



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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# Institutionalization of the SDGs in the work of parliaments

## Introduction

### Background Information

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Through a series of declarations and resolutions, IPU Member Parliaments have committed to taking action on the SDGs by adapting them to each country's context, aligning them with the country's national development plans, translating them into legislation as necessary and holding governments to account for progress toward them.

It is clear from IPU activities for the promotion of parliamentary engagement on the SDGs that many parliaments are taking action, including institutional arrangements or involvement in national structures for sustainable development.

### IPU's Global Survey

Now that three years have passed since the adoption of the SDGs, it is important to understand, document and publicize the ways in which parliaments are taking up their role as critical actors in achieving them. In June 2018, the Secretary General of the IPU therefore invited parliaments to answer a questionnaire on how parliaments are engaging with and institutionalizing the SDGs.

## Response Rate

As of 14 February 2019, 89 responses had been received: 88 from IPU Member Parliaments and 1 from a non-Member country (Jamaica). The participation rate for IPU Members was 49.4 per cent.

Among the IPU's geopolitical groups, the Twelve Plus Group had the highest participation rate (74%) and submitted the greatest number of responses (35), accounting for 39 per cent of all the responses received.

For this analysis, data from the Asia-Pacific and the Eurasia Geopolitical Groups have been combined and are referred to as "Asia-Pacific and Eurasia Group".

Because Jamaica is not an IPU Member, the data from that country have not been included in any of the geopolitical groups, and are reflected only in the global results.

| Participation by geopolitical group | Number of responses by geopolitical group | Total number of Members per group | Percentage of participation within each group |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Twelve Plus Group                   | 35  | 47                                | 74%   |
| Arab Group                          | 8   | 21                                | 38%   |
| African Group                       | 23  | 52                                | 44%   |
| GRULAC                              | 10  | 24                                | 42%   |
| Asia-Pacific + Eurasia Group        | 12  | 45                                | 27%   |

## Methodology

The survey was sent out on 15 June 2018 to parliaments around the world. Its aim was to learn, document and publicize what parliaments are doing, and how, to institutionalize the SDGs and to organize their work around them, identifying patterns and sharing good practices.

The first half of the survey focuses on parliamentary *activities*, and the second on parliamentary *mechanisms*, for achieving the SDGs. The analysis follows that same structure.

To note:

- Blank submissions were not included in the analysis.
- Some of the survey responses were incomplete. Those missing only the second part (e.g. Sierra Leone and Congo) were retained.
- Some of the countries (including Bahrain, Djibouti and Kenya) submitted several questionnaires for the same parliamentary chamber. These were merged to form a single response.

### *Bicameral parliaments*

Ten countries with bicameral parliaments (Bahrain, Belgium, Burundi, France, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Oman, Pakistan, and Romania) submitted two responses, one for each chamber. In those cases only the lower house's response was used for the analysis.

The other bicameral parliaments submitted a single response containing answers from both chambers.

### *Questions*

Different question formats were used. For Questions A (i-iii, v-vii and ix-x), B, C, D and E, respondents were asked to answer "Yes", "No" or "Don't Know". For most of those questions only a very small number answered "Don't Know". The analysis indicates where larger numbers of "Don't Know" responses were received.

Questions A (iv) and (viii) were intended to be binary, "Yes" or "No" questions with an option to provide more information. Due to technical issues, however, simple "Yes" or "No" answers – i.e.

those without additional information – could not be retrieved. Only those providing additional information were available for analysis. This technical issue should be resolved if the survey is to be repeated.

## Analysis

As mentioned above, the analysis is divided into two parts, on parliamentary activities and mechanisms for the SDGs. It has the same question-by-question format as the questionnaire. The questions inviting respondents to provide further information were included as an attempt to identify the different ways parliaments approach the SDGs and to highlight good practices. The examples cited were taken directly from the survey answers without confirmation as to their accuracy.

## Parliamentary activities on the SDGs

### ***Question A (i) – Has parliament organized training sessions or awareness-raising activities on the SDGs for parliamentarians?***

Fifty-six per cent of the respondents answered "Yes", they had held such sessions and activities for parliamentarians, with seminars and workshops being the most commonly cited examples. Thirty-eight per cent answered "No", and 6 per cent did not know.

