

Assessing Progress in Sustainable Governance in EU and OECD Countries

Results of the Sustainable Governance Indicators Survey

In a nutshell



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May 2025

Published by

Bertelsmann Stiftung

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256, 33311 Gütersloh

www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

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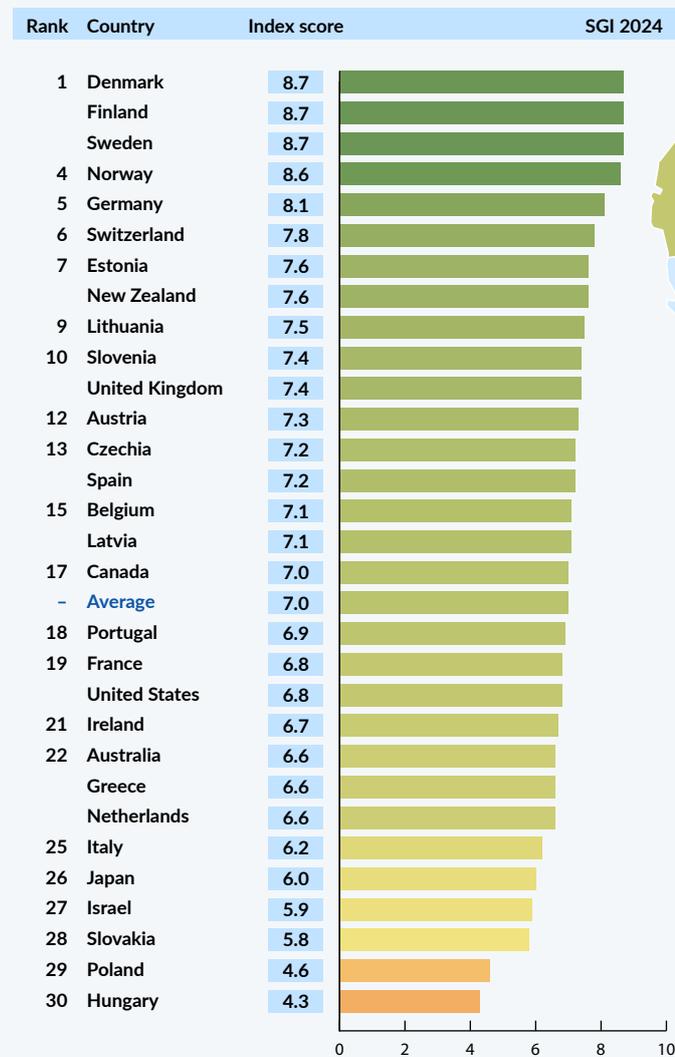
Table of contents

Overall performance in sustainable policymaking	6
Overall performance in sustainable governance	7
Executive summary	10
About our dataset	15

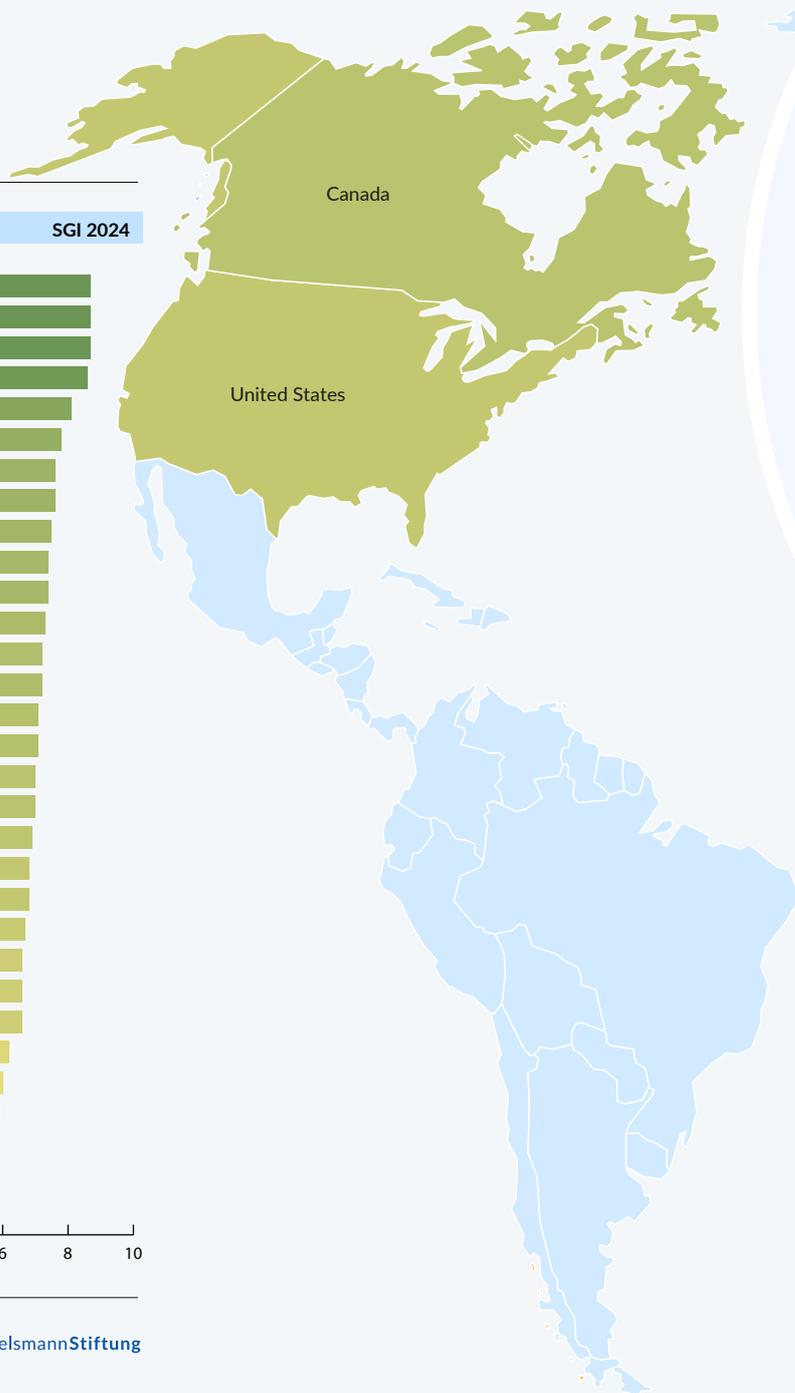
Find the complete report, along with graphics, at www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de and www.sgi-network.org.

