



July 2022

From 5 to 15 July 2022, the United Nations Economic and Social Council will convene a High-Level Political Forum where governments' representatives and major stakeholders will assess global progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are 17 interconnected and indivisible goals, each with a series of specific targets, to be attained by 2030. Both developed and developing countries committed to the SDGs, which address the multiple causes and consequences of environmental depletion and social inequalities. The European Union has been a leader in drafting the SDGs; it is also a frontrunner in mainstreaming the SDGs in all its policies. This topical digest features the main EPRS publications and audiovisual products on the subject of SDGs, which illustrate clearly both the successes and challenges in pursuing their achievement.

These and other analyses are available on the European Parliament's [Think Tank](#) pages.

EPRS publications

Overview

Understanding SDGs

Briefing by Eric Pichon, EPRS, June 2022



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In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be attained by 2030, as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and the Rio+20 Summit (2012). Unlike their antecedents, the SDGs commit both developed and developing countries. The structural transformation that would bring about the desired change requires a joint effort by the international community, but equally so from public authorities, companies and citizens, to speed up the process.

Reporting on SDG implementation: UN mechanisms and the EU approach

Briefing by Eric Pichon, EPRS, July 2022

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly links the 17 SDGs to a series of targets to be reached by 2030. The 2030 Agenda includes a detailed mechanism to monitor progress with regard to these targets. At the core of this mechanism are a number of quantified indicators for each target. UN agencies, other international agencies and the EU provide support to national statistical services across the world in collecting data for the SDG indicators in order to gather reliable and comparable datasets. These data help countries exchange good practice and advice on implementing their SDG strategies. High-level forums take stock of both progress and weaknesses in implementation, so as to ensure that everybody is on track in pursuing the SDGs. The EU has long experience in collecting consistent data from its Member States. Eurostat has created a set of sustainable development indicators that provide a good overview of progress within the EU. However, the European Parliament and other stakeholders regret that the spill-over effect of EU policies on third countries remains a blind spot in the evaluation of the EU's contribution to the SDGs. Although technical in nature, SDG indicators and data also have a political dimension, as they clearly measure countries' and other stakeholders' achievements against their own commitments.



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Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in EU regions

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, June 2022



The SDGs also have a regional dimension, sometimes called 'localisation'.

Achievement of around 65 % of the targets is estimated to depend on input from local and regional authorities. Numerous regions and cities, including in the EU, have expressed support for the SDGs and many have integrated them in their policy frameworks. Efforts to localise the SDGs are ongoing and regional achievements are featured in the national reviews presented at international conferences. Monitoring SDGs at the regional level can thus help support the overall implementation of the SDGs, reinforce national efforts, support regional development strategies, and provide a broader picture of within-country trends. The European Parliament has expressed its support for an EU sustainable development strategy, and enhanced involvement of regional, local and civil society stakeholders in SDG implementation.

Children's rights and the UN SDGs: A priority for EU external action

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, November 2019



No action to implement the SDGs can be detrimental to the rights of the child.

More than a normative framework guiding the implementation of the SDGs, the rights of the child are a fundamental enabling factor for sustainable development and vice versa. Healthy, well-nourished, well-educated children, who are protected from violence and abuse, are the best guarantee of long-term sustainable development. On the other hand, the rights of the child can only be realised in an appropriate environment – peaceful, prosperous, protective of the child and fostering human development. Thus, there is a natural convergence between the SDGs and specific children's rights. While progress has been steady in certain areas, particularly on health-related issues, in others, progress has been less conclusive. The EU prioritises children's rights and relevant SDGs in its external action. It aims at mainstreaming human rights including children's rights in its development assistance to connect the normative and developmental dimensions. The European Parliament has repeatedly defended the need to protect and promote children's rights through EU external action, and has asked the Commission to propose a strategy and action plan in this sense.

