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Strengthening Capacities for an Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development (P178917)

Deliverable 1

Report on Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment in the Field of Sustainable Development

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SECRETARIATUL GENERAL AL GUVERNULUI

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Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AP	National Action Plan for the Implementation of NSSD
CBT	Competency-Based Training
CPF	Country Partnership Framework
DNSH	Do Not Significantly Harm
DSD	Department of Sustainable Development
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GD	Government Decision
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoR	Government of Romania
GSG	General Secretariat of the Government
HRM	Human Resources Management
ICT	Information and communication technology
IT	Information Technology
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes
LAU	Local Administrative Units
L&D	Learning and Development
MFYEO	Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities
MIEP	Ministry of Investments and European Projects
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MOLSS	Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity
NACS	National Agency for Civil Servants
NAQ	National Agency for Qualifications
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NIA	National Institute of Administration
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NSDIs	National Sustainable Development Indicators
NSSD	National Strategy for Romania's Sustainable Development 2030

NIS	National Institute of Statistics
NUTS	Nomenclature des Unités territoriales statistiques (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP AC	Operational Program Administrative Capacity
PEST	Political, Economic, Social, and Technological Analysis
RAS	Reimbursable Advisory Services
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SD	Sustainable Development
SDE	Sustainable Development Expert
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSPA	Strengthening the Public Administration
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
NVR	National Voluntary Review

Executive Summary

1. **The Government of Romania (GOR) has committed, as part of its National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), to strengthen the coordination of sustainable development (SD) initiatives across the Romanian public administration.** This commitment aligns with Romania's broader dedication to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which encompass a wide range of economic, social, and environmental objectives. The NRRP-associated initiatives aim to inform a policy framework to incorporate sustainable development principles across all government levels and sectors. This framework would help ensure that sustainable development considerations are systematically integrated into decision-making processes, policy formulation, and implementation. The reform initiatives place a strong emphasis on leveraging digital transformation to enhance the efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness of public administration. This includes streamlining procedures, improving service delivery, fostering innovation in sustainable development, and employing scientific methodologies to ensure evidence-based decision-making and alignment with established best practices.[1] These initiatives are meant to complement and support the implementation of Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 (NSSD)[2] and its action plan,[3] which outline the country's goals and actions towards achieving sustainable development.[4]

> ***"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." - Brundtland Commission***
>
> *Sustainable development recognizes the interdependence between economic growth, social progress, and environmental protection. It ensures that economic growth is inclusive, environmentally responsible, and socially equitable. This approach promotes long-term economic stability, resilience, and the efficient use of resources, leading to sustainable and balanced economic development that benefits present and future generations.*

2. **While Romania performs well (or is improving) on several SDG indicators related to environmental sustainability (SDGs 6, 11, 13, and 15), it needs to catch up (SDG 12) and maintain its progress (SDG 7) on others.** On responsible consumption and production, Romania has been performing poorly. Its circular material use rate is declining while the EU has progressed substantially (1.3% vs 12.8% in 2020). The material footprint of the Romanian economy has significantly increased (almost by a third) since 2015 while it remained stable in the EU. Performance on other indicators linked to climate action, life on land, and the sustainability of cities and communities has been more positive. The NRRP will further help Romania to address its current challenges notably with strong reforms to support the circular economy and improve waste management but also with flagship reforms on the phasing out

[1] Annex to the Proposal for a Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Romania, European Commission, 27/09/2021, p581, available at: NEW CID ANNEX ROMANIA RRF 13 09 2021 (gov.ro)

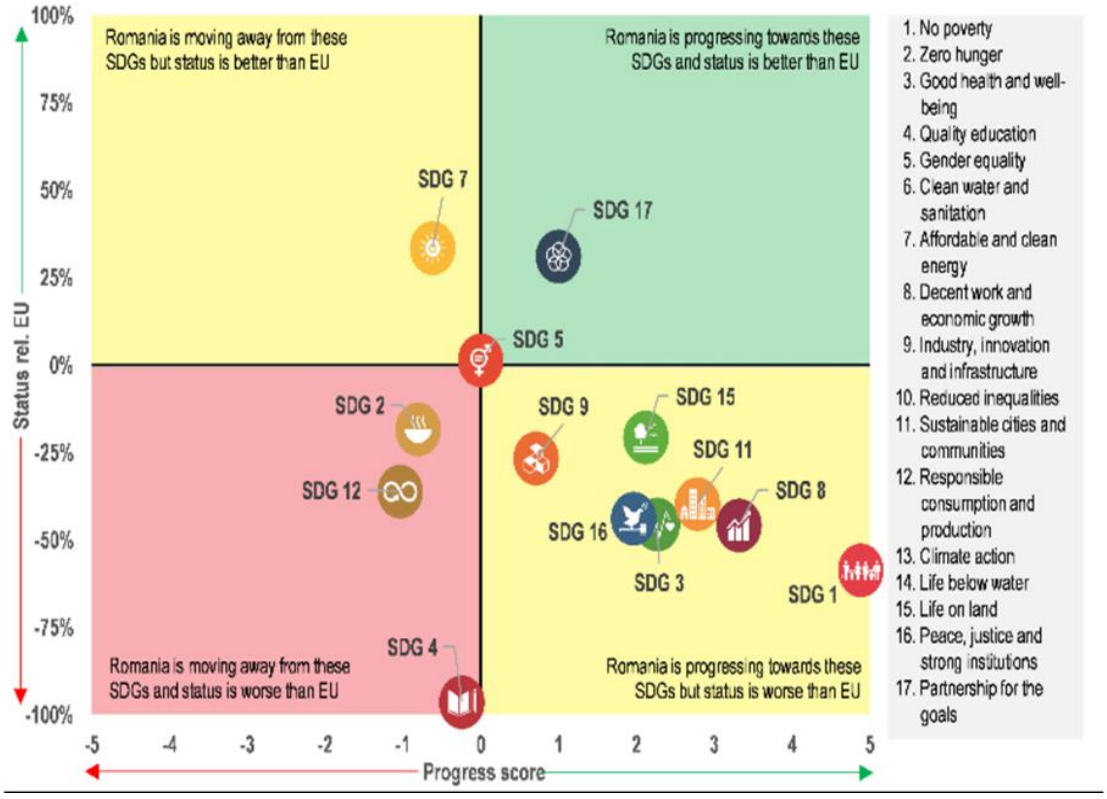
[2] Departamentul pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă (gov.ro)

[3] https://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/planul-national-de-actiune-final

[4] The NSSD, adopted by the Romanian Government in 2018, establishes the national framework to support the UN Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the set of 17 SDGs, gearing the country's development on three main pillars, namely economic, social and environmental.

of coal and the decarbonization of road transport[5]. The progress towards SDGs in Romania is shown in the graph below:

Graph I: Progress towards SDGs in Romania in the last 5 years[6]



Source: Eurostat, latest update of 28 April 2022

3. **The World Bank is providing support to the GOR in its implementation of the sustainable development reforms outlined in the NRRP through Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) on Strengthening Capacities for an Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development**. The objective of this work is to develop institutional capacity in the Romanian Center of Government to support an integrated approach to the implementation and monitoring of reforms on sustainable development. The RAS covers three main areas: support for the development of the career development program for selected job profiles in the field of sustainable development (component 1); support for preparatory activities in the establishment of a virtual resource center for the localization of SDGs (component 2); advice on proposed operationalization of the CExDD (component 3).[7]

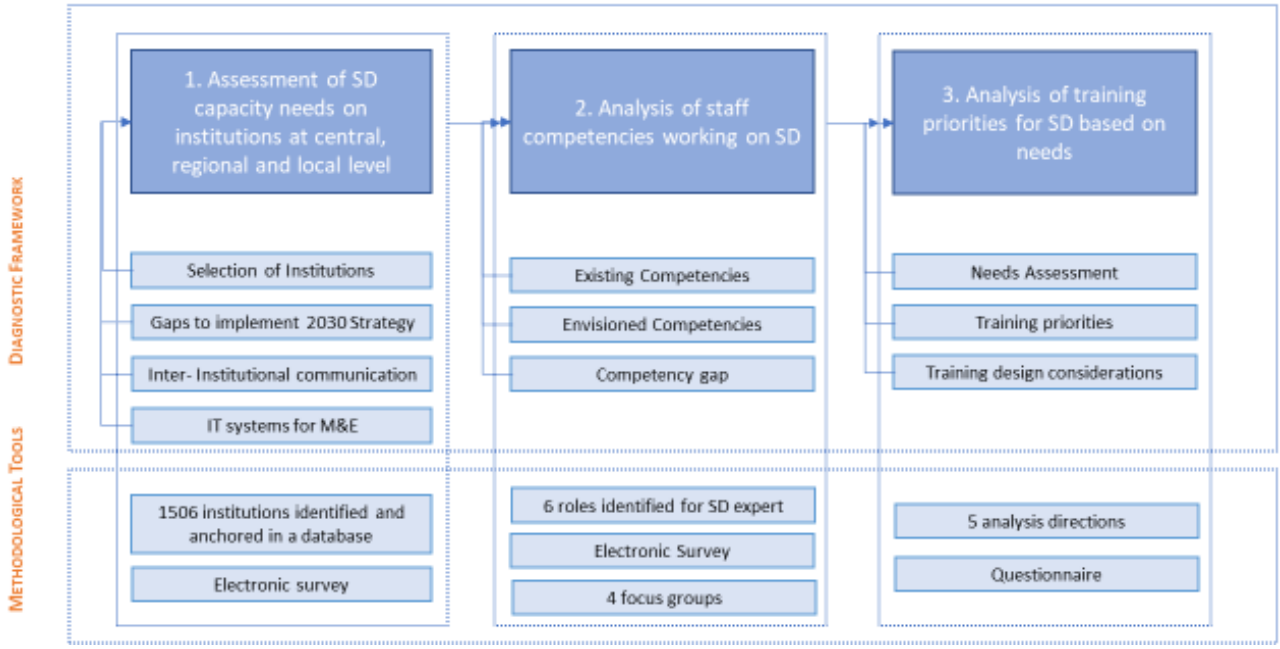
[5] EC 2022 Country Report – Romania: Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2022 National Reform Program of Romania and delivering a Council opinion on the 2022 Convergence Program of Romania

[6] EC 2022 Country Report – Romania: Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2022 National Reform Program of Romania and delivering a Council opinion on the 2022 Convergence Program of Romania

[7] The components listed match those components included in the RAS legal agreement. "CExDD" stands for Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development.

4. **This report corresponds to Deliverable 1: *Report on Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment in the Field of Sustainable Development*, under Component 1 of the RAS.** The report focuses on assessing the capacity needs of public administration institutions in relation to SD, analyzing the competencies of staff engaged in SD at both the central and local levels, [8] and identifying the current skills and training priorities for SD among the workforce. The findings of this report will serve as inputs to other RAS activities supporting Romania's NRRP SD reform initiatives, particularly for the development of the curriculum for the training program and the design and delivery of the training of trainers program (Deliverable 4), as well as advice for contracting professional training activities (Deliverable 2). The main topics covered by the report, the diagnostic framework and methodological tools are summarized in the diagram below:

Figure I. ***Diagnostic framework and Methodological tools***



5. **This executive summary provides an overview of Romania's efforts to enhance the coordination of sustainable development initiatives in its public administration.** It then presents the key findings from assessments on institutional capacity needs, current staff competencies in SD, and SD training priorities. Finally, it outlines the next steps for advancing these coordination efforts.

Romania's approach to coordinating sustainable development initiatives across the government

6. **The Department for Sustainable Development (DSD) within the General Secretariat of the Government (GSG), is spearheading efforts to strengthen institutional mandates and redefine the roles of public administration staff in order to effectively implement the sustainability agenda.**

[8] The research under this report addressed public administration institutions at central, territorial and local levels. At the central level, the survey addressed all ministries and the institutions under their subordination, coordination, and authority, except for state-owned enterprises. At the local and territorial levels, the research covered prefectures and county councils and deconcentrated public services in all 41 counties, as well as all cities and towns across the country. Additionally, the surveys targeted all eight regional development agencies Even though these structures do not belong to public administration, they were analyzed due to their important role at the regional level, related to SDGs implementation

Romania has adopted an occupational standard for SDEs[9], which provides a comprehensive outline of the core responsibilities, tasks, skills, and competencies expected from professionals in this role. [10] This initiative was followed by establishing the "sustainable development expert" (SDE) public function by the amended Romanian Administrative Code in 2022 (Law 156/2022). According to it, public authorities and institutions of central and local public administration with responsibilities in specific SD-related activities, including the ones foreseen in NRRP, may establish specific SDE public functions of execution as follows*: (i) by changing the title of the public execution functions which have among the attributions in the job description more than 50% specific activities for sustainable development, related to the implementation of projects or other activities, including those in the NRRP, and who have completed courses/postgraduate training programs organized in accordance with the SDE occupational standard or (ii) by transforming or establishing a/public functions of sustainable development expert under the circumstances that there are no public execution functions with responsibilities of more than 50% on specific activities for sustainable development, related to the implementation of projects or other activities, including those in the NRRP*[11]. This legal provision serves as a foundation for central and local public administration institutions to enhance their involvement in sustainable development and recognize the importance of the SDE role, by the possibility to incorporate SD positions into their organizational structures and adjust the job descriptions of staff accordingly.

7. **Another noteworthy activity toward institutionalizing SD expertise is the setting up of SD Hubs.** These Hubs, comprised of one or more individuals, serve as intermediaries between public administration institutions and the DSD, facilitating communication and collaboration. The Hubs aim to establish 'teams' of sustainable development experts at all state levels. By connecting with the DSD and the National Institute of Statistics, the Hubs ensure that public institutions adhere to the principles of sustainable development in their policies and practices. Currently, there are 22 SD Hubs in operation, each focusing on a specific sectoral area.[12] These Hubs are staffed by approximately 90 technical professionals who work within the central public administration. Their expertise and knowledge contribute to the effective implementation of sustainable development initiatives in their respective sectors.

8. **The GoR has demonstrated a visionary[13] approach in its efforts to establish a professional network of experts in sustainable development within public institutions.** While several important elements of this vision are already in place, further consideration and adaptive implementation are required. Many of the remaining elements will be prepared with World Bank support provided under this RAS.

[9] SDE Occupational Standard (COR 242232):
http://romania-durabila.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SO_expertdezvoltaredurabila-1.pdf

[10] The introduction of the SDE occupational standard and public function were government initiatives and not based on World Bank recommendations.

[11] Art. 610, Law 156/2022 (the amended Administrative Code).

[12] Foreign Affairs; Home Affairs; Agriculture; Defense; Water and Forests; Culture; Research; Communications; Regional Development; Economy; Education; Energy; Public Finance; European Funds; Justice; Environmental Protection; Business Environment; Labor and Social Protection; Health; Youth and Sport; Transport and Infrastructure; Tourism

[13] A review of institutional arrangements for SD initiatives in the EU did not identify any known benchmarks or comparable initiatives in public institutions of other EU countries. This pioneering approach positions Romania as a leader in promoting sustainable development within its public institutions and may serve as a potential model for others.

The key initiatives include establishing a center of excellence, training civil servants on SD principles, and creating a virtual resource center. The GoR recognizes the ongoing need to develop institutional capacity to support the implementation of the SDGs. The DSD has made significant efforts in this regard, including a pilot project financed by the European Union (EU) to support the strategic and institutional framework for sustainable development.

SD institutional capacity needs of public administration, at the central, regional, and local levels

9. **The Romanian public administration continues to face institutional gaps and weaknesses that hinder the implementation of SDGs.** The main weaknesses include:

- *Insufficient clarity about the SDE role.* The SD-related institutional mandates and the role that SDEs[14] should play in public institutions are not sufficiently clear. There is currently a prevailing ambiguity and uncertainty related to the institutional mandates, as well as the precise role and responsibilities of an SDE.
- *Communication and Coordination.* There is limited awareness of institutional mandates related to sustainable development and a lack of knowledge and skills among staff, particularly at the local level. [15] The fragmentation and limited awareness of SD-related roles and mandates within institutions, as well as poor coordination between institutions, contribute to slow progress in building institutional capacity for SD.
- *Fragmentation of technical expertise.* While SD Hubs have been established at the central level, SD hubs are not yet set up at the territorial and local levels and lack clear guidance.
- *Data collection and exchange.* OECD has highlighted the need to streamline government data collection mechanisms and clarify which institution is best suited to track indicators and assess the impact of policies on sustainability. Furthermore, challenges that impede the development of an interinstitutional data platform and investment map in Romania have been identified. These challenges include data quality and reliability, interoperability, and resourcing issues. Without technical and organizational data exchange standard services between institutions, the GSG team cannot access or collect relevant data from different institutions. The required investment data are not available in a standard format and require skills and tools to harmonize. For interoperability, investment data is missing critical elements to connect data sets with one another[16].

  Other institutional capacity factors, such as bureaucratic processes, delays in decision-making, and limited information exchange between different levels of governance, also impede the successful implementation of the NSSD and its Action Plan.

10. **In a survey conducted at the national level under the RAS, central public administration institutions more explicitly identified two areas as critical for enhancing capacity to effectively achieve the SDGs: technical expertise and the ability to access technical knowledge and data for implementation.** The

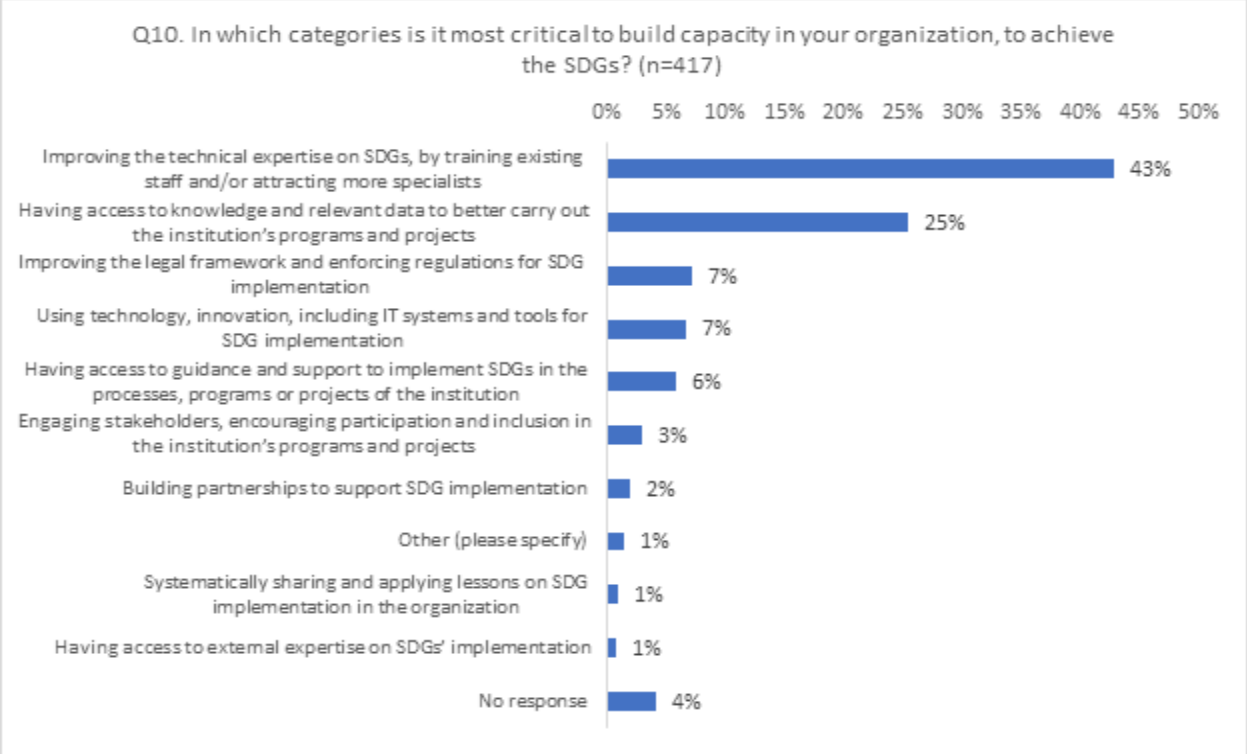
[14] Given the incipient status of implementation of the SDE public function, when referring to the national research conducted within this report, the SDE term includes all the staff in the public administration institutions at central, territorial, and local levels who carry out SD-related activities, in line with the provisions of the NSSD and its Action Plan, covering the following main dimensions: social, economic, environmental, management of EU funds, digital solutions, and services to achieve SDGs.

[15] Romania: OECD Scan of Institutional Mechanisms to Deliver on the SDGs.

[16] RAS Strengthening the Capacity of the General Secretariat of the Government to Accelerate Public Investments in Romania (P171255), Deliverable 3c: Report on high-level concept and possible key functional requirements for an information system to support the functioning of the coordination mechanism.

first aspect identified by 43 percent of respondents is the need to improve technical expertise on SDGs, as shown in Figure II below. This indicates that institutions recognize the importance of enhancing their knowledge and skills in understanding and implementing the SDGs effectively. By improving technical expertise, either through training or hiring new specialists, institutions can develop a deeper understanding of the goals and targets, as well as the strategies and actions required to achieve them. The second critical aspect, highlighted by 25 percent of respondents, is ensuring access to knowledge and relevant data to support implementation efforts. Access to knowledge and relevant data enables institutions to make informed decisions, track progress, and evaluate the impact of their programs and projects in relation to the SDGs. It also helps in identifying gaps and areas for improvement, allowing institutions to adjust their strategies and actions accordingly.

Figure II. ***Most critical aspects to build the capacity of public administration institutions to achieve the SDGs***[17]



Source: World Bank elaboration based on the results of the institutional capacity survey conducted under the RAS

11. **The results of the institutional capacity needs assessment also revealed that the majority of public institutions at both central and local levels do not consider the employment of additional specialized staff to carry out sustainable development activities as a key priority.** Rather than opting for additional specialized personnel, most public administration institutions are considering alternative approaches. These include assigning additional responsibilities to existing staff or helping existing staff transition into new roles in the field of SD to leverage existing human resources effectively. This implies

[17] Strengthening Capacities for an Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development (SD RAS) Deliverable 1, *Annex 4: Survey 1 - Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment Survey Report: Assessing Capacity, Challenges, and Needs for Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals in Romania*

that public institutions do not deem the creation of full-time SDE positions to be essential at this stage, there is widespread recognition among the respondent public institutions of the need to train existing staff to be able to implement sustainable development initiatives. The likelihood of employing additional specialized personnel was considered lowest in prefectures, county councils, and cities, while training existing employees was seen as the most probable option for all respondent institutions. The World Bank team subscribes to this view from respondents as generally speaking training and redeployment of existing staff is more fiscally sustainable.

12. **Enhancing inter-institutional mechanisms for coordination, consultation, and reporting on the SDGs is critical to addressing challenges related to the implementation of the NSSD and its Action Plan.** However, strengthening inter-institutional cooperation and reinforcing the coordination role of the DSD in the implementation of the NSSD and its Action Plan remains a persistent challenge. Targeted actions to improve communication among institutions across government levels, particularly at the territorial and local levels, are needed. Potential measures to support this include providing training, implementing improved coordination and human resource management practices (HRM) within partner institutions, developing effective working methodologies for SDEs, and enhancing communication flows to actively involve local stakeholders, especially in the process of reporting on the implementation of the SDGs.

Current SD skills and competencies of relevant staff working in public institutions

Defining the SD Competency profile

13. **A robust and comprehensive competency profile, is crucial for operationalizing the SDE function and ultimately enhancing the implementation of the NSSD in the public administration.** The competency profile should outline the specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that SDEs need in order to be able to effectively contribute to the implementation of the NSSD and other SD initiatives. The main roles of SDE are highlighted in the SD competency model developed within the report. The model provides a clear vision of the core mission of SDEs, which is to "generate innovative solutions for the sustainable development of communities."[18] The proposed competency model for SDEs has been meticulously aligned with the competency framework model and principles developed with support from the World Bank and approved and adopted by the Romanian Government.[19] This alignment ensures that the competency model is consistent with the established criteria and guidelines set forth in the Occupational Standard for SDEs.

14. **The process of determining the necessary competency areas for SDEs involved national-level research, including surveys and focus groups, as well as an analysis of various sustainable**

[18] "Communities" refer to groups of individuals connected by common interests, goals, or characteristics. The term includes geographical, social, or value-based connections and comprises stakeholders such as residents, organizations, and institutions.

[19] Romania's National Committee for Coordinating the Implementation of the Strategy on Strengthening Public Administration (CNCISCAP) approved and adopted the competency framework for general public functions in 2020. The Competency Framework was developed as part of a broader human resources management reform program led by the GSG, the National Agency for Civil Servants, and supported by the World Bank. The approved Competency Framework was designed under the RAS on Developing a Unitary Human Resources Management System within the Public Administration.

development initiatives. Key questions addressed include: the desired competency profile for public servants specialized in sustainable development, the roles and responsibilities requiring sustainable development competencies, the training needs of individuals with national-level sustainable development responsibilities, and the design of a training program to meet these needs. Based on the consultations and analysis, the report presents six proposed main roles (or competency areas) for SDEs, which collectively form the proposed competency model for SDEs.[20] These are described in detail in the report and outlined in the table below.

Table I: Proposed main SDE competency areas[21]

Definition of SD Competence: the interlinked set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enables innovative problem solving in sustainable development in communities.	
SDE role (Competency areas)	***Illustrative example***
(i) Contributing to public policies, strategies, projects, initiatives, or decisions that aim for the sustainable development of communities.	*Contributing to the formulation and coordination of a public policy that promotes sustainable agriculture in a community, thereby supporting its sustainable development.*
(ii) Evaluating the impact of applied sustainable development solutions at the community level.	*Evaluating the impact of a sustainable transportation project in a community to determine if it is effectively reducing carbon emissions and increasing the use of public transportation.*
(iii) Monitoring and reporting on applied solutions and progress achieved in the sustainable development of communities.	*Monitoring the implementation of a waste management program in a community and reporting on the reduction of waste and promotion of recycling.*
(iv) Building communication bridges with the community in line with the values and principles of sustainable development.	*Organizing local events to build awareness in the community on the benefits of renewable energy sources and gather their input on potential initiatives.*
(v) Identifying sustainable development needs at the community level.	*Performing an assessment in a rural community to determine unmet needs related to accessing clean water as a key sustainable development issue.*
(vi) Working in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions at the community level.	*Collaborating with social development, urban, and environmental specialists to conduct sustainable development assessments in a community to determine environmental, social, and economic challenges impacting sustainability.*

Source: World Bank elaboration

15. **Special attention should be given to the practical application of implementing the SDGs at the local, territorial, and central levels.** This is where the SD Competency areas outlined above come into play. SDEs should have the ability to translate SDG targets into actionable plans and initiatives that can be implemented effectively within their respective areas of responsibility. This practical application ensures

[20] SDE competency model (Chapter 5, main body of the report).
[21] These 6 main competency areas cluster the 34 'detailed competencies' described in the occupational standard.

that sustainable development efforts are not only theoretical but also result in tangible outcomes and positive impacts on the ground. By combining solid technical expertise, knowledge of SD concepts and frameworks, and practical implementation skills, SDEs can effectively contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals at various levels of governance.

CURRENT STAFF'S SKILLS AND TRAINING PRIORITIES FOR SD

16. **The results of a survey on SD staff competencies help identify the training needs that, together with the technical knowledge and the model of six SD core competencies, will lay the foundation for the elaboration of the forthcoming SD training program.** While the SD competency model developed within the report is expected to inform the curriculum topics to build the participants' SD-related core competencies, the survey on SD staff competencies has identified specific areas of training priorities that will guide the design of the upcoming training program in the field of SD. Additionally, the survey has compiled a database of over 1800 potential candidates from public administration institutions at the central, territorial, and local levels who can participate in the training program.[22]

17. **The most pointed out training needs, common to all public servants, as identified in the survey, and further detailed in focus groups, pertain to the digital dimension and technological innovation.** These have been divided into two distinct categories: One concerns the needs for using digital technology in SDE activities such as: statistical data processing (Excel, SPSS), accessing digital platforms with SD data and indicators (INS and EUROSTAT databases), exchanging best practices (professional communities), communicating through digital platforms with community stakeholders, collecting sustainable development needs, etc. These should be incorporated into training programs. The second aspect relates to the development and implementation of digital technologies within communities (SDG-9), which can be a subject of specialization or an optional training module.

Informing the design of the SD training program

18. **The GoR has committed to training 2,000 public employees in central, territorial, and local public administration institutions on sustainable development by the end of Q3 2025.** This training, based on the SDE occupational standard and informed by the current analysis, aims to bring about changes in the roles and responsibilities of public employees as they acquire new knowledge and competencies in sustainable development. This will enable them to effectively contribute to the implementation of the NSSD and its associated Action Plan. Through this training program, the GoR also aims to foster a culture of sustainability within public administration institutions and empower public employees to actively contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals in Romania.

19. **A group of 150 SDEs in central public administration participated in 2022 in a pilot training program[23], designed on the basis of the SDE occupational standard.** Participants currently have responsibilities in the

[22] Two databases of public administration personnel at central and local levels are included in this report, to be used by the DSD in the training participants selection process. The target audience for the training program, consisting of approximately 1800 potential candidates, is categorized into two groups: (i) staff from public administration institutions who participated in the capacity needs assessment survey (Survey 1) and (ii) staff nominated by their institutions for participation in the training program based on their SD competencies and training needs identified in the Survey on SD staff competencies (Survey 2).

[23] DSD's Project "Sustainable Romania" (SIPOCA 613)

field of SD. Based on the feedback from the DSD team and insights from participants who participated in the focus groups, the main identified weaknesses of the pilot SD training program included: (i) the six-month duration of the program was not sufficient; (ii) the training materials were not unitary and in some cases the quality of content and presentation was not satisfactory; (iii) the practical training (e.g. study cases) and its applicability, considering the institutional mandates and participants' SD-related roles were often not satisfactory; (iv) participants in the pilot project reported an abundance of theoretical knowledge and rich informational content provided by lecturers. However, they expressed uncertainty about the application of this knowledge in real-world scenarios. For example, despite understanding concepts like smart cities and green energy, they lacked insight into their role in fostering such initiatives within their communities; (v) the issue of how the acquired specific knowledge could be implemented in the trainees' current activities was raised during the focus group meetings.

20. **The main training areas and topics that will need to be covered in the SD training program are derived from five main elements.** These elements comprise a) the requirements of the 2021 SDE Romanian Occupational Standard; b) the training needs assessment; c) the need to incorporate key lessons from the pilot program; d) taking into account the evolving policy/regulatory environment, most recent EU and global developments in SD and best practices; and e) priorities in the Romanian context such as the need for digitalization, capacity building, accessing EU funds and implementing EU funded projects. These main areas and topics will be further validated and prioritized in developing the SDE curriculum. The main training areas and examples of training topics are detailed in the table below.

