

Sustainable development requires integration of the 2030 Agenda into policy-making

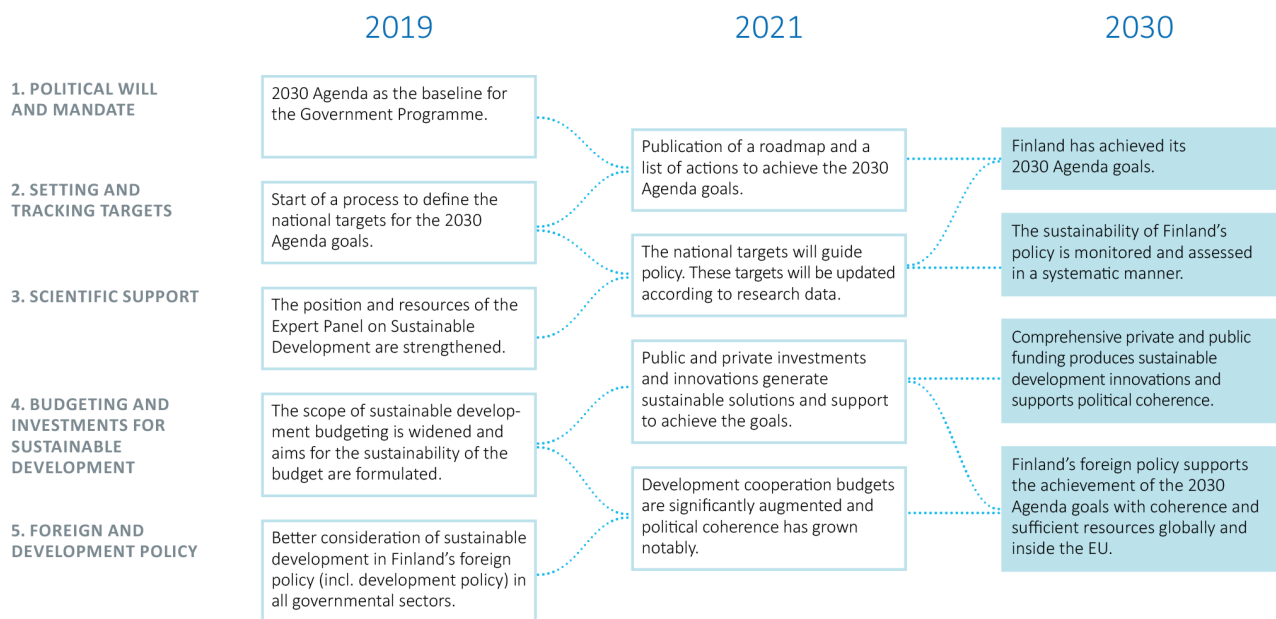
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All UN countries have committed to achieving the 17 goals (the 2030 Agenda) of sustainable development by the year 2030. There is a sense of urgency here: we have just over one decade and in the case of Finland, only two full terms of government left. The 2030 Agenda links many issues, such as climate change and employment, often in an uncomfortable manner. This discomfort can however be turned into opportunity. Society as a whole needs systemic change in terms of sustainability and it needs to address several phenomena simultaneously.

Transformation pathways to more impactful sustainable development policy



PATH2030 – AN EVALUATION OF FINLAND'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The PATH2030 project produced an evaluation of Finland's sustainable development policy as well as concrete recommendations for the next steps. The evaluation utilised multi-disciplinary methods and a wide, diverse set of material consisting of both indicators and documents as well as expert insight collected through questionnaires, interviews and workshops. The 4I's framework¹, in which sustainable development policy is analysed through **institutions, interests, ideas and information**, served as a key analysis framework for the evaluation. The evaluation process gave different stakeholders in sustainable development policy the opportunity to contribute to the study. A total of 130 experts took part in the workshops and 80 were interviewed bilaterally. The questionnaire produced 238 responses.

The state of sustainable development in Finland

Finland has a good reputation as a pioneer of sustainable development on a global scale

An assessment of all UN countries published in 2018 ranked Finland as the third-best country in the world in terms of sustainable development. The SDG Index² is not a perfect measure but nevertheless, third-best is not good enough. The path to meeting the set goals is a long one even in Finland. The global community looks up to the Nordic region as a pioneer: if it is possible to achieve the goals anywhere, it should be here. Finland's strengths include education and skills, societal stability, strong institutions and an administrative model of sustainable development that integrates different groups widely. Related to sustainable development, Finland has plenty of expertise and innovations with export potential.³

Not one single country has yet presented a plausible plan for how to achieve the 2030 Agenda goals. Finland can lead the way as it is the number one by many metrics and has every chance of accomplishing the SDGs.