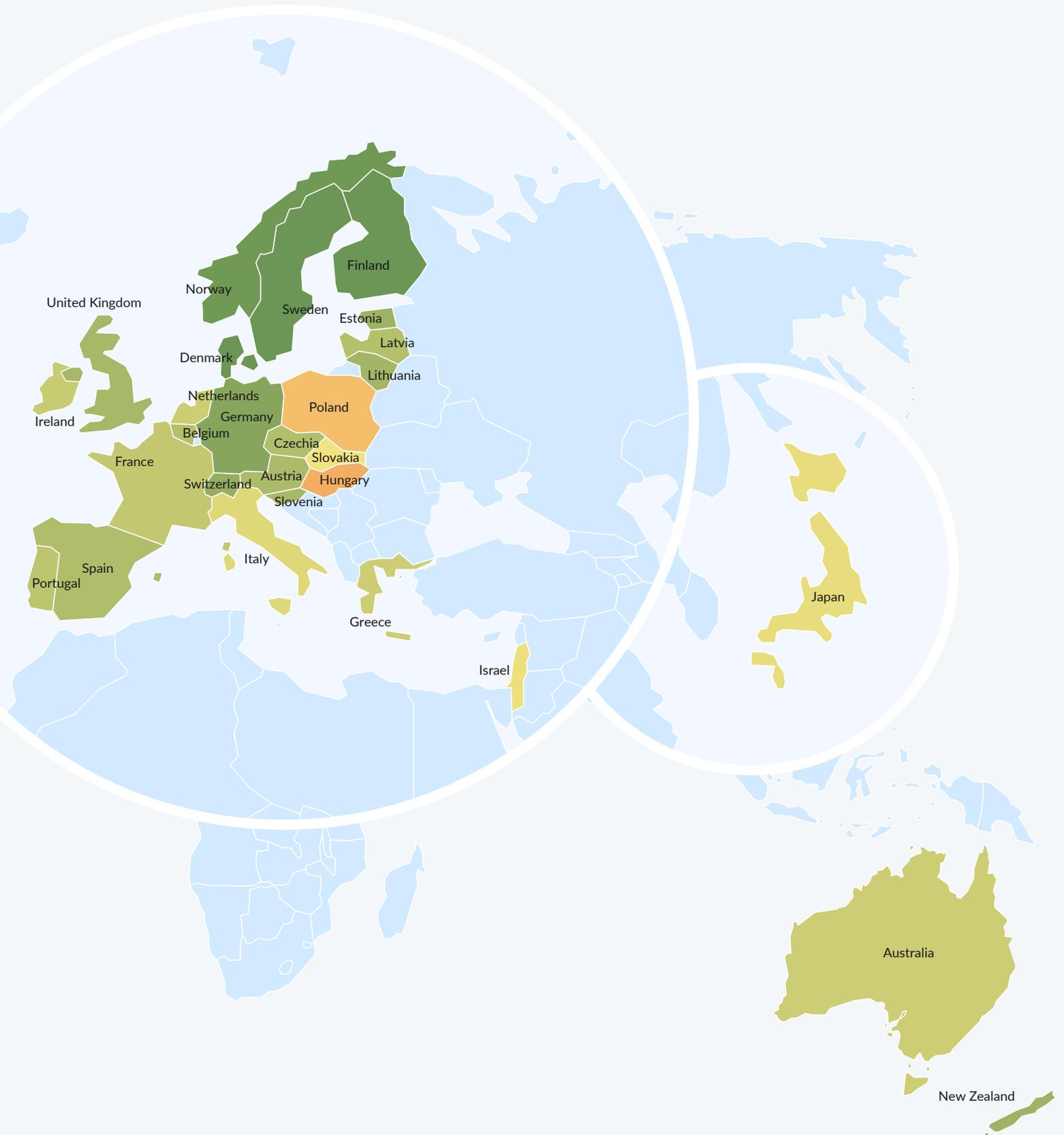
Sustainable Governance in 30 OECD and EU Countries

FIGURE 1 Sustainable Governance



Score: standardized, 1–10





Overall performance in sustainable policymaking

The Nordic countries have made notable advancements in sustainable policymaking, as evidenced by their historical achievements and current policy strategies across economic, social and environmental sectors. However, even in these countries, there remains a need for coherent policy solutions that fully align with sustainable development goals and the Paris Agreement. Conversely, in Hungary, Poland, Israel and Slovakia, policymaking has often relied on short-term solutions and ad hoc measures.