### ***Question A (ii) – Has parliament organized training sessions or awareness-raising activities on the SDGs for parliamentary staff?***

Fewer respondents (46%) had held such sessions and activities for staff (mostly through workshops) than for parliamentarians. Interestingly, the website of Canada's Library of Parliament publishes articles of up to 1,000 words for use by parliamentarians, their staff and the general public. One such article, entitled "Envisioning a Sustainable and Dignified World", published in April 2016, discusses the 2030 Agenda. This represents a training method that is simple to implement and accessible for parliaments worldwide.

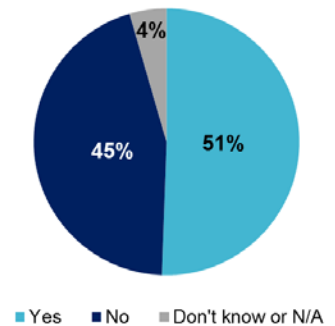
### **Data from Questions A (i) and (ii) - Has parliament organized training sessions/awareness-raising activities on the SDGs for parliamentarians and/or parliamentary staff?**

Overall, looking at Questions A (i) and (ii) together, 46 per cent of the respondents had held awareness-raising activities for **both** staff and parliamentarians. The Swedish Riksdag, to take one example, had effectively done so to inform both groups about Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. In the case of training, however, only a small number of respondents indicated sessions being held for both.

**Question A (iii) - Has the government submitted reports to parliament about the implementation of the SDGs?**

Respondents indicated that most of their governments (51%) had submitted such reports, although a sizable percentage (45%) had not done so (five of the parliaments in this second group had received such reports but from a different organization, other than the government).<sup>1</sup>

Graph 3: Has the government submitted reports to parliament about the implementation of the SDGs?



**Question A (iv) - Which of the following organizations have submitted reports to parliament about the implementation of the SDGs?**

This is very similar to Question A (iii), but instead of asking if *governments* had submitted the reports, respondents were asked to choose from a list of *organizations* that might have done so, with the option "Other" and a space for indicating organizations not listed.

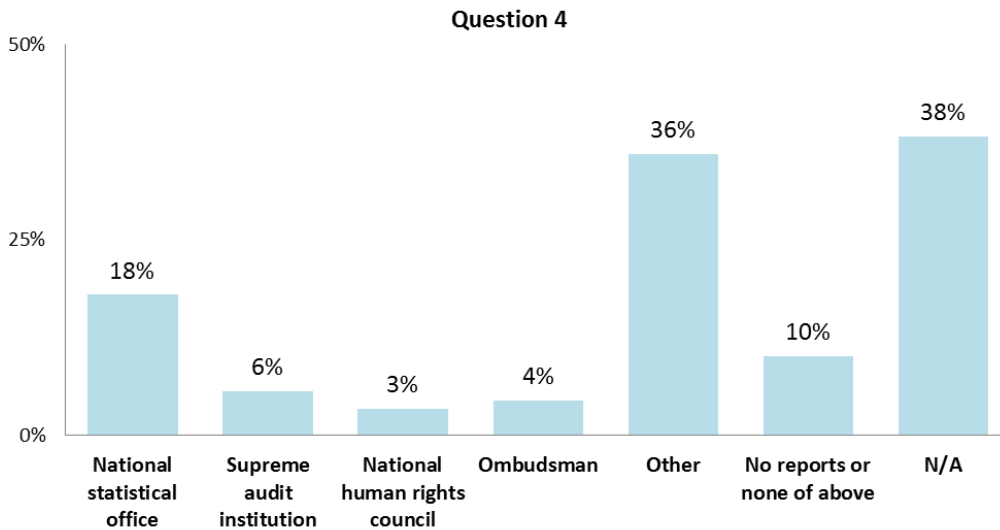
Sixteen respondents chose "National statistical office", with far fewer choosing "Supreme audit institution", "National human rights council" or "Ombudsman". Thirty-eight per cent of the respondents gave no answer, and 36 per cent chose "Other", specifying ministries or other governmental departments or organizations in most cases.

Ten per cent of the respondents answered that no reports had been submitted. The actual figure may be higher, however, because some of the respondents who chose "Other" went on to write "None" when asked to specify – and also because the large number of missing answers (from 34 countries) could reflect the absence of such reports.

The reporting mechanisms indicated by the respondents vary. In some countries official and independent bodies already report to parliament on SDG-related matters. In others, new bodies have been created for that purpose.

In Greece, for example, such reports come from official bodies – the "National statistical office", "National human rights council" or "Ombudsman" – as well as from independent authorities concerned with related thematic areas, such as the Hellenic Consumer's Ombudsman, the Hellenic Recycling Agency, the Regulatory Authority for Energy, etc.

