

Time to reach for the moon

The EU needs to step up action and lead the transformation to sustainability

Civil society SDG monitoring report



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Table of content

About this report	5
Summary	6
Counting what counts : How to make SDG indicators meaningful to hold governments to account	9
The EU's SDG monitoring and reporting not yet fit for purpose: Towards an inclusive, participatory and transparent process that works for all	16
A wake-up call for change: The impacts of COVID-19 on SDG implementation and the reduction of inequalities in and by the EU	23
Status 2020, Vision 2030: SDG challenges and solutions for the EU	35
• SDG1: No poverty	36
• SDG2: Zero hunger	40
• SDG3: Good health and well-being	46
• SDG4: Quality education	50
• SDG5: Gender equality	54
• SDG6: Clean water and sanitation	58
• SDG7: Affordable and clean energy	62
• SDG8: Decent work and economic growth	66
• SDG9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure	70
• SDG10: Reduced inequalities	74
• SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities	78
• SDG12: Responsible consumption and production	82
• SDG13: Climate action	86
• SDG14: Life below water	90
• SDG15: Life on land	94
• SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions	98
• SDG17: Partnerships for the goals	102



About this report

The EU and its Member States were a driving force behind the negotiation and adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Now, the EU's leadership is needed to make the Goals a reality, at home and globally. The EU has the power to pass transformative laws and commands the resources needed to drive the transition towards sustainability. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has called the European Green Deal, which she has put forward to address many of our sustainability challenges, the EU's "man on the moon moment". The time is now for the EU to reach for the moon and lead by example.

The EU, which prides itself on its core values of human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, has many positive achievements to its credit: cleaner rivers and better waste management, reduced chemical pollution, stronger social protection and consumer rights, quality education and free movement within the Schengen area, to name a few.

But the EU's ambition to be a frontrunner for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs has yet to be realised. If everyone in the world lived like the average European, we would need 2.6 planets to satisfy our demands on nature. Our economic system, characterised by labour exploitation and resource depletion, overconsumption and waste, is not sustainable. It has deepened inequalities and social exclusion, globally and within most Member States, and will deprive future generations of the ability to meet their needs.

The indicators used by the EU to monitor and report on the SDGs provide an overly positive picture. The yearly Eurostat SDG report celebrates even the slowest progress, but ignores pressing challenges, including our global ecological footprint, homelessness, and human rights violations in European supply chains. It does not ask which policies drive sustainability, and which undermine it, which funds support

the transition, and which block it. The European Commission does not promote a public debate about its SDG report's findings and what needs to be done to accelerate action. There is no role for civil society in the EU's SDG monitoring.

This is why civil society presents this SDG monitoring report for the EU.

SDG Watch Europe, an EU-wide, cross-sectoral civil society alliance, has brought together its members from development, environment, social, human rights and other sectors to provide their expertise and to hold the EU to account on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

This report explains why the EU's SDG reporting creates an illusion of sustainability and makes concrete proposals for meaningful monitoring to become a stronger foundation for transformative policies.

We tell a more critical story about sustainability in the EU. Our report flags up serious gaps, bringing them to life with 17 individual stories. We also share our vision of what a truly sustainable Europe could look like. We show what we can achieve by 2030 if we do the right things now, building on our Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for its Citizens, published by civil society for the 2019 European Elections. We offer 17 solutions, real-life examples of progressive policies, innovative initiatives and truly sustainable business models. These glimpses of a sustainable Europe nurture hope and inspire action in people – and need a progressive political framework to support and scale them up.

We would like to thank all members and partners of SDG Watch Europe for pooling their knowledge and wisdom to create this report, and for sharing their vision of a sustainable Europe for its people.

Patrizia Heidegger
European Environmental Bureau
Member of the SDG Watch Europe Steering Group

Summary

What progress has the European Union made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda since their adoption five years ago on 25 September 2015? The latest edition of Eurostat's SDG monitoring report,¹ published in June 2020, declares success with positive trends for 14 of the 17 SDGs. It finds a negative development only for SDG 5 (gender equality). Though the report does not deny that there are challenges, the overall message is that the EU is progressing well towards sustainability by 2030. **Claiming that the EU is fast approaching sustainability is, to a good degree, an illusion.**

This report examines how the EU measures progress towards the SDGs. Eurostat publishes an annual SDG monitoring report based on a set of 100 SDG indicators. While selecting indicators may sound like a technicality, in reality we are only able to count what counts with the right indicators. Their choice is highly political and reflects priority setting.

What are the most important issues to look at when measuring our level of sustainability? And what do we not measure? **The EU's current indicator set ignores some key sustainability challenges.** An example: the SDGs call for decent work and sustainable consumption and production. Yet, no indicator looks into the sustainability of the EU's global supply chains, neither their human and labour rights violations nor their negative environmental impacts. The EU's SDG monitoring also does not track the total material use embedded in our supply chains. The exploitation of workers and of natural resources go completely unaccounted for. The same holds true for all other negative spillover effects that our European policies and practices have on the rest of the world, ranging from arms exports to tax evasion in the billions.


Next to protecting the planet from degradation, the 2030 Agenda sets out to eradicate poverty and to curb inequalities. **The EU's SDG monitoring does not look into some of the most extreme forms of poverty and inequality in the EU.** Homelessness has been increasing in all but one

Member State but is not tracked. No indicator tracks discrimination and inequalities linked to ethnicity, race, religion, age, or sexual orientation. **The exclusion of specific groups remains hidden behind average figures for the whole population:** only 2.3% of all European households have no basic sanitary facilities, but more than half of the EU's Roma have no access to drinking water in their homes.

Other major sustainability challenges are monitored but in a way that creates an illusion of sustainability. Another example: Eurostat looks into the average CO₂ emissions of new passenger cars. These have been decreasing due to better fuel efficiency. What the indicator does not reveal, is that the number of passenger cars has been increasing over the same period of the time. CO₂ emissions from cars now account for more than 60% of the total CO₂ emissions from road transport. The indicator does not measure whether we are actually bringing down emissions, making us believe more efficient cars solve the issue.

Because of their political nature, the discussion on SDG indicators cannot be left to technical experts and politicians alone. **The choice of indicators must be a key element of a participatory, inclusive, and transparent SDG monitoring and reporting process in which civil society is guaranteed an active role, to make sure that the most politically relevant indicators are included.** This report does not provide a final answer to the question which indicators are the most relevant, but it offers criteria to determine the relevance of indicators.

¹ Eurostat [Sustainable Development in the European Union. Overview of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context](#) (22 June 2020).



Meaningful SDG indicators:

- Focus on the issues where we face the biggest sustainability challenges (rather than on easy wins).
- Pay attention to problems that affect a lot of people – inside and beyond the EU.
- Measure the EU's negative impact on the global commons and monitor negative spillover effects and externalities of European policies and practices in the world.
- Are valid, i.e. they are able to actually measure what they claim to measure (rather than creating illusions of sustainability).
- Are specific and time-bound by being linked to EU-wide targets (instead of trying to measure progress without clear goals set).
- Make use of disaggregated data to monitor progress for different parts of society to ensure that no one is left behind by the policy responses adopted.
- Are selected and reviewed with meaningful involvement of civil society and the research community.
- Should also be obtained from sources other than statistical offices when data provided by civil society and research is able to close important gaps in SDG monitoring.

The EU's current SDG monitoring and reporting system is not fit for purpose. Beyond the need for better indicators, a more meaningful process is needed to create a strong basis for progressive policies that can ensure progress towards the Goals and to hold decision-makers to account. The overall lack of leadership on the SDGs at the top political level does not only hinder policy coordination around the SDGs, but it also undermines effective monitoring. The absence of an overarching Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU results in the lack of concrete targets to report progress against. There is no structural involvement of civil society or other crucial stakeholders, such as the European Parliament, to allow for a critical discussion of our level of sustainability.

The report argues that the EU needs to set up an inclusive, participatory and transparent SDG monitoring process that works for all. This includes:

- Creating a framework for SDG implementation in the EU by means of a new, **overarching Sustainable Development Strategy** which contains **clear, measurable and time-bound EU-wide targets for all SDGs** to report against, the implementation of which is overseen by the top political level;
- Establishing **meaningful stakeholder engagement mechanisms** via a new advisory body, an **"SDG Forum"**, to play an important role in the whole SDG monitoring and reporting process, and in particular in the selection and review of indicators, data and the continuous improvement of the assessment method;
- Placing the **SDGs at the core of the European Semester cycle with 5 to 10 headline indicators** that address the EU's main sustainability challenges and ensure a clear role for civil society in Member States to contribute to the European Semester cycle;
- Putting in place an **annual and multi-annual SDG monitoring and reporting cycle** with clear roles for the European institutions, in particular the European Parliament, the new SDG Forum and wider civil society, including regular **"Voluntary Regional Reviews"** (VRR) for the European Commission to present at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) with participation from European civil society.

We need the right progress indicators and a meaningful SDG monitoring system to help us accelerate action for the SDGs at a time when their realisation is at risk. **Like an X-ray displaying illness, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the ugly consequences of existing socio-economic, civil and environmental inequalities, together with the triple environmental crises of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and pollution across nation states in all regions of the world.** The pandemic and the immediate measures taken in response exacerbate existing inequalities in the EU. The most vulnerable are hit hardest by the social and economic fallout: women, young people, older people, persons with disabilities, refugees.

The pandemic is a wake-up call for change. We need to boldly address the deep inequalities that persist in the EU and beyond with policies focusing on strong social protection, a robust health care system, a resilient, low-carbon well-being economy and ambitious policies to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises for a healthy environment and planet. The EU needs to invest in the well-being of all people, across the life course and in all their diversity, and we need to put in place a genuine global partnership for sustainable development. More and more people now see tackling inequalities and climate change as urgent priorities, together with wealth redistribution and basic income, the reduction of corporate power, stronger workers' rights, the de-privatisation of strategic companies and an end to austerity. Research across countries has found that many governments are starting to consider bolder policies such as basic income, moratoria on debts and rent, conditionality on corporate bailouts, climate action based on science and wealth or solidarity taxes. People in the EU and around the world want change now.

SDG Watch Europe makes 10 key demands for the EU to build back better and to insure the ambitious implementation of the SDGs by 2030:

- Our system is the problem - we need a paradigm shift.
- Make the SDGs and the Paris Agreement the guidelines to resolve the crisis.
- Strengthen the social protection system and make it accessible for all.
- Lead the way to a socially and ecologically sustainable economic system with revised, green budgets.
- Link economic recovery to clear conditions and say no to bailouts for polluters and no to tax havens.
- Implement immediate debt cancellation and stop unjust austerity measures.
- Fight all other crises, too.
- Protect our democracies, human and civic rights.
- Ensure transparency of political decisions on COVID-19 and beyond, as well as full inclusion and participation of civil society.
- Show transformative global action against poverty and hunger.

As it examines each of the 17 SDGs, the report highlights some of the biggest sustainability challenges that we are facing in the EU. These are illustrated by **17 testimonies from 17 people responding to sustainability challenges:** exploited workers providing Europe with products and services and people suffering from environmental degradation or the lack of bold political responses to today's challenges. Their stories show how the Goals are interlinked in a myriad of ways: how sustainable farming connects with gender equality and decent work; how safeguarding peace is linked to our economic practices and how innovation and infrastructure impact equal access to education.

Solutions to our sustainability challenges are available. What they need is strong political backing, a regulatory framework making sustainable solutions the norm and increased financial support. We present **our vision based on the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens**.² We make suggestions for better indicators for each SDG based on our members' work and taking inspiration from 2030Watch, a participatory initiative from Germany. **17 exemplary solutions oriented towards the inclusion of those most left behind and genuine respect for the planet's ecological boundaries inspire action:**

- Courageous community-led initiatives and projects guided by sustainability principles.
- Innovative and bold policies that strive to change fundamentally how we live.
- Truly sustainable business models that enable the economic transition.
- Governance models that enable civil society to fulfil a meaningful role.

This is the EU's chance to reach for the moon.

The time to act is now.

² The SDGs serve all people, regardless of their legal status. When we use the term citizen we understand it in the broad sense of its meaning as 'inhabitant'.

Counting what counts

How to make SDG indicators meaningful to hold governments to account

By Claudia Schwegmann and Patrizia Heidegger

Reaching the agreement on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015 was an achievement of global significance bringing together policymakers, civil society and other stakeholders. Built into this process, and included as specific target 17.18, was the commitment for continuous monitoring with ‘high quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts’. Meaningful monitoring creates a basis for good policies, to ensure progress towards the Goals and to hold decision-makers to account.

It is said that ‘we treasure what we measure’, indicating that choices can be, and are, made about what and how we measure progress. The 2030 Agenda provides for adaptation to local contexts and recommends that its goals

and targets be aligned with existing regional and national strategic frameworks and policies. This applies to the EU and its Member States. This explains why many countries and regions, and even cities and companies, have developed adapted monitoring systems with specific SDG indicators.

The number of 169 SDG targets and their interpretation allows for many potential indicators to be chosen to measure progress. Global, regional and national processes have been established for this. However, decisions on indicators are not straightforward and cannot be derived automatically from the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Goals. Agreements on indicators are subject not only to data availability and practical issues relating to statistical comparability and sampling but also to political preferences.

AT A GLANCE: Meaningful SDG indicators

- ✓ Focus on the issues where we face the biggest sustainability challenges (rather than on easy wins).
- ✓ Give attention to problems that affect a lot of people – inside and beyond the EU.
- ✓ Measure the EU’s negative impact on global commons and monitor negative spillover effects and externalities of European policies and practices in the world.
- ✓ Are valid, i.e. they are able to measure what they claim to measure (rather than creating illusions of sustainability).
- ✓ Are specific and time-bound by being linked to EU-wide targets (instead of trying to measure progress without clear goals set).
- ✓ Make use of disaggregated data to monitor progress for different parts of society to ensure that no one is left behind in the policy responses taken.
- ✓ Are selected and reviewed with meaningful involvement of civil society and the research community.
- ✓ Should also be obtained from sources other than statistical offices where data provided by civil society and research can close important gaps in SDG monitoring.

The EU context

In 2017, the European Commission developed an indicator framework, reviewed in 2019, to monitor the SDGs within the EU. Eurostat acts as its key monitoring body. The framework uses 100 indicators to address the 17 SDGs, limited to six indicators per SDG, and includes multi-purpose indicators (MPIs) to monitor more than one goal. The principle behind choosing six indicators per goal is to *'attach equal importance to all goals and to allow a balanced measuring of progress across the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of sustainability'*.¹ New and replacement indicators can only be added by removing indicators already included in the set within the same goal, to be considered *'if leading to an improved measurement of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context'*.

Civil society is questioning both indicator substance – pointing out gaps in the indicator set as well as the lack of qualitative data – and the process, calling for a broad dialogue in indicator revision to enable questions to be asked about the choices being made. The current Eurostat indicator set, for instance, does not measure SDG 12.6 on sustainability reporting by companies or 12.7 on sustainable procurement, even though in recent years both issues have been given higher political priority. SDG 16.2 on human trafficking and SDG 16.4 on illicit financial flows and illicit arms flows are also not monitored in the SDG context. These targets may not have been considered as sufficiently relevant by the technical experts choosing the indicators, or adequate data may not be available.² The issue here is not necessarily that Eurostat has limited its set to 100 indicators, but who may have a say in the selection of indicators.

Why do statistics matter?

While selecting indicators to monitor progress towards the SDGs may sound like a technicality, the reality is that only with the right indicators are we able to count what counts and to understand whether our policies and practices are on track to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs on time. This article argues that the choice of SDG indicators is highly political and is part of priority setting. The definition of indicators decides whether good intentions are carved in stone or are built on sand. It has major effects on the accountability of governments. Based on examples from five SDG indicator sets, this chapter sets out to discuss the challenges of selecting relevant and appropriate indicators.

Because of its political nature, the discussion on SDG indicators should not be left to technical experts and politicians alone. Rather, the choice of indicators must be a key element of a participatory, inclusive, and transparent SDG monitoring and reporting process in which civil society is guaranteed an active role, to make sure that all the most politically relevant indicators and data sets are included. While this chapter does not provide a final answer to the question of which indicators are the most relevant, it offers criteria to determine the relevance of indicators and argues that the selection process should be based on broad consultation and agreement amongst diverse stakeholders.

The first set of SDG indicators for the 2030 Agenda was negotiated at the level of the United Nations by the Interagency Expert Group of the Statistical Commission (IAEG). This indicator set was accepted by the UN General Assembly in 2017, is under constant review, and all countries, including EU Member States, are supposed to report data on these indicators. To monitor SDG implementation by and in the EU, Eurostat developed its own set of 100 indicators for the EU and its Member States. This selection was made by technical experts without acknowledging the political nature of indicator selection and without involving civil society in the process in a meaningful way.

Two other indicator sets are interesting for comparison. First, the indicator set developed by the OECD, which covers all EU Member States. Second, the SDG Index developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Bertelsmann Foundation, a prominent example of an indicator set developed outside political institutions and with the involvement of sustainability experts. The indicator set linked to the German Sustainability Strategy is the national example chosen for purposes of comparison.

Are we focusing on our sustainability challenges?

One way of ensuring that indicators are relevant is to monitor progress in policy areas that are most challenging for sustainable development in our European context – rather than ignoring them. For example, SDG 8.3 calls for decent work. Eurostat has chosen to monitor this target with indicators that include measuring unemployment, work accidents and in-work poverty in the EU. Given that many products sold on the European market are produced outside the EU, SDG monitoring arguably should also look at the question

¹ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/276524/10369740/SDG_indicator_2020.pdf

² See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/peace-justice-and-strong-institutions>

of decent work for those producing goods for European consumers. Decent work should be monitored throughout the value chains. Eurostat does measure trade volumes with developing countries (as an indicator for SDG 17 which seeks to increase market shares of developing countries). This indicator, however, does not look at decent work. Any increase in import volumes of cheaply produced goods – often linked to labour exploitation and negative environmental impacts in low-income countries – paradoxically contributes to a positive evaluation of the sustainability performance of the EU. The SDG Index, in contrast, has included the Slavery Index to monitor the prevention of labour exploitation around the world. The German Sustainability Strategy tried to cover workers' rights throughout the value chain employing an indicator recording corporate memberships of an alliance for fair textiles. Methodologically, this indicator may be weak, but it is a positive attempt to focus on a real sustainability challenge.

SDG 10.7 calls for orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration. The EU has signed international human rights agreements and has committed to a policy framework for migration. Nevertheless, thousands of migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Many more are kept in camps in inhuman conditions or are blocked from applying for asylum by diplomatic and military anti-migration measures. Eurostat chose to measure SDG 10.7 by the number of first-time asylum applicants and the number of positive decisions per one million inhabitants. Key problems of the EU's migration policy and its failure to find a common approach for safe migration pathways cannot be measured with these indicators. The OECD, the SDG Index and the German SDG indicator set do also not include other indicators on migration.

Are we focusing on the people affected?

Indicators can be more relevant if they bring into focus the experiences of large numbers of people. For example, for SDG 16.1, which calls for significant reductions in all forms of violence and related death everywhere, the IAEG, Eurostat and the OECD have chosen the death rate due to homicide, and the German government uses its crime rate. These indicators only measure impacts on people within the EU or the Member State. A potential indicator for the EU could be to look into European arms trade. The export of arms from the EU affects populations in many conflict-prone regions of

the world now and for years to come. The Eurostat indicator set, however, does not address the question of arms exports. Interestingly, the German government added an indicator for SDG 16.4 on arms trade: not to measure Germany's role as an arms exporter, but to measure disarmament projects funded by German development cooperation. This is an interesting political choice that shows how governments perceive Europe's contribution to sustainable development.

Are we focusing on global commons and spill-over effects?

Another way to make indicators more relevant is to make sure that impacts on the global commons and negative spill-over effects are accounted for. Indicators on issues that affect the global commons, such as CO₂ emissions, the rise in ocean acidity or the volume of raw material consumption, would be preferable to many others, because these issues have long-term, global impacts on sustainable development that threaten human well-being and the functioning of the life support systems of the planet.

In addition to effects on global commons, policies and practices in the EU can have negative impacts on sustainable development in third countries, so-called spill-over effects or negative externalities. For instance, the consumption of certain agricultural commodities such as meat, palm oil or biofuels can exacerbate deforestation; increased demand for mined raw materials can drive displacement and environmental conflict; and cotton production for our textiles can be linked to desertification and forced labour. The facilitation of illicit financial flows or unfair tax regimes supported by governments in the EU have significant impacts on developing countries.

The SDG Index shows that impacts on the global commons and negative spill-over effects can be measured by including, among others, indicators such as CO₂ emissions embedded in imports. SDSN has also developed the Spillover Index Score to measure international environmental and socio-economic impacts embodied in trade for each country. As expected, many European countries have a very unfavourable score. As the Eurostat indicator set does not contain indicators on global commons and spill-over effects, the EU's negative impacts on third countries' sustainable development are unmeasured and unaccounted for.

Are the EU indicators valid?

While the question of what is most relevant to measure is already complex enough, another way to make indicators meaningful is to make sure they are valid. An indicator is valid if it measures what we want to measure. A few examples from the five mentioned indicator sets show how seemingly reasonable indicators provide a distorted picture of the level of sustainability that has been reached.

SDG 5 seeks to establish gender equality. The German government measures the number of women on the boards of large and publicly listed companies. These companies are required by law to have 30% of women on the executive board. Unsurprisingly, the performance on this indicator is very good. The same holds true for the Eurostat indicator, which also looks at women on the boards of publicly listed companies. While there is no EU-wide mandatory gender quota for such boards, several Member States have introduced quotas. The indicator, however, says very little about the representation of women in senior management across the whole spectrum of companies and organisations. Only a small part of the EU's more than 27 million active enterprises is covered. If a broader data sample covering women in senior management in non-listed companies and SMEs had been chosen, performance against this indicator would be much weaker – in contrast to the Eurostat evaluation which claims significant progress for women in senior management roles.

SDG 8 seeks to ensure decent work and sustainable growth. Eurostat uses GDP per capita as an SDG indicator even though an increase in GDP may mean a reduction in decent work. As we have seen in the EU, in-work poverty can increase in line with GDP. Moreover, highly developed countries, including most EU Member States, should not treat GDP as an indicator of sustainable development. Recent research has shown that continuous GDP growth is incompatible with key sustainability objectives such as significantly reducing raw material use, land and water use, pollution, and emissions.³

SDG 9 seeks to build resilient infrastructure, to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and to foster innovation. The IAEG, the OECD and the German government propose to count the number of researchers and the amount of money spent on research in that field. Eurostat's

measure is the number of patent applications made to the European Patent Office. These indicators do not allow for a conclusive evaluation of whether innovations are beneficial or harmful for inclusive and sustainable industrialisation.

Eurostat also uses the indicator of average CO₂ emissions of new passenger cars. While the emission levels of new car models have gone down due to better technology, the absolute number of passenger cars has increased over the same period of the time. CO₂ emissions from passenger cars now account for more than 60% of the total CO₂ emissions from road transport in Europe. The indicator also does not take into account a life-cycle approach which includes emissions during manufacture and disposal, and therefore ignores the growth in emissions resulting from high replacement rates and shorter car life cycles – now far shorter than the optimal life-cycle of 15-20 years.⁴ The indicator is not valid as it does not measure whether the absolute volumes of CO₂ emissions from passenger car transport is decreasing or not.

SDG 11 focuses on sustainable cities and communities. One indicator used by Eurostat is recycling rates of municipal waste. While recycling is undoubtedly important, the more important question is how much waste we produce in the first place. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the generation of municipal waste per capita in the EU-27 has increased, according to Eurostat figures, but these are not used for SDG monitoring. The recycling indicator also does not account for waste that is exported from the EU for recycling (some of which ends up in landfills and is not recycled). According to the EEA figures, the EU exports 150 000 tonnes of plastic waste every month.⁵ So are we measuring what we want to measure?

SDG 15 focuses on sustainable ecosystems. The IAEG, the OECD and Eurostat use the share of forest cover as an indicator even though many forest areas are dead from a biodiversity perspective. With this indicator, 20% forest cover with rich biodiversity and habitat for endangered species would be less valuable than 25% of forest monoculture. Again, we do not necessarily measure what we want to measure, namely healthy forests rich in biodiversity.

³ Parrique T., Barth J., Briens F., C. Kerschner, Kraus-Polk A., Kuokkanen A., Spangenberg J.H. (2019) *Decoupling Debunked. Evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability.*

⁴ See Transport & Environment https://www.transportenvironment.org/sites/te/files/publications/2018_04_CO2_emissions_cars_The_facts_report_final_0_0.pdf

⁵ See EEA <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/waste/resource-efficiency/the-plastic-waste-trade-in>

Are our indicators specific and time-bound?

The UN official indicators do not specify a level or date of achievement for each of the SDG targets, so where these are absent, they have to be set at the national or regional level. This is reasonable given varying levels of development between countries. Where levels of achievement are set, they may not be sufficiently ambitious or do not reflect the scientific consensus on what is needed to achieve sustainability. The setting of such specific targets and the level and date of achievement and progress towards achievement, measured by its indicator, are highly political choices.

An example from the German indicator set illustrates how specific targets and linked indicators are not necessarily aligned with the scientific advice provided. To monitor SDG 2, the German government has selected nitrogen surplus on cultivated agricultural land as an indicator. It has set a target of 70 kg per hectare even though the expert commission of the German government on the environment recommends that the target should be a maximum of 50 kg per hectare.

Another example of a missing target on a key sustainability objective concerns the circular economy. The EU has made the circular economy one of its main priorities and a new Circular Economy Action Plan has been published as part of the European Green Deal.⁶ However, the Action Plan does not contain a clear and time-bound target for the circularity of the EU's economy. Eurostat measures the circular material use rate to monitor progress towards SDG 12. This rate has increased in recent years and Eurostat evaluates this as progress towards the SDGs. However, the increase in the circular material use rate over the last decade has been extremely slow – only a few percentage points – so that we will still be a long way from a circular economy by 2030. The missing target makes it impossible to evaluate progress.

Do we have disaggregated data?

Another test of relevance is to have disaggregated data, that is, data that shows impacts on different sectors of society; men or women, younger and older people, people with disabilities, low-, middle- and high-income groups, people of colour, etc. Disaggregated data are essential if we are to

honour a key principle of the 2030 Agenda: to leave no one behind. Using disaggregated data is included as a specific commitment in SDG target 17.18.1 to be reached by 2020.

Access to education, for example, can be measured for the population as a whole or assessed specifically for the most vulnerable groups. If only data for the general population is chosen, unequal access to education for children from poorer or less privileged households is hidden behind the general data. A concrete example from the Eurostat indicator set is access to basic sanitary facilities, as an indicator for SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation. The current rate of around 2% of the EU's population without access to basic sanitary facilities is relatively low; therefore, Eurostat's monitoring report concludes that the EU has made significant progress towards its SDG target. However, what is hidden behind the figures – due to a lack of disaggregated data – is that a majority of the EU's estimated 6 million Roma people do not have access to water in their homes and that more than half of them rely on water sources more than 150m away from their homes.⁷ Many Roma communities also have to rely on uncontrolled and potentially polluted water sources.⁸ The lack of access to water and basic sanitation of Europe's largest ethnic minority has not seen any significant progress and is obscured by the general data of the Eurostat SDG monitoring report.

What are we comparing?

Another question is: what are we comparing? Eurostat indicators have to cover all EU countries, so the indicators must use comparable data collected in each Member State. Monitoring SDG 10.7 on orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration is again instructive: currently, the indicator looks at the number of asylum applications per million inhabitants. The ranking of countries would look quite different if Eurostat considered, for instance, the number of asylum applications in relation to the economic strength of a country. This example shows, again, that the choice of indicators and what makes them meaningful, is political as well as technical. We first need to be able to answer the question whether the wealthy EU Member States should take on more responsibility for refugees or not? And our answers should be based on broad stakeholder consultation.

⁶ See DG Environment <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/>

⁷ See ERCC <https://www.europeaninterest.eu/article/europe-must-ensure-access-water-pandemic/>

⁸ See EEB <https://eeb.org/library/pushed-to-the-wastelands-environmental-racism-against-roma-communities-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

What has greater weight?

While Eurostat publishes comparable data for all Member States, it does not aggregate data to rank the Member States against each other. The SDG Index, on the other hand, does aggregate the performance of each country across all SDGs without weighting. As a result, poor performance in SDG 13, 14 or 15, which measures trends of global relevance concerning climate change and biodiversity loss, can be balanced out by a good performance in the education or the health sector. Because it uses a range of indicators which overall are more focused on challenges in developing countries, the SDG Index results in highly industrialised countries, with their well-developed social welfare systems, coming out as the top performers. It presents Denmark, Sweden and Finland as the sustainability pioneers. All 10 top performers are EU countries, so are 24 of the top 30. However, among these high performing countries are most of the biggest global arms exporters and countries with very high per capita CO2 emissions, and the highest levels of waste production and raw material consumption per inhabitant. Among the top performers are also important tax havens and the home countries of multinational corporations lobbying against stricter regulations on environmental and social protection in supply chains. Such comparisons of levels of sustainability are misleading and allow governments of countries with significant sustainability challenges to celebrate themselves as leaders.

What role for civil society?

The discussion on meaningful indicators so far has shown that the selection and definition of indicators is not a technical process that should be left to statistical experts. Instead, it should be acknowledged that decisions about indicators always reflect interests and political priorities and are thus highly political. For that reason, civil society must participate in, give input to and have an influence on this process. Civil society organisations have developed vast expertise on questions of sustainable development in the EU and beyond and have unique insights into very specific issues ranging from tax policies to arms exports, from particular aspects of inequality and exclusion to highly technical environmental issues. This expertise and the interests that civil society organisations represent must be considered in the selection of indicators to ensure that they embody the highest level of policy relevance.

