2023 is the halfway mark towards the 2030 deadline set in 2015 for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In July, Members of the European Parliament will attend the UN high-level political forum on sustainable development with governments’ representatives and major stakeholders, to assess global progress towards the SDGs. In September the SDG Summit convened by the UN General Assembly will, for the second time since 2019, set priority actions with a view to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda. 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 EPRS publications and audiovisual products that illustrate clearly both the successes and challenges in pursuing SDG achievement.

These and other analyses on SDGs are available on the European Parliament’s Think Tank pages.

EPRS publications

SDGs to be discussed at the high-level political forum in 2023

**SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation**

**UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation – EU support through focused action**

Briefing by Vivienne Halleux and Eric Pichon, graphics by Eulalia Claros, EPRS, July 2023

Freshwater is a rare and increasingly threatened resource. Progress towards SDG 6 is globally off-track and many of its targets will not be reached by 2030. Access to freshwater and sanitation is alarmingly challenged in several regions. While the EU is rather well endowed in freshwater resources, it is hit by more frequent and intense droughts or floods. The European Union (EU)’s legislation and tools cover a wide range of issues relevant to the implementation of SDG 6 – notably within the scope of the EU Water Framework Directive. This directive inspired third countries’ initiatives, and the convention on transboundary watercourses and lakes initiated in Europe is now open for accession to all UN Member States. The EU not only leads by example, it also supports third countries improving their access to freshwater, sanitation and hygiene services.

**SDG 7 – Affordable and clean energy**

**EU progress towards Sustainable Development Goal on energy (SDG 7)**

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, July 2023

The EU is focusing its SDG 7 action on energy consumption, energy supply and access to affordable energy. Indicators are monitoring progress on energy efficiency, the share of renewables in energy consumption, energy import dependency and energy poverty. EU policies and legislation are addressing many of these areas, thus contributing to the achievement of SDG 7. These include the Energy Efficiency Directive, the Renewable Energy Directive, the REPowerEU plan, measures on energy demand reduction and efforts to curb energy prices. To support SDG 7 worldwide, EU external action is conducted under initiatives such as the Global Gateway strategy, the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, and energy partnerships with third countries. While progress on SDG 7 is advancing, meeting the ambitious targets for 2030
will require more effort, in particular by making efficiency improvements, boosting renewables and ensuring access
to clean and affordable energy.

**SDG 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure**

*Revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive*

‘At a glance note’ by Vivienne Halleux, EPRS, July 2023

In July, Parliament will vote on the report adopted by its Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) on a Commission proposal updating EU rules to prevent and control pollution from industry. The report, as voted, would form Parliament’s position for trilogue negotiations with the Council.

**A new European innovation agenda**

*Briefing by Clément Evroux, EPRS, September 2022*

The growing impact of the ecological crisis (from climate change to loss of biodiversity) as well as digitalisation and mounting geopolitical tensions have broadened the scope of innovative policies geared towards the changes required to achieve both sustainability and crisis preparedness. With the adoption of a communication on a new European innovation agenda on 5 July 2022, the European Commission aims to encourage innovators to make better use of EU single market finance opportunities, as well as to attract new private and public investors to reinforce EU financial and capital markets.

**SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities**

*Cities in a globalised world: Exploring trends and the effect on urban resilience*

*Study by Eckhard Binder et al., EPRS, October 2021*

Cities are inevitably affected by shocks and disruptions, the pandemic being a case in point. The extent of the impact, however, depends on cities’ preparedness and capacity to adapt. By thinking ahead, cities can explore emerging or plausible developments in order to anticipate them and contain potential disruption. Drawing on a report prepared by the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), this EPRS paper explores the impact on and implications for cities of current global trends, such as climate change, population growth, urbanisation, economic growth, increasing energy demand, higher connectivity and a changing world order, that will have direct consequences for the future of cities and their inhabitants.

**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 forums of various kinds.

**The future of multilateralism and strategic partnerships**

*Briefing by Elena Lazarou, EPRS, September 2020*

The 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 EU, a multilateral entity itself, has illustrated the relevance of cooperation. Beyond its internal strengthening, the EU has made the defence and reform of multilateralism 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, reinvigorated cooperation with major
democracies, and mobilisation of the EU's foreign policy tools, widely defined. As the pandemic 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.