<sup>1</sup>The formula used:  
SUMPRODUCT(((DATA!Z2:Z300="\*")+ (DATA!AA2:AA300="\*")+ (DATA!AB2:AB300="\*")+ (DATA!AC2:AC300="\*")+ (DataQ4!A2:A300="Other. Please specify:"))\*(DATA!W2:W300="No"))

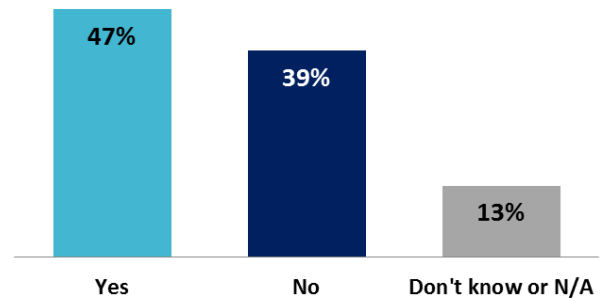


**Question A (v) – Has the government made ministerial statements to parliament about the SDGs?**

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) answered "Yes".

Looking at the data from Questions A (iv) and v) together, the governments of 36 per cent of the respondents had both made ministerial statements *and* submitted reports to parliament. This indicates that in most cases where a government made ministerial statements it also submitted reports to parliament.

Question 5 - Has the government made ministerial statements to parliament about the SDGs?



Ministerial statements in the Fijian parliament, where "SDG Champions" raise questions and promote debate on linkage between the SDGs and government programmes, have reflected the steps being taken to make SDGs a national priority.

Fiji was one of the first parliaments to use the IPU/UNDP self-assessment toolkit.

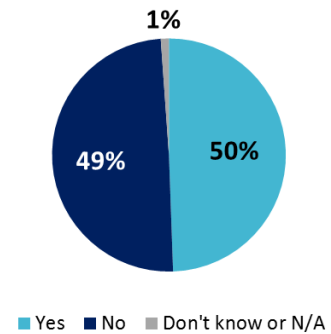
### Question A (vi) - Has parliament held plenary debates on the SDGs?

The responses were evenly divided between parliaments that had held and not held plenary debates (50% and 49%, respectively). Only one respondent gave no answer to this question.

A small number of the respondents mentioned that such debates normally take place when legislation related to the SDGs and their implementation is being drafted.

An example given in the response from Canada concerned a non-binding motion tabled in the Senate, in March 2017, by a member of the Executive Committee of the IPU's Canadian Group: That the Senate take note of Agenda 2030 and the related sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations on September 25, 2015, and encourage the Government of Canada to take account of them as it drafts legislation and develops policy relating to sustainable development. This debate was ongoing when Canada responded to the IPU Survey. During debate on the motion, one Senator discussed the connection between achieving the SDG goals and addressing the interrelated problems of poverty, deficits in public health and housing, discrimination, criminalization and incarceration in Canada, described as disproportionately affecting the country's indigenous peoples. Such deliberations are important because they highlight how the SDGs are interconnected and how they can help countries address priority issues.

Question 6 - Has parliament held plenary debates on the SDGs?



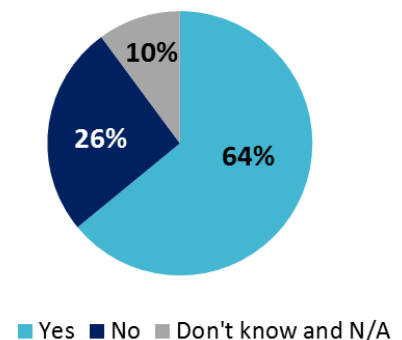
### Question A (vii) - Have any parliamentary questions been asked about the SDGs?

Most of the respondents (64%), answered "Yes", parliamentary questions had been asked about the SDGs, with just over a quarter (26%) answering "No". Ten per cent did not know or chose not to answer.

The frequency of parliamentary questions varied. They were quite frequent in some countries, such as Ireland, where 96 parliamentary questions (written and oral) had related to the SDGs between 1 January 2016 and 30 June 2018.

At the other end of the scale, in Finland, there had been only one such question in 2016 and another in 2017 (both oral). Similarly, the former and current governments of New Zealand had been asked such questions in December 2016, June 2017, and April 2018. Most countries did not provide exact figures, answering merely that "many questions" had been asked, or that questions had been asked "regularly".

