



Rat für
NACHHALTIGE
Entwicklung

13.11.2023 Initial recommendations of the
German Council for Sustainable Development

Updating the German Sustainable Development Strategy and Advancing Sustainability Governance

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Initial recommendations for updating the German Sustainable Development Strategy (DNS) and advancing sustainability governance

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) proposes the following recommendations to the federal government for the forthcoming update of the German Sustainable Development Strategy, due by the end of 2024. Among them are additional suggestions for strengthening the governance around sustainable development in Germany.

The RNE would further advise the government to pass a new basic resolution on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (corresponding in time and content with the upcoming Coalition Agreement) at the start of the legislative period.

I. Governance

Cross-ministerial cooperation in the federal government

- The RNE fundamentally welcomes the expansion of cross-ministerial cooperation within the federal government by the appointment of Transformation Teams (TTs).
- The political level should, however, be adequately involved in the cross-ministerial work processes (e.g. through clear mandates from state secretary or ministerial level), as the direct link to real-world action by the government must become clear.
- The Council expects to be involved in the TTs' work process at an early stage. It should be engaged in plenty of time before the final adoption of the guidance documents for the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development, namely in close connection with the involvement of the Science Platform Sustainability 2030 (wpm2030) and the so-called dialogue group.
- The Council also wishes to be called upon not only as part of the consultation on the guidance paper, but also with regard to the handling of the transformation report in the State Secretaries' Committee.

Role of the German Bundestag

- The RNE proposes closer involvement of the Bundestag in the German Sustainable Development Strategy (DNS). This could be achieved, for example, by discussing and possibly even voting on the strategy in the Bundestag as well as holding an annual debate on the progress of its delivery (similar to the annual budget debate).



Preparations for the plenary session on this should be led by the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development.

- The guiding principle of sustainable development and its application must be considered at all times by the Bundestag – whether dealing with committees, parliamentary groups or in its plenary work – and must be supported with appropriate resources.¹

Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (PBnE) in the German Bundestag

- Moving forward, the PBnE – like the Bundestag committees – should automatically be employed at the beginning of a legislative period, thereby acquiring the status of a Permanent Advisory Council. This would require an amendment to the Bundestag's rules of procedure.
- The RNE contends that in future the PBnE should upon request be given access to the sustainability impact assessments of the various ministries, to use as a basis for its own independent plausibility check.
- Furthermore, the PBnE should lead-manage the DNS and other overarching sustainability topics in the Bundestag.
- The RNE recommends that the PBnE should also be actively involved in setting up a sustainable budget going forward.

Role of the German Council for Sustainable Development

- The RNE's involvement in the governing processes around sustainable development should be scaled up. This could include early interaction with the Transformation Teams and integration in the State Secretaries' Committee also during passage of the transformation report (see above). Closer involvement of the RNE in the external representation of German sustainability policy would also be preferable (e.g. as a member of the German delegations at sustainability-related signatory conferences like the COP climate change gatherings or the SDG Summit).
- What's more, the Council could exercise its bridging function better between the legislative periods if its reappointment were to take place in the middle of the respective period with a lineup lasting for four years.

¹ See the [RNE Recommendations for the Reform of Government Work – Better Governance for Sustainable Development](#) from October 2021, p. 5.



II. Instruments

Fundamental questions

- The German Sustainable Development Strategy should be preceded by a political approach that takes up the concept of planetary boundaries.
- The RNE further recommends adding sustainable development as a national objective to Germany's Basic Law² (GG), building on the existing Art. 20a GG and the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court on the Climate Change Act.
- In addition, the federal government should develop a guiding law on sustainability (a benchmark law with basic principles, mandatory core targets and leading indicators, not unlike the Climate Change Act), with an amended sustainable development strategy as the implementation policy.
- The objective should be a good combination of the existing sustainability impact assessment with the planned new climate check and other reviews in the legislative process. Integrated checks as part of an integrated electronic tool for the legislature would be of benefit.