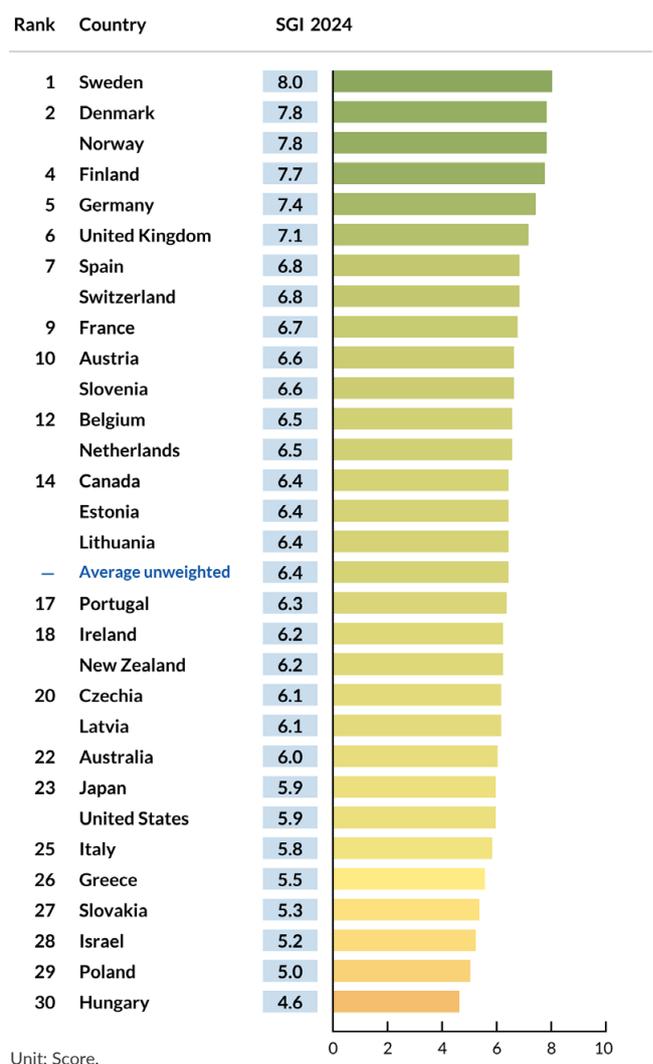
While G7 countries possess substantial economic power and share a collective responsibility to advance sustainable development, their overall performance in sustainable policymaking remains mixed. Germany, the United Kingdom, and France have demonstrated the most significant progress in this area (see figure 2).

The following priorities remain high on the agenda for most OECD and EU countries surveyed:

- Strengthening policy coherence across key areas of economic, social and environmental sustainability
- Creating favorable conditions for the transition to a circular economy
- Developing a robust innovation system that leverages research and innovation as catalysts for transitioning to a more sustainable economy
- Transforming welfare states into forward-looking entities capable of implementing effective policies that combine aspects of sustainability, empowerment and protection
- Identifying sustainable policy solutions to ensure equal access to basic public services and basic income support to meet human needs and contribute to global poverty reduction

- Preventing excessive disparities in policy outcomes related to the effective protection of the environment and health, as well as contributions to global environmental protection

FIGURE 2 Sustainable policymaking: overall performance



Unit: Score.

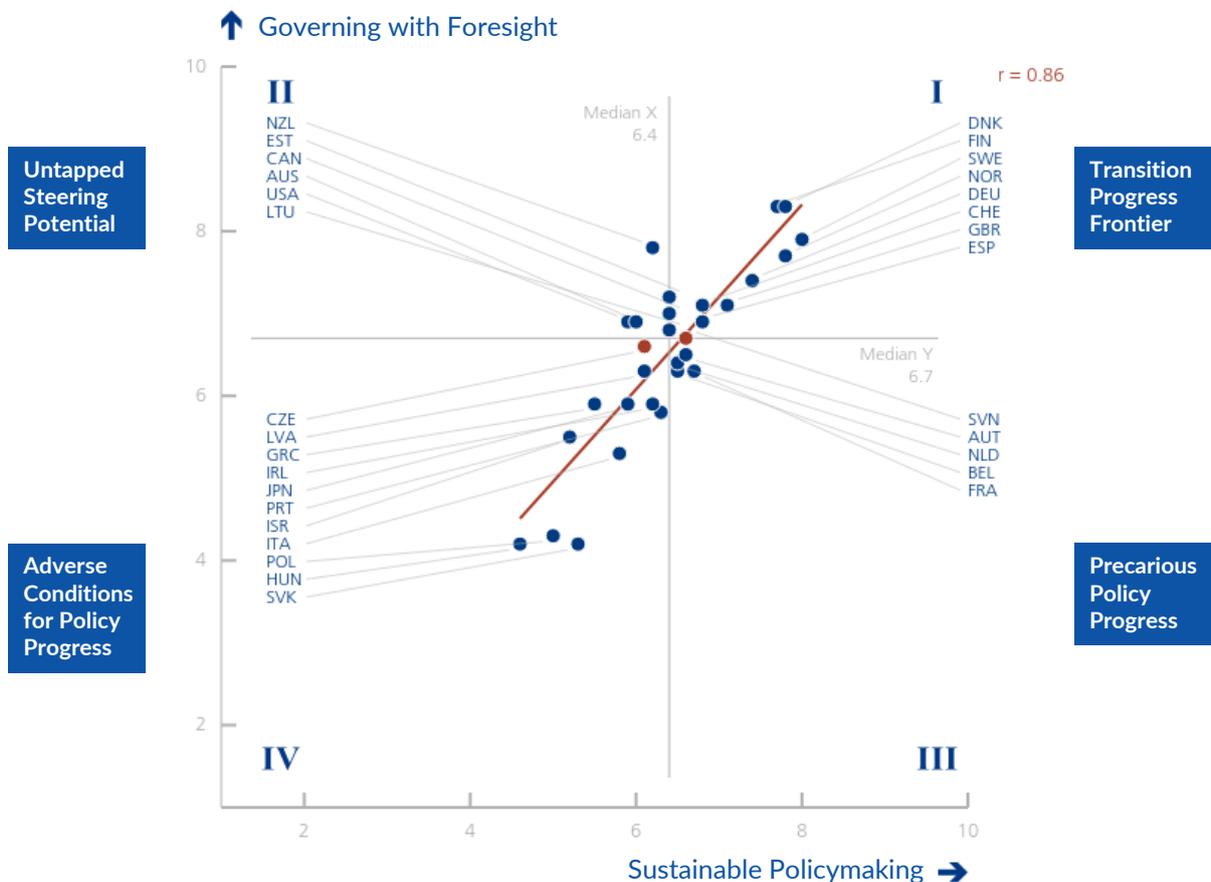
Source and metadata:
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Overall performance in sustainable governance

