



Kurzinformation

Sustainability at the parliamentary level in Germany

In 2002, the Federal Government adopted the National Sustainability Strategy to implement the United Nations' 1992 Rio Agenda. The National Strategy has been reviewed and adjusted several times.

The biggest change took place in 2016, when the Federal Government integrated the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the Strategy. As of now, the Strategy is set to be valid till at least 2020 and will then be reviewed again.

The institutional and regulatory framework for sustainable policies has stayed mostly unchanged, though it did evolve over the years. There are three bodies that monitor, control, and review the implementation of the Strategy on the executive, legislative, and civil society level.

On the parliamentary level:

In 2004, the Bundestag constituted the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (Parlamentarischer Beirat für nachhaltige Entwicklung). The Council oversees the mainstreaming of sustainability in all fields of legislation. It is constituted at the beginning of each new legislative session.

Currently (since April 2018), the Council has 17 members which, as in every parliamentary committee, reflect the composition of the plenary. Because in Germany's parliamentary democracy, the Federal Government is elected by parliament and reflects the parliamentary majority, cooperation and communication between Government and Council is usually smooth, though differences may, of course, arise.

The Council is, however, no committee and doesn't have legislative powers in its own right. Its role is advisory and monitoring and it regularly publishes an evaluation report on the mainstreaming and implementation of the National Sustainability Strategy. Its competencies have been expanded over time. Whereas at the beginning, it primarily monitored the implementation of the National Strategy, it now also monitors the Federal Government's implementation

and mainstreaming of sustainability on the European and international level. The Council publishes a report on its work at regular intervals. It also examines the Federal Government's reports on sustainability and publishes a statement on those, which is then discussed in the plenary. At least once in each legislative session, it reports its own findings on the implementation of the National Strategy and gives advice and criticism.

On the executive level:

The body for supervising the mainstreaming of sustainability is the Committee of State Secretaries on Sustainable Development (Staatssekretärsausschuss für Nachhaltige Entwicklung). It is composed of State Secretaries (an administrative level just below that of minister) from each federal ministry, presided over by the administrative head of the Federal Chancellery. The Committee coordinates sustainability mainstreaming efforts on the level of the ministries and gives advice. It is also responsible for the publishing of the Government's report on the progress of Germany's sustainability policy. The report is published every four years. In addition, the Committee regularly reviews the indicators used to evaluate the sustainability efforts.

Moreover, every two years, a report on specific indicators informs parliament and public about the progress of sustainable policies in Germany. This report is published under the auspices of the Federal Agency of Statistics and both the Government's and the Council's reports usually include key findings from the Agency of Statistics' biennial report.

On the civil society level:

The Council for Sustainable Development (Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung, RNE, <https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/en/> (in English)) is composed of prominent figures from businesses, science institutions and civil society. It, too, publishes reports regularly, advises both Government and Bundestag and forms a link between them and German society (for the current work programme and Rules of Procedure, please see https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/RNE_Work_Programme_2017-2019.pdf (in English)).

To this end, the RNE initiates and oversees several projects, events and initiatives on different fields, such as in education, industry, energy, agriculture, finance, IT, and culture. It also conducts and publishes its own research. Unlike the other two bodies, it concentrates less on oversight and monitoring, but rather on giving new impulses by generating knowledge. It also focuses on specific topics and how to implement sustainability therein. For example, it has published a report on sustainable land use and presented new ideas as well as sustainable policies from other countries in that regard (please see <https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/en/topic/agriculture-land-use-and-soil-conservation/> (in English)). Ideally, this input would be taken up by government and parliament and implemented in the form of policies and legislation.

The RNE also advises Government and Bundestag on promoting and implementing sustainability on the European and UN level.

All these bodies receive their financial means from the federal budget, though not from the same detailed (departmental) budgets. The Parliamentary Council's budget is found under detailed budget No. 02 (the Bundestag), the State Secretary Committee and the RNE under detailed budget No. 04 (the Federal Chancellery).

Furthermore, the National Strategy has been reviewed independently by an international commission under the presidency of New Zealand's former PM Helen Hunt. It has been rated quite favourably, but as it is understood to be a process rather than a fixed programme, improvements and readjustments can always be made.

While there is an emphasis on the implementation of the SDGs on a national level, and most resources are allocated to that level, it is the held view that sustainability in general, and the implementation of the SDGs in particular, are a matter of mainstreaming all policy, be it on a national, European, or international level.