Finland has many different national targets and action plans that point in the right direction, yet the country still needs to grasp the big picture and to have more ambition in pursuing these targets. According to the SDG Index and Finland's own indicators of sustainable development, **Finland's biggest challenges in sustainable development policy are related to climate change, consumption, the state of the environment, and growing societal inequality**. The questionnaire and expert interviews of the PATH2030 evaluation highlighted the environmental implications of Finnish consumption also outside our national borders, as well as Finland's responsibility on a global level.

Assessment of sustainable development in Finland via national indicators⁴

State of nature and the environment

- Dead wood in forests and high nature value farmland
- Phosphorus and nitrogen load on the Baltic Sea from Finnish rivers
- Atmospheric sulphur, nitrogen and fine particulate emissions in Finland
- Environmental protection expenditure included in the statistics in Finland

Housing and communities

- Housing expenditure
- Access to grocery stores
- Number of people over the age of 75 living in their own home
- Flood risk
- Intact community structures and conditions for public transportation

Social inequality

- Numbers and regional distribution of beneficiaries of basic social assistance
- Income disparities (Gini coefficient, low income rate, income development in the lowest and highest 10th percentile)
- Satisfaction with life among young adults (aged 18 to 25)
- Numbers of quota refugees and asylum seekers/positive decisions on asylum applications

Resource-wise economy and carbon-neutral society

- Greenhouse gas emissions and removals
- Natural resource/raw material consumption, breakdown
- Growing stock increment and drain
- Share of renewable energy in energy use
- Tekes (Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation) funding for resource efficient and carbon neutral solutions

Public procurement and consumption

- Carbon footprint of consumption
- Consumption of vegetable, meat and fish based foods
- Trends in municipal waste
- Average carbon dioxide emissions of cars and vans registered for the first time

Social exclusion and inclusivity

- Experience of exclusion or loneliness
- Voting rate
- Young people excluded from work or education
- Confidence in the society and its future among the young
- Trend in Finland by the Corruption Perceptions and World Press Freedom indexes

Working life, quality and change

- Women's average earnings compared to men's
- Employment rate (Statistics Finland, Labour Force Survey)
- Good working life
- The global responsibility of the working life

Global responsibility and policy coherence

- Finland's development cooperation funding trend
- Finland's developments using the sub-index of the Commitment to Development index in assessing Finland's trade policy
- Finnish participation in international crisis management
- Finland's imports and exports measured in tons and by material type

Education and development of competence

- Societal skills and literacy
- Research and development costs, share of GDP
- Life-long learning and participation in training
- The number of daycare centres, schools and educational institutions with a focus on sustainable development
- Use of library services

Prerequisites for health

- Morbidity index
- Self-rated health and well-being in different population groups and regions
- Equal health and social services in different regions
- Violence against women / use of shelters

EVALUATION OF INDICATOR STATUS

- = Good
- = Alarming
- = Poor
- = Ambiguous

SOURCES AND

BACKGROUND MATERIAL:
Finland's Prime Minister's Office's website on sustainable development: <https://kestavakehitys.fi/en/monitoring>
Helsus Policy Dialogues: www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-institute-of-sustainability-science/news-events/helsus-policy-dialogues-2018

Finland has good focus areas in terms of sustainable development





Finland's official focus areas to pursue the 2030 Agenda are 1) a carbon neutral and resource-wise Finland, and 2) a non-discriminating, equal and competent Finland. The governmental process for assessing budgets from sustainability perspective is noteworthy even on a global scale. According to the PATH2030 evaluation, Finland's sustainable development policy has succeeded in involving different societal groups; the result of this is that **sustainable development has become a widely accepted aim in society**. Reaching the 2030 goals requires, however, many system-level changes and the mediation of conflicts of interest.

According to the POLKU2030 evaluation, **there is still a lot to improve in sustainable development policy in terms of its coherence and transformative potential**. Finland needs to critically examine the ability of the entire economic system **to ensure sustainable well-being**. Sustainability should play a greater role in central decision-making processes including the Government Programme, budget preparations and the management systems of different ministries.

One of the central tasks of coming governments will be to carry out a fair structural change towards carbon-neutrality and resource wisdom.

Summary of the results of the evaluation

(Adapted from the framework by Brockhaus & Angelsenin (2012))

	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
Institutions 	There is a diverse and participatory approach to sustainable development. The pursuit of sustainability is fairly visible e.g. in the strategies of different ministries.	Sustainable development has not been sufficiently integrated into all governmental sectors and their management systems. Governmental work on sustainable development is poorly resourced when the actual required workload is taken into consideration. Compartmentalisation is still a core problem.
Interests 	Widely shared aims and processes, such as the 2030 Agenda Government Report and reviews with a sustainable development angle (e.g. the budgetary review) help to mediate conflicts of interest.	Conflicts of interest (e.g. short and long-term, different dimensions of sustainable development) decrease the coherence and transformational power of politics. Tightly defined commercial interests have a tendency to outweigh sustainable development policy based on human rights.
Ideas 	Sustainable development is a widely shared and mainstream aim.	In practice, there are many disagreements over sustainable development solutions.
Information 	There is a wealth of information available on the state of sustainable development and different solutions.	The systematic use of indicators and research data in decision-making and societal learning is insufficient. The understanding of cross-sectoral themes of sustainable development is underdeveloped and information on Finland's foreign policy aims is fragmented.