In certain cases, civil society can also contribute with data that is not collected anywhere else. A good example of this is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index which is used by Eurostat, the SDG Index, and the German government. Another example is the Financial Secrecy Index compiled by the Tax Justice Network, which has collected and analysed data on illicit financial flows and tax havens for many years. The data collection method is highly transparent and has been vetted by tax experts. The rating of individual countries based on the data could be a valuable contribution to the monitoring of SDG 16.4 in the EU. A third example is the data collected at a national level in Germany by the NGO Frauen in die Aufsichtsräte (FIDAR). This NGO collects data on the number of women on the boards of private sector companies and publishes three different indices based on different company samples (of which the German government only uses one for the monitoring of the National Sustainability Strategy).

The fact that collaborative indicator selection involving civil society is not only possible but can be very fruitful has been shown by the SDG monitoring tool 2030Watch, which was piloted by the Open Knowledge Foundation in Germany. The initiative was based on an intensive research process of possible indicators and existing sets of sustainability indicators. The research included interviews and workshops with civil society experts and researchers, and it resulted in a list of several hundred potential SDG indicators. This list was then assessed based on criteria such as the availability of current data and regular historical data, the availability of data for different countries and the possibility of identifying a clear baseline and target value. The indicators were also assessed as to their relevance to the current situation in Germany. Next to the indicator selection, another key aspect of the project was the visualisation of data. To be useful for awareness-raising and advocacy, it was important that the users of the web tool quickly understand the assessment and its political message. The tool received positive feedback, particularly from civil society and policymakers. The project will soon be relaunched by the German Forum on Environment and Development.

Despite the potential of civil society to make positive contributions, its involvement to date in the selection of SDG indicators has been limited. At the UN level, an open consultation process was held under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG), where governments, civil society stakeholders, researchers and companies could

contribute online to the discussion on indicators. All inputs were published. However, given the complex nature of the process, the number of inputs from civil society was relatively low. Many civil society organisations lacked the resources and capacity to contribute to the process. The IAEG held further internal discussions with statistical experts from institutions and some governments. The work on SDG indicators is ongoing; recommendations are periodically made by the Statistical Commission on SDG indicators and submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

In their selection processes, both Eurostat and Germany invited feedback on the indicators from stakeholders while the main discussions and decisions were made in an internal process. In the case of Germany, the consultation covered not only indicators, but general input on the revised German Sustainability Strategy. Eurostat invited stakeholders to a meeting in March 2017 before finalising its initial indicator set. However, the meeting came at a relatively late stage in the process of indicator selection. The draft indicator set had already been developed in consultation with the European Commission and with the Member States but without the meaningful engagement of civil society. Invitations to the consultation were sent at short notice, giving insufficient time for proper preparation and input from civil society. As a result, there was effectively very little scope for civil society to contribute to the development of the indicator set, and there was no broad consultation of stakeholders. Later, when the European Commission set up its expert group, the 'Multi-Stakeholder Platform for the Implementation of the SDGs', its main advisory body on the SDGs was not involved in the review of the Eurostat indicator set.

What is needed now?

A different selection of indicators, more ambitious EU-level targets with measurable achievements and dates and the inclusion of indicators covering the global commons and spillover effects on people around the world would result in a very different ranking – which would in turn change the political discourse about the EU being a sustainability leader.

The first step for an inclusive process would be to convene, at the very beginning of a review of the current indicator set, a range of public debates with stakeholders, inviting them to contribute their specific expertise. As pointed out above, the SDG targets and the existing EU policies are very broad. Public discourse is needed for each SDG to identify

what topics within a given policy area should be prioritised in the monitoring system. The selection of concrete indicators should then be based on that broad consultation and should consider the integration of data from civil society or independent research bodies where adequate and available.

If the new European Commission, which has made sustainability and the just transition to a low-carbon economy its main priority, is serious about its ambition, it must initiate as a matter of urgency a broad stakeholder consultation – now long overdue – on both the most meaningful SDG indicators and clear and time-bound targets to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Ideas of how civil society can be engaged in both indicator selection and the monitoring and reporting cycle are laid out in the following chapter.



The EU's SDG monitoring and reporting not yet fit for purpose

Towards an inclusive, participatory and transparent process that works for all

Fritz Schiltz® Vitezslav Titl® Deni Mazrekaj®¹

Summary

This chapter looks into the current SDG monitoring and reporting process at EU level, discusses its weaknesses and makes action-orientated recommendations to transform it into an inclusive, participatory, and transparent process that works for all. We argue that the EU's current SDG monitoring and reporting process is not yet fit for purpose, and that the EU can and should learn from good practices at Member State level.

There are several reasons for the weakness of the current process. The overall lack of political leadership to coordinate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the highest political level and to ensure inclusive, participatory and transparent monitoring the SDGs is an external factor that undermines the efforts led by Eurostat with its annual SDG report. The current SDG monitoring at EU-level is very limited in terms of civil society and stakeholder participation, while some Member States have shown the added value of including a broader range of civil society experts in the exercise. The built-in weaknesses of Eurostat's SDG report include the indicator set chosen with its gaps and inconsistencies, the methodology used to measure progress, and the overall absence of a deeper assessment of the impact of European policies on progress towards, or regression from, achieving the SDGs (see also previous chapter on Counting What Counts).

Our recommendations are to:

- Create a framework for SDG implementation in the EU by means of a new, **overarching Sustainable Development Strategy** which contains clear and measurable EU-wide targets for all SDGs to report against and whose implementation is overseen by the top political level;
- Establish **meaningful stakeholder engagement** mechanisms with a new advisory body, an **"SDG Forum"**, to play an important role in the whole SDG monitoring and reporting process, and in particular in the selection and review of indicators and the continuous improvement of the assessment method;
- Place the **SDGs at the core of the European Semester cycle with 5 to 10 headline indicators** that address the EU's main sustainability challenges, and ensure a clear role for civil society in Member States to contribute to the European Semester cycle;
- Put in place an **annual and multi-annual SDG monitoring and reporting cycle** with clear roles for the European institutions, in particular the European Parliament which so far has played a very minor role in that regard, the new SDG Forum and wider civil society, **including regular "Voluntary Regional Reviews" (VRR)** for the European Commission to present at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) with participation from European civil society.

¹ This chapter has been authored by Public Policy Consult Leuven in cooperation and consultation with SDG Watch Europe. Authorship was determined by a random generator. The authors would like to thank the interview participants that made this chapter possible by sharing their expertise and insights, and SDG Watch Europe for its valuable guidance and input throughout the process. The interviews while preparing this report included: (i) national experts from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Slovenia, Sweden and international civil organisations such as European Environment Bureau, SDG Watch Europe, and 2030 Watch; (ii) officers from the European Commission (Unit E2 Natural Resources, Energy Union & Sustainability of the Secretariat-General), Eurostat (Unit E2 — Environmental Statistics and Accounts; Sustainable Development), the European Environmental Agency (IAS2 - Socio-Economic Analysis), the European Parliament (Secretariat of Development Committee), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Public Governance Department); the Joint Research Centre (Directorate Sustainable Resources); members of the European Parliament and their assistants.

Why the EU's SDG monitoring and reporting is not yet fit for purpose

Lack of political leadership to effectively monitor the SDGs

During the Juncker Commission, First Vice-President Frans Timmermans was assigned the role of horizontal coordinator for sustainable development at the political level.² The Commission President, however, did not give political priority to sustainable development within his Europe 2020 strategy which limited the possibilities for action on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015, the Juncker Commission refused to develop a new Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU in line with the global goals and to present an implementation plan. This was despite various calls for such action from the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Committee of the Regions (CoR), and civil society. Such a strategy and implementation plan would provide clear, EU-wide targets for all SDGs against which to monitor and report the EU's progress. Sustainable development targets have remained scattered across different policies and strategies with the consequence that many SDGs and their targets are not being translated into concrete and measurable EU-wide policies and targets.

From 2017, Eurostat has published its annual report *"Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context"*. In these reports, making use of Eurostat's set of 100 indicators, both the EU's overall progress, as well as the progress made in each EU Member State is assessed and reported on. In 2019, as well as the Eurostat report, the Commission published its *"Reflection paper: Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030"*. The Reflection Paper was not an SDG monitoring report assessing existing EU policies and how these contribute to or undermine the EU's sustainability. In the same year, the European Commission also published the *"Joint synthesis report on supporting the Sustainable Development Goals across the world"*, a partial SDG report focusing on the external

dimension and its role in international development. Civil society was consulted on this report, and the reporting exercise was accomplished in collaboration between the EC and the Member States.

These three reports formed the basis of the EU's first presentation of the progress made in implementing the SDGs at a side event during the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2019. While the prepared reports and the side event were the first presentation of its kind, they did not constitute a full SDG monitoring report. With the presentation of the Joint Synthesis Report, more attention was given to the external dimension, and comparatively, little attention was given to domestic European policies and sustainable development challenges within the EU. Negative spillover effects of European policies and practices that have been well covered by civil society, were not addressed. The presentation did also not provide a qualitative analysis of the EU's current policies and practices. The EU has so far lacked the leadership to prepare and discuss a full SDG monitoring report comparable to Voluntary National Reviews prepared by national governments.³

Under the von der Leyen Commission, all Commissioners have been tasked with the responsibility to implement the SDGs within their portfolios. The Commissioner for the Economy, Paolo Gentiloni, has the oversight responsibility for SDG implementation within the European Semester. While these changes in the governance setup of the SDGs may open up new possibilities to hold all Commissions to account and have a more holistic all-of-government approach, what is missing is a high-level member of the Commission, either the President or one of the Vice-Presidents, acting as the overall coordinator for SDG implementation. As its predecessor, the new Commission has also refused to adopt an overarching Sustainable Development Strategy to guide all European policies and efforts and to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development, and an implementation plan for the SDGs with clear timelines, EU-wide targets and responsibilities. The SDG monitoring and reporting through Eurostat has remained unchanged.

² For a detailed outline of the SDG monitoring and reporting system in the Juncker Commission, see Niestroy et al. (2019) Europe's approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward. Brussels: European Parliament.

³ At the global level, each EU Member State can present a Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the UN HLPF, which meets every year in July. To date, all EU Member States have presented at least one VNR while the European Commission has not yet presented a full SDG monitoring report similar to a VNR.

Absence of structural involvement of civil society stakeholders

To identify indicators, Eurostat consulted statistical experts from the Member States and different Directorates General. However, neither EU institutions, such as the European Parliament, the EESC and the CoR, nor civil society have been structurally integrated in the process of indicator selection. Different stakeholders have been consulted on an occasional basis, as explained in the previous chapter *Counting What Counts*. Eurostat's narrow focus on quantitative statistical standards instead of a more open discussion on what should be included as relevant indicators has created a disconnect from a broader range of stakeholders and has limited involvement to statistical experts.

In terms of monitoring and reporting processes beyond indicator selection, the current production of the Eurostat report does not allow for any specific role for civil society. In 2018, the Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) on SDGs was established to advise the Commission on SDG implementation. Chaired by then First Vice President of the European Commission, it included representatives from various civil society organisations. The MSP published recommendations on SDG implementation in the EU alongside the 2019 Reflection Paper, but the MSP was not given the opportunity to participate in a review of Eurostat's SDG indicators nor was it directly involved in the preparation of the EC's side event during the UN High-Level Political Forum where the EU presented its progress towards the SDGs.

Weakness of the Eurostat SDG indicator set and methodology

The existing Eurostat indicator set is constructed in accordance with six criteria of statistical quality. These are frequency of dissemination, timeliness, reference area, comparability over time, comparability over geographies, and time coverage. It is limited to a total number of 100 indicators as this limit is "*widely recognised as an upper limit for effective and harmonised reporting by experts from National Statistical Offices, OECD, Eurostat and many others*".⁴ The indicator set is updated yearly, with 11 indicators currently on hold as they do not yet meet statistical criteria.

The existing Eurostat SDG indicator set has faced criticism from different sides, including academia (e.g. Miola & Schiltz, 2019)⁵, civil society (SDG Watch Europe, 2019)⁶, and European institutions themselves (Miola et al., 2019).⁷ They argue that the current set of indicators is not able to fully capture the most relevant aspects of sustainable development in the EU context. One example, which is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, is the lack of indicators on negative spill-over effects of European policies and practices, an issue covered by an SDG shadow report presented by SDG Watch Europe in 2019.⁸

Also, the internal coherence between indicators is disputed. Prajal Pradhan and fellow experts from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research have developed a methodology to assess such internal consistencies.⁹ When applying it to the Eurostat indicator set, it throws up inconsistencies showing that many indicators are negatively correlated across goals. This implies that improving one indicator can go together with a decrease in another, offsetting the underlying shared goal of sustainable development. These inconsistencies are more pronounced in the Eurostat indicator set than in the UN indicator set.

⁴ Note that indicators can be used across several goals. These are referred to as "multi-purpose indicators (MPIs)" and limit the total number of unique indicators.

⁵ Miola, & Schiltz (2019) Measuring sustainable development goals performance: How to monitor policy action in the 2030 Agenda implementation? *Ecological economics*, 164, 106-373.

⁶ SDG Watch Europe (2019) Who is paying the bill? (Negative) impacts of EU policies and practices in the world, available at <https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/who-is-paying-the-bill/>

⁷ Miola, Borchardt, Neher & Buscaglia (2019) Interlinkages and policy coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals implementation. JRC Technical Reports.

⁸ SDG Watch Europe (2019) Who is Paying the Bill?

⁹ Pradhan et al. (2017) A systematic study of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) interactions. *Earth's Future*.

Another challenge regarding the current methodology is how progress is measured. Where the EU has set a quantifiable target, Eurostat compares the necessary annual increase or decrease to reach the target with data on annual growth. However, about 60% of the current SDG indicators used by Eurostat to monitor the EU's progress on the SDGs are not linked to any quantifiable level of achievement. In these cases, Eurostat considers any improvement that exceeds 1% per year as significant progress. This is misleading in several cases. While the failure to specify a level of achievement cannot be attributed to Eurostat, since these are political decisions, the methodology used to measure progress in their absence is nevertheless flawed. The previous chapter gives concrete examples of measuring progress without a specified level of achievement, such as the rate of progress towards circular material use. The circular material rate has been increasing so slowly that the EU's economy will be far from circularity in 2030. However, in the absence of a clear target, the minimal increase is evaluated as "significant progress". Eurostat's methodology needs to be improved in the absence of targets. One option, which is not free of weaknesses either, is to benchmark progress on top-performing countries, as proposed in the distance measure offered by the OECD. The most meaningful indicators, however, are those linked to clearly defined and quantifiable EU-wide targets.

Towards a process that works for all

To overcome the weaknesses of the EU's current SDG monitoring and reporting process, we make four recommendations for an inclusive, participatory and transparent process that works for all.

Need for true EU leadership on SDGs

The European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the MSP and civil society have repeatedly asked the European Commission to formulate an ambitious, comprehensive and overarching Sustainable Development Strategy based on the principles of the 2030 Agenda and aligned with the SDGs and presenting an implementation plan for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs up to 2030 and beyond. Such an overarching Strategy should serve as the compass for all EU's policies, practices and budget. It would define clear policy goals in support of the whole 2030 Agenda, and would define EU-wide, quantifiable targets for all SDGs against which to monitor and report the EU's progress.

The strategy should be designed in broad consultation with civil society and other stakeholders, and then set out the functioning of an inclusive, participatory and transparent SDG monitoring and reporting process.

Meaningful involvement of civil society in the SDG monitoring process

Civil society and other stakeholders must be structurally involved in the EU's monitoring and reporting process for the SDGs. Learning from the strengths and weaknesses of the previous Commission's Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs (MSP), an "SDG Forum" needs to be set up with better representation of the diversity of civil society including vulnerable groups. It should serve as the new Commission's multi-stakeholder advisory body on SDG implementation in and by the EU. Based on a stronger and more political mandate than the previous MSP, the SDG Forum should enable broad and regular participation on the design of policies critical for the achievement of the SDGs and throughout the whole monitoring and reporting process. While the SDG Forum could play a key role in enabling continuous stakeholder engagement, wider civil society beyond those stakeholders active in the SDG Forum must also have regular opportunities to contribute to the assessment of progress made.

A critical task for the SDG Forum will be to identify and select the most relevant indicators. Eurostat should support the collaboration with civil society by compiling an "indicator catalogue" containing all existing sustainability indicators that are used by different EU bodies and that are of high statistical quality. An example of such an indicator catalogue already exists: the 'Environmental indicator catalogue' is an inventory of more than 200 European indicators, providing a one-stop shop for high quality indicators on environmental and environment-related topics.¹⁰ Looking at the catalogue, civil society stakeholders can then shortlist the most relevant indicators and flag indicators so far missing (e.g. on negative externalities). Combining indicators in a catalogue can improve relevance while safeguarding statistical quality. When identifying gaps, the SDG Forum can then consider and propose alternative data sources provided by the research community and civil society for their inclusion into Eurostat's SDG indicator set (see Figure 1). The SDG Forum should then also play a role in continuously updating indicators and refining the assessment methodology (see Figure 2).

¹⁰ The catalogue currently includes indicators from Eurostat, European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), and other international sources.

Proposal for an inclusive process to select SDG indicators and to continuously improve the assessment method for SDG monitoring in the EU.

Establish an indicator catalogue for SDGs



Eurostat

Shortlist indicators and identify gaps¹¹



SDG Forum

Report on selected indicators



EC and Eurostat

Figure 1: Process for indicator selection

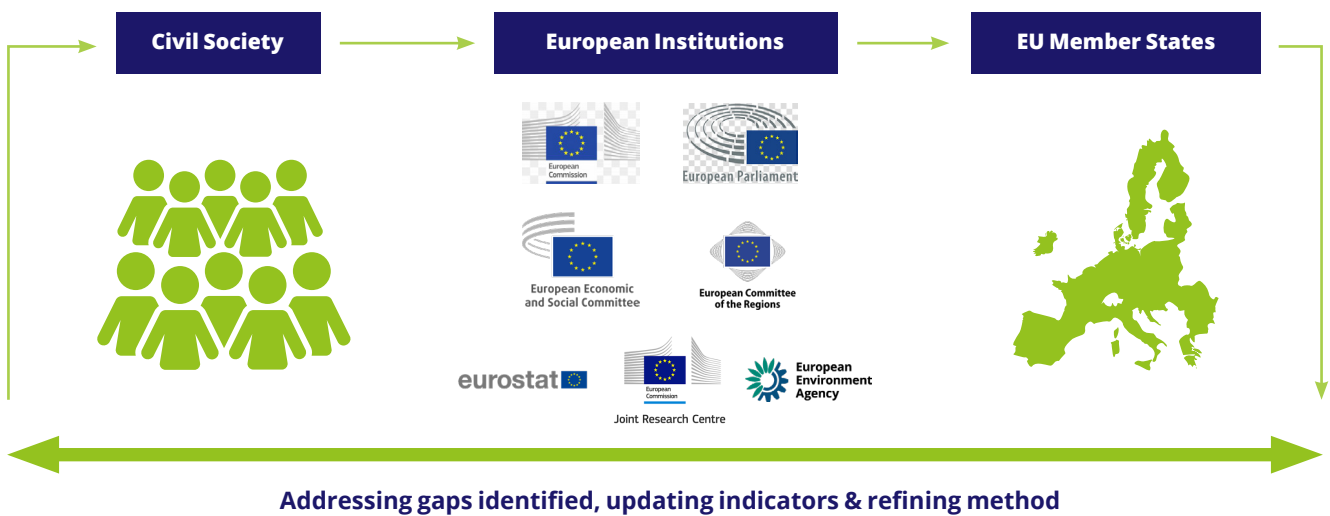


Figure 2: Multi-stakeholder approach to continuously update indicators and improve monitoring.

SDGs at the core of the European Semester

Based on the promise of the new European Commission in 2019 to integrate the SDGs into the European Semester, the SDG must be placed at the centre of the annual European Semester cycle. This can be done through the agreement on 5 to 10 headline indicators that address the EU's main sustainability challenges. The headline indicators could be composite indicators. It is crucial to consult with a broad range of stakeholders to agree on this set of core indicators and the method used to aggregate them. The proposed SDG Forum can play a leading role in proposing these indicators.

The assessment of progress against the headline indicators would play a central role in November each year when the European Commission defines the priorities for the following year's Semester Cycle through the Autumn Package. In the Commission's annual country reports for the Member States, published every February, it should then include an assessment against the SDG headline indicators. The country-specific recommendations made each summer should consequently be focused on recommendations that help Member State to progress towards the SDGs, measured through the headline indicators. This would ensure the systematic integration of the SDGs in the country reports.

¹¹ Including selection of headline indicators for European Semester.

In the 2020 Semester cycle, the country reports referred to progress made towards the SDGs in a patchy and incoherent way. Some of the country reports even focused on less relevant aspects of sustainable development while country-specific SDG data were parked in an annex.

Preparation and assessment of the country reports and country-specific recommendations prepared by the Commission must come with opportunities for civil society and other stakeholders from each country to provide input and share their expertise on SDG implementation.

Annual and multi-annual SDG monitoring and reporting cycle

The Eurostat SDG monitoring report as well as the instruments of the European Semester should all be integrated into the EU's annual and multi-annual SDG monitoring and reporting cycle. These cycles can and should actively involve the different European institutions, in particular the European Parliament as the elected body with a supervisor role of the Commission's policy implementation, the SDG Forum and wider civil society.

The cycle should start each year in early June with the publication of Eurostat's annual SDG monitoring report, based on a more meaningful indicator set and improved methodology of progress monitoring. The SDGs Forum should then be invited to assess the state of sustainable development in the light of the report and make recommendations on priority policies highlighting gaps, regress, and the risks of trade-offs and lack of policy coherence for sustainable development. The Commission should, as a next step, report to the European Parliament on the implementation of the SDGs in September, based on Eurostat's report and referring to the recommendations made by the SDG Forum. The process should include all of the European Parliament's Committees, which could call in the respective Commissioners to report more in detail on SDG implementation in each policy area. In October, the European Parliament could present its annual SDG progress report to respond to the European Commission and Eurostat's report and considering the SDG Forum's recommendations. While certain Committees, for instance, the Environment, Development, Employment and Social Affairs and Economic Affairs Committee could take the lead in this exercise, all Committees would have to be consulted and should hold their respective Commissioner to account.

In November, when the new priorities for the up-coming European Semester cycle are drafted, the European Commission will base these on the assessment of the SDG headline indicators, the recommendations from the SDG Forum and the European Parliament's annual SDG progress report. Additionally, as outlined above, the Commission's country reports, the countries' responses and the country-specific recommendations in the Semester process would address these recommendations.

The adoption of an annual SDG reporting cycle should integrate Eurostat's indicators and reports with a stronger role for the European Parliament, a strong mandate for the SDG Forum and participation of civil society, connecting SDG monitoring to the recommendations contained in the European Semester cycle.

Every four years, the European Commission should present a comprehensive "Voluntary Regional Report" (VRR) at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July. Such a report could be compiled, for instance, in 2021, 2025, and 2029. The VRR should cover all SDGs with an equal focus on domestic and external affairs, a strong consideration of trade-offs, a critical assessment of negative spillover effects and an assessment of policy coherence for sustainable development.

The preparation of the VRR should start at least one year before its presentation at the July HLPF to allow for a broad and continuous civil society consultation process in which the SDG Forum could take a central role. Civil society representatives should also be actively involved in the presentation of the VRR during the HLPF itself as an official part of the European Commission's delegation.

Innovative and progressive forms of civil society engagement mechanisms in the SDG process at Member State level should serve as a blueprint for the European Commission when creating an inclusive, participatory and transparent process that works for all. A best practices example from Finland, included in this report as a solution for SDG 16, shows how civil society and Parliaments are already playing a meaningful and strategic role in SDG monitoring and reporting. It should encourage the European Commission to step up its multi-stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the SDGs, including the monitoring of progress made.

Proposal of annual and multi-annual process of SDG monitoring and reporting for the European Union.

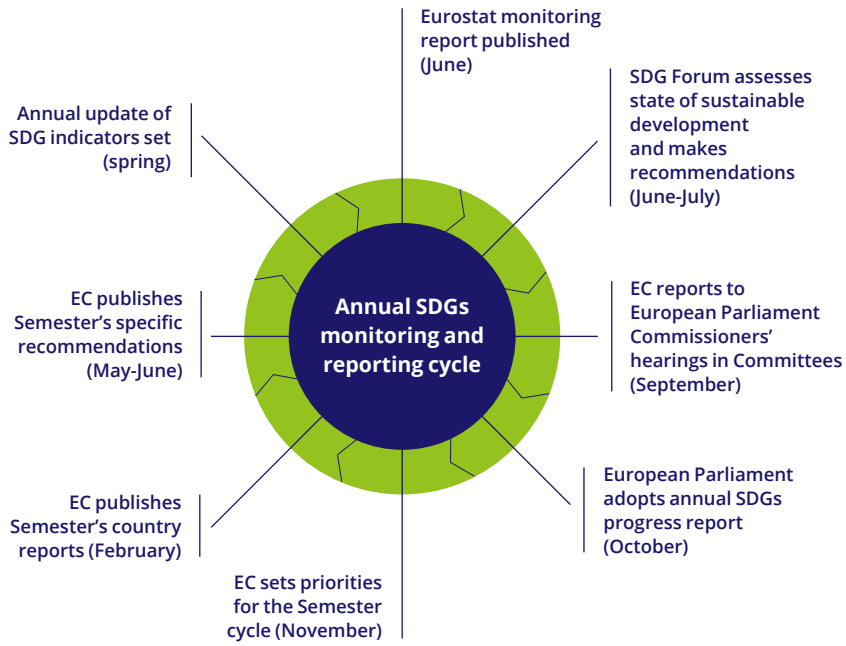


Figure 3: Proposed annual monitoring cycle for the EU

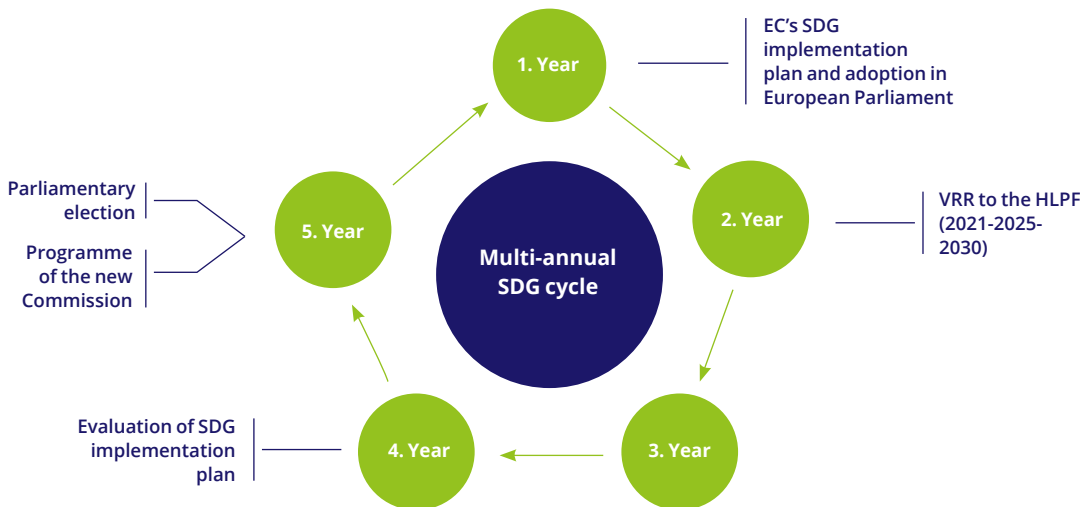


Figure 4: Proposed multi-annual VRR process culminating in the presentation of the EU's report during the July UN HLPF.

A wake-up call for change : **The impacts of COVID-19 on SDG implementation** **and reduction of inequalities in and by the EU**

Sylvia Beales, George Gelber and Patrizia Heidegger

The Ministerial Declaration of the 2020 UN High-Level Political Forum recognises that “the poorest and the people in vulnerable situations are being left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and are the most affected by the COVID-19 crisis,” and reaffirms that “the 2030 Agenda should be our collective roadmap to respond and build back better.” Across the EU, COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and thus, severely impacts the EU’s achievement of SDG 10 to reduce inequalities, as well as a wide range of other SDGs.

This analysis explores how the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate measures taken in response impact human health and well-being and interact with and exacerbate existing inequalities in the EU. It shows how the pandemic challenges the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in and by the EU. COVID-19, with the impacts that it has already made and will continue to make, is a wake-up call for change. It highlights the urgency of addressing the deep inequalities that persist in the EU and beyond, the need for European policies to focus on strong social protection, ensure a robust health care system and a resilient, low-carbon well-being economy; and to put in place ambitious policies to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises for a healthy environment and planet. This analysis does not cover in detail the long-term impact of recovery measures, as these are yet to be fully experienced.

“Whether we like it or not, COVID is a disease of poverty, powerlessness, inequities and injustice.”

Dr David Nabarro, Special Envoy to the UN Secretary-General on COVID

An X-ray of global crises

As an X-ray displays illness, the pandemic has exposed the ugly consequences of existing socio-economic, civil and environmental inequalities, together with the triple environmental crises of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and pollution across nation states in all regions of the world.

The pandemic threatens the progress made on poverty reduction and socio-economic development in the last two decades and casts a dark shadow over the prospects for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in particular its commitment to leave no one behind.²

Unemployment around the world is rising rapidly and, as livelihood support measures come to an end (where they exist), the numbers of unemployed will increase further. The UN is predicting that, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, global human development, as measured by the Human Development Index which measures countries’ education, health, and living standards is on course to decline for the first time since the measurement began in 1990.³ According to the latest estimates, the global extreme poverty rate is projected to be

¹ Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council on the annual theme “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. Revised draft 16 June 2020.
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26339HLPF_MD_Revised.pdf

² Ladd, P and Bortolotti, E. (2020) UNRISD COVID-19 Response. Protecting and Supporting Vulnerable Groups Through the COVID-19 Crisis, see:
[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpPublications\)/0AC8BC84CFBB2D488025859F001EB3C3?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpPublications)/0AC8BC84CFBB2D488025859F001EB3C3?OpenDocument)

³ UNDP (2020) COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis, Envisioning the Recovery.

