

New SDSN report shows how the EU can strengthen its leadership at home and internationally to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Paris, 05 December 2022: Today, the 4th edition of the Europe Sustainable Development Report (ESDR) was released. It includes the SDG Index and Dashboards which track progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the EU, its member states and partner countries. The report shows that, seven years after the SDG's adoption by the international community and amid multiple crises, the EU's progress on the SDGs has stalled. Based on trend data available since 2015, the EU is still on track achieving around two-thirds of the targets, yet a third of the targets show insufficient progress or are heading in the wrong direction, especially those related to responsible consumption, climate and biodiversity (SDG2; 12-15). Through unsustainable consumption and trade the EU generates large negative spillovers on the rest of the world.

Guillaume Lafortune, Vice President of the SDSN and lead author of the report, states that:

“In the midst of multiple health, security, climate, and financial crises the SDGs remain the future Europe and the world want. By living up to the ambitions of the European Green Deal at home and strengthening access to international SDG financing, the EU can achieve its strategic objectives and rally other countries to its values centered around human dignity, freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The EU's leadership and diplomacy will remain critical to advancing key multilateral processes towards achieving the SDGs including at the UN Heads of States' SDG Summit in September 2023 and UN Summit of the Future in 2024.”

Adolf Kloke-Lesch, Co-Chair of SDSN Europe, emphasizes:

“Diplomacy, peace, and global cooperation are fundamental preconditions for making any progress on sustainable development. The EU should ensure a proactive and SDG oriented foreign and security policy and invest in its international partnerships. In a multipolar world, peace cannot be assured solely through ‘defense against’ thinking but also requires a ‘cooperation for’ approach: for a sustainable, peaceful future. In view of the mid-point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is now the time for the EU to rise to the occasion and invest “whatever it takes” in the global common good, epitomized and documented in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.”

Citation details:

Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Bermont-Diaz, L., Kloke-Lesch, A., Koundouri, P., Riccaboni, A. (2022). *Achieving the SDGs: Europe's Compass in a Multipolar World*. Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022. SDSN and SDSN Europe. France: Paris.

Download the report:

Website: <https://sdgindex.org/EU>

Data visualization: <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/>

SDG progress has stalled in Europe and globally since 2020

Multiple and simultaneous health, security, climate, and financial crises led to a slowdown of SDG progress on average in the EU, driven notably by slow progress on socio-economic outcomes and environmental goals. Finland tops the SDG Index this year (for the second year in a row) yet even countries at the top of the SDG Index face significant challenges in achieving several SDGs. The EU faces its biggest SDG challenges in responsible consumption & production, climate and biodiversity and in promoting convergence in SDG progress across its member states. Over the past two years, progress has stalled on many of the social and health indicators including poverty, life expectancy and unemployment. High inflation and the energy crisis will likely affect disproportionately the most vulnerable population groups in the coming months and years.

Yet, in the EU, the negative impact of multiple crises on SDG progress was somewhat contained up until now compared with the rest of the world, thanks to well-functioning social protection systems and automatic stabilizers as well as exceptional government interventions and measures – notably emergency and recovery financial packages adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic by the EU and its member states. In the rest of the world, SDG success is held back by severe financing constraints facing the developing countries: constraints that have been gravely aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The SDGs remain the future Europe and the world want

In a context of increased geopolitical rivalries and fragmented multilateralism, the SDGs remain the only comprehensive and universal vision for socio-economic prosperity and environmental sustainability adopted by *all* UN member states. Failures to implement the bedrock SDG principles of social inclusion, clean energy, responsible consumption, and universal access to public services will lead to more crises. In a multipolar world, the EU should, more than ever, use the SDGs as a compass internally and in its worldwide dialogue and cooperation – including with Brazil, China, India and Africa.

The world needs an equitably shared fiscal space to invest into the SDGs. The SDGs are largely an investment agenda into human capital (health, education, social protection) and physical infrastructure (clean energy, digital technologies). It is not the time to scale-back ambitions on international solidarity, including targets on Official Development Assistance. The cost of future conflicts, humanitarian crises, population displacement and refugee crises will exceed by far financial transfers to be made now for the SDGs.

Five practical recommendations for strengthening the EU's SDG leadership

By July 2023, the EU will present for the first time a Union wide SDG Voluntary Review at the United Nations. This review presents an opportunity to send a very strong signal to the international community about the EU's commitment and leadership on the SDGs. A few months later, in September 2023, Heads of States will sit down under the auspices of the UN General Assembly in New York for the second SDG Summit (the last one was in 2019). Following the SDG Summit, there will be a Summit of the Future in September 2024 which is intended to adopt a Pact for the Future including major reforms of multilateral institutions and sustainable development finance. This year's report makes five practical recommendations to strengthen the EU's SDG leadership at home and internationally:

- 1. The EU 2023 Voluntary Review to be presented at the UN in July 2023, should cover three important elements:** (1) internal priorities, (2) international spillovers, and (3) international partnerships and diplomacy for the SDGs.
- 2. Publish a joint political statement from the three pillars of EU governance** – the European Council, European Parliament, and European Commission –reaffirming their strong commitment

to the 2030 Agenda in the context of multiple crises, and to a renewed momentum towards achieving the SDGs in a multipolar world.