A future-oriented approach to policymaking should also include improvements to the machinery of government. Governments in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway regularly assess and refine their structures, procedures and tools, contributing to governmental efficiency, effectiveness and foresight. This practice has led to cohesive and sustainable policy strategies. New Zealand, Estonia, Canada, Australia, the United States and Lithuania may benefit from reassessing their policy portfolios to enhance future policy performance.

Similarly, Slovenia, Australia, the Netherlands, Belgium and France could strengthen the strategic capacity of their politico-administrative systems to sustain policy progress. To address future policy challenges, governments in Czechia, Latvia, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Portugal, Israel, Italy, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia would benefit from greater investment in improving the coherence of their policy portfolios as well as their executive capacities (see figure 3).

FIGURE 3 Correlation between governing with foresight and sustainable policymaking

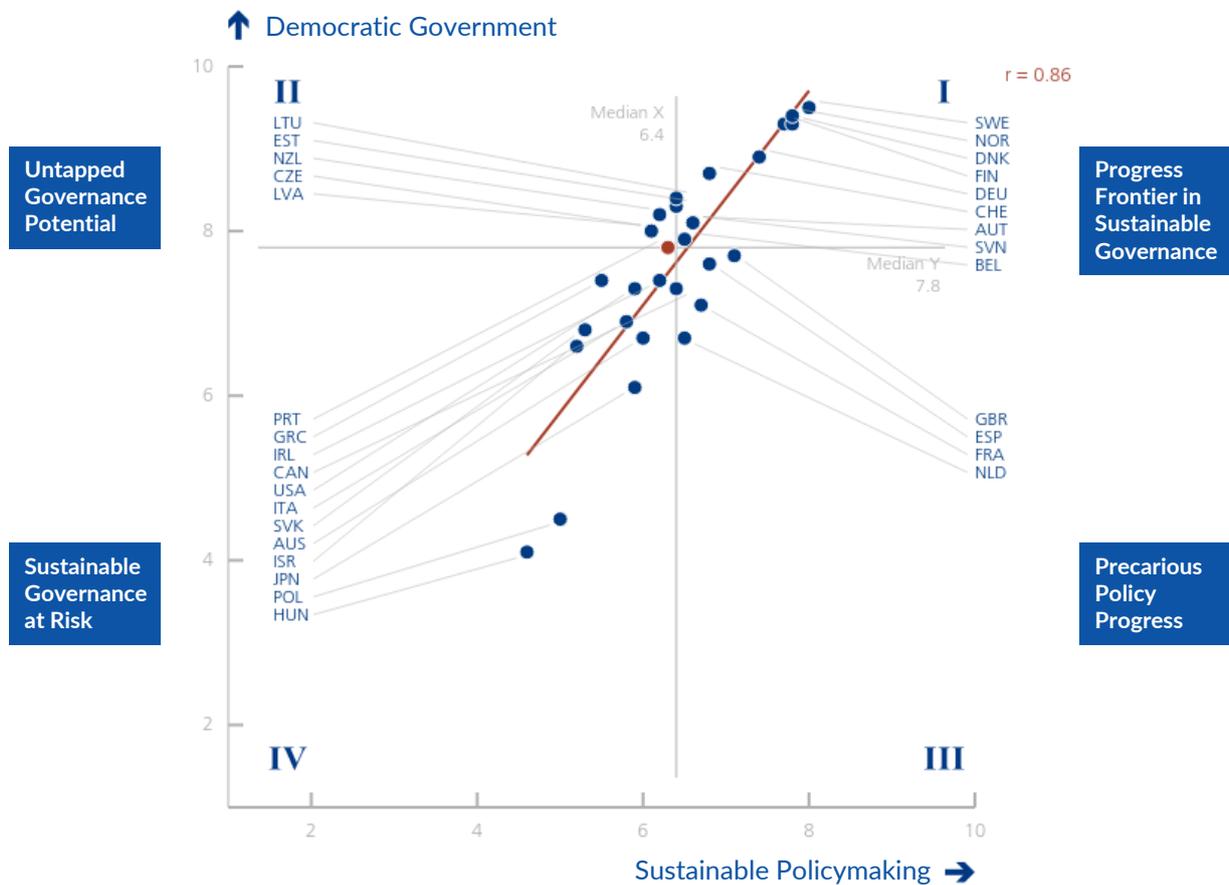


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Sustainable policymaking is most effective in environments with strong democratic oversight mechanisms that enhance citizens' trust in state institutions. The governments of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Switzerland have established robust accountability mechanisms between the executive branch and citizens through free and fair elections, socially rooted political parties, effective cross-party collaboration and comprehensive access to official

information. Additionally, media freedom and pluralism, a strong civil society and an effective separation of powers contribute significantly to maintaining democratic accountability in these nations. These countries exemplify the forefront of progress in sustainable governance due to both their sustainable policy strategies and their robust societal accountability mechanisms (see figure 4).

FIGURE 4 Correlation between democratic government and sustainable policymaking



Source and metadata:
www.sgi-network.org/2024/Survey_Structure.

Countries such as Lithuania, Estonia, New Zealand, Czechia and Latvia might benefit from reassessing their policy portfolios and strategies to fully unlock their potential in sustainable governance. To maintain recent policy advancements, the UK, Spain, France and the Netherlands should consider reforms to safeguard and reinforce their democratic institutions.

Conversely, sustainable governance in Greece, Ireland, Canada, the United States, Italy, Slovakia, Australia, Israel, Japan, Poland and Hungary is currently at risk. These countries would benefit from increased efforts to strengthen democratic oversight mechanisms and enhance sustainable policymaking processes (see figure 5).

FIGURE 5 Overall performance in sustainable governance

Rank	Country	Democratic Government	Governing with Foresight	Sustainable Policymaking	Ø
1	Denmark	9.3	8.3	7.8	8.7