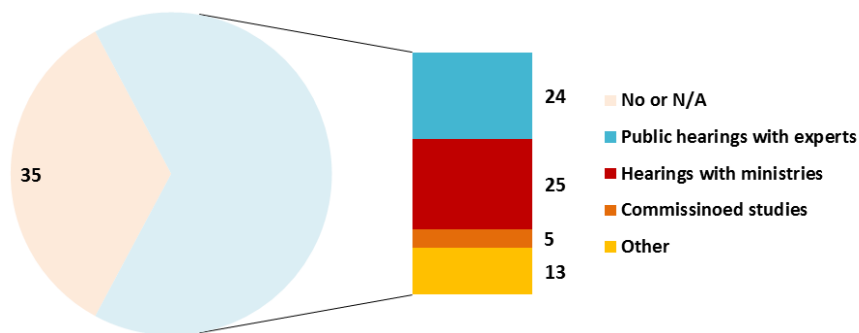
7. Have any parliamentary questions been asked about the SDGs?



**Question A (viii) - Have any parliamentary committees held inquiries into the SDGs? If yes, please specify the nature of the inquiries.**

Sixty per cent of the respondents indicated that parliamentary committees in their countries had held inquiries of various kinds into the SDGs. Most had consisted of "hearings with ministries" (28%) or "public hearings with experts and others" (27%). Only five parliaments had "commissioned studies". Fifteen per cent of the respondents chose "Other", specifying in many cases that committees usually held inquiries during their committee meetings.

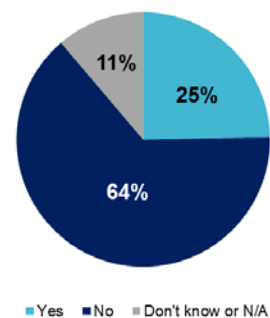
**Question 8 Parliamentary Committee Inquiries into the SDGs (N°)**



**Question A (ix) - Have any parliamentary committees published reports on the SDGs?**

Only 25 per cent of the respondents answered that parliamentary committees had published such reports. Most of the respondents (65%) answered that no such reports had been published, commenting in some cases (e.g. Pakistan and Sudan) that plans had been made to do so shortly. In Indonesia reports had been published annually on work and recommendations for achievement of the SDGs. In Switzerland, on the other hand, parliamentary committees had not published reports, demonstrating how different such processes can be from one parliament to the next.

**Question 9 - Have any parliamentary committees published reports on the SDGs?**

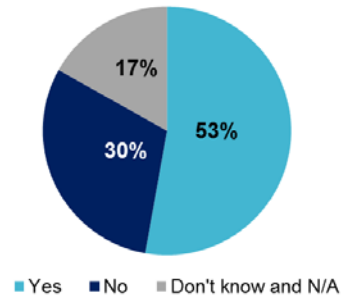


**Question A (x) - Has parliament taken action to ensure the SDGs are reflected in the national budget?**

Most of the responding parliaments (53%) indicated that they had taken action to ensure the SDGs were so reflected; 17 per cent did not know if they had, and 30 per cent knew they had not.

The way countries incorporate the SDGs into their budgets varies. While some allocate their budgets to broad areas, such as health and education, that merely relate to the SDGs, Suriname's Ministry of Internal Affairs has introduced a special budget, presented to and approved by parliament, specifically aimed at facilitating and advancing achievement of the SDGs. Similarly, Indonesia's House of Representatives reports that it ensures SDGs are reflected in the national budget during its budget meetings with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of National Development Planning.

Question 10 - Has parliament taken action to ensure the SDGs are reflected in the national budget?



**Parliamentary mechanisms on the SDGs**

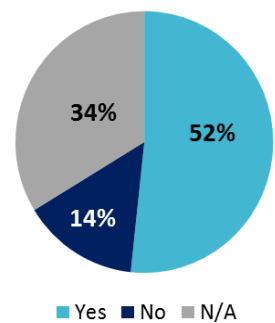
**Question A - Are there any parliamentary mechanisms specifically dedicated to the SDGs?**

Fifty-two per cent of the respondents reported that at least one such parliamentary mechanism had been established. Examples included informal groups or networks; a focal point system; a parliamentary body for the SDGs and other specifically dedicated mechanisms.

Fifteen per cent of the respondents indicated that no such mechanism had been established. The actual figure may be much higher, since over a third (34%) gave no answer to this question.

Asked for more information about each such parliamentary mechanism, respondents classified most of the mechanisms as formal and permanent.