8.4-8.8% in 2020. This means that an estimated 40-60 million people will be pushed back into extreme poverty, mainly due to job loss, causing the first increase in global poverty in more than 20 years. A recent global survey on COVID-19 impact published by UNRISD with input from 82 countries “supports the narrative that – as a result of lockdowns – many people have faced a terrible choice between lives and livelihoods.”⁴

While the virus is affecting the way of life of all people, in all societies, and is impacting economies at their core, it has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in opportunities, income, health care and social protection globally. The poorer segments of our societies experience multiple deprivations and inequalities. They have unequal access to quality health care and other essential services, exposure to disease, poor housing and overcrowding, vulnerable working conditions in addition to high levels of air pollution, inadequate sanitation and water availability and lack of access to quality education. Migrant workers, as well as those in informal work situations are particularly affected. In many places, minorities or migrant workers have also been made scapegoats and have been the object of hate speech and threats. To add to this, gender inequality in the workforce puts millions of women at risk of infection, as they are classed as “essential workers”, and work on the front lines as shop workers, cleaners, carers and hospital workers, often for inadequate minimum pay. At the same time, women are among the first to lose their jobs in the COVID-19 recession.

The COVID-19 crisis is a direct consequence of human activity and decision making. The majority of mankind’s infectious diseases have originated in animals, and urbanisation and encroachment on the natural environment have brought an increasing number of people into direct contact, and often conflict, with animals. The spread of infections is facilitated by ever-increasing global mobility. It is linked to an economic system that depends on growth and expansion at any cost, and that is responsible for the cutting back of social protection and health services.

“Rampant deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development, as well as the exploitation of wild species have created a ‘perfect storm’ for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people. This often occurs in areas where communities live that are most vulnerable to infectious diseases. Our actions have significantly

impacted more than three-quarters of the Earth’s land surface, destroyed more than 85% of wetlands and dedicated more than a third of all land and almost 75% of available freshwater to crops and livestock production.”⁵

The virus is a wake-up call for change – to build back differently and better. Investing in the well-being of all people, across the life course and in all their diversity, is now an urgent necessity, and is essential for survival. We need now to transform our socio-economic system so that it focuses on the well-being of people and the natural world and to put in place a genuine global partnership for sustainable development.

Prioritising policies and programmes that build trust and confidence between citizens and government will mean putting in place universal systems that guarantee the human right to essential services such as access to health and social protection in all countries, to live in a healthy environment and to breathe clean air, for all people across the life-course. The challenge now is to ensure that the short term measures taken in many countries evolve into a set of sustainable policies – and to ensure that these address the vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, particularly those related to gender, age, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, diversity and location.

Ready for change

The impacts and spread of the virus have made people look critically at their work and travel habits, opened possibilities of digital inclusion for all, and focused attention on the need for greater care and attention to the natural world as well as our dependence on animal products. It has asked us to question our addiction to goods that are delivered through complex supply chains linked to environmental destruction and labour exploitation. A growing body of evidence shows that the pandemic and its impact are significantly affecting people’s priorities for the future and that policies previously viewed as “radical” are receiving more widespread support. Tackling inequalities and climate change are now seen as urgent priorities, together with wealth redistribution, basic income and higher taxes on wealth, the reduction of corporate power, stronger workers’ rights, the de-privatisation of strategic companies and an end to austerity. Research across countries has found that many governments are starting to

⁴ See [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpPublications\)/0AC8BC84CFBB2D488025859F001EB3C3?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpPublications)/0AC8BC84CFBB2D488025859F001EB3C3?OpenDocument)

⁵ Josef Settele; Sandra Díaz; Eduardo Brondizio; Peter Daszak. (27 April 2020) COVID-19 Stimulus Measures Must Save Lives, Protect Livelihoods, and Safeguard Nature to Reduce the Risk of Future Pandemics. IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services). 27 April 2020. <https://ipbes.net/COVID19stimulus>

consider bolder policies such as basic income, moratoria on debts and rent, conditionality on corporate bailouts, and wealth or solidarity taxes.⁶ People around the world want change now.

How COVID-19 undermines the implementation of the SDGs in the EU

There are three principal elements of the impact of COVID-19. The immediate impact of the disease itself, in terms of the people infected by the virus, deaths and excess mortality; the immediate impact on well-being, health, socio-economic, environmental and civil rights caused by the measures taken by governments to slow and halt the disease – principally lockdowns; and, third, the more long-term environmental, social and economic impacts both of COVID-19 itself, of lockdown and recovery measures, yet to be fully experienced.

COVID-19 impacts all of the SDGs in various, interconnected ways – as the infographic illustrates. Many of these impacts still need to be researched while other impacts will only become apparent in the long-term. We focus in this analysis on the impacts in the EU on human health and well-being and their strong links to existing inequalities and other key challenges regarding the implementation of the SDGs.

In relation to health and well-being, SDG 3 commits governments to strive for healthy lives and well-being for all during the course of their lives. The pandemic is creating new challenges to SDG3 every day. In mid-August, the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre had recorded over 20 million infections and nearly 750,000 deaths, with infection and mortality rates varying widely across the world.⁷ There are growing numbers of infections, in particular in the United States, Latin America, and India, and across Africa and Central Asia, where the real numbers are likely to be higher than those reported.

It has been clear from early on in the pandemic that those most likely to be hospitalised and to die from COVID-19 in hospital and in care homes are older persons,⁸ persons with underlying health conditions (co-morbidities) and persons with disabilities living in segregated institutions.⁹ Fatality rates of older people across Europe and the Americas are much higher than those of people below the age of 60. For people over the age of 80 fatality rates are five times the global average.¹⁰ Early research in Europe showed that deaths of residents in care homes accounted for an average of 50% of all COVID-19 related deaths.¹¹

Once infected, taking age into account, men are more likely to die from COVID-19. Research by the Robert Koch Institute in Germany shows that the mortality rate for men had grown significantly since the beginning of the pandemic and by May was 50% greater than the mortality rate of women.¹² Other countries have similar findings. Therefore, regarding SDG 3, there is a disproportionate impact on men. The causes, as yet not fully understood, appear to be a combination of risk factors, with older men more likely to have underlying health issues such as diabetes, obesity and cancer, and differences in the immune systems of women and men.¹³ As older men are dying in greater numbers than older women, increasing numbers of older women are widowed, potentially without support (with implications in particular for SDG 1, SDG 2 and SDG 10).

While in some countries lockdowns have been largely effective in slowing the spread of the virus – it has been calculated, on the basis of data from 11 European countries, that they have prevented about 3.1 million deaths which would have occurred in the absence of any intervention¹⁴ – fresh spikes are occurring as lockdowns ease.

Enormous resources are being deployed to develop a vaccine, but we do not know if or when an effective vaccine will become available. In the meantime, suppression of the

6 Leah Zamore and Ben Phillips (June 2020). COVID-19 and Public Support for Radical Policies, NYU, International Castro for Cooperation, see <https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/zamore-phillips-covid19-public-support-radical-policies-web-final.pdf>

7 For up to date figures see <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

8 Jérémie F. Cohen; Daniël A. Korevaar; Soraya Matczak; Joséphine Brice; Martin Chalumeau; Julie Toubiana (16 April 2020) COVID-19-related mortality by age groups in Europe: A meta-analysis. MedRxiv, see <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.11.20061721v1.full.pdf>

9 See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1110906/comorbidities-in-COVID-19-deceased-patients-in-italy/>

10 World Health Organization (14 April 2020) COVID-19 Strategy Update, see <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/COVID-19-strategy-update---14-april-2020>

11 Comas-Herrera A, Zalakaín J, Litwin C, Hsu AT, Lane N and Fernández J-L (2020) Mortality associated with COVID19 outbreaks in care homes: early international evidence. Article in LTCCOVID.org, International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPEC-LSE, <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Mortality-associated-with-COVID-3-May-final-5.pdf>

12 Brookings Institute (1 May 2020) COVID-19 trends from Germany show different impacts by gender and age.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2020/05/01/COVID-19-trends-from-germany-show-different-impacts-by-gender-and-age/>

13 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (15 June 2020). More men dying from COVID-19 than women, but as with so much about this disease, the reasons are unclear, <https://eu.jsonline.com/story/news/2020/06/15/men-more-risk-dying-COVID-19-than-women-but-why/5343586002/>

14 Flaxman, S. et al. (2020) Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in Europe. Nature https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2405-7_reference.pdf

virus is dependent on social distancing, wearing of masks and continuing limits on travel and indoor gatherings to prevent infection, and track and tracing. These measures are difficult to implement in low-income countries, where many people are faced with a choice between hunger and continuing to work regardless of the risks to themselves and others. However, these factors also apply in middle- and high-income countries where such measures are challenging for workers in precarious conditions or for people living in informal settlements. The measures taken to protect human health impact on all other SDGs, in particular on SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 10 (reducing inequalities).

Many people who contract COVID-19 display no symptoms or only mild symptoms. At the same time testing facilities in most countries, even where they are most extensive, do not detect everyone who has the disease and yield a significant proportion of false negatives.¹⁵ In poorer countries with limited testing facilities only a small proportion of total infections are detected, so reported rates of infection significantly underestimate the true rates.

For these reasons, excess death rates are a more accurate measure of the impact of COVID-19 than figures produced for COVID-19 related deaths.¹⁶⁻¹⁷ Excess deaths are the difference between death rates in the COVID-19 period with average death rates for the same months in previous years. This measure includes deaths which may have been caused by conditions which have not been treated because hospital services have been narrowly focused on COVID-19. Reluctance to go to hospitals and fear of infection have also kept people away from hospitals. EuroMOMO estimates that there were approximately 170,000 excess deaths across its 20 reporting countries between 16 March and 31 May only. COVID-19 accounts for about 80% of these deaths. While all EU countries have been affected, some stand out. The UK, no

longer part of the response and recovery plans of the EU, has the highest numbers of cases and deaths, followed by Italy, France, Spain and Belgium.¹⁸

Gender

The pandemic has impacted SDG 5 on ensuring gender equality in various ways. Nursing and caring are occupations in which women predominate with 85-90% of all nurses being women in many countries around the globe; in Europe, 76% of the 49 million care workers in the EU are women.¹⁹ This puts them in the front line of the fight against COVID-19 in hospitals and care homes. Carers UK surveyed over 5,000 informal carers in April 2020. 81% of respondents were women and 54% of respondents were 55+ years old. The survey showed that 70% of unpaid carers were providing more care due to COVID-19 outbreak; 35% reported services reduced or closing; and 55% of carers felt overwhelmed and worried about burnout.²⁰ But as cleaners, cooks, supermarket and shop-workers, women also come face-to-face with the public every day and are therefore at greater risk of being infected with the virus. At the same time, hospitality and tourism, where women account for 60% of the workforce,²¹ are likely to suffer the greatest number of job losses. Eurofound argues that “measures taken by governments to control the spread of the virus are exacerbating gender divides in unemployment, domestic labour and financial security, all to the disadvantage of women”.²²

Lockdown has reinforced gender inequality, compelling women to combine roles as educators (with schools closed), carers, housewives and sometimes distance workers. A French feminist campaigner said, “There’s a form of regression for mothers during the lockdown. They are now having to do a triple day. We already know women’s work is double (compared to men’s) because they have to do their jobs, housework and parenting ... to that they have had to add home schooling.”²³

15 Johns Hopkins Medicine (26 May 2020) Beware of False Negatives in Diagnostic Testing of COVID-19, see <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/newsroom/news-releases/COVID-19-story-tip-beware-of-false-negatives-in-diagnostic-testing-of-COVID-19>

16 EuroMOMO Bulletins, see <https://www.euromomo.eu/bulletins/2020-22/>

17 The Economist (16 April 2020, updated 13 June) Tracking COVID-19 excess deaths across countries, see <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/07/15/tracking-covid-19-excess-deaths-across-countries>

18 ECDC (20 June 2020) Europe: 187 231 deaths; the five countries reporting most deaths are United Kingdom (42 461), Italy (34 561), France (29 617), Spain (28 315) and Belgium (9 695), see <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>

19 EIGE (2020) Frontline Workers, see <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/frontline-workers>

20 Carers UK (April 2020) Caring behind closed doors – Forgotten families in the Coronavirus outbreak, see https://www.carersuk.org/images/News_and_campaigns/Behind_Closed_Doors_2020/Caring_behind_closed_doors_April20_pages_web_final.pdf

21 Eurostat. (2017) Characteristics of jobs in tourism industries, see https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism_industries_-_employment#Characteristics_of_jobs_in_tourism_industries

22 Eurofound (3 June 2020) COVID-19 fallout takes a higher toll on women, economically and domestically, see: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/COVID-19-fallout-takes-a-higher-toll-on-women-economically-and-domestically>

23 The Guardian (29 May 2020) We are losers in this crisis: research finds lockdowns reinforcing gender inequality. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/29/we-are-losers-in-this-crisis-research-finds-lockdowns-reinforcing-gender-inequality>

Lockdown has also provoked a sharp spike in domestic violence, described by UN women as a shadow pandemic. “Confinement ... is increasing isolation for women with violent partners, separating them from the people and resources that can best help them as health systems are stretching to breaking point, domestic violence shelters are also reaching capacity, a service deficit made worse when centres are repurposed for additional COVID-response. Even before COVID-19, domestic violence was already one of the greatest human rights violations. In the previous 12 months, 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) across the world have been subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner.”²⁴ Where studies exist those over 49 also report greater levels of violence, with domestic abuse experienced by the over 60s a growing concern.²⁵

Young people

Young people, while less affected by the actual disease itself, are likely to be strongly affected by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19. Before the crisis, the unemployment rate among young people (15-24 years) across the EU 27 was already at 15% (while for the general population it was 6.7%)²⁶. These numbers are likely to rise sharply (youth unemployment in June 2020 was at 15.7%). COVID-19, in addition to interrupting and disrupting education for all young people, especially for those due to sit exams this year, has had a disproportionate impact on employment, with the risk that “they will be scarred throughout their working lives – leading to the emergence of a ‘lockdown generation’.”²⁷ Young people are also more likely to be employed in the informal sector, and are therefore more vulnerable to economic crises and shocks, revealing a close link between SDG 10 and SDG 8 on decent work.²⁸

Older people

Some press reports indicate that elderly persons living with disabilities, who normally rely on domiciliary care services to meet their personal or domestic needs, may have opted to refuse care because of fears about infection or have been unable to access care because carers are ill or are themselves vulnerable, with the consequence that in some situations, across the EU, older people may have been left behind without adequate support or treatment where carers feared infections. Older people have also faced disruptions to routine health services, in obtaining medicine, or are already impacted by pre-existing health conditions, this has been made particularly difficult for older people living alone, 19.8 million of which are women who form the largest portion of women living alone overall.²⁹

Persons with disabilities

There are about 1 billion persons with disabilities worldwide, accounting for one third of all people over 60. They are at greatest risk of death if they contract the virus,³⁰ with excessive risks to infection, and serious barriers to healthcare and public health measures. Persons with disabilities face similar risks to care home residents if they are living in special institutions. In Europe, the estimated 1 million persons with disabilities who live segregated in residential institutions are now more vulnerable than ever, facing increased risk of infection by COVID-19, physical and psychological abuse due to isolation, neglect and even abandonment.

The dangers that persons in institutions face include:

- Lack of personal protective equipment for persons with disabilities and staff of institutions leads to higher risk of infection for both staff and residents. The risk is compounded due to the communal life typical of institutions;

²⁴ UN Women. 6 April 2020. Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic. Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

²⁵ Reliefweb. 15 06 20. Neglect and abuse of older people around the world intensified by COVID-19. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/neglect-and-abuse-older-people-around-world-intensified-COVID-19>

²⁶ Eurostat. For young people, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Youth_unemployment_rates_and_ratios_2019_persons_aged_15-24_\(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Youth_unemployment_rates_and_ratios_2019_persons_aged_15-24_(%25).png) For general population, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00203/default/table?lang=en> Please note, there are large variations between different EU Member States.

²⁷ ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_745963.pdf

²⁸ Ibid. 32.9% of 15-24 year old workers are informal employment compared with 12% of all workers. (ILO Europe and Central Asia region)

²⁹ European Parliament. Elderly women living alone: an update of their living conditions. 2015. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/519219/IPOL_STU%282015%29519219_EN.pdf

³⁰ Kuper H, Banks LM, Bright T et al. Disability-inclusive COVID-19 response: What it is, why it is important and what we can learn from the United Kingdom's response [version 1; peer review: 2 approved]. Wellcome Open Res 2020, 5:79 (<https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.15833.1>)

- Lack of care and residents left unattended due to staff shortage – staff cannot work as they are infected or under quarantine, or do not work because of fear of becoming infected;
- Forced medication and forced restraint measures under the pretence of preventive measures;
- Forced confinement leading to lack of contact with the outside world – family, friends and others.

If persons with disabilities require treatment for COVID-19 they may also face the possibility of medical bias, stemming from views about their quality of life and social value. These can be reflected in triage guidelines for allocation of scarce resources with exclusion criteria based on certain types of impairment or medical condition. Dangerous narratives have emerged that persons with disabilities cannot contribute to the response to COVID-19, that their lives are not considered as worth saving, and that they are a “necessary sacrifice” to be left behind in the recovery period. Persons with disabilities and their families have faced pressure within the health system to renounce resuscitation measures.³¹ Public health information at the European and national level has also not been accessible to persons with disabilities. The lack of accessibility of public health announcements, which lack captioning, sign interpretation and easy to understand format, has put the lives of many persons with disabilities at risk. It is clear that this pandemic is not only a public health emergency, but an economic, social and human rights crisis which threatens progress towards inclusive, sustainable growth and the achievement of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Refugees

Many organisations have highlighted the vulnerability of refugees and displaced persons to COVID-19, a threat to achieving target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. Those held in already overcrowded and not fit-for-purpose camps and

reception centres have been unable to self-isolate or access hand-washing facilities, while asylum seeking women and girls have had limited access to specialised medical services, including access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Social distancing and hygiene measures are nearly impossible to follow in overcrowded refugee camps, both within and outside the EU. In a refugee centre in Baden-Württemberg, where there were 259 COVID-19 cases in April, the local refugee council commented, “The rise in infection numbers... shows that the high risk of infection continues to be a serious threat as long as people have to live in such camps where they have to share bathrooms, toilets and canteens with many others.”³² The informal jobs that many refugees need to sustain themselves are also threatened by the pandemic. It has been reported that the most acute anxiety of Syrian refugees subject to lockdown in Lebanon is hunger and access to medical services. They can no longer work and thus not afford food.³³ They face difficulties in visiting clinics for urgent treatment.³⁴ In the Greek refugee camps, such as Moria on Lesbos and Vial on Chios, so far no COVID-19 related death has been reported. However, the lockdowns of the camps lasted longer than for the rest of the country until 2 August which severely impacted the well-being of people inside the camps. After a first COVID-19 case was detected in Moria in early September, a two-week quarantine was imposed. The camp will remain completely sealed and only accessible for security personnel.³⁵ Refugees in Greece feel discriminated against by stringent lockdown measures while Greece has long opened up to tourists.³⁶

Ethnic minorities and migrants

Ethnic minorities and migrants across the EU are more likely to be poorer, to live in overcrowded accommodation and to be in insecure jobs – e.g. as delivery drivers, in factories and warehouses, where physical distancing is challenging – which puts them at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. They are also more likely to have underlying health conditions which put them at greater risk of dying when they do fall ill with COVID-19.

31 UN OHCHR (2020) COVID-19 and the rights of persons with disabilities, see

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

32 InfoMigrants (17 April 2020) Hundreds of corona cases between two migrant facilities in Germany, see

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/24158/hundreds-of-corona-cases-between-two-migrant-facilities-in-germany>

33 France24 (20 June 2020) Syrian refugees in Lebanon: ‘After corona, there’s no food anymore, see

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200620-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-after-corona-there-s-no-food-anymore>

34 The New Humanitarian (21 April 2020) How COVID-19 is limiting healthcare access for refugees in Lebanon.

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2020/04/21/Lebanon-coronavirus-refugee-healthcare>

35 Al-Jazeera (2 September 2020) Moria refugee camp under quarantine after Coronavirus case, see

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/moria-refugee-camp-quarantine-coronavirus-case-200902120237795.html>

36 The Guardian (27 May 2020) Greece ready to welcome tourists as refugees stay locked down in Lesbos, see

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/27/greece-ready-to-welcome-tourists-as-refugees-stay-locked-down-in-lesbos-coronavirus>

For example in the UK, the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that “the death rate for people of black African descent was 3.5 times higher than for white British people, while for those of black Caribbean and Pakistani descent, death rates were 1.7 times and 2.7 times higher, respectively.”³⁷ These disparities are still subject to research, which must take account of the socio-economic inequalities affecting these communities. In the UK African and Caribbean populations and people of South Asian heritage are more likely to have front-line jobs, to live in overcrowded accommodation and to have poor diets³⁸ and also to suffer from diabetes and hypertension.³⁹ Black and minority ethnic medical staff also report that they had greater difficulty in obtaining good personal protective equipment than white colleagues.⁴⁰

In metropolitan Paris, the department of Seine-St Denis is home to many non-European immigrants (23% of the local population⁴¹) and has some of the worst social conditions in France. Excess mortality rates in Seine-Saint-Denis are dramatic: almost 130% overall⁴² (compared with a national excess death rate of 26%⁴³ and for people over 65 years of age - 44.6%.⁴⁴ Insecure employment, insufficient medical facilities, comorbidities and over-crowding are key features of social and health inequalities. Risk is increased by travel to and from work: just over half of residents have to travel outside their department to their place of work - twice the average proportion for metropolitan Paris as a whole.

Roma communities across the EU face difficulties in implementing key measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as maintaining physical distances, self-quarantine and

regular handwashing: 30% live in households with no tap water and up to 80% in some countries live in overcrowded housing.⁴⁵ The failure to realise SDG 6, which promises access to water and sanitation for all, is putting Roma families at immense risks during the pandemic. Other sources report that “soldiers, police personnel, and drones have been more present in Roma communities in Bulgaria and Slovakia than have nurses, doctors, and medical supplies” and “distance learning measures leave more than half of Roma children out of school and will likely lead to an increase in the already high dropout rates among Roma students.”⁴⁶ Roma communities across the EU have been made scapegoats for the propagation of the virus and have faced hate speech and threats. Looking at the socio-economic impact, a survey of 11,000 Roma in Spain showed that the closure of street markets, and the impossibility of collecting scrap metal, selling fruit and other informal jobs have left many families facing a situation of acute emergency. One third of Roma in paid employment lost their jobs, another third was temporarily laid off and 12% saw their working hours reduced.⁴⁷

Informal workers, freelancers, artists

Governments across Europe and elsewhere are providing bailouts to businesses and support for furloughed workers. While the detail of support schemes and safety nets varied across Europe⁴⁸, well-established businesses and employees and workers with formal contracts did best out of these measures. The distance between poor, informal sector workers without financial support and middle-class employees who can work at home on a laptop has never been greater. The

37 Tony Kirby (8 May 2020), Evidence mounts on the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities, The Lancet, see

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30228-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30228-9/fulltext)

38 Full Fact (30 June 2020) What do we know about COVID-19 inequalities among people from minority ethnic groups?

<https://fullfact.org/health/Covid-19-inequalities-minority-ethnicities/>

39 See British Heart Foundation at <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/risk-factors/ethnicity>

40 British Medical Association (BMA) (2020) Fighting the odds – BAME doctors at greater risk from COVID-19.

<https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/fighting-the-odds-bame-doctors-at-greater-risk-from-covid-19>

41 Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (2020) Étrangers - Immigrés en Département de la Seine-Saint-Denis (93), see

<https://insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3569308?sommaire=3569330&geo=D93>

In France it is prohibited to collect data on ethnicity, so the figure for immigrants is an approximation and an underestimate because it does not include minority ethnic people who are French citizens (non-immigrés).

42 Le Monde (17 May 2020) Coronavirus : une surmortalité très élevée en Seine-Saint-Denis, see

https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/05/17/coronavirus-une-surmortalite-tres-elevee-en-seine-saint-denis_6039910_3224.html

43 France24 (29 May 2020) Hausse de la mortalité en France pendant la crise du COVID-19, see

<https://www.france24.com/fr/20200529-hausse-de-la-mortalite-C3%A9-en-france-pendant-la-crise-du-covid-19>

44 Le Monde. 17 May 2020. Coronavirus : une surmortalité très élevée en Seine-Saint-Denis

45 FRA (7 April 2020) Persistent Roma inequality increases COVID-19 risk, human rights heads say,

see <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2020/persistent-roma-inequality-increases-covid-19-risk-human-rights-heads-say>

46 Reliefweb (29 April 2020) Roma in the COVID-19 crisis: An early warning from six EU Member States, see

<https://reliefweb.int/report/italy/roma-covid-19-crisis-early-warning-six-eu-member-states>

47 EU Observer (22 June 2020) COVID-19's impact on Spanish Roma, see <https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148675>

48 OECD (20 May 2020) Supporting livelihoods during the COVID-19 crisis: closing the gaps in safety nets, see

<http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-livelihoods-during-the-covid-19-crisis-closing-the-gaps-in-safety-nets-17cbb92d/>

self-employed, owners of and workers in small businesses, informal workers or those with fluctuating incomes did less well and have regularly been left behind by support schemes. The EU's 30 million informal sector workers⁴⁹ remained beyond the scope of most income-support schemes.⁵⁰ Many will have faced the choice of continuing to work during lockdown at risk to themselves and others or going hungry.

Across Europe, with theatres, bars and concert halls closed, cultural workers and artists are struggling. Like informal sector workers, many are freelancers who fall outside government support schemes. The future of many of the venues which provide artists with their performance spaces is also in jeopardy. The Arts, a major strand in the spiritual lifeblood of European nations, is a key economic sector: there are 8.7 million people in cultural employment⁵¹ while over a million cultural enterprises contribute more to the EU economy than the motor trade sector.⁵²

Exploited labour in global supply chains

The COVID-19 crisis exposed the vulnerability of companies and workers around the world who depend on the consumer economies of Europe and North America. In response to lockdowns, clothing chains have abruptly cancelled orders from Bangladesh and other countries even when they were in production, threatening the viability of manufacturing companies and the livelihoods of their workers. The garment industry is the backbone of the economy of Bangladesh, with 4,500 factories employing more than 4 million people, exporting goods worth USD \$34 billion a year and providing 83% of Bangladesh's export earnings. The industry has already lost \$3.5 billion in orders.⁵³ For this reason in early April the Bangladeshi government announced a USD \$8 billion stimulus

package of support for the garment sector which mandated factories to continue to pay their workers.⁵⁴ This support, however, will not last more than a few weeks. At the end of March, before this package was announced, it was reported that over a million Bangladeshi garment workers had been fired or furloughed.⁵⁵ Government support will not extend to the millions of Bangladeshis who work in the informal sector. The response to COVID-19 of large clothing chains in Europe and North America has exposed the vulnerability of the Bangladesh economy, and highlights the importance of the implementation of SDG 8 (decent work), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production) and SDG 17 (global partnership).

Back to business as usual – or building back better?

In April 2020, the United Nations published a comprehensive road map for a global response to COVID-19, listing the most at risk populations, and five priority streams of work for recovery. The report emphasises the importance of essential health services, social protection, and basic services, protecting formal and informal sector employment, fiscal responses focusing on vulnerability and multilateralism and investment in community led responses connected by strong environmental sustainability and gender equality imperative to build back better.⁵⁶

The EU focused its short-term response on limiting the spread of the virus, the provision of medical equipment, promoting research for treatments and vaccines and supporting jobs, businesses, and the economy. The EU recovery plan, Next Generation EU (NGEU), which was agreed at the end of May and was intended "to harness all the resources in a spirit of unity and solidarity,"⁵⁷ provides €750 billion to support

⁴⁹ ILO (November 2019) Calculation of total numbers of informal sector workers based on total estimated employed population 15+ for 2020, available at https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer52/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EMP_2EMP_SEX_AGE_NB_A; and ILO estimates of informal employment in ILO: Women and Men in the Informal Sector A Statistical Picture, available at https://ilo.userservices.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V2/1252879760002676

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Eurostat (2018) Culture Statistics – Cultural employment. Culture provides 3.8% of employment, see https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Culture_statistics_-_cultural_employment

⁵² European Parliament (2020) EU support for artists and the cultural and creative sector during the coronavirus crisis. In 2016 culture contributed more to the economy than accounted for 2.7% of the value added (€192 billion) of the non-financial business sector, slightly more than the motor trade sector. These are EU28 figures, see [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649414/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649414_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649414/EPRS_BRI(2020)649414_EN.pdf) In 2017 (EU27) 1.1 million cultural enterprises contributed €145 billion of value added, see https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Culture_statistics_-_cultural_enterprises&oldid=449346

⁵³ The Guardian (11 May 2020) Bangladesh garment factories reopen despite coronavirus threat to workers, see <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/11/bangladesh-garment-factories-reopen-despite-coronavirus-threat-to-workers>

⁵⁴ BBC News (29 April 2020) Coronavirus: Two million Bangladesh jobs 'at risk' as clothes orders dry up, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-52417822>.

⁵⁵ Penn State Center for Global Workers' Rights (27 March 2020) Abandoned? The Impact of COVID-19 on Workers and Businesses at the Bottom of Global Garment Supply Chains., see <http://www.workersrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Abandoned-Penn-State-WRC-Report-March-27-2020.pdf>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43384/roadmap-for-recovery-final-21-04-2020.pdf>

Member States and ailing economies as well as research, humanitarian aid and international cooperation.