Table II. Main training areas and examples of topics

Training area	*Examples of training topics*
(I) PUBLIC ADMINISTRA-TION	***From World Bank team analysis:*** • **Enabling "whole-of-government" approach in fostering SD and avoiding "silos-mentality"** • **Legislation and policies in support of the transition to a circular economy and climate change mitigation** • **Green/climate-informed public financial management** ***From Occupational Standard:*** • **Importance of the public sector in sustainable development** • **Career management in sustainable development** • **Functioning of public sector: efficiency, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of institutions** • **Decision-making; management, control, and evaluation of management processes** • **Elements of communication; elements of ethics, integrity, and compliance**
(II) ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF SD	*From World Bank team analysis:* • Sustainable Development as an economic growth model. • EU Green Deal; Cost of Inaction *From Occupational Standard:* • Sustainable economic activities; definition and multidisciplinary approach; action plan on financing sustainable growth, Regulation (EU 2020/852 Regulation on Taxonomy), system analysis, introductory aspects of supply chain analysis; • Sustainable management and circular economy: models of sustainable economic development: Production and consumption from perspective of sustainable business; Cross-cutting issues related to EU Action Plan for circular economy, eco-design, competitiveness economic, waste management;

	• Economic approach to product circularity (supply and demand, productivity of natural resource use, design and circular production, material flow analysis, green procurement). • Externalities and public goods - cases of market failure. Pollution abatement.
(III) SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SD	*From World Bank team analysis:* • Just transition in context of Romania (decarbonization, migration, impacts on gender, etc.); • Ensuring citizen engagement *From Occupational Standard:* • Qualitative research methods and techniques for assessment of social problems through SD lens • Specifics of approach to social problems through SD lens. Main indicators in programmatic documents • Integrating multi-sectoral information, collected with different research tools, to inform strategies and public policies for sustainable development; Methods for producing summary reports related to the social issues of sustainable development • Research methods quantitative analysis of the social dimension of SD • The practice of interpreting data from different sectors.
(IV) ENVIRON-MENTAL DIMENSION OF SD	*From World Bank team analysis:* • Environmental Impact Assessments; Addressing Triple Crisis (Biodiversity/Pollution/Climate Change) • Climate Impact Knowledge: Develop a comprehensive understanding of climate change impacts on economy, environmental and societal systems and structures • Mobilizing public/private finance for climate action • Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies with Funding Focus: Equip SDEs with the capabilities to devise and execute climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, with a special emphasis on securing funding for projects that comply with the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) criteria • Addressing environmental priorities through Circular Economy: Mastery of circular economy concepts to minimize waste and pollution and enhance the recycling and repurposing of resources *From Occupational Standard:* • Environmental and health impacts of economic sectors and environmental impacts of climate change • Elaboration of environmental reports • Environmental policies in public sectors • Environmental project management for sustainable development • Environmental and sustainable development advice
(V) DIGITAL SKILLS, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY IN SD	*From World Bank team analysis:* • Innovation and Technology in SD: Encourage cutting-edge technologies and practices that can be applied in climate change and circular economy, fostering innovation in critical areas • Digital transformation in communities • Digital literacy. Modeling Tools, Data collection and visualization; Geographic Information System (GIS)
(VI) ACCESSING EU FUNDS FOR SD	*From World Bank team analysis:* • Identifying EU funds for specific SD projects • Evaluating the SD-related dimension of the project • EU-compliant project preparation and applications for EU funding

Source: World Bank elaboration[24]

21. **The SD training program should establish clear and specific objectives that align with the SDEs' mission and the competency areas associated with their work.** The main objective should be to enhance the development of SD competencies to an autonomous expert level, enabling SDEs to independently generate innovative solutions for sustainable community development. This objective can be divided into three main learning objectives: (i) acquiring knowledge sets through theoretical

[24] Based on Annex 1 of the SDE occupational standard and the results of the WB team research

approaches/methods (estimated at 60 hours), (ii) practicing main skills through practical approaches/methods, including 50 detailed skills (estimated at 100 hours), and (iii) shaping attitudes through practical approaches/methods (estimated at 20 hours). To meet the Romanian occupational standards, a minimum of 180 hours is required for certified expertise in sustainable development, with 60 hours allocated for theoretical approaches and 120 hours for practical approaches.

22. **Romanian public servants seem eager to participate in a comprehensive training program on SD. The training needs assessment survey with over 1000 respondents from Romanian public institutions shows a prevailing preference for training programs with a maximum duration of 6 months.** In an intensive format, the minimum 180-hour program can be structured as follows: 170 hours of instruction conducted over the first 3 months, comprising 60 hours of theory and 110 hours of practical training. Subsequently, participants will have an additional 10 hours of supervised practical work with mentoring or guidance over a maximum of 3 months to prepare the individual project required for the certification exam. Alternatively, for a more flexible training path, the initial 170 hours of instruction can be extended to 5 months, followed by the preparation of the individual project and personalized assistance over a maximum of one month[25].

23. **The introduction of the SD training program offers opportunities to collaborate closely with the National Institute of Administration (INA) and the National Agency for Civil Service (NACS) – two central institutions with significant roles in identifying training needs and providing specialized training for civil servants.** To align with their missions, the report recommends that the DSD work with NACS and INA to consider incorporating the coherent and specific definitions of roles, competencies, and performance expectations outlined in this report, particularly for SDEs. This will ensure a more targeted and effective approach to training civil servants, including SDEs, and enhance their capacity to contribute to sustainable development initiatives.

Immediate next steps

24. **There are several next steps for advancing Romania's initiatives to coordinate SD initiatives across the government and to operationalize the SDE role.** Immediate next steps could include:

- *Designing and implementing the SDE training program:* The DSD will lead the development of the curriculum for the forthcoming career training program on SD in alignment with INA and NACS. This curriculum should be in line with the NSSD and action plan and in accordance with the latest EU developments for achieving the SDGs. It will correspond to the SDEs competencies and training priorities, providing the participants with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to fulfill their roles effectively. The World Bank will provide support for this activity under the RAS and provide recommendations for the curriculum under RAS Deliverable 4 (a).[12]

- *Preparing selection criteria for trainers:* The DSD, with the support of relevant stakeholders, should prepare selection criteria for training providers. These criteria should ensure that trainers possess the expertise, experience, and qualifications necessary to deliver high-quality training on SD. The World Bank

[25] A detailed proposal for training design (learning objectives, main topics, training methods, duration, delivery, etc.) is included in Section 6.2 of the report.

will provide support for this activity under the RAS and provide technical inputs to inform the development of selection criteria for trainers under RAS Deliverable 2.[11]

- *Elaboration of procurement documents:* The DSD, in collaboration with relevant entities, can contribute to the elaboration of terms of reference and required procurement documents for the contracting of professional training services. These documents should outline the specific requirements and expectations for the delivery of the career development program on SD.

- *Build synergies with the planned SD center of excellence (CExDD):* The GSG is developing a center of excellence in sustainable development, with the aim of consolidating the SD governance capacity at the central level. The World Bank is currently providing support for this activity under Deliverable 3 of the RAS, offering advice on budgeting approaches and financing options for the operationalization of the CExDD, based on a model to be prepared by the GSG and its partners. Synergies between the SDE and the CExDD should be further explored and incentivized.

- *Build synergies with the planned SD virtual resource center (One Stop Shop):* The GoR is working on a virtual resource center to support public administrations at regional and local levels in their SD initiatives. The World Bank is currently providing support for this activity under Deliverable 5 of the RAS and will prepare recommendations on a concept for a virtual resource center and functional and basic technical requirements for an IT solution for the virtual resource center. Access to the resource center should support SDEs as well as citizens.

25. In the short-medium term, the Government can take additional actions to advance this agenda, including:

- *Operationalizing the SDE competency model:* The operationalization of the SDE competency model provides a standardized framework for defining the roles and competencies of SDEs, ensuring consistency and quality in their work. This enhances collaboration, enables targeted training, and improves the overall effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives.

- *Promoting awareness and engagement:* The DSD can launch awareness campaigns and engage stakeholders at all levels to promote the importance of SD and the role of SDEs. This can involve organizing workshops, conferences, and seminars to foster dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among government officials, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders.

- *Fostering cross-institutional collaboration:* The DSD can promote effective collaboration and communication among different government entities involved in SD programs. This can be achieved through regular meetings, working groups, and the sharing of best practices and resources, enabling a coordinated approach to sustainable development initiatives. The SD Hubs can also play a role in this regard.

- *Evaluating and further refining the SD training program:* this could help systematically enhance knowledge, skills, and commitment to sustainable development principles in public institutions, leading to improved implementation of sustainable development initiatives across the government.

26. Successful implementation of these next steps will contribute to improved coordination of SD programs, enhanced collaboration among government entities, and the development of a skilled

workforce capable of effectively implementing sustainable development initiatives. This will contribute to the advancement of sustainable development goals, promote cross-institutional collaboration, and address sustainability challenges more effectively.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

27. In Romania, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are addressed through the *National Strategy for Romania's Sustainable Development 2030*[26] *(hereafter the 'Strategy' or 'NSSD')*. The document, adopted by the Government of Romania (GoR) in 2018, establishes the national framework to support the UN Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the set of 17 SDGs, focusing the country's development on three main pillars: economic, social, and environmental. The Strategy covers all sectors of society and economy and is developed in line with the response of the European Union (EU) to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the relevant policies at the EU level.

28. The GoR is firmly committed to achieving the SDGs. However, overall progress has been slow, compared to other European countries and (interagency) coordination, implementation, and monitoring of climate change and sustainable development (SD) initiatives need strengthening and a more integrated approach. Although Romania has made progress on the SDGs, for most indicators, it falls in the last part of the European ranking.[27] The General Secretariat of the Government (GSG), through the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD), aims to address these challenges through initiatives under two main national programs: the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) of the EU and the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the NSSD, which was elaborated in 2022 with financial support from the EU. As part of the NRRP, a number of initiatives will help deliver the objectives of the Strategy.

29. Based on NRRP provisions, institutional capacity-building activities are being conducted by the DSD, in cooperation with the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to provide comprehensive support to the SDG agenda around three pillars. The first pillar aims at consolidating the governance capacity at the central level, by developing a center of excellence in sustainable development. The vision, mandate and structure are currently being currently elaborated based on the OECD support, while the model of costing will be provided by the WB. The second pillar, supported by the WB, refers to human resource development across central and local administration, to ensure that the relevant staff are equipped with the necessary skills to work as sustainable development experts (SDEs). The third pillar is focused on strengthening the monitoring and implementation capacity at the local level, by setting up with WB assistance and operationalizing a *One-stop-shop Romania 2030*, a virtual resource center that would support a local approach to SD objectives.

30. The reforms envisaged in the NRRP for which World Bank support was requested build upon previous efforts carried out by the DSD to support the implementation of the Strategy. Starting in August

[26] Departamentul pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă (gov.ro).
[27] As per Eurostat data SDG COUNTRY OVERVIEW (europa.eu).

2019, the DSD has implemented the EU-funded project 'Sustainable Romania',[28] aimed at developing the implementation framework for the Strategy, increasing the institutional capacity of central authorities, improving interinstitutional coordination, and supporting evidence-informed decision-making. Activities included developing the abovementioned National Action Plan for Implementing the NSSD, developing and operationalizing a monitoring and reporting framework, based on statistical data, setting up the institutional framework for the implementation of the Strategy, and supporting the professionalization of the staff in the central administration, by developing and certifying a new job profile, that of an SDE.[29]

31. Based on certification of the new job profile, the DSD is currently leading the process of introducing Sustainable Development Experts to public administration. Based on the newly created SDE occupation, according to the Romanian standards (COR 242232), the Administrative Code[30] was extended with the public function of 'sustainable development expert'. This provides the legal basis for public institutions at central and local levels to include SD positions in the organizational charts and to adapt staff's job descriptions accordingly. This legislative change was completed and came into force in 2022. It will be followed by a training program to be delivered at all levels of the public administration, so that by Q3 2025, about 2,000 persons will have been trained in the field of sustainable development.[31]

1.2 Scope

32. The scope of the report is to assess the institutional capacity of the public administration for supporting the implementation and monitoring of the NSSD and SD National Action Plan at the central, regional, and local levels by contributing to their operationalization. The areas of analyses agreed with the DSD[32] cover the following:

(a) *Responsibilities of institutions and staff* in the implementation of the NSSD and Action Plan.

(b) *Interinstitutional communication*, both horizontal and vertical, within the central public administration and between central and local public administrations in relation to shared responsibilities in implementing and reporting on the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan.

(c) *Key competencies* needed for the effective implementation of the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan with respect to (i) specific knowledge related to the SDGs; (ii) relevant skills appropriate to the occupation of SDEs considering the relevant competencies resulting from General Competency Framework; (iii) relevant skills to facilitate access and implementation of EU-funded projects, in accordance with the principles of SD, including green procurement, climate change, digital skills; and (iv) scope of knowledge on information technology (IT) relevant to identifying digital solutions and/or services necessary to achieve the SDGs. (c) identify the skill gaps of existing staff and the type of training needed to fill such gaps.

[28] Proiect "România Durabilă" (gov.ro).
[29] Certification was granted by the National Authority for Qualifications. For details on the standard (COR 242232): SO_expertdezvoltaredurabila-1.pdf (gov.ro).
[30] ANEXA Nr 5 | Codul administrativ actualizat 2022 - Lege5.ro.
[31] As per NRRP, Chapter 14. Good Governance, R2. *Strengthening the coordination at the center of government through an integrated and coherent approach to climate change and sustainable development initiatives*, Action 2 (pages 57–59).
[32] SD RAS Legal Agreement, concluded between the DSD and World Bank representatives on November 18, 2022.

(d) *IT management systems' needs, availability, and interoperability* and proposing options to fill the systems' gaps for monitoring and measuring progress toward achieving the SDGs.

33. The report also aimed at developing a training needs assessment (TNA) at the central, regional, and local levels, based on findings under the research conducted by the World Bank team and the consultations with the DSD and other key SD players. Based on the analysis of SD key skills and identification of skills gaps, the current report also covers a TNA that includes the identification of main training needs of the SD staff in public administration institutions at central and local levels.

34. The report represents the basis for the elaboration of project Deliverable 4[33] that aims at supporting the DSD in the process of developing skills and careers in the field of sustainable development for staff in the public administration. Based on the current analysis and close consultations with the DSD, the World Bank team will propose a curriculum for the career development program on SD in public administration institutions at the central and local levels and will design and deliver an initial training program dedicated to 50 SD trainers.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The current deliverable is structured as follows:

35. Chapter 1 provides the overall framework of developing and implementing this RAS, the scope of the report, and previous related work conducted by the World Bank.

36. Chapter 2 describes in detail a step-by-step methodology and tools for conducting Survey 1[34] and Survey 2[35], as well as how they were applied for this report.

37. Chapter 3 concerns the detailed information about target institutions and target groups; the latter is represented by SD managers and operational staff at the central, regional, and local levels.

38. Chapter 4 provides an assessment of the current institutional capacity-building needs, for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on the desk research and Survey 1 main results.

39. Chapter 5 includes a thorough analysis of the SDE competencies and provides a blueprint and vision for a new model of SDE core competency in the public administration.

40. Chapter 6 provides an in-depth TNA, followed by recommendations of priority SD training areas and inputs for developing the SD training plan and curriculum.

41. Chapter 7 includes the conclusions of the analyses conducted under this deliverable and provides a summary of recommendations related to further steps to continue building the capacities of the central and local authorities for implementing the SDGs. The results of the research incorporate a strong strategic dimension that can effectively support the SD reform agenda for the public administration.

[33] Deliverable 4: (a) Report containing the proposed curriculum for the career development program on SD, including input on available supplemental training options and (b) Report on the delivery of the initial training of SD trainers.
[34] Survey 1: Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment: Assessing Capacity, Challenges, and Needs for Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals in Romania.
[35] Survey 2: Analysis of Staff's Competencies in the Field of Sustainable Development.

42. The six annexes comprise the following: (a) **Annex 1:** Database containing the target institutions: public administration institutions (central and local levels); (b) **Annex 2:** Database containing the contact persons at the management level in public administration institutions (central and local levels); (c) **Annex 3:** Database containing the list of persons in public administration institutions (central and local levels) designated to participate in the SD training program; (d) **Annex 4:** Report on Survey 1; (e) **Annex 5:** Report on Survey 2; and (f) **Annex 6:** Report on Focus Groups with Sustainable Development Experts in Public Administration Institutions.

43. The report provides an in-depth assessment of how institutional development needs in the field of SD, including learning and development (L&D) needs, are identified for selected categories of institutions for respective staff in the Romanian central and local public administration in terms of process and current practices. It is based on previous and current World Bank practices of institutional analyses and TNA in the public administration, the results of two surveys conducted within this project deliverable, and constant dialogue with the DSD and focus group consultations with stakeholders.[36] Besides the World Bank's previous institutional capacity-building reports, secondary sources were also used to document the findings, such as Voluntary National and Sub-National Reviews 2023 and a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report.[37]

1.4 Link with Other World Bank Projects

44. The World Bank has been supporting reform efforts of central public administration in Romania. Institutional capacity development of the GSG and other central public administration institutions, by addressing in particular strategic management and human resources management (HRM) reforms, was supported in recent RAS projects presented hereafter.

45. ***Consolidating the Strategic Management Function of GSG (ID: P170487).*** **The 36-month project aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Romanian GSG to consolidate its strategic management functions and support capacity building of line ministries in elaborating national strategies and policies.** The key project activities fed into the operations plan of a Policy Lab, led and staffed with the GSG experts and supported through coaching by the World Bank team. The World Bank had a significant role in supporting the GSG in political and technical dialogue, knowledge management, and communication. Specifically, this can entail helping the lab team get its results to the attention of the senior management, or in return get assignments that help the lab exercise its functions within the system, and gain better traction with the processes of the government and bureaucratic apparatus. The knowledge management support will help codify the tested methods and assemble them in a training tool. The communication support will help gradually position the lab team internally and possibly externally, as the experts on innovative methods in evidence-based policy making and strategic management.

[36] Ministry of Investments and European Projects (MIEP), Ministry of Justice (MJ), Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities (MFYEO), National Agency of Civil Servants (NACS), National Institute of Administration (INA), National Agency for Qualifications (ANC), county councils, RDAs.

[37] Romania: OECD Scan of Institutional Mechanisms to Deliver on the SDGs.

46. ***Developing a Unitary Human Resources Management System within the Public Administration, HRM RAS project (ID: P165191).*** **The HRM RAS was developed in line with the objectives included in the Strategy for Strengthening the Public Administration (SSPA) 2014–2020 and was financed by the EU from POCA 2014–2020 funds.** The recipient was the GSG and its project partners are the National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS) and the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity (MOLSS). The HRM RAS targeted several core challenges of the HRM policy. Activities of the HRM RAS sought to reduce politicization and improve the professionalization of the Romanian public administration by streamlining/clarifying HRM policy, competency, recruitment, and performance assessment frameworks.

47. ***Supporting the Establishment of an Improved Training System in the Romanian Public Administration (ID: P169456).*** **The RAS project assisted the National Institute of Administration (NIA) in identifying the training needs of the Romanian public administration, providing evidence-based policy recommendations to improve training policy and support new training programs (mentoring).** The support was meant to contribute to the overarching goal of the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Romania 2019–2023 to build institutions fit for a prosperous and inclusive Romania. The proposed interventions supported an improved training system in public administration. This was achieved through two main channels: (a) by providing evidence-based policy recommendations for improving training for public administration staff and to inform the development of the Public Administration Training Strategy for 2021–2027 and (b) by identifying mechanisms for linking training to career progression, including the introduction of mentoring schemes to foster learning and professional development.

48. ***Improvement of the Training System in Romania (ID: P170498).*** **The project supported the GoR to develop an evidence-based training policy framework for the Romanian public administration.** This was a 22-month engagement to support the development of an evidence-based training policy for the Romanian public administration. The support provided to the GSG under this proposed engagement was built upon activities that were conducted in parallel under the engagement with NIA. Activities supported the GoR in establishing an improved training system in the Romanian public administration. The RAS assisted the GSG in identifying the training needs of the Romanian public administration, providing evidence-based policy recommendations to improve training policy and support new training programs. The World Bank elaborated a report containing technical inputs and recommendations for the development of the Public Administration Training Strategy for 2021–2027, including considerations on change management. It also acted as a facilitator during working groups and workshops organized by the GSG to inform the new strategy.

49. ***Strengthening the Administrative Capacity of the Civil Service Agency (ID: P174143).*** **The project aimed at supporting NACS to develop its strategic human resources functions in the civil service as well as to improve its capacity to perform.** The specific objective of the project was to support NACS in strengthening human resources functions in the civil service and to improve its performance. The support to NACS was provided within the following components: Component 1: Support for the development of the strategic and operational framework of NACS that will enable the institution to deliver on its new mandate; Component 2: Support for the implementation of the main HRM reforms; and Component 3: Support for capacity building of NACS staff.

2. Methodology and Tools

2.1 Desk Research and Surveys

Desk research: Main data sources

50. The main sources of data that inform the desk research include the following:

- Romanian and internationally relevant legislation and regulations
- Data from international and EU reports and surveys relevant to the SDGs
- Analytical reports and recommendations relevant to the SD (for example, World Bank documents, OECD reports, European Commission [EC] reports, and VNR).

Surveys

51. As part of Deliverable 1, the World Bank team, in close cooperation with the DSD, rolled out two surveys: institutional capacity needs assessment (Survey 1) and analysis of staff competencies in the field of sustainable development and TNA (Survey 2). The methodologies for each of the surveys (included in the Surveys' reports: Annexes 4 and 5) were transmitted to the DSD at the end of March 2023 and agreed upon, before launching the surveys.

52. Survey 1 aimed at collecting and processing key information on the institutional capacity needs of public administration institutions in the field of sustainable development at the central, regional, and local levels. The survey was used to assess (a) existing gaps and needs in terms of staff availability and overall institutional capacity in implementing the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan; (b) interinstitutional communication between the different levels of the public administration in relation to shared responsibilities in implementing and reporting on the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan; and (c) IT management systems' needs, availability, and interoperability for monitoring and measuring progress toward achieving the SDGs. The results of the survey informed further work under this RAS: the TNA and the development of the training curricula for the future SDEs.

53. *Methodology: Survey 1.* The survey covered public institutions and authorities at central, regional, and local levels. At the central level, the survey addressed all ministries and the institutions under their subordination, coordination, and authority, except for state-owned enterprises. At the regional level[38], the survey targeted all eight regional development agencies[39], while at the local and territorial levels, the survey addressed prefectures and county councils and deconcentrated public services in all 41 counties, as well as all cities and towns across the country.

54. The survey was deployed online using the *Survey Solutions* platform. The World Bank team distributed invitations via email to the heads of targeted institutions, accompanied by an endorsement letter signed by the DSD to confirm the project's authority and validity (Annex 4, Appendix 1). The survey link was active between April 8 and May 11, during which one reminder was sent to encourage recipients to complete the survey. Throughout the survey, the World Bank and DSD teams provided assistance to respondents by email. The total number of institutions contacted was 1,506. The database of institutions

[38] Operational regions

[39] Even though these structures do not belong to public administration, the RDAs were analyzed due to their SD-related relevant roles at the regional level

(including contact data) covered by Survey 1 is shown in Annex 1. A summary of the target institutions (by category and number) is presented in the Table below.

55. ***Survey 1 - Respondents:*** **Considering the objective of Survey 1, the World Bank team estimated that the respondents must have a high-level managerial function in their organization and a good overview of their role and responsibilities in implementing the NSSD and AP**. The respondents were expected to be well positioned to be able to collect information internally to effectively answer the questions related to capacity gaps and needs for SD implementation and mainstreaming, including staff availability and skills and IT systems, as well as related to the interinstitutional communication, horizontally and vertically, with other organizations regarding the SD Strategy and Plan. While the invitation for participation in the survey was addressed to the heads of the institutions, it was expected that they nominate a person to gather the information and complete the task. The survey took about 45 minutes to complete.

56. The detailed description of the main phases of conducting the two surveys are presented in Annex 4.

57. Content: Survey 1. The questionnaire related to institutional needs analysis is detailed in Appendix 2 of Report on Survey 1 (Annex 4).

58. The content of each section and expected outcomes are shown in the Table below.

Table 1. Survey 1 questionnaire: Sections and expected data results

Section	No. of questions	Expected data results
Section 1. Profile	7	Information about the institutions: location (region and county), type, sector of activity, and responsibilities in terms of delivering the SDGs Findings were used to (a) profile respondents and (b) detail responses from the next sections by location/type of institution/other criteria.
Section 2. Overall capacity, main challenges, and gaps in relation to delivering the SDGs	14	Information regarding the perceived existing capacity in terms of staff availability and skills, governance, main needs and priorities for capacity improvement, and capacity of the institution to integrate SD in its operations
Section 3: Vertical and horizontal communication	4	Information regarding the perceived challenges and main needs in relation to the vertical and horizontal coordination and communication with other stakeholders, for effectively delivering the SDGs
Section 4. Availability of IT Systems	8	Information regarding the perceived availability, challenges, and main needs in relation to the expertise and IT systems and tools, for monitoring and measuring progress toward the SDGs, including perceived needs for the OSS
Final open question	1	Any other information respondents want to share in relation to the capacity and needs for delivering SDGs

59. Report on Survey 1. Answers were processed and analyzed by the World Bank team. A survey report was developed (Annex 4), comprising charts for responses for each question, overall, as well as filtered by region and by level of government (central, regional, and local). Other breakdowns were included,

such as by type of organization and main SDG. Brief interpretations of the findings are provided in Chapter 4.2. The outcomes from the survey were used to inform the current institutional analysis in the field of SD.

60. Survey 2 aimed at collecting and processing key information on SD-related competencies and training needs. The target institutions is represented by all institutions at the central, regional, and local levels (1,506 public administration institutions and RDAs). The breakdown per type of institution is shown in the Table below.

Table 2. Overview of institutions targeted by the surveys

Type	Number contacted	Number of respondents / type of institution
Ministries	20	46
Public institutions under the ministries' subordination, coordination, or authority	55	261
Deconcentrated public institutions	1,014	551
Prefectures	42	99
County councils	41	67
City municipalities	109	56
Towns	217	51
RDAs[40]	*8*	*20*
Total	**1,506**	**1,151**

Source: World Bank

61. The target group of experts in SD who participated in this survey referred to 1,151 public servants and contractual personnel from public administration institutions.

62. Training needs in the SD area refer to the competency gap that needs to be covered through a structured training process in SD. The competency gap is assessed as the difference between the expected competencies of Sustainable Development Experts (SDE) according to the occupational standard and what the target group currently reports as their skills level. In addition to this gap analysis, the team conducted an analysis of institutional factors that hinder the narrowing of this gap. These factors include role clarity and the extent to which SD professionals have access to best practices and tools for applying sustainable development principles within their specific roles. This comprehensive assessment allows for a nuanced understanding of both individual and systemic barriers to effective SDG implementation.

[40] RDAs are not public administration institutions. Nevertheless, their staff was considered in the surveys and focus groups, for consultations, based on the RDAs' SD-related institutional mandates and the staff's roles and activities related to the implementation of SDGs

63. Specific competencies in the field of SD can be defined by listing the activities that an SD specialist should carry out. The activities that require specific competencies of an SDE will be taken from the occupational standard and enriched and detailed with the help of SDE.

64. According to the occupational standard, the World Bank team analyzed the list of 34 statements under the *competencies* section, which could be interpreted in terms of both *activities* that require the competency of an SDE and the *skills* that make up that competency. **A skill** means that the person is performant in doing that activity (or achieving performance in that activity), and the specific competency covers all the skills necessary to perform all the activities in the SD field.

65. Regarding using the concept of specific competencies in training programs for public servants (as well as in other processes related to the career of public servants such as recruitment-selection, promotion, performance evaluation, mobility, and professional reorientation), these should be *as comprehensive as possible to cover an entire field of specialization*. According to the competency framework for public servants, a public servant will be associated with seven general competencies, one or two specific competencies, and two to four managerial and leadership competencies (depending on the managerial level).

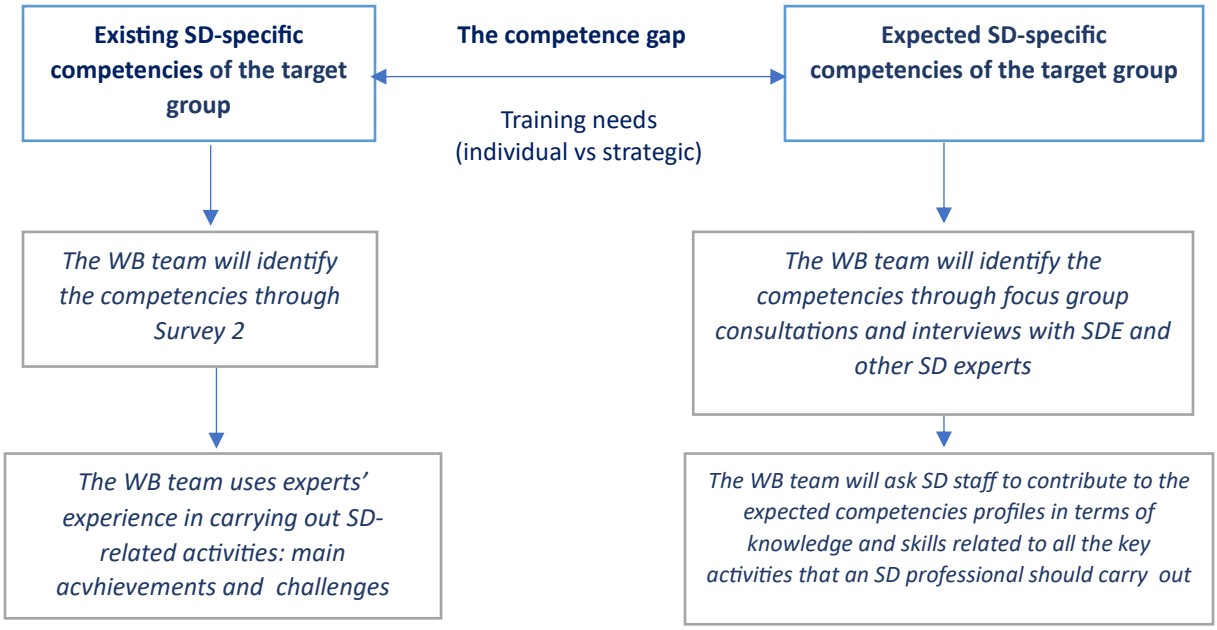
66. For this reason, the World Bank team expected public servants with responsibilities in the field of SD to have *one or two specific competencies associated with their role* (job description). For example, using *provisional* names, these could be (a) –SD competence - meaning competence in carrying out multiple activities specific to the field of SD, a profile that can be largely taken from the occupational standard and later detailed; (b) environmental management (or environmental governance) competence - meaning competence in carrying out specialized SD activities in the field of environment; (c) both the abovementioned competencies; and (d) one of the above competencies plus another specific competency that does not belong to the field of SD.

67. Following an analysis of the necessary competencies required of SDEs (through focus groups and surveys) and consultation of European good practices in SD, the WB team established how the specific competencies should be defined. This includes the set of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) associated with them, for public servants or contractual employees in the public administration who will have roles and responsibilities in the ecological, social, and economic field of SD, as well as in the area of IT or attracting funds in the area of SD.

68. The expected competency profile was shaped by collecting the opinions expressed by specialists about the knowledge and skills (abilities) that should be possessed by SDEs specializing in the environmental, economic, and social areas, as well as those involved in fundraising or digitization.

69. The methodology for conducting the TNA is summarized in the Figure below:

Figure 1. Methodological tool for TNA



Source: WB Author

Note: WB = World Bank

70. *Preparation of Survey 2*. To identify training needs for a target group with diverse responsibilities in SD, *the World Bank team* will apply two complementary methods in two stages.

71. In the first stage, the World Bank team identified the profile of roles and responsibilities that the respondent has in SD, and for each of these, we will investigate the challenges and training needs. This method is recommended for identifying existing competencies that need to be developed. The questions had the following order: (a) *What are your job responsibilities related to SDGs?; (b) Which of the following activities best described your role and current responsibilities in the SD domain?* (*World Bank team provides a list of key roles and activities derived from occupational standard); (c) What are the main challenges you are facing in these activities? (World Bank team provided a list of main challenges that should be addressed by a training program).* In the second stage, the World Bank team will provide a list of tasks and skills required from an SDE and verify whether respondents identify them as needs. This method is recommended for identifying new competencies that need to be acquired. The main question is the following: *To what extent do you consider a training program that develops the following skills and competencies necessary for SD to be a priority for your professional development? (World Bank* team *provides a list of the main skills requested by an SDE, which will be created based on focus group participants, desk research, and other World Bank experts interviewed.)*

72. ***Survey 2 - Content.*** **The questionnaire related to SD staff skills analysis is detailed in the Appendix of Report on Survey 2 (Annex 5).**

73. The survey aimed to identify the actual responsibilities, challenges, and training needs of public servants and contractual staff with roles in SD or related field. The respondents were nominated by institutional representatives (managers) according to this profile. The other technical aspects, relating to the platform used, reminders, and link activation remained the same as in Survey 1. The time for completion was about 40 minutes. The answers were anonymized, but the responses could be associated with the institution type and geographical region (the same identification as in Survey 1).

