Background: Institutions are paramount to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is well recognised in the Agenda itself. Four years after the start of the implementation of the Agenda, governance issues remain at the forefront. A study of the voluntary national reviews (VNR) presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) in 2019 highlighted that 38 out of 47 countries had identified governance as a key priority for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, significantly more than in previous years.

Since 2015, countries have adjusted their institutional frameworks to support their commitments to implementing the 2030 Agenda. This has comprised, inter alia: the incorporation of the SDGs and other elements of the Agenda into the national institutional context (for instance, national strategies and plans, planning and budget processes, work of parliaments); the creation of new institutions (for example, high-level coordination mechanisms or technical working groups); and setting up new mechanisms for engaging various stakeholders around SDG implementation. Prevailing institutional arrangements have been documented for many countries, in particular thanks to the VNR reports presented by countries at the HLPF every year. The VNRs have supported the development of a larger ecosystem around SDG follow-up and review, with many insights provided by civil society organizations, international organizations, and others.

However, while institutional arrangements at a given point in time have been well documented, their effectiveness remains so far less explored, and will be the primary focus of the World Public Sector Report 2021. Two aspects are especially relevant in this context.

First, the report will consider the time dimension of institutional changes. Over the past five years, governments have had time to try different institutional responses and adjust their institutional systems to better accommodate the requirements of the 2030 Agenda, sometimes based on evaluations of the effectiveness of prior arrangements. Unfortunately, the VNRs have focused little on this aspect so far. Most of them do not reflect in detail the changes that have been made over time, nor the reasons for those changes. Yet, understanding the rationale for these changes is critical for a broader understanding of how effective the institutional arrangements for the SDGs are.

1 See A/RES/70/1 found at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.
3 Three examples, among many, are: DESA’s annual syntheses of VNRs; DESA/DPIDG’s Compendium of national institutional arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and annual reports by CCIC and other CSOs, Progressing National SDGs Implementation.
Second, the report will respond to the need for a more systemic understanding of the institutional arrangements for SDG implementation as they relate to broad functions of the policy process (for example, monitoring and evaluation). This involves looking at how the different institutional pieces fit together as a system in relation to a specific function, focusing on the relationships that exist among them, and assessing how well the prevailing institutional arrangements work in practice. For an illustration, see Figure 1 below.

*Figure 1: Systemic view of the monitoring and evaluation system around the SDGs in Finland in 2017.*

It is only by looking at those interrelationships and the actual workings of institutions that the effectiveness of institutional arrangements in relation to policy functions can be assessed. Taking monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as an example, this means examining how existing processes of data collection, analysis and reporting (e.g., SDG indicators, but also other M&E processes in place at the macroeconomic or sector level) inform policy-making; whether information systems put in place for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and other information systems mutually support one another; how reports produced by the government or other actors are examined and validated by parliaments and audited internally and externally; and how the information produced in the context of SDG monitoring at the national level informs the national policy debate and opens up channels of engagement for non-State actors.

In practice, the two dimensions highlighted above are linked. Presumably, at least some changes in institutional arrangements are effected by governments in response to the identification of underperforming mechanisms (for instance, coordination mechanisms led by agencies with insufficient political clout) or weak linkages (for instance, lack of feedback between parliaments and government on SDG implementation).

Some countries have communicated the importance of this systemic view of institutional arrangements for SDG implementation since the beginning. However, this remains rather the exception. Existing studies based on VNRs tend to describe individual pieces of the institutional system (for instance, high-level mechanisms for coordination of SDG implementation) and practices relating to those (for instance, civil society engagement) rather than systematically...
documenting how various actors and processes work as a system to deliver certain functions. A key reason for this is that VNR reports themselves – the primary source of information used by those studies – are usually not conceived in this way.

The World Public Sector Report 2021 aims to bridge this gap. The report will rely on the massive amount of information on progress in SDG implementation at the national level that has been produced since 2015 by governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and academia, among other actors.

Objective: The main objective of the report is to document key trends in the institutional arrangements adopted by countries to implement the 2030 Agenda, and to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of those arrangements in relation to the performance of key functions of the policy process. The report also aims to highlight novel and innovative practices adopted by countries to remedy shortcomings, with a view to enabling the exchange of experiences and practices in this regard.

Conceptual framework: The focus of the report will be on functions of the policy process (e.g., strategy and planning; implementation; monitoring and evaluation) and on underlying actions and processes supporting them (e.g., capacity building in public administration). The analysis will focus on how institutions and actors work together as a system to deliver specific functions. The first stage in such analysis is to map the various actors that contribute to a particular function, as well as their relationships in the delivery of that function as codified by law or enshrined in practice. The second step is to look at strengths and weaknesses that exist both in the different pieces of the system and in the connections that exist among them, with a view to identifying “strong links” and “weak links”. Ideally, a cross-country analysis performed on a sufficient number of countries at similar levels of institutional capacity should elicit common strengths and weaknesses, as well as practices adopted by some countries to address perceived challenges.