The EU's long-term budget of €1.074 trillion (Multiannual Financial Framework, 2021-2027) was agreed by the European Council on 21st July. Together with the NGEU it is hoped that it will not only help countries overcome the effects of the COVID-19 crisis but lay the foundations of a more resilient, climate friendly and socially equitable future. As negotiations on the MFF and NGEU continue, with the European Parliament withholding its consent on the MFF on 23rd July, it is critical EU decision-makers adopt a recovery plan and budget that puts the well-being of all and the planet at the centre. There are some positives: for example, the target on climate action expenditure in the EU budget has been increased to 30% from the 25% proposed by the European Commission, with climate-related spending to be consistent with the EU's 2030 climate targets and goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050.

In terms of the SDGs, civil society organisations and others have questioned whether the conditions attached to spending by Member States of funds provided by the NGEU and the budget are sufficiently robust to tackle the growing inequalities within and beyond the EU, and particularly to require Member States to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law. Civil society considers that the recovery plan lacks ambition in addressing the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic and the looming food crisis. Very few conditions for a sustainable recovery are in place to support businesses and prevent bankruptcies, and Next Generation Europe comes with very few strings attached to ensure that all recovery measures are based on sustainable development principles.⁵⁸ Gender mainstreaming provisions are also absent in NGEU, given the lack of targeted measures to address the increased numbers of cases of violence against women and girls during COVID-19, and the lack of investments towards the care sector in which women form the majority of workers. Gender budgeting must be implemented across NGEU and the MFF 2021-2027 to ensure all funds and programmes benefit all rather than unintentionally widen gender inequality gaps.

Development NGOs are critical of the EU's weakened international solidarity at a time when developing countries are struggling with the COVID-19 crisis and facing ever more severe consequences of climate change.⁵⁹ The budget negotiations cut development funding by 10.4% to €70.8

billion within a largely static external spending budget with Member States rejecting the Commission's proposal of an additional €10.5 billion for development funding and €5 billion for humanitarian aid as part of the May pandemic recovery package. Climate and environmental funding is also likely to suffer although the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of preserving nature and forests in particular to curb the spread of zoonoses.

European civil society argues that all recovery measures need to be based on sustainable development principles, in particular leave no one behind, the realisation of human rights, people's empowerment and participation in decision-making, and ambitious environmental protection and climate justice.

SDG Watch Europe has put forward 10 key demands for the EU to build back better while ensuring the implementation of the SDGs by 2030:

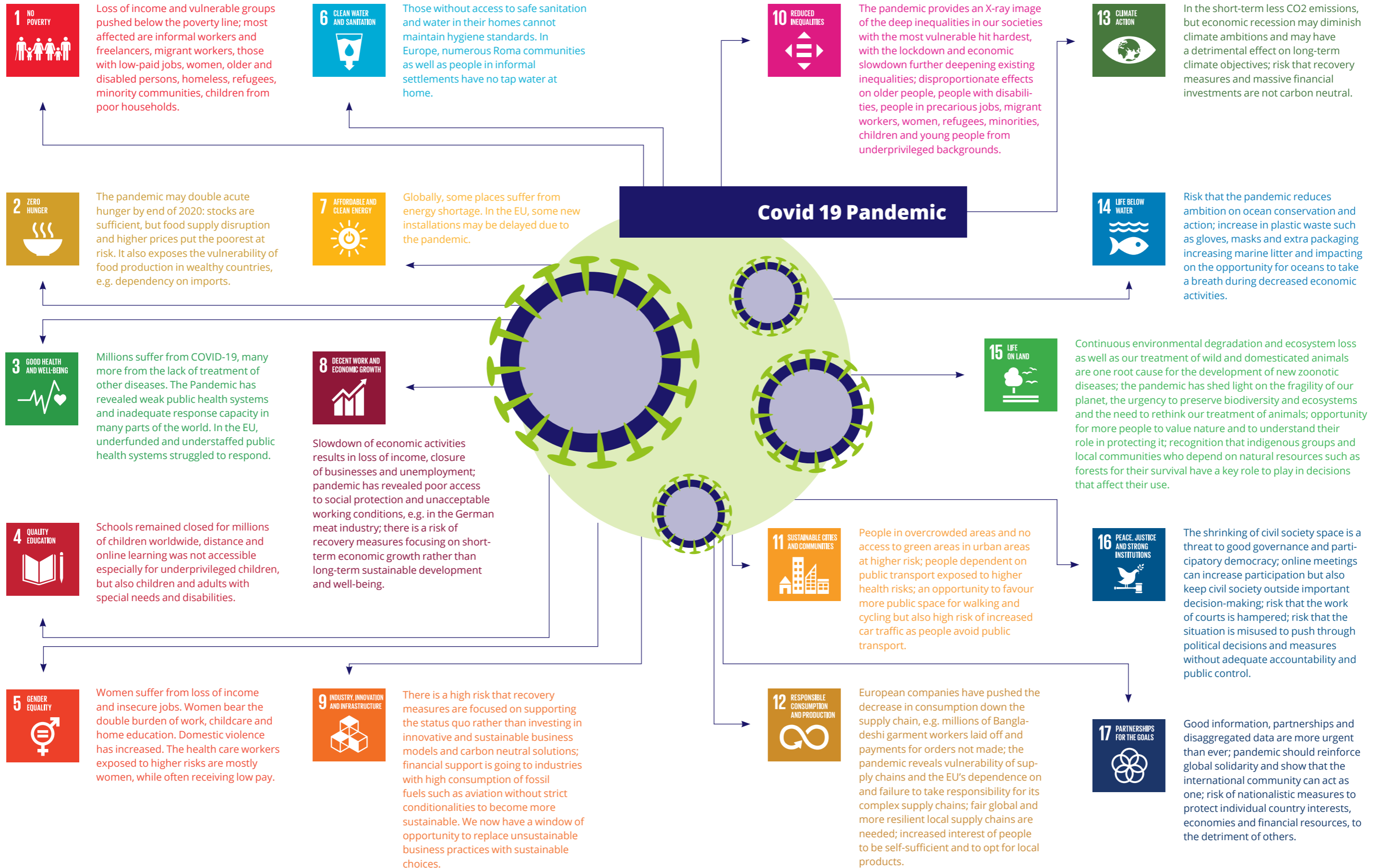
- ✓ Let this be a Wake-up Call: Our System is the Problem - We need a paradigm shift
- ✓ Make the SDGs and the Paris Agreement the Guidelines to get out of the Crisis
- ✓ Strengthen the Social Protection System and make it Accessible for All
- ✓ Lead the Way to a Socially and Ecologically Sustainable Economic System with Revised, Green Budgets
- ✓ Link Economic Recovery to Clear Conditions and Say No to Bailouts for Polluters and No to Tax Havens
- ✓ Implement Immediate Debt Cancellation and Stop any Unjust Austerity Measures
- ✓ Fight all other Crises too
- ✓ Protect our Democracies, Human and Civic Rights
- ✓ Ensure Transparency of Political Decisions on COVID-19 and Beyond, as well as Full Inclusion and participation of Civil Society
- ✓ Show Transformative Global Action against Poverty and Hunger

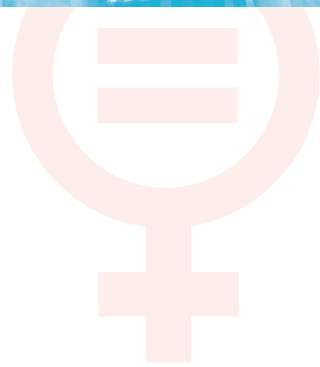
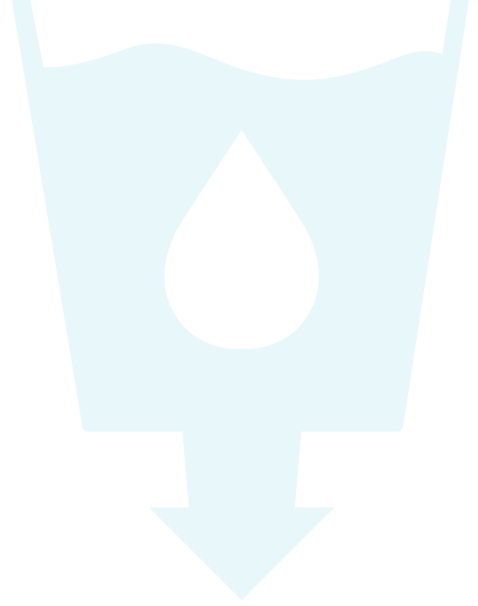
Read SDG Watch Europe's full statement on its 10 demands [here](#)

⁵⁸ See <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/eu-decides-no-green-strings-attached-on-cash-to-virus-hit-firms/>

⁵⁹ Vince Chadwick (22 July 2020) Foreign aid neglected in historic EU budget deal, see <https://www.devex.com/news/foreign-aid-neglected-in-historic-eu-budget-deal-97747>

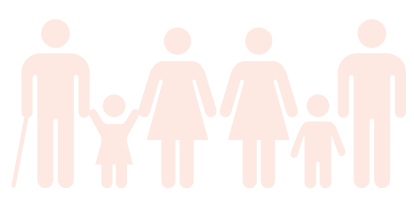
Impacts of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in the EU and globally



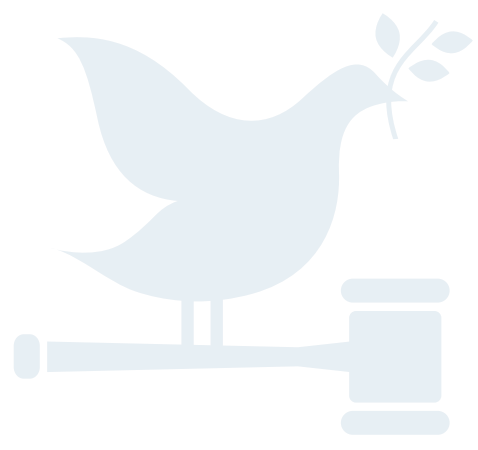




**Status 2020,
Vision 2030:**



**SDG challenges
and solutions
for the EU**





End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Poverty is a challenge for wealthy Europe

The good news is that the EU has some of the lowest poverty rates worldwide. In all Member States, many can benefit from a level of material wealth that allows them to live well. The challenge is that, despite wealth and prosperity, different dimensions of poverty are still a reality in the EU today – some are increasing, while in others there is no significant change. The progress made in poverty reduction in recent years is now under threat as COVID-19 and its aftermath put living standards, incomes, and millions of jobs at risk, hitting the most vulnerable hardest. With the European Social Fund (ESF) and other instruments, the EU seeks to address poverty and social inclusion. However, in recent funding periods the involvement of civil society organisations and the most vulnerable groups has been limited, and the allocation of resources to Member States has been based primarily on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), even though this does not adequately capture social issues or target those who most need support. The “Social Scoreboard” used by the European Commission for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights overlooks key challenges of poverty and social inclusion such as in-work poverty or housing affordability.¹

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers’ full attention:

- More than 20% of the EU’s population are at risk of poverty and social exclusion – a large share for a wealthy region. While poverty rates have decreased in the EU’s poorest regions, more than 30% of people in Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy and Greece continue to live at risk of poverty. In nearly half of the EU Member States children are the age group with the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat).
- In recent years, in-work poverty has been increasing in the EU and currently over 9% of people in work are counted as experiencing in-work poverty. In-work poverty even affects Member States with very strong economies, such as Germany, which are struggling with an increasing or stagnating number of people who work but whose salaries or wages are too low to provide for a decent life (Eurostat).
- Close to 14% of all people in the EU live in poor housing. 2% live without adequate sanitation and access to water (Eurostat); in other words, several million people live without sanitation and water in their homes. More than half of the EU’s Roma population lives without adequate sanitation or access to water in their homes.²
- An estimated 700,000 people were homeless in the EU in 2019, with numbers rising across the Union. The only exception is Finland, which reported a decrease of 45% due to a progressive and long-term policy addressing homelessness. Latvia has seen an increase of 389% in homelessness between 2009 and 2017, and the numbers of homeless in Ireland increased by 203% between 2014 and 2018. Housing deprivation is at the heart of poverty and social exclusion, and closely linked to unemployment.³ Eurostat’s SDG monitoring does not use any indicator on homelessness despite it being one of the most extreme forms of poverty in the EU.

¹ Social Platform [For ESF project outcomes with a real impact for people’s lives.](#)

² ERRC [Europe must ensure marginalised communities have access to water during pandemic.](#)

³ European Parliament [Urgent Action Need to Address Homelessness in Europe.](#)



Left behind: lack of social protection makes domestic workers vulnerable

Marta Lucía Arboleda's story



SPAIN

Marta had been working as a live-in domestic worker for more than seven years when her visa expired. Spanish immigration law requires applicants to wait for three years before they can obtain a work permit, *"but you have to earn a living while you are waiting, so you have to accept domestic work. This is not difficult because private householders don't make a fuss if your paperwork's not in order. But they use your insecurity to blackmail you, threatening to confiscate your passport or have you deported, saying 'Just be thankful that we have given you a job at all', and making you work long hours for low wages."*

On her second job as a domestic help, with shorter hours and time off at weekends, Marta started going to Sedoac ('Active Domestic Service'), an association that fights for the rights of domestic workers.

Marta explains that many workers suffer from depression *"because they care for people with Alzheimer's without being properly trained. They are not nurses. They earn only €600-700 a month. They don't get enough sleep but still have to be on their feet the next day to look after them, make sure that they don't get injured or leave the house. We are campaigning for the abolition of live-in domestic jobs, because really, they're three-person jobs."*



9.2%

OF EMPLOYED PERSONS
AGED ABOVE 18 IN THE EU
ARE AT RISK OF **POVERTY**
DESPITE **HAVING A JOB**



Source: Eurostat

Even when the employer complies with all the legal requirements and pays generously, *"it's still a live-in job. It's not a life – you have nothing to talk about with your friends except your employer, the house, the dog, the kids. You're there 24/7."* Many domestic workers experience sexual abuse – something that does not receive the attention it deserves."

Domestic workers want *"the Government to acknowledge that their care work is important and as valued as any other work. Domestic service, however, is not recognised by the Spanish social security system, which means that, as domestic workers, we can't claim unemployment benefits. Our employers can fire us without notice or justification. We don't have labour inspections to check our working and living conditions. Retirement is not an option for us. Many colleagues realise that after five or ten years of work, they should have worked double their hours – obviously an impossibility – because their employers' contributions aren't enough to provide decent retirement benefits."*

Marta Lucía Arboleda's story has been facilitated by Futuro en Común



For a strong social Europe curbing poverty and providing opportunities for everyone to thrive

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

A strong social Europe – The European Social Model should provide full and fair protection to all citizens, while alleviating poverty and providing opportunities for everyone to thrive. Decent incomes should narrow the gap between the wealthy and disadvantaged and ensure quality living. Everyone should benefit from decent work standards, equality, improved well-being and decreased health disparities within and between countries and across generations. Social inclusion and protection, decent work, gender equality, public health and health care, access to affordable and quality housing, environmental justice, quality education and equal access to culture, must be the main principles driving national and European political agendas.

38

Read more about SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

Social Platform

[For ESF project outcomes with a real impact for people's lives](#)

EAPN

[Assessment of the 2020 Country-Specific Recommendations](#)

EAPN

[Poverty Explainer on what is poverty and how to combat it?](#)

EAPN

[Putting Social Rights and Poverty Reduction at the heart of EU's COVID-19 Response](#)

FEANTSA

[5th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe](#)

Eurochild

[Towards no Child Poverty in Europe in 2020](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ provide information and detail on the number of homeless people;
- ✓ provide and analyse disaggregated data, for instance, on gender, sex, age, groups, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and migrants with regards to poverty risks, social exclusion and material deprivation.



Economic development in poor rural communities with a focus on child well-being



BURUNDI & OTHER COUNTRIES

Economic development can make a huge difference to children's well-being, but there is no guarantee that children will benefit from it. This is the reason why Help a Child set up EPIC (Economic Programme with Impact on Children)

EPIC combines best practices and learning from social resilience, economic development and child development. The programme puts the well-being of children and youth at its centre, recognising that economic development is not an objective in itself, but a pathway to sustainable well-being for the next generation. EPIC believes that a sustainable, healthy economy has to have solid social foundations and its programmes therefore address both economic and social issues.

EPIC takes time to strengthen the social capacity of the community as a prior step to economic development, delivering this part of its work at community and household level. At the community level, EPIC builds and strengthens community structures to promote socio-economic resilience (SDG 11), working with self-help groups (SDG 11) and overarching Cluster Level Associations which advocate for common interests, such as quality education (SDG 4) and access to land, capital, and services. Young people learn life skills and

farming and farm management (SDG 8). In collaboration with local partners, EPIC facilitates Early Childhood Education and parenting groups to support families and give young children a promising start (SDG 17).

At household level, family members are invited to develop a shared vision and build a sustainable agricultural livelihood. EPIC uses PIP (Plan Intégré du Paysan), a proven integrated farm planning approach from Wageningen University. The combination of PIP with child-centred community empowerment produces quick and positive outcomes, creating hope and ownership and improving yields of nutritious and responsibly produced food for all family members, including children (SDGs 2, 3, 12). In Kirundo, Burundi, for example, the proportion of participating households experiencing extreme hunger was reduced from 71% to 33%. In addition, within seven years, households are ready to participate in sustainable value chains, aiding economic development that benefits children and youth and reduces inequalities (SDGs 1, 10).

We believe that further implementation of EPIC would enable the European Union and Member States to progress towards leaving no one behind.

*This story has been provided by
Help a Child*





End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The EU food system is not sustainable, neither environmentally nor socially

While many people in the EU enjoy a high level of food security and good nutrition, an estimated 20% of our food is wasted, and 33 million people cannot afford a high-quality meal every second day.¹ Unhealthy diets lead to an increasing number of people who are obese and suffer from chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension and heart problems. Much of our food is produced by unsustainable intensive agriculture or is imported from third countries together with much of the grain feeding our livestock. Intensive farming methods inside and outside the EU often destroy habitats, are a main driver for biodiversity loss and require high inputs of chemical fertiliser, pesticides and antibiotics. All of this results in pollution and significant greenhouse gas emissions. Regular animal welfare scandals – as well as scandals around labour rights in agriculture and food processing – shake the sector. Small-scale farmers and family farms struggle to earn a decent income for their hard work. The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) continues to reward large-scale and intensive farming. It accounts for around one third of the EU's total budget but has been unable to ensure decent prices for producers and to avoid biodiversity loss, soil erosion, greenhouse gas emissions and groundwater pollution.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- According to Eurostat more than half of the EU's population, in some Member States more than 60%, suffers from obesity. Poor diet and obesity contribute to two main killers in the region: cardiovascular disease and cancer.
- In the EU, around 20% of all food produced is wasted. 70% of food waste in the EU occurs at retail, food service and consumer level. Households generate more than half of that food waste.²
- As stressed by the EEA, meat and dairy products have high environmental impacts primarily related to their production, including the production of feed. A study conducted by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) found that meat and dairy contributed 24% of the environmental impacts of consumption in the EU.³ Moves to reduce the consumption of meat and dairy towards more sustainable sources of protein have, as yet, received no support from policymakers in the EU despite proof of the positive environmental impact.
- Agricultural intensification is one of the main reasons for the decline of plants and animals in Europe. Half of our farmland birds have disappeared since the 1980s.⁴
- Agriculture is the main source of nitrate in ground water. Excess fertiliser percolates through the soil and water pollution can occur decades later. While the Nitrates Directive seeks to bring nitrogen pollution below 50 mg/l, nitrate concentrations in many parts of the region are above recommended levels recommended (Eurostat). According to the EC's latest report (dating 2002), 20% of EU monitoring stations showed concentrations higher than allowed, and 40% were higher than the guide value of the Drinking Water Directive (25mg/l).⁵
- Agriculture is one of the five main sources of all greenhouse gas emissions across the EU, accounting for 10%. 53% of anthropogenic methane and 94% of ammonia emissions in the EU stem from agriculture.
- Organic farming in the EU accounts for only about 8% of agricultural land use with a rather slow increase of around half a percentage point per year.
- The number of small-scale and family-run farms in the EU has declined sharply: according to the Eurostat Farm Structure Survey, the number fell from 15 to 10.5 million between 2005 to 2016. Low prices for hard work undermine the livelihoods of rural communities.

1 European Commission [Food Waste](#).

2 European Commission [Stop Food Waste](#).

3 JRC [Environmental Improvement Potentials of Meat and Dairy Products](#).

4 BirdLife International [300 million farmland birds lost since 1980 - How many more must we lose before changing course on the CAP?](#)

5 EEA [Percentage of sampling sites in groundwater bodies where annual average concentrations exceed 50 mg/l nitrate](#).



Sustainable food production? Respect the environment, involve your customers – and value women farmers' contribution Heleen Lansink-Marissen's story



THE NETHERLANDS

My name is Heleen Lansink-Marissen. I did not grow up in the countryside but moved when I married a farmer. Certain things surprised me as an outsider. There was little critical discussion among farmers or with the world beyond. In fact, there was a blame game with society accusing farmers of causing climate change and farmers blaming consumers for their high energy lifestyles. My response, after some years on the farm, was to avoid the blame game and to opt instead for dialogue – which in fact had already begun with primary schools, sports clubs, and bicycle tourists visiting our farm.

There was genuine dialogue: people were impressed by the choices we made and we responded to our visitors. We started milk vending at home and set up a website, demelk-tapperij.nl, and now have a lot more contact with customers.

Women farmers are an under-valued resource. Of 800 women farmers at a recent For Farmers event, almost all owned 50% of their farms and participated equally in business decisions. But few attend agricultural gatherings and visiting advisers speak only to their husbands.

It is women with their contacts with the outside world, at the school gate and in shops who bring in new ideas. For example, on our farm we treat our manure with micro-or-



FROM **2005 TO 2016** THE NUMBER OF FARMS IN THE EU WENT DOWN FROM **15 TO 10,5 MILLION**. WE **LOST 4,5 MILLION FARMS** IN JUST **10 YEARS**



Source: Eurostat

ganisms from an organic company. I learned that 80% of new customers are introduced by farmers' wives: first they go to buy organic cleaning products and then start asking questions about fertilisers. This is a perfect example of the power of change brought about by women.

The corona crisis has been an opportunity. People have more time for each other. Many more people have come to the farm to tap milk and see the importance of supporting local businesses. We have worked with the hashtag #supportyourlocalsNL. Hopefully, more people will opt for local, sustainable products, even if they cost a bit more.

But there is tension. Farmers feel attacked by the environmental movement – they need help! Help them become more sustainable by rewarding good behaviour, favouring those who provide clean water, biodiversity, animal welfare and care for our soil. Farmers too want to contribute because they, the environmental movement and consumers ultimately have the same goal: food safety and a sustainable food chain.

Heleen Lansink-Marissen's story has been facilitated by Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF)



For a food system that serves nature protection, provides healthy food, offers fair prices to farmers, prevents wastage and safeguards food sovereignty globally

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Sustainable and healthy food systems – A deep reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is imperative to produce healthier food and give fair prices for the European small scale and organic farmers. This should mean more environmental and nature protection, increased food sovereignty, regional farmers' markets, healthier food systems, less food waste and the halting of dumping in the Global South. The EU should prioritise the transition towards organic, small scale agriculture, and reforestation as key measures for fighting climate change.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

Make Europe Sustainable for all + Forum for Environment and Development [The Common Agricultural Policy and the SDGs](#)

Make Europe Sustainable for all + IFOAM Organics International [#IGrowYourFood – voices from European farmers](#)

EEB, Birdlife, WWF, Greenpeace [Last Chance CAP](#)

EEB + Birdlife International [Agriculture and Climate Change](#)

EEB, Birdlife, German Watch, CEE web for biodiversity, FNE, IIDMA + Birdwatch Ireland [Recommendations on the future CAP and Climate Policies](#)

WWF and WRAP [Halving Food Loss and Waste in the EU by 2030: the major steps needed to accelerate progress](#)

NGO coalition [Less and better meat, dairy and eggs in Farm to Fork Strategy](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ include a better understanding of poor diets and related health issues beyond the obesity rate;
- ✓ measure meat or meat & dairy consumption per capita;
- ✓ track food waste across the entire supply chain;
- ✓ establish transparency of the footprint of animal feed imported from third countries;
- ✓ track the quantities of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and antibiotics used in agriculture;
- ✓ monitor GHG (particularly nitrous oxide and methane) emissions from agriculture;
- ✓ follow the trend of small-scale and family farms closing down.



Ending the Gangmaster system in Italian agriculture: new law to curb exploitation



📍 ITALY

The term “Caporalato” (Gangmaster System) describes the illicit system of recruiting and exploiting labour through illegal intermediaries (“caporali”). The exploitation of workers by the “caporali” is widespread throughout Italy. Of the 1 million agricultural workers in Italy about 130,000 live in conditions of severe labour exploitation, in forms of para-slavery, of whom 80% are migrants and 20% Italian.

Our campaign against the gangmaster system started with social mobilisation and public denunciation, and went on to involve the media and politicians. Our aim was to secure legislation to penalise and outlaw the “caporalato”, and to establish new social enterprises that respect labour rights and have the support of responsible consumers.

Grassroots work, information and awareness raising campaigns and work with the press and the media focused public attention on the gangmaster system and the involvement of organised crime. Bottom-up mobilisation created the social and political conditions for the enactment of the national law on the gangmaster system.

The 199/2016 law penalises the crime of labour exploitation and authorises sanctions, through fines for employers who hire workers in exploitative conditions, directly or through intermediaries; confiscation of assets of companies; and arrest and prison terms in cases of in flagrante delicto. The law also provides for measures to combat so-called “illegal work” and the introduction of efficient transport in the agricultural sector.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy’s three-year plan, drawn up in collaboration with social and business organisations, identifies six priority areas to prevent and combat labour exploitation. These are control and surveillance; quality assurance of the food production chain; intermediation and services for work; building a network for quality employment in agriculture; transport; and temporary housing and accommodation.

Our successful fight for a law outlawing the gangmaster system, involving civil society, the media and trade unions, contributes to the achievement of ending hunger, promoting decent work and economic growth and responsible consumption and production. It also indirectly contributes to improving health and well-being, gender Equality and reducing inequalities.





Preventing risks of hunger with sustainable food: Potato Revolt 2020



FRANCE, SWEDEN



ECOLISE's Swedish national transition member, Stödföreningen för omställningsinitiativ, is organising 'Potato Revolt 2020', a national campaign launched by Närjord, an NGO in Söderhamn.

The campaign is inspired by the Swedish potato revolts of 1917 which were a response to nationwide hunger. The campaign's focus today is the very real possibility that Covid-19 will cut incomes and make people go hungry. On 1st May Stödföreningen för omställningsinitiativ called for community potato field planting by asking municipalities to give up parkland and allow planting in unused fields. Community groups Grangärde, Holmåsa and Värmdö planted potatoes together while others held 'Protest Bucket' demonstrations. These took place all over the country, including Malmö, Gothenburg, Molkom and right in front of the parliament building in Stockholm. Citizens were demanding that representatives should act on a list of 22 demands which had initially been presented to Söderhamn municipality. Sävarådalen's Garden Club near Umeå also distributed Potato Revolt buckets to 10 villages in order to spread the concept.

The 'Potato Revolt 2020' is a good illustration of the impact and transformational potential of community-led initiatives. It also shows that they can be up-scaled rapidly and easily at a national level and also transnationally – the idea has been picked up and promoted by Transition France. Transition initiatives are based on the best information and evidence available and use people's collective intelligence to find and devise better ways of living. They are compassionate, valuing and paying attention to the emotional, psychological, relational and social aspects of each community. Starting with the concerns and difficulties that communities are facing (like Covid-19), they work to turn their vision and ideas into reality. Such initiatives also have indirect positive impacts on other SDGs. For example, 'Potato Revolt 2020' has also brought about changes in people's consumption patterns and boosted local production capacities, thereby contributing to the achievement of sustainable consumption and production. These creative protests pioneered a new style of collective action which empowers and enables people to work towards sustainability within their cities and communities.



Kipster's circular farm: climate neutral and animal friendly poultry



THE NETHERLANDS

Kipster chicken farms are an alternative to intensive animal agriculture with positive impacts on several SDGs – and they are commercially successful.

In regular egg production, millions of day-old male chicks are macerated or gassed every day and turned into pet food. Kipster does not kill male chicks but instead raises them for meat. The laying hens are given ample inside space and outside runs, an inner garden and the provision of natural light. They are an adapted breed that is not prone to feather pecking which means there is no beak trimming - standard practice in conventional systems. Hens can fully express their natural behaviour, with sufficient space to move and flap their wings, soil to scratch in, branches to perch on and the chance to take a quiet nap. Improving their welfare strengthens their health, making production more resilient and reducing the risk of zoonoses – diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans.

Sustainability is the core of Kipster's operations. Extraction fans remove 95% of fine particles from the air, safeguarding the health of people living nearby. Laying hens are kept in natural daylight, which helps to save energy. The farm's 1,078

solar panels produce twice as much electricity as it needs. At Kipster hens are not given commercial feed, made from corn, maize and soybeans, which people could eat, but they turn scraps and waste from the food industry into something edible, as they did on pre-industrialisation farms.

Kipster started with one house and 24,000 birds, doubling this size on its second site. In the US, the starting farm has five houses and 120,000 birds. The principal obstacle to scaling up is the limited availability of food waste to feed livestock. For instance, in an EU where land and waste streams were optimally used, only 6 million hens, 50 million pigs and 30 million milk cows could be raised – a decrease of between 30 and 100% depending on the species.

Kipster has shown that farming can transform for the best: a circular model with respect for the welfare of animals.





Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Public health under attack

In general, the EU has achieved very high levels of health and well-being: life expectancy for women is above 83 years, and 78 years for men, overall maternal and infant health is excellent, and most people have access to high quality health care, affordable medicines, and health insurance. There are still substantial challenges, however. Austerity measures implemented since 2010 have cut healthcare budgets and social protection, reduced insurance coverage and increased fees and co-payments. Health care systems have to adjust to the impacts of demographic change, with ageing populations and growing prevalence of chronic disease, while many countries of the EU struggle with staff shortages in the health and social care sector, especially nurses and care workers, who are often underpaid. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed these weaknesses.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- There are significant inequalities in terms of the right to timely, affordable, good quality preventive and curative care. Unequal access to quality health care in rural areas and among specific vulnerable groups is evident in longer, often unpublicised, waiting lists for treatment, prohibitive charges for pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies, and difficulties in retaining sufficient medical staff.¹
- Non-communicable diseases, often related to unhealthy lifestyles, are major causes of disability, ill-health, health-related retirement, and avoidable death. They are the leading cause of mortality in the EU and account for most healthcare expenses, costing EU economies €115 billion annually.² More than half a million people of working age in the EU die early from non-communicable diseases.
- Tobacco use has decreased, but more than one third of the population still smokes. Alcohol is a major cause of non-communicable diseases and increases risks of accidents, violence, homicide and suicide.³ The WHO estimates that the EU's average per capita consumption is over twice the world average at 12.5 litres of pure alcohol each year. Drug abuse is widespread, including increased use of highly potent synthetic opioids.⁴
- In 2015, there were on average 11 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants,⁵ and more than one third of all people experience mental health problems every year including anxiety, depression and substance abuse.⁶
- Although air pollution is the biggest environmental health risk in Europe, responsible for some 400,000 avoidable deaths in the EU every year,⁷ and recognised by Eurostat as a health risk, there is no indicator to capture its health impacts.
- Poorer people are exposed to higher levels of air pollution, extreme weather, noise and chemicals resulting in disproportionate health impacts that exacerbate existing health inequities.⁸
- Two thirds of the chemicals produced in Europe today are hazardous to health. They are found in, among other things, food packaging, pesticide residues in food and in cosmetic and textile products. Exposure to chemicals is not tracked by Eurostat's SDG indicators. Impacts of exposure to certain chemicals have been estimated. For example, in utero exposure to BPA in thermal paper may cause adverse health effects in 81,000 children each year. Disease related to the exposure to only a small group of endocrine disrupters is estimated to cost €157 billion per year in the EU.⁹

¹ European Commission [Inequalities in Access to Health Care](#).

² European Commission ["Non-communicable diseases"](#).

³ WHO [Alcohol in the EU](#).

⁴ EMCDDA [European Drug report 2019](#).

⁵ World Population Review ["Suicide rates per country"](#).

⁶ EU [Compass for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).

⁷ EEA [Cutting air pollution in Europe would prevent early deaths, improve productivity and curb climate change](#).

⁸ EEA <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/healthy-environment-healthy-lives>

⁹ Tarasande L. et al. (2016) Burden of disease and costs of exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals in the European Union: an updated analysis.



More respect for nurses is the basis for a sustainable public health system

Valérie Pasquier's story



FRANCE

I have been working in hospitals in France since 2000. Over the years, my working conditions have deteriorated. Hospitals are no longer considered a public service but as businesses that must make a profit. Consequently, patients spend less time in hospital, more expensive medical procedures are preferred, absent staff are often not replaced. For the managers, we are no more than numbers.

As understaffing becomes the 'new normal', it's difficult to keep up with the fast pace of hospital life. Too few people are entering nursing which, given the salaries of our predominantly female profession, is hardly surprising. With 20 years' experience, I make €1700 per month and that is only because I often take extra shifts at night, on public holidays and weekends so I can make ends meet. Our salaries are not adjusted to the cost of living and as a result we are amongst the most underpaid health workers in Europe!

Since March, I have been working in the Covid-19 department. This is stressful in itself, but it's made worse by the lack of personal protective equipment.

Physical and psychological exhaustion is the consequence of these working conditions. Even when you are on leave, you can be called to work at any time to fill in for a sick or absent



THERE ARE CURRENTLY **4.45 MILLION NURSES** AND MIDWIVES IN THE EU. THIS IS NOT ENOUGH. **MORE OLDER PEOPLE MEANS MORE NURSES NEEDED.** LOW PAY, CHALLENGING WORKING CONDITIONS AND HEALTH RISKS KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE FROM CHOOSING A NURSING JOB. **MIGRATION OF NURSES** FROM OTHER COUNTRIES HELPS BUT CREATES SHORTAGES IN THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN. AROUND **90% OF NURSES AND CARE WORKERS ARE WOMEN.**

Source: Eurostat

colleague – another cause of stress with a significant impact on relationships and family life.

But I never wanted to do anything else. Both my parents were health professionals and as a child, I dreamed of becoming a nurse. I have always enjoyed relationships with patients. The same goes for relationships with colleagues. We make close and lasting friendships and together we find ways to compensate for our poor pay and working conditions – by exchanging clothes and homemade goods. We manage to enjoy ourselves without breaking the bank and at the same time it's good for the planet and morale.

Now, with the coronavirus crisis, we are getting more public recognition. The crisis has shown the urgent need to review our pay and conditions. We love our work and do it with a sense of vocation, but that does not mean that the government can take us for granted. It is time for government to provide the resources to ensure good working conditions – material, financial and psychological.

Valérie Pasquier's story has been facilitated by
Women Engage for a Common Future France
(WECF France)





For equitable access to health care for all and for a toxic-free environment

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Equitable access to health care – Europe needs to ensure equitable access to health care for all and must decrease health disparities within and between countries and across generations. All European policies need to protect and safeguard well-being and health.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

EPHA

Health inequalities: a public health challenge for European policy-makers

HEAL

How the chemicals in food contact materials are putting our health at risk

EEB et al.

Time to ensure that the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability delivers a toxic-free environment

EEB

Most Member States are failing to protect citizens from toxic air

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ analyse inequalities in access to health care;
- ✓ track drug abuse and unhealthy alcohol consumption;
- ✓ monitor mental health issues, for instance, evidenced by suicide rates and psychiatric illnesses;
- ✓ track the exposure to harmful chemicals.



Education for a toxic-free life: the Nesting project



FRANCE

Women Engage for a Common Future network started the NESTING project in 2008, amid growing concern in the scientific community and the public about the use of synthetic chemicals and their health impacts, evidenced by increases in reproductive health disorders, neurodevelopmental diseases, diabetes, obesity and childhood cancers.

Preventive action by decision-makers and the government was lagging behind. WECF France therefore developed Training of Trainers modules for maternity hospitals on environmental health. This developed into a national network of trainers whose workshops help parents to ensure their families have a healthy indoor environment. 200 trainers, mainly healthcare professionals, run workshops in around 60 institutions, mostly maternity hospitals. Workshop numbers have doubled and now receive financial and technical support from the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Solidarity, the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES) and Regional Agencies for Health (ARS).

Workshops focus on participant's understanding of the links between early life and daily environmental exposure to pollutants and their health risks - (co-construction); concrete and simple solutions and alternatives to limit exposure to pollutants - (practical application) and personal actions for change

- (the psychological dimension). Participants are supported to problem solve and reach solutions, take responsibility for their own health and be actors for change.

Advocacy is central to the project. WECF France inputs into policy making processes. These include the National Health and Environmental action plan, National Strategy on EDCs and the ANSES steering committee. Campaigns, focusing on the health of pregnant women and children, have called for the removal of certain chemicals in products for children and have initiated collaborative projects with key stakeholders to reduce global exposure to harmful chemicals.

To date participants have been mainly women, prompting questions whether action on health and environment reinforces gender stereotypes, with women still tied to tasks traditionally assigned to them, still too little shared with their male partners. WECF France recognises this paradox and will look at ways to resolve it.

As all European citizens are affected by health and environment issues the Nesting project was primarily conceived as an EU-wide initiative. After 10 years of experience and success, the training could be replicated in other countries, with only slight changes when required by local regulations.

*This story has been provided by
Women Engage for a Common Future France
(WECF France)*





Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Leaving no one behind not yet achieved for education and culture

The EU and its Member States ensure that many people benefit from early childhood care, school and tertiary education. Levels of adult learning have been rising. Gender equality in education across all age groups is at a historic high. Rates of illiteracy are very low. However, Europe's share of GDP invested in education has never been as low as it is today. Not everyone enjoys the right to quality education and access to education is still very unequal. The COVID-19 pandemic, with widespread school closures and expansion of digital learning, has exposed deep inequalities in access to education, digital learning tools and availability of basic facilities and equipment (such as fast internet and laptops).

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- Across Europe the average share of GDP invested in education has never been so low, the Lifelong Learning Platform argues. In recent years public spending on education in most Member States on education has decreased, demonstrating a clear lack of coherence between educational and lifelong learning objectives and the financial resources needed to achieve them.
- While a large majority of children and young people have access to education, the quality of education is not always of a high enough standard. In 2018, on average 22.5% of 15-year olds lacked basic skills in reading, maths or science (Eurostat / OECD). More than 10% of young people in the EU leave education early with percentages in some Member States as high as 17% or more (Eurostat).
- While the European Commission has researched the correlation between family background and educational opportunities and outcomes, educational inequalities are not examined in Eurostat's SDG monitoring report. Recent research from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) has shown that the gap between less privileged children and the majority of students has been reduced in very few EU Member States, while several countries show rising educational inequalities. The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has shown, in one striking example, that there are considerable gaps between Roma and non-Roma children from preschool to secondary education, with only 12% of Roma children completing upper-secondary or vocational education.
- Educational systems are regularly focused on narrow skills that are perceived as necessary to satisfy the labour markets needs rather than lifelong learning and more holistic personal development objectives, including goals such as education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, health education, the promotion of culture, human rights and gender equality, global citizenship and other key skills needed in healthy and sustainable societies. Equally valuing all forms of education, supporting life-long learning opportunities and fostering transformative global citizenship education is the first step towards achieving the 2030 Agenda vision.
- According to the European Disability Forum, children and young persons with disabilities are able to participate in mainstream education in some Member States. In other countries, the situation is quite different, and in some cases, pupils with disabilities are totally excluded from schools and universities. The EU Disability Strategy 2020-2030 needs to deliver on ensuring access to mainstream, inclusive, quality education and life-long learning for people with disabilities. At EU level, persons with disabilities are, for instance, less likely to participate in Erasmus+ than persons without disabilities.
- SDG 4 calls for the appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. However, cultural organisations have pointed out that references to culture in SDG monitoring and reporting are scarce, and governments do not sufficiently acknowledge the many ways in which cultural aspects influence and contribute to sustainable development.

1 European Commission / Joint Research Centre [Socio-Economic Background and Educational Inequalities](#).

2 FRA [Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States](#)

3 European Disability Forum [EDF Written Review of the Disability Strategy 2020-2030](#).

4 Culture Action Europe et al. [Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda](#).



1 NO POVERTY



5 GENDER EQUALITY



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Unequal access to education worsened with pandemic

Oana's story



 ROMANIA

Oana is a 12th grade student in a poor rural area in Romania. She lives with her father, brothers, sisters, sister-in-law and her niece. Her mother left the country to look for work but, because of the Covid-19 crisis, cannot work or send money home.

Covid-19 overshadows everything. Oana is revising for university admission exams – a real challenge because she has to study at home, communicating with her teachers via email or Whatsapp. *"Before the pandemic, I hardly ever used email. My difficulty is that I have limited access to the internet and I don't have a laptop, so I have to do everything on my phone, even writing essays."*

All Oana's plans, indeed her whole life, has been turned upside down by Covid-19. She now divides her life between studying and household chores. *"We are all under lockdown. My father is the only one who goes out because he has to go to work. The rest of us stay in the yard. This was supposed to be my year, the year when I was going to have fun and enjoy these last weeks together with my school friends. Now, look at us, communicating through messages, learning online, wishing we could be back on the school bench again. We, the 12th graders, are the most affected of all – I hope we can make it through all this!"*

IN 2019, **11.9 %** OF **YOUNG MEN** AND **8.4 %** OF **YOUNG WOMEN** IN THE EU WERE **EARLY LEAVERS** FROM **EDUCATION AND TRAINING.**



Source: Eurostat

"I am studying biology for final high school exams and for university admission. With this pandemic, I have to be extra strict with myself because I'm at home all the time. It's really tough, because we haven't had any tutoring in biology and some things are really difficult to understand just from books and videos without help from a teacher. But this has also made us more responsible than normal for completing these assignments."

Oana receives a scholarship from World Vision.

"The scholarship programme has given me real opportunities... It has enabled me to say what I think and given me confidence in public speaking. I am no longer the shy young person that I used to be."

Oana was fortunate enough recently to be given a laptop as part of her scholarship. Like Oana, many more children across the EU need help and digital infrastructure to continue studying online. Education is their online chance to get out of poverty.



For quality education, equal access to culture and the empowerment of people to be active citizens

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Quality education and equal access to culture for all – For an EU that ensures quality education and equal access to culture for all, and with people-centred budgets investing in education and culture. For an EU that supports citizenship education and the promotion of critical thinking to empower people to better participate in public debates.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

Lifelong Learning Platform

Europe's share of GDP for education and training has never been this low.

Lifelong Learning Platform

PISA 2018 results a wake up call to put well-being not numbers at the heart of policy making

Culture Action Europe

Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Bridge 47

Envision 4.7. Roadmap in support of SDG target 4.7

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ measure public spending on education and lifelong learning, e.g. % of GDP spent on education;
- ✓ monitor the correlation between the socio-economic background of families and education opportunities with disaggregated data for specific groups such as low-income families, ethnic minorities and migrants;
- ✓ cover the role of culture in the implementation of the SDGs.



Guaranteeing the universal right to education during the Covid-19 crisis: the #AlleanzaAgisce website



📍 ITALY

The project #AlleanzaAgisce (Alliance in action) was born from the desire to showcase the commitment of ASviS' over 270 members and over 200 associates:

it has become a portal that collects, gives visibility and immediate access to the dozens of initiatives that ASviS' network deployed in the field, both to counter the difficulties derived from the health emergency, and to lay down the work to build a more sustainable and resilient future.

With "#AlleanzaAgisce", the asvis.it website will make the portal collecting the initiatives available to everyone, and will also describe some of the projects in depth with news containing interviews and specific focuses.

The portal is updated daily with the numerous projects that have been started: countless solidarity initiatives, including fundraising, donations, webinars, free books, campaigns, workshops and new platforms. In particular, within the **Working group dedicated to SDG 4**, there are many **initiatives highlighted by the ASviS members working in the area of inclusive and quality education for all.**

The #AlleanzaAgisce project saw the participation of 79 of ASviS' member organisations, who presented 217 initiatives detailing the efforts confronted by them in the various fields of sustainable development. A greater visibility for these was achieved also thanks to the weekly newsletter that is sent to over 15-thousand users. The sharing of best practices

brought to light by #AlleanzaAgisce was amplified also thanks to the network of associations that are members of ASviS and that, since the beginning of the Alliance, are committed in a constant exchange of initiatives. The entire campaign can be replicated at any level and in different countries. Its point of strength consists in the involvement of the networks of organisations that are mainly focused on education and that are most rooted on the ground.

Two macro-areas have seen the involvement of the ASviS' working group dedicated to SDG 4 members active in the sector:

1. Education that transforms itself to become resilient to the virus

2. Students and teachers together to overcome the crisis in the universities

Since 2011 Save the Children through the Fuoriclasse project intervenes against primary and lower secondary school dropout. The project has a preventing and integrated perspective, supporting the motivation to study and to learn, with the aim to guarantee the fulfillment of the universal right to education. The activities are developed in a formal and informal educational context. In 2017, Fuoriclasse in Movimento was born; this is a network of 160 schools, promoting students' active role. It supports teachers' strengthening on innovative and participatory methodologies and the construction of Consigli Fuoriclasse; these latter are consultation processes among students and teachers aiming to realise changes, producing a virtuous and sustainable change within the school. Over 500 proposals of change have been realised since 2017.



How surviving domestic violence empowered me – the fight for justice must continue

Maria Fernanda's story



1 IN 5 WOMEN
IN THE EU AGED OVER 15
EXPERIENCE PHYSICAL
AND/OR _____
SEXUAL INTIMATE
PARTNER VIOLENCE.

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

55

SPAIN

"I never thought it could happen to me. I used to think that gender-based violence was something that happens to other women – more submissive, uneducated... But is there such a thing as a profile for victims of abuse? No, there is not." Annette, originally from Mexico, moved to the United States to study and work as a journalist. She met her abuser, who is also the father of her child, in Spain.

Eventually she found a programme supporting women survivors of gender-based violence. She joined a self-defense course titled 'I am not a victim, I am a survivor'. 'For them we were the 25 women most at risk in the city, whose lives were most in danger. It's awful to think that you were selected because your life was at risk.'

The course became a turning point in her life. The participants set up a WhatsApp group which eventually became *Somos Más* ('We Are More'), to ensure that 'other women would not experience these moments of loneliness, of anguish, of feeling completely helpless and misunderstood.'

Annette stresses the importance of seeing oneself reflected in success stories. 'Look at her, she went through this eight years ago and she's fine and looks happy. She looks safe on the streets, and I can see that even though she is still threatened, she says "it's

okay, I'm healthy, physically and mentally, and we're going to get through this.'" Rebuilding our lives means different things: going out alone, just getting out of the house. We have members who don't go out for two, three weeks.'

Women's rights activists in Spain are campaigning so that the justice system stops issuing joint custody orders in cases of gender-based violence. In Spain, between 2013 and 2019, 29 children were killed by their fathers taking revenge on their former partners. 'They are allowing abusers to carry on raising the children, even when the kids are scared. When my son was three years old, each time I told him that I had to take him to see his father, he would ask me to forgive him ... "Forgive me, forgive me, I'm good, please don't do this." And you have to explain that you do love him and it's not your decision. Why should the rights of the father override those of the child?'

Maria Fernanda's story has been facilitated by Futuro en Común

FUTURO EN COMÚN

For a Europe in which women are free from discrimination and violence and enjoy equal opportunities

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Equality and human rights – Public policies and legislative measures should ensure that, in line with European and international human rights law, all European citizens and residents enjoy the same level of protection and can exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms, allowing them to live according to their own convictions under the principles of self-determination and human dignity, free from discrimination. The EU must improve its policies and actions to ensure gender equality, in addition to guaranteeing that all people facing multiple discrimination have equal opportunities in society.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

European Women's Lobby

[Women in Politics and Women in Business](#)

Make Mothers Matter

[Mothers' Unpaid Family Care Work](#)

European Women's Lobby

[Disrupting the Continuum of Violence against Women and Girls](#)

End FGM European Network

[Tackling FGM in Europe](#)

IPPFEN

[End Reproductive Coercion](#)

European Women's Lobby + a broad coalition of NGOs

[Brussels' Call 'Together for a Europe free from prostitution'](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ better understand gendered income gaps at retirement age and old-age poverty;
- ✓ monitor the number of women in senior management across all types of companies, in science and public institutions;
- ✓ track the problem of human trafficking, in particular for sexual exploitation;
- ✓ better assess the intersectionality between gender equality and other dimensions of inequality.





Fighting violence against women with innovative policies: “Stop FGM” passports



BELGIUM, GERMANY, SPAIN, THE NETHERLANDS, THE UNITED KINGDOM

Target 3 of SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is the elimination of all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM).

Some EU Member States have moved to prevent FGM from occurring. One example is ‘Stop FGM’ passports – declarations backed by governments to raise awareness of FGM, together with related legislation, penalties and information on available help or support. The intention is that individuals from FGM-affected communities should keep these declarations with their travel documents when they go abroad. They are provided in a number of languages, in the hope that they will be utilised if a girl or her family face pressures to undergo FGM.

In 2009, the Dutch government, along with other organisations, signed a ‘Statement Opposing Female Circumcision’, which can be given to parents of daughters from high risk countries. In the UK, there is ‘A Statement Opposing Female Genital Mutilation’ or ‘Health passport’ for people from affected communities to take with them when going abroad. In Belgium, ‘STOP FGM passports’ are available at travel clinics, vaccination centres and front-line services. Similarly, in Spain, parents travelling to high risk countries can be asked to sign a declaration promising that their daughters will not undergo FGM. In Hamburg, Germany, a ‘statement opposing FGM’ was released in 2019.

We urge European countries to maintain and scale up national, regional and international commitments to promote gender equality, and combat all violence against women and girls, including FGM. ‘Stop FGM’ passports and statements are a good way of dealing with the issue in coordination, partnership and open dialogue with families and girls at risk. They are an essential element in raising awareness of FGM and preventing it from happening, as well as consolidating knowledge of relevant legislation and penalties. They are a tool that demonstrates sound understanding of the practice and its complexities and deals with it in a sensitive way and they provide added support against community pressures. For these reasons we recommend that they should be developed and given wider dissemination.

Most importantly, they are a step by step response towards total abandonment of this harmful practice: a world we all want to see!

This story has been provided by the End FGM European network





Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

No access to water for millions of people in Europe, water bodies under pressure

While the great majority of Europeans do not have to worry about safe drinking water and decent sanitation, there are significant minorities and people in poverty living at the margins of our prosperous societies who do not have adequate sanitation or access to safe drinking water in their homes.

At the same time, across the EU sources of water are under immense pressure as a result of unsustainable withdrawals of freshwater, alteration of water bodies and pollution. Alongside the need to ensure the availability of water and sustainable water management, there is an urgent need to protect and restore water-related ecosystems. The EU also imports large quantities of virtual water, that is water used for the production of food and goods outside the EU, including from countries suffering from water scarcity. The EU, therefore, affects the achievement of SDG 6 in other regions.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- 2.3% of people, on average across the EU, live without access to sanitation in their homes with a range between close to 0 and 60% in certain Member States, especially in rural areas. In terms of numbers this means that around 10 million people in our affluent region are denied the human rights to sanitation and water. A majority of the EU's 6 million Roma people do not have adequate sanitation or access to drinking water in their homes.¹ Poor and problematic sanitation and access to water is a daily problem for homeless people across the EU. In addition, the fact that, according to Eurostat, more than 17% of all Europeans live in overcrowded homes, means that many have inadequate access to sanitation.
- In most countries, reproductive health and menstruation supplies are still taxed as a luxury.
- The EU has pushed for continuous liberalisation and privatisation of the water market, treating water as a commodity rather than a public good. More than one million people have signed the European Citizens Initiative Right2water² to make the human right to water central in the EU's water policy. The initiative, that is supported by a broad network of trade unions and civil society organisations, demands that everyone – and this must include low-income groups – should have access to affordable water. The initiative has established that 16 million people in the EU are at risk of having their water cut off for non-payment of their bills.³ The updated drinking water directive is a step, but not enough.
- Eurostat's Water Exploitation Index is a potentially useful tool, showing water usage in each Member State as a proportion of available water resources and indicating where water shortages are likely, but recent data (post-2016) are lacking for most Member States.
- Both industrial users and intensive agriculture use water unsustainably and pollute surface and groundwater in the EU. The Ministry of Ecological Transition of Spain estimates that half of the country's groundwater reserves are polluted, and the supply of drinking water is at risk. Nitrate levels in different regions of the EU are above what is considered safe (see also SDG 2).
- The European Environmental Agency (EEA) has warned that the EU's wetlands are under severe pressure from land use and pollution, as they often border agricultural land and transport infrastructure such as roads. 60% of Europe's rivers, lakes and wetlands are not in good ecological health due to pollution from agriculture and industry, over-abstraction, and hydropower.⁴
- In general, the involvement of stakeholders such as women, young people or minorities in the governance of water in all its aspects is still weak, despite Art. 14 of the Water Framework Directive's obligation of public participation.

¹ ERRC [Europe must ensure marginalised communities have access to water during pandemic](#).

² See <https://www.right2water.eu/>

³ Right2water initiative [The right to water must be a priority for the Commission and the new European Parliament says ECI campaigner](#).

⁴ See EEB on [the state of European water bodies](#).



Europe in the 21st century: no safe drinking water for a Roma village

Erika Berkyova's story



 SLOVAKIA

My name is Erika Berkyova and I live in central Slovakia in the tiny village of Janice with just 300 inhabitants.

In Janice, we cannot access water from the tap. We depend on local wells. Our water is unsafe because the wells are contaminated. This is partly a natural phenomenon, but the principal cause dates back to the period of socialism: the intensive use of agricultural chemicals has contaminated the soil with nitrates and made our water dangerous to drink.

Unsafe water is a huge problem for us. We cannot drink it or cook with it. We should not even wash our dishes with it. The chemicals can harm you even when you shower or take a bath. It touches everyone, old and young alike. The most affected are babies and young children, susceptible to disease and prone to allergies, and older people with immune deficiencies. In my own family our kids are often ill.

Some years ago, the municipality started to provide filtered water from a tap located in the premises of the municipal office. You had to go with a container and collect your water during office hours. This was not a solution: we could not get water at weekends. Initially, we had pay for it, not much, but nevertheless it was a significant sum for people living in

CLOSE TO **9 MILLION PEOPLE**
IN THE EU DO **NOT HAVE BASIC**
SANITARY FACILITIES



Source: Eurostat

poverty. So much so that many neighbours chose to continue using unsafe water. Things have improved since then: the water is now free, and the office is open for longer hours but still not at weekends. The filter is costly to operate, so the municipality rations its use, at times making safe water unavailable for days. During the Covid-19 crisis, despite the cost, most people are buying bottled water from the shops.

What Janice needs is a central water main connected to a safe source. This is a big investment and we have already talked to the mayor. She has promised to obtain approval for a water main and to raise money from the government or the European Union. I am following this closely. Everyone in the European Union in the 21st century – including us, Roma from a small village – should have access to safe water.

Erika Berkyova's story has been facilitated by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)





For clean rivers and lakes, pollution-free ground water and the right to access to water for all

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

For European policies that ensure quality living and decent housing for all.

For an EU that guarantees environmental justice.

For an EU that sets up and enforces common standards that deliver clean water.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

EEB

[Roma communities pushed to the wastelands](#)

WECF International

[Safe Water and Sanitation](#)

EEB

[Protect water - letter to the EU from 130 NGOs](#)

EEB

[The Future of EU Rivers](#)

Women for Water Partnership

[8th World Water Forum. Regional Report Europe](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ collect and analyse disaggregated data, such as by gender, age and income, on who is denied the right to water and sanitation and which communities are most affected;
- ✓ provide better information on the ecological state of lakes and rivers and water resources.



Access to water and sanitation for everyone: the “Water is a Right!” campaign



© Cécile Massie

FRANCE

In 2010 the UN General Assembly recognised the human right to safe and clean water and sanitation. 10 years on, there are still immense challenges: globally 2.2 billion people do not have access to safe water and 4.2 billion people do not have safe sanitation.

The figures for metropolitan France are 1.4 million people without access to safe water and 7.5 million people without adequate sanitation. People leading insecure and precarious lives – living on the streets, in shanty towns and squatter settlements – are the hardest hit.

In November 2019, 30 French organisations joined forces to launch the “Water is a Right” campaign to galvanise the government to take action. They called on candidates for the 2020 municipal elections (held between March and June) to commit to five pledges of their Water Manifesto. There is much that local authorities can do to make clean water and sanitation available to all, because they are legally responsible for water in their jurisdictions – water fountains, public toilets and showers. They can also introduce social and progressive pricing and strengthen citizen participation. There are also mechanisms for international action in the form of decentralised solidarity projects for water and sanitation, in particular via the 1% water solidarity scheme.

The Water is a Right campaign reached many candidates in these elections through advocacy – letters, requests for meetings, conferences – and special events and challenges on social networks.

Results were very positive. 152 elected officials signed the Water Manifesto and promised to take action in their districts and internationally. Among them were 52 mayors and councillors from opposition and ruling majority parties. Many signatories were elected in major cities including Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Marseille and Paris.

The health crisis has demonstrated that effective improvements in the living conditions of marginalised families and isolated people cannot be achieved without mobilising local stakeholders and involving communal and intercommunal teams. More generally, multi-stakeholder coordination involving state and civil society actors will be required to ensure that everyone, including the most insecure, can have access to water and sanitation.

The fulfilment of the right to clean water and sanitation is the first step towards educational, social and economic integration for people living on the margins.





Affordable and Clean Energy

The obstructed energy revolution

In 2018, 19% of the energy consumed in the EU came from renewable sources, putting the EU on target to reach 20% by 2020.¹ This rate of progress, however, is not fast enough to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040, a goal which a recent scenario from EEB and CAN Europe has shown to be achievable, safe and sustainable. The scenario shows that switching to renewable supply and greater energy efficiency are essential, but by themselves are not enough to reach net zero by 2040 – we must also reduce our energy needs.

Further investment in fossil fuels must be avoided at all costs. They create lock-ins, committing Europe to decades of carbon emissions. All new investments must be for renewable energy, taking care to avoid negative environmental impacts: hydroelectric plants, for example, can disturb ecosystems and disrupt the lives of entire communities. The transition to carbon neutral energy can only be achieved with the support of people and will need to respect wider environmental objectives.