74. Expected outcomes of Survey 2. The table below summarizes the structure and expected main data results of Survey 2.

Table 3. Survey 2 questionnaire: Sections and expected data results

Section	No. of questions	Expected data results
Section 1. Profile Identification	7	Information about the target group's location (region and county), type, sector of activity, and responsibilities in delivering the SDGs Findings were used to (a) profile respondents and (b) detail responses from the next sections by location/type of institution/other criteria.
Section 2. Challenges Associated with the Actual SD Role	2	Information regarding the staff's challenges associated with the actual SD role.
Section 3 – Training needs assessment	8	Information about staff's skills and competencies, priority training needs, preferred training paths, training methods and availability to participate in the training program.

75. Survey 2 outcomes will further support the DSD design and conduct SDE training focused on: strengthening (a) the capacity to *access and absorb European funds* in accordance with the principles of SD; in the thematic content, among others, emphasis will be placed on the analysis of the Taxonomy Regulation (2020/852), in particular 'Article 17. Significantly damaging environmental objectives (DNSH - Do Not Significant Harm)', green procurement, and how to concretely translate the SDGs and 'Article 16. Peace, justice, and effective institutions'; (b) *skills specific to the SDGs linked to the sphere of competence in the workplace or the institution* in which it operates, directly and indirectly; (c) *skills appropriate to the occupation of expert sustainable development* (code ROC 242232); the occupational standard corresponding to the occupation of 'sustainable development expert' (No RS - 9/25.02.2021) lists the competencies concerned; part of these competencies may be taken over in the general competency framework developed by the NACS; and (d) *specific digital skills*, with emphasis on digital solutions and services to achieve the SDGs.

76. The survey informed the TNA with the following objectives: (a) identification of training needs in the field of SD by regions and institutional categories: central, territorial, and local; (b) identification of relevant responsibilities (activities and roles), challenges, and specific competencies currently carried out by SDEs; (c) identification of the challenges and training needs for the personnel who only partially fulfill

responsibilities in the field of SD; and (d) identification of training needs for five specific competencies of an SDE: economic, social, environment, accessing funds, and digitalization.

Limits and constraints considered in the design of the surveys

77. At the time of rolling out Survey 2, the target group profile was not well outlined. There was a core of about 150 SDEs[41] in central public administration institutions and an unspecified number of public servants or contractual staff with (more or less) responsibilities in the field of SD, which were cumulated with other responsibilities. This means the main target group could not be identified by job title and only in a few cases, it could have been identified by department title. The proposed solution to determine who is fit for a TNA survey in the SD area was to have a preliminary phase in which an institutional leader would indicate such individuals. Furthermore, in Survey 2, the World Bank team first identified the specific role and responsibilities the respondents have in the SD area and after that asked about it.

78. As a new specialization and profession, whose occupational standard has just been established, the training needs are strategic in nature (top down: from the governmental level to the institutional level, and subsequently to the individual level). SDGs, policies, and strategies formulated for their implementation require changes at the level of organization of public institutions and implicitly changes in the roles and responsibilities of personnel. These changes or assignments of new roles and responsibilities are currently ongoing, which means that a significant part of the target training group does not have specific responsibilities defined for the role of SDE and therefore cannot identify training needs on this subject. The proposed solution to address these distinct types of training needs (strategic and individual) was to add complementary objectives to Survey 1 and focus groups as follows: (a) in Survey 1, which targets institutional leaders with an overview of strategic development needs, the World Bank team added questions related to institutional intentions to develop SD competencies, including new roles and specialized staff; this will help identify individuals who need to be trained or specialized in new roles and responsibilities; (b) in the focus groups, which involved experts in SD policies and strategies, the World Bank team added questions to identify the new roles and responsibilities that an SDE should cover from a strategic perspective; and (c) in Survey 2, which will involve respondents who may or may not be aware of changes in their own roles and responsibilities, we suggest asking separate questions about their training needs related to their current responsibilities and questions regarding their desire or intention to access a specific training module from a strategic perspective.

79. Overall, these additions to the survey and organization of focus group meetings helped identifying the training needs of both individuals and institutions from a strategic perspective and provide a more comprehensive approach to addressing the training needs for SD.

2.2 Focus Groups

80. Focus groups with representatives of institutions at the central, regional, and local levels were one of the tools applied for consultations with the key stakeholders. The overall objective of focus groups was to validate and complement the information from Survey 2 related to defining and analyzing the profile of the specific core competencies (environmental, social, economic, management of EU funds, and

[41] The total number of SD hubs is to be confirmed by the DSD, based on the Minister's Orders of designation of SD hubs in line ministries.

digitization) in terms of skills and knowledge required from an SDE. The specific objectives were to (a) identify types of roles and responsibilities that future specialists in SD in local and territorial public administration must fulfill; (b) identify the training needs of the SDE group. Participants targeted for the focus groups were part of the following categories of personnel at the operational level, from public administration institutions and RDAs: experts in SD from central institutions in the fields of environment, economy, social, and justice; experts in SD from territorial and local institutions in the fields of environment, economy, and social; SDEs who have contributed to the definition of SD policies and strategies; and experts in SD with a role in the management of European funds and digital transformation.

3. Institutions Analyzed and Target Groups at the Central, Regional, and Local Levels

3.1 Institutions Analyzed

81. The research was addressed to all categories of public administration institutions at the central and local levels and RDAs. At the central level, the research covered all ministries and institutions under their subordination, coordination, and authority, except for the state-owned enterprises. At the local level, the prefectures and county councils, together with deconcentrated institutions in all 41 counties and in Bucharest, were targeted. The research also targeted all municipalities of cities and towns in the country. Given their roles in the regional strategic planning process and EU project implementation, all eight RDAs were involved in the project. All 1,506 public administration institutions and RDAs were contacted to participate in the research, as planned in the methodology presented in Section 2.1.

82. The table below provides data on type and number of institutions at the central, regional, and local levels approached for the research, as well as the number of responses by type of institution (total: 389 respondents, out of 1506 institutions invited to participate in Survey 1).

Table 4. Overview of institutions targeted and the responses to the institutional assessment survey

Institution type	Number contacted	No. of responses
Ministries	20	16
Public institutions under the ministries' subordination, coordination, or authority	55	156[42]
RDAs	8	8
Deconcentrated public institutions	1,014	82[43]
Prefectures	42	32
County councils	41	32
City municipalities	109	19
Town municipalities	217	18

[42] The difference results from a wrong classification between the two categories made by the respondents.
[43] The difference results from a wrong classification between the two categories made by the respondents.

Other	0	26
Total	**1,506**	**389**

Source: World Bank.

83. The response rates were considerably high[44] from the institutions at the central level (over 80 percent), whereas an expected lower response rate (but still over the figure estimated in the surveys' methodologies) was registered from the local level (about 26 percent). Out of 1,506 institutions invited to participate in the surveys, 417[45] responded, representing about 28 percent of the total. The World Bank team estimated a response rate of over 80 percent for responses received from central institutions (ministries) and 100 percent considering ministries, national agencies, and their affiliated institutions. The response rate at the local level was approximately 26 percent.[46] Thus, 101 entities from 409 invited institutions responded. All RDAs responded to the invitation to appoint contact persons (at management level) and staff (at management and operational levels) as potential invitees to the training program (response rate: 100 percent). The response rates by development regions are presented in the Table below.

Table 5. Response rates by development regions

Region	Responses	%
Development Region Bucharest-Ilfov (8)	68	17.5
Development Region Center (7)	63	16.2
Development Region North-East (2)	47	12.1
Development Region North-West (1)	38	9.8
Development Region South-East (3)	45	11.6
Development Region South-Muntenia (4)	45	11.6
Development Region South-West Oltenia (5)	43	11.1
Development Region West (6)	40	10.3
Total	**389**	**100.0**

Source: World Bank.

3.2 Target Group

84. Based on the NRRP requirements, the primary target group in this report is represented by civil servants and contractual staff in the target public administration institutions at the central and local levels and RDA staff. The estimated calculation of the number of persons to be further trained (2,000), based on this RAS input, was done considering the number of administrative units served by public institutions: 8 Regions (NUTS 2) + 42 Counties and Bucharest (NUTS 3) + 366 Towns and Cities (LAU) = 416

[44] The rates were higher than the ones estimated in the methodology (Section 1.2).
[45] According to the survey methodology, out of these persons, 389 at the management level were nominated to represent their institution in this project ('contact persons') - Annex 2 of the Report.
[46] The calculation does not consider the institutions in the category 'Other' and 'Deconcentrated public services'.

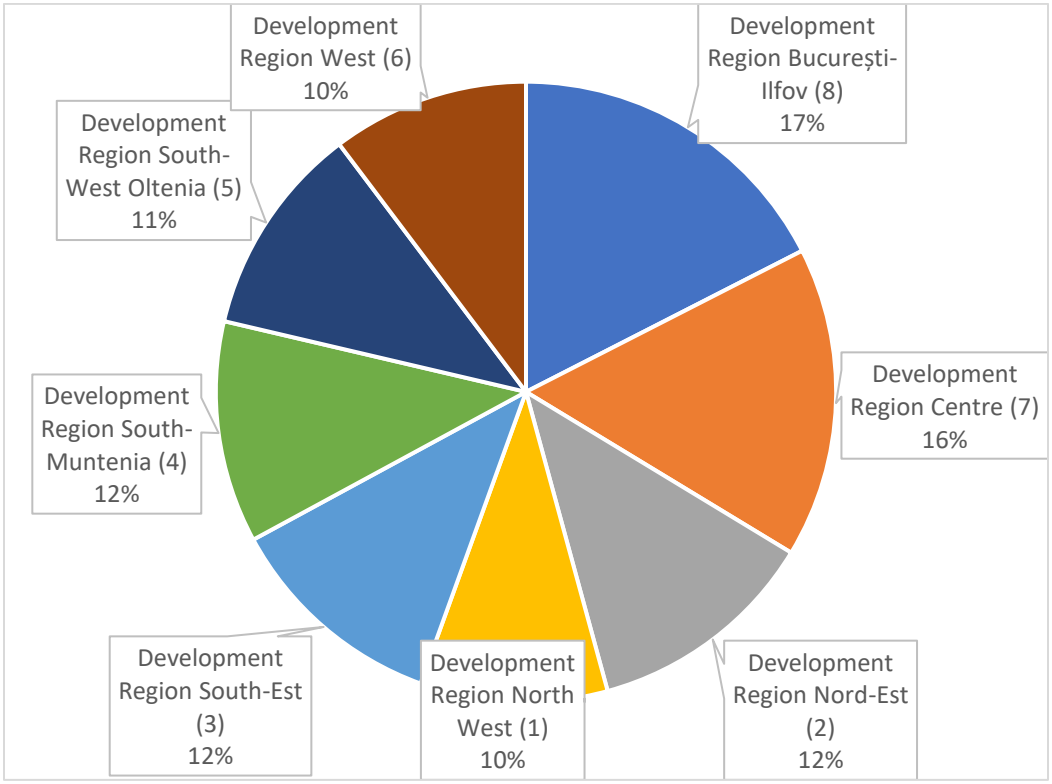
units × 4 people = 1,664 persons from the public administration at the regional and local levels + 336 people from the central public administration.[47]

85. Out of 1,506 institutions invited to nominate persons for the training program, 1,460 persons in institutions at the central, regional, and local levels were selected as potential participants in the future SD training program. The designated persons were staff at management and operational levels (civil servants, contractual staff, and RDA staff). The database of persons nominated by the target institutions to participate in the SD training program[48] is presented in Annex 1.

86. The secondary target group is represented by the management staff in the target public administration institutions at the central and local levels and RDA, who were designated as contact persons for this RAS project and were invited to participate in Survey 1. The database of contact persons is presented in Annex 2.

87. The responses per development region are quite balanced. These vary from 10 to 17 percent, whereas the number of contact persons per region are from 38 to 68. Entities' responses and contact persons (at management level) by regions are shown in Figure below and Table below.

Figure 2. Entities—responses and contact persons—by regions



[47] NRRP, Chapter 14. *Good Governance, R2. Strengthening the coordination at the center of government through an integrated and coherent approach to climate change and sustainable development initiatives*, Action 2 (page 58).
[48] The data were collected over the 22-day period via the Survey Solutions Platform and further completed manually via DSD, after the two-week extension of the process of nomination of potential future trainees in the SD training program.

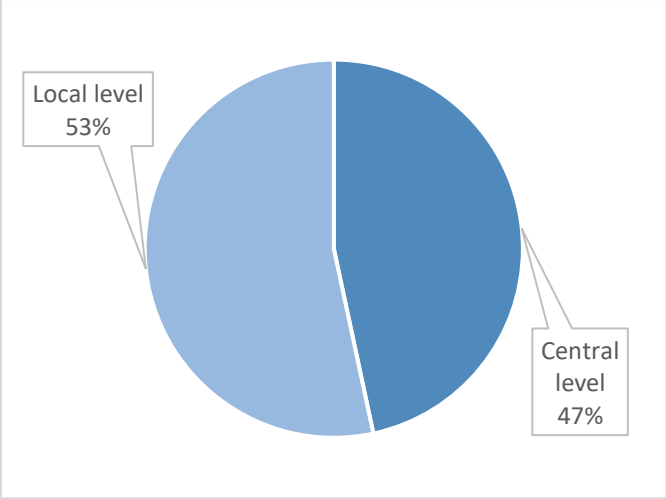
Source: Author

88. A total of 632 persons in central public administration institutions (ministries and affiliated institutions) and 794 persons from local authorities were designated for participation in the SD training program. The number of designated persons by institution type is shown in the Table below.

Table 6. Designated persons by institution type

Institution type	No. of persons
Ministry	53
Central public institution or authority under the ministries' subordination, coordination, or authority	579
Deconcentrated public service	297
RDA	34
Prefecture	133
County council	137
Local administration (cities)	63
Local administration (towns)	66
Other	98
Total	**1,460**

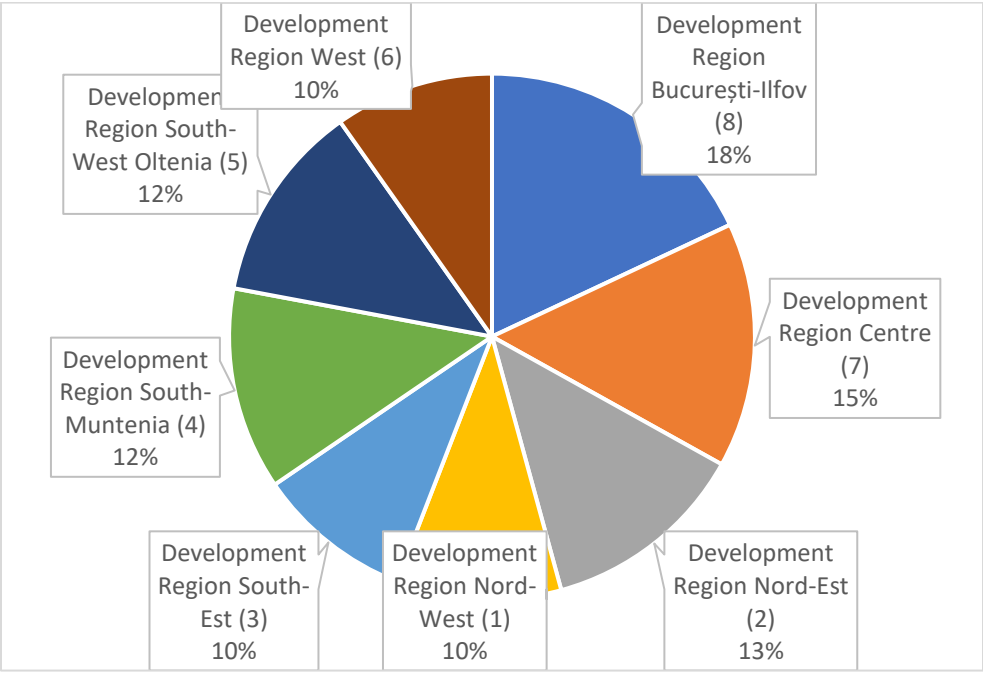
Figure 3. Designated persons by local and central level



Source: Author

89. The number of designated persons for the SD training program is balanced per development region (140–263 persons per region). The distribution (% and number of persons) by region is shown in Figure below and Table below.

Figure 4. Designated persons by region



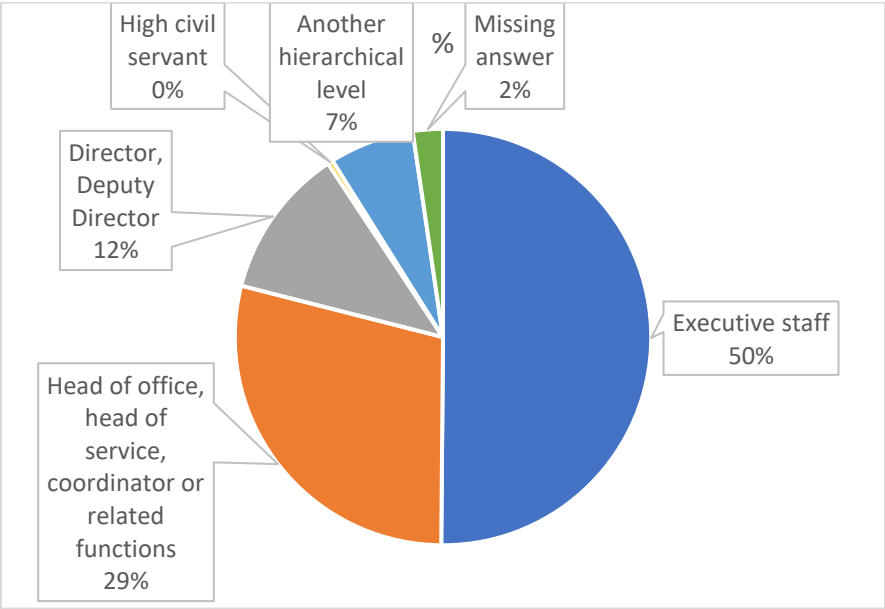
Source: Author

Table 7. Institutions—responses and contact persons—by regions

Region	No. of persons	%
Development Region Bucureşti-Ilfov (8)	263	18.0
Development Region Center (7)	220	15.1
Development Region Nord-Est (2)	185	12.7
Development Region Nord-West (1)	148	10.1
Development Region South-Est (3)	140	9.6
Development Region South-Muntenia (4)	182	12.5
Development Region South-Vest Oltenia (5)	179	12.3
Development Region West (6)	143	9.8
Total	1,460	100.0

90. The designated persons by hierarchical level in the entity (41 percent management staff and 50 percent executive staff) are shown in Figure below and Table below (number of persons per category).

Figure 5. Designated persons by hierarchical level in the entity



Source: Author

Table 8. Designated persons by hierarchical level in the entity

Hierarchical level in the entity	No. of persons	%
Executive staff	732	50.1
Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	421	28.8
Director, Deputy Director	171	11.7
High civil servant	6	0.4
Another hierarchical level	96	6.6
Missing answer	34	2.3
Total	1,460	100.0

Table 9. Designated persons by hierarchical level in the entity and type of the entity

Entity type	Hierarchical level in the entity	No. of persons	%
Ministry	Executive staff	41	77
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	10	19
	Director, Deputy Director	2	4
	Executive staff	275	47

Entity type	Hierarchical level in the entity	No. of persons	%
Central public institution or authority under the ministries' subordination, coordination, or authority	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	165	28
	Director, Deputy Director	70	12
	Another hierarchical level	47	8
	Missing answer	22	4
Decentralized public service	Executive staff	146	49
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	94	32
	Director, Deputy Director	37	12
	Another hierarchical level	9	3
	Missing answer	11	4
RDA	Executive staff	19	56
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	12	35
	Director, Deputy Director	2	6
	Another hierarchical level	1	3
Prefecture	Executive staff	84	63
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	31	23
	Director, Deputy Director	3	2
	High civil servant	6	5
	Another hierarchical level	9	7
County council	Executive staff	72	53
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	32	23
	Director, Deputy Director	21	15
	Another hierarchical level	12	9

Entity type	Hierarchical level in the entity	No. of persons	%
Local administration (cities)	Executive staff	24	38
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	14	22
	Director, Deputy Director	17	27
	Another hierarchical level	7	11
	Missing answer	1	2
Local administration (towns)	Executive staff	27	41
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	26	39
	Director, Deputy Director	5	8
	Another hierarchical level	8	12
Other	Executive staff	44	45
	Head of office, head of service, coordinator or related functions	37	38
	Director, Deputy Director	14	14
	Another hierarchical level	3	3

Source: Author

4. Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment

4.1 A Review of the Current Situation

91. A multilevel governance system supports the implementation of the NSSD. The DSD is responsible for coordinating the activities related to the implementation of the 17 SDGs across the various public institutions. The Inter-departmental Committee for Sustainable Development[49] is a high-level body overseeing the implementation process. The Advisory Council for Sustainable Development[50] is a consultative body comprising members selected from the academia, the scientific community, and civil society representatives. The Coalition for Sustainable Development is a private apolitical initiative, established as a framework for voluntary collaboration—of which the DSD is a member—and reunites representatives of civil society, the private sector, unions, employers' associations, research and development institutions, academic community, mass media, other entities, and private individuals. The

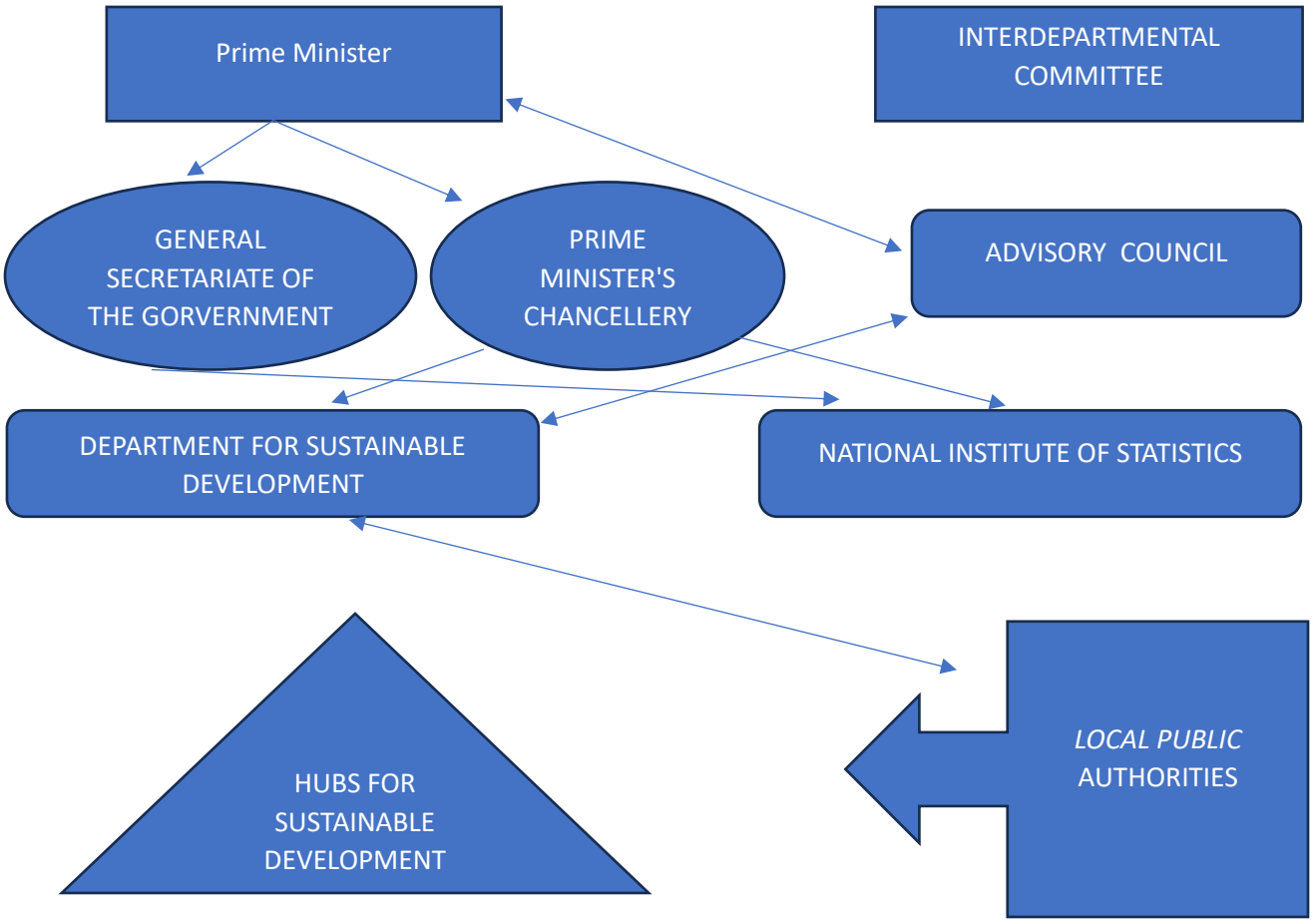
[49] Government Decision (GD) No. 272 08/05/2019.
[50] Established by GD No.114/2020, available at: HOTARARE 114 04/02/2020 - Portal Legislativ (just.ro). The functioning of the Council, including the members' remuneration, is covered by EU funding.

National Institute of Statistics (NIS) is responsible for the coordination of all activities at the national level related to data collection and processing concerning the national SDGs.

92. At the DSD's initiative, a network of hubs for SD at the central level was set up in 2021. With the support of all ministries and other central public authorities, the DSD managed to set up 22 SD hubs, covering 22 sectoral areas,[51] with approximately 90 technical staff in central public administration.[52] Each hub is responsible for driving and monitoring SDGs' implementation in the specific field of the institution. They also act as liaisons between their institutions, the DSD, and the NIS.

93. The Figure below shows the key players at the central and local levels who participate in the coordination and implementation of the SDGs.

Figure 6. SD institutional mapping in Romanian public administration[53]



[51] Foreign Affairs; Home Affairs; Agriculture; Defense; Water and Forests; Culture; Research; Communications; Regional Development; Economy; Education; Energy; Public Finance; European Funds; Justice; Environmental Protection; Business Environment; Labor and Social Protection; Health; Youth and Sport; Transport and Infrastructure; Tourism

[52] Voluntary National Review 2023 – Romania.

[53] World Bank, SD RAS Inception Note, February 2023.

Source: World Bank

94. An overview of the institutional mechanisms to support the implementation of SDGs at the level of public administration is presented in the Box below:

Box 1. Romania's institutional mechanisms to support the implementation of the SDGs

Department for Sustainable Development (DSD)

Set up in 2017 and reporting to the Prime Minister, the DSD is tasked with coordinating the implementation of SDS 2030. In particular, it is responsible for streamlining planning processes; coordination, identification and prioritization of targets; monitoring implementation based on indicators and reporting to Government and Parliament.

Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development (ICSD)

The ICSD is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes all ministers, with the Secretariat provided by the DSD. The ICSD follows the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and revision of SDS 2030, including through endorsing a national set of indicators for sustainable development to monitor progress. It furthermore seeks to ensure that sectoral policies and strategies help implement SDS 2030 and that there is coherence and collaboration across Ministries in developing these.

Inter-ministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Integration of Environmental Protection Principles into Sectoral Policies and Strategies at the National Level (ICCIE)

Created in 2001 and updated in 2011 (GD No. 741/2011), led by the Minister of Environment, ICCIE is composed of representatives from across different Ministries of the central public administration, at the level of State secretary/Director/Head of institution. The Committee is in charge of coordinating environmental protection and ensuring that sectoral policies are coherent with environmental goals. It provides inter-ministerial support and consultation relating to environmental transition, and updates and approves the National Action Plan for Environmental Protection.

Sub-Committee for Sustainable Development (SCSD)

Established within the Chamber of Deputies at the Romanian Parliament, the SCSD has oversight responsibilities in relation to the inclusion of SDG considerations in legislative projects.

Sustainable Development Network Hubs ("Hubs")

The Hubs[54] represent a development to enhance communication between public institutions and the DSD. The Hubs aim to establish 'teams' of sustainable development experts at all state levels. The Hubs are connected with the DSD and National Institute of Statistics and aim to ensure that public institutions are true to the principles of Sustainable Development.

Consultative Council (CC)

Established by Government Decision no.114/ 2020 at the initiative of the DSD, the CC facilitates inputs from academia and researchers on the implementation of the SDGs, as part of the institutional framework envisaged in SDS 2030.

National Institute of Statistics (NIS)

The NIS has been given two years to update the national indicators set out in the Strategy in 2018 according to the 2030 Agenda. It will also have a duty to monitor progress in relation to these indicators.

[54] Persons nominated by the public administration institutions to support the implementation of the NSSD and Action Plan

Source: (OECD, 2020)[55]

95. The recent national legislative framework creates the basis for an integrated and coherent approach to the process of mainstreaming the SDGs into policy planning and budgeting. The GD No. 379/2022 provides a framework for collaboration and dialogue between the Prime Minister's Chancellery and GSG's structures and the Public Policy Units in line ministries. The National Strategy for Circular Economy and the National Integrated Urban Development Strategy for Resilient, Green, Inclusive and Competitive Cities 2022–2035 are just two of the documents adopted in 2022 that reflect a coherent approach to sustainable development. GD No. 427/2022 improves the short- and medium-term public policy planning system by aligning strategic planning with budgeting[56]. The development of coherent budgets aligned with clear public policy objectives is a crucial step toward the transition to green budgeting and SDGs budgeting[57].

96. The main current challenges and ways ahead in implementing the SDGs by public administration institutions are summarized hereafter.

97. Limited awareness on SD-related institutional mandate and limited SD-related awareness, knowledge, and skills of staff especially at the local level hinder the implementation of SDGs in public administration institutions in Romania[58]. Despite recent efforts by the DSD to support the creation of legislative and strategic framework, the institutional capacity-building process is still at its beginning. Fragmentation and limited awareness of SD-related institutional roles and mandates, especially at the local level and poor interinstitutional coordination contribute to limited progress in the institutional capacity-building process.

98. Recent studies conducted by the World Bank in Romania[59] suggest that the challenge to attract and maintain skilled civil servants is partly driven by a limited public service training system. The lack of adequate training policies within the public administration results in increasing challenges to ensure that individuals with adequate skills remain in civil service positions. Undertaking activities targeting public administration training, alongside the reforms included in the HRM RAS, will further support the professionalization of Romania's public administration while also helping address its retention concerns. This overall situation also affects the job creation and maintaining of skilled SDE in public administration institutions.

99. The OECD report[60] pinpoints the need for a better interinstitutional coordination to integrate the SD concepts and measures to achieve the SDGs into the strategic planning process. The report highlights the lack of guidelines to support mainstreaming the SDGs into the sectoral policies and the need to professionalize skills in strategic planning and SD of public administration at all levels. The report also notes that although some SD strategies at the county and regional levels were developed, local authorities do not have the capacity to access funds and there is no mechanism to systematically involve regions and

[55] Romania: Linking Policy Planning and Budgeting to Support the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
[56] Voluntary National Review 2023 - Romania.
[57] GD No. 443/2022 on regulatory impact assessment
[58] Romania: OECD Scan of Institutional Mechanisms to Deliver on the SDGs
[59] RAS on Strengthening the National Institute of Administration's (INA) Capacities to Improve the Training Policy Framework in the Romanian Public Administration (P169456), WB, 2021

[60] Romania: OECD Scan of Institutional Mechanisms to Deliver on the SDGs, p. 15.

cities in formulating, implementing, and evaluating the national SD plans. Also, there is no central mechanism to keep track systematically of the SD strategic documents developed by local authorities and to make an inventory of guidelines and good practices.

100. The OECD[61] also signals the need to streamline government data collection mechanisms and clarify which one is best placed to track SNDD indicators and policies' impact on sustainability. In order to track how sector policies contribute to the implementation of SDGs, existing data collection mechanisms (i.e. monitoring plans, institutional strategic planning, national statistical database, etc.) should be linked to NIS's new set of National Sustainable Development Indicators (NSDIs). One possibility would be to link the ISP dashboard, which monitors policies' implementation across pilot ministries, to the National Sustainable Development Indicators (NSDIs). Data interoperability across ministries and levels of government may be a challenge. The DSD could also train evaluation statistical divisions within each ministry to report on these indicators.

101. In the actual SD Action Plan, the responsibilities of institutions at the local level are not stated explicitly enough and detailed to engage the local authorities. This contributes to limited awareness of SD-related institutional roles and mandates, especially of the personnel at the management level, which generates poor awareness of the operational staff at the local level regarding their SD-related responsibilities.

