

Replies to the questionnaire on

“Human Rights, Transformative Actions and the UN Sustainable Development Goals”

Answers to questions are provided by the Ministry of Environment and Energy of the Hellenic Republic

Greece presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2018 and will present its second VNR at the upcoming 2022 UN High Level Political Forum.

Ensuring the country’s environment protection is equally important, as is its economic growth, social prosperity and cohesion, since the environmental dimension of the SDGs can provide a catalyst and an accelerator for the achievement of all other non-environmental SDGs.

Greece has placed the aim of “building back, better and greener” at the core of its efforts for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, aspiring not to back-track from its long-term environmental objectives, but rather to convert the challenge of embedding the environmental dimension in the stimulus packages, into an opportunity. By maintaining a high level of ambition with regard to environmental protection, in particular the fight against climate change, Greece aims to boost the country’s economy and the society’s resilience, and develop an “insurance policy” against future shocks through its environmental agenda, towards a green and resilient recovery pathway.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) “Greece 2.0” is, in this context, a key instrument for Greece to address not only the need for the necessary post COVID-19 economic recovery, but also to establish the strategic implementation framework to enable sustainable growth, as a green recovery can create new jobs and income, while ensuring that no one is left behind and safeguarding an environmentally sustainable future.

The investments for a “green transition” in our NRRP¹, aligned with the priorities set by the European Union Green Deal (2019) that in turn is aligned to the SDGs, correspond to more than 38% of its total budget, as environmental-related issues heavily impact on both the society and economy. Focus is attributed to energy efficiency, especially in the buildings’ sector, renewables, innovative energy technologies including storage, bioclimatic urban regeneration and electromobility, biodiversity and forests protection, circular economy and adaptation to climate change impacts.

The ambitious green agenda that the Greek Government has adopted and is meticulously implementing with a view to a resource-efficient, low-emission and circular economy,

¹ The green pillar of the NRRP includes, in particular, *inter alia*: the interconnection of Greek islands to the mainland’s power grid; a massive program of energy efficiency renovation for residential, businesses and public sector buildings; the development of publicly accessible infrastructure for boosting e-mobility for the public and private fleet; a new National Reforestation Plan together with the reform of the forest maps; the implementation of comprehensive urban plans and spatial planning frameworks (e.g. the establishment of a new spatial planning with positive impacts in RES, industry, tourism, aquaculture and marine areas is foreseen); as well as initiatives for the adaptation to climate change impacts and biodiversity conservation.

approaches environmental sustainability not as an isolated issue, but as the thread that connects every aspect of our policies:

a. At the heart of this agenda is climate action (SDGs 13 and 7). Greece, firmly committed to the collective efforts to achieve the Paris Agreement objectives, has embraced the European Union's strategic long-term vision for a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. Through the 2019 National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) which is currently being revised, and the first National Climate Law, which will soon be submitted to Parliament, Greece has set ambitious targets for 2030 and 2040, and the objective to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. With this framework, Greece paves a front-loaded decarbonisation path, with quantitative emission reduction targets for all sectors, starting by de-lignitising the country's energy mix by 2028 coupled with a Just Transition Action Plan for the affected lignite producing regions. Greece also aims to increase the share of renewable energy (RES) in gross final energy consumption to 35% until 2030. Among other key objectives is the promotion of smart and e-mobility with the aim 1 out of 3 new cars sold in Greece in 2030 to be electric, and, as an island country, the electrical interconnection of all islands by 2030, to ensure energy security, efficiency and emissions' reduction.

b. With regard to biodiversity, Greece, due to its unique geographic and climatic characteristics, has an exceptionally rich species' and ecosystems' diversity, is a hot-spot for endemism and hosts 30% of Europe's biodiversity (SDG 15). Thus, Greece's green growth efforts go hand-in-hand with the protection of biodiversity. Key current priorities and activities underway to this direction include: the revision of the governance system of the country's numerous protected areas to increase effectiveness of management bodies' operation and activities' performance; the elaboration of Management Plans for all protected Natura 2000 sites; the mapping and assessment of the country's ecosystems and their services (natural capital accounting); as well as filling in the knowledge gaps for species and habitats and further integrating biodiversity considerations in all sectoral policies.

While already achieving SDG 14.5, Greece is committed to the collective goals, at the EU level, of legally protecting a minimum of 30% of the EU's land areas and 30% of the EU sea areas by 2030 with 10% of land and sea under strict protection², and at the Mediterranean level, of protecting 30% of the Mediterranean by 2030. In this context and with regard to marine biodiversity (SDG 14), Greece has committed to reduce overfishing, by declaring 10% of our seas will be no-take reserves, by 2030³.

c. The shift to a circular economy (SDG 12) is another major priority that for Greece is much more than innovation in waste management and resource efficiency: it can help stimulate employment, promote entrepreneurship and new businesses as well as awareness among the society at large on sustainable development and strengthening of social ties between groups and citizens. With a new National Circular Economy Action Plan for the period 2021-2025, Greece aims to promote the circular and sustainable use of resources, to urgently address plastic pollution and to support sustainable production and consumption as well as environmentally sound waste management. Furthermore, a law on reducing single-use

² EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-annex-eu-biodiversity-strategy-2030_en.pdf)

^{3,4}: Commitments announced by the Greek Prime Minister at the IUCN World Congress in Marseilles (3 September 2021) at the launching event of the "Mediterranean: a model sea by 2030" Initiative.

plastics, giving priority to sustainable and re-usable products, thus reducing plastic waste generated, has been adopted and is implemented already since 2020.

Greece, with its extended coastline and high number of islands, is considerably affected by plastic marine litter that negatively impact on marine ecosystems as well as on important economic activities such as tourism and fishing. In this context, Greece has adopted the target to reduce plastic litter at sea by 50% and microplastics released into the environment by 30%, by 2030⁴.