Affordability and energy poverty are a challenge. While we have sophisticated technologies for renewable energy production and supply, many people in Europe still cannot afford to heat their homes and are at risk of having their gas or electricity disconnected.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- The EU has met its 2020 goal of 20% of energy being supplied from renewable sources – but the target was set too low. The aim must be to make the European energy system 100% renewable by 2040. This requires very significant changes in the ways we replace old with new technologies to shift from fossil fuels to clean, fully renewable energy in all sectors of the economy. The necessary financial resources must be found from the EU Taxonomy,² the European Recovery Plan and the 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework.
- Estimates of the EU's fossil fuel subsidies range from €39 to over €200 billion per year, depending on the measurements used,³ and they are not declining.⁴ Fossil fuel subsidies are hidden in the form of tax exemptions, fiscal advantages, state aid or eligibility criteria for EU funds, such as cohesion funds or the Connecting Europe Facility. These subsidies are evidence of a clear lack of policy coherence on sustainable energy. Investments in gas infrastructure are subsidised even though they undermine our objective of carbon neutrality.
- The EU is dependent for its energy needs on imported oil and gas, principally from Russia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Norway, which exposes Europe to the hazards of volatile energy markets. According to Eurostat, in 2018 over half of the EU's energy needs (58%) were met by imports. This dependency rate rises to more than 90% in Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus and is below 25% in Romania, Denmark and Estonia. In 2000, the dependency rate on energy imports was 56%.⁵
- The EU and Member States are part of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), an international investment agreement that protects investments in fossil fuels and allows foreign investors to sue signatory governments under international arbitration tribunals. At least 130 claims oblige governments to pay billions of euro. The ECT is one of the key obstacles to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal and the new European Climate Law as in reality it protects investments in fossil fuels against new government measures to promote renewable energy sources. However, the ECT is very little known in public. It is currently under reform - and it is now urgent that the EU and the Member States should break free from any agreement that undermines or slows down the transition to clean, affordable and sustainable energy.
- Energy poverty is an issue throughout Europe, with people unable to heat or cool their homes, generate adequate warmth or power their appliances. The SDGs call for universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy. According to Eurostat, 7.6% of Europeans cannot afford to heat their homes, and this might well be an underestimate. We need to know who does not have access to affordable energy and why this is happening.

¹ Eurostat [energy statistics 2018](#).

² The EU Taxonomy is a tool to help investors, companies, issuers and project promoters navigate the transition to a low-carbon, resilient and resource-efficient economy.

³ European Parliament [Fossil Fuel Subsidies](#).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Eurostat [factsheet on energy import dependency](#).



Sustainable energy with - and not against - nature and local communities

Catherine Bohne's story



ALBANIA

My name is Catherine and I live in Tropoja, Albania. In 2016, we learned of plans to build up to 14 small hydropower plants (HPPs) on a 30km stretch of the Valbona River, eight of them within the national park. Local people were not consulted or even informed about these plans. Their opposition to the projects gave me an opportunity to be of service to the people who had shared their homes with me since my arrival. Since then, I have been fighting to give people a voice and to force the system to be accountable.

Is hydropower not sustainable, you may ask. This question has not been answered by the Environmental Impact Assessment filed for the power plant. Especially not for those within the national park which, according to Albanian law, is an area to be "minimally impacted by human activity".

The fact that the HPPs will be private investments is even more important. This is a violation of the culture of the area and its customary law (the 'kanun'). This states that: 1) the treasures of nature must be preserved for future generations; 2) individual interests may never outweigh those of the community; 3) all have an equal voice in deciding how natural resources should be shared and (4) everyone has an equal right to benefit from them.



MORE THAN **32**
MILLION PEOPLE
IN THE EU (**7.3% OF ALL EUROPEANS**)

CANNOT AFFORD
TO KEEP THEIR
HOMES WARM.



Source: European Energy Poverty Observatory

There is a hydropower boom in Albania. Between 2009 and 2013, concessions were granted for 700 small HPPs on virtually every river in the country. Albania is now 99% reliant on hydropower. Despite this, electricity supply is still unreliable. The problem is not the capacity to generate energy but the seasonality of hydropower with fluctuating rainfall and the poor distribution infrastructure. Every time it rains or the wind blows, the electricity will fail. When a transformer breaks down, local people are 'invited' to buy a new one and pay to have it installed. And then, as I have seen at Gjelaj village, the electricity company will demand the payment of old bills – this is puzzling because the village has been without power for 13 years.

The hydropower battle has forced us into a crash-course on energy and the economics of the modern world. We find out how we can participate in a meaningful way. We are now formulating our own vision for the future, starting from our own experience and the wisdom of the kanun, from which Europe as a whole should learn.

Catherine Bohne's story has been facilitated by Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) Germany and MilieuKontakt Albania





For a Europe providing 100% renewable energy which is clean, affordable and in support of community ownership

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

The just and sustainable transition to renewables - The EU should accelerate the just and sustainable transition to a 100% renewable energy supply, which is clean, affordable and supports community ownership and does not lead to energy poverty.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

REN21, CAN Europe, EEB and Renewables Grid Initiative
[An EU Energy Scenario Compatible with the Paris Agreement](#)

CAN Europe
[More fossil fuel subsidies](#)

Global Witness
[Pipe Down. How gas companies influence EU policy and have pocketed €4 billion of taxpayers' money.](#)

Transnational Institute + Corporate European Observatory
[ECT's dirty secrets](#)

EAPN
[Right to Energy for All Europeans!](#)

Action is needed for more data and additional indicators at EU level to:

- ✓ give an accurate account of fossil fuel subsidies;
- ✓ monitor per capita energy consumption and CO2 emissions;
- ✓ identify who are and where are those without affordable energy and suffering energy poverty with the help of disaggregated data.



Bringing affordable renewable energy to all: citizens' cooperatives



📍 GERMANY & SPAIN

If we are to achieve a transition towards 100% renewable energy, we will need the capacity to deliver decentralised and inclusive energy.

"Prosumers" (producer-consumers of renewable energy (RE), are now playing a major role in energy transition, by installing RE technologies on their own roofs or by participating in renewable energy communities.

Collectively prosumers are financing and speeding up progress to achieving the SDGs. They do this by raising awareness on climate change; creating employment and resilient local infrastructures; building greater acceptance of RE technologies and providing affordable energy. Throughout Europe energy cooperatives are helping to transform the energy market from a centralised market dominated by large utilities to a decentralised market with millions of active citizens. With their democratic and participatory structure, energy cooperatives help to empower all socially and economically disadvantaged groups and specifically target women, who are under-represented in the energy sector. By actively involving women as members, managers, investors, producers, consumers and employers, they can boost entrepreneurship throughout the energy value chain and combat energy poverty.

Citizen energy solutions scaled up to the European level would have the potential to achieve the Paris Agreement and the SDGs in a socially and gender-just way.

GOIENER TALDEA is a citizens' cooperative generating and promoting the use of renewable energy in the Basque country and Navarra, Spain, benefitting people whose energy needs are not being met and who are excluded by big energy corporations. The cooperative – set up in 2012 – is now a successful non-profit energy supplier with a turnover of €8.9 million with a business model based on sustainability and partnership.

GOIENER was set up as a response to the lack of democratic representation in the energy corporations, their scant or total lack of consideration for the environment, and their view of renewables as just another way to make a profit. In contrast, GOIENER has been citizen-focused right from the start. Today GOIENER has more than 10,000 members and more than 70 participating municipalities with organisations accounting for 8% of its membership and 50% of its annual turnover.



*This story has been provided by
Women Engage for a Common Future Germany (WECF Germany)
& Cooperatives Europe*





Decent work and economic growth

The pursuit of infinite economic growth is pushing people and our planet to a burnout

SDG 8 call for sustained economic growth, “in accordance with national circumstances”, emphasising the specific needs of least developed countries. For the EU, the political objective of infinite economic growth is counterproductive and threatens to undermine other goals. In most parts of the EU, we produce and consume much more than is needed to live well. Our economic system and lifestyles are pushing the planet beyond its carrying capacity. Infinite GDP growth is not only an outdated political objective, it also does not work as an indicator for sustainable development and well-being. It only expresses the monetary value of the products and services our economy produces – and says nothing about the quality of work, the well-being of people in the economy, or its environmental sustainability. While GDP has been increasing in the EU, so have the numbers of people suffering from in-work poverty within the Union and the number of workers exploited globally to produce goods sold on the European market. And still, our economic policies and instruments are all oriented at generating ever increasing GDP growth. Voices from science, civil society and policymakers have become louder in recent years arguing that sustainable growth in overdeveloped economies is impossible and a carefully constructed myth. The reality is that we are unable to sufficiently decouple economic growth from our resource use.¹ What is urgently needed is transition from a growth-oriented economy to an inclusive, fair, carbon neutral, post-growth economy focused on human and planetary well-being.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers’ full attention:

- Even though tax reforms have been suggested for decades, the EU has been unable or unwilling to shift taxes away from labour to pollution and resource extraction. Repair and refurbishing could create countless jobs while avoiding the constantly growing consumption of new and wasteful products.
- Economic policies need to focus much more on democratising workplaces and creating the enabling framework for micro- and small enterprises and sustainable business models that share benefits evenly, such as cooperatives.
- Decent work is under threat. Not only is in-work poverty increasing according to Eurostat data, more and more people, often women, work in precarious conditions with temporary contracts and for low wages. Unknown numbers of informal workers without rights and social security and workers under shady contracts offered by intermediaries are employed across the EU in agriculture, as domestic workers, in the care sector, in slaughterhouses, construction sites and other sectors. Refugees and migrants are often denied the right to work forcing them into dependence on social welfare or informal work. European policies need to ensure everyone’s right to decent work.
- Young people in many European countries face a future of unemployment and lack of perspective. The brain drain especially from Southern and Eastern Member States negatively affects whole societies. Macroeconomic measures must aim at providing opportunities and socially and environmentally sustainable work under fair conditions for all.
- SDG 8 calls for an end to modern slavery, the worst forms of child labour and human trafficking. Some supply chains of European consumer goods have been linked to modern slavery and child labour, but EU legislation on due diligence in supply chains is still under debate. Business lobby groups have been successful in pushing back against legally binding rules in their supply and value chains. Some Member States, such as the Netherlands, have taken the initiative with legislation to curb child labour in supply chains. To monitor the EU’s progress towards the SDGs, Eurostat does not assess decent work in supply chains or the prevalence of child labour or forced labour.



The new slaves: overcoming the gang master system in Italian agriculture

Abu Moro's story



📍 ITALY

My name is Abu Moro, I'm from Ghana and I'm 42 years old. I started working as a day labourer in Bari in the Southern Italian province of Apulia in 2011. This was my first encounter with the gang master system.

Exploitation in agriculture touches everyone, migrants and Italians alike. There are over one million agricultural workers in Italy, 26% of them non-Italians. Around 450,000 of them are exploited with up to 300,000 experiencing extreme exploitation. If we look at those who experience modern slavery, 80% are migrants, 20% are Italians. Extreme exploitation means hunger wages, no rights, and locked containers for shelter.

They are the new slaves. And I was one of them. The gang master system grinds the life out of both Italian and migrant workers. The weakest are most at risk, so the migrants are the first to die.

The gang master system makes you a prisoner. You have to ask permission from your boss for anything and everything. He exploits you. You're his slave. You get paid €2.50 for packing a box of tomatoes. The cost to the producer is €5.00 but you have to give half to your boss. And on top of that you have to pack an extra box for him. Even though I have

IN ITALY AND SPAIN, OVER **40%** OF **AGRICULTURAL WORKERS** ARE **MIGRANT WORKERS,** OFTEN LABOURING IN VERY **PRECARIOUS CONDITIONS.**



Sources: ISTAT (IT) and SEPE (ES)

legal status here in Italy, with a residence permit and a work contract, I still have to pay the boss from what I earn. In the absence of controls, I'm completely dependent on him. If you are an illegal migrant, you are even more at risk as you can be deported.

Social cooperatives offer an alternative, a way out. I now work for SfruttaZero, a social cooperative in Bari. Here we are all working together, Italians and migrants, to build and maintain our cooperative. We are an alternative to exploitation and the gang master, providing decent work and ensuring sustainable production.

Gang masters and exploitation are integral in a system controlled by giant retailers in which production and labour costs must be minimised. The SDGs seek to end all this. Achieving Goal 8 (decent work) and Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production) means the end of the gang master system and modern slavery. Social cooperatives promote and guarantee decent work and an inclusive and sustainable economic system in a direct response to the gang master system.

Abu Moro's story has been facilitated by ENGIM





For decent work and income, in the EU and in our global supply chains, and a post-growth economic model focussed on wellbeing

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

For an EU where everyone should benefit from decent work standards and a decent income.

For European trade agreements that benefit people, workers and small producers, guarantee decent work and better social protection, and are not solely tools in the interest of multinational companies and investors.

For an EU that moves away from a high-growth, profit for the few, resource-intensive economic model.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

EEB

[Decoupling debunked: Evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability](#)

European Youth Forum

[The Future of Work and Youth](#)

SOLIDAR

[Factsheet on Decent Work in Agriculture](#)

Cooperatives Europe

[Vision paper: A cooperative vision for the collaborative economy](#)

Oxfam

[Human-rights abuses commonplace in farms linked to major European supermarkets](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ replace GDP with other indicators to monitor human wellbeing, a sustainable economic system and planetary health, such as the Ecological Footprint;
- ✓ monitor numbers of people in vulnerable, non-standard forms of employment such as temporary or chain contracts, and people in the low wage sector;
- ✓ gather data on informal workers, e.g. in European agriculture;
- ✓ assess modern slavery and worst forms of child labour in supply chains of imported raw materials and products.



“We do not fear hunger”: Lessons of agroecology for the SDGs



 NICARAGUA

In Nicaragua, SOLIDAR’s member Movement for Peace (MPDL) cooperates with the Fundación Entre Mujeres (FEM) to promote Rural Women’s Decent Work through agroecology, defined as the application of ecological principles to the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment, for the purposes of food security and nutrition.

Since 1995 FEM has set up eight cooperatives in Estelí, advancing women’s economic and social development through agroecology, education, technical assistance and awareness raising.

For FEM the social value of agroecology and food production goes beyond efficiency and maximising yields and profits.

“Life and our relationship with people and our environment are at the heart of our food production. For us, agroecology is about having sufficient diverse healthy food to feed our families; autonomy; earning a decent income; and conserving and improving our natural resources – soil health, biodiversity, and water quality and availability.”

The contribution of agroecology to achieving the SDGs

Agroecology supports decent work, empowers women as agents of change and helps to achieve the SDGs. It fights climate change, reduces migration and promotes social

stability. Agroecology is key to producing food and generating income while increasing sustainability, health, gender equality, food sovereignty and supporting resilience.

Building resilient communities

“Water levels have drastically decreased. Through our agroecological practices and rain harvesting, we try to protect and restore them. Industrial producers come and pump our efforts away”. Rural women are fighting an unequal battle with industrial producers in the low-cost economy of Nicaragua. Agroecology is more resilient in crises because of its ability to rebuild healthy ecosystems and perhaps even prevent future outbreaks like COVID-19. *“Because we produce our food, we are better able to face the socioeconomic and Covid-19 crises than others who have left the community. We do not fear hunger.”*

Lessons for the EU

In Europe, the Farm to Fork Strategy could provide real impetus towards a sustainable and resilient food system, as agreed by the FAO, IPCC, IPBES and scientists, and advocated by civil society (EEB - farm to fork strategy, Farm to Fork - civil society support, iPES - towards a common food policy EU). Such a system will need to take into account the economic, social and ecological dimensions of the food production system in Europe and worldwide.





Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

The big lock-in

Across the EU, people enjoy the benefits of modern infrastructure. Many industries are becoming increasingly sustainable, and the EU and its Member States invest in innovation, research and new technological developments. Eurostat's SDG indicators for SDG 9 measure European investments in research and development, the level of employment in the research sector and the number of new patents. What these indicators are unable to do is to assess the contribution that innovation and research are actually making to sustainability. These indicators reflect the mistaken belief that all new technical development means progress and is inherently good. While certain innovations and technological development are crucial for our transition to sustainability, we are still locking ourselves into unsustainable, new infrastructure by investing in outdated technology such as coal-fired power plants or more and bigger airports. Meanwhile many people in Europe do not have affordable access to critical modern infrastructure such as high-speed internet or fast train connections.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- Sustainability should be the prime criterion guiding all investments in research and infrastructure. This is the reason why the [Green 10 presented a list of 21 industry and business sectors that should be excluded from financial support](#) from the EU Next Generation recovery package. These include fossil gas infrastructure, the hydropower sector, crop-based biofuels, combustion engine vehicles, the expansion of motorways and aviation and intensive livestock farming. All new investment – grants subsidies and loans for research and new infrastructure – must be channelled to sustainable alternatives.
- Transport infrastructure is a key concern. Eurostat's SDG indicators show that the share of buses and trains in passenger transport is decreasing while the car still rules, contributing to congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The share of freight transported on inland waterways and rail is also declining and is being transferred to increasing numbers of heavy trucks on our roads. Investments, subsidies and other incentives must favour sustainable modes of transport, for people and goods. The Eurostat indicator monitoring CO2 emissions from new cars is misleading: while each new car is more fuel efficient, the fact that there are more and more cars on our roads means that emissions from passenger cars have been increasing.
- The EU and Member States are still providing support for investment in out-dated or unsustainable infrastructure. These investments create lock-ins: once the infrastructure is built, it must be used for many years to bring a return on investment. Proliferating local airports are one example of unsustainable infrastructure. In 2014, the European Court of Auditors had already found that EU investments in airports were poor value for money, without even looking into the environmental costs.¹ Support for gas infrastructure instead of renewable energy is another example of locked-in investment. Investments in gas infrastructure run the risk of making us dependent on – mostly imported – fossil fuels for another 40 to 50 years.² Despite this, in early 2020, the EU pledged €29 billion for 32 major gas infrastructure projects.
- Digital infrastructure remains a challenge: according to EU figures, in 2019, 83% of households had broadband internet connections with 44% having access to very high capacity networks. That means that millions of Europeans do not have access to digital infrastructure. SDG 9 calls for equitable and affordable access to infrastructure for all.
- SDG 9 calls on high income countries to facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries. Innovation and technology that could help poorer countries are often protected by intellectual property rights, restricting developing countries' access to them. Intellectual property rights need to be balanced with the need to assist developing countries in accessing important technologies. The EU and its Member States should make much greater efforts in this area.

¹ European Court of Auditors [EU-funded airport infrastructures: poor value for money](#).

² CEO [The Great Gas Lock-In](#).



Digital infrastructure and literacy to leave no one behind Simona Kybartiene's story



 LITHUANIA

I am a retired middle class professional and I am 68 years old. Libraries play an important role in Lithuania by preserving our cultural heritage in digital form and by providing educational services. However, 70% of 55-64 year-olds and only 40% of 65-74 year-olds have access to information and services online. This digital inequality is particularly common in smaller towns and rural areas. For this reason, the digital literacy lessons provided by public libraries are a significant contribution to the digital integration of all Lithuanians, especially older persons.

Younger people find it hard to understand that we older persons have difficulty in using the internet and other digital technologies. The digital revolution seemed to happen so fast that I almost didn't notice how virtually everything moved online and everybody was using the internet on a daily basis, sometimes for hours on end, for both social and business purposes. I did not pay much attention to start with – I thought it would be something for those who needed it but for the rest of us life would go on as before. But almost everything became digital – paying bills, registering for medical check-ups and contacting family abroad. I have 40 years of

44%
OF EUROPEANS
DO **NOT** HAVE
**BASIC
DIGITAL
SKILLS.**



Source: European Commission

experience in the field of medicine but sometimes it's more difficult for me to cope with new digital technologies than to understand the latest advances in medicine.

There are few groups or centres for older persons in our small city - we have one training centre and there is the public library. I enjoy learning new things and I see that there are real opportunities in the digital world, so I am upset when people say that these new technologies are just for younger people, and that we are too old to benefit from them.

I go to our small public library for ICT classes and enjoy its supportive atmosphere because the people who go there are, like myself, mainly older persons. In addition to the comfort and support of the library, there is also free internet. I learn a lot – about new programs, electronic services and everyday apps and that's very helpful.

*Simona Kybartiene's story has been
facilitated by Lithuanian NGDO Platform*



Lithuanian
National
Non-Governmental
Development
Cooperation
Organisations'
Platform



For deeply sustainable and inclusive infrastructure, needs-driven and responsible research and people-centred budgets

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

A people-centred EU budget – A people-centred EU budget needs to phase out unsustainable investments and subsidies.

Needs-driven and responsible research – EU investments should deliver returns for the public good and address societal challenges. Research that is prioritised and funded today should have a decisive impact on the future of our societies and our planet. Our research should make Europe and the world environmentally sustainable, peaceful and a healthy place to live. Preference must no longer be given to military budgets and business priorities. EU Research should be democratic, for public profit, localised and respect planetary boundaries which means a move away from high-growth, profit for the few, resource-intensive economic models.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

CEO

[The Great Gas Lock-In](#)

Climate Action Network Europe

[Future EU investment package falls short of climate ambition](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ monitor the availability and cost of stable and fast internet (4G) across the EU;
- ✓ consider an indicator such as the Center for Global Development's Index assessing willingness to share technology.¹



Phasing out dirty coal with the miners: Spain leading by example



📍 SPAIN

There's something grim about coal mines. Now the Spanish government has decided to replace them with something brighter.

Using coal to generate electricity is not only polluting and bad for the climate, but it is often also unprofitable. Up to 2018, government subsidies had kept some coal mines open and secured some, but fewer and fewer, jobs – and certainly none that were healthy and pleasant.

In December 2018, when the last Spanish coal mines closed due to a European ban on government subsidies, the Spanish government did not forget about the workers and their families.

On the basis of Spain's commitment to the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the government, trade organisations and workers' unions agreed a "Just Transition" scheme to accompany and finance the change to renewable energy. In each affected region, detailed action plans were drawn up with public participation. Public funds were made available for social measures, including retraining workers for new jobs in the industrial sector –not simply to find work in the next steel mill, refinery, or gas-powered plant, but to transfer jobs linked directly to renewable energy.

Spain has already set up large numbers of solar and wind installations. Running them, setting up new ones and upgrading the existing power grid requires people, power and brains. In this way, the communities of the traditional coal mining regions in the North-West are exchanging an unsustainable, dirty and bleak industry for a low-impact, clean and thriving activity that benefits everyone.

Like most countries, Spain still has a long way to go to become a sustainable country and to make the SDGs a reality. Phasing out the use of fossil fuels is a huge but necessary part of this process, and is a challenge for all countries. Spain is leading by example in terms of managing infrastructure, industrialisation and innovation. At the same time Spain is promoting clean energy, providing decent work and putting climate protection into action by means of strong partnerships.

Where others delay, Spain is taking bold steps in the right direction.



Reduce inequality within and among countries

Too many people are falling through the cracks

Reducing inequality and ensuring no one is left behind are at the core of the SDGs. The EU has increased disposable income per capita, lifted employment rates and reduced numbers of early school leavers. But there are large differences between Member States, and the gap between low- and middle-income and high-income groups is actually growing. Discrimination is widespread across Europe, based on religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, or sexual identity. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities (see chapter on the impacts of the pandemic on SDG implementation in the EU) and has hit the poorest and the most vulnerable hardest.

The global picture is even more dire. As Oxfam International puts it: “Extreme inequality is out of control. Hundreds of millions of people are living in extreme poverty while huge rewards go to those at the very top. There are more billionaires than ever before, and their fortunes have grown to record levels. Meanwhile, the world’s poorest got even poorer.”¹ The wealth of the world’s richest 1% is more than twice that of the other 6.9 billion people. Wealth inequality has a gender and geographical dimension, too: men own 50% more of the world’s wealth than women, and the 22 richest men in the world own more than all women in Africa together.²

In 2019, SDG Watch Europe published its shadow report [Falling Through the Cracks: Exposing Inequalities in the EU and Beyond](#) covering Member States’ specific issues and offering in-depth analysis of some of the most important dimensions of inequalities across the EU.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers’ full attention:

- SDG 10 calls for higher than average rates of income growth for the bottom 40% of the population. Currently,

according to Eurostat, the bottom 40% in the EU receive only around 21% of total income, and there has been no improvement in the last 10 years. The 20% with the highest incomes earn over five times more than the 20% with the lowest incomes. Inequality levels across the EU differ. Some of the highest levels of inequality are found in very powerful economies, such as Germany or Luxembourg.

- Taxation and other fiscal measures have not been used with sufficient vigour to redistribute income and reduce inequality. Governments across the Union have been unwilling to reduce the tax deductions and tax exemptions that benefit the rich. The OECD itself has argued that higher property taxes, more progressive taxation and better tax compliance could reduce inequality.³
- Overt discrimination persists: racism, ageism, antisemitism, islamophobia, antigypsyism and xenophobia are manifest in violent attacks and hate speech, but less visible discrimination is also common, in housing, education and employment. Eurostat does not use any indicator on discrimination to monitor progress towards SDG 10.
- SDG 10 calls on governments to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, but for years Member States have been unable to agree on a joint migration policy that would allow equitable burden sharing and ensure the safety and well-being of migrants. More and more children and youth flee violence and destitution, often alone. Unaccompanied minors need the EU’s strong protection, and the well-being of child asylum-seekers needs to be prioritised.
- The European Consensus on Development Cooperation commits the EU to fighting inequality globally. This cannot be achieved without policy coherence for sustainable development between core EU policies such as trade, investment, agriculture and climate to ensure they do not exacerbate global inequalities.

¹ Oxfam International [5 shocking facts about extreme global inequality and how to even it up](#).

² Ibid.

³ OECD Insights [Income Inequality](#).



Special protection for special needs: child refugees in the EU

Ali's story



1 IN 4
ASYLUM APPLICANTS
 IN THE EU WAS A
CHILD IN 2015



Source: European Commission

GREECE

My name is Ali and I come from Pakistan. I was 11 when I arrived in Greece three years ago.

I was very young when I realised that I had to leave my homeland. I longed for education but, because my parents were poor, I had to drop out of school. I had to go to work, first in a mobile phone factory and then in a garage. In spite of long hours at work, I still had some free time which I spent playing theatre and singing with a friend. However, in Pakistan theatre and music are frowned upon and my parents soon put a stop to this and sent me to a strict religious school. This was unbearable, so with my uncle I decided to leave and make my way to Europe.

Not long after our arrival in Greece my uncle left for Germany and I ended up alone. Strange as it might seem, these are the best days of my life so far. Today I live in an unaccompanied minors' refugee hostel in the centre of Athens, run by the NGO European Expression. The staff have made it possible for me to go to school, learn Greek and English, attend dance classes and participate in a choir and a theatre group, which I really love. I have not experienced much discrimination. The only difficulty is sharing a house with 39 other unaccompanied children.

European children have better education than was available to me in Pakistan and enjoy security and support as they make their way into adult life. We unaccompanied child migrants need special support to enable us to acquire the skills and meet the standards expected of European children so that in years to come we can compete for decent jobs.

Many of us are orphans or have parents who are unable to help. That's why we left our homes in the first place – to go in search of a better life. My plea to the people of Europe is to give us a helping hand. For example, would it be possible to set up an adoption programme for underage refugees? This would not only provide formal, legal status but would lay the foundation of the emotional stability which we need to become fully integrated European citizens.

Ali's story has been facilitated by Hellenic Platform for Development



For a Europe where everyone is free from discrimination, enjoys the same level of protection and can live in dignity

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Equality and Human Rights – Public policies and legislative measures should ensure that, in line with European and international human rights law, all European citizens and residents enjoy the same level of protection and can exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms, allowing them to live according to their own convictions under the principles of self-determination and human dignity, free from discrimination. The EU must improve its policies and actions to ensure gender equality, in addition to guaranteeing that all people facing multiple discrimination have equal opportunities in society.

A people-centred response to migration – Europe should assume a leading role in ensuring a human response to global migration, for the benefit and protection of all those involved. Asylum seekers should be welcomed in Europe and treated in the spirit of the UN Refugee Conventions. Closing our border to those in need runs contrary to the core values of the EU and we have walked back some of the historical gains we have fought for.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

ENAR

[Racist crime and institutional racism in Europe](#)

ENAR, ERGO network and Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

[Combatting Antigypsyism](#)

Age Platform Europe

[Age Barometer 2019](#)

ILGA

[Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGBTI People](#)

150 NGOs

[Letter to EU and Greek leaders on Right to Asylum](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ capture and monitor all dimensions of discrimination;
- ✓ understand and monitor the right to asylum;
- ✓ track the integration of migrants (e.g. through the Migrant Integration Policy Index - MIPEX).



Ensuring equality of persons with disabilities in the face of COVID-19: positive responses



 DENMARK, FRANCE, ITALY, SPAIN

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and face increased levels of inequality and discrimination.¹

Dangerous narratives have emerged: it is being said that the lives of persons with disabilities are not worth saving and that they can be a “necessary sacrifice” to be left behind in the recovery period. It is clear that this pandemic is not only a public health emergency, but an economic, social and human rights crisis.

There have been many human rights violations during the COVID-19 pandemic. But we have also seen examples of best practice during the pandemic thanks to the successful advocacy and involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities. Some governments have reached out to organisations of persons with disabilities and involved them in their responses to the pandemic, making them more inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

- In Ireland, EDF member Disabled Federation Ireland has been included in the national taskforce designing responses to the crisis.

- In France, organisations of persons with intellectual disabilities had weekly meetings with the government to ensure that measures taken were inclusive of persons with disabilities.
- The Italian government announced plans for a strategy during the recovery for persons with disabilities.

France, Spain and Italy made exceptions and adjustments to the lockdowns for persons with disabilities, permitting them to go out when they needed, to get food, hygiene products and support services.

Funding for organisations of persons with disabilities helped them tackle the exclusion and loneliness faced by persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In Denmark, EDF member Disabled People’s Organisation Denmark (DPOD) received €3 million in government funding as part of the Disability Area Partnership adopted by the Danish Parliament.

The Bioethics Committee of San Marino issued anti-discrimination guidelines on access to intensive care for persons with disabilities. This was a response to the practice seen in many countries of denying critical health care to persons with disabilities or assigning them lower priority.

¹ Evidence provided by the World Health Organisation, other UN agencies and EDF members

Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

The urban paradox: opportunities meet sustainability challenges

75% of Europeans live in urban areas. Education, employment opportunities and the promise of vibrant social and cultural life attract people to cities and towns from across the EU. Some problems of urban life, such as noise pollution, overcrowding and crime have improved, but significant issues remain: scarcity of affordable housing; air pollution and other environmental pressures; traffic congestion and poor public transport. Successes in reducing traffic, encouraging cycling and walking and opening up more green spaces also bring the challenge of balancing opportunities and greater sustainability. Sustainable urbanisation must be participatory. Many local communities have embarked on an inclusive transition to sustainability – and should have the full support of policymakers..