	Finland	9.3	8.3	7.7	8.7
	Sweden	9.5	7.9	8.0	8.7
4	Norway	9.4	7.7	7.8	8.6
5	Germany	8.9	7.4	7.4	8.1
6	Switzerland	8.7	7.1	6.8	7.8
7	Estonia	8.3	7.2	6.4	7.6
	New Zealand	8.2	7.8	6.2	7.6
9	Lithuania	8.4	6.8	6.4	7.5
10	Slovenia	8.1	6.7	6.6	7.4
	United Kingdom	7.7	7.1	7.1	7.4
12	Austria	8.1	6.5	6.6	7.3
13	Czechia	8.0	6.6	6.1	7.2
	Spain	7.6	6.9	6.8	7.2
15	Belgium	7.9	6.3	6.5	7.1
	Latvia	8.0	6.3	6.1	7.1
17	Canada	7.3	7.0	6.4	7.0
–	Average	7.6	6.5	6.4	7.0
18	Portugal	7.8	5.8	6.3	6.9
19	France	7.1	6.3	6.7	6.8
	United States	7.3	6.9	5.9	6.8
21	Ireland	7.4	5.9	6.2	6.7
22	Australia	6.7	6.9	6.0	6.6
	Greece	7.4	5.9	5.5	6.6
	Netherlands	6.7	6.4	6.5	6.6
25	Italy	6.9	5.3	5.8	6.2
26	Japan	6.1	5.9	5.9	6.0
27	Israel	6.6	5.5	5.2	5.9
28	Slovakia	6.8	4.2	5.3	5.8
29	Poland	4.5	4.3	5.0	4.6
30	Hungary	4.1	4.2	4.6	4.3

Unit: Score.

Source and metadata:
www.sgi-network.org/2024/Survey_Structure.

SGI Sustainable
 Governance
 Indicators

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Key findings, by reform priorities

The key findings are structured around the following reform priorities:

Effectiveness of **transformational policy strategies** targeting a resource-efficient and climate-neutral economy

Strengthening **democratic accountability** through vertical, diagonal and horizontal mechanisms

Governing with foresight by enhancing coordination, consensus-building and sensemaking

Advancing sustainable policymaking in economic, social and environmental sustainability

1. Transformational policies for a resource-efficient, climate-neutral economy

- Affluent democracies that have implemented ambitious, consistent climate frameworks often also develop effective policies for transitioning to a decarbonized energy system or circular economy.
- Even forerunners such as Sweden, Finland, Spain, and Denmark still face challenges in aligning policy goals, institutions and policy measures or in developing safeguards to ensure the efficient implementation of their ambitious climate policies.
- Meanwhile, all 30 OECD and EU countries evaluated are only beginning to prepare for a shift toward a circular economy. Our sectoral analysis highlights opportunities and barriers for transformational policy strategies to succeed.

Good practices

- In **Denmark**, an independent climate council monitors annual progress, while a new six-member internal committee, led by the Ministry of Finance, coordinates climate policies across sectors. The country aims to end fossil fuel-based electricity generation by 2029. Significant progress has been made toward zero-emission heating due to strong alignment across policy targets, institutions, instruments and infrastructure. However, challenges remain in fully transitioning to electric mobility.
- In **Sweden**, the Circular Economy Strategy and its action plans, though not legally binding, are assessed as part of the national budget alongside other environmental objectives. Various stakeholders, including government agencies, regional authorities and municipalities are responsible for monitoring progress. Binding measures are being enacted for specific areas within the action plan.

