

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Policy Segment: The Second year of the SDGs in the region – knowing where we stand and moving on to prosperity and well-being for all

Geneva 25 April 2017

Elements for a statement by Marja Ruotanen

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- The Council of Europe welcomes this regional cross-sectoral exchange on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The Council of Europe is pleased to participate in this Forum as it truly believes that it can make a major contribution toward the measurable implementation of the SDGs. The Council of Europe has integrated the SDGs in its agenda and is committed to support States in achieving and reviewing progress. While the implementation and achievement of the SDGs is the primary responsibility of States, Agenda 2030 calls upon a universal mobilisation and partnership at all levels. Most of the SDG targets are linked to international human rights instruments and State's treaty obligations. States have the opportunity to use existing mechanisms to monitor progress on the SDGs. And, this why the Council of Europe has an added value/role:
 - it provides a comprehensive and measurable normative framework which can be used to identify indicators. Most of the Council of Europe treaties have a multi-stakeholder approach and global out-reachs. They are made in Europe, but not meant for Europe only;
 - its monitoring mechanisms and follow-up processes are useful for gathering data, assessing progress and providing guidance to overcome obstacles and to ensure that progress is being achieved;
 - its intergovernmental, expert, parliamentary and civil society platforms provide precious support to states in their efforts to translate the global agenda into real action at national and local level: "Making Global Goals Local"
- More specifically, this is what the Council of Europe has to offer on SDG 1 (End Poverty) and 5 (Gender Equality):

SDG1:

The European Social Charter, a human rights protection treaty, guarantees the right to be protected against poverty and social exclusion through its Article 30, as it is considered that living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion violates the dignity of human beings. Article 30 of the Charter is the first binding human rights provision in Europe for the protection against poverty and social exclusion. The primary obligation for States Parties under Article 30 is the adoption of a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach which explicitly aims at combating poverty and social exclusion by adopting measures aimed at preventing and removing obstacles to access to fundamental social rights, in particular employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance.

The European Committee of Social Rights monitors the implementation of the Charter, not only theoretically, but also in practice. In light of this approach, assessments of situations under Article 30, as for other substantial provisions of the Charter, are based on this human rights approach, which has been reaffirmed by the Guiding Principles on extreme poverty and human rights (submitted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, and adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council on 27 September 2012) and which has consistently been applied by the ECSR. In particular, the ECSR has interpreted the scope of Article 30 as relating both to protection against poverty (understood as involving situations of social precarity) and protection against social exclusion (understood as involving obstacles to inclusion and citizen participation) in an autonomous manner or in combination with other connecting provisions of the Charter.

Furthermore, the ECSR emphasises the very close link between the effectiveness of the right recognised by Article 30 of the Charter and the enjoyment of the rights recognised by other provisions, such as the right to work (Article 1), access to health care (Article 11), social security allowances (Article 12), social and medical assistance (Article 13), the benefit from social welfare services (Article 14), the rights of persons with disabilities (Article 15), the social, legal and economic protection of the family (Article 16) as well as of children and young persons (Article 17), the right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment and occupation without sex discrimination (Article 20), the rights of the elderly (Article 23) or the right to housing (Article 31), without forgetting the important impact of the non-discrimination clause (Article E) which obviously includes non-discrimination on grounds of poverty.

SDG5:

The Council of Europe has three ground-breaking conventions in the area of human dignity that are all instrumental to achieving the SDG5:

- The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings;
- The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse – “the Lanzarote Convention”;
- The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – “the Istanbul Convention”.

These conventions have a global outreach. Their provisions can inspire normative and policy changes in all regions of the world and all States can become Party to them. These treaties offer a comprehensive normative framework, a platform for international cooperation and monitoring mechanisms to gather data, assess progress and promote solutions that work. They can thus provide guidance and good practice examples when designing national policies and legislation globally and be used as indicators in the framework of national and international efforts to assess progress in the implementation of Agenda 2030.

The Council of Europe’s Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 directly addresses many of the targets of Goal 5, including human dignity and the fight against gender inequality; the promotion of the full participation of women in society; the need to guarantee access to fair justice systems for all and to work in partnerships. The 14 indicators agreed for SDG5 cover priority areas of the Council of Europe work, such as laws and policies to promote gender equality; legal frameworks to promote and monitor non-discrimination on the grounds of sex; and eradication of gender-based violence. At the same time, the Council of Europe is effectively mainstreaming gender equality considerations throughout its programmes and working methods. This allows the Council of Europe to promote gender equality when supporting States in their efforts to meet several sustainable development goals (in particular SDGs 4, 8 and 16 – notably through specific work on access of women to justice).

The reports and recommendations of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) are relevant for achieving in particular targets 5.2 (Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation), but also other SDGs.

Lastly, the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe acts as an interface between the Council of Europe and its neighbouring regions and contributes to promote Council of Europe conventions and standards in the field of gender equality and fighting violence against women in the Southern Mediterranean.