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- Inequality is often more acute in cities – in 2014, 34 million urban dwellers were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.¹
- Urban congestion costs Member States around €100 billion a year.² Buses and trains account for about 17% of urban passenger traffic – and this is decreasing as the use of cars is on the rise. There has not been sufficient investment in sustainable transport systems and the policies needed to support them. Public transport must be more affordable, more efficient, more accessible and inclusive. It needs to cater for the special needs of women, children and young people, persons with disabilities and older people. Cities offering free public transport have seen a significant uptake.
- Air pollution, measured by concentrations of small particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), affects urban populations across the region and can have major health impacts. 77% of the EU's population is exposed to PM_{2.5} concentrations above

the WHO's Air Quality Guidelines and 8% above those of the EU.³ The main sources of air pollution are transport, industry, coal power plants, agriculture and outdated heating systems.

- Urban sprawl has increased in all EU Member States. As more land is used for housing and roads, fertile farmland and precious habitats are destroyed, soils are sealed by concrete and landscapes are fragmented and lost. Built-up areas are expanding, even where populations are in decline, as our lifestyles demand more space and bigger buildings. Each year, between 2000 and 2006, Europe lost 1,120 km² of natural and semi-natural land (of which almost 50% was arable or cultivated land) to urban or other artificial land development.⁴
- More than 13% of Europeans live in substandard housing with, for instance, damp rooms or leaking roofs. The right to safe and affordable housing in the EU is under threat. According to Eurostat's housing overburden rate, 10% of all people in Europe pay more than 40% of their household income towards housing. This rises to 38% for households who are at risk of poverty.⁵ Policies and investments must support social, cooperative and public housing.
- Urgent measures are required to tackle homelessness, which is increasing in the European Union. At least 700,000 people are homeless on any given night in the EU, 70% more than a decade ago. 24 Member States report that homelessness has increased over the last decade with Finland being the only MS where homelessness has declined (see also SDG 2).
- Proximity to green urban areas is a major factor in urban quality of life but access to green areas is far from equitable across the EU. Current Eurostat indicators for sustainable cities do not measure the availability and accessibility of green spaces, which is a target of SDG 11.

¹ Eurostat [Urban Europe](#).

² European Commission [Clean Transport, Urban Transport](#).

³ European Environmental Agency. [Air quality in Europe - 2019 report](#).

⁴ EEA [Urban Sprawl in Europe](#).

⁵ Eurostat [Housing cost overburden rate](#).

My village – not safe or sustainable without proper planning

Basia's story



📍 POLAND

In 2001, I moved to Jesówka, a village south of Warsaw, to give my children more space. Little did I know that I was embarking on a nightmare.

Jesówka started with one street with plots of land for each family stretching back from the street. Then the families built their houses as they pleased, without seeking or obtaining planning permission. Over 30 years more and more houses were built on each strip, further and further away from the main street. There was no planning, no thought for the layout of the village. The roads leading to the houses set back from the main street have become narrower and narrower so the road leading to my house is only three meters wide.

Buying my plot was an administrative nightmare of division and subdivision. I put up with this because I thought that the end result would be beautiful. How wrong I was. For example, there was an electricity pole in the middle of my narrow street where it meets the main street. Manoeuvring round it was very difficult and my neighbour was always crashing into it with his truck. In the end it was moved, but only because the media became involved.

Then I had to fight to get a gas pipeline laid to my house. I tried to get the road paved, but the mayor's office said that

NEARLY **73%** OF THE EUROPEAN POPULATION **LIVES IN AND AROUND CITIES,** POSSIBLY **82%** BY **2050.** WE LOSE MORE THAN **1000 KM² OF NATURAL AREAS** PER YEAR TO **URBAN SPRAWL AND LAND DEVELOPMENT.**



Source: European Environment Agency

this would not happen until all underground piped services had been laid. When sewage pipes were installed, I asked the mayor at least to put in a sidewalk, but again I came away empty handed. Later I was told that we were to blame because our road was not six meters wide and therefore did not meet municipal standards. At the same time, however, the officials acknowledged that our houses had been built without permission or enough space for a proper road. They are responsible for planning, but they blame us because they have failed to do their job – it is legalised disorder.

And then I learned that my taxes had paid for roads no wider than mine to be paved in neighbouring villages. This is a never-ending absurdity. Truly, there is no logic to planning regulations in Poland. We, the citizens, are the victims – and also the natural world, as our landscape is being ruined. Lack of urban planning is also bad for health and the environment, because there are delays in building the infrastructure needed for clean water and air.

Basia's story has been facilitated by Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD)





For healthy, sustainable and inclusive cities and communities where everyone has access to affordable housing and enjoys quality living

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Quality living for everyone and sustainable communities – The EU needs to ensure quality living for everyone. European policies must guarantee access to affordable and quality housing for all. We want an EU that promotes inclusive, participatory and sustainable communities.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

European Disability Forum
[Webinar on Passenger Rights](#)

Housing Europe
[The State of Housing in the EU 2019](#)

Housing Europe
[Public, cooperative and social housing in EU Cohesion policy post-2020](#)

Ecolise
[Local, Community-Led. A new future unfolding](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ analyse the trend of how much congestion in urban and dense areas costs us every year;
- ✓ monitor increases in built-up areas and urban sprawl;
- ✓ expand the existing Eurostat indicator on housing cost overburden;
- ✓ assess and monitor the availability and accessibility of green urban spaces.



Creating living laboratories for sustainable communities: the example of ecovillages



GERMANY, DENMARK, ITALY



Ecovillages – often described as “living laboratories” – are unique spaces of experimentation in the social, economic, cultural and ecologically sustainable ways of living that will be required for the communities and towns of tomorrow.

Already homes and workplaces of thousands of people around Europe (and the world), ecovillages serve as test sites for regenerative practices that can be adapted to all kinds of communities and spaces in cities, towns and villages. They are testing grounds of practical sustainability, using technologies such as closed-loop waste management and social tools needed for participatory decision-making and conflict resolution and transformation.

Once we have shown that these tools can work on the ground within ecovillages, they can be scaled up and used to design resilient, sustainable communities and neighbourhoods with people and planetary well-being at their core.

While many ecovillages are rural, much can be learned from exchanges between rural sites and urban spaces. Ecovillages are increasingly recognised as having a ripple effect, with impacts extending well beyond the ecovillage itself. The presence of an ecovillage in a municipality can have many positive effects, including the opening (or reopening) of schools, reviving local cultural traditions, and spurring social

enterprise and local economies. For example, the Living in Sustainable Villages project – a collaboration between the German ecovillage network and local authorities in Germany – twins established ecovillages with traditional settlements affected by economic and social decline, with the aim of reviving their social and economic life.

Meanwhile, Boekel Ecovillage (<https://www.ecovillage-boekel.nl/>) in the Netherlands, has the ambition of being a showroom for all 17 SDGs. Its commitment to ecology and the circular economy and issues ranging from construction to the economic life of communities has generated interest and investment from the Dutch government.

All this shows that ecovillages are no longer on the margins. With their holistic focus encompassing all aspects of sustainability, ecovillages have the potential to provide a blueprint for the communities, cities and societies of the future.

The European ecovillage network, GEN Europe, is a member of ECOLISE, the European organisation for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability, with over 110 ecovillage members and more than a dozen national and bioregional ecovillage networks throughout Europe.

This story has been provided by Ecolise and GEN Europe





Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

We consume, produce and discard much more than we need to live well

If everyone in the world lived like the average European, we would need 2.6 planets to satisfy our needs.¹ On average, a person in the EU uses 14 tons of materials per year. We consume more than what the planet can regenerate, destroying our own life-support-systems. The EU is in ecological deficit because our demand for ecological goods and services exceeds what our ecosystems can supply.² Technological innovation improves resource- and energy-efficiency, but our efficiency gains are often cancelled out by our increased consumption. We drive more often, fly more regularly and build bigger houses. We eat more meat, import foods from other continents, and buy more clothes and electronic gadgets than we did 20 years ago. Many products on sale to consumers in the EU are cheap because they are made by low paid and sometimes abused workers and do not include in their prices the costs of environmental degradation and resource depletion in developing countries. We are a long way from SDG 12: while the EU is failing to reign its demand for natural resources, it is high time to walk the talk and create a circular, carbon-neutral and fair economy that increases sufficiency and resilience.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- The EU is committed to a circular economy, but only 11% of the materials we use come from recycling, while 'make, use and dispose' is still the dominant reality of 89% of the goods we buy. In the textile industry, recycling rates are below 1%.
- Despite improving recycling rates, the waste generated each year in Member States comes to 1800 kg per capita. Packing waste accumulates to nearly 174 kg per person every year – the highest value in history.³ While recycling targets must be ambitious, policies need to focus on the prevention and reduction of waste generation in the first place.
- The EU is not willing to deal with all its waste on its own and exports waste to third countries. While the export of hazardous waste to non-OECD countries is banned, there are well-known leaks, for instance, with waste electrical

and electronic equipment (WEEE) ending up in Western African and East Asia. The EEA reports that the EU exported around 150 000 tons of plastic waste every month in 2019,⁴ often to countries that struggle with the waste generated by their own populations.

- The EU has not set itself clear reduction targets on resource use and material footprint. It should also set targets on the reduction of the ecological footprint per capita or on progressively delaying the Earth overshoot day.
- SDG 12 has a target of halving food waste. In the EU, around 88 million tons of food are wasted every year, with total associated costs of €143 billion⁵ (see also SDG 2).
- SDG 12 calls for the environmentally sound management of chemicals and hazardous waste. While EU legislation places restrictions on toxic chemicals, processes to phase them out are very slow. Too little is known about the chemicals contained in products and in material streams and action against their adverse impacts is usually taken only after they have caused serious harm. The draft Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability presented by DG Environment in 2020 is too weak. DG GROW has sought to block stricter regulation of chemicals and weaken requirements on prevention of harm and safe-by-design innovations.
- Sustainable consumption and production require fair and environmentally friendly supply chains. The rules for accountability for the supply chains for the consumer goods produced for the European market by companies based in developing countries is weak. Some European companies subscribe to voluntary codes, while others assume no responsibility for human rights and environmental protection in their supply chains. Transparency and fairness in the supply chains of textiles, coffee, cocoa and other agricultural commodities or electronic gadgets and batteries are just a few examples. At EU-level, policymakers so far have failed to develop legally binding due diligence obligations across all sectors and inject them in EU trade policy.

1 EEA [Ecological footprint of European countries](#).

2 Ibid.

3 Eurostat [Waste packaging](#).

4 EEA [The plastic waste trade in the circular economy](#).

5 Fusion [Estimate of European Food Waste Levels](#).

We don't want your garbage clothes

Reuben Kiboi's story



© Caitriona Rogerson

 KENYA

I am a *mitumba* seller in Mombasa, Kenya. *Mitumba* is our word for second-hand clothes which are shipped to Kenya from abroad. Kenya imports over 150,000 tonnes of second-hand clothes every year. Most of the *mitumba* comes from Europe, the US and Canada. It is shipped to the port of Mombasa, and then transported to warehouses where it is sold to us market traders. The original owners think they are recycling their clothes, but the truth is very different.

I have been a *mitumba* seller my whole life. When I began my business in the 1990s, there were very few *mitumba* sellers in Kenya, and the imported clothing was high quality. You could make a good living. Over the years, however, the quantity of clothing we import has increased, while the quality has declined. One 45kg bale of *mitumba* can cost up to USD\$200. Our problem is that we do not know the quality of clothing inside until we open it. Today you can open a bale of *mitumba* and find that half the contents cannot be sold at any price – the clothes are torn, dirty and very poor quality. What can we do? We have no choice but to dump these clothes or burn them. When the bales I buy turn out to be of such poor quality, I take the hit, not the big clothing merchants.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT CONSUMERS IN THE EU DISCARD **5.8 MILLION TONNES OF TEXTILE WASTE** EACH YEAR. **ONLY 1% OF TEXTILES ARE RECYCLED.**



Source: European Environment Agency

But it is not just a question of money. There is the environment to consider. We have no proper waste management systems or recycling facilities here in Kenya, so this waste clothing ends up dumped in landfill sites and in our rivers. But our landfill sites are already full, and our rivers are overflowing with pollution. We can no longer manage this quantity of waste. When I see the contents of these shipping containers, I feel that our country, Kenya, has become a dumping ground.

I would really like you to help us to clear up this mess. I say to Western governments and the clothing merchants of Europe, "Up your game. We don't want your garbage. We too are conscious of quality." We welcome good quality clothes. As for the rest, you must find a way to recycle them in your own country.

Reuben Kiboi's story has been facilitated by Irish Environmental Network (IEN)



For a system of production and consumption that satisfies human needs in full respect of the Earth's capacity and guarantees wellbeing of all

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Respect for the Earth's capacity through sufficiency – EU policies need to create measures to bring European resources consumption levels in line with the Earth's capacity including through implementing sufficiency strategies, based on absolute resources use/material footprint reduction per capita and ambitious waste prevention targets.

For a fair-trade agenda – International trade should be seen as a means to the efficient distribution of goods and services among world citizens, respecting social and environmental objectives. Trade agreements should benefit people, workers and small producers and cannot be seen as tools solely in the interest of multinational companies and investors. This should guarantee, for instance, decent work and better social protection. Trade and investment agreements must be designed primarily to advance well-being and the public interest, instead of cost and burden reduction for companies. Existing VIP rights for investors and corporate courts should be abolished.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

Friends of the Earth Europe, Ecological Economics and EEB [A Circular Economy within Ecological Limits](#)

EEB [Enjoying more with less](#)

EEB [Coolproducts don't cost the Earth](#)

EEB [Europe's new waste prevention and reuse laws](#)

NGO coalition [Civil Society Strategy for Sustainable Textile, Garments, Leather and Footwear](#)

NGO coalition [Tackling Food Waste in the Farm to Fork Strategy](#)

NGO coalition [Chemical strategy to deliver a toxic-free environment](#)

NGO coalition [A call for EU human rights and environmental due diligence legislation](#)

NGO coalition [10 policy priorities to reduce waste](#)

Fair Trade Advocacy Officer [From local to EU level. Scaling up Fair Trade in Europe](#)

FERN and Fair Trade Advocacy Office [Towards Sustainable Cocoa Supply Chains](#)

Make ICT Fair [Case studies](#) and [Change for Good](#)

EEB [Towards a socially sustainable and circular ICT sector](#)

Fondation Nicolas Hulot and Veblen Institute [Making Trade Serve the Ecological and Social Transition](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ include the total material use of products and services consumed in the EU, such as Raw Material Consumption (RMC), Material and Consumption Footprint in SDG monitoring;
- ✓ track the average per capita ecological footprint and the date of the Earth overshoot day for the EU and its Member States;
- ✓ include exports of waste (hazardous and non-hazardous) outside the EU in the context of SDG monitoring;
- ✓ analyse food waste along the whole food chain;
- ✓ assess and monitor the social and environmental sustainability of European supply chains (e.g. with an indicator on the market share of fair trade or other certified products);
- ✓ monitor the ratio of Green public procurement at national level and of sustainable procurement at company level.



Reuse, repair and remake to build back better: business models for truly sustainable fashion



© Irish Environmental Network

📍 BELGIUM, FRANCE, GERMANY, IRELAND, SLOVENIA, SWEDEN, THE NETHERLANDS

When it comes to textiles, achieving SDG 12 will require a radical shift from current business models dependent on an ever increasing stream of new products to one based on waste prevention and resource sufficiency.

Selling more and more new clothing every year increases the negative impacts of the industry, regardless of progress in recycling textile waste into new yarns and fabrics and adoption of lower-impact production techniques.

Progress towards SDG12, therefore, depends on reducing the quantity of new textile products made from virgin resources entering the economy in the first place. Best practices based on reusing, repairing and remaking show the way.

- The Lena Fashion Library, a lending service for fashion in Amsterdam, enabling people to check out clothes as they would a book, encourages us to ask fundamental questions about ownership. The Irish rental platform Sharedrobes, a 'peer to peer' model, allows users to make money by renting their clothes to others. Swapsies in Ireland and Swap Party in Slovenia organise clothing swap events, and on the Irish app NuWardrobe everything is 'for share', not for sale.

- Some brands have pioneered repair schemes. The Swedish denim brand Nudie Jeans has a network of repair shops and partners around the world where their customers can take their ripped and torn jeans. German outdoor brand Vaude has an in-house repair service and makes repair manuals (as well as spare parts) available online so customers can mend their products themselves. Pool, a small Belgian social enterprise, extends the life of clothing with workshops on mending clothes.
- Many companies and small designers disassemble textiles otherwise destined for incineration or landfill and remake them into something new. This is often known as 'upcycling' – the small brand, Isatio, has pioneered the concept in Belgium. Perhaps one of the most inspiring examples is La Tête dans les Nuages in France which takes retired hot air balloons and turns them into multi-coloured bean bags – putting the 'up' into upcycling! The company also offers employment to people who have experienced exclusion from the labour market.

Governments must champion policies that allow best practices like these and others to thrive and become the new norm.

This story has been provided by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)





Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Our house is on fire – and bold steps are needed to put the fire out

2020, at the end of the world's warmest ever decade (2010-2019), is likely to be another "hottest year ever recorded". In recent years, Europeans have experienced unprecedented floods, heatwaves, tornados and other weather extremes. Economic losses from weather and climate-related events cost the EU more than €12 billion in 2017.¹

Looking beyond the EU, combatting climate change is a question of global justice. Climate change exacerbates poverty and inequality, impacting most those communities which have contributed least to global warming. Scientists foresee that up to 19% of the planet's land surface may be uninhabitable by 2070, potentially turning billions into 'climate refugees'.² Even within the EU, people may have to migrate due to an increasingly hostile environment.³

By 2020, EU greenhouse gas emissions had decreased by more than 20% compared to the 1990 levels. Projections from the EEA from late 2019, however, show that current policies and measures can only deliver a 30% reduction by 2030. If we do not adopt bold measures now, we will miss even the weak 40% target set by policymakers for 2030 and fall a long way short of the 65% reduction target that many experts and civil society are calling for.⁴

The 2015 Paris Agreement committed the international community to keep the global temperature rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. The new EU Climate Law proposed in March 2020 would commit Europe to become the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. According to the EEB and CAN Europe, the EU can achieve climate neutrality by 2040 – a decade before the EU target – and have zero-pollution by 2050. Civil society is calling for the bloc to cut emissions by 65% by 2030, as opposed to the current EU target of 40%,⁵ with the energy efficiency target raised to at least 40% and renewables supplying at least 45% of energy needs.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- We need to decarbonise the economy across the entire value chain and across all sectors and across the whole life-cycle including end-of-life emissions (e.g. through landfills and incineration) and also to take responsibility for carbon emissions embodied in imports to the EU to avoid "carbon dumping".
- There are too many loopholes for emissions from the carbon-intensive sectors of transport, including shipping, aviation and buildings. Effective carbon pricing must be introduced to take account of the negative externalities of energy production which, except in a few Member States, are not subject to taxation.
- New regulation must focus on energy efficiency of particularly difficult sectors. For instance, ageing, poorly insulated buildings are currently responsible for 36% of Europe's total CO₂ emissions. The EU's new Renovation Wave strategy⁶ must give a clear signal that inefficient electric and fossil fuel operated appliances should be phased out by 2030. The Energy Efficiency and the Energy Performance of Building Directives⁷ must ensure climate-proof homes for all Europeans by 2050.
- The EU has set an energy efficiency target of 32.5% by 2030, but Member States set their own targets. The European Parliament's Environment Committee has voted for a binding 40% target for 2030, national binding targets and obligations for stronger energy savings.
- The SDG pledge to mobilise \$100 billion annually to support the poorest communities to mitigate climate change impacts must be honoured. The EU must allocate 50% of its development funding to climate and environment action.
- Currently, international law as well as national or regional frameworks do not offer any protection to 'climate refugees' or environmental migrants. The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2018, recognises that 'climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements'; however, the EU so far has no answer for how to deal with migration movements due to climate change.

1 Eurostat [SDG 13 - Climate Action](#).

2 New York Times Magazine [The Great Climate Migration](#).

3 Khaled Diab (2020) [Warming May Push Humanity Out of Its Climate Comfort Zone](#).

4 EEA [Total greenhouse gas emission trends and projections in Europe](#).

5 CAN Europe and EEB [Paris Agreement Compatible Scenarios for Energy Infrastructure](#).

6 See https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave_en

7 See https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/energy-performance-buildings-directive_en



Climate change – our government’s denial of human rights

Michaela Krömer’s story



AUSTRIA



Source: Austrian Environment Agency

I am a constitutional lawyer and believe that the ultimate task of our legal system is to ensure a good life for all. Human rights law serves to protect and uphold this goal. Yet, the right to life, the right to health and the right to own property are threatened by this crisis and violated by the failure of states to act upon climate change. Fundamental rights include the positive obligation of states to prevent harm. If states fail in their duty to protect their citizens without justifiable reason, these rights are infringed. There is no article in the Austrian constitution, however, which would allow the state’s inaction to be challenged, even when it constitutes an infringement of fundamental rights. This, to me, is unacceptable, which is why I was pleased to join forces with ÖKOBÜRO and Greenpeace Austria to fight for exactly these rights.

Given the limits of the system, we focused on climate-damaging state action, as opposed to inaction. On behalf of 8,063 frequent users of the railways, we requested the Constitutional Court to invalidate tax exemptions, such as the VAT exemption on international flights and tax exemption on kerosene fuel for domestic flights. These tax breaks make flying cheaper than taking the train, even though train journeys are 31 times more climate friendly. The submission is primarily based on human rights law.

This submission has cost me blood, sweat and tears, and yet the chances of success are limited, simply because our system is not designed to deal with global challenges of this scale. It is difficult to demonstrate sufficient harm to the Court and prove its connection to the climate crisis, despite the fact that the harmful impacts of flying have been proven by science and life will become unsustainable if global warming is not halted. The (legal) system needs to change and hopefully we can at least drive this point home. At times when I am daunted by the legal challenges we face, I like to remind myself of my favorite quote, “If you aim for the moon and miss, you will still end up among the stars.”

Michaela Krömer’s story has been facilitated by ÖKOBÜRO





For ambitious climate action through rapid phase-out of all fossil fuels, an absolute decrease of energy use and energy efficiency guaranteeing climate justice

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Ambitious climate action – The Paris Agreement should be fully implemented and reflected in the alignment of the EU’s emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2050 with the commitment to limit temperature increases to 1.5°C through ambitious EU climate policies, including a rapid phase-out of all fossil fuels, and moving from energy efficiency towards an absolute decrease of energy use. The EU should accelerate the just and sustainable transition to a 100% renewable energy supply, which is clean, affordable and supports community ownership and does not lead to energy poverty.

SDG Watch Europe’s members’ and allies’ vision for a sustainable Europe:

EEB

[Reply to public consultation on climate law](#)

EEB

[Response to Consultation and Energy Efficiency and Building Renovation](#)

CAN Europe et al.

[Environmental action in development funding](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU’s SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ analyse GHG emissions from the transport sector, including total emissions from passenger cars (rather than looking at the emission levels of new cars which is misleading), road freight transport, aviation and shipping;
- ✓ monitor emissions from sectors in which emissions are increasing or where reductions are too slow, e.g. buildings or heavy industries such as the steel industry;
- ✓ measure the net emissions of products imported for consumption in the EU including emissions stemming from land-use-change;
- ✓ monitor how development funding delivers on climate agreements.



Rewetting peatlands to mitigate climate change: an untapped potential



© Jurate Sendzikaite

LITHUANIA

The peatlands of Lithuania could store vast amounts of CO₂, one of the main greenhouse gases, and so help to mitigate climate change. Unlike tropical forests, reduced yearly in area by human activity, peatlands have received little attention. Although they account for only 3 per cent of the world's land surface they hold almost twice the organic carbon contained in all the planet's forests.

Undisturbed peatlands sequester carbon and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. By restoring and protecting our peatlands, we could prevent the release into the atmosphere of very large quantities of CO₂. Since the majority of degraded and abandoned peatlands in Lithuania are on state land, and the government is committed to combatting climate change, restoration and protection of our peatlands is a practical possibility.

Peatlands must be wet – this means that rewetting of peatlands should be the main restoration measure. Water starts the process of peat forming and prevents mineralisation and loss of peat layers. If rewetting were scaled up in Lithuania's degraded peatlands, it could regenerate 300,000 hectares, almost half of the country's peatlands. Paludiculture, wet

agriculture and forestry on the rewetted peatlands, which is respectful of nature and stimulates peat forming processes, can also help.

Saving peatlands has now been recognised as a powerful strategy for mitigating climate change. The rewetting of peatlands is part of the Paris agreement, and is a means to combat climate change. Peatlands also promote water sustainability by acting as a biofilter and sink for nutrients, and contribute to the achievement of the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. On a global scale the saving of peatlands would contribute to eradicate poverty and hunger since healthy ecosystems are essential to the quality of life on earth.

Lithuania's peatlands are now severely degraded, but they were here long before us and it is our responsibility to ensure that they remain after us. "Our region has always been naturally wet. But now we have few peatlands left, and those we still have are seriously threatened by climate change," says Nerijus Zableckis, "We must rewet them for future generations."

This story has been provided by Foundation for Peatlands Restoration and Conservation



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources

Our oceans need more action, sea life better protection

Conservation and the sustainable use of the oceans are at the core of sustainable development. Critical systems depend on healthy oceans: rain, weather and climate, the oxygen cycle, and vital food chains. More coastal zones are now protected around the EU, the quality of bathing water has improved, and fish stocks are being used more sustainably. However, the oceans are still threatened by pollution of coastal waters and from ships and oil rigs, overfishing and ocean acidification with serious negative impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- Eurostat data show that fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic have improved in the last ten years because they are now more sustainably managed. The data also show, however, that more than a third of European fish stocks in the North East Atlantic are still overfished. European fishing fleets are regularly allowed to exceed the limits recommended by scientists. At the same time, unwanted by-catch is thrown back into the sea in huge quantities. By 2030, all commercial fish stocks must be managed sustainably, and must respect scientific recommendations to protect biodiversity.
- For decades, EU fishery subsidies promoted the artificial growth of the EU's fishing fleet, which was two to three times bigger than the size required for sustainable catches. In 2004, the EU had already agreed to reduce the subsidies that had resulted in overfishing. However, as negotiations for the post-2020 Maritime and Fisheries Fund are continuing, there is a clear risk that powerful vested interests will manage to retain some harmful subsidies.
- Beyond the EU's fishing grounds, recent research shows,¹ European fishing vessels are still threatening the food security of local communities along the West African coast, including through joint ventures and charters.
- In recent years plastic pollution of the oceans has hit the headlines: at least 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans around the world each year, constituting 80% of all marine debris from surface waters to deep-sea sediments. While most marine litter finds its way to seas beyond European coasts, the EU is not immune. In 2019, each month we exported 150,000 tonnes of plastic waste to countries outside the EU, without reliable assurance that none of discarded plastic ends up in the ocean. Moreover, as research by the Break Free from Plastics alliance shows, the largest quantities of single-use plastic items found in our oceans are produced by multinational companies headquartered in the developed countries including the EU, that sell food, beverages, cosmetics and cigarettes.
- There are high levels of nitrogen in European seas, causing harmful algae blooms, eutrophication and dead zones where it is difficult for marine life to survive. In shallow seas, such as the Baltic, biodiversity has been drastically reduced and the overall ecosystem degraded. There is clear evidence, mainly from the North Sea and the Baltic, of high levels of nitrogen. However, data on nitrogen levels in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea are lacking.
- Beyond the sea border of the EU, the bloc's Blue Growth Strategy and the Innovation Partners on Raw Materials have taken interest in deep sea mining, an activity that risks leading to irreversible environmental impacts in vulnerable ecosystems and biodiversity hotspots so far little touched by human activity. According to Seas at Risk, over one million square kilometres in the oceans are already licenced for exploitation, in advance of any agreement about environmental rules that should govern this activity. "Intrinsically linked to the exploitation of non-renewable resources, deep-sea mining also conflicts with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production and the EU's circular economy ambitions", argues Seas at Risk.²

¹ Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood and Dyhia Belhabib [The duplicity of the European Union Common Fisheries Policy in third countries: Evidence from the Gulf of Guinea.](#)

² Seas at Risk [Deep Sea Mining.](#)

Unsustainable economic system threatens marine life

João Correia's story

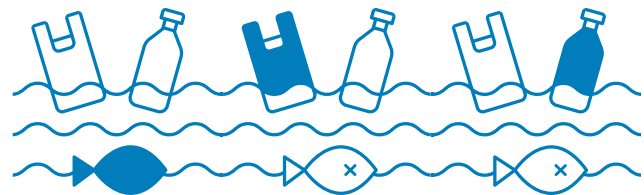


 PORTUGAL

João Correia, a marine biologist has dedicated his entire professional life to the study and health of our oceans. As a child, he had a passion for nature, and a special interest in sharks, sparked by Steven Spielberg's film, "Jaws". He shared his concerns with us.

"Sharks are a highly threatened species and easy prey to overfishing, habitat loss, and pollution, because they occupy the top position in their respective food webs, through the phenomenon of bioamplification. Through this, conservative pollutants (i.e. substances that aren't eliminated by living organisms) accumulate in the tissue of species at the bottom of food webs, which are then preyed upon by those above them, and so forth, reaching massive concentrations at top levels. Conservative pollutants include heavy metals such as lead cadmium, nickel, pesticides and hormones found, for example, in birth control pills, which are known to cause serious harm to fish populations worldwide.