2. Strengthening vertical accountability

- **Ensuring free and fair elections:** In 21 of the 30 OECD and EU countries, governments have effectively reduced or eliminated significant barriers to voting and fair competition. However, the United States, Israel, New Zealand, Japan, Italy, Australia and the Netherlands continue to face challenges in ensuring seamless electoral accountability. Poland and Hungary have experienced significant declines in electoral integrity.
- **A party system grounded in society and effective cross-party cooperation:** In several countries, including Poland, France, Slovakia, Israel, Hungary, Canada, Australia and the United States, political party systems are increasingly characterized by growing ideological polarization, which undermines the collaborative efforts essential for effective dem-

ocratic oversight. Additionally, specific features of party systems in Hungary, Israel and Slovakia pose significant challenges to societal integration.

- **Expanding access to government information:** In several countries, including Poland, Hungary, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan and Australia, citizens face barriers such as broad exemptions and bureaucratic delays that limit their ability to obtain official information.

Good practices

- **Estonia** has implemented various voting methods, including advance voting, home voting and internet voting, to enhance voter participation. In the 2023 parliamentary elections, 74% of votes were cast before election day, with 51% submitted online.
- In **Norway**, all major political parties are unified in their commitment to democratic principles and human rights and actively oppose anti-democratic and extremist ideologies. This collective stance contributes to low political polarization in the country.

3. Enhancing diagonal accountability: civil society and media freedom

- **Promoting media freedom and pluralism:** In 26 of the 30 OECD and EU countries examined, governments have removed significant barriers that could discourage media from criticizing authorities or hinder a diverse media landscape. However, media freedom and pluralism continue to face challenges in Hungary, Poland, Japan and Australia.
- **Protecting the integrity of public discourse and strengthening civil society participation:** During the observation period from 2022 to 2024, freedom of assembly and association remained under threat in Hungary and Poland. Additionally, in at least 14 out of the 30 countries examined, major civil society organizations (CSOs) lack the capacity to meaningfully contribute to policymaking in key areas such as economic, social and environmental policy.

Good practice

- In **Sweden**, advisory bodies and consultative forums facilitate dialogue between government officials and civil society representatives. Additionally, funding programs and grants strengthen the operational capacity of CSOs, enabling them to conduct research, organize advocacy campaigns and implement policy-relevant initiatives.

4. Reinforcing horizontal accountability: checks and balances in government

- **Empowering independent oversight bodies:** Eleven of the 30 OECD countries examined could take further steps to strengthen the independence and capacity of their public audit offices in areas such as mandates, expertise, staffing and financial resources. Nine countries could benefit from reforms to enhance their data protection frameworks.
- **Effective safeguards for the rule of law:** Twenty-five of the 30 OECD countries could benefit from reforms aimed at strengthening legal oversight, safeguarding civil rights or improving anti-corruption measures. During the observation period, the rule of law faced significant challenges across multiple dimensions in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland. In Israel, between 2022 and 2024, the government's commitment to protecting civil rights was limited.
- **Enhancing parliamentary oversight:** Well-resourced legislatures and committees are essential for conducting thorough investigations, monitoring executive actions and influencing legislation. Twenty-seven of the 30 OECD countries require reforms to improve parliamentary oversight. Japan, the Netherlands, Israel, France, Estonia and Canada could benefit from a more systematic approach. In Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, parliamentary oversight remained contentious during the observation period.

Good practice

- The **National Audit Office of Sweden** holds exclusive authority over auditing state finances and actively participates in international initiatives to enhance auditing practices in low-income countries. Its audit reports, many of which are available in English, cover a broad range of topics and frequently receive substantial media attention.

5. Fostering policy coordination

- **Enhancing interministerial coordination:** Over the past decade, Finland has made significant progress in strengthening its executive capacity by establishing effective interministerial coordination mechanisms. These mechanisms facilitate proactive problem-solving and improve decision-making processes.
- **Strengthening multilevel governance:** In ten of the 30 OECD and EU countries analyzed, central governments struggle to ensure that subnational self-governments consistently meet national minimum standards for public service delivery. Additionally, in Poland, Hungary, the United States, Slovakia, Greece and Canada, national policymakers face challenges in collaborating with regional and local governments to enhance public service delivery.

Good practice

- In **Finland**, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reviews draft bills on behalf of the head of government. The Finnish Council of Regulatory Impact Analysis, which reports to the PMO, issues statements on government proposals and their regulatory impacts. Its role is to enhance the quality of draft legislation by improving impact assessments and refining the policymaking process, including the scheduling and planning of proposals.

6. Building societal consensus

- **Incorporating scientific expertise into policymaking:** Nations such as Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States have made considerable efforts to ensure their governments have timely access to high-quality scientific expertise from the outset and throughout the observation period from 2022 to 2024.
- **Strengthening civil society engagement:** During the observation period, the involvement of employers' associations, trade unions, welfare organizations, and environmental CSOs in the policymaking process remained minimal in Hungary, France, the United Kingdom, Poland and Italy. In contrast, governments in Japan and Greece frequently engaged with employers' associations and trade unions but showed less interest in involving environmental groups or welfare organizations.
- **Enhancing government transparency:** Countries such as Finland, France, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States have taken a more proactive approach by publishing a wide range of detailed information to meet growing public demands.