4.2 Survey 1: Description of Main Findings Per Each Analyzed Area

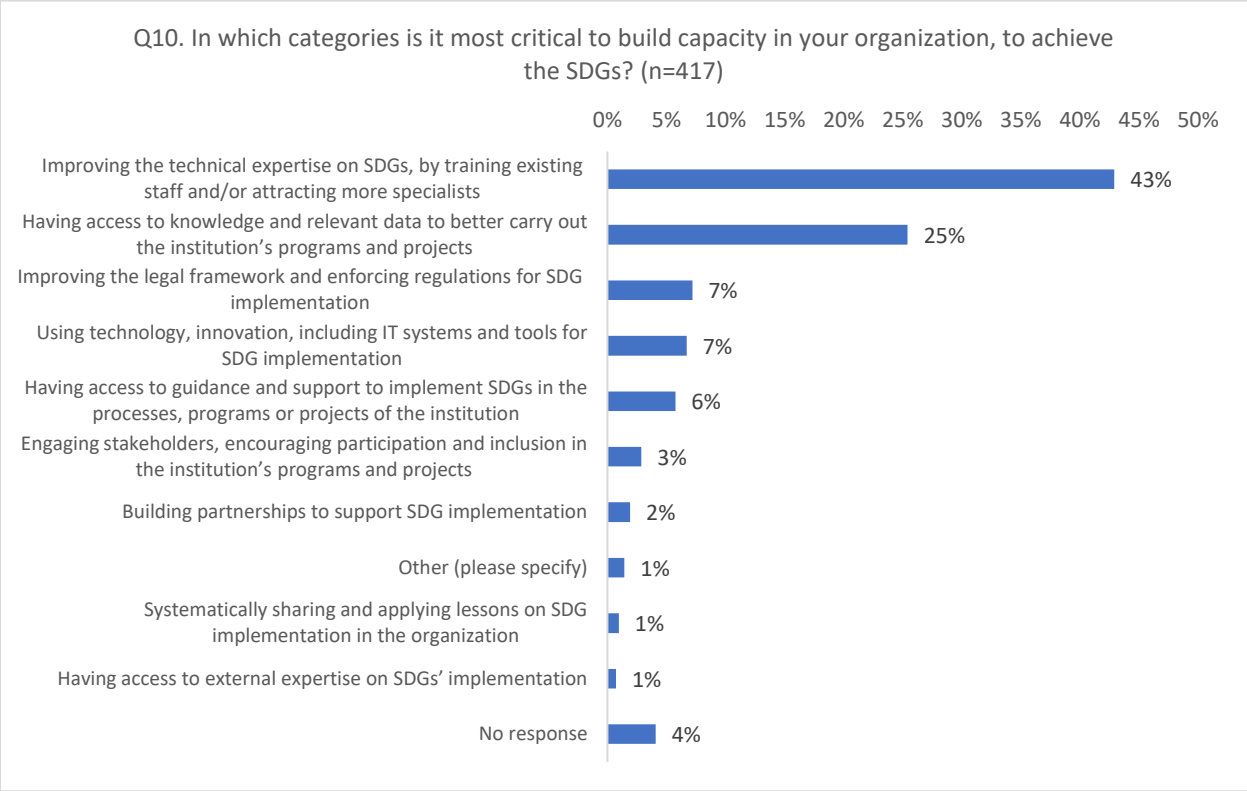
102. The main finings of Survey 1 per each analyzed area are summarized below. More details (including tables and graphs per each question, related questions, type of institution, and development region) are presented in *Annex 4: Report on Survey 1.*

Institutional capacity to implement the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan, including gaps and needs related to staff

103. Critical capacity-building needs were acknowledged by the participants in Survey 1. The results of the survey highlights that there is a significant gap in knowledge, awareness, and familiarity regarding the SDGs among the respondents. The most prominent need identified is the improvement of technical expertise on SDGs, with a high number of respondents (43 %) emphasizing the importance of training existing staff and attracting specialists in the field (Figure below). The respondents flagged several critical needs for effective SDG implementation within institutions. This indicates need for increased understanding and engagement with the SDGs, especially at local level. Higher levels of awareness and familiarity are observed in the capital region and at the central level.

[61] Romania: OECD Scan of Institutional Mechanisms to Deliver on the SDGs, p. 8

Figure 7. Critical areas for institutional capacity building[62]



Source: Authors

104. While there is some capacity available for institutions to effectively perform responsibilities related to the SDGs, there is a notable number of respondents who express uncertainty or lack of awareness regarding the available capacity. Different regions have varying levels of perceived capacity for SDG implementation, with the South-Muntenia region having the highest perception of 'good capacity available'. The ministries and RDAs generally report a higher capacity available, while deconcentrated public services and town-level institutions have more respondents indicating limited capacity.

105. The current number of persons and approach in performing specific SDGs-related functions acknowledged by the management personnel in most of the analyzed institutions is relatively low (up to three persons). The majority of respondents reported that there is no specific person assigned to oversee SDG-related tasks. The need for specialized personnel and financial resources allocated exclusively for sustainable development was acknowledged by the respondents. Most of respondents recognize the need for one to three persons to address the tasks associated with the listed dimensions of the SDGs. For the institutions performing SDG-related tasks, the number of persons usually differs and tasks are assigned on a case-by-case approach. When dedicated teams are set up, they are usually made up of one to five persons and more rarely of more than five.

106. Most of the respondents acknowledged the need to improve the SD staff's technical expertise. The survey highlights several critical needs for effective SDG implementation, including improving technical

[62] Institutional capacity building survey, Annex 4, Figure 18.

expertise, accessing knowledge and relevant data, enhancing the legal framework, utilizing technology and innovation, building partnerships, and providing guidance and support.

107. The process of mainstreaming the SDGs in sectoral and cross-cutting strategic documents is considered to be slow and slender. The survey indicates insufficient progress in embedding SDGs in the strategic planning process at the institutional level, suggesting a need for greater awareness, interinstitutional cooperation, and clarity in this area.

108. The most critical need identified for effective SDG implementation within institutions is the improvement of technical expertise on SDGs. Having access to knowledge and relevant data to support program and project execution is ranked as the second most important need, indicating the significance of evidence-based decision-making. Using technology and innovation, including IT systems and tools for SDG implementation, is recognized as the third most important need for effective implementation.

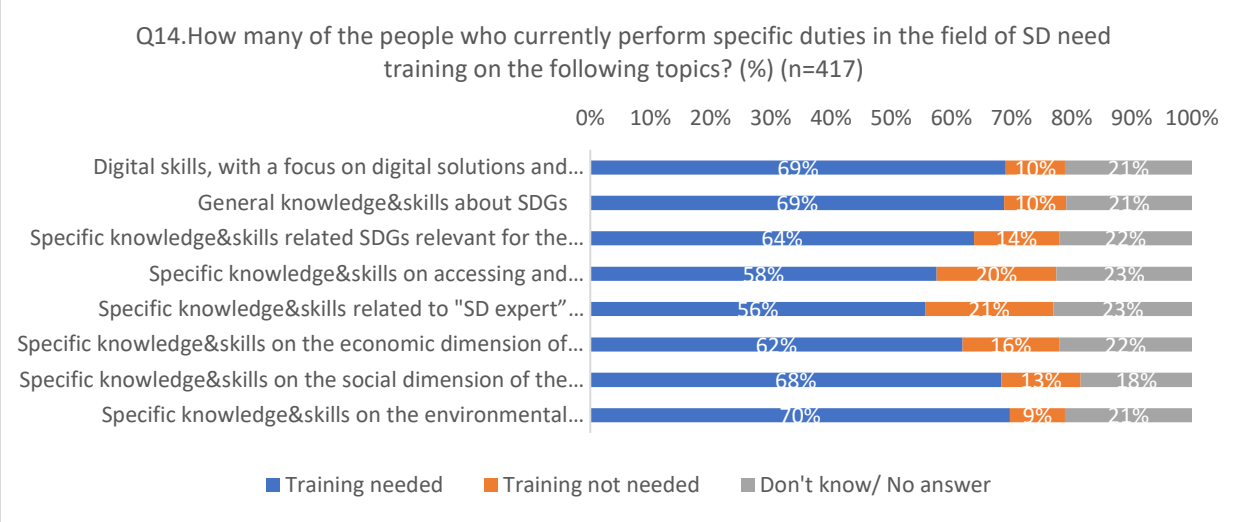
109. Varying levels of involvement in SDG-related tasks are observed across public administration institutions, suggesting different approaches and capacities for SDG implementation. Some institutions do not consider themselves responsible for SDG-related tasks, as indicated by a significant number of respondents who mentioned no individuals were involved in such tasks. The number of persons involved in SDG-related tasks differs, with most dedicated teams consisting of one to five persons. The ministries generally have larger teams (>5 persons) compared to other types of institutions, while teams of four to five persons are more frequent in RDAs. Only a small percentage of respondents reported having individuals specifically assigned to oversee SDG-related tasks, with a significant share mentioning no specific person or department responsible for oversight.

110. The institutionalization process of SD mandate and functions at the level of public administration is currently limited. The ministries most often have a high-ranking decision-maker overseeing SDG-related tasks, and they are less likely to mention not having any person responsible for overseeing SDG-related work compared to RDAs and prefectures. Central public institutions, ministries, cities, and towns are more likely to have a specific department responsible for SDG implementation, while deconcentrated public services are more likely to have a dedicated SD unit.

111. Building institutional capacity to achieve SDGs needs in SD-related topics is widely recognized at the management level in the analyzed institutions. Respondents recognized the need for training in various areas related to the SDGs, indicating a strong recognition of the importance of enhancing knowledge and skills for sustainable development. Respondents ranked the critical areas for capacity building and *Improving the technical expertise on SDGs, by training existing staff and/or attracting more specialists* is by far the top priority mentioned. *Access to knowledge and relevant data to better carry out the institution's programs and projects* was ranked second.

112. Developing the staff's digital skills and the knowledge of SDGs by training is considered by most of the respondents a priority. General knowledge of SDGs and digital skills are the topics most frequently mentioned as training needs by the respondents, followed by specific knowledge and skills related to the SDGs relevant to their institutions. Respondents also expressed a need for training in areas such as accessing and implementing EU-funded projects; becoming an SDE; and understanding the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the SDGs. Details by each skills area are shown in Figure below.

Figure 8. Training needs for the staff who currently perform specific duties in the field of SD[63]



Source: Authors

113. The staff's need to improve skills in specific SD areas[64] by training was widely acknowledged by the respondents at the central and local levels. The majority of respondents mentioned one to three persons requiring training, but larger teams were also mentioned for certain skills, particularly general knowledge about SDGs, specific knowledge relevant to the institution, EU-funded projects, and digital skills, as shown in the Table below. The ministries expressed the highest training needs in adapting strategic SDGs to the institution's specifics, building system procedures, organizing structures and work teams, and establishing new roles and attributions. Prefectures, cities, and towns also showed high training needs in various topics related to the implementation of the SDGs. The majority of respondents consider training existing employees, who will perform duties in the field of SD while carrying out other responsibilities, as a critical approach.

Table 10. Staff (no.) who currently perform specific duties in the field of SD, who need training, breakdown of answers by type of institution and each training topic[65]

	Ministry	Central public institution	Deconcentrated public service	RDA	Prefecture	County council	City	Town	Other	Total
General knowledge and skills about SDGs										
0	9	5	16	0	9	0	0	6	25	10
1–3	22	25	30	17	28	13	35	29	38	28
4–5	13	22	17	0	28	26	25	24	13	20
>5	26	26	18	50	11	35	30	18	19	22
I don't know	22	13	14	17	20	9	10	12	6	14

[63] Institutional capacity building survey: Annex 4, Figure 22.
[64] Eight areas of specific and respective general knowledge are listed in Question 14 of Survey 1 Questionnaire (Annex 4, Appendix).
[65] Institutional capacity building survey: Annex 4.

	Ministry	Central public institution	Deconcentrated public service	RDA	Prefecture	County council	City	Town	Other	Total
No answer	9	10	5	17	4	17	0	12	0	7
Specific knowledge & skills related SDGs relevant for the institution										
0	4	4	16	0	4	0	10	18	38	10
1–3	26	24	32	17	43	9	30	35	19	29
4–5	13	24	16	33	26	30	25	18	6	20
>5	22	27	19	33	0	35	25	6	31	20
I don't know	26	12	14	0	20	9	10	12	6	1
No answer	9	10	5	17	7	17	0	12	0	7
Specific knowledge and skills related to the SDE occupation										
0	9	10	20	0	4	4	15	12	31	10
1–3	22	26	30	33	37	17	45	35	25	29
4–5	13	17	20	17	20	22	20	18	13	20
>5	26	24	11	17	11	26	10	12	6	20
I don't know	22	13	13	17	22	13	10	12	25	14
No answer	9	10	5	17	7	17	0	12	0	7
Specific knowledge and skills on the social dimension of the SDGs										
0	17	16	30	0	7	4	10	6	38	20
1–3	17	25	26	50	52	13	50	53	31	30
4–5	4	12	11	17	20	22	20	12	0	13
>5	22	19	14	0	0	35	10	6	19	15
I don't know	30	16	14	17	15	9	10	12	13	15
No answer	9	11	5	17	7	17	0	12	0	8
Specific knowledge and skills on the environmental dimension of the SDGs										
0	9	12	33	17	9	4	20	18	50	21
1–3	9	22	26	67	50	22	45	35	13	28
4–5	13	15	14	0	17	22	10	12	0	14
>5	30	24	7	0	0	26	20	6	25	14
I don't know	30	15	16	0	17	9	5	18	13	15
No answer	9	11	5	17	7	17	0	12	0	8
Specific knowledge and skills on the economic dimension of the SDGs										
0	9	12	24	0	7	4	15	6	38	16
1–3	22	26	35	83	37	22	50	47	19	33
4–5	17	16	14	0	28	26	10	12	6	16
>5	17	22	9	0	2	17	15	6	25	13
I don't know	26	12	14	0	20	13	10	12	13	14
No answer	9	11	5	17	7	17	0	18	0	8

	Ministry	Central public institution	Deconcentrated public service	RDA	Prefecture	County council	City	Town	Other	Total
Specific knowledge and skills on accessing and implementing EU-funded projects										
0	9	8	22	0	4	0	10	0	38	13
1–3	26	27	34	67	48	13	40	47	19	33
4–5	9	20	20	0	22	17	15	18	6	18
>5	22	26	10	17	7	39	30	12	25	18
I don't know	26	9	10	0	13	13	5	12	13	11
No answer	9	11	5	17	7	17	0	12	0	8
Digital skills, with a focus on digital solutions and services to achieve SDGs										
0	0	6	15	0	0	0	10	0	38	9
1–3	35	29	34	67	33	13	50	41	13	32
4–5	13	16	18	0	17	22	20	18	6	17
>5	22	26	16	0	22	39	15	18	31	21
I don't know	22	12	12	17	22	9	5	12	13	13
No answer	9	11	5	17	7	17	0	12	0	8

Source: WB Author

114. The need for employing additional specialized staff to perform SD-related activities was not considered a priority for the majority of respondents at central, regional, and local levels. Instead, the need for training of existing staff was widely acknowledged. Employing additional specialized personnel is seen as least likely in RDAs, prefectures, county councils, and cities, with training existing employees being the most likely option for all respondents.

Interinstitutional communication between different levels of public administration in relation to shared responsibilities for implementing and reporting on the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan

115. The survey responses indicate that there are several obstacles to interinstitutional coordination and communication in relation to implementing SDGs. These obstacles include a lack of staff and skills to effectively develop and maintain functioning interinstitutional relations, insufficient information and guidance on coordination, limited financial resources, and overlapping or unclear allocation of responsibilities. This indicates a need for adequate human resources and institutional capacity to enhance collaboration between institutions. Another main barrier is the lack of information and guidance regarding why and how to coordinate on SDG implementation. This suggests a need for clearer communication and awareness about the importance of interinstitutional coordination and the specific processes involved.

116. Different types of institutions face different challenges in interinstitutional coordination. Central-level institutions often struggle with the lack of institutional and regulatory frameworks for coordination, insufficient enforcement of existing frameworks, and limited financial resources. Local-level institutions face challenges such as the lack of a coordination framework, unclear allocation of responsibilities, insufficient personnel to foster interinstitutional relations, and inadequate guidance and financial

resources. The main challenges in interinstitutional coordination, by type of institution are highlighted in the figure below.

Table 11. Challenges in interinstitutional coordination, by type of institution

	Ministry	Central public institution	Deconcentrated public service	RDA	Prefecture	County council	City	Town	Other	TOTAL
Lack of an institutional and/or regulatory framework to support coordination between institutions	26%	23%	29%	33%	33%	30%	15%	29%	38%	27%
Insufficient motivation to coordinate actions in respect to SDGs implementation	0%	4%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Other	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Insufficient enforcement of the institutional and/or regulatory framework for coordination	0%	9%	6%	33%	4%	17%	5%	12%	0%	8%
Overlapping, unclear, non-existing allocation of responsibilities between institutions	13%	20%	12%	0%	15%	4%	5%	6%	19%	14%
Insufficient people to effectively develop and maintain functioning interinstitutional relations	0%	11%	20%	0%	26%	17%	30%	18%	0%	18%
Insufficient skills to effectively develop and maintain functioning interinstitutional relations	13%	1%	2%	0%	2%	13%	10%	0%	19%	3%
Insufficient technical capacities, including IT tools, to exchange data and information	0%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	3%
Insufficient information about why and how to coordinate on implementing SDGs	9%	10%	7%	0%	9%	0%	0%	0%	13%	7%
Insufficient guidance about why and how to coordinate on implementing SDGs	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	10%	6%	0%	2%
Insufficient financial resources	9%	5%	6%	0%	2%	0%	10%	12%	13%	6%
No answer	9%	11%	9%	33%	9%	17%	5%	18%	0%	10%

Source: WB team[66]

117. The great majority of analyzed institutions did not acknowledge belonging to formal partnerships. Most respondents stated that their organization is not part of any formal partnerships related to the SDGs. There are also a considerable number of respondents who express uncertainty or a lack of knowledge about their organization's participation in formal partnerships. When partnerships are mentioned, the most common types are with other public institutions, organizations in the county, civil society actors, and, to a lesser extent, private sector actors.

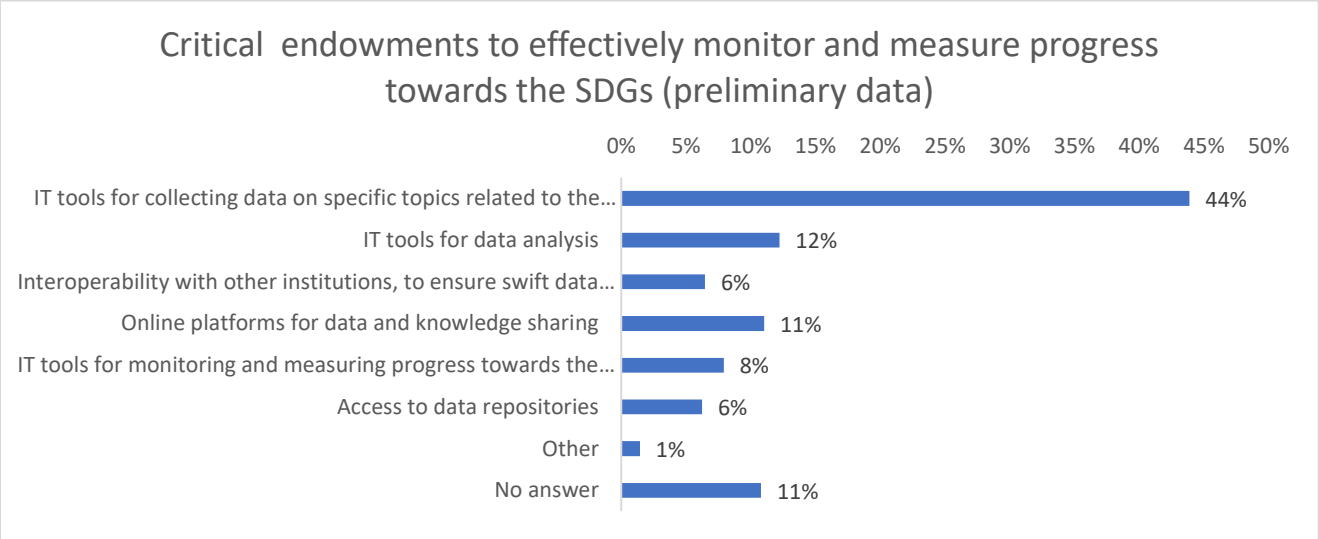
Availability and interoperability of IT management systems for monitoring and measuring progress toward achieving the SDGs

118. The survey reveals varying levels of availability of IT systems for monitoring SDGs among the respondents. While some participants rated the availability as moderate, a significant number reported limited or no availability. This highlights a substantial gap in organizational infrastructure, emphasizing the need for increased investment and focus on ensuring the availability and accessibility of IT systems for effective SDG monitoring.

119. The respondents identified several critical needs for effectively monitoring and measuring progress toward the SDGs. These needs include IT tools for data collection on specific topics related to their organization's field of activity, data analysis capabilities, interoperability with other institutions, online platforms for data and knowledge sharing, and access to data repositories.. A significant number of respondents (44 %) emphasized the importance of IT tools for collecting data on specific topics related to their organization's field of activity. Additionally, data analysis was also identified as a crucial need, with 12 percent of the respondents emphasizing the requirement for IT tools dedicated to data analysis. Ensuring interoperability with other institutions was another critical aspect, as expressed by 11 % of respondents, emphasizing the need for swift data access and collaboration. Online platforms for data and knowledge sharing were deemed essential by 11 % of participants, while access to data repositories was highlighted by 6 % of respondents. These requirements emphasize the importance of technological support and data management solutions in the SDG monitoring process.

[66] Institutional capacity survey (Survey 1): Annex 4 of the Report, Table 18, page 50

Figure 9. Critical needs for effectively monitoring SDGs



Source: WB team [67]

120. Survey respondents displayed mixed opinions regarding the potential use of a virtual resource center for their operations. While most participants expressed a moderate likelihood and willingness to explore such a resource, a smaller number indicated a high likelihood of utilizing a virtual resource center. However, a notable portion of respondents reported not knowing about this likelihood, indicating a need for further information or clarification. The lack of answers from some respondents also suggests a potential lack of interest in or clarity about the topic.

[67] Institutional capacity survey (Survey 1): Annex 4 of the Report, page 61

5. Analysis of Staff Competencies in the Field of Sustainable Development

121. In the pursuit of implementing ambitious strategies and SD projects at the national level, the DSD within the GSG aims to train 2,000 SDEs. This group of professionals is anticipated to utilize their expertise to contribute meaningfully to national strategic goals for SD.. To achieve this, it is essential to define SD competencies in a clear and specific manner. The identification of priority competencies for both current and future SDEs is also crucial. This process will ensure that the training program effectively addresses the specific needs and requirements of the SDEs, empowering them to play a significant role in driving SD initiatives at the national level.

122. In alignment with Human Resource Management Reform and Administrative Strengthening (HRM RAS), the National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS) plays a pivotal role in defining the framework for general competencies and career management for public servants. Additionally, NACS approves the positions open for competition and the specific competencies associated with the job descriptions as proposed by the institutions. This approach offers flexibility at the institutional level in defining these competencies, while simultaneously necessitating a unified approach to specific competencies. This ensures their subsequent inclusion in standardized training programs across public administration. This approach allows each public institution to define its own Sustainable Development competency as it sees fit for operationalization within its own framework. However, this creates the potential for hundreds of variations of this competency, complicating a unified approach to Learning and Development (L&D) processes within the public administration. The establishment of a unified competency for experts in sustainable development is therefore crucial. Specialized derivative competencies—such as climate change expert or circular economy expert—can be defined at dedicated institutions that possess experts with these specializations.

123. In this context, the National Institute of Administration (INA) stands to benefit significantly from the operationalization of these competencies. INA is responsible for creating or aiding in the development of customized training programs aimed at bolstering the competencies of public servants. This collaborative approach ensures that training initiatives are not only relevant but also directly applicable to the challenges faced in public service roles.

5.1 A Review of the Current Situation

124. The definition of a specific competency, that should be included in the job description of a public servant with responsibilities in SD, should be carried out in a standardized manner across all public institutions. This would ensure consistency and coherence in the way competencies are understood and applied in learning and development (L&D) processes or SDE career path.

125. The method of defining competencies within the competency framework for public servants in Romania has the following characteristics:

- It distinguishes between general competencies and specific competencies; general competencies are divided into four main classes corresponding to managerial levels, while specific competencies are defined in correspondence with a specific set of responsibilities or professional domain.
- Each competency covers a broad range of activities related to a specific domain or hierarchical level, and each is operationally defined by a set of behavioral indicators exhibited by public servants possessing that competency or through a listing of the KSA that constitute that competency.
- General competencies are already predefined within the competency framework, while specific competencies are left to the discretion of being defined by each central public institution separately, according to a procedure described in the Explanatory Note to Government Emergency Ordinance No. 191/2022 for amending and completing Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 on the Administrative Code.
- The concept of cross-functional or interinstitutional competencies has not yet been operationalized in the competency framework of public servants, meaning that the way a specific competency is established and defined by one institution may not be consistently found in the competency portfolio of other public institutions under the same name and operational definition. This lack of standardization could result in variations in how competencies are understood and assessed across different institutions, potentially leading to challenges in talent management, recruitment, and other human resources practices.

126. To define a specific competency, we will consider the principles supported by European best practices[68] as well as the competency framework for public servants in Romania. Therefore, the following apply to a specific competency for a professional in a public function:

- Clearly relate to the specific responsibilities, roles, and mission of the public servant. It should be closely aligned with the actual professional context in which the public servant operates. Reflect on the unique requirements and challenges faced by public servants within their specific institutions. This ensures that the competency is tailored to the needs and demands of their professional reality.
- Be delimited by the *general competencies* described in the public function competency framework; this means it should underline the specificity of the competency, and also be delimited by other human attributes which are less trainable (such as aptitudes or personality traits). The competencies framework for public servants distinguishes general competencies (established for all public servants) from specific competencies (established by each public institution). The general competencies are distributed into four hierarchical layers:

[68] Bianchi, G. 2020. "Sustainability Competences - A Systematic Literature Review."; Scalabrino, C. 2022. "European Sustainability Competence Framework Background Document - Literature Review, Analysis of Frameworks and Proposals."

Table 12. Distribution of general competencies into hierarchical layers

Execution level	Technical management	Mid-level management	High civil servants
Problem-solving and decision-making	Forward and conceptual thinking	Forward and conceptual thinking	Strategic thinking
Initiative	Accountability	Accountability	Accountability
Planning and organizing	Planning team activities	Planning team activities	Strategic planning and organizing
Communication	Networking and influencing	Networking and influencing	Strategic communication
Teamwork	Teamwork	Conflict mediation	Conflict mediation
Citizen centricity	Citizen centricity	Citizen centricity and politically savvy	Public commitment
Integrity	Integrity	Managing vulnerabilities	Managing vulnerabilities
	Managing performance	Resources and process management	Resources and process management
	Team development	Team development	Team development
		Create engagement	Create engagement
		Promote innovation and guide change	Strategic agility

Source: WB Author

- Be defined in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including public servants themselves, to ensure their input and expertise are considered. This collaborative approach ensures that the competency is comprehensive, relevant, and applicable to the specific roles and responsibilities within the public sector.
- Should promote an outcome-based approach.[69]
- Should have an operational definition in terms of *knowledge* (composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas, and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject), *skills* (ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results), and *attitudes* (the disposition and mindsets to act or react to ideas, persons, or situations).

[69] Bianchi, G. 2020. "Sustainability Competences." EUR 30555 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Box 2. EU policy in defining a "competency"

"In alignment with previous preliminary studies for developing Key Competency Frameworks (e.g. Ala-Mutka, 2011; Ferrari, 2012; Gagliardi & Komarkova, 2015), the term 'competency framework' is used in its wider meaning, i.e. as an organized conceptualization of competencies. Furthermore, the EU policy debate on competencies has tended to lean towards the use of 'competency' which promotes an outcome-based approach. That being said, attitudes are included as one of the main defining constituents. Both the 2006 and the 2018 European Recommendation on Key Competencies put forward by the European Commission defined competency as a set or combination of *knowledge, skills, and attitudes*. This approach is widely adopted in the European policy debate."

127. Despite these widely accepted principles among competencies development specialists, defining a specific competency remains a challenge, as it involves delineating a field of knowledge or professional practices, which can be done at a more general or specific level, based on multiple criteria. For example, a competency, such as 'statistical data analysis', can encompass several sub-competencies simultaneously (inferential statistics, statistical modeling, statistical reporting, and so on) or it can be part of other competencies, such as statistical programming or social research.

128. Both from the practice of defining competencies in human resources processes and from literature reviews, the following conclusion emerges: the level of specificity and the interrelationship between competencies (and their interpretation meaning) are influenced by various factors and contexts, primarily depending on their intended use. For instance, the Romanian occupational standard for SDEs presents a list of 34 mandatory competencies without associated definitions, which might be self-explanatory for nonspecialized individuals. However, for the competency's framework in public functions, it should focus on a single comprehensive competency that is well-defined and described in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

129. The occupational standard for SDE places competencies such as 'developing professional networks' or 'report presentation' (which could be considered as specific skills due to their defined and discrete nature) on the same level as competencies such as 'develop policies' or 'conduct strategic research activities related to sustainable development domain' (which may encompass multiple sets of skills or competencies and broader expertise). The diverse nature of competencies necessitates different levels of training and experience: while certain skills such as 'report presentation' can be acquired relatively quickly, competencies such as 'conduct strategic research' may require a more extensive and dedicated program comparable with a master's degree.

130. The public servants' competency framework stipulates that such skills as 'developing professional networks' or 'report presentation' should be included in one or more general competencies. For example, networking, communication, or planning and organizing. In the public servants' competency framework, a skill such as 'report presentation' would be included in a specific competence, for example, SD, adding more specificity: 'Draft and present reports to justify the need for sustainable development measures and initiatives or to monitor the impact of these measures.'

131. Therefore, the process of defining specific competencies requires careful consideration and thoughtful analysis to ensure clarity and accuracy for the target group's usability. Literature reviews draw attention to a lack of empirical evidence, depth, and rigor in the discourse on key SD competencies[70].

132. Despite this considerable pioneering effort, it is hard to define a competency that covers all these requirements. However, recent works position SD competencies close to competencies such as: change agent, social researcher, problem-solving and decision-maker, strategic planning or systems thinking.[71] This could help to articulate a structured specific competency profile for SDE and to point out the border with other closely related competency types.

133. From an operational definition standpoint, requested by public servants' competency framework methodology, the SD competency should encompass the fundamental KSA required for an expert to perform in his/her professional field. To achieve this, key areas of competency will be grouped so that, when combined, they will comprehensively cover the sustainable development (SD) competency. This approach will utilize occupational analysis, maintain correspondence with the occupational standard, and incorporate insights from literature review, as well as findings from both studies. (Survey 1: Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment Survey Report: Assessing Capacity, Challenges, and Needs for Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals in Romania and Survey 2: Analysis of Staff's Competencies in the Field of Sustainable Development).