An ocean without sharks is an ocean with uncontrolled food-chains, where species that sharks prey upon would multiply excessively and therefore prey excessively on those below. As apex predators, sharks are the backbone of the oceans' health and the perils they face today will have dire effects in the global fisheries economy. Thankfully, smaller coastal



AT LEAST **8 MILLION TONNES** OF **PLASTIC** END UP IN OUR **OCEANS** EVERY YEAR. SOME OF IT ORIGINATES IN **EUROPE**, AND A LOT OF IT IS PRODUCED BY **MULTINATIONALS**.

Source: IUCN

communities have been investing in shark diving and other ecotourism related activities, instead of extensive shark fishing. Some scientific references have calculated that the value of 'live' sharks is 100 (!) times greater than that of 'dead' sharks.

The oceans represent 71% of the planet's surface and 97% of its water resources. About 50% of the oxygen we breathe is produced in the oceans, and they absorb around 25% of the carbon dioxide humankind emits. By protecting the oceans, we will not only protect sharks but will put ourselves on the path to achieving the 2030 Agenda by slowing or even halting climate change, protecting life on Earth, and improving the quality of our air and water resources. If we can ensure the sustainability of our marine resources, we will contribute to improved health, reduction of hunger and poverty and have an impact on those factors that cause some groups of people to migrate. But to achieve this we must change our economic system, slow down consumerism and push towards circular economy societies, which don't pose as much of a threat to the oceans."

João Correia's story has been facilitated by the Portuguese Confederation of Environmental Defense Associations (CPADA)



For clean and healthy oceans with thriving biodiversity

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Robust management of natural resources - Common standards should be set up and enforced to deliver clean air and water, safe and healthy food and to protect our oceans. Ambitious measures must be implemented to stop biodiversity loss in Europe and globally, and to end the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, including from the Global South.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

Break Free From Plastics

[Open Letter to the world's top plastic polluters](#)

Birdlife International, WWF, ClientEarth + Seas at Risk

[Post-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund](#)

Seas at Risk

[Deep-sea mining has no place in a future shaped by the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ track the overfishing of those species most at risk;
- ✓ monitor biodiversity in European seas and oceans of species that are not commercially fished;
- ✓ monitor unhealthy levels of nitrogen in European seas.

Protecting seas against plastic waste: pioneer legislation in the Balearic islands



 SPAIN

In the EU, plastics constitute up to 95% of all waste found on shorelines and at sea.

In 2019, the Balearic Autonomous Government is pioneering the fight against single-use plastics with the approval of sweeping legislation which, as of January 2021, will ban many plastic products, including lightweight plastic bags, plastic cutlery, plates and straws, disposable razors and lighters and single-use coffee capsules. This ground-breaking law goes further than the EU Directive on Single-Use Plastics, by prohibiting more items and having more ambitious re-use objectives, establishing a benchmark for the fight against marine litter in Europe.

Waste has always been an issue in the Balearic Islands, creating tension between local populations and tourists. One of the consequences of the great number of tourists is huge quantities of waste, which for small islands can be difficult to manage and dispose of. The resulting plastic litter and pollution on the coasts and in the sea and their impact on marine life have led the government to take a holistic approach to waste, focusing on prevention and reduction at source in addition to management.

The law aims to reduce the total volume of waste by 20% by 2030. In addition to banning the sale of many plastic products, it makes producers responsible for waste collection and management; allows for deposit return systems for beverage containers; and incentivises sustainable consumption and re-use through green public procurement. This comprehensive text offers a unique combination of practical prevention measures to achieve effective reduction in the use of single-use plastics, which can be replicated in other European countries when transposing the new EU Directive on single-use plastics into national law.

Marine litter, and plastic pollution in particular, touches on several SDGs. Due to its global nature, plastic pollution can only be addressed by comprehensive policy strategies, including toxic-free design and materials; pollution free oceans; and systemic modification of production and consumption patterns.



Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

We need to stop the sixth mass extinction, in and beyond the EU

Human well-being is unthinkable without a thriving natural environment and intact biodiversity. The crucial ecosystem services of pollination, flood protection, carbon sinks, climate regulation, soil fertility and food production depend on healthy environments and biodiversity. Despite environmental protections and an expanding network of Natura 2000 sites,¹ natural habitats and biodiversity, our forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands are being steadily and dramatically eroded. We have missed by a long way our target to halt biodiversity loss by 2020. Changes to natural habitats – caused by intensive agriculture, construction, urbanisation, quarrying, overexploitation of forests, oceans, rivers, lakes and soils, invasive alien species, pollution and global climate change – are the main causes of the current extinction wave,² which threatens around 25% of European animal species.³

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- The [Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) promises a comprehensive, systemic and ambitious long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems but it cannot be successful without legislation with binding targets and effective enforcement across the EU.
- More than 40% of the EU's land surface is covered by forest, but only a small proportion is original. Eurostat claims that we are progressing towards sustainable forest management, but its indicator does not distinguish between healthy natural forests with high biodiversity and monocultures used for logging.⁴ European forests are threatened by climate change, pests, pollution,

encroachment and unsustainable forestry. Only 26% of forest species and 15% of forest habitats are in favourable conservation status, and unsustainable forest practices are the main cause of bad conservation status.⁵ The SDGs call for sustainable management of all forests and for the restoration of degraded forests by 2020. The EU has missed this target.

- Every year, as the Eurostat Soil Sealing Index⁶ shows, the EU loses more than 1000 km² of non-built-up land. Systemic solutions, including binding quantitative targets, are needed to halt this rate of land take (also see SDG 11).⁷
- SDG 15 calls for urgent action to end illegal trafficking of wildlife. EU ports are major transit points for this illegal global trade and the EU itself is a final destination for illegally traded wildlife and a source of some internationally traded endangered domestic species. The efforts of the EU to combat the organised crime networks behind wildlife trafficking are undermined by a lack of resources. A tougher approach is needed to halt this trade, together with enhanced cooperation between Member States.
- Invasive alien species are a very significant cause of biodiversity loss in Europe, with an annual cost of €12 to €20 billion.⁸ To address this the EU needs to strengthen existing measures and Member States should work together more effectively.
- The EU's dependence on imported raw materials, including fossil fuels, minerals, agricultural commodities and consumer products with high environmental footprints, is linked to the destruction of habitats and biodiversity in third countries, deforestation in the Amazon and Southeast Asia, and habitat destruction in and around oil fields – impacts that are not accounted for in Eurostat's SDG report.

¹ See https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

² EEA [Biodiversity - Ecosystems](#).

³ [European Commission - IUCN European Red List](#).

⁴ [Eurostat - SDG 15 - Life on Land](#).

⁵ EEA [Forest dynamics in Europe and their ecological consequences](#).

⁶ Eurostat [Soil Sealing Index 200-2015](#).

⁷ RECAP [Soil sealing and land take](#).

⁸ IEEP [Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Invasive Alien Species](#).



The problem with coal Ronja Weil's story



GERMANY

This year Germany opened a new hard coal power plant which will continue to burn coal until 2038. Of all fuels coal is the most polluting and the most damaging to our environment, emitting huge quantities of CO₂. Germany's coal plants, the dirtiest in Europe, are making the water of our rivers and reservoirs undrinkable, causing deforestation and destroying our natural environment.

My name is Ronja Weil. For me, a student in my twenties, the climate crisis has been a constant shadow. I used to believe that politicians and governments would take it seriously. I was mistaken. I am now an activist with the climate justice group Ende Gelände. Since 2015 we have been fighting to shut down the coal industry – mainly in Germany, but there are local groups throughout Europe and we are part of a world-wide network for climate justice.

It is clear that neither Germany nor Europe has the political will to do what is needed to prevent catastrophe. This is a crisis – one that is already happening and causing people to flee their homes. For these climate refugees, who have contributed least to this crisis, there is no place in Fortress Europe – a bitter irony since our continent's cumulative CO₂ emissions are a major cause of global heating and so much of

THERE ARE STILL MORE THAN
250 COAL POWER PLANTS IN THE EU.

CORRESPONDING **HEALTH COST** RELATED TO **RESPIRATORY DISEASES** CAUSED BY **POLLUTANTS**:
MORE THAN **€60 BILLION PER YEAR.**

Source: Beyond Coal

our wealth was amassed through exploitation of the Global South.

The crisis is now so acute that climate change could become unstoppable and our future impossible to predict. That's why short-sighted politicians cannot be allowed to destroy any more of our planet. This sense of betrayal is what brought me to activism and the realisation that it is we, the younger generation, who will have to deal with the crisis. And this is why Ende Gelände has taken to civil disobedience to shut down the coal industry. We march into the open pit mines and onto the railway tracks of coal power plants to prevent any further destruction by blocking the coal infrastructure with our bodies. We have done more to stop climate change than the EU has managed to do with its ineffective and scandalously slow policies. We need a system change, not climate change. And we have to take matters into our own hands.

Ronja Weil's story has been facilitated by
Ende Gelände



For clean and healthy ecosystems with thriving biodiversity

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Robust management of natural resources - Common standards should be set up and enforced to deliver clean air and water, safe and healthy food and to protect our oceans. Ambitious measures must be implemented to stop biodiversity loss in Europe and globally, and to end the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, including from the Global South.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

WWF

[EU Preventing Paper Parks](#)

FoE Europe + Heinrich-Böll Foundation

[Insect Atlas 2020](#)

EEB

[Assessment of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#)

FoE Europe

[Re-rooting EU's food supply: towards healthy forests and social justice](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ better understand the conservation status of European forests;
- ✓ monitor our impact on ecosystems and biodiversity globally by, for instance, assessing the impact of imported food products on biodiversity in third countries.

Protecting Earth rights: the groundbreaking case of the Atrato River



© Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)



COLOMBIA

SDG 15 will only be achieved if the communities who depend on each ecosystem are empowered to protect, restore, and sustainably manage them. The Chocó region in Colombia is one place on Earth rich in biological, ethnic and cultural diversity.

The Atrato River in Chocó sustains 44 different ecosystems, and is the economic, cultural, and spiritual lifeline of its ethnically diverse riverine communities. For decades, the river and its people have suffered the consequences of war and state neglect. Communities have been caught in the crossfire, targeted, displaced, confined, and abused; their resources usurped, contaminated and destroyed; their leaders threatened and killed. The riverbanks have been deforested and dug up for gold, and their waters polluted.

In 2017 the Atrato River communities, supported by local, regional, national and international NGOs and universities, achieved the historic Constitutional Court ruling T-622. This recognises the Atrato as a bearer of rights, one of the first rivers in the world to achieve this status. It grants the river and its communities biocultural rights covering protection, conservation, maintenance, and restoration and makes the State and the riverine communities jointly responsible for

guaranteeing them. The ruling created a commission of River Guardians to act as the voice of the river, consisting of the Environment Minister and 14 river guardians (seven women and seven men).

The strength of the Atrato process is community engagement and empowerment. The ruling was the culmination of a community-led process dating back to before 2003. In a conflict affected region of great ethnic diversity, the Atrato River was a symbol of peace and unity, bringing communities together to fight for the protection, conservation, and restoration of the river and their cultures and livelihoods.

The River Atrato court ruling is an excellent example of progress towards SDG 15, and lays the foundation for progress on other SDGs. It has also prompted similar rulings in Colombia and further afield, in the Amazon, Australia, Bangladesh and USA. A healthy river can reduce poverty. But without peace and justice and a reduction in historic and persistent inequalities progress will be minimal. In that sense, Ruling T-622 must act as a catalyst for community-led peace and reconciliation processes in Chocó, and state responses must take a similarly holistic approach.

This story has been provided by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)



Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

The EU needs to step up efforts to tackle transparency issues, corruption, tax evasion

EU Member States are for the most part peaceful and democratic. Crime rates are decreasing and there are relatively low levels of corruption. EU citizens, however, say they want more honest, equitable and transparent institutions. The Panama Papers and LuxLeaks scandals uncovered systematic tax evasion and money laundering. At the same time the space for civil society and trade unions to act in defence of fundamental rights, freedoms and environmental protection is shrinking in many countries in Europe undermining the Union's fundamental values.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- Eurostat figures show that a majority of Europeans want more inclusive, participatory and transparent decision-making and lack confidence in EU institutions.¹
- Despite the European Transparency Initiative, decision-making in the Council of the EU remains opaque with extremely limited participation opportunities for civil society.² The European Commission struggles to deal effectively and transparently with conflicts of interest. The way EU trade agreements are negotiated behind closed doors makes people feel excluded by policymakers.
- Europeans are unable to participate effectively in decisions that affect them because they are denied access to the information they need. Despite the Aarhus Convention guaranteeing the right of access to information on environmental matters, authorities regularly withhold information from people who need and have a right to it.³
- In the EU, we face issues with access to justice. One example is the lack of justice for victims of human rights violations and environmental degradation in the supply and value chains of European companies. EU trade agreements contain arbitration mechanisms granting wide-ranging rights to investors over governments without giving access to justice, for instance, to local communities who suffer negative impacts on their livelihoods. In November 2017, the European Union was found to be in non-compliance

with the Aarhus Convention for restricting the possibilities for NGOs to bring cases before the Court of Justice – another case of disrespect for access to justice.

- Eurostat uses Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) to monitor SDG 16, but TI has criticised Eurostat for claiming that the EU is among the least corrupt regions in the world. In reality, CPI rankings across the EU diverge significantly: Denmark, with very low levels of perceived corruption, ranks first in the world, and Bulgaria lags behind in 75th place. EU Member States need to improve and strengthen anti-corruption efforts. TI has also been critical of the fact that bribery in the private sector and corruption of foreign officials by European businesses are not part of the SDG monitoring.⁴
- Every year, wealth acquired through tax evasion, bribery, money laundering, embezzlement and smuggling, totalling USD\$1 trillion, leaves developing countries through illicit channels. These sums regularly exceed the official development assistance they receive. Within the EU, annual losses caused by multinationals shifting profits to low tax jurisdictions amount to €50 to €70 billion, depriving Member States of resources that could be invested in education, environmental protection, health care or culture and the arts. The EU has stepped up measures on corporate transparency, but genuine tax justice requires a much bolder approach.⁵
- EU arms exports undermine peace and security in third countries. Saudi Arabia, waging war in Yemen, and Egypt, notorious for its suppression of political dissent, are among the biggest purchasers of EU weaponry. The EU "Common Position" on arms exports is not enforced because they are treated as matters of national sovereignty.⁶ The different positions taken by Member States on arms exports to Saudi Arabia show that export licenses are first and foremost political and commercial decisions.

¹ Eurostat. [SDG16 - Peace Justice and Strong Institutions](#).

² Corporate European Observatory. [Reform of Council transparency in stalemate](#).

³ EEB. [For your Information](#).

⁴ Transparency International. [SDGs progress report: a partial truth](#).

⁵ EURODAD. [Country by country reporting](#).

⁶ Bonn International Center for Conversion [EU common position on arms exports](#).

No peaceful societies without curbing the arms trade

Kareem Taha's story



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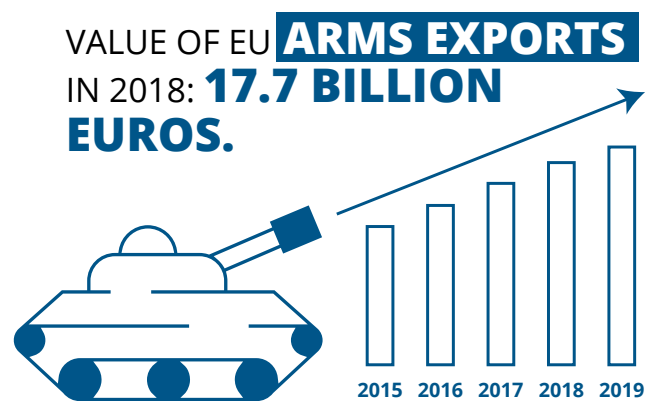
CZECH REPUBLIC

My name is Kareem Taha. I was born in Cairo, Egypt and I now live in Brno, Czech Republic.

I joined the social movement in Egypt in 2007. There have been changes since then, but human rights are still routinely violated, opposition oppressed and demonstrations violently suppressed.

I was arrested for the first time in a demonstration in 2010. I was held for a few days and tortured. Since then I have been repeatedly arrested in demonstrations, experiencing months of torture and horrible conditions in prison. In 2014, I helped to organise more demonstrations, was again arrested and spent several months in prison. I was beaten, given electric shocks, kept in overcrowded cells and solitary confinement. I was released without charges against me. I suffered from depression for twelve months and even now have flashbacks.

My last arrest came after a ceremony held to remember a friend killed in a demonstration. After my release my lawyer told me that I had been accused of terrorism and sentenced to life imprisonment. I knew I had to leave Egypt. I was invited to move to the Czech Republic but I had to pay smugglers to get me to Europe. Fortunately my application for political asylum in the Czech Republic was successful. I enjoy living here but I have not left Egypt behind, so in 2017 I founded the Egyptian Front for Human Rights.



Source: European Network Against Arms Trade (ENAAAT)

I began to ask why our revolution was unsuccessful. Part of the answer was the firepower of the security forces. The Egyptian police use weapons manufactured by the Czech company Ceska Zbrojovka. In August 2013 their guns were used to fire on protestors in Nahda Square, killing at least 90 people and wounding another 600. One of the dead was a friend of mine who was there to cover the event as a journalist. Our evidence proves that weapons from the Czech Republic and elsewhere in the EU are used against political opponents, violating their right to life.

The 2030 Agenda speaks about reducing the illicit flow of arms to ensure peaceful societies. But what about European governments legally trading arms that are used by despotic governments to break down protest? The European Union and the Czech Republic helped me personally when I left Egypt and came to Europe. But they failed me, my friends and the Egyptian people when they permitted EU companies to export arms to Egypt.

For a Europe free of corruption and tax evasion with transparent and participatory decision-making and a thriving civil society

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

Putting Europe in the hands of people – New and effective civil society participation and active citizenship must be prioritised to improve democracy, transparency, access to fundamental rights for all and trust of EU citizens in building a just and sustainable Europe. Youth and children should be engaged as active citizens and encouraged to meaningfully participate in European political processes. Measures should be taken to ensure increased accountability and transparency of decision making by EU institutions and national governments. Citizens and civil society interests must be prioritised over vested financial and commercial interests.

Fair taxation – Effective and coordinated taxation measures should ensure that all companies pay their fair share of taxes and contribute to national and European public budgets for access to socio-economic rights and well-being. The EU must commit to effectively fight tax evasion worldwide and shutdown European tax havens.

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

Corporate European Observatory
[Reform of Council transparency in stalemate](#)

EEB
[For your Information](#)

Transparency International
[SDGs progress report: a partial truth](#)

Action is needed for more data and additional indicators at EU level to:

- ✓ assess different dimensions of corruption and bribery (including in the private sector);
- ✓ monitor and assess access to information;
- ✓ better understand financial transparency and illicit financial flows;
- ✓ monitor arms exports from EU Member States;
- ✓ track shrinking civil society space (for instance, through data obtained by the FRA).



A model of open & transparent policymaking: the Finnish sustainable development strategy



FINLAND

Finland was the first country in 2016 to make a joint Government-CSO VNR presentation and has just presented its second review. Civil society again made its own assessments of Finland's performance in relation to each SDG, and its findings were presented side by side with those of government.

Civil society's assessment was positive on two SDGs, neutral on seven and negative on eight, and were largely in agreement with those made by government. Civil society, however, was sharply critical of Finland's exports of weapons and military equipment to countries at war.

The positive consultation processes used for the first VNR have been improved and developed. The influential National Commission on Sustainable Development, bringing together all significant social sectors, promotes cooperation on SDG policy and strives to ensure that sustainable development is integrated into the policies and practice of government and is supported by wider society. Civil society (youth, environment, social, minorities, development) is represented on the 100 member Commission, its chairperson is the Prime Minister and its secretariat is based in the Prime Minister's Office.

The progress made in the second VNR period means that sustainable development is now the general approach sha-

ping the government's programme. In 2019 the government began gradually to incorporate sustainable development in the budget. It has now initiated the process for the second National 2030 Agenda Implementation Plan and is continuing its work on multi-sectoral follow-up on national assessment procedures. A citizens' panel on sustainable development has met twice and a youth 2030 Agenda group has been formed. This year the government appointed a Climate Policy Round Table which works closely with the Commission and there will be a timetable for preparing a roadmap to achieve all the SDGs by 2030.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights will shape the forthcoming law on mandatory human rights due diligence, but action on the global dimension of sustainable development is less clear. Finland's impacts on developing countries must be examined to ensure that global responsibility informs our foreign policy.

At the EU level, a whole-of-EU implementation plan is needed. It should be co-led by the Presidents of the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. The key is to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is mainstreamed in everything that the EU does.





Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

True partnership once all EU policies are aligned with sustainable development objectives

Global, regional, national and local partnerships are at the core of Goal 17. The 2017 European Consensus on Development aligns European development cooperation with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In 2019, the EU and its Member States together disbursed €75 billion in aid, over 55% of the global total. The EU is also the world's main provider of foreign investment to developing countries, totalling €104 billion in 2018. Only Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg and the UK met the target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) for development assistance. Not all aid disbursed by the EU or Member States supports long-term sustainable development when it is influenced by commercial interests. Foreign direct investment is first driven by businesses' interest in sourcing raw materials or relocating production to cheaper labour markets – and not necessarily by the long-term sustainable development interest of local communities. Profits derived from world trade mainly benefit multinationals and larger companies headquartered in the developed world or owned by a rich elite, while poorer communities are exploited for their natural resources, cheap labour and environmental dumping. The poorest countries have to deal with around \$36 billion of debt service in 2020. Some of our own European policies and practices contradict sustainable development objectives and the EU fails to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development.

Goal 17 commits governments to provide data disaggregated by age, gender, disability, ethnicity and other factors in order to monitor accurately the impact of policies on people and the planet. There are significant data gaps that Eurostat and Member States should remedy.

Here are some of the key challenges that need policymakers' full attention:

- The EU and its Member States use a number of financial instruments to support European companies in risky markets. The global association of export credit agencies (ECA) invests around \$1 trillion every year in large-scale industrial development projects in developing countries and emerging markets.¹ Some of this investment is in fossil fuel projects which will have irreversible impacts on natural habitats, primary forests and protected areas, and may violate human rights.²
- It is not acceptable to use the Eurostat indicator of the trade volumes from developing countries (€893 billion in 2018 and growing) to measure the quality of the EU's global partnerships without looking at the quality of trade. As long as global trade to the EU is tainted by the exploitation of workers, child labour and modern slavery, deforestation and the destruction of natural habitats, the depletion of natural resources and pollution, growing trade volumes have a detrimental effect on sustainable development.
- CSOs have criticised the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative for its lack of a long-term approach including debt relief and cancellation, in particular in face of the COVID-19 pandemic. They call for a global mechanism under the UN to address the global debt crises in a systematic, comprehensive and enforceable way.³
- The EU's and Member States' own funding base for sustainable development is weak. Eurostat's indicator shows that the share of environmental taxes in the total tax revenue decreased to less than 6% in 2018. There is no political will to implement the long overdue shift from taxing labour towards taxing resource use, emissions and pollution.
- SDG 17 calls for policy coherence for sustainable development. The EU's governance structures do not allow to design, implement and monitor all policies and practices in a coherent and integrated way. Harmful consequences of European policies and practices are not properly accounted for, such as negative externalities linked to the Common Agricultural Policy or the EU's trade policy.

¹ See <https://www.berneunion.org/DataReports>

² Finance and Trade Watch + CEE Bankwatch Network. [ECAs go to market](#); FERN and ECA Watch Europe. [Still Exporting Destruction](#).

³ Eurodad [Shadow report on the limitations of the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative: Draining out the Titanic with a bucket?](#)



If our life is miserable, then how can your life be good? Nazma Akter's story



📍 BANGLADESH

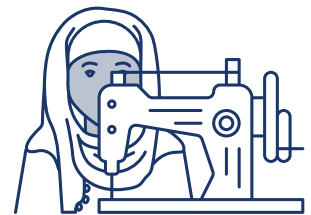
Nazma Akter is a labour leader and a campaigner for workers' rights and welfare in Bangladesh. As a child she worked in garment factories. Later she joined a trade union and now campaigns against exploitative working conditions.

'The European Union is an important trading partner for Bangladesh. But sadly, more than half of the companies exporting goods to the EU do not guarantee workers' rights and well-being. Covid-19 has highlighted the vulnerability of countries like Bangladesh. We are very dependent on exports to the EU. With workers, the great majority women, no longer able to work in the garment factories because of the pandemic, production and exports have slumped. Countries, like Bangladesh, which depend on exports to rich countries, have been overlooked and neglected by global policy makers.'

'If we want to foster sustainable development, we cannot measure sustainability by looking only at what happens within Europe. It has to be measured at every stage of the supply chain, from the provision of raw materials at the beginning through production to transport to overseas markets. Accountability at the EU end of the chain must include gender equality, fair pricing, decent work, and quality of goods in the exporting country. Freedom of



THE MINIMUM WAGE FOR TEXTILE WORKERS IN BANGLADESH? 85 EUROS PER MONTH. REAL LIVING COST? 170 EUROS PER MONTH. EUROPEANS BUY **6.4 MILLION TONNES** OF NEW CLOTHING A YEAR AND IN DOING SO SUPPORT THIS **SYSTEM OF EXPLOITATION.**



Source: European Parliament Research Service

association and collective bargaining are essential to ensuring better working conditions and decent work.'

Nazma stresses that the quality of the exported goods is key as it translates directly into better working conditions. Focusing on quantity produced under time pressure, as opposed to giving time to quality products, encourages unfair labour conditions and abuse of workers.

Nazma believes that adopting a wider perspective of sustainability and looking beyond the volume of exports, would have a positive impact on education and training, the environment and gender equality.

'There has to be accountability at every stage in the supply chain. A better tomorrow is possible, but it depends on people from different countries and fields working together.' Nazma asks: *'if our lives are miserable, then how can your life be good?'*

Nazma Akter's story has been facilitated by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)





For true global partnership focussed on the most vulnerable and ensuring that all our policies are aligned with sustainability principles

From the Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for Its Citizens

The EU's role in the world – The EU has a key responsibility to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The EU must ensure that all its internal and external policies are coherent and aligned with the SDGs. EU Overseas Development Aid should prioritise those most in need including Least Developed Countries and benefits the most marginalised. The EU must restructure its investments to achieve sustainability, poverty eradication and make universal access to fundamental rights a reality worldwide. The EU should actively support legally binding European and international human rights obligations for its businesses that operate overseas, including to push for a UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights.

104

SDG Watch Europe's members' and allies' vision for a sustainable Europe:

CONCORD

[AidWatch 2019](#)

Eurodad

[G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative: Draining out the Titanic with a bucket?](#)

SDG Watch Europe

[Who is Paying the Bill? Negative impacts of European policies and practices](#)

EEB

[Taxing Polluters. What is going wrong?](#)

Action is needed for more data and better indicators in the EU's SDG monitoring report to:

- ✓ assess the quality and impact of Direct Foreign Investment and export credits;
- ✓ monitor the EU's and Member States' efforts to reduce the debt crises;¹
- ✓ analyse whether and how imports from developing countries contribute to sustainable development;
- ✓ identify gaps in current data sets and indicators to assess EU aid impact on those left behind.

¹ See suggested indicator of the German NGO coalition erlassjahr.de.



Creating networks for fair trade: lessons learned from the GEPA business model



© GEPA – The Fair Trade Company

GERMANY

GEPA, the Fair Trade Company, is an outstanding example of how an organisation can implement SDG 17 “Partnership for the goals” throughout its core business. With 131 trading partners in 45 countries in 2018 and an annual wholesale turnover of €80 million in 2019, GEPA, is now Europe’s largest Fair Trade Enterprise.

GEPA’s work is not only focused on trade. Its threefold mission is to promote disadvantaged producers, especially in the Global South; influence and change the attitudes of consumers in the North; and influence and change unfair structures of international trade by means of lobbying and advocacy.

For nearly 45 years, GEPA has been working to improve the life of marginalised producers, and to give nature the respect it deserves, with fully sustainable consumption and production as the ultimate goal.

GEPA understands that the work of smallholder farmers involves constant crisis management and that there will always be new difficulties to face. In contrast to many mainstream businesses, GEPA stands by its producers through thick and thin, something that it has demonstrated in the current COVID-19 situation, using its trade partner fund (usually used for capacity building and workshops for

the producers) to provide emergency help for smallholder producers affected by the crisis.

Through its advocacy work GEPA aims to address the root causes of poverty and climate change. In collaboration with others it conducts high quality research and seeks to influence decision and policy makers. GEPA’s policy work is varied, ranging from publication of statements on the COP 25 and the European climate law to pressing hard for mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence legislation in Germany.

GEPA is a member of WFTO-Europe, the European branch of the World Fair Trade Organization which has 400 membership organisations. Owing to its consistent growth over the past 45 years GEPA is currently the biggest European Fair Trade enterprise.

GEPA demonstrates how an enterprise that works closely together with its customers can profoundly change production and consumption patterns. GEPA’s experience also shows that scaling up fair and alternative enterprises offers a practical opportunity for the development of the European Union, the challenge of which can be addressed by collaboration and joint efforts by enterprises, policy makers and consumers.

This story has been provided by GEPA and the World Fair Trade Organization-Europe



Published by:



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The following organisations have contributed with testimonies and solutions:



SDG Watch Europe is the European cross-sectoral civil society alliance advocating for ambitious implementation of the SDGs. A broad alliance of more than 100 CSOs from all areas and sectors, including development, environment, social & human rights, its goal is to jointly hold the European Institutions and Member States to account for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This report was made possible through contributions from members and partners of SDG Watch Europe.
<https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org>

The EU-wide project Make Europe Sustainable for All (MESA) is coordinated by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and implemented in 15 European countries by 25 partners. It aims to raise citizens', CSOs', and policy-makers' awareness of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the 193 Member states of the United Nations in 2015.

#SDGS4All

<https://makeeuropesustainableforall.org>