Good practices

- **France** has made notable progress with the launch of its official data platform, data.gouv.fr. According to government sources, the platform currently hosts 35,000 datasets contributed by more than 2,200 entities, including local actors, national administrations, universities and private organizations. Engagement has increased significantly, with the platform recording over eight million visits in 2022 and nearly 40,000 instances of data reuse.
- **Finland** has adopted a more interactive approach to its open data portals, using them as feedback and communication tools rather than mere data repositories. Quality standards and standardization efforts ensure the production of consistent government information and data.

7. Improving sensemaking within the government

- **Promoting strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation:** The integration of strategic foresight into routine ministerial operations remains underdeveloped in most, if not all, of the 30 OECD and EU countries reviewed. Even advanced nations such as Denmark and Finland have only recently begun implementing some of the institutional frameworks necessary to foster anticipatory innovation.
- **Strengthening analytical competence:** Strategies to improve both ex ante and ex post policy evaluations could benefit at least 19 of the 30 assessed OECD and EU governments. Denmark has made significant progress in enhancing the effectiveness of its policy evaluation tools and methodologies.

Good practice

- In **Denmark**, policy evaluations and sustainability assessments guide public policy. Regulatory impact assessments are publicly available, reflecting a commitment to transparency. If a policy fails to meet expectations, amendments are typically made.

8. Advancing economic sustainability

- **Building a circular economy:** Sweden and Finland stand out for their comprehensive commitment to advancing the transition toward resource-efficient production.
- **Updating and protecting critical infrastructure:** Switzerland and Finland have undertaken substantial measures to enhance the resilience of their critical infrastructure.
- **Decarbonizing the energy system:** Throughout the observation period, Finland, France and Spain have demonstrated a strong commitment to transitioning their energy systems by 2050.
- **Preparing labor markets for future challenges:** Denmark, Norway and Switzerland have made significant efforts to align their labor market policies with anticipated future demands.

- **Aligning national tax systems with sustainability goals:** Sweden, Denmark and Finland have made notable strides in tax system reforms aimed at securing adequate revenue, promoting tax equity, reducing compliance costs and internalizing both negative and positive externalities.
- **Aligning budgetary institutions and policies with sustainable budgeting goals:** Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have made significant progress in implementing budget rules to ensure fiscal resilience, enhance budgetary transparency, and prioritize long-term well-being.
- **Harnessing research and innovation as drivers of a sustainable economy:** Throughout the review period, the governments of Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria and the United States have demonstrated a clear commitment to leveraging research and innovation as key enablers of the transition to a sustainable economy and society.

Good practices

- In 2023, **Switzerland's** Federal Council revised the National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP), outlining key goals and actions for all stakeholders. The strategy includes eight measures to enhance infrastructure resilience, such as requiring authorities to assess and mitigate major supply disruption risks across sectors.
- In **Denmark**, 10-year fiscal plans assess budget sustainability. Reforms to boost employment and raise the retirement age have stabilized public finances. The structural budget deficit is capped at 1% of GDP under the 2014 budgetary law, with exceptions permitted during crises. The finance minister negotiates state expenditure ceilings with regional and municipal representatives, imposing penalties for breaches. An independent economic council conducts annual compliance reviews.

9. Advancing social sustainability

- **Ensuring equal access to a high-quality education system:** Canada, Norway and Denmark have made substantial progress in securing high-quality education for all of their citizens.

- **Securing fundamental human needs:** Denmark and Belgium have made significant advancements in providing equitable access to high-quality services and basic income support for individuals in need.
- **Ensuring equal access to a resilient, high-quality healthcare system:** Germany and Sweden have made notable progress in enhancing the resilience and equitable accessibility of healthcare services during the observation period.
- **Promoting gender equality:** The Nordic countries, Spain, France, and Belgium have demonstrated a strong commitment to developing policy strategies and regulatory frameworks designed to advance gender equality in both the private and public sectors.
- **Strengthening families:** During the review period, the Nordic countries, France and Slovenia made significant progress in supporting individuals in their decisions to start families. This has been achieved through the provision of affordable childcare services, the implementation of parental leave policies that promote shared household responsibilities, and the expansion of financial assistance programs.
- **Building a sustainable pension system:** Norway, Denmark, and Finland have made notable progress in addressing the challenges of preventing old-age poverty and ensuring intergenerational equity.
- **Integrating migrants into society:** Portugal has implemented significant policy measures to facilitate the sustainable integration of migrants into both society and the labor market.

Good practices

- **Spain's** gender equality efforts are guided by the III Strategic Plan for Effective Equality between Women and Men 2022–2025, which aligns with the 2030 Agenda and European gender equality strategies. The plan includes four key action areas and tracks progress using 78 key metrics.
- In **Norway**, parental leave regulations are structured to encourage shared household responsibilities. Fathers are entitled to four months of parental leave

with full pay, and the right to stay at home with a sick child is equally divided between both parents.

10. Advancing environmental sustainability

- **Promoting climate action:** The current climate action frameworks in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Sweden demonstrate a high level of ambition and consistency. These frameworks include clearly defined goals, sector-specific targets, detailed action plans and robust progress-tracking mechanisms.
- **Preventing pollution and reducing health risks:** Canada, Finland and Sweden have implemented significant initiatives to improve environmental health.
- **Fostering the protection of national ecosystems and biodiversity:** Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom have adopted a more proactive and flexible approach during the review period, continuously refining their policy strategies, action plans and monitoring systems.
- **Proactively supporting the advancement of international environmental cooperation:** The governments of Norway, Sweden, Germany, and the United Kingdom have actively promoted international initiatives to address global challenges such as climate change and environmental crises.

