the abovementioned mechanisms, creating incentives for the CSOs to part of the process.

In order to successfully implement 2030 Agenda, effective monitoring is in great need and Georgia has developed an innovative **electronic monitoring system** to monitor and measure the progress. The web-portal is accessible to the public as well.

***2) QUESTION (Lithuania): As Lithuania is very much attentive to the progress of the judicial reform in Georgia and wishes it the proper outcome, we would like to hear from you what steps of the reform are expected to be the most***

***successful. Accordingly we would ask you to share with us what spheres were the most complicated and problematic and what were the reasons for that?***

**ANSWER:**

In recent years numerous positive developments had taken place in the common courts of Georgia. Since 2013, the so-called “four waves” of the judicial reforms had been carried out and had been accomplished in 2019. Various legislative amendments elaborated in the course of the reform had become a basis for introducing the new institutions and innovative mechanisms that had greatly contributed to the enhancement of independence, efficiency, and accountability of the judiciary as a whole. The legislative amendments of all “four waves” of the reforms addressed the challenges identified by the international and civil society organizations and incorporated their key recommendations, based on the best international practices.

As an example, we consider the introduction of lifetime appointment of judges of the Common Courts together with the improvement of the recruitment and appointment procedure as a crowning achievement of the past judicial reforms. The previous procedure according to which the judges were being appointed for probation period was considered to be problematic. And in compliance with the recommendations of our international partners, in 2017, the Parliament of Georgia abolished the constitutional clause concerning the appointment of judges for the probationary period. Currently, the Constitution of Georgia stipulates that after 31 December 2024 each judge shall be appointed for life. Furthermore, the legislative amendments addressed the issues related to the judicial recruitment inter alia by increasing the duration of initial training for judicial candidates, providing pre-established criteria (integrity and competence) for the selection of the candidates, requiring the High Council of Justice (HCJ) to reason its decisions on judicial appointments and providing for a possibility for candidates to challenge the decision of the council. The aforementioned major improvements have created tangible guarantees for judicial independence and ensure merit-based, objective and transparent judicial appointments.

The introduction of the system of random electronic assignment of cases to judges (since 31 December 2017) is another core achievement to ensure the independence of the Georgian judiciary.

Another significant outcome of the reform has been the transformation of the HCJ into a politically neutral body by the exclusion of the representatives of other branches of the government from the membership of the council and improvement of the regulations of its activity. Responding to challenges identified by the international and civil society organizations concerning transparency of work the HCJ, the following improvements have been made in the course of the reform: accountability of the HCJ to the self-governing body of judges of the common courts has been defined in the constitution; access to the sessions as well as publicity of the decisions of the council has been ensured;

conflict of interest rules has been prescribed; an obligation of the HCJ to justify in writing its decisions has been defined to avoid arbitrary decisions. We are deeply convinced that the measures taken for improving the activity of the HCJ and its outcomes will ultimately respond to the high expectations towards the judiciary of Georgia.