Sustainable Development Goals and indicators

- The German Council for Sustainable Development advocates realigning the goal and indicator system based on the UN SDGs. In the interests of political prioritisation and better communicability, the RNE moots a focus on action-oriented core targets and leading indicators, which inter alia pick up on the international commitments entered into and should also illustrate the international impact of the German economic system (including spillover effects).
- The RNE will provide additional and substantiating proposals on the goal and indicator system at a later stage.

Integrating the different government levels

- In the RNE's opinion, a number of critical milestones are needed at regional level for sustainable development. It is therefore pushing for representatives of local government to take part in dialogues on future topics at federal level, such as in the Alliance for Transformation.

² See the [RNE Recommendations for the Reform of Government Work – Better Governance for Sustainable Development](#) from October 2021, p. 2.



- Plus, the Council is renewing its call for the pooling of sustainability-based support programmes of the federal government for local authorities.
- The RNE also supports greater interlinking of German sustainability policy with the updating of the European Green Deal proposed by the RNE (Green Deal 2.0).³

III. Finances and budget

- The RNE would also like to see the aspect of sustainability added to both the law on budgetary procedures and the federal budget code.⁴
- The Council offers to monitor the implementation of the recommendations resulting from the spending reviews of the federal budget from 2022. The planned sustainability “tagging” in particular presupposes a functioning indicator system. The RNE could introduce a proposal for how to measure the effects of budgetary items.
- From the RNE’s point of view, the climate impacts of the federal budget should be measured and subsequently a climate quota (as in the EU budget) established.
- The Council would further urge the removal of environmentally harmful subsidies⁵ (e.g. reforming the commuting allowance on a socio-ecological basis and abolishing tax breaks for company cars, kerosene, diesel and flight tickets).

IV. Initial content recommendations

The Council recommends refining the German Sustainable Development Strategy around the following topics, among others:

Social cohesion in the transition

- The RNE firmly believes that social cohesion in the transition has a key role to play in the new sustainable development strategy. A useful basis for this is the findings of the transformation report on “Human Well-Being and Capabilities, Social Justice”⁶.
- The Joint Action for Sustainable Development and the RENN network (Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies) can play an important

³ See the RNE’s recommendations in the run-up to the 2024 European elections [Steering Europe towards Sustainability with the Green Deal 2.0](#) from September 2023.

⁴ See the [RNE Recommendations for the Reform of Government Work – Better Governance for Sustainable Development](#) from October 2021, p. 5.

⁵ See the [RNE-Stellungnahme nachhaltige Stadtentwicklung und Verkehrspolitik](#) [RNE statement on sustainable urban development and transport policy] from May 2023.

⁶ See federal government publication (10 August 2023): [Menschliches Wohlbefinden und Fähigkeiten soziale Gerechtigkeit](#).



part in strengthening social cohesion and as such should also be adequately factored into the budget.

The Council's recommendations on the RNE's other two focus topics – “Ways to net zero in climate policy” and “Biodiversity loss – reversing the trend” – should likewise be seen as recommendations for further progress on the sustainable development strategy.

From the RNE's perspective, the Sustainable Development Goals along with ambitious measures to deliver them are more important than ever in light of the changed geopolitical and geoeconomic situation.

About the German Council for Sustainable Development

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) advises the Federal Government on issues of sustainability policy. It acts in this capacity as an independent entity, and since 2001 its members have been appointed every three years by the Federal Government.

The Council consists of 15 public figures, comprising individuals from civil society, the business sector, the scientific community and the political arena. It has been chaired since 2023 by Reiner Hoffmann and his deputy, Gunda Röstel. The Council also carries out its own projects aimed at advancing the topic of sustainability in practical terms. In addition, it helps shape topically focused momentum within policy and societal dialogue. The Council is supported in its activities by an administrative office based in Berlin.

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