Good practice

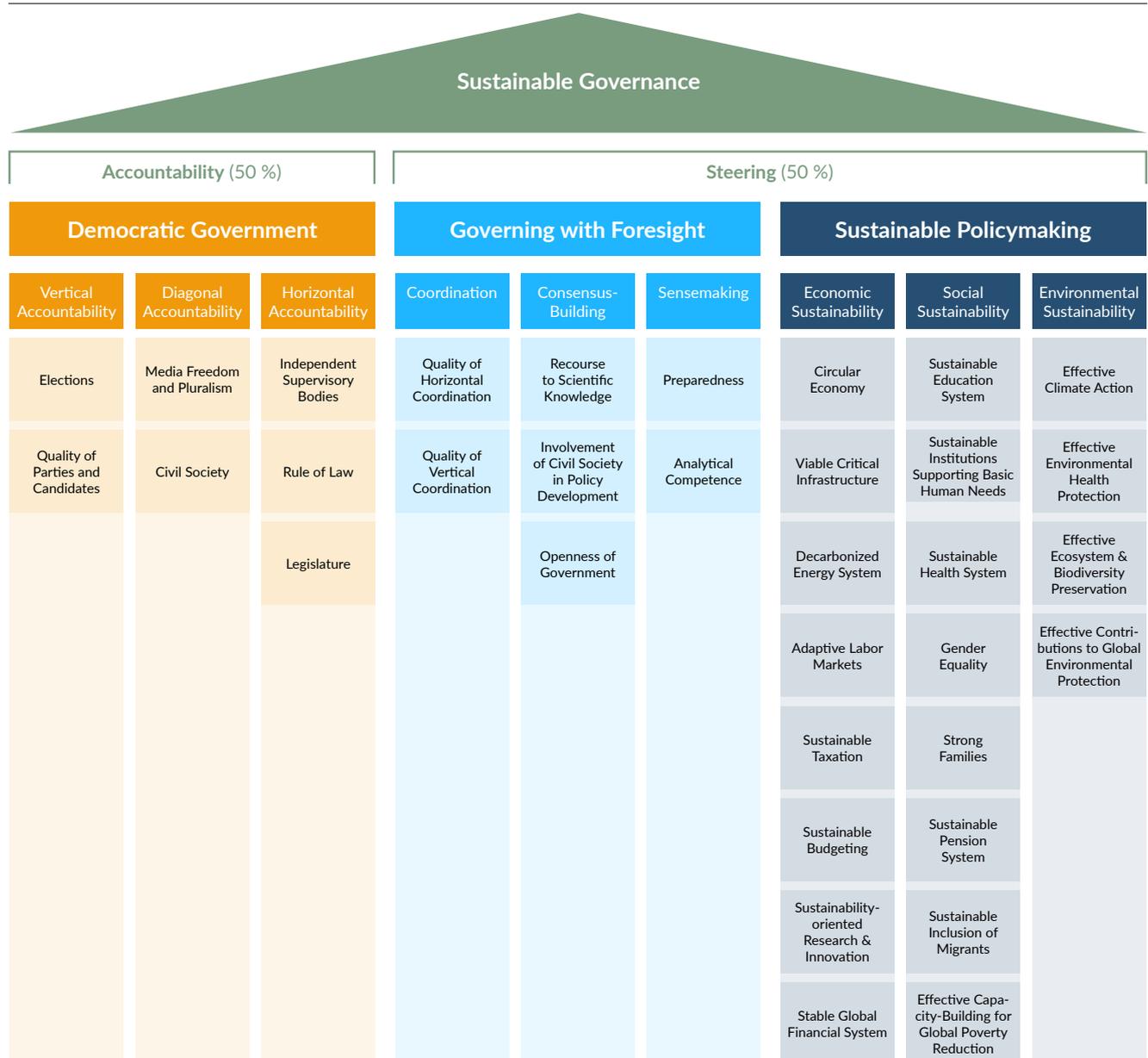
- **Sweden's** approach to monitoring environmental health risks is outlined in several of its 16 environmental targets, including clean air, toxin-free environments, preventing overfertilization, high-quality groundwater and good living conditions. Progress is measured using 20 indicators, such as nitrogen dioxide emissions, travel habits, polluted areas and toxin levels in breast milk and blood. In 2023, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency evaluated these targets and concluded that by 2030, the clean air and toxin-free environment targets would be partially met or that necessary preconditions for their achievement would be in place.

About our dataset

The SGI dataset is a comprehensive resource for tracking and comparing policy progress across 30 OECD and EU countries. It focuses on strengthening democratic oversight, developing sustainable economic, social and environmental policies, and advancing forward-looking governance. The cross-country comparison is based on 144 indicators and in-depth country reports. Each country's

performance is assessed through a rigorous, multi-stage review process conducted by an international network of experts. More than 100 scholars in economics, environmental studies, political science and the social sciences contribute to each assessment round – bringing with them a broad range of international, comparative, methodological, regional and sector-specific expertise.

FIGURE 6 Hierarchy levels of the Sustainable Governance Indicators



Source: Own representation.

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