

Montenegro - VNR key messages

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) are an integral part of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS). Review of the NSDS implementation by 2021 showed progress with achievement of four SDGs (1, 8, 9 and 12); assessment of trends for the remaining goals was not possible due to a lack of data. It is necessary to step up NSDS implementation, monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Agenda 2030 and the EU accession process are highly complementary. Nearly two thirds of SDG targets (109 out of 169) are closely linked to EU policies, especially those from chapters: 27 on environment and climate change; 23 and 24 on the rule of law, freedom and security; and 19 on social policy and employment.

Financing and coordination for sustainable development have been enhanced through programme budgeting and Eco-fund establishment, restructuring of the National Council on Sustainable Development, and by positioning the Office for Sustainable Development (OSD) within the Government's General Secretariat. The need for continuous efforts to foster implementation mechanisms and accelerate attainment of SDGs remains.

In the first year of COVID-19 pandemic, GDP fell by 15.3%; registered unemployment (annual average) rose by 13.4% compared to 2019. Lowered wages were received by more than a fifth of workforce. Available evidence suggests vulnerable groups were disproportionately affected. Children were affected in several ways, including through an increased number and intensity of domestic violence cases. COVID-19 had a profound impact on education.

At-risk-of-poverty rate¹ of 22.6% was lower in 2020 compared to previous years. Positive trend has been also recorded for poverty, social exclusion and material deprivation of children, but the rate (38.6%) remains high and worrying. Poverty is increasing in the north with the rate four times higher compared to the southern region. Effective social and regional development policies are necessary to achieve SDG 1.

Some progress with the achievement of SDG 4 is evident: number of children in early education increased, accessibility was improved and free textbooks provided. Education is becoming more inclusive and equitable, yet inequalities remain as regards vulnerable groups. Quality of education is emerging as the key issue, referring both to infrastructure and learning results and outcomes.

Gender policies (SDG 5) contributed to greater participation of women in public life, with a growing share (albeit certain fluctuations) of Parliamentary seats being held by women. Number of violence cases with a court epilogue is also increasing. Nevertheless, traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist, especially inside the house, but also in politics and on labour market. Gender equality index suggests Montenegro is lagging behind the EU average and within the region.

Development of policies to protect marine and terrestrial biodiversity (SDGs 14 and 15) is predominantly driven by the EU accession. Significant progress has been achieved with protected areas: in 2020, 13.41% of land area was designated for protection. As of 2021, protection regime was introduced for 0.98% of marine area. Challenges remain, in particular with sustainable forest and protected areas management, and protected species.

Close to 1.55 billion euros has been disbursed from the national budget for institutions, programmes and measures related to SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 over the period 2015 – 2020. Of this amount, 1.2

¹ Share of population with income below the national poverty line.

billion (78%) was for education. Gender equality expenditure was 4.2 million (0.3%), with a strong declining trend. Expenditure for protection of marine and terrestrial biodiversity (112.4 million) doubled over this period, while 222 million (14%) have been set aside for diverse interventions related to SDG 17. Public spending for the five goals were at the level of 6 – 7% of GDP annually.

The NSDS plan for phased introduction of SDG indicators into statistical system (77 by 2018, additional 91 by 2020) was not implemented. Lack of indicators hinders assessment of achievements and formulation of adequate policies. Absence of clearly defined parameters, procedures and responsibilities for data collection requires decisive actions and clear assignments for the coming period.

Wide consultations were carried out in the course of VNR preparation; institutional mechanisms, regional meetings and online tools have been used. Office of the Protector of Human Rights and its network of Golden Advisors for children's rights made an especially valuable contribution. The process of VNR preparation has been coordinated by the OSD, with support of the UN system in Montenegro.