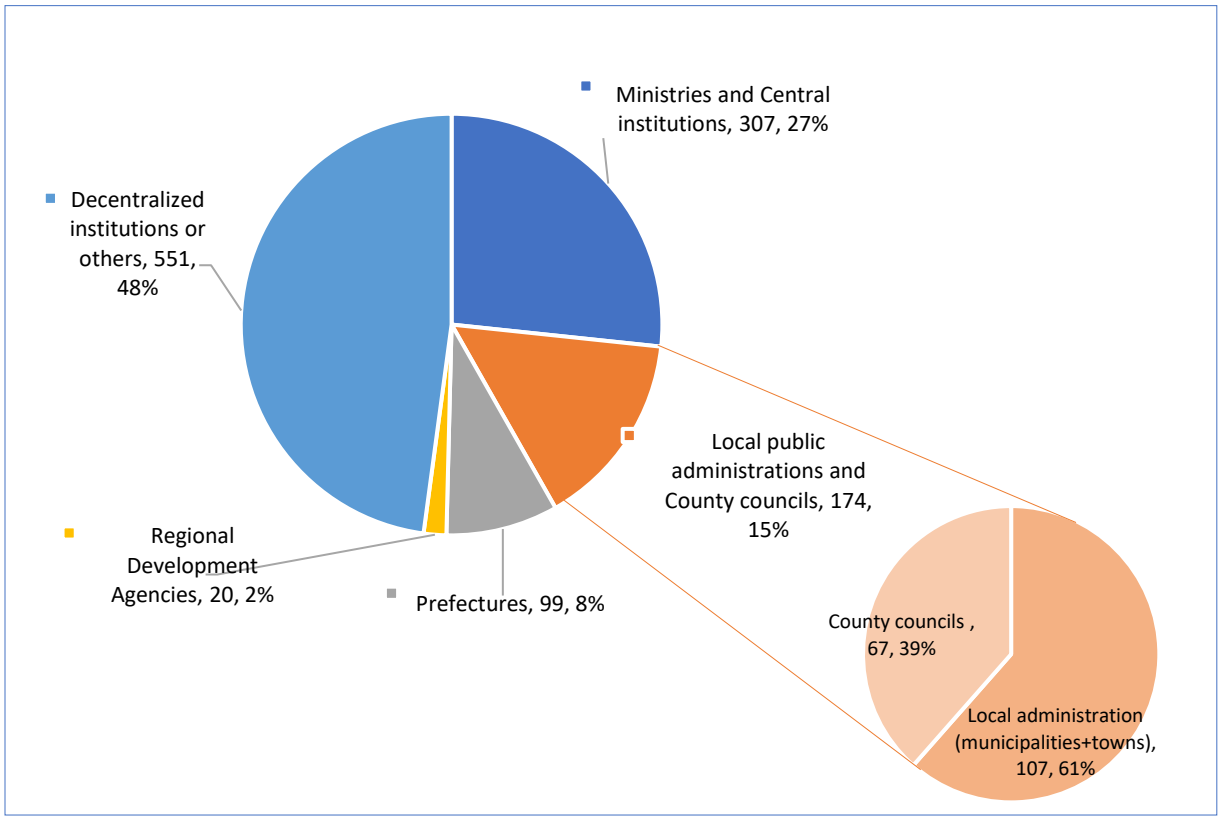
5.2 Survey 2: Description of Main Findings by Each Analyzed Area

134. There were 1,157 respondents proportionally distributed within their respective regions, indicating that the volume of data and information collected in this report corresponds to a uniform distribution at the regional level. From the perspective of the number of respondents associated with each institutional category, we were able to gather sufficient information to outline a profile of the SDE for the eight categories of institutions: ministries, central institutions, local public administrations, county councils, decentralized institutions, prefectures, RDAs, and others.

[70] Wiek, Arnim, and Lauren Withycombe Keeler. 2011. "Key Competencies in Sustainability: A Reference Framework for Academic Program Development." *Sustainability Science* 6: 203–218.

[71] Systems thinking competence is the ability to collectively analyze complex systems across different domains (society, environment, economy, and so on) and across different scales (local to global), thereby considering cascading effects, inertia, feedback loops, and other systemic features related to sustainability issues and sustainability problem-solving frameworks. The term 'complex system' has been used (along with 'coupled human-environment systems' or 'social-ecological systems') as an open notion to include qualitative data, quantitative data, narratives, 'thick descriptions', and so on.

Figure 10. Distribution of respondents by institution type

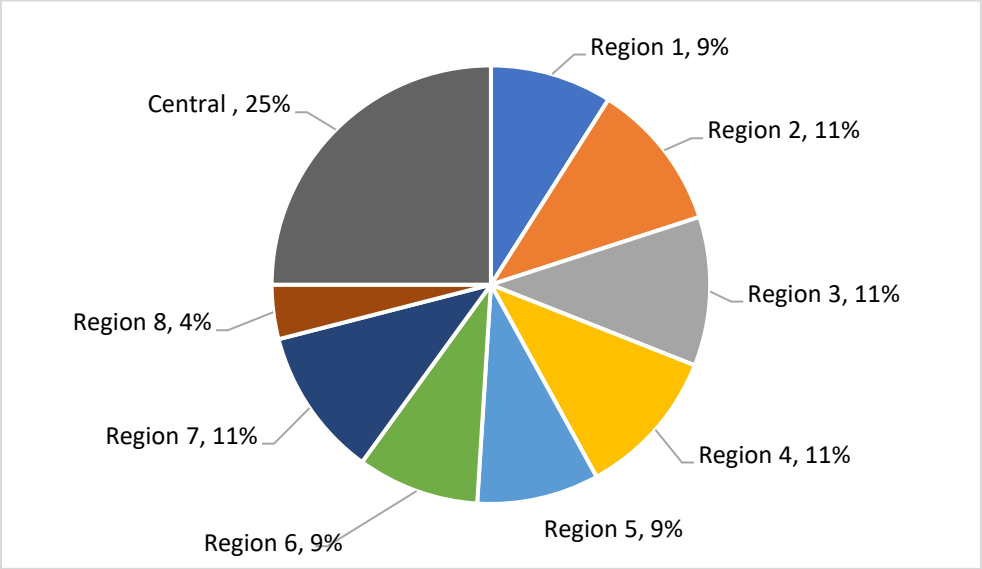


Source:WB Author

135. The profile of SDEs in public administration, as they are referred to within the belonging institutions, is mostly (74 percent - 857 out of 1,157) public servants: more than half (53 percent) in execution positions and most of them (83 percent) did not receive any training or complete academic courses in the field of SD. However, 50 percent of respondents perceive themselves as having over three years of experience in the field of SD, while the remaining 50 percent have less than three years of experience or are unable to estimate.

136. The respondents were proportionally distributed across regions. Each Romanian geographical region (consisting of an average of four counties) accounted for approximately 9–11 percent of respondents, except for region 8 (4 percent), which consists of only one county.

Figure 11. Distribution of respondents by region



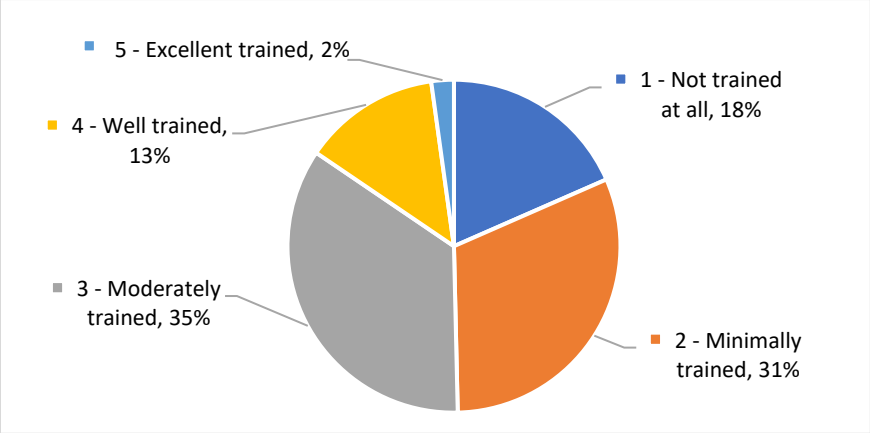
Source: Author

137. The top five professional challenges faced by SDEs are *Lack of procedures and best practice examples; Lack of resources (human, technical, or material); Complex regulatory environment; Heavy workload due to other job responsibilities; and Difficult access or collection of necessary data and information*. These challenges are frequently identified by respondents, regardless of the type of duties or responsibilities they have in the field of SD, with few exceptions (see Annex 2—table 4—Professional challenges of SDE related to their responsibilities)

138. Following the analysis of responses to the open-ended question to list three challenges in the field of SD activities, 15 categories have been identified. Some of the responses present the challenges in a new perspective such as *leadership reluctance, convincing and involving all stakeholders, managing complexity, measuring and reporting impact, data scarcity and poor interconnection of databases, access to relevant knowledge, and data for project development.*

139. Only 15 percent of the respondents considered themselves to be excellently trained or well trained to face the SD challenges, while nearly 50 percent regarded themselves as minimally trained or not trained at all. The results are based on the responses to the question: *On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you consider yourself trained to cope with the challenges and changes generated by sustainable development policies within your organization*?

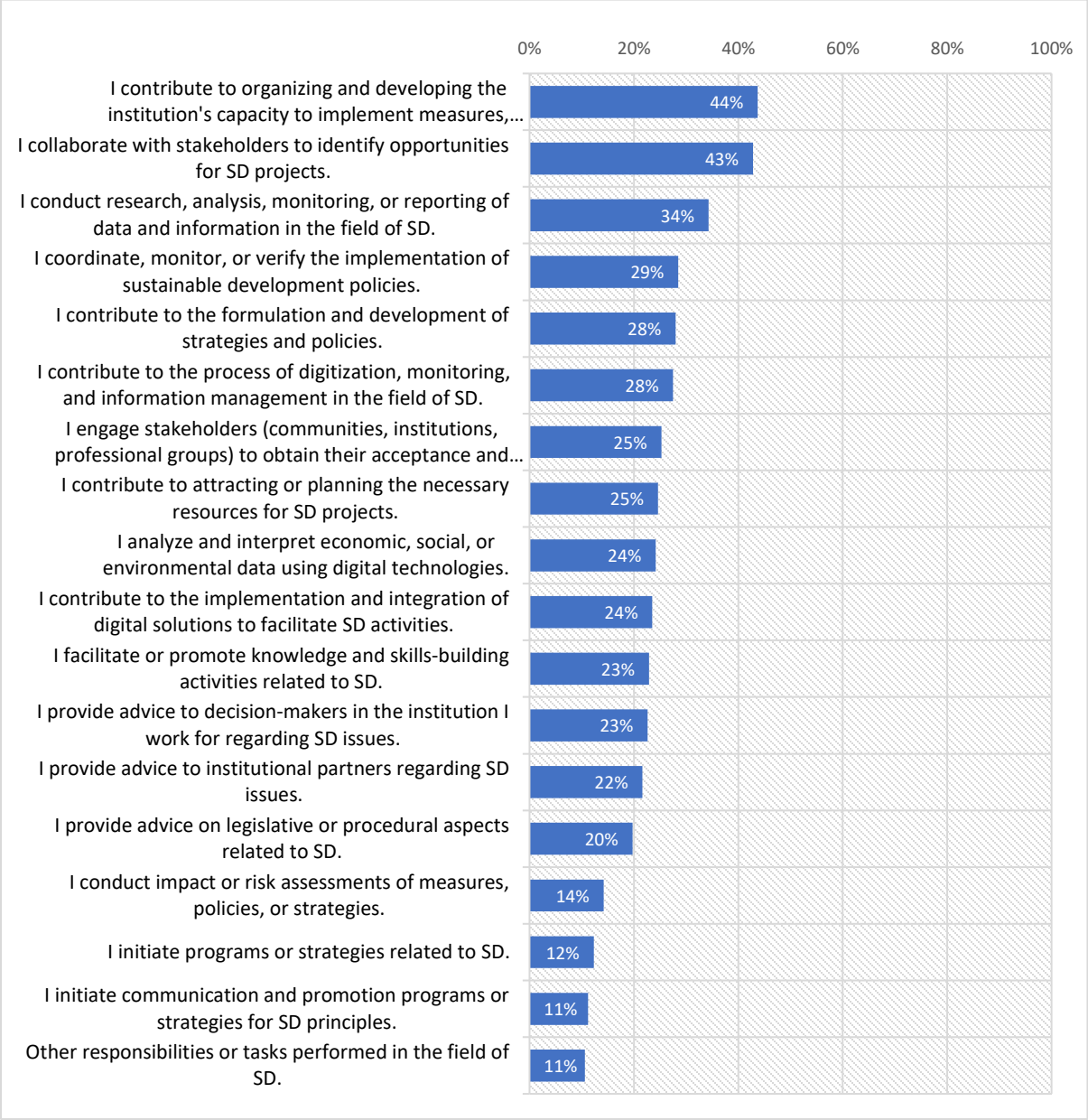
Figure 12. Distribution of perceptions regarding one's own level of preparedness (training) in managing the challenges of SD activities



Source: Author

140. Respondents considered that they have a diversified set of responsibilities in the field of SD but without identifying a distinct trend. Over 40 percent of them indicated that they have responsibilities in enhancing the institution's capacity to implement SD objectives and also collaborate with various categories of stakeholders to identify opportunities for SD projects. Most of the other responsibilities are distributed in the target group at a proportion of 20–25 percent. Responsibilities such as risk analysis, impact assessment or program initiation, strategic policies, communication, and promotion of SD are represented at a proportion of 11–14 percent.

Figure 13. Percentage of respondents who answered the question: Which of the following activities best describe your current role and responsibilities in the field of sustainable development? (multiple answers permitted)



Source: WB Author

141. Role expectations and responsibilities for an SDE are, on one hand, highly varied, and on the other hand, unclear from the perspective of the survey respondents. The occupational standard for SDE is a new concept, and Romania was the first in Europe to create it in 2021. In 2022, a core group of 150 SDEs was trained and established within public institutions. These experts underwent an intensive training program (according with the training plan proposed by Romanian Occupational Standard) and currently have certain responsibilities in the field of SD to some extent. These experts are primarily found in central

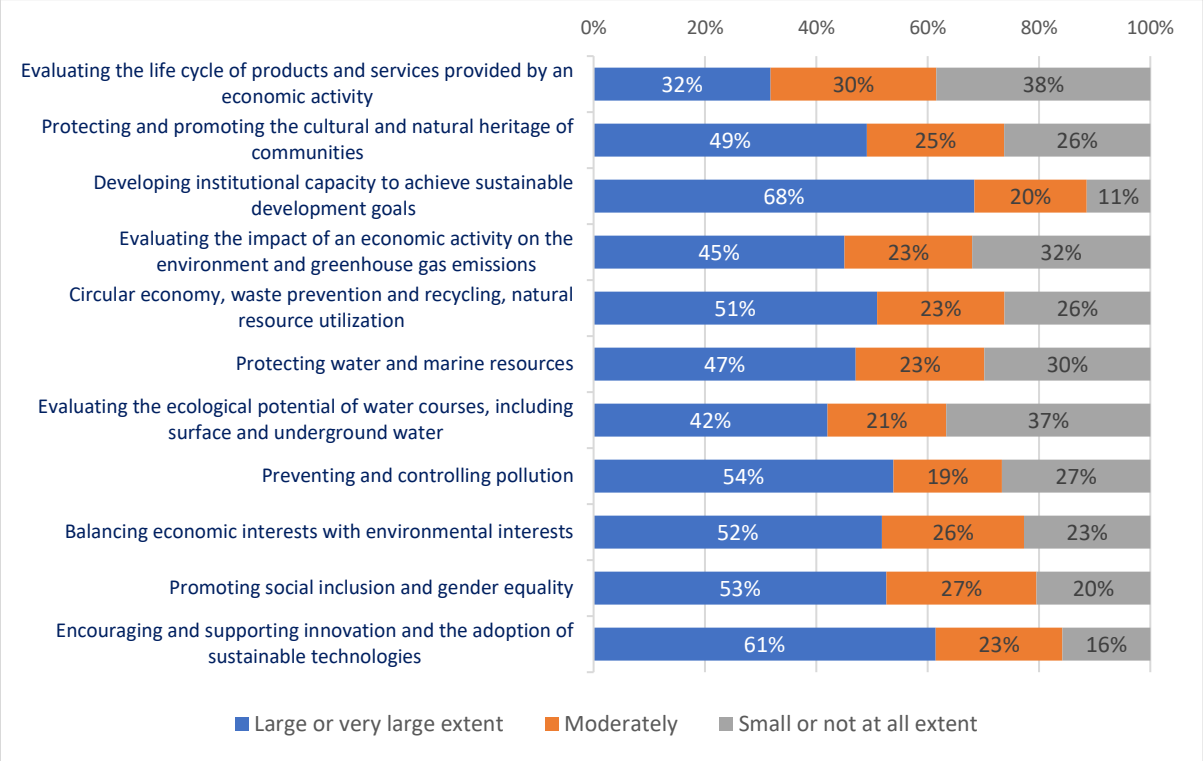
institutions, especially ministries, which themselves have specialized mandates and different institutional missions, resulting in different training and deepening interests in the field of SD. Based on the feedback from this course, participants indicated that they gained new insights, although it was not clearly articulated how the acquired specific knowledge could be implemented in their current roles. They also suggested that a more cohesive approach to the course content is needed to enhance clarity and applicability.

142. The success of previous efforts lies in the fact that a general framework has been created regarding the scope of SD responsibilities and activities. A list of skills/competencies required for these experts has been identified, and there is a core group of individuals familiar with the issues of SD. However, a unified understanding of what a key role for an SD specialist should entail at the level of public institutions has not yet been formed, as indicated by the results of the analysis (the two surveys and focus groups). The need to create a unified understanding of the roles and expected mission of an SDE is evident from the following examples:

- Only 26 percent of respondents in Survey 1 (considered representative leaders or experts in SD at the institutional level) considered their familiarity with the objectives of the NSSD to be high or very high.
- Participants in the focus groups, especially those from central institutions (ministries and RDAs), provided highly diverse responses regarding the activities and role-responsibilities they carry out as SDEs. Examples: social workers, urban planners, development project evaluators, crime prevention specialists, administrative capacity builders, human resources professionals, contracting officers, project managers, procurement officer, legal professional, public servants in county councils, etc. They also encountered difficulties in distinguishing between their current responsibilities in the field of SD and other organizational duties. Differences were observed in the types of methods, digital applications, or sources of information used as well as in the performance criteria to be considered in evaluating an SDE's work. On the other hand, participants from county councils stated that they are preparing for specific SD activities and responsibilities but they cannot claim to currently engage in such activities, as the field is relatively new to some of them. This aspect was also emphasized by experts who participated in a training program, stating that "*you cannot call yourself an expert after completing a course.*"
- Survey 2 revealed that the most common role (shared responsibility) identified among SDEs is "*Contributing to the organization and development of the institution's capacity to implement sustainable development measures, objectives, and strategies*." Although this role is quite general and can be attributed to all experts with responsibilities in any of the social, economic, or environmental domains, it was only identified by 44 percent of respondents. The other roles that SDEs believe they fulfill were considered less common. The significance of these results indicates that there is no unified, emerging role common to all SDEs. If a training program addressing this role is implemented, it will not be of interest to more than 55 percent of participants, as they will not identify themselves with it.
- Through Survey 2 we also observed that dividing the training needs of SDEs by specific domains of interest leads to even greater diversity of interests and training requirements. There is a

noticeable trend of clustering (61–68 percent) toward broad domains such as "*Developing institutional capacity to achieve sustainable development goals*" or "*Encouraging and supporting innovation and the adaptation of sustainable technologies*." Despite this clustering trend, none of the expressions that can define the role, responsibilities, or competencies of SDEs are unanimously shared to a large extent or a very large extent.

Figure 14. Percentage of respondents who answered the question: To what extent do you need the following skills and competencies for your current work activity? (answer scale from 1 - not at all extent to 5 - very large extent)



Source: WB Author

- Respondents who provided answers to open-ended questions in Survey 2 regarding their training needs presented very general and diverse needs that go beyond the set of identified occupational responsibilities in the occupational standard. Also, over 30 percent of participants did not respond or stated that they *"do not know"*. 147. The findings from Surveys 1 and 2, as well as the focus groups, highlight the lack of a unified understanding and clear role expectations for SDEs within public institutions. There is a significant variation in familiarity with SD objectives, diverse interpretations of responsibilities, and a lack of consensus on key roles. The results suggest the requirement for a comprehensive and standardized approach to define the roles and expectations of SDEs, addressing diverse needs and interests and ensuring clarity and coherence in their training programs.

143. There is a great diversity of training needs expressed by the respondents in the survey. Although certain trends and top priorities of these highly diverse training needs could be identified, all training needs proposed for evaluation by the respondents, based on the criterion 'competencies' from the actual

SD occupational standard to be prioritized for development, were considered priorities by at least 57 percent of the respondents.

144. The top five training needs priorities declared by the survey participants, based on a adapted list from predefined 34 competencies proposed by the Romanian Occupational Standard for Sustainable Development Experts, were as follows:

1. Use digital technologies in SD projects and activities.
2. Establish communication channels between public institutions and communities.
3. Identify and analyze community needs.
4. Effective teamwork and collaboration with stakeholders from diverse cultural, institutional, and professional backgrounds.
5. Develop projects to attract the necessary resources to achieve SD objectives.

145. The analysis of training priorities based on the type of institution revealed some similarities in the top six areas. These common top development priorities (with similar colors) are listed in Table 14.

Table 13. Training priorities per each type of institution

	RDAs	Ministries + Other central public administration institutions	Local administration (cities and municipalities)	County councils	Decentralized public services + Others	Prefectures
1	Utilizing digital technologies in SD projects and activities	Data analysis and visual presentation in an easily understandable manner for various stakeholders	Identifying and analyzing community needs	Identifying and analyzing community needs	Utilizing digital technologies in SD projects and activities	Creating communication bridges between public institutions and communities
2	Development of public strategies, policies, and implementation guidelines	Creating communication bridges between public institutions and communities	Budgeting, forecasting, and cost-benefit analysis related to SD projects and initiatives	Development of projects to attract the necessary resources to achieve SD objectives	Creating communication bridges between public institutions and communities	Utilizing digital technologies in SD projects and activities
3	Development of procedures, tools, and working guidelines for public institutions	Utilizing digital technologies in SD projects and activities	Utilizing digital technologies in SD projects and activities	Development of programs, initiatives, and solutions to address challenges in the SD field	Identifying and analyzing community needs	Efficient teamwork and collaboration with stakeholders from diverse cultural, institutional, and professional backgrounds

	RDAs	Ministries + Other central public administration institutions	Local administration (cities and municipalities)	County councils	Decentralized public services + Others	Prefectures
4	Creating partnerships between public institutions and the business sector, academia, and the nongovernmental sector	Advising department leaders on organizing and planning team activities and resources	Development of public strategies, policies, and implementation guidelines	Creating communication bridges between public institutions and communities	Creating partnerships between public institutions and the business sector, academia, and the nongovernmental sector	Development of communication, promotion, and awareness strategies in communities
5	Data analysis and visual presentation in an easily understandable manner for various stakeholders	Development of projects to attract the necessary resources to achieve SD objectives	Advising specialized structures on fundraising for SD initiatives and projects	Development of public strategies, policies, and implementation guidelines	Data analysis and visual presentation in an easily understandable manner for various stakeholders	Creating partnerships between public institutions and the business sector, academia, and the nongovernmental sector
6	Identifying and analyzing community needs	Identifying and analyzing community needs	Development of projects to attract the necessary resources to achieve SD objectives	Project management for change, transformation, and modernization in the field of SD	Development of projects to attract the necessary resources to achieve SD objectives	Identifying and analyzing community needs

Source: WB Author

146. The differences regarding the development needs of SDEs are not significant in terms of the regions they belong to, however, there are few significant differences based on the category of institutions the respondents belong to. However, the need to develop skills and competencies related to *Identifying and analyzing community needs* and *Utilizing digital technologies in sustainable development projects and activities* is present in the top priorities across all categories of institutions, regions, or missions in achieving the SDGs identified by the respondents.

147. From the perspective of the key areas of SD (according to the classification of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), top two training priorities are considered by over 60 percent of the respondents: (a) "*Developing the institutional capacity to achieve sustainable development goals*" and (b) "*Encouraging and supporting innovation and the adoption of sustainable technologies*."

148. The responses to the open-ended question about three training priorities in the field of SD could be grouped into 20 categories. Some of them bring a fresh and broader perspective on training needs such as the following:

- *Leadership and communication management in sustainable development*
- *Ensure continuous training in sustainable development and Train the trainers for efficient knowledge dissemination*
- *Develop systemic and creative thinking skills and innovation and adaptability in the field of sustainable development.*

149. The training needs expressed freely by the participants in this study reflect a wide range of areas that are considered crucial for SDEs to enhance their skills and perform effectively in their roles. The identified categories encompass diverse aspects of knowledge and skills required in the field, such as the following:

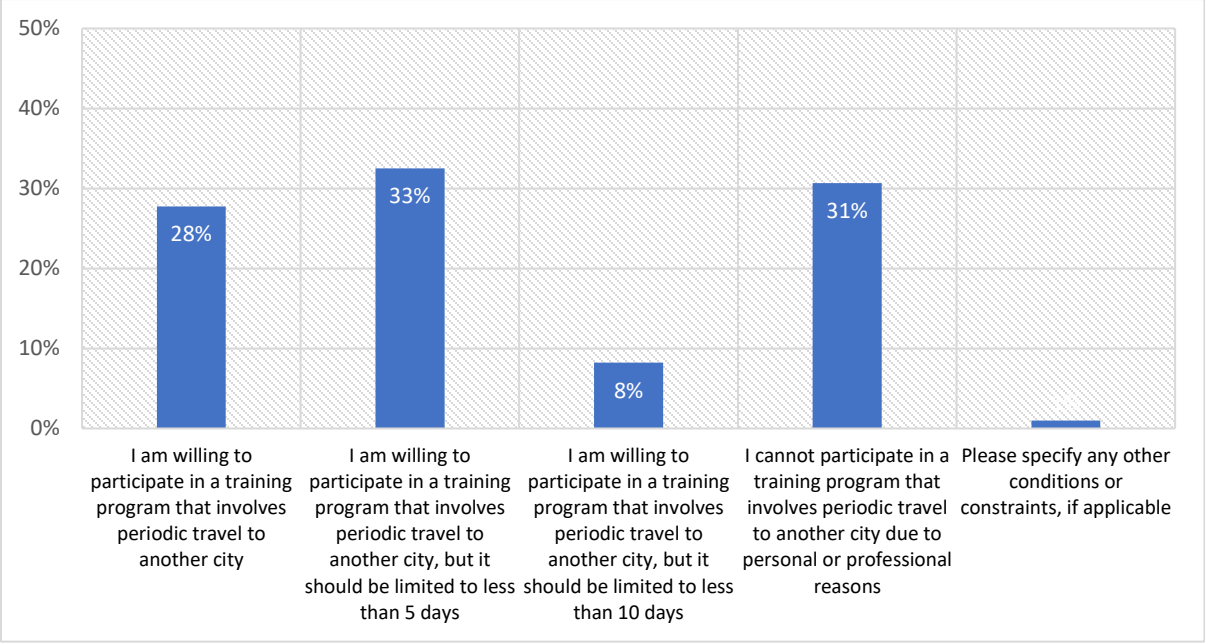
- Communication skills, project planning and management tools, creative thinking, and innovation emerged as prominent areas of training needs. These skills are considered essential for effective stakeholder engagement, problem-solving, and promoting sustainable practices.
- A strong demand for training in areas such as environmental education, sustainable finance, legal frameworks, and impact assessment.
- The significance of digital tools and adaptability to emerging technologies was emphasized, highlighting the growing role of technology in SD initiatives.
- The need for continuous training and knowledge dissemination through training of trainers was recognized to ensure ongoing professional development and knowledge transfer.

150. Collaboration, teamwork, and social responsibility skills were also highlighted as essential for successful implementation of SD projects. The integration of SD elements, the use of accurate information, and the identification of SD indicators were emphasized to support informed decision-making. All these findings will be considered in designing the competency profile of SDE and curriculum design.

151. The preferred administrative arrangements of a training program for the participants would include a duration of up to 3–6 months and a maximum of five out-of-town trips, and the main teaching methods would be 'Presentations by trainers in classroom settings', 'Predominantly online training sessions', and 'Exchange of experiences with specialists from other institutions'.

152. For 31 percent of the participants, attending a training program that requires travel is considered a challenge.

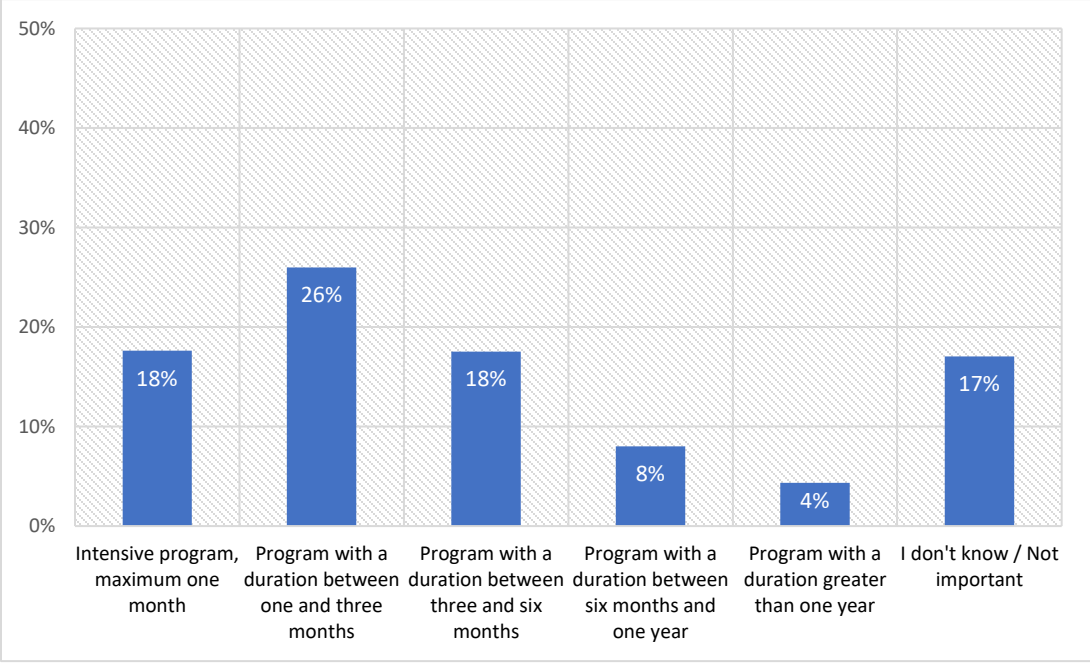
Figure 15. Percentage of respondents who answered the question: To what extent can you participate in a training program that involves periodic travel to another city in your region? (one answer permitted)



Source:WB Author

153. The results show that 62 percent of respondents prefer a training program duration less than six months. In the case of 17 percent of the participants, this is not important.

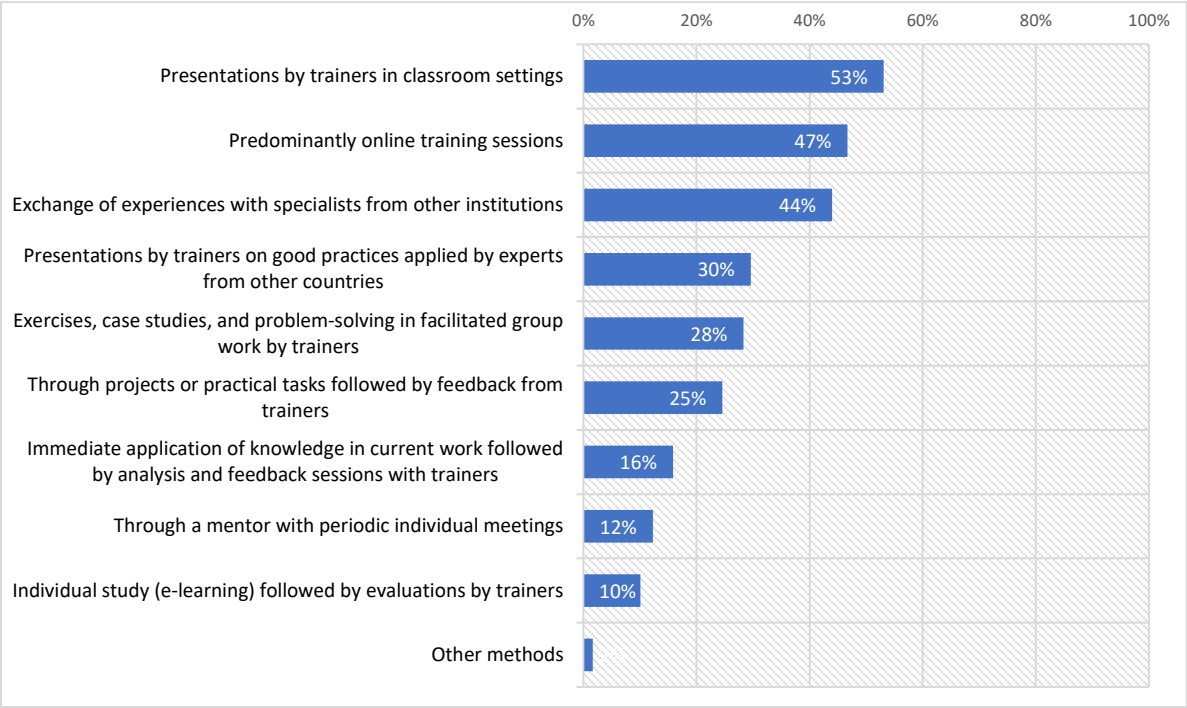
Figure 16. Percentage of respondents who answered the question: What training pace do you consider to be optimal for your sustainable development training needs? (one answer permitted)



Source: WB Author

154. Participants were asked to rank the training methods from most preferred to least preferred. Figure below represents the frequency with which each of these methods was selected in the top three.

