

SIDE EVENT CONCEPT NOTE

Event title

Halfway to SDGs implementation: the Balkans perspectives

Background and Rationale

While the needs to accelerate the pace of development, advance European integration, foster the transition to a green economy, and enhance capacities for sustainability-driven policies are widely recognized in the Balkans, implementing national SDGs can add impetus to ongoing transformation processes. Yet, halfway to Agenda 2030, it can be said that the Balkan countries are making only modest progress towards achieving the Global Goals. In this perspective, some interesting differences with Western European countries are observed. Understanding the process dynamics and inherent challenges and opportunities in the Balkan region is crucial. This will allow us to put them in a broader European context and benchmark policy approaches to SDGs implementation and performances of countries.

Bringing the sustainability perspective into the national context is also vital as regards rethinking underlying 'growth-based' development models and the whole idea of catching up with Western Europe. Facing multiple crises (economic, demographic, social, political, and ecological) could often tempt a country to search for short-term solutions to pressing problems, ignoring sustainability considerations. However, this approach, which focuses on the present, often results in missed opportunities in the long term. Against this background, reinforcing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs in the Balkan countries could be seen not only as a way of keeping the momentum and guiding the regional processes in the right direction but also as a key factor for strengthening integration and stability in Europe, in a broader perspective.

Session objectives and expected outcomes

The session aims to offer a platform for exchange between representatives of different networks and societal groups (scientific and non-scientific actors) on delivering the SDGs in the Balkan region. It will create room for presenting research insights and countries' progress based on statistical data, Voluntary National Reviews, and practical experiences.

The session will be structured in two modules. The first begins with a welcome address by the organizers, followed by short presentations to set the stage and focus the upcoming discussions. The presentations seek to provide scientific and practical insights on governing the SDGs and measuring progress at a country level.

The second module aims to facilitate a group discussion on progress, regional specifics, and critical needs and challenges in implementing the SDGs in the EU and non-EU Balkan countries.

Desirable outcomes are exchanging information, knowledge, and good practices, networking among participants, and generating ideas of cooperation.



Organizers

Lead organizers: Sofia University, Department of Regional and Political Geography; POLIS University, Observatory of the Mediterranean Basin; Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development; Western Balkan Network on Territorial Governance (TG-Web); Taskforce on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs Taskforce); River Cities Network (RCN)

Agenda and Structure

Module 1: Presentations (ca. 45 min.)

- Welcome address by the organizers
- Brief presentations of the three networks co-organizing the event: Western Balkan Network on Territorial Governance (TG-Web), Taskforce on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs taskforce), and River Cities Network (RCN)
- Insights into the SDGs and Balkans-related perspectives
 - ❖ Carole-Anne Sénit - Research frontiers on the governance of the SDGs
 - ❖ Hristo Dokov - Development trends in the Balkans: How much is enough to reach the 'desired state' of sustainable development
 - ❖ Anila Bejko and Fiona Imami – Beyond Reporting: Exploring the role of non-governmental actors in shaping the SDGs landscape in Albania
 - ❖ Aneliya Paneva - Progress on SDG 13 for Climate action: a review of evidence from the Western Balkans

Module 2: Discussions (ca. 45 min.)

- ❖ Theoretical considerations on the SDGs framework and related governance models
- ❖ National and sub-national initiatives - best practices and barriers to SDG implementation
- ❖ Initiatives and possibilities for experience exchange, knowledge transfer and regional cooperation

List of Panellists

Hristo Dokov (Sofia University)

Anila Bejko (Polis University and Co-PLAN)

Carole-Anne Sénit (Utrecht University)

Aneliya Paneva (University of Oldenburg and visiting researcher at iASK Hungary)

Sign-up / Registration Link

<https://forms.gle/thfmFzhbBgSgtmKq6>