Green and sustainable finance

Briefing by Stefano Spinaci, EPRS, February 2021



The dramatic consequences of climate change and environmental degradation have brought the need for a more sustainable economy to the top of the agenda. In its 2018 action plan on financing sustainable growth, the European Commission set out the EU strategy to connect finance with sustainability. The first deliverables have been three key regulations seeking to create a classification system to determine whether an economic activity is environmentally sustainable (the 'taxonomy'); to make disclosures relating to sustainable investments and sustainability risks clearer; and to establish low-carbon benchmarks. The Taxonomy Regulation is particularly important for driving the consistent development of future legislation, as advocated, in particular, by the European Parliament. Given that climate change and environmental degradation are global challenges, international cooperation is in the common interest; the European Union is actively promoting this through the International Platform on Sustainable Finance.

Ten composite indices for policy-making

In-depth analysis by Samy Chahri, Eulalia Claros, Alina Dobрева, Liselotte Jensen, Lucille Killmayer, Eric Pichon and Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, September 2021

The information provided in this publication is designed to help policy-makers by providing sources of data and identifying possible bias in their use. EPRS has selected 10 composite indices in a range of policy areas from reliable sources; indices already used as references by policy-makers. For each index, a chapter presents the

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producers and describes their objectives in publishing the index, the data compiled, and how that data is being or could be used by policy-makers. The chapters also highlight each index's limitations.

SDGs to be discussed at the High-Level Political Forum in 2022

SDG 4 – Quality Education

Early leavers from education and training

Briefing (infographic) by Denise Chircop and Eulalia Claros, EPRS, March 2021

Young adults whose highest level of education is at or below lower secondary school level are considered early leavers from education and training. Policy efforts have brought down their numbers to ratios that are very close to the EU target. Nevertheless all those who fall into this category suffer considerable disadvantage as they are more likely to be out of employment and less likely to engage in further education and training than others of their age group with a higher level of education. The EU supports Member States through policy coordination, and programmes such as the Youth Guarantee.

 [Watch the video.](#)

SDG 5 – Gender equality

The Istanbul Convention: A tool for combating violence against women and girls

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, EPRS, November 2021

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is the first instrument in Europe to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence and punish perpetrators. EU accession to the Istanbul Convention is one of the priorities in the EU 2020-2025 gender equality strategy.

Exploring gender equality across policy areas

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, EPRS, October 2021

The European Union has adopted gender mainstreaming as its official approach to gender equality, alongside targeted action to eliminate discrimination and advance women's empowerment. The European Parliament's committees and delegations held a series of events in October 2021 aimed at highlighting the importance of gender equality and gender mainstreaming across different policy domains.

SDG 14 – Life below water

EU action on ocean governance and achieving SDG 14

Briefing by Frederik Scholaert and Karin Jacobs, EPRS, June 2022

SDG 14 on 'life below water' focuses on the sustainability of the oceans, thereby recognising their essential role in life on our planet. Oceans contain 80 % of all life forms, produce more than 50 % of the Earth's oxygen and play a central role in regulating the climate. In addition, the 'blue economy' provides 4.5 million direct jobs in the EU. It covers traditional sectors, such as fisheries, maritime transport and coastal tourism, as well as innovative sectors, such as renewable ocean energy and the blue bioeconomy, which show great potential for sustainable blue growth. However, human activities threaten the health of our oceans. The effects of climate change are devastating, resulting in rising water temperatures, acidification, increased flooding and loss of marine biodiversity. The combination with other man-made stressors poses a serious threat to the planet as a whole. To manage maritime activities sustainably, the EU has implemented a wide range of policies. This includes established policies, such as the common fisheries policy, the marine strategy framework directive and the maritime spatial planning directive, as well as specific legislation related to marine litter. Other new initiatives under the European Green Deal also play an important role in relation to ocean governance and

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sustainable blue growth. The external dimension of EU policies, its international ocean governance agenda and its global commitments make the EU a global player in shaping ocean governance and contribute to its commitment to deliver fully on SDG 14.

SDG 15 – Life on land

Biodiversity protection: Where do we stand?