Figure 17. Percentage of top three choices to the task: Rank the following training methods based on how suitable/preferred they are for your professional development in sustainable development



Source: WB Author

155. During the time of elaboration of the report, four focus group meetings were organized by the World Bank and DSD teams and conducted by the World Bank team with institutions at the central, regional, and local levels to validate/complement the results of Survey 2. Four focus group meetings of 6–10 participants belonging to central, regional, or local public institutions with a duration of about 110 minutes were conducted online on June 7 and 8 2023, 10.00–12.00 h and 13.00–15.00 h. Based on responses to DSD's invitation addressed to institutions at the central, regional, and local levels (priority was given to the institutions that did not respond to the surveys to complement the surveys' data), the structure of focus groups was as follows: one meeting with participants in institutions at the central and regional level (Ministry of Investments and European Projects [MIEP] and Ministry of Justice [MJ]), one meeting with participants in institutions at the central level (NACS, RDAs), and two meetings with representatives at the regional and local levels (RDAs and county councils).

156. The guidelines, main activities, and results of the focus group meetings are presented in detail in Annex 6.

5.3 Analysis and Definition of the Core Competencies for SDE

5.3.1. SDE Roles and Responsibilities

157. As revealed by both surveys, the current analysis of the role of Sustainable Development Experts (SDEs) within public institutions and the intentions for role development indicate a prevailing strategy: the SDE role is often an additional responsibility to a pre-existing position, despite ongoing efforts to establish it as a distinct occupation. This approach may be largely driven by current policies that discourage workforce expansion within public institutions. Consequently, the majority of staff with SD related-responsibilities in the surveys and focus group interviews held other job titles. They also had only a partial, limited, role in the field of sustainable development. Examples include legal professionals, architects, inspectors, social workers, project managers, etc. The policy of public institutions to primarily integrate Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their objectives and strategies by assigning additional responsibilities to existing staff with diverse specializations complicates the effort to identify a common specific competency profile. This approach also makes it challenging to ascertain shared training needs for these pre-existing roles.

158. Despite the differences in roles and responsibilities between central and local levels of public administration, a pressing need remains for an integrated and unified competency framework for Sustainable Development Experts (SDEs). While central-level positions may focus more on policy-making and local-level roles on public service delivery, the overarching competencies, development needs, and learning requirements for SDEs should be harmonized across these levels for greater effectiveness and coherence.

159. To create a well-defined and specific competency profile, the main tasks and responsibilities that SDEs should undertake for effective mission fulfillment must be identified. The newly created occupational standard of SDE in Romania creates a generic overview of the responsibilities, tasks, skills, and competencies of an SDE. Furthermore, the occupational standard allows for the creation of a clear and professional mirror-type report between responsibilities and abilities/competencies. However, it does not provide sufficient elements to easily distinguish specific key components that must necessarily be included in the 'SDE' competency from other general components that facilitate the manifestation of competency. While these additional components may be necessary, it is unclear whether they are mandatory or optional. For example, *generating reports, interacting with government agencies,* and *establishing contacts with government officials* are found in a wide range of responsibilities and competencies across various occupational categories without being specifically related to SD. This is likely the reason why such competencies are not explicitly included in the thematic content of training programs or among the evaluation criteria for developed competencies.

160. To create a distinction between specific, mandatory components and general, nonspecific ones, it is necessary to start with the societal expectations placed on such an occupation and the definition of the mission of an SDE. The possible formulations of the mission of an SDE could be expressed as follows:

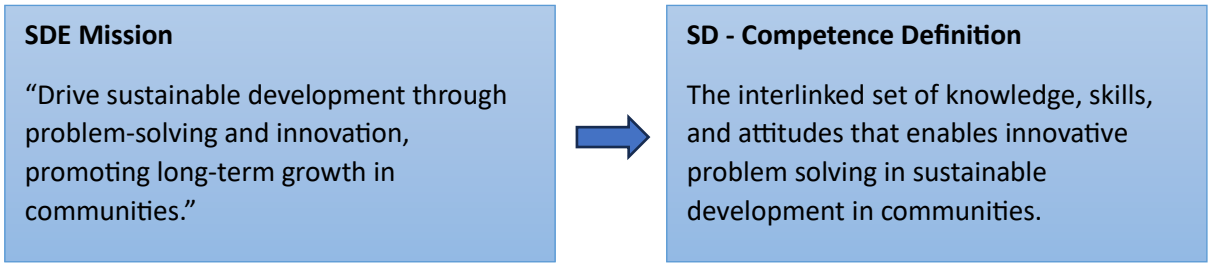
- *Contribute to the advancement of sustainable communities through problem-solving and innovation.*

- *Drive sustainable development by tackling barriers and promoting long-term growth in communities.*
- *Provide solutions to overcome challenges that hinder the sustainable development of communities.*
- *Champion the achievement of sustainable development goals by resolving challenges faced by communities.*

161. All the proposed definitions contain two key elements: *community* and *sustainable development solutions*. These elements capture the essential focus and purpose of an SDE's mission. By emphasizing the community and the need for sustainable solutions, these definitions highlight the expert's role in promoting positive change and long-term well-being.

The SD competency definition should express the ability for such experts to fulfill their mission through innovative solutions.

Figure 18. SD mission and competence definition



Source: WB Author

162. Such clarification of definitions enables a proper calibration of expectations regarding what an SDE can do: generate solutions that significantly contribute to the SD of communities. The reverse can also be true: communities develop sustainably due to the competency of SDEs within these communities.

163. Using the term 'innovative problem-solving' in the core definition of the SD competency conveys a proactive and forward-thinking approach to addressing challenges in SD. Unlike traditional problem-solving, which focuses on conventional methods and known solutions, innovative problem-solving involves exploring new ideas, approaches, and technologies to find creative and sustainable solutions. It encourages thinking outside the box, embracing experimentation, and challenging the status quo to achieve transformative outcomes. By emphasizing the innovative aspect, we highlight the importance of creativity, adaptability, and continuous improvement in addressing complex sustainability issues and driving positive change.

164. Problem-solving is a fundamental aspect that serves as a gateway to the mission and roles of an SDE. At the core of their responsibilities, SDEs should excel in solving problems related to SD, making them the primary source for finding or generating solutions. SD issues are often complex, multifaceted, and interconnected. They require a holistic approach and the ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems across various domains such as social, economic, and environmental. SDEs, as problem solvers, can navigate these complexities and propose effective solutions.

165. Innovation in SD solutions, as reflected in literature reviews, often involves the following[72]:

- Novelty: Innovative solutions propose fresh ideas or unconventional methods that differ from conventional practices, offering unique approaches to address sustainability challenges.
- Transformation: They aim to drive transformative change by challenging existing paradigms, promoting systemic thinking, and fostering sustainable behaviors and practices.
- Scalability: Innovative solutions have the potential to be scaled up or replicated in different contexts, maximizing their impact and contributing to broader SDGs[73].
- Collaboration: They encourage cross-sector collaboration, engaging diverse stakeholders to combine their expertise and perspectives, resulting in more holistic and effective solutions.
- Even if SD solutions are 'copied' as best practice models from other communities, they are applied within a context that is typically characterized by cultural, political, and economic differences. This implies the need for adaptations and innovations, at least in the implementation phase of these solutions.

166. In conclusion, while conventional solutions may provide effective outcomes, innovative problem-solving in SD emphasizes a forward-thinking mindset that seeks to identify unconventional approaches, leverage emerging technologies, and integrate interdisciplinary perspectives.

167. Communities – in the proposed definition, the concept "communities" should be interpreted in a broader perspective: group of individuals who share common interests, characteristics, or goals and are connected by geographical proximity, social relationships, or shared values. It is a collective entity that encompasses various stakeholders, including residents, organizations, institutions, and other entities, who interact and collaborate to address common needs, solve problems, and enhance the well-being of the community as a whole. For an SDE working in a public institution, the concept of community extends to include the institutional beneficiaries aligned with the mission of the institution.

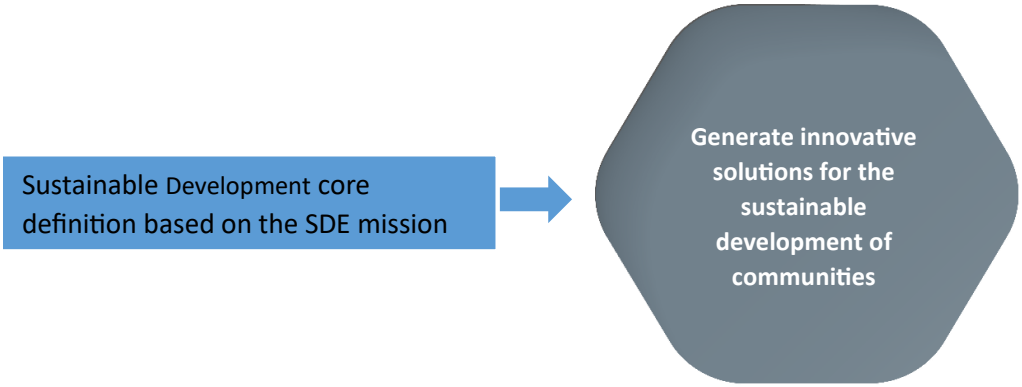
168. Based on such definition,[74] we can state that an individual possessing the competency of "sustainable development" ***is capable of generating and implementing sustainable development solutions for communities*****.** The effectiveness of these solutions, as well as the impact resulting from their implementation on community SD, constitutes the primary generic criterion for evaluating the competency of the expert who proposed or coordinated the application of these solutions.

[72] A. Leicht, J, Heiss and W.J.Byun – Issues and trends in Education for Sustainable Development – UNESCO Publishing - 2018

[73] Breno Henrique Tomiyoshi Nakao & José Baltazar Osório Salgueirinho de Andrade Guerra - Creativity, Innovation, and Sustainable Development - Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals - 2017

[74] A similar approach to define sustainability competencies as "the interlinked set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable effective, embodied action in the world with respect to real-world sustainability problems, challenges, and opportunities, according to the context" was made by Wiek et al. 2011; Redman and Wiek, under review; UNESCO 2007.

Figure 19. SDE core role



Source: WB Author

5.3.2. SD Specific Competency: Key Skills Component

169. The SD solutions analyzed, identified, or generated by an SDE are found within policies, strategies, initiatives, or projects of sustainable development. To pinpoint the key skills that make up such a competency, the question to be answered is: where and in what context are these innovative solutions formulated? According to the occupational standard, these SD solutions are formulated and provided within policies and strategies. Although only a small portion of SDEs currently have the responsibility of policy and strategy development (28 percent), these remain the primary means through which expert solutions can be implemented. Furthermore, the solutions analyzed or proposed by an SDE can be found within projects, action plans, decisions, or initiatives at the community or institutional level, as well as in activities involving methodological counseling for stakeholders on SD issues.

Box 3. Examples of measuring SDE performance

SDEs who participated in focus groups have indicated that the performance of an SDE can indeed be mainly measured through

- Quality of project evaluation and objective differentiation;
- Quality of regional planning;
- Quality of formulating strategic objectives;
- Enhanced capacity to make informed decisions regarding the identification of impactful measures; and
- Clarity of specifications, documentation, and requests for clarification issued by an SDE.

Source: WB Author

170. Even though SDEs may not have responsibilities or are required to have in-depth knowledge of public policy making, according to the mission, they should be able to contribute at least with:

- Analyzing the quality of SD solutions proposed in these policies;
- Evaluating the effectiveness and efficacity of the solutions included in a policy;
- Recommending (standpoint perspective) adjustments, changes, completions, and prioritizations that enhance the effectiveness of solution implementation in a public policy; and

- Raising awareness when certain public policy measures could involve consequences or derailments from SD principles.

Box 4. Examples of main challenges faced by SDE

During the focus groups, SDEs from RDA stated that one of the main challenges is to establish a set of criteria through which they can differentiate the quality of projects proposed for funding based on their impact on sustainable development.

Other participants in focus groups have indicated how they are requested to contribute in decision-making process as well as in analyzing the quality of solutions proposed within a public policy:

"I encounter this terminology in my field as well, specifically in relation to concrete subjects such as legislative acts. When drafting a normative act, it is crucial to ensure that it is aligned with all sustainable development objectives and does not have a negative impact on them."

"It is important to understand that a public policy does not operate in isolation. For example, addressing violence against women does not only impact the justice system, but it also requires measures for the protection of aggressors and considers the impact on children, healthcare, and education. Therefore, when formulating a public policy in the field of justice, it should integrate solutions and consider the impact on other areas of sustainable development, including infrastructure."

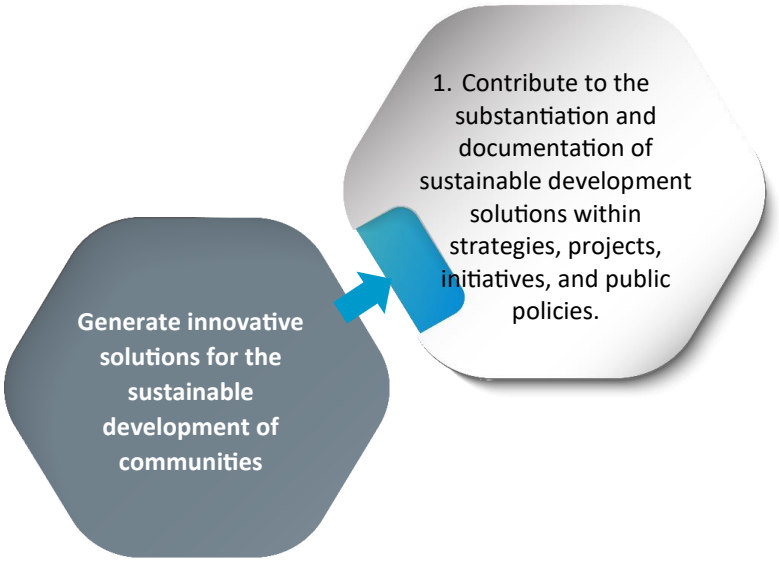
Source: WB Author

171. The following list of skills could be extended regarding the strategy making, project design, advising for initiatives, decisions, legislative acts, or foreign business policy.

- Plan, organize, and manage SD projects, including coordinating tasks, resources, budgets, and timelines to achieve project objectives.
- Evaluate how SD principles and solutions are reflected in the design of projects and the allocation of resources *(this is a skill specially requested for improvement by SDE from RDAs - in focus groups).*
- Analyze how SD solutions are reflected on public strategies, projects, or initiatives on the axis of measures-actions-resources-operational objectives-strategic SDG.
- Create a breakdown structure for an SDG, including operational objectives, indicators, means of action, and SD solutions at the community level.
- Evaluate risk factors related to the economic, social, and environmental pillars of SD in the context of developing projects, strategies, or public policies.

172. The conclusion, based on occupational standard and also on SDE perspective, is that one of the key abilities of SD competency should be the capacity to exercise sound judgment regarding how the SD solutions are reflected in strategies, public policies, projects, or stakeholders' decisions. And this competency area should reflect the first main role for an SDE:

Figure 20. SD Competency Area (no. 1)



Source: WB Author

173. The role of an SDE extends beyond providing SD solutions; it also encompasses the evaluation of the real impact of these solutions, measures, policies, and strategies. Such a role is fundamental for the continuous improvement and innovation process demanded by the principles of SD, serving as the primary driving force through which both experts and communities learn.

174. Assessing the real impact of SD policies and strategies is crucial for ensuring their efficiency and effectiveness. Through impact evaluation, an SDE can identify whether the set objectives have been achieved, whether there have been any unintended effects, or whether adjustments are needed to maximize positive outcomes. This evaluation enables an evidence-based approach and contributes to informed decision-making for continuous improvement of SD policies and strategies. Also, assessing the real impact of SD policies and strategies promotes transparency and accountability. By analyzing the tangible effects of these initiatives, greater transparency is ensured in front of the community and stakeholders, understanding the extent to which these policies and strategies have contributed to progress toward sustainable development. This facilitates accountability in the implementation and monitoring of these initiatives, ensuring that decisions and actions are justified and that resources are efficiently allocated to achieve desired results.

175. Occupational analysis and the occupational standard underline the role that an SDE must perform in this area of activity: 'Assessing the degree of implementation in specific domains/subdomains of activity, according to the sustainable development objectives included in the NSSD.

176. Measuring and assessing the impact of implementing SD solutions, policies, and strategies involve a range of skills which may include the following:

- Collect, analyze, and interpret relevant data to assess the impact of SD decisions, initiatives, policies, or strategies. This includes statistical analysis, data visualization, and the ability to draw meaningful insights from complex datasets.

- Conduct evaluations and assessments to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of SD interventions. This involves designing evaluation frameworks, selecting appropriate evaluation methods, and conducting comprehensive assessments of the outcomes and impacts achieved.
- Develop indicators, establish baselines, and use appropriate measurement techniques to quantify the extent of change resulting from the implementation of solutions, policies, and strategies.
- Utilize ex post impact analysis methods such as sustainability assessment; cost-benefit analysis; or political, economic, social, and technological analysis (PEST).

177. For a sound ex post analysis, in this competency area a set of skills related to use of digital applications, data analysis tools, and data processing and interpretations, should be included, as follows:

- Utilize digital applications and tools for data collection, storage, and analysis to enhance efficiency and accuracy in the assessment process.
- Maintain proficiency in data analysis software, such as Excel, SPSS, or other specialized tools, to handle and process large datasets effectively.
- Apply data processing techniques to clean, transform, and prepare data for analysis, ensuring data integrity and reliability.
- Interpret and visualize data through graphs, charts, and other visual representations to facilitate the communication of findings and insights.

178. In conclusion, the second area for SD competency should enable an expert to effectively evaluate and assess the impact of implementing SD solutions, policies, and strategies, thereby informing decision-making and facilitating continuous improvement.

Figure 21. SD Competency Areas (no. 1 - 2)

Source: WB Author

179. Another important role of an SDE, necessary to fulfil the mission of generating innovative solutions, is to synthesize through reports how SD solutions have been implemented, their level of effectiveness, and their potential to become best practice models. By synthesizing this information, an SDE provides a comprehensive overview of the application of SD solutions, capturing their outcomes and impact. This analysis allows for a deeper understanding of what worked well and what can be improved in future initiatives.

180. Moreover, by identifying successful cases, the SDE can highlight these as models of best practices that can be replicated and scaled-up in similar contexts. These models serve as valuable references for others seeking effective approaches to address sustainability challenges. The synthesis of applied SD solutions through reports plays a vital role in knowledge sharing, learning, and continuous improvement in the field. It facilitates the identification and dissemination of successful strategies, fosters collaboration, and ultimately contributes to the advancement of SDGs.

181. The occupational standard underlines this role with the next responsibilities: *Reporting findings on the effects of existing policies; Effective communication of analyses, reports, and studies conducted on SD*; and *Monitoring and implementing specific principles, norms, procedures, and strategies of intervention to mitigate existing risks related to achieving SDGs*. Within the same role, the expected contribution of the SDE to voluntary national reporting efforts can be included.

Box 5. Examples of SDE information sources

SDEs who participated in focus groups have indicated a set of information sources which they are using in fulfilling their SDE monitoring and reporting role:

- Official data sources (INS, TEMPUS, flood platform, ADI - Intercommunity Development Associations)
- Field analysis and community engagement (on-site visits, door to door, local sources)
- Expertise and colleagues' knowledge or specialists from other institutions
- Miscellaneous sources (RoAdapt, EC, OECD, legislative software programs).

182. Monitoring, reporting, and contributing to the dissemination of best practices in SD solutions involve a range of skills which may include the following:

- Perform data collection and analysis; using digital tools for gathering, interpreting, and reporting data.
- Synthesize relevant information for distribution as an example of best practice.
- Condense and consolidate pertinent information; develop proficiency in selecting and curating relevant data and evidence.
- Develop comprehensive reports that extract key insights and lessons learned from successful projects, highlighting essential points for wider dissemination.
- Prepare case studies or success stories that illustrate best practices, showcasing innovative solutions and their positive outcomes.
- Engage in knowledge sharing and networking activities to contribute to the development of professional networks within the SDEs' communities.

183. At first glance, this area of SD competency may appear more limited in terms of complexity and the set of required skills compared to the previous ones. However, it corresponds to a crucial role in contributing to the formation of an expert network that shares best practices and continuously innovates in this field. Considering that Romania is developing a Virtual Resource Center for Sustainable Development, SDEs should be the primary contributors to this center.

184. In conclusion, the third main role of an SDE should be sustained by a key competency area as shown in the Figure below.

Figure 22. SD Competency Areas (no. 1- 3)

Source: WB Author

185. The fourth main role of SDEs relate to how they communicate and promote the values and principles of SD at the community level. The results of Survey 2 show that *Creating communication bridges between public institutions and communities* is one of the top three main skills that should be developed by an SDE. Occupational analysis and occupational standards highlight this important role through responsibilities such as *Implementing communication strategies to raise awareness of SD issues*; *Communicating on SD topics with public institutions, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, the academic community, and other stakeholders*; *Engagement in promotional and awareness activities for SD, including events and joint projects.*

Box 6. Examples of training methods and practices resulted from the focus group meetings

SDEs who participated in focus groups have indicated a large range of methods and practices they apply (or should apply) to fulfil the role of building communication bridges with the communities:

- Direct communication and personal interaction (direct interaction and on-site visit, in association with a local representative such as the local priest, the teacher, the medic, or nongovernmental organizations [NGOs])
- Virtual platforms and online communication (citizens can give and get feedback from institutions and other online apps or platforms)
- Data-driven strategies and institutional mechanisms (newsletters, statistics, and graphic materials to be presented)
- Collaborative approaches and community engagement (focus groups, meetings in communities, seminars, public debates).

Source: WB Author

186. While this role is better understood and accepted by social workers or public health field workers and less known or practiced by other categories of SDEs, the direct contact role with the community should be defined for an SDE and should be reflected accordingly in the competency profile.

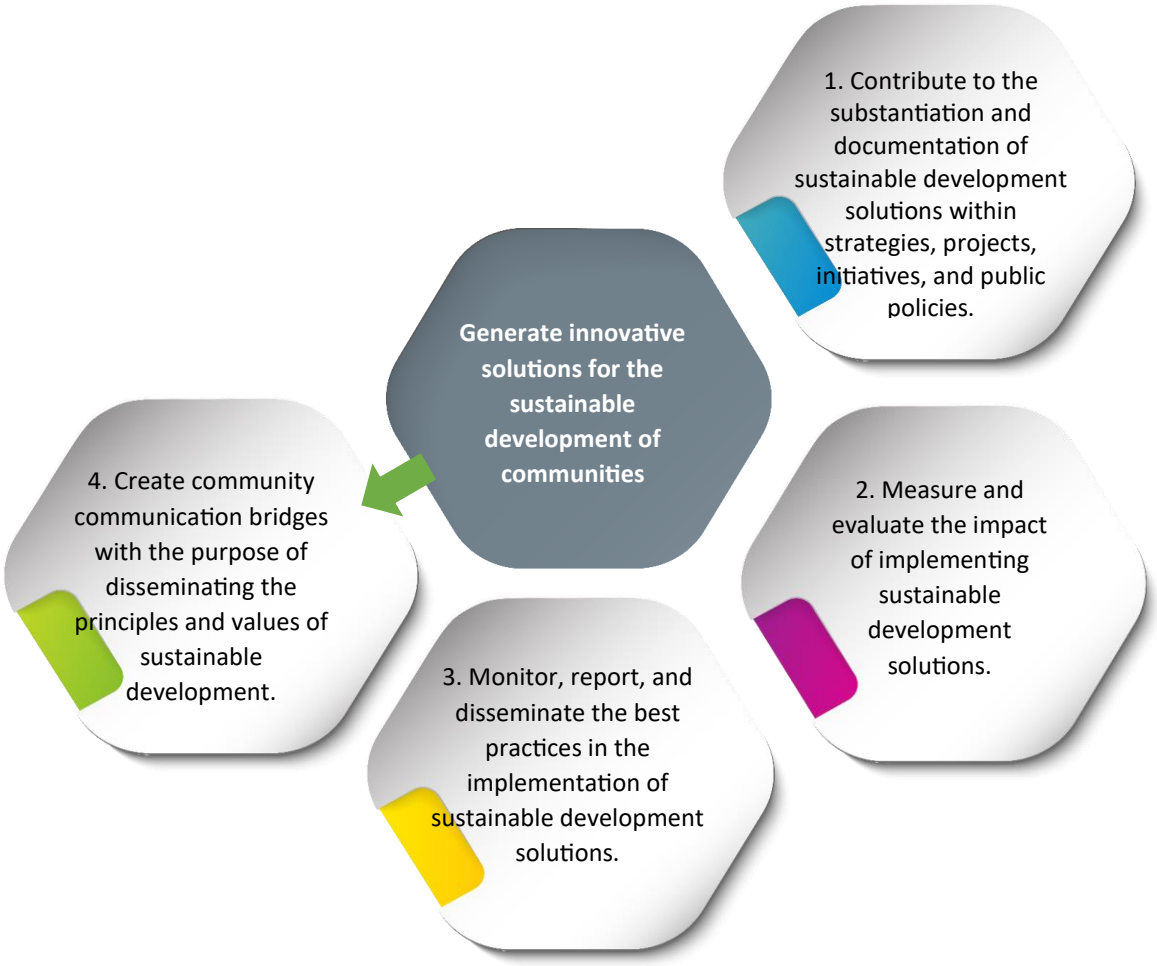
187. Associated with this role we should also include the responsibilities of creating links/bridges between communities and public institutions. The occupational standard underlined it through a list of needed skills: *Engages with government agencies; Establishes contacts with communities and local authorities; Establishes contacts with government officials.*

188. Creating community communication bridges with the purpose of disseminating the principles and values of SD involve a range of skills which may include the following:

- Convey complex concepts in a clear and accessible manner; condense and consolidate pertinent information.
- Facilitate communication between diverse stakeholders.
- Promote collaboration and consensus building among different actors.
- Deliver presentations to persuade a call to action.
- Engage and inspire others through storytelling and narrative development.
- Leverage digital tools and social media for communication purposes.
- Address communication challenges and potential conflicts of interests.
- Adapt communication style to different audiences and contexts.
- Create content for promoting the SDGs and principles.
- Build networks and relationships, formal and informal, develop interpersonal rapport, establishing trust, and maintain ongoing communication to foster collaboration and mutual understanding.

189. The competency model needs to be enriched with a fourth competency area corresponding to this role, as shown in figure below.

Figure 23. SD Competency Areas (no. 1- 4)



Source: WB Author

190. The fifth main role of an SDE highlights a fundamental aspect of its mission: identifying the SD needs at the community level. The respondents of Survey 2 emphasized that the skill of *identifying and analyzing community needs* is among the top six priorities, regardless of the type of institution, region, or individual responsibilities of the SDE. The recognition of this role as defining for the SDE occupational profile shows the importance of equipping professionals in the field with a comprehensive set of skills to effectively fulfil it.

191. By actively engaging with the community members and stakeholders, the SDE can gain insights into their unique social, economic, and environmental challenges. This understanding allows for the development of tailored and effective SD solutions that address the community's specific needs and aspirations. By involving the community in identifying and analyzing their own needs, the SDE fosters a sense of ownership and engagement. This participatory approach enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives, as the solutions are co-created with the community, considering their perspectives, values and priorities. Ultimately, this leads to more meaningful and impactful outcomes in SD.

Box 7. Main training needs (Survey 2: open-ended responses)

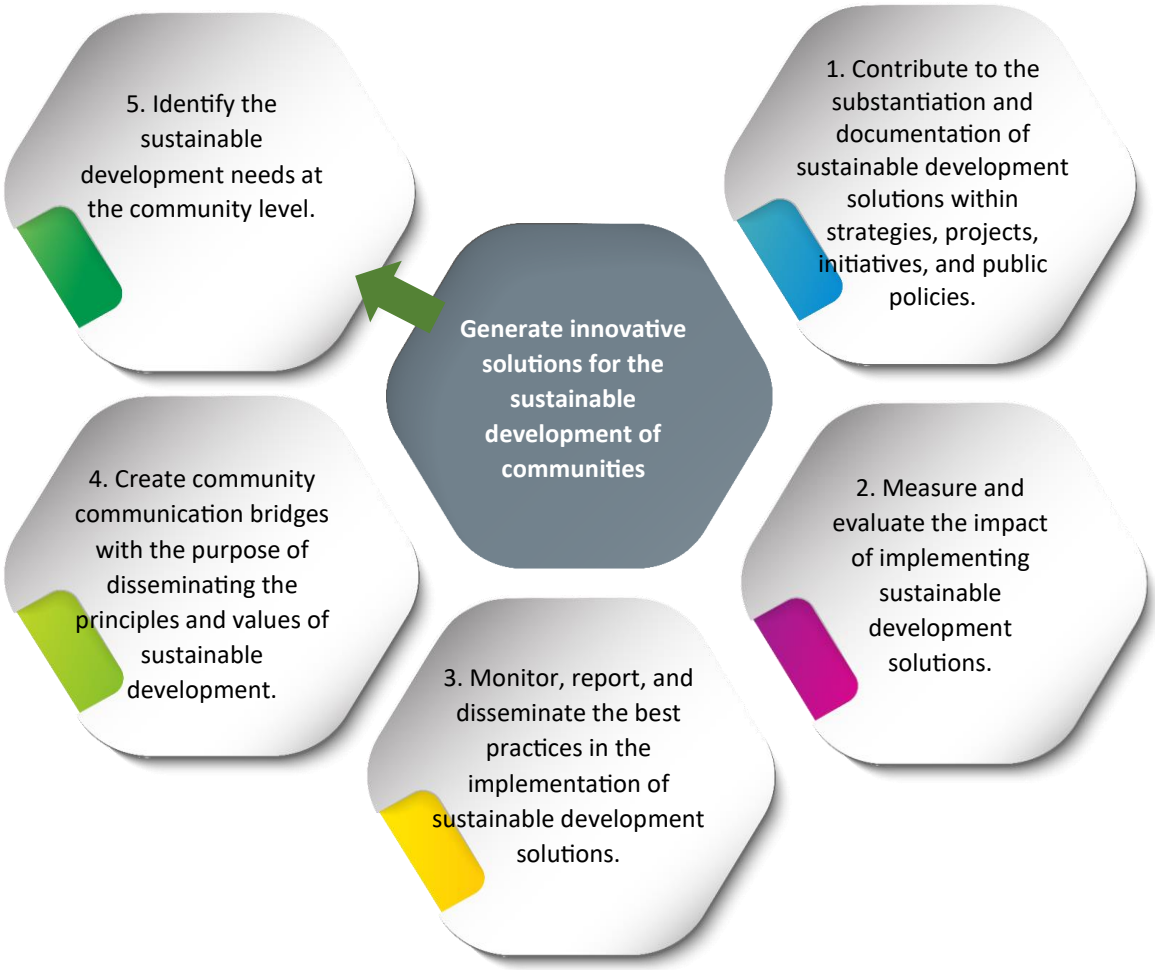
By analyzing the open-ended responses to the question posed in Survey 2, *Please specify 3 additional training needs that will enable you to perform as a sustainable development expert*, a high frequency of responses highlighting the need for training in fulfilling the role of community needs analyst was identified:

- Continual analysis of societal needs
- Accessing current and accurate information, data collection in SD, identification and monitoring of SD needs and indicators.