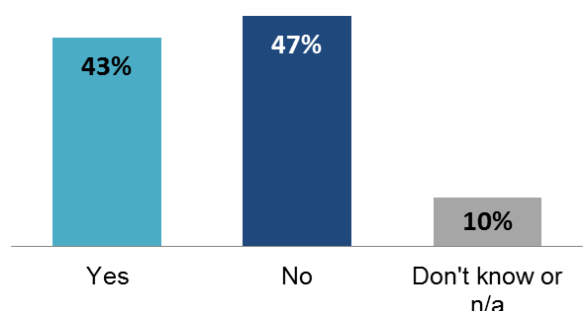
Question 2A



**Question B - Have the SDGs been mainstreamed into the work of all relevant parliamentary committees?**

The percentage of parliaments that *had* mainstreamed the SDGs into the work of all relevant parliamentary committees (43%) was very similar to the percentage that *had not* done so (47%). This polarity underscores how differently parliaments organize their work on the SDGs.

Question B





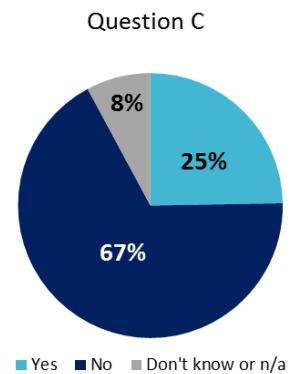
They also take different approaches to mainstreaming, as illustrated by the examples below.

As stated in its response, Canada does not have a single parliamentary committee mandated to oversee SDG implementation. Nor does it have multiple committees to oversee the implementation of specific SDGs. Instead, SDGs are addressed by parliamentary committees according to their existing remit and authority. For example, when reviewing legislation in 2016, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development (Environment Committee) studied Canada's Federal Sustainable Development Act and made recommendations to the federal government for implementation of the SDGs. The Government of Canada subsequently tabled legislation amending the Federal Sustainable Development Act so that it now addresses SDGs 6, 7 and 15, ensuring sustainable management of water, energy and eco-systems.

Fiji indicated in its response that its Standing Orders of Parliament make it mandatory for parliamentary committees, when conducting any inquiry, to enquire into how the SDGs have been addressed, with a focus on gender consideration. This places an onus on parliamentary committees to report on the SDGs.

**Question C - Has the responsibility for coordination of work on the SDGs been assigned to a specific parliamentary body or structure?**

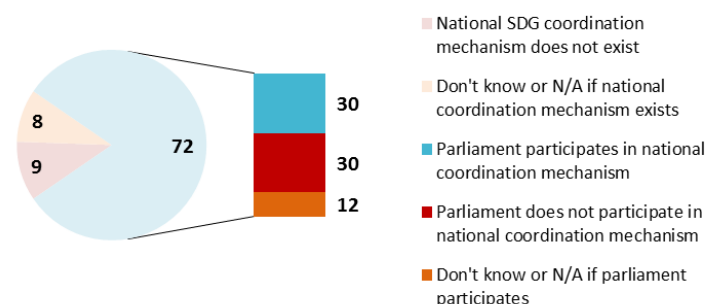
According to the responses, one quarter of the parliaments (25%) had assigned the responsibility for coordinating work on the SDGs to a specific parliamentary body or structure, and typically to a committee or a "sustainable development committee" more specifically.



**Question D - Is there a national SDG coordination mechanism? Does parliament participate in this national SDG coordination mechanism?**

The existence of a national SDG coordination mechanism was reported by 72 of the responding countries (81% of the total). In 30 of those 72 countries (42%) parliament had participated in this national coordination mechanism, while in an equal number it had not.

**Question 2D: Parliamentary participation in national SDG coordination mechanism (N°)**



**Question E - Countries having submitted a review of progress on the SDGs to the UNHLPF**

Fifty-six of the surveyed countries reported having submitted a voluntary national review (VNR) of progress on the SDGs to the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

- Parliaments in 43 per cent of those 56 countries had been consulted in the preparation of the most recent VNR, but almost the same percentage (in 41% of those countries) had not. Sixteen per cent of the respondents either did not know if parliament had been consulted or did not answer.
- In 41 per cent of the countries having submitted a VNR, parliament had been included in the official delegation that had presented the most recent version, while in approximately 39 per cent it had not. Twenty per cent of the respondents either did not know if parliament had been included or did not answer.
- Parliament had discussed the HLPF's conclusions and recommendations in 25 per cent of the countries participating in that forum, but had not done so in more than half of those countries.
- Fifty-two per cent of the parliaments had not conducted hearings with the Executive about its plans to implement these conclusions and recommendations, while only 32 per cent had conducted such hearings.