3. **Prepare a Communication issued by the European Commission clarifying how the EU aims to achieve the SDGs** in Europe including targets, timelines, and roadmaps.
4. **Implement and bolster the commitments made at the G20 Summit in Bali/Indonesia and at COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh/Egypt, in support of the call made by the UN Secretary-General for an “SDG Stimulus”.** The stimulus should address fiscal space issues in developing countries and the EU should push for the adoption of a global mechanism to share fairly and globally the burden of financing for human-induced adaptation and loss and damage costs among responsible countries.
5. **Set up a new mechanism or renew the mandate of the EU’s SDG Multi-Stakeholder Platform for a structured engagement with civil society,** youth organizations, the business community, trade unions and scientists on SDG policies and monitoring.

Other findings:

- Through unsustainable consumption and trade the EU generates large **negative spillovers** on the rest of the world. The EU’s consumption is associated with 1.2 million people in forced labor and more than 4,000 fatal accidents at work each year. 40% of greenhouse gases to satisfy consumption of goods and services in the EU are emitted abroad. The EU has adopted or is in the process of adopting major instruments to curb negative international spillovers.
- To a large extent, multiple crises and EU’s responses have clarified the way forward for sustainable development in Europe: accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal through a massive **scale-up of renewable energy and integrated and digital power grids.** Partnerships between the EU and neighboring countries, including in the Western Balkans and North Africa, can help advance the energy transition in the EU. The report describes how an integrated approach that aims to achieve six key SDG Transformations (one of them being energy decarbonization) can help advance the SDGs in the EU.
- This year’s special edition includes 10 contributions from experts and practitioners, notably from the SDSN, IDDRI, IDOS, OECD, IEEP and EESC (among others), about ways the EU can strengthen its SDG leadership at home and internationally.

About the report

The 4th edition of the Europe Sustainable Development Report is part of the larger Sustainable Development Report (SDR) series. Since 2015, the SDR provides the most up-to-date data to track and rank the performance of Europe and all UN member states on the SDGs. The methodology was peer-reviewed by *Nature Geoscience* and *Cambridge University Press* and statistically audited by the European Commission. The European edition builds on several rounds of public consultations and on inputs received by numerous scientists and practitioners, notably members of the SDSN network – the largest global network of scientists and research institutions dedicated to the SDGs. The report was prepared by a group of independent experts at SDSN and SDSN Europe.

Contacts

Maëlle Voil | media@unsdsn.org | +33 (0) 6 99 41 70 11

About SDSN

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) mobilizes scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society, and the private sector to support practical problem solving for sustainable development at local, national, and global scales. The SDSN has been operating since 2012 under the

auspices of the UN Secretary-General. The SDSN is building national and regional networks of knowledge institutions, solution-focused thematic networks, and the SDG Academy, an online university for sustainable development.

About SDSN Europe

Set up in 2020, SDSN Europe mobilizes and coordinates the knowledge and science across SDSN networks in support of a sustainable and resilient European Recovery. With ten national and regional networks of universities and knowledge institutions in the EU, and over 360 member organizations across the entire continent, SDSN is ideally placed to provide evidence-based policy development in Europe.

The 2022 SDG Index Scores and Rankings by country and subregions



SDG Index Rank	Country	SDG Index Score	SDG Index Rank	Country	SDG Index Score	Subregion	SDG Index Score
1	Finland	81.7	18	Portugal	70.6	European Union	72.0
2	Sweden	80.6	19	Italy	70.6	Baltic States	69.1
3	Denmark	79.2	20	United Kingdom	70.5	Candidate Countries	57.8
4	Austria	78.2	21	Slovak Republic	70.2	Central and Eastern Europe	69.6
5	Norway	77.2	22	Spain	70.1	EFTA Countries	75.1
6	Germany	74.8	23	Hungary	69.9	Northern Europe	80.8
7	Czech Republic	74.2	24	Latvia	69.5	Southern Europe	70.0
8	Slovenia	74.0	25	Luxembourg	68.7	Western Europe	73.7
9	Switzerland	73.7	26	Lithuania	66.1	Albania	NA
10	Estonia	73.2	27	Greece	65.7	Bosnia and Herzegovina	NA
11	France	73.1	28	Malta	64.9	Liechtenstein	NA
12	Iceland	72.8	29	Romania	63.4	Montenegro	NA
13	Poland	72.4	30	North Macedonia	62.9		
14	Ireland	72.2	31	Serbia	61.1		
15	Belgium	71.7	32	Cyprus	60.7		
16	Netherlands	71.6	33	Bulgaria	60.7		
17	Croatia	70.7	34	Turkey	56.7		

Source: Authors

Source: Authors