

Regional Seminar on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for the IPU's Twelve Plus Geopolitical Group

5 and 6 June 2019, Lisbon (Portugal)

REPORT

Members of Parliament from the Twelve Plus Group gathered in Lisbon, Portugal, on 5 and 6 June 2019 for the second Regional Seminar on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The seminar was jointly organized by the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

The seminar discussed the implementation of the SDGs. It focused on SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), and devoted a panel discussion to each. The debates were enriched by the best practices, experiences and lessons learned of parliamentarians, government representatives and experts from business, academia and the United Nations. There were field visits across Lisbon to centres of excellence in innovation and health. The visits gave practical insight into how innovation can help accelerate progress for health-related and other SDGs.

Innovation as a driver of change

The first panel aimed to answer key questions on how scientific research and technological progress could help address social and environmental challenges, and how parliaments could promote innovation and multisectoral action on science, technology, education and employment.

There was a special emphasis on innovation: it must be at the service of citizens to improve well-being and increase sustainability. Various approaches to improving parliamentary engagement with innovation and technology emerged from the discussion:

- Knowledge is at the core of sustainable development. Investment in all areas of knowledge is required, including basic research and social sciences. Measures are also needed to ensure that science and research are translated into concrete solutions that address people's needs.
- Innovation and technology have an important social impact, but can also pose risks to the employment sector. Parliaments should promote forward-looking employment and education policies. They should allocate adequate resources to mitigate these risks and address inequalities that result from new technologies.
- The promotion of innovation and technology should be included in environmental strategies and policies. For the energy and transport sectors, parliaments also have an important role in developing an enabling legal and policy framework as a critical precondition to improving sustainability and addressing current environmental challenges.
- Digitalization and the promotion of digital skills, including in parliament, can improve transparency and accountability, and contribute to strengthening democratic processes.

- Exchanging experiences and sharing best practices contribute to raising awareness and building synergies among relevant stakeholders and across the region. Parliaments are encouraged to promote collaboration among public and private stakeholders; to initiate public debates on science, technology and innovation; and to participate in parliamentary platforms such as those provided by the IPU.

Health and social welfare

The second panel addressed key health challenges in the countries of the Twelve Plus Group, with a view to improving access to health while ensuring sustainability.

In past decades, the European region has seen remarkable progress on several health indicators, such as maternal and infant mortality rates. However, maintaining these achievements is a constant challenge, while progress also needs to be accelerated in areas including HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases. Regional and national averages also hide unequal health outcomes among countries and populations. The discussion identified ways in which parliaments could strengthen their health-related work for current and future generations:

- Poverty and inequalities, including gender inequality, are major determinants of health and well-being. Health policies must be accompanied by social policies and adequate legal protections of the right to health and other human rights.
- Parliaments should review health policies to ensure that emerging issues and needs are adequately included. Measures to ensure healthy ageing and mental health are particularly needed. Parliaments should also promote stronger national and international action on antimicrobial resistance.
- Territorial coverage of health facilities and personnel remains a major challenge in Europe. Territorial policies, telemedicine and health workforce strategies can improve access to health outside main urban centres.
- The sustainability of health systems is a pressing issue, and out-of-pocket expenditure is still a significant financial burden for many people in the region. Parliaments should take a multisectoral approach to health so as to address its underlying determinants – including poverty, inequality, climate change, food, water and sanitation – and to promote preventive measures.
- Disaggregated data must be available to assess progress on SDG 3 and identify remaining gaps. To collect relevant data, local and national SDG implementation strategies are needed that focus on measurable goals and results. Citizens, civil society, the private sector and all other stakeholders should be engaged in implementing the SDGs, as they are for everybody and should guide daily actions.

The seminar highlighted the importance of leadership. It called for the parliaments of the Twelve Plus Group to engage consistently and for the long term in implementing the SDGs. It also recognized the value of exchanging best practices among parliaments and parliamentarians to inform national SDG implementation and to encourage parliaments to treat the SDGs as mainstream parliamentary business. The IPU will continue to provide the Group's parliaments with a platform from which discussions can move forward. The seminar's outcomes should inform the future work of parliaments and will be brought to the attention of the global parliamentary community at the 141st IPU Assembly in Belgrade.