Briefing by Vivienne Halleux, EPRS, June 2021

The latest assessment on the state of nature by the European Environment Agency shows that despite some encouraging developments, the overall picture remains bleak. Only 15 % of habitats and around 27 % of species protected under EU legislation have a good conservation status. An EU-wide assessment of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems found that, overall, the condition of ecosystems in the EU is unfavourable. Worldwide, most indicators of ecosystems and biodiversity show rapid decline. Targets set to tackle biodiversity loss by 2020, at both EU and global levels under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), have not been met. Under the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, part of the European Green Deal, the EU has therefore set itself new targets for the next decade. These include enlarging the current network of legally protected areas to cover at least 30 % of the EU's land area and 30 % of the EU's seas; and setting legally binding EU nature restoration targets to restore degraded ecosystems. The recent zero-pollution action plan for air, water and soil proposes additional commitments relevant to biodiversity protection.

Protecting pollinators in the EU

Briefing by Vivienne Halleux, EPRS, July 2021

Europe hosts a rich diversity of wild pollinators, including over 2 000 species of bees, more than 480 species of butterflies, almost 1 000 species of hoverflies and thousands of other insect species. Studies in selected European countries have provided worrying examples of pollinator declines. Such loss entails risks for both societies and ecosystems. Assessments of action at EU level identified gaps in the key EU policies addressing the main threats to wild pollinators. Although progress has been made to tackle the decline of wild pollinators, more needs to be done, in particular to address the loss of habitats in farming landscapes and the impacts of pesticides. The EU Biodiversity and the Farm to Fork strategies set out specific targets that can help advance pollinator conservation. Integrating them into the new CAP however remains a major challenge. Pollinator protection is a key issue for the European Parliament.

 [Watch the video.](#)

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals

The European Union and the multilateral system: Lessons from past experience and future challenges

Briefing by Guest author: David O'Sullivan, EPRS, March 2021

David O'Sullivan, former Secretary General of the European Commission and EU Ambassador to the United States, reflects on the Union's contribution to and standing in the multilateral system, as well as on some of the issues that confront Europe if it is to maximise its influence in international economic fora of various kinds.

The future of multilateralism and strategic partnerships

Briefing by Elena Lazarou, EPRS, September 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated global geopolitical trends, including the struggle to uphold multilateralism in a climate of growing nationalism, protectionism and rising great power competition. At the same time, it has demonstrated the need for multilateral cooperation for the effective mitigation of cross-border threats, including health crises. Within this environment, the European Union, a multilateral entity in itself, has illustrated the relevance of cooperation. Beyond its internal strengthening, the EU has set the defence and reform of multilateralism as one of its key priorities under the current European Commission. This will require a more coordinated and autonomous EU foreign policy, a smart approach towards the escalating US–China rivalry,

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reinvigorated cooperation with major democracies, and mobilisation of the EU's foreign policy tools, widely defined. As coronavirus leaves parts of the world more fragile and vulnerable, it also precipitates the need for a reformed multilateral system 'fit for purpose' and able to address the challenges of the future.

Other SDGs

EU support for fighting global poverty: Implementing UN SDG 1 – 'Ending poverty'

Briefing by Marta Latek, EPRS, November 2019

Poverty affects more than a quarter of the world's population, and that is why erasing it is a principal objective for humanity, enshrined as the first of a number of goals (SDGs) in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Poverty is more than just having insufficient income – it is a multidimensional phenomenon closely related to unequal access to education, health and other basic services. Increasingly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, extreme poverty destroys the lives of millions through malnutrition, high infant mortality rates and the violence and insecurity it fuels. Poverty eradication gained new momentum with the incorporation of the SDGs into the 2017 European consensus on development – the framework for EU action in the area of development cooperation. The EU supports, through its different instruments and programmes, key areas – such as education, healthcare, social security and good governance – relevant to poverty eradication in developing countries. Some doubt that using aid to subsidise private investment is the optimal way to tackle poverty, and insist on strict implementation of development objectives, environmental and social standards, and on highlighting human rights in all projects. Others also denounce the diversion of aid to finance migration management in countries of origin and transit of migration from Africa to Europe. A shift towards a post-growth economy is perceived by many as a radical long-term solution for global well-being and sustainability of the planet.