192. Identifying the SD needs at the community level involves a range of skills which may include the following:

- Conduct community needs assessments and analysis to identify SD priorities and challenges.
- Collect and analyze data related to social, economic, and environmental aspects of community development.
- Interpret data, identify trends, and make informed recommendations for SD interventions.
- Engage with community stakeholders and conduct consultations to gather insights and perspectives on SD needs.
- Articulate and present findings to diverse audiences, including community members, government officials, and other stakeholders.
- Use relevant tools, software, and technologies for data collection, analysis, and reporting in the context of community SD needs.
- Commit to equity, social justice, and inclusivity in the process of identifying and analyzing community needs for SD.

Figure 24. SD Competency Areas (no. 1- 5)



Source: WB Author

193. The sixth main role of an SDE is related to the process of problem-solving and solution generation. The process of generating solutions in SD is rarely the exclusive result of individual thinking or individual research. In generating solutions, SDEs collaborate with multidisciplinary teams that bring diverse specializations, experiences, and sociocultural backgrounds.

194. Engaging resources, conducting risk analyses in implementing solutions, prioritizing interventions, or obtaining stakeholder commitment—all of these are part of a problem-solving process that requires teamwork or an SDE should master such skills to fulfil the mission.

195. The occupational standard indicates this role as a responsibility: *Becoming familiar with the functions of teamwork.* Also, in the competencies list we can find *Developing professional networks; Establishing contacts with government officials; Establishing contacts with communities and local authorities.* It highlights the collaborative nature of an SDE's mission in generating SD solutions.

196. Working in multidisciplinary teams to generate SD solutions for the community involves a range of skills which may include the following:

- Effectively work with individuals from diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and perspectives to achieve common goals in SD.
- Collect, analyze, and interpret data related to SD, using relevant digital tools and methods.
- Change ideas to strengthen and analyze complex problems, identify innovative solutions, and make informed decisions in the context of SD.
- Navigate and work in dynamic and changing environments, adapting to new challenges, technologies, and methodologies.
- Use ex ante impact analysis methods and tools.
- Analyze the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental systems to develop holistic SD solutions.
- Facilitate multidisciplinary teams, foster collaboration, and inspire others toward a shared vision of SD.
- Think creatively and propose innovative approaches to address sustainability challenges, fostering new ideas and solutions within multidisciplinary teams.
- Manage conflicts and disagreements that may arise within multidisciplinary teams, promoting a positive and productive work environment.
- Engage and involve diverse stakeholders, including local communities, government officials, NGOs, and industry representatives, in the process of generating SD solutions.

197. The competency model is completed with the sixth competency area corresponding to the sixth main role of an SDE.

Figure 25. SD Competency Model

Source: WB Author

198. In conclusion, the specific SD competency should mirror the mission and the main roles expected from an SDE.

Table 14. Mission and the main roles expected from an SDE

SDE mission statement	**SD competency definition**
Drive sustainable development through problem-solving and innovation, promoting long-term growth in communities.	The interlinked set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enables innovative problem-solving in sustainable development in communities
SDE - main roles	**SD - competency areas / key skills**
Role 1 - To contribute to public policies, strategies, projects, initiatives, or decisions that aim the community sustainable development	Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of sustainable development solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies.
Role 2 - To evaluate the impact of applied sustainable development solutions at the community level	Measure and evaluate the impact of implementing sustainable development solutions.
Role 3 - To monitor and report on applied solutions and progress achieved in the sustainable development of communities	Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of sustainable development solutions, projects, strategies, and public policies.
Role 4 - To build communication bridges with the community in line with the values and principles of sustainable development	Create community communication bridges with the purpose of disseminating the principles and values of sustainable development.
Role 5 - To identify sustainable development needs at the community level	Identify the sustainable development needs at the community level.
Role 6 - To work in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions at the community level	Work in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions for the community.

Source: WB Author

199. Although the wording of the two columns is similar (for simplicity and clarity, it is recommended to use similar expressions. The difference lies in the fact that the first column refers to the roles and responsibilities expected or attributed to an SDE (from external sources), while the second column refers to what an SDE develops (from within) through training or experience.

200. The use of digital technologies is identified as a crucial training need, however, from the perspective of an SDE's role; it cannot be an objective or role in itself but rather a means to fulfill the mission and the six main roles. From the perspective of SD competency, the use of digital technologies and data analysis skills belong to multiple competency areas. Therefore, training objectives for an SDE could be formulated in terms of 'how to use digital technologies to fulfill the main roles':

- How to use digital technologies in identifying community needs or challenges
- How to access digital data sources to substantiate SD solutions

- How to access digital data sources to identify trends or progress track
- How to use digital application to measure the impact of an SD solution.

Box 8. Categories of digital technologies or applications SDEs need to use

SDEs who participated in focus groups have indicated five categories of digital technologies or applications they need to use in the actual role:

- Databases tools (INS and EUROSTAT databases, publicly available and exportable to Excel)
- Universal data processing tools (Excel and AI tools)
- Specific institutional tools (online service portal at the institutional level for provision and collection of relevant information), 'Smart Territory' - an app dedicated to citizens
- Geographic information system (GIS) and related applications
- Applications for fund management (SMIS, digital signature).

Source: WB Author

201. These digital usage skills should be part of the training package for an SDE and included under each of the six SD core competency areas.

202. Furthermore, in relation to the mission of an SDE to contribute to the digital development of the community, reference is made to a specialized role and, naturally, to a distinct approach in terms of competency and skills. For instance, an SDE with a specialized focus on digitalization within SD would have a specific competency such as 'Digital Sustainable Development' and could have a crucial role in

- Ensuring access to digital technologies and infrastructure in underserved communities;
- Promoting digital literacy and skills development for all individuals, including marginalized groups;
- Enhancing the use of digital solutions for efficient and transparent governance;
- Improving digital connectivity and access to affordable and reliable internet services;
- Harnessing the potential of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, for SD; and
- Enhancing cybersecurity measures to protect digital systems and infrastructure in the community, and so on.

203. In this context, the competency required for an SDE with a digitalization focus would encompass a blend of both SD competency and digital transformation competency and could be named as *Sustainable Development Digitalization.*

204. The same principles of specialization could be applied for social, environmental, or economic pillars of SD. Simplified, the six core areas of sustainable development competency[75] follow the six key roles expected from an SDE and serving as a direct call to action:

1. Drive Change!
2. Measure Impact!
3. Learn and Share Best Practices!
4. Build Communication Bridges!

[75] The terms 'competence areas' and 'key skills' are interchangeably used in this model of six core areas of SD competency.

5. Identify Communities' Development Needs!
6. Generate SD Solutions!

Figure Main SDE Roles

Source:WB Author

205. This model, which creates a universal competency framework for an SDE, meets the following requirements:

- It is in line with an internationally adopted conceptual and methodological framework.[76]
- It corresponds to the responsibilities-competency axis as represented in the SDE occupational standard.

[76] Bianchi, G. 2020. "Sustainability Competences." EUR 30555 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

- It offers a simple and appealing vision of the mission and competency expected from an SDE: *Generate innovative solutions for the sustainable development of communities.*
- It allows for easy application of the model in setting training objectives and methods.

206. From an operational definition perspective, the model emphasizes the essential *skills* that are part of SD competency, and it should be complemented with *knowledge* and *attitudes*.[77]

207. Emerging as the chapter's pinnacle, the refined model comprises six competency-based modules, meticulously aligned with distinct roles and responsibilities in sustainable development. Given its roots in role-based analysis, the model is strongly advised for incorporation into training initiatives targeting sustainable development experts.

5.3.3. SD Specific Competency: Attitudes Component

208. When it comes to the attitude component of an SD competency, the following aspects are imperative for consideration: attitudes that reflect a commitment to SD values and principles; a problem-solving attitude; attitudes of tolerance, acceptance, empathy toward the needs and interests of communities; and the attitudes necessary for innovation and collaboration. To enumerate the specific attitudes of an SDE, they should be closely related to the mission and roles SDEs are expected to fulfill.

209. Because the SDE mission contains the keywords: sustainable development, problem-solving, and communities, the fundamental attitudes must align with the key elements of the mission. Additionally, we can include attitudes of openness toward innovation—to provide specificity to the type of problems being solved (innovative solutions) and openness to teamwork and collaboration.

210. Studies[78] underlined the importance of the attitudinal component of SD competencies. "… Rieckmann (2012) tried to address the lack of diversity among scholars who were engaging in studies on SDE. In particular, the author conducted a Delphi study engaging 70 experts from Latin America and Europe, in order to build consensus on an inclusive set of key competences necessary for sustainable development. Experts were first divided in two geographical groups who ranked a priori identified competences according to the saliency of their local context. Then, both groups convened on a common ground and selected key competences for sustainable development. Their framework can be distinguished by the attitudinal description of competences. It is worth noting the importance of interdisciplinary work (e.g., Chandu & Kancharla, 2012; Dimante et al., 2019; Lozano et al., 2017) and heterogeneous collaboration (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2016); empathy and change of perspective (e.g., Garcia et al., 2017; Lozano et al., 2017), as well as ambiguity and frustration tolerance. Differing from Wiek et al. (2011, 2016) and Brundiers et al. (2020), experts include critical thinking among the core competences for sustainable development.

[77] A widely accepted understanding within the field of psychology and social sciences; refers to the definition of attitudes as a set of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies that shape a person's thoughts, actions, and responses to various situations. They are the predispositions or inclinations individuals have toward certain ideas, values, or behaviors. Attitudes can influence how individuals perceive and interact with the world around them, for guiding their decision-making processes and actions.
[78] Marco Rieckmann. 2012. "*Future-Oriented Higher Education: Which Key Competencies Should Be Fostered through University Teaching and Learning*?" Institute for Environmental and Sustainability Communication, Leuphana University of Lünebur, Germany.

Glasser and Hirsh (2016) identified five additional core competences in their case study by building on the original framework by Wiek and colleagues (2011). They conducted a workshop with 100 participants and tried to identified the core competences necessary for students, who by being responsible citizens, can influence (and educate) the wider community. In particular, authors added affinity for life; a general knowledge about the state of the planet; and two performance related competences such as modelling sustainable behaviour, wise decision making and transformative social change."

211. The main attitudes proposed for SD competency cover the main findings of researchers in a more concise way:

- **Commitment for SD values** covers *affinity for life, modeling sustainable behaviors,* and *transformative social change.*
- **Problem-solving attitude** covers *critical thinking, wise decision-making, ambiguity,* and *frustration tolerance* regarding complexity and uncertainty.
- **Tolerance, acceptance, and empathy toward the needs and interests of communities** covers *empathy*, change of perspective, and *frustration tolerance* regarding different interests or cultural perspectives.
- **Openness to innovation** covers *transformative social change*, *ambiguity, and frustration tolerance.*
- **Promoting synergy through teamwork and collaboration** covers *interdisciplinary work* and *heterogeneous collaboration.*

212. Within the competency framework for public servants, problem-solving and decision-making are recognized as essential general competencies (expected from all public servants). However, in the context of SD competency, problem-solving has specific characteristics. For example, solutions must be formulated considering their impact on the future, which require anticipation and thinking in terms of cause and impact chains. Additionally, the ability to think widely and develop actions and decisions that can influence the future is crucial. These elements are specific to the SD context and necessitate strategic thinking skills.

213. Research and meta-analyses conducted to answer the question of which general competencies are necessary for SDEs have been synthesized by UNESCO.[79]

Box 9. general competencies necessary for SDEs

"The following competencies are generally regarded as crucial for advanced sustainable development (see de Haan, 2010; Rieckmann, 2012; Wiek et al., 2011):

- Competency in **Systematic Thinking**: The ability to recognize and understand relationships, analyze complex systems, think about how systems are interconnected across different domains and dimensions, and address uncertainty.
- **Anticipatory Competency**: The skills to understand and assess multiple futures - possible, probable, and desirable; create one's own vision for the future; apply the precautionary principle; evaluate the consequences of actions; and address risks and changes.

[79] Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives - Published in 2017 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

- **Normative Competency**: The ability to understand and reflect upon the norms and values that underpin one's actions, negotiate values, principles, goals, and targets of sustainability in contexts of conflicting interests and compromises, uncertain knowledge, and contradictions.
- **Strategic Competency**: The skills to collectively develop and implement innovative actions that advance sustainability at the local and broader levels.
- **Collaboration Competency:** The skills to learn from others; understand and respect the needs, perspectives, and actions of others (empathy); understand, relate to, and be sensitive to others (empathetic leadership); address conflicts within a group; and facilitate problem-solving through collaboration and participation.
- **Critical Thinking** Competency: The ability to question norms, practices, and opinions; reflect on one's own values, perceptions, and actions; and take a stance in sustainability discourse.
- **Self-Awareness** Competency: The ability to reflect on one's role in local and global communication and society; continually evaluate and motivate one's own actions; and manage one's own feelings and desires.
- **Integrated Problem-Solving** Competency: The overall ability to apply various problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability issues and develop viable, inclusive, and equitable solutions that promote sustainable development, integrating the afore mentioned competencies."

Source: UNESCO

214. The proposed SD competency for public servants include in its operational definition the above perspective; and there are found in different skills' or attitudes' descriptors. systematic thinking, strategic and anticipatory competency, critical thinking, and integrated problem-solving are considered in the descriptions of the main *skill sets* (or competency area) for:

- (6) Working in multidisciplinary teams to generate SD solutions for the community; and
- (1) Contributing to the establishment and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies.

215. Normative competency is reflected by the requested *attitudes*:

- Commitment for SD values
- Tolerance, acceptance, and empathy toward the needs and interests of communities.

And by the next set of skills:

- (4) Creating communication bridges within the community to promote the principles and values of SD.

216. Collaboration is reflected by the following set of skills:

- (6) Working in multidisciplinary teams to generate SD solutions for the community
- (3) Monitoring, reporting, and contributing to the dissemination of best practices in implementing SD solutions.

and by the attitude of

- Promoting synergy through teamwork and collaboration.

217. Self-awareness is reflected by the attitudinal set proposed for SD competencies and is sustained by the specific mission and roles clearly defined for SDEs. This motivational and attitudinal set found under the concept of **self-awareness** should be considered in a training program in the following ways:

- The communication of the training program should be clear regarding the professional expectations for those who will dedicate themselves to these occupations. This ensures that participants make an informed choice when selecting the program. By providing clear and transparent information about the professional expectations associated with the training program, individuals can make an informed decision about whether to pursue it. This helps align the participants' expectations with the program's objectives and ensures a more effective learning experience.
- Throughout the training program, participants should have an accurate and realistic understanding of what they know and can do, as well as of what they do not yet know or are unable to do. Fostering self-awareness among participants is essential for their personal and professional development. By helping individuals assess their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth, the training program can tailor its methods and activities to address their specific needs. This promotes a realistic self-assessment and supports participants in setting achievable learning goals, maximizing their learning outcomes.

218. By considering the motivational and attitudinal aspects of self-awareness and implementing these strategies within the training program, individuals can make informed decisions about their professional aspirations and gain a clear understanding of their own capabilities.

5.3.4. SD Specific Competency: Knowledge Component

219. To establish the knowledge set for SD competency, it is crucial to address the following questions: What are the essential knowledge areas, key principles, and foundational theories that every SDE should be able to apply? Answering these questions enables the identification of the core knowledge domains that form the basis of Sustainable Development (SD) competency. This includes understanding key sustainability concepts, such as the triple bottom line (economic, social, environmental), systems thinking, and SD frameworks (for example, Agenda 2030, SDGs). Additionally, familiarity with relevant theories and models, such as ecological economics, social equity, and environmental governance, is vital for effective decision-making and problem-solving in SD contexts.

220. By this comprehensive knowledge base, all SDEs could navigate the complexities of SD, apply interdisciplinary approaches, and contribute to innovative and holistic solutions. The occupational standard for SDE proposes an implicit knowledge set classification under four training modules: Management and public administration; The economic dimension of SD; The social dimension of SD; The environmental dimension of SD. This classification can serve as the foundation for developing more specialized competencies; however, it alone does not provide a comprehensive overview of the specific knowledge areas that all SDEs should possess.

221. UNESCO[80] proposed an approach regarding each SDG and learning objectives associated. Indeed, all SDEs must have knowledge of the objectives, principles, and concepts associated with SD, particularly

[80] Education for Sustainable Development: Learning Objectives - Published in 2017 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

regarding how they interrelate and interdepend. The mandatory knowledge embedded in SD competency should enable experts to adopt a holistic approach when addressing complex sustainability challenges and facilitate a clear understanding of the interconnected nature of SD.

222. The insights from Survey 2, focus groups, and other extensive works converge to a list of mandatory knowledge needed for SDEs which contain the following:

- SDG and the main indicators of SD.
- Values and principles of SD: sustainability, equity and social justice, ecological integrity, intergenerational integrity, participation and engagement, environmental stewardship, social inclusivity, economic prosperity, cultural preservation.
- Main concepts used in SD practices: climate change, biodiversity, energy efficiency, corporate social responsibility, social inequalities, sustainable urban development, circular economy, responsible consumption, DNSH.
- Legal and policy framework of SD (Romania and EU).

223. The set of knowledge referring to problem-solving methods, statistical methods for data processing, impact evaluation methods (such as PESTLE[81]), and digital tools which are also requested from an SDE can be presented under the 'knowledge' section, or included in the 'skills' section, indicating the action through which they are applied:

- Utilize problem-solving methods to generate solutions for SD challenges in the community.
- Apply statistical methods to identify trends and provide evidence supporting the need for SD measures and decisions.
- Use impact evaluation methods to assess the impact of SD policies or strategies.
- Utilize digital tools for data analysis and reporting the impact of SD policies or strategies.

224. By categorizing them under 'skills' category, it emphasizes their active use in problem-solving and decision-making processes and acquiring such knowledge is not a scope but a means to operate with the main knowledge set. This approach enhances the clarity and effectiveness of the competency framework, enabling participants to understand how to practically apply the acquired knowledge to achieve SDGs.

5.3.5. Integrating SD Specific Competency into the General Competency Framework

225. In the context of the competency framework for public servants, the SD competency can be classified as a cross-functional competency, also known in specialized literature as transversal competency. This implies that if a specific job requires this competency (as indicated in the job

[81] PEST analysis stands for 'political, economic, social, and technological' whereas PESTLE stands for the same but adds 'legal' and 'environmental' factors to the analysis. It is one of the most widely used methods for evaluating the impact of policies at the European level.

description), the operational definition in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes should be consistent across different institutions.

226. In the current legislation, public institutions have the discretion to define their own specific taxonomy, description, and operational definitions for specific competencies, known as *specific institutional competencies*. However, they can also incorporate the name and operational definition established for the *cross-functional (or interinstitutional) use of the SD competency*, which ensures a common understanding and application of the competency across all public institutions. By adopting a shared definition and operational framework for the SD competency, public institutions can promote consistency and coherence in their approach to sustainable development, a unified interpretation and implementation in human resource processes (L&D, career path).

227. The SD competency should align and complement the general competency framework of public servants, particularly in terms of problem-solving and decision-making skills, integrity, and citizen orientation, showcasing its distinguishing features and additional dimensions it encompasses or enhances.

228. The operational definition for SD competency in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes could be as listed in table 16.

Table 15. Operational definition for SD competency

	SD Competency
Definition	The specific interinstitutional competency that enables individuals to identify, propose, and implement innovative solutions for sustainable development of communities.
Knowledge	• SDG and the main indicators of SD. • Values and principles of SD: sustainability, equity and social justice, ecological integrity, intergenerational integrity, participation and engagement, environmental stewardship, social inclusivity, economic prosperity, cultural preservation. • Main concepts used in SD practices: climate change, biodiversity, energy efficiency, corporate social responsibility, social inequalities, sustainable urban development, circular economy, responsible consumption, DNSH. • Legal and policy framework of SD (Romania and EU).
Skills	• To contribute to the establishment and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies. • To measure and evaluate the impact of implementing SD solutions. • To monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in implementing SD solutions. • To create communication bridges within the communities to promote the principles and values of SD. • To identify SD needs at the community level. • To work in multidisciplinary teams to generate SD solutions for the community.
Attitudes	• To raise awareness when the values of SD are being compromised (commitment for SD values).

	SD Competency
	• To demonstrate emotional resilience when confronted with the complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty of SD issues (problem-solving attitude). • To demonstrate intercultural acceptance, empathy, and understanding of the needs, interests, and opinions of diverse community groups. • To show initiative in disseminating and attracting best practice solutions in the field of SD for the community (openness to innovation). • To promote synergy through teamwork and collaboration.

Source: WB author

229. This competency sheet model is requested by NACS from central and territorial public institutions in the process of approving job positions and their corresponding job descriptions. This approval is currently required to determine the specific types of competencies on which job selection is based.

230. The new recruitment model for public service in Romania consists of two stages: a National competition led by NACS that assesses the general competencies of the candidates. Subsequently, those who are admitted will be evaluated by the employing public institutions based on specific competencies within the job competition. Therefore, adopting this competency sheet model can significantly streamline a unitary approach in the recruitment process and ensure that candidates are well-suited for their roles.

231. Additionally, these well-defined models of specific competencies will add greater significance to the training and career development processes for public servants. By having a clear set of competencies to aim for, public servants with responsibilities in sustainable development can better understand what is required for career advancement and continuous professional development.

Table 16 . SD Competence model: detailed skills per each area of competence

SD - competence areas / key skills	Detailed skills in this category
1. Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies	• Make recommendations about the quality of SD solutions proposed in a public policy. • Assess the quality of SD solutions in terms of defined, fact-based approach, alternatives considerations, and impact estimation. • Assess the effectiveness and efficacity of the SD solutions proposed for policies, strategies, or projects. • Recommend adjustments, changes, completions, and prioritizations that enhance the effectiveness of solution implementation in SD policies, strategies, or projects. • Create a breakdown structure for an SDG, including operational objectives, indicators, means of action, and SD solutions at the community level. • Assess the alignment of projects and resource allocation with SD principles and solutions. • Evaluate risk factors related to the economic, social, and environmental pillars of SD in the context of developing projects, strategies, or public policies. • Raise awareness when certain public policy measures could involve consequences or derailments from SD principles.

SD - competence areas / key skills	Detailed skills in this category
	• Provide methodological guidance on SD to various stakeholders in government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and community settings.
2. Measure and evaluate the impact of implementing SD solutions	• Collect, analyze, and interpret relevant data to assess the impact of SD decisions, initiatives, policies, or strategies. • Conduct evaluations and assessments to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of SD interventions. • Establish indicators, baselines, and use appropriate measurement techniques to quantify the extent of change resulting from the implementation of solutions, policies, and strategies. • Apply ex post impact analysis methods such as life cycle assessment, cost-benefit analysis, or PEST (political, economic, social, and technological analysis). • Use digital applications and tools for data collection, storage, and analysis to enhance accuracy in the assessment process and to handle and process large datasets effectively. • Use data analysis software, such as Excel, SPSS, or other specialized tools, to establish the statistical relevance of impact indicators. • Apply data processing techniques to clean, transform, and prepare data for analysis, ensuring data integrity and reliability. • Visually represent data through graphs, charts, infographics, or animation for effective communication of findings and insights of the impact measure reports.
3. Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of SD solutions	• Use appropriate methods to collect relevant data on the progress of SD projects, policies, strategies, or other initiatives. • Prepare regular progress reports of SD policies and strategies and effectively communicate findings to relevant stakeholders. • Condense and consolidate pertinent information; develop proficiency in selecting and curating relevant data and evidence. • Develop comprehensive reports that extract key insights and lessons learned from successful projects, highlighting essential points for wider dissemination. • Prepare case studies or success stories that illustrate best practices, showcasing innovative solutions and their positive outcomes. • Engage in knowledge sharing and networking activities to contribute to the development of professional networks within the SDEs' communities • Utilize data visualization tools to present complex information and trends in a clear and easily understandable manner for various audiences, facilitating the dissemination of best practices. • Facilitate cross-border collaboration and exchange of best practices by actively participating in European-level professional forums, conferences, and working groups dedicated to sustainable development.
4. Create community communication bridges with the purpose of	• Convey complex SD concepts in a clear and accessible manner; condense and consolidate pertinent information to be used in diverse communication means and channels with the community.

SD - competence areas / key skills	Detailed skills in this category
disseminating the principles and values of SD	• Facilitate communication, collaboration, and consensus-building among different communities' representatives, public institutions, or other stakeholders of SD initiatives. • Create an attractive vision of an SD future and deliver presentations to persuade a 'call to action' regarding SD initiatives. • Create content, guides, storytelling, and narrative to inspire others in the pursuit of SD goals and principles. • Address communication challenges and potential conflicts of interests regarding SD communities' needs. • Adapt communication style, both verbal and written, to different audiences and contexts. • Use digital tools and social media platforms for communication purposes of SD values and goals. • Develop networking and relationships, both formal and informal, to establish interpersonal rapport, build trust, and maintain ongoing communication within the community. • Design and implement community engagement strategies to actively involve community members in SD initiatives and decision-making processes.
5. Identify the SD needs at the community level	• Assess the current needs for improvement in sustainable development at the community level, including challenges, resources, potential areas of development, and opportunities. • Collect and analyze data related to social, economic, and environmental aspects of community development, using dedicated digital database sources. • Interpret data, identify trends, and make informed recommendations for SD interventions related each identified need. • Engage with community stakeholders and conduct consultations to gather insights and perspectives on SD needs. • Articulate and present findings regarding SD needs to diverse audiences, including community members, government officials, and other stakeholders. • Implement data collection methods, such as surveys, focus groups, or participatory mapping, to gather comprehensive insights into community SD needs. • Demonstrate a commitment to equity, social justice, and inclusivity throughout the process of identifying and analyzing community needs for sustainable development. • Facilitate participatory decision-making processes with community members to collaboratively identify and prioritize SD needs. • Apply scenario planning techniques to explore different future scenarios and their potential impacts on SD in the community.
6. Work in multidisciplinary teams to generate SD solutions for the community	• Foster a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing within the multidisciplinary team, promoting open communication and the exchange of ideas to enhance the development of sustainable solutions for communities.

SD - competence areas / key skills	Detailed skills in this category
	• Change ideas to strengthen and analyze complex problems, identify innovative solutions, and make informed decisions in the context of sustainable development. • Apply group problem-solving techniques and propose innovative approaches to address the complex SD needs of the communities. • Analyze the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental systems to develop holistic/integrated SD solutions. • Identify financing solutions required for community sustainable development, exploring various funding sources and mechanisms to support the implementation of sustainable projects and initiatives. • Assess multiple scenarios - possible, probable, and desirable; and address uncertainty, risks, and anticipated challenges in SD solutions' implementation. • Utilize ex ante impact analysis methods and tools to make recommendations for optimization and improvement of SD impact. • Seek and provide continuous feedback and opinions within an established professional network regarding SD solutions for communities. • Engage and involve diverse stakeholders, including local communities, government officials, NGOs, and industry representatives, in the process of generating SD solutions.

Source: WB author

232. All these skill sets can be established as learning outcomes and practice objectives in the practical part of training programs for SDEs.

6. Training Needs Assessment

6.1 Tools and Approach

233. The main objective of the survey was to analyze the responsibilities and challenges of the staff in the field of sustainable development, to identify development needs through training. The main areas of analysis included actual responsibilities, challenges, and training needs of public servants and contractual staff with roles in sustainability development.

234. For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered to the staff of public institutions at central, regional, and local levels to identify the abovementioned elements through a bottom-up approach, directly from the target group.

235. To carry out the identification and analysis of the training needs, five analysis directions were established, corresponding to five categories of questions that aimed to address the following:

- Training needs identified directly, structured, from the list of skills and competencies (26), as proposed by the occupational standard for SDE (COR 242232).
- Training needs identified directly, and structured, from the list of key areas (12) of sustainable development, according to the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.
- Training needs identified indirectly, structured, from a list of professional challenges encountered in carrying out duties in the field of sustainable development.
- Training needs identified indirectly, unstructured, through an open-ended question related to main professional challenges and constraints in sustainable development.
- Training needs identified directly, unstructured, through an open-ended question related to the top three training needs in the SD area.

236. In addition to these main directions, the survey design allowed for the analysis of training needs based on demographic data, particularly regions and the type of institution to which the respondents belong.

237. The survey participants, about four or five per institution, were appointed by an institutional representative at the management level. The recommended criterion for selecting respondents at the institutional level was “individuals with expertise in sustainable development, specifically those with responsibilities in sustainable development.” This allows us to assume that these individuals have profiles closely aligned with that of an SDE, who can provide insights into the challenges and training needs in this field within the institution.

238. The questionnaire was formulated using the terminology and conceptual framework proposed by the occupational standard: *Sustainable Development Expert*, COR Code 242232 as well as that from the project: *Occupational Analysis - Sustainable Development Expert*, SIPOCA/SMIS2014+ Code: 613/127545.

239. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 1,500 public institutions in Romania.[82] The survey was conducted online, using the *Survey Solutions* Platform. The questionnaire was structured in three sections, as follows: (a) SD staff profile, (b) main challenges related to performing SD-related tasks, and (c) training needs self-assessment. It consisted of 17 questions, including 6 demographic questions and two open-ended questions. The estimated average completion time was 40 minutes per participant. The respondents completed the questionnaire while maintaining anonymity. During the survey, the World Bank and DSD teams assisted the respondents by email.

240. The analysis of the results aimed to identify the main trends and tendencies regarding how respondents identify with certain roles, the extent of challenges associated with their current responsibilities, and whether training needs are specific to certain regions or institutions. Additionally, the analysis sought to determine the most suitable competency profile for an SDE.

6.2 Main Findings and Recommendations for Training Curriculum Design

241. The primary goal of the training program is to create a meaningful contribution to the sustainable development of the communities in which the program participants will be actively involved. This implies that every decision regarding the content, methods, and design of the program must be made with the aim of ensuring this long-term, measurable impact. The expectation is that these SDEs will play a decisive role in the sustainable development of their communities. A significant number of program participants currently have limited responsibilities in the field of sustainable development. However, following the training program, in response to the continuously growing institutional needs related to sustainable development, we expect that the scope of duties, roles, and responsibilities will expand or diversify as part of their professional reorientation and career conversion process. Even so, the impact of this training program should be reflected in the indicators of sustainable development at the level of the served community.

242. The training program should establish clear and specific objectives that directly align with the mission of the SDEs and the six key roles associated with their work. The main objective must be to foster the development of the SD competency to an autonomous expert level or *empowering SDEs to possess the KSA necessary to independently generate innovative solutions for the SD of communities*. This objective should be split into at least three main learning objectives categories related to

- **(4) Acquiring knowledge sets** - allocating around 60 h (theoretical approaches/methods)
- **(6) Practice main skills**, divided in (50) detailed skills - allocating around 100 h (practical approaches/methods)
- **(5) Shaping attitudes** - 20 h (practical approaches/methods).

243. The hours are estimated considering that for a standard training program from specialization 180 h is officially allocated (60 h theoretical approaches and 120 h for practical approaches).

[82] Ministries; central public institutions under the ministries' subordination, coordination, or authority; RDAs; decentralized public services; cities; towns; prefectures; and county councils. The number of respondent institutions by category is detailed in Survey 1 'Institutional Capacity Needs Assessment Survey Report', Table 1.

244. For such ambitious learning objectives, which are expected to have an immediate impact on participants' professional activities and will be evaluated for their long-term effectiveness, the most appropriate approach is competency-based training (CBT),[83] reflected in the following principles:

- *They are pragmatic and adapted to the specific activities that require that competency*. The training design should assure participants a similar context, environment, information sources, challenges, relationships as the real professional life. A CBT program needs to be adapted to the specific nature of the activity and the expected performance. It emphasizes practical application and real-world scenarios, enabling participants to acquire the necessary abilities to perform effectively in their professional roles. The main methods used for such training program should be the following:
    - Simulations or elaborated study cases where participants should analyze, interpret, take decisions on their own (individually or in teams) using data, scenarios, and challenges close to those encountered in real professional life.
    - Simulations or elaborated study cases where participants should analyze, interpret, take decisions on their own (individually or in teams) based on data sources and using dedicated digital apps.
    - Study cases or problem-solving scenarios especially designed to facilitate a team-based approach and to exercise participants' abilities in systematic, critical, and strategic thinking.
    - Ongoing feedback from trainers, facilitators, or specialists regarding how each participant or teams elaborate the solutions.
    - Knowledge is offered to participants through a short *brief* before a simulation or study case or by a *debrief of* (after) the simulation or study case. The methods enhance the learning experience but also facilitate learning by discovery.
    - Works or projects conducted under the guidance of a mentor or specialist in the SD domain.
    - All the above methods should constitute the focus of the training program, estimated as at least 100 h (from those 120 h of practice established for SDE training).
- *It is centered on the individual needs of the participant*. Although group training methods are often used to enhance efficiency, training is adapted to the individual and immediate needs of the participants, rather than too general, undefined, or hypothetical needs (knowledge or skills that may not be immediately required but possibly in the future). For SDE, the training program should address individual training approaches, such as mentoring or supervising an individual project, or individual observation with feedback. Also, the program should permit self-assessment or self-tracking tools for KSA under development.