Finland as a global trailblazer in sustainable development

Finland already has a reputation as a global vanguard of sustainable development. It is also to Finland's benefit that as many countries as possible reach their targets. **Finland needs to continue assessing its sustainability impact beyond its national borders. This should be done in a comprehensive manner that transcends the ministerial boundaries.** At the moment, the promotion of sustainable development on a global scale is too centralised within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and more specifically within the Department for Development Policy and certain individual experts in the ministry. Foreign policy related to sustainable development needs to be supported by sufficient resources from all areas of government.

On an international level, Finland also needs to gradually increase its development aid budget to meet the 0,7% goal and to support the international rule-based system spearheaded by UN institutions. On the international arena, Finland also needs to support the wider coherence of the different aspects of sustainable development and to ensure better cross-national coordination of these efforts. All work must include a better consideration of human rights-related impacts and the constant pursuit of a "Leave No One Behind" principle.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. Future governments need to adopt the 2030 Agenda as a base for government policy.

Reaching the 2030 Agenda goals should be a baseline for the Government Programme that sets out the government's main areas of activity - and all governmental goals should be guided by sustainable development. Finland's focus areas in sustainable development of creating 1) a carbon neutral and resource-wise Finland and 2) a non-discriminating, equal and competent Finland are justified, and steps towards reaching these goals should be continued. Finland has still work to do in, for example, tackling climate change and in reducing the overall global impact of its production and consumption, as well as in reducing societal inequality. All of the Finnish government's ministries and departments should integrate the 2030 Agenda into their strategies, actions, measures and future briefings.

2. The government needs to create a national roadmap until the year 2030 in order to strengthen the nation's ambitions and policies regarding sustainable development.

The roadmap should define how Finland is to reach the 2030 Agenda goals and how the country should support the goals in the EU region and globally. Furthermore, measurable national goals should be defined and a long-term political commitment to fair structural change should be ensured. With this roadmap, Finland would be able to assume a position of global leadership in developing an economic system that takes into account planetary boundaries.

3. The government needs to direct public funds to sustainable development in a more coherent way.

The governmental budgeting process of taking into account sustainable development is to be continued and widened. There should be targets set for the budget such as phasing out support for environmentally harmful activities and increasing investments that support sustainable development in both the public and private sectors. Ideally the budget should be designed so that funds are allocated in such a way that makes it possible to monitor governmental support as a whole for phenomena that are central to sustainable development.

4. Strengthening scientific support and monitoring for the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda needs to be taken as a starting point for national sustainable development efforts. This means improving awareness of national indicators of sustainable development and their utilisation by binding them clearly to the 2030 Agenda goals. We need a singular, clearly visualised indicator system that functions as a comprehensive focal point of discussions. The Expert Panel on Sustainable Development needs to function as an independent high-level advocate for sustainable development. This panel should have the mandate to comment on the most crucial governmental plans that affect sustainable development.

5. Making sustainable development a fixed cross-administrative part of foreign and development policy.

Finland needs to have a plausible plan to raise development aid funding to 0.7 percent of the GDP along with a broad-based commitment to reach this pledge. Finland's sustainable development policy must reduce inequality according to the "Leave No One Behind" principle and strengthen the evaluation of the human rights impact of all foreign policy.

References and additional information:

¹ Brockhaus, M., & Angelsen, A. (2012). Seeing REDD+ through 4Is: A political economy framework. In: Angelsen, A., Brockhaus, M., Sunderlin, W.D & Verchot, L. (ed.) Analysing REDD+: Challenges and choices. Bogor: Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

² Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2018). SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2018. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

³ Mika Naumanen, VTT. Kestävän kehityksen innovaatiot tukemassa Agenda 2030:n toimeenpanoa (KITA). Unpublished draft of the research report (in Finnish). January 2019.

⁴ The interpretation of the state of sustainable development is based on an expert review composed of different sources. The national indicators are divided into ten indicator baskets that measure the eight aims of Finland's Society's Commitment to sustainable development.

Governmental website for sustainable development: www.kestavakehitys.fi/en

Government Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in Finnish): <http://julka-isut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/79854>

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PATH2030 is part of the implementation of the 2018 Government plan for analysis, assessment and research.

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