Methodology: Given the existing landscape of information on institutional arrangements for SDG implementation at the national level, the preparation of the report will adopt a multi-source, multi-method and tiered approach.

A first level of information, which is available for a large number of countries, is that provided by VNR reports from 2016 to 2020. Even though information pertaining to institutional arrangements varies considerably across countries, the VNR reports and derived analyses provide a first layer of information for more than 150 countries. Analysis of this information would reveal broad-based trends regarding the way countries have adapted their institutions to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

A second tier would be a restricted sample of countries – 3 or 4 per UN region, or 15 to 20 in total, for which additional information would be sought. Beyond regional representation, criteria for inclusion of countries in this sample would include: the depth of the VNR report and other national documentation regarding institutional arrangements and their evolution since

4 As an illustration, DESA/DPIG’s Compendium documents institutional arrangements for the SDGs in the following nine areas: high-level institutional arrangements; national strategies for sustainable development; involvement of Parliaments; involvement of local authorities; involvement of supreme audit institutions; engaging and equipping public servants; engaging civil society and the private sector; arrangements for monitoring and review; and budgeting processes.
2015; countries known for cutting-edge practices in relation to a specific policy function (e.g., incorporating SDGs in strategies and plans; policy integration; planning and budgeting; monitoring and evaluation); countries having commissioned independent evaluations of the performance of their institutional arrangements for implementing the SDGs, or where related assessments have been performed by supreme audit institutions or other actors.

Countries in the restricted sample would be examined in greater detail. For those countries, the report team would attempt a systematic mapping of institutional systems in relation to specific functions, and gather information on the performance of those systems. Sources of information in addition to published reports would include as appropriate: questionnaires addressed to governments; interviews with national level actors; targeted calls for inputs or deeper collaboration with international organizations or networks catering to specific types of institutional actors (e.g. parliaments, supreme audit institutions, local governments, schools of public administration). The analysis based on information collected for those countries would be validated at an expert group meeting to be organised in late 2020.

**Structure of the report:** The report will have four chapters (see below), preceded by a short introduction. An executive summary will synthesize the main findings and messages. For reasons of conciseness, a choice was made not to cover in depth all the relevant policy functions and supporting processes since some of them (for instance, budgeting and policy integration) had been covered in recent editions of the Report. Three substantive chapters (chapters 2, 3 and 4) will focus respectively on: documenting institutional changes at the national level in relation to SDG implementation; assessing the performance, strength and weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation systems for the SDGs; and analysing efforts made by governments to enhance capacity in public administration to implement the SDGs. Salient points regarding other policy functions will be reflected in a first synthesis chapter.

**WPSR 2021: Potential chapters**

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Synthesis: how are institutional arrangements of SDG implementation working?
- **Chapter 2** Institutional changes at the national level in response to the 2030 Agenda
- **Chapter 3** Monitoring and evaluation systems for the SDGs
- **Chapter 4** Capacities for SDG implementation in public administration: a stocktaking

Source: DPIDG.
**Draft chapter outline**

**Introduction**

The introduction will present the scope of the report, its analytical framework and methodology; introduce the main research questions; and present the outline and focus of the rest of the report.

**Chapter 1: National institutional arrangements for the SDGs: How well are they working?**

This chapter will synthesize the findings of research done for the report. It will highlight the strengths and weaknesses stemming from the analysis of the interaction among key policy functions: strategizing and planning; budgeting; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation; in the context of SDG implementation. The chapter will aim to present commonalities in terms of strengths and challenges faced by countries at different levels of development to make institutions work better for delivering the SDGs. It will also highlight promising practices adopted by some countries to address shortcomings in specific institutions and relationships among institutions in relation to specific policy functions.

**Research questions:**

1. What areas and policy functions have countries focused on in their attempts to adapt their institutional systems to the 2030 Agenda? What critical policy functions have been less addressed?
2. How are different types of institutions involved in the various policy functions? Are there common patterns in terms of strengths and weak links among those institutions in relation to SDG implementation?
3. How well is the institutional apparatus put in place around the 2030 Agenda integrated with other policy and institutional processes? Are the institutional setups put in place around SDG implementation reinforcing the broader institutional systems, or are they largely operating in silo?
4. What is the available evidence of the effectiveness of efforts to make institutions work better as a system for delivering on the SDGs?
5. To what extent are institutional arrangements in relation to different policy functions working in an integrated and systemic way to support the implementation of the SDGs?
6. How have government efforts to enhance the capacity of public administration worked in practice to support the implementation of the SDGs?
7. What are key prospects, challenges and opportunities for national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation in the medium term (5 years)?