SDG 2 – Zero hunger: EU action against hunger and malnutrition

Briefing by Anna Caprile and Eric Pichon, EPRS, January 2022

 [Listen](#) |  Watch [part 1](#), [part 2](#)

At least one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the

United Nations (UN) will be missed in 2030 – SDG 2 – 'zero hunger' – also endangering the accomplishment of the rest of the SDG goals under Agenda 2030. In 2020, 811 million people in the world were facing hunger, the highest level since 2014, and 3 billion people were without access to a healthy diet. In the EU itself, considered one of the most food-secure regions in the world, nearly 7 million people were already experiencing severe food insecurity before the pandemic, and malnutrition is on the rise, as demonstrated by obesity and pre-obesity prevalence rates. SDG 2 aims not only at achieving food security but also at improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. These objectives have been mainstreamed in the recently reformed common agricultural policy and the 'farm to fork' and biodiversity strategies. In developing countries, the EU is strongly committed to achieving SDG 2. Alongside development aid, the EU has several levers at its disposal to act on food insecurity causes, such as security and defence missions and comprehensive strategies in conflict areas, as well as substantial research capacities. The fact that its internal policies, in particular agricultural, climate and trade policies, have a spill-over effect on other food systems in the world, in particular in poorer countries, also make the EU a significant player.

On the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on food security, see: Safeguarding EU and global food security, in: [Future Shocks 2022](#), EPRS, April 2022, pp. 169-180

EU support for implementing SDG 16 worldwide

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, July 2022

While several of its targets (such as peace, corruption-free institutions and freedom from violence) were once seen as prerequisites of sustainable development, the adoption of SDG 16 – to 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and

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inclusive institutions at all levels' – marked the first time that they were recognised globally as development objectives in themselves. To achieve universal recognition, SDG 16 leaves out explicit reference to internationally recognised political and civil rights norms, attracting some criticism. Its very general scope has also stirred controversy regarding the type of data required in order to assess progress rigorously.

The state of play with regard to the implementation of SDG 16 indicates that substantial progress is still needed in order to achieve the SDG targets by 2030. Violent conflicts continue to affect many parts of the world, societal violence remains widespread in many countries and violence against children in particular remains a pervasive phenomenon, especially in developing countries. The Covid-19 pandemic has erased previous progress on SDGs and has led to restrictions on freedoms and more limited government accountability. The war in Ukraine, with its negative spill-overs on other SDGs, demonstrates once more the crucial role of peace.

From the Global Strategy to the 'new consensus on development', various EU policy documents acknowledge the crucial role of peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law for sustainable development. The interconnection between the pursuit of these fundamental values and EU efforts to help developing countries achieve the SDGs is obvious in numerous measures undertaken in the framework of EU external action. The European Parliament is a strong champion for these values in the world.

Publications by other EP services

The Sustainable Development Goals in the EU budget

Briefing, Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs, July 2021

Budgetary control of the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU budget

Briefing, Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs, July 2021

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda's principles of 'leaving-no-one-behind' and 'addressing the needs of those furthest behind first' in the EU's development policy

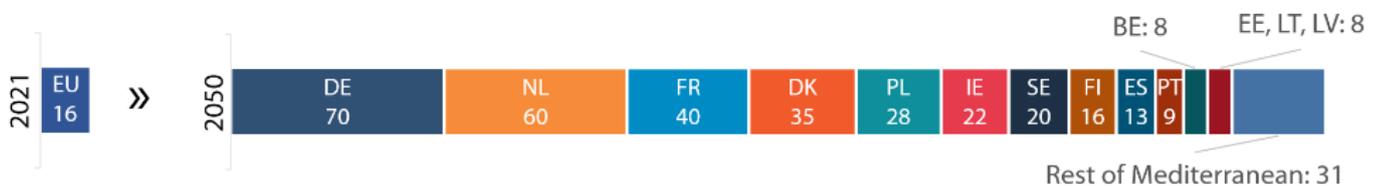
Study, Policy Department for External Relations, January 2022

Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Good practices and the way forward

Study, Policy Department for External Relations, February 2019

EPRS graphics

Current and potential EU offshore wind energy capacity in 2050 (gigawatts)



Source: [EU action on ocean governance and achieving SDG 14](#), EPRS, June 2022

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External publications on SDGs: [Selected Online Reading guides of the EP Library](#)

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