[83] UNESCO defines CBT as an approach to vocational education and training that places emphasis on what a person can do in the workplace as a result of completing a program of training. CBT programs often comprise modules broken into segments called learning outcomes, which are based on standards set by industry, and assessment is designed to ensure each student has achieved all the outcomes (skills and knowledge) required by each module. *Source:* ILO 2020. *Competency-Based Training (CBT): An Introductory Manual for Practitioners*.

- *It aims to achieve autonomy in applying the competency*. The training aims to equip participants to independently apply the skills and competencies in various activities, including managing challenges and exceptions that may arise. To achieve this, the proposed training programs should include self-assessment tools to monitor progress and methods for autonomously applying each skill being developed, such as individual or group tasks, practical work with trainer feedback, and project elaboration. These approaches will allow for feedback from trainers or self-assessment based on the criteria provided by trainers.

- *It requires methods based on direct skills practice.* Training methods such as lectures, presentations, and discussions are optional and used only to facilitate skill-based methods, which are fundamental and mandatory in competency development. Therefore, all programs contain recommendations for practicing all proposed skills for development, both individually and in groups. Online training is not recommended if it does not fully allow skills practice within exercises and individualized attention from the trainer during group exercises. On the other hand, online courses can be applied during mentoring, individual coaching sessions, or for presentations of concepts and best practices by teachers or various invited specialists.

- *Evaluation of CBT is done directly through practical tests with behavioral evidence or action-results.* Participants demonstrate their competency by applying those key skills and behaviors that enable them to act autonomously in an environment as close to the real one as possible. Thus, evaluation of the training can also be done in the professional environment, with the participants collecting these pieces of evidence, through an applied project with a theme at their choices from a predefined list or formulated with a guidance of a mentor or instructor, for example,

    - *Developing a strategy for enhancing community engagement and participation in decision-making processes related to SD.*
    - *Creating a campaign to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in SD initiatives.*
    - *Conducting a feasibility study for the implementation of a circular economy model within a local business or industry.*
    - *Analyzing the economic impact of SD initiatives on the local economy and proposing strategies for maximizing positive outcomes.*
    - *Creating a biodiversity conservation plan for a local natural area, considering the preservation of ecological integrity and the promotion of sustainable tourism.*
    - *Implementing a waste management system that focuses on reducing, reusing, and recycling to minimize the environmental footprint in the community.*
    - *Implementing a digital campaign to promote responsible consumption habits and sustainable lifestyle choices among community members.*
    - *Creating the specification for e-learning platform to provide accessible and inclusive education on SD topics to community members, and so on.*

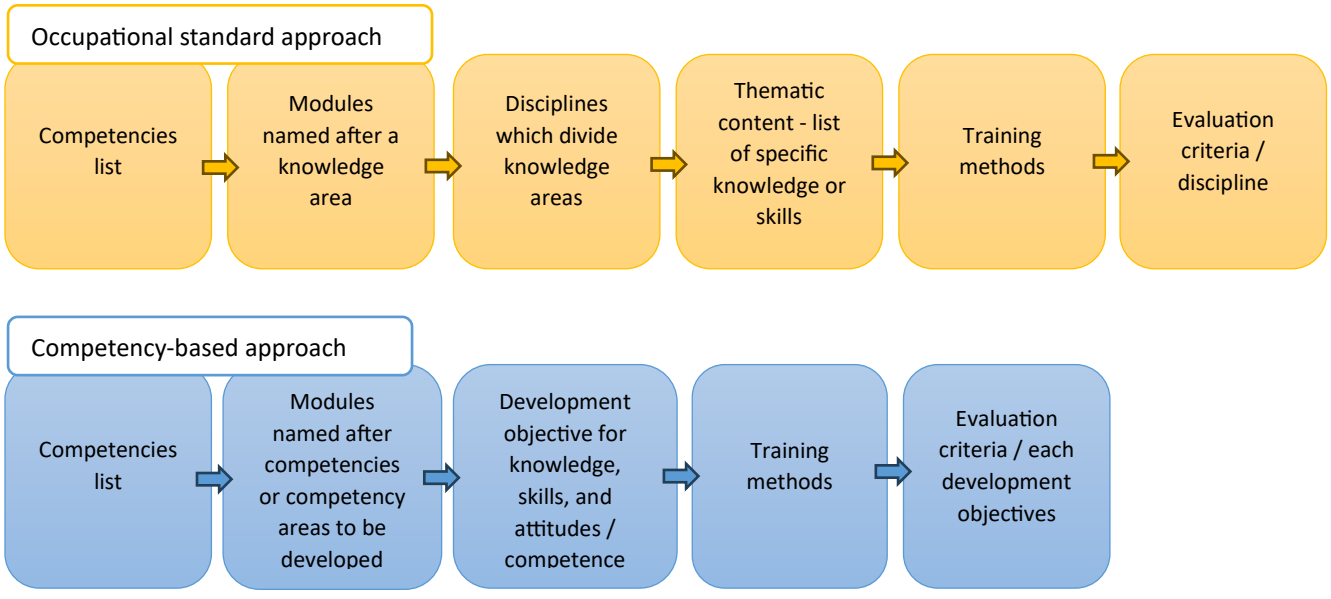
245. The learning objectives regarding acquiring knowledge should be addressed from behavioral competency perspectives. In the traditional academic approach, the main objective is the development of knowledge, which involves dividing a knowledge domain into learning topics. The development of practical skills or behavioral competencies is considered a secondary objective.

While in the past 20 years, using the concept of competencies in academic settings has become a good practice, it often focuses on cognitive competencies (mental operations with knowledge) and the course topics are named after knowledge domains rather than competencies. In modern approaches, the concept of CBT is used, emphasizing the development of behavioral competencies. The training program topics are named after competencies, such as *leadership*, *project management*, or *public communication*.

246. To manage these differences in approaches and customs in adult training, the occupational standard proposes a training plan and program for SDEs that focuses on developing a list of competencies formulated in behavioral terms. It also requires that the number of practical training hours be twice as much as the theoretical hours. However, it still retains the traditional approach where modules and disciplines are not defined based on the competencies, they develop rather on knowledge domains. For example, there are nine competencies proposed for development in Module 1 – 'Public Management and Administration', which is further divided into three disciplines: 'Public Sector and Sustainable Development', 'Public Policy Management for Sustainable Development', and 'Public Management and Administration'. Each of these disciplines is then divided into three to four topics. And the evaluation criteria comprise a list of 13 indicators associated with each discipline. Consequently, the connection between the initial competencies list and the organization of modules, disciplines, thematic content, and evaluation criteria may not be clearly established.

247. The differences between occupational standard approach and competency-based approach are shown in Figure below.

Figure 27. The differences between occupational standard approach and competency-based approach



Source: WB Authors

248 Both approaches, the traditional academic approach and the competency-based approach, have their advantages. However, the competency-based approach is preferred as it emphasizes the development of practical skills and behavioral competencies, aligning with modern trends in adult training.

249. The characteristics of a CBT program make it more practical and tailored to the participants' professional needs, which is why it is perceived as highly beneficial by the participants. "Competency Based Training is replacing traditional training and learning methods, which are often undertaken within a course or subject. These have tended to mostly focus on knowledge without the mastery of real-life industry skills or any consideration for labor market performance: ..."[84]

Box 10. Characteristics of a fully-competency based training program

A training program is considered fully competency-based if it has the following characteristics:

- Competencies are derived from an occupational analysis that has been verified by practitioners and endorsed by industry.
- Theoretical and practical training sessions are shaped around the list of agreed KSA, as per competency standards.

A participant's program completion is based on the satisfactory mastery of all competencies to the standard of a real workplace environment.

Source: WB author

250. In the context of CBT, the key principle that stands out is the imperative of practical application for all acquired knowledge. Unlike traditional approaches where knowledge might be viewed as an end in itself, CBT emphasizes the integration of knowledge with skills and attitudes, fostering a holistic understanding that is directly applicable in real-world scenarios. In CBT, every piece of knowledge is interconnected with the development of practical skills and is designed to be utilized effectively in specific contexts. Participants are not simply expected to memorize facts, but rather to comprehend how these facts align with real-life challenges and opportunities. The emphasis is on bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and their practical implementation, enabling learners to grasp the relevance and value of their knowledge.

251. Learning objectives regarding shaping attitudes should be specifically addressed. It is essential to distinguish between skills and attitudes due to their different impacts on competency development, requiring distinct approaches to training. Skills are usually cultivated through practice and repetition, whereas attitudes are grounded in personal values and motivation and are more challenging to mold or train, and sometimes it may not be possible (therefore, there may be a need to change one's occupation or profession that requires the presence of certain attitudes).

Without the appropriate attitudes, individuals may lack the necessary will, energy, or desire to acquire knowledge, develop skills, or effectively apply them in professional activities. Attitudes serve as the driving force behind personal growth and professional success, influencing the individual's mindset, motivation, and approach to learning. Therefore, nurturing positive attitudes through tailored training approaches and creating a supportive learning environment is crucial for fostering SD competency development.

[84] ILO. 2020. *Competency-Based Training (CBT): An Introductory Manual for Practitioners*. Copyright © International Labour Organization 2020.

252. Despite the importance given to attitudinal modelling, traditional training programs either do not set objectives of this type, or if they do, they do not apply different methods from those used for knowledge or skills training. Programs focused on 'Personal development' or individual development methods such as coaching or mentoring often target attitudinal shaping objectives more. These programs aim to enhance participants' self-awareness, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, and overall mindset, fostering positive attitudes and behavior changes.

253. The methods indicated for the attitude's development of SDE could be as follows:

- Engaging in group discussions where participants are encouraged to reflect on their personal values and their commitment to sustainable development *(Commitment for SD values)*. These discussions can be initiated with questions such as, *How will your personal contribution be observed in the sustainable development of the community you serve*? Additionally, inviting guest speakers or role models who exemplify commitment to sustainable values to share their experiences can inspire participants further.

- Incorporating activities that challenge participants to embrace ambiguity and frustration as opportunities for growth and learning. For instance, training them to categorize problems into classes such as 'well defined' and 'not yet defined' or to formulate specific questions that need to be answered to have a better problem-definition, can help increase complexity, ambiguity, and frustration tolerance *(Problem-solving attitude)*.

- Facilitating role-playing exercises that encourage participants to step into the shoes of community members with different needs and interests *(Tolerance, acceptance, and empathy towards the needs and interests of communities)*.

- Providing opportunities (work, study cases) for participants to experiment with innovative solutions and learn from both successes and failures. Debrief sessions can be conducted to evaluate the outcomes of working groups, starting with questions such as *What did we learn*? or *How could this be improved*? *(Openness to innovation)*.

- Encouraging participants to share their knowledge and expertise with others. Participants can be asked to seek at least two peer reviews from teammates regarding their individual works; also, participants are requested to offer feedback in return *(Promoting synergy through teamwork and collaboration)*.

254. The training program should include elements of adaptability and flexibility, allowing participants to apply the knowledge acquired in a way that aligns with the specific needs and characteristics of their job challenges. It should be taken into consideration that participants will be trained for responsibilities and challenges based on a model with which they are not fully familiar and that may not completely reflect their actual job context.

255. Creating interest-based groups, such as those related to social, environmental, economic, and digital domains, would allow a portion of practical sessions to be allocated to case study analyses and problem-solving activities that are more tailored to their professional reality, without compromising the development of competencies and skills. Additionally, individual activities, assignments, or projects can be customized to meet individual needs. For instance, an individual project, such as analyzing the

needs of the community served by the institution or structure that the SDE is a part of, can focus on a customized set of concepts and knowledge.

256. By forming such groups and having individual adapted tasks, participants can engage in more targeted and relevant learning experiences, enabling them to better apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills to real-world situations. This approach ensures that the training remains contextually relevant and meaningful for each participant, while still aligning with the overall objectives of the program.

257. The training program design should permit participants to self-evaluate their progress and to receive periodic feedback from trainers. This can be achieved through a dedicated digital application or by creating a table that includes all the detailed training objectives and beside each objective, a three-level scale: awareness (I know how to explain), applied it (I applied), master it (I can do it easily without supervision). Participants could check the box in an online personalized template after each training session and they could revise it periodically.

Table 17. Example of training program design

	Learning outcomes for *Modules 1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of sustainable development solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies.*	**Not yet**	**Awareness**	**Applied it**	**Master it**
1	Make recommendations about the quality of sustainable development solutions proposed in a public policy		☑		
2	Assess the quality of SD solutions in terms of defined, facts-based approach, alternatives considerations and impact estimation	☒			
3	Assess the effectiveness and efficacity of the SD solutions in various types of documents			☑	
4	Recommend adjustments, changes, completions, and prioritizations that enhance the effectiveness of solution implementation		☑		
5	Create a breakdown structure for an SDG, including operational objectives, indicators, means of action, and sustainable development solutions at the community level				☑
6	Assess the alignment of projects and budget allocation with sustainable development principles and solutions			☑	
7	Evaluate risk factors related to the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development in the context of developing projects, strategies, or public policies		☑		
8	Determine if the concept of circular economy is correctly applied in various types of documents			☑	
9	Determine if the concept of DNSH is correctly applied in various types of documents		☑		
n	...	☒			

Source: WB author

258. Considering the need to develop a new training curriculum that aligns with strategic priorities outlined in the NRRP and ambitious objectives concerning community impact and the TNA results while also ensuring participants receive the SDE certificate, there are two options:

- Create an alternative curriculum that meets the expectations and the expected outcomes of this program, including the TNA results. Elaborate an analytical report to National Agency for Qualifications (ANC)/Ministry of Labor, documenting that the changes in the training plan and training program do not alter the training objectives and lead to the development of the same competencies included in the occupational standard and the graduates can demonstrate by a rigorous examination the acquisition of these competencies at the end of the training program.
- Arrive at a compromise by proposing additions and minor optimizations that do not affect the existing standard curriculum. This option involves adding supplementary knowledge to the thematic content and proposing optimizations for practical learning methods. However, this approach may not fully utilize the results of the TNA and particular needs of the target group because the modules, subjects, allocated time for each module and each study discipline, as well as the evaluation criteria cannot be modified.

259. To obtain the SDE certificate within this program, an explicit correspondence between the competency list proposed by the occupational standard and the six competency areas must be ensured In the occupational standard, the expressions in terms of action of the competencies list - indicating the type of actions the holder should be able to undertake - could create an equivalence with a list of skills. In turn, by composing these skills, they can form a competency, or a competency area as described in the six areas of competency in Table 19.

Table 18. Correspondence between competencies from SDE occupational standard and Sustainable Development competency model

No.	Competencies list from SDE occupational standard	Correspondence with the six areas of Sustainable Development competency model
1	Analyzes environmental protection data	5 - Identify the sustainable development needs at the community level.
2	Analyzes community needs	5 - Identify the sustainable development needs at the community level.
3	Analyzes progress toward meeting the objective	3 - Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of sustainable development solutions.
4	Analyzes economic trends	2 - Measure and evaluate the impact of implementing sustainable development solutions.
5	Conducts strategic research activities related to the economic dimension of sustainable development	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies. 5 - Identify the sustainable development needs at the community level.
6	Conducts strategic research activities related to the social pillar of sustainable development	" … "

No.	Competencies list from SDE occupational standard	Correspondence with the six areas of Sustainable Development competency model
7	Conducts strategic research activities related to the environmental pillar of sustainable development	"… "
8	Develops professional networks	3 - Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of sustainable development solutions. 6 - Work in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions for the community.
9	Develops policies	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies.
10	Evaluates risk factors related to the economic pillar of sustainable development	2 - Measure and evaluate the impact of implementing sustainable development solutions (ex post). 6 - Work in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions for the community (ex ante).
11	Evaluates risk factors related to the social pillar of sustainable development	"… "
12	Evaluates risk factors related to the environmental pillar of sustainable development	"… "
13	Evaluates environmental impact	"… "
14	Manages the implementation of government policies in the environmental field	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies. 2 - Measure and evaluate the impact of implementing sustainable development solutions (ex post). 3. Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of sustainable development solutions.
15	Manages the implementation of government policies related to the economic pillar of sustainable development	"… "
16	Manages the implementation of government policies in the social field	"… "
17	Provides advice on legislative acts	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies.
18	Provides advice on sustainable economic development	"… "
19	Provides advice on foreign business policy	"… "
20	Provides advice on government policy compliance	"… "
21	Presents reports related to the economic pillar of sustainable development	3. Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of sustainable development solutions.

No.	Competencies list from SDE occupational standard	Correspondence with the six areas of Sustainable Development competency model
22	Presents reports related to the social dimension of sustainable development	"… "
23	Presents reports	"… "
24	Promotes awareness of environmental issues	4 - Create community communication bridges with the purpose of disseminating the principles and values of sustainable development.
25	Proposes improvement strategies	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies. 6 - Work in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions for the community.
26	Conducts resource planning related to the economic pillar of sustainable development	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies.
27	Conducts resource planning related to the social dimension of sustainable development	"… "
28	Conducts resource planning related to the environmental dimension of sustainable development	"… "
29	Interacts with government agencies	4 - Create community communication bridges with the purpose of disseminating the principles and values of sustainable development. 6 - Work in multidisciplinary teams to generate sustainable development solutions for the community.
30	Establishes contacts with communities and local authorities	"… "
31	Establishes contacts with government officials	"… "
32	Monitors compliance with government policies related to the economic dimension of sustainable development	1 - Contribute to the substantiation and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives, and public policies. 3 - Monitor, report, and contribute to the dissemination of best practices in the implementation of sustainable development solutions.
33	Monitors compliance with government policies related to the social dimension of sustainable development	"… "
34	Monitors compliance with government policies related to the environmental dimension of sustainable development	"… "

Source: WB author

260. The duration of the training program should be between three and six months. A shorter duration would not allow enough time for consolidating knowledge and practicing skills, while a longer duration is not desirable for the participants. In an intensive format, the minimum 180 h required for the program can be distributed as follows: during the first 3 months, 170 h will be conducted, comprising 60 h of theory

and 110 h of practical training. Afterward, participants will have an additional 10 h of supervised practical work with mentoring or guidance over a maximum period of two months, to prepare the individual project required for the certification exam. For a more flexible training path, the initial 170 h of instruction can be extended to 5 months, followed by the preparation of the individual project and personalized assistance over a maximum period of one month.

Table 19. Example of a Training Schedule

Training format	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
Intensive format	60 h theory + 110 h practice			10 h - project elaboration		
Extensive format	60 h theory + 110 h practice					10 h - project elaboration

Source: WB author

261. Special attention should be given to communicating the training program to the target group of future SDEs. A dedicated campaign is necessary to communicate the value that this program brings, both in terms of career opportunities for the participants and the institutions they are involved in, as well as the expected social impact. Communication should be more focused on the local communities (municipalities and county councils) where the promoted messages reach less easily. In these communities, the response rate is lower compared to other categories of public institutions, but, on the other hand, the identified training needs are more elaborate.

262. The added value of this training program consists of the following:

- Providing a comprehensive and specialized curriculum that addresses the specific and complex SD challenges faced by local communities. Participants will gain in-depth knowledge of the SDGs and the principles of sustainability, equity, and social inclusivity.
- Empowering participants to propose and implement innovative solutions that align with the legal and policy frameworks of SD.
- Emphasizing practical skills, such as data analysis, impact evaluation, and effective communication, enabling participants to contribute significantly to the design, monitoring, and reporting of SD initiatives.
- Fostering a multidisciplinary approach, equipping participants to collaborate with diverse stakeholders and work in teams to generate sustainable solutions,
- Embracing the opportunity to join a nationwide professional network in SD, where SDEs can actively contribute and benefit from a dedicated Virtual Resources Center tailored to enhance their daily activities.
- Benefitting from personalized mentoring and guidance during the practical project phase, ensuring their ability to address community-specific needs effectively.

- Ensuring the program is flexible and can be adapted to meet the individual needs of participants through both intensive and extended program options. This flexibility allows participants to choose the format that best suits their schedule and learning preferences.
- Becoming a driving force for positive change in the community.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Institutional Capacity Building

263. The main results of Survey 1 highlight specific needs to improve institutional capacity building of public authorities at central and local levels to implement the SDGs. The most prominent need identified is the improvement of technical expertise on SDGs, in particular by training the existing staff. It reflects the recognition that specialized knowledge is vital for the successful implementation of SDGs. Another significant need is access to knowledge and relevant data to support program and project execution, indicating the importance of evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, improving the legal framework and enforcing regulations for SDG implementation are considered important, emphasizing the need for a supportive policy environment. Utilizing technology and innovation, including IT systems and tools, is also recognized as a need for effective implementation. Building partnerships, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring inclusivity are identified as important factors for collaborative implementation efforts. Access to guidance, support, and external expertise is also highlighted, indicating the need for external assistance and expertise.

Gaps and needs concerning staff and institutional capacity to implement the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan

264. Based on the newly created SDE occupation, according to the Romanian standards (COR 242232) and the extension of the Administrative Code with the public function of 'sustainable development expert', further steps need to be taken by public administration institutions, both at central and local levels, to institutionalize the SDE functions and position, as detailed below:

265. Public administration institutions would need to adapt staff's job descriptions to reflect SDE main roles. The job description needs to be developed to explicitly state the responsibilities for driving and monitoring SDGs implementation in the specific field of each type of institution.

266. Staff skills need to continue to be improved, especially in local public administration institutions, by participation in the SD training program, to be launched and coordinated by the DSD. Encouraging the participation of local authorities, especially staff who work in public policy planning and project management, in the forthcoming SD training program is expected to strengthen the administrative capacity of local public authorities in implementing the SDGs by improving the staff's SD-related skills. The SD training program will be designed in accordance with the provisions of the existing SDE occupational standard and strategic documents for training the personnel in public administration institutions.

267. Including SD-related key elements in the new training strategy in public administration, which is required for the next programming period (2021–2027). Based on the TNA conclusions of this report and SD curriculum that will be developed as part of Deliverable 4, encompassing SD training concepts and

strategic areas in the new training strategy in public administration will ensure unitary and coherent objectives and approach of the future SD-related training programs.

268. Recognizing the important role of advanced managerial and leadership competencies in SDG implementation within public institutions, competencies such as strategic thinking, strategic organization and planning, strategic agility, and generating engagement, as part of the high-level public servant competency framework, are essential to be developed. While various development programs are underway, in accordance with HRM-RAS, it is crucial to emphasize that specific, efficient methods related to SDGs are needed to align these competencies. In this context, streamlined approaches such as seminars, experiential change programs, and workshops are expected to be effective for enhancing practical leadership skills. These initiatives should focus on specific themes, drawing from best practices and can be conducted periodically. This approach facilitates SDG integration into operational objectives, involving the restructuring of activities, processes, and procedures to align with SDG goals. Consequently, the public administration institutions would need to fully utilize the capabilities of trained SDEs leaders.

269. The results of Survey 1 revealed several critical needs for effectively monitoring and measuring progress toward the SDGs. One of the main findings refers to the need at the level of public administration institutions to include IT tools for data collection on specific topics related to their organization's field of activity, data analysis capabilities, interoperability with other institutions, online platforms for data and knowledge sharing, and access to data repositories for tracking the progress in SDG implementation.

Interinstitutional communication between different levels of public administration in relation to shared responsibilities for implementing and reporting on the 2030 SD Strategy and Action Plan

270. A multi-annual interinstitutional communication strategy and action plan to share knowledge and increase awareness and efficiency of SDGs implementation would better structure and formalize the interinstitutional dialogue. A communication strategy and action plan should aim to facilitate collaboration and communication among institutions, ensure a common understanding of the SDGS and expected changes and provide mechanisms to inform and engage a wide range of stakeholders, facilitate dialogue and co-design, and integrate stakeholder engagement activities throughout the SDGs implementation process. Additionally, the documents should promote the SD strategy and action plan, the SD mission and values, and main objectives to all stakeholders involved in the SDGs implementation.

271. The DSD could consider setting up a centralized communications unit to promote the awareness on SD strategy and action plan, in accordance with the above-mentioned interinstitutional communication SD strategy and action plan. The aim of strengthening communication's overseeing role would be to provide a shared communication resource since the DSD currently has limited staff and media experience. The unit can operate as an orchestrator and connector with local authorities, putting together and spreading best practices, updating and distributing guidelines and communication recommendations, and overseeing the implementation of the SD communication strategy and action plan.

272. During the process of updating the SD action plan, the responsibilities of institutions at the local level should be stated explicitly and in detail. This will contribute to increasing awareness on the SD-related organizational roles and functions at the level of local public administration institutions.

273. The use of GSG's ICT in SD-related activities can help increase sharing of knowledge on SDGs, reduce the duration of administrative procedures, broaden access to SD-related services, increase transparency to the public, and improve interinstitutional coordination. Interoperability of the DSD's existing ICT management platforms for monitoring and measuring progress toward achieving the SDGs can contribute essentially to the facilitation of the interinstitutional communication on SDGs at central, regional, and local levels, fostering a unified approach toward achieving SDGs and enhancing collaboration among various stakeholders. The SD virtual center[85] to be established and managed by the DSD is expected to be a resource on SDGs at central, regional, and local levels, enhancing collaboration among various stakeholders. It will also operate as a platform for publishing information for the general public, raising awareness about SD issues, and engaging citizens in the conversation around sustainability and its importance and develop a tool to support the process of planning and monitoring SD initiatives, by offering a centralized solution for tracking the progress of these initiatives and ensuring their alignment with national and international sustainability targets.

7.2 Sustainable Development Expert Competency Model and Training Needs

274. Survey 2, comprising over 1,100 individuals with responsibilities in sustainable development within public institutions, has allowed the World Bank team to outline a general profile of the responsibilities, challenges, competencies, and training needs of current and future SDEs. The main conclusion of the study is that defining competencies and training should focus more on a set of future roles and responsibilities for SDEs, rather than solely on their current roles and responsibilities. As a result, the training program for the 2,000 future SDEs under the NRRP will inherently lead to changes in roles and responsibilities due to the acquisition of new competencies.

275. The role and professional scope of Sustainable Development Experts (SDEs) within public institutions are not yet uniformly defined, despite a clear need for such an expertise. To tackle this gap, institutions may add SD responsibilities to current roles, hire specialized staff, or retrain existing personnel. However, before initiating any training programs, targeted consultations with the involved institutions are critical. These consultations should focus on SD priorities, clarify the roles and specific competencies required for SD functions, and map out a comprehensive training approach. This consultative process is a key prerequisite for ensuring alignment and effectiveness in the implementation of SD strategies in a public institution..

276. The definition proposed in this work for SDEs describes them as *Agents of change who identify and implement SD solutions within communities*. This perspective shapes the related responsibilities, competency model, training programs, and career path, all centered around the notion that SDEs play a crucial role in advancing the SD of communities. This vision of the SDE's role is grounded in previous achievements, including the establishment by the Romanian Government of the first occupational standard for SDEs in Europe, the training of 150 SDEs in central public administration institutions , and the establishment of expert hubs in central public institutions. Moreover, it is aligned with the vision presented in the 2030 Romania National Strategy for Sustainable Development .

[85] Deliverable 5 of this RAS "Report containing inputs to the concept note for a virtual resource center and to the draft ToR/specifications developed by the client for an IT solution" (under preparation at the time of delivery of this draft report).

277. Public sector employees who will have a substantial set of responsibilities in the field of sustainable development can have the competency 'sustainable development' associated with their job description. The recommendation is for this competency to be considered cross-institutional, meaning it should be defined similarly across all public institutions, even though the concept of cross-institutional competency is not yet implemented in the competency framework for public servants. Further development of specialized competencies within the SD domain, such as in the social or environmental area, can be referred to by derived names such as Environmental Sustainable Development or Social Sustainable Development, and so on.

278. The target group profile for the SDE training program consists of employees in public institutions with partial responsibilities in the field of SD, who have not previously undergone any training programs in this domain. Most of the participants have notable experience in fulfilling public service duties, with highly diversified training needs. The main professional challenges they face include *Lack of procedures and best practice examples in SD, Difficult access or collection of necessary information, Heavy workload due to other job responsibilities, Lack of resources (human, technical, or material),* and *Complex regulatory environment.* These challenges faced by personnel involved in SD can be partially addressed by the training program. For instance, the *Lack of procedures and best practice examples* can be resolved through practicing these best practices within the training program and by establishing a secondary objective of creating a national network of professionals. The *Complex regulatory environment* will be tackled through attitude modeling methods and the development of problem-solving skills to effectively manage complexity.

279. The expectations for the training program of the 2,000 SDEs are highly diverse from the participants' perspective and ambitious in terms of the expected social impact of training these experts. To meet these demands of diversified needs and high effectiveness, modern and innovative approaches are required. These include a mix of learning methods through application, practice, and discovery, combining the acquisition of knowledge with skill practice and attitude shaping. Additionally, methods that blend guidance and personalized approaches with sharing experiences and experiential learning are essential. These approaches can be more easily applied and integrated if the training curriculum is developed based on the principles of CBT. This involves defining training objectives for each skill, knowledge, and attitude that defines the SD competency. Furthermore, the training and evaluation methods will be adapted to each training objective.

280. The solution identified to address the challenge of covering both the development of core competencies in SD and specialized approaches in the pillars of SD, such as social, economic, and environmental aspects, according to the diverse needs based on institutional affiliation, is to allocate dedicated time within the same training program for these specific needs. This can be achieved through individual development methods like mentoring, where participants can work on a project of their choice from any of the three domains (for example, minimum 10 h mentoring for project design assistance). This applied project could serve as the primary evaluation method for assessing the development of SD competency at the conclusion of the training program.

281. Aspects related to the use of digital applications in SD activities will be incorporated as training objectives to develop the necessary skills for specific competency areas. For example, *Use data analysis*

software, such as Excel, SPSS, or other specialized tools, to establish the statistical relevance of impact indicators; Utilize data visualization tools to present complex information and trends in a clear and easily understandable manner for various audiences, facilitating the dissemination of best practices; Use digital tools and social media platforms for communication purposes of sustainable development values and goals; and so on. Regarding aspects related to digital transformation within communities, such as *Digitalization to achieve sustainable development goals,* this topic can be addressed separately through individualized methods, such as mentoring-assisted project development.

282. Aspects related to funding sources for SD programs will be addressed from a problem-solving perspective and through skills such as *identifying financing solutions required for community sustainable development.* However, these aspects may not necessarily require a dedicated module, as seen in training programs that specifically focus on the competence of 'Accessing European Funds'. Instead, they can be integrated into the overall curriculum, ensuring a comprehensive approach to SD funding without the need for a separate module. Managing resources and budgets is also covered in the module dedicated to 'contribute to the establishment and documentation of SD solutions within strategies, projects, initiatives'. Additionally, this aspect can be further explored within the individualized approach of a project assisted by a mentor, with the title *Financial Strategies for Sustainable Community Development* or *Innovative Financing Solutions for Sustainable Development Projects.* This approach allows participants to delve into creative and innovative ways of obtaining funding for community SD projects, under the guidance of a specialized mentor.

283. The training program for SDEs should aim to empower participants to become a driving force for positive change in their communities. Through a comprehensive curriculum and practical skills development, they will be equipped to propose innovative solutions and actively contribute to SD initiatives. Moreover, as part of the program, participants will join a nationwide professional network, gaining access to a dedicated virtual resources center. This unique opportunity allows them to benefit as both beneficiaries and collaborators, ensuring their continuous growth and impact in the field of sustainable development. The benefits of the training program should be promoted at both the local and regional levels.