**Chapter 2. Integrating the SDGs into national institutional frameworks: a five-year stocktaking**

This chapter will attempt a comparative analysis of institutional arrangements adopted by countries to deliver specific functions in relation to SDG implementation. The analysis will be based on information for a large number of countries collected through existing sources (VNR
reports and analyses thereof), as well as more in-depth information collected on a restricted sample of countries. For the latter, mappings showing the relationships among different institutional actors in the delivery of key functions - strategizing and planning; budgeting; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation - will be developed. The chapter will also aim to document the rationale behind the choices and adjustments of institutional setups, based on national timelines of institutional change and country-level information. Novel and innovative practices at the country level will be used to illustrate the potential for countries to more fully incorporate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into their national institutional frameworks.

Research questions:

1. What adjustments have been made over time in the institutional arrangements for SDG implementation (e.g. National Sustainable Development Strategies, National Development Plans, high-level coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation sectoral strategies and plans, planning and budgeting processes, monitoring and evaluation, oversight)? What factors explain those changes?
2. What has been attempted to make institutions work better (individually and as a system) for delivering the SDGs? (Government leadership and commitment to the 2030 Agenda; horizontal integration, vertical integration, whole of society approaches)
3. Are there any trends/patterns across countries in terms of changes in the institutional arrangements supporting different policy process for delivering on the SDGs?
4. What systems have countries put in place to assess the effectiveness of their institutional arrangements for SDG implementation (e.g. evaluations, audits)?
5. How have lessons from the first 4 years of implementation been fed back into institutional design?

Chapter 3. Monitoring and evaluation systems for the SDGs

This chapter will attempt to analyse the performance of monitoring and evaluation systems for the SDGs. While considering individual elements of such systems (for instance, the production of indicators for the follow-up and review of progress on the SDGs), the analysis will focus on the relationship among the different parts of the M&E system. This includes, for example, how the M&E system for the SDGs is connected to key institutions and processes in terms of accountability and oversight such as parliaments, supreme audit institutions and civil society. The chapter will also look into how well the M&E system for the SDGs is integrated with other M&E processes and whether the various M&E processes are supporting each other (e.g. increase in statistical capacity in government; improved performance indicators for the national development plan or the budget). Broader political economy questions which the chapter will pose are how M&E systems for the SDGs inform government actions beyond the preparation of voluntary national reviews; and whether information produced in the context of SDG follow-up and review has provided new channels for awareness raising, information sharing and engagement among State and non-State actors. In all these areas, the chapter aims to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, based on the perspectives of different actors.
Research questions:

1. How have national M&E systems for the SDGs been designed, and how do their different components interact both formally and in practice (e.g. reporting, validation, contribution from different levels of government...)?
2. What are the connections (considering both synergies and tensions) between SDG-related M&E systems and processes with other M&E processes? (e.g. for national development plan; for budget performance indicators)?
3. How is the SDG M&E system connected to key accountability and oversight institutions and processes (e.g., Parliament, supreme audit institution), and how does it inform the work of those processes?
4. How has the SDG M&E system informed government action beyond the preparation of the VNR?
5. How have the outputs (data/information) of the M&E system on SDGs been used by different stakeholders to inform decision-making, raise awareness and engage around SDG issues?
6. What is the performance of the M&E system for the SDGs based on available evidence and/or the perceptions of different stakeholders?

Chapter 4. Capacity building for SDG implementation in public administration

This chapter will consider efforts made by governments to enhance the capacity and skills of the national public administration (including sub-national levels as relevant) to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It will consider the priority given to this by governments; the tools and channels that have been mobilized, from broad awareness raising to targeted capacity building in specific policy functions (e.g. planning, budgeting, citizen engagement) and specific parts of government; the actors that are involved in the delivery of capacity building around SDG implementation in the public service; the resources mobilized, the scale of capacity building efforts and their sustainability over time; as well as any indication of impacts and remaining gaps. The chapter will aim to assess the potential for exchange of practices and synergies among national, regional and international actors in capacity building for the SDGs.

Research questions:

1. What has been done by governments and other actors to raise awareness of the SDGs among civil servants?
2. What has been done by governments and other actors to assess capacity needs and gaps for SDG implementation in public administration and to develop strategic responses to address such gaps? (e.g., capacity gaps assessments; government-wide strategies or action plans for capacity building)
3. What has been done by different actors in terms of building the capacity of civil servants, both across government and in specific government departments for implementing the SDGs?
4. As of 2020, what has been the scale of the capacity building efforts, and are there any measurable results and impacts?
5. What are achievements and challenges in terms of enhancing the capacity of public servants to implement the SDGs, and how could the shortcomings be addressed?