Background

**Understanding SDGs**
Briefing by Eric Pichon, EPRS, July 2023

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 2023

The 17 SDGs are clearly linked to a series of targets to be reached by 2030, with 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 that are regularly revised by the UN and other international agencies. These agencies and the EU support national statistical services across the world in collecting data for the SDG indicators in order to gather reliable and comparable datasets. In 2023, at the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development the EU will present the contribution of its policies and initiatives to progressing towards each of the SDGs in the EU and at global level. 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.

**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 built them into 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 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 sub-national trends. The European Parliament has expressed support for an EU sustainable development strategy, and enhanced involvement of regional, local and civil society stakeholders in SDG implementation.

**Green and sustainable finance**
Briefing by Stefano Spinaci, EPRS, February 2021

The dramatic consequences of climate change and environmental degradation have pushed 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 Dobreva, 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 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.

Other SDGs

SDG 1 – No poverty
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. Through its different instruments and programmes, the EU is active in 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 best way to tackle poverty, and insist on strict implementation of development objectives, environmental and social standards, and the highlighting of human rights in all projects. Others denounce the diversion of aid to finance migration management in countries of origin. 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
SDG 2 – Zero hunger: EU action against hunger and malnutrition
Briefing by Anna Caprile and Eric Pichon, EPRS, January 2022

At least one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN will be missed in 2030, that is SDG 2 – ‘zero hunger’. This failure will also endanger 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 seeks not only to achieve food security but also to improve nutrition and promote 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.
**SDG 3 – Good health and well-being**

**New EU global health strategy: A recalibrated agenda**  
*Briefing by Gabija Leclerc, EPRS, January 2023*

On 30 November 2022, 12 years after the adoption of the first strategy on the EU's role in global health in 2010, the European Commission unveiled the EU global health strategy, with the overarching goal of improving global health security and ensuring better health for all. The document takes stock of lessons learnt from the pandemic and guides EU action in an evolving landscape of threats and opportunities, including towards reasserting responsibility for attainment of the UN SDGs – currently unfinished business. The strategy constitutes the external dimension of the European health union and is a cornerstone of the Global Gateway strategy. It not only relaunches the EU’s global health agenda but also recalibrates the EU’s approach to global health, by positioning it as an essential pillar of EU external policy, a critical geopolitical sector and a central aspect of EU strategic autonomy.

**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 disadvantages as they are more likely to be out of employment and less likely to engage in further education and training than others in their age group with a higher level of education. The EU supports Member States through policy coordination, and programmes such as the Youth Guarantee.

**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 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. In the EU, 78% of native flora and 84% of crops are either partially or fully dependent on insects for pollination. According to the European Red List of Bees, around 9% of all bee species are threatened in the EU. The EU grassland butterfly indicator has recorded a 39% decline in grassland butterfly abundance since 1990. Studies in selected European countries have provided further examples of pollinator declines. Such loss entails risks for both societies and ecosystems. Assessments of action at EU level have 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’s biodiversity and ‘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.

SDG 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions
EU support for implementing SDG 16 worldwide
Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, February 2020

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 – ‘Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’ – marked the first time that they were globally recognised 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. 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. At the same time, fundamental freedoms have come under increased attack from regimes that disrespect human rights and undermine international and national norms in this area. The specific targets of SDG 16 have been given special recognition by the EU. 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 European Parliament services
The UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 10-19 July 2023, New York
Briefing, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, June 2023

Achieving the UN Agenda 2030: Overall actions for the successful implementation of the Sustainable
Development Goals before and after the 2030 deadline
In-depth analysis, Policy Department for External Relations, January 2023

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

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

EPRS graphics

Fresh water: A small fraction of the Earth’s water

Estimated distribution of Earth’s water in thousand km³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Volume (km³)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oceans and saline water</td>
<td>1 351 305</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freshwater</td>
<td>34 648.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icecaps and glaciers</td>
<td>27 372.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundwater</td>
<td>6 929.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface water</td>
<td>346.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graphic by Eulalia Claros in [UN Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation](http://un.org), July 2023.

Share of renewable energy in three key sectors, 2021 (%)

- **Electricity**: 37.5%
- **Heating and cooling**: 22.9%
- **Transport**: 9.1%

Data source: [Eurostat](http://eurostat.eu).  
Graphic by Samy Chahri in [Renewable energy in the EU](http://ec.europa.eu), March 2023 and [SDGs: The EU and the Sustainable Development Goals](http://epthinks.paro.eu), July 2023.