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#### 'I' ITEM NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 2)
Subject:	Reflection Paper on the stocktaking of the 2030 Agenda implementation at EU level and way forward – A perspective from the Council of the EU

1. As part of its proposed work programme for the Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (WP 2030) in the second half of 2022, the Czech Presidency initiated a reflection about successes and challenges in SDG implementation at EU level.
2. This exercise should be seen as a first step towards reviewing progress on SDG implementation in the context of a structured dialogue with the European Commission, in accordance with the Council conclusions of 22 June 2021.<sup>1</sup>
3. The Czech Presidency prepared the Reflection Paper which appears in the annex to this note to summarise the discussions held in WP 2030 on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs at EU level. It was agreed at Working Party level on 12 December 2022.
4. COREPER is invited to take note of this Reflection Paper, which may also be used to support future internal discussions about how the Working Party can further improve the way it fulfils its mandate to assist the Council to follow up, monitor and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda across policy sectors at EU level.

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<sup>1</sup> 9850/2021

# Reflection Paper on the stocktaking of the 2030 Agenda implementation at EU level and way forward - A perspective from the Council of the EU

## Introduction

In the Council conclusions approved on 22 June 2021 (ST 9850/21, hereinafter “the conclusions”) the Council of the EU committed “to review progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda at the EU level” (para 13) as part of the regular dialogue with the Commission. This uneasy task is driven by a strong belief and sense of urgency that the 2030 Agenda represents the only blueprint to fulfil the requirements for a sustainable future for all. It is supposed not only to guide all countries through the multiple unfolding crises (triple environmental crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, energy and food insecurity and soaring prices, fragile supply chains and rapid inflation), but also to meet ambitious mid-term social, economic, environmental, and governmental objectives. Moreover, according to the latest Eurostat's 2022 Report: Sustainable development in the European Union – Overview of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context (WK 8564/2022) the EU moderately moved away in regard to three SDGs. In the year 2020, it was the first time that the EU and Member States slightly declined in the SDG Index which is published annually by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). According to the SDG Index, poor performance on environmental goals and negative spillover effects are posing major challenges to the EU and its Member States in terms of meeting all SDGs.<sup>1</sup>

Being halfway through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, starting the preparations of the EU Voluntary review which will be presented at the High-Level Political Forum in 2023, and in view of the regular structured dialogue organised in the context of and in line with the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making as well as the EU Council Working Party's input into the Joint Declaration on Legislative Priorities in the form of a Presidency Summary, the following Reflection Paper is intended to summarise and reflect the views expressed in the context of the Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereinafter “the Working Party”) on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs at EU level. Moreover, it is intended to foster an internal discussion about the future orientation of the Working Party and the actual implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the EU level in coming years, serving as a basis for a mid-term outlook or work programme and identify concrete areas of interest until the next European Parliament elections and the establishment of a new European Commission.

This reflection paper will be submitted to Coreper II for information.

<sup>1</sup> Sachs, J., Lafortune, G., Kroll, C., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2022). [From Crisis to Sustainable Development: the SDGs as Roadmap to 2030, and Beyond. Sustainable Development Report 2022](#). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 30.

## Structure and methodology

The Reflection paper begins with a description of the key tasks and recommendations contained in the conclusions and takes stock of concrete actions and intentions. Then follows a list of next steps and recommendations on what the Working Party's focus should be in the next years and how to improve the policy coherence across Council bodies. These proposals should help to define the priorities and policy gaps to improve the implementation and mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and suggest the main areas of action. A brief evaluation of selected SDGs is presented in Annex I.

Primarily, SDGs showing moderate movement away or moderate progress according to the Eurostat report were included. Those SDGs are assessed as concisely as possible while bearing in mind the time lag in the provision of indicators and the fact that the effects of current crises cannot be taken fully into account yet. Each SDG is evaluated on the basis of the following points in Annex I:

- 1) Connecting the relevant paragraphs of the conclusions and stance of the Council toward the particular SDG. Where the conclusions do not refer to the SDG in any way, references are made to the previous Council conclusions (ST 14835/2021);
- 2) Assessment of progress thus far (based mostly on the Eurostat indicators and report);
- 3) Summarising existing legislation, strategies and financial tools, while noting that the assessment is not exhaustive as many strategies, legislations and initiatives have been adopted recently or are still being negotiated, which prevents a solid evaluation at this point in time.

On this basis, the next steps and main areas of action which could be focused on and/or monitored and assessed by the Working Party in the near future were identified. Proposals stem from other relevant Council conclusions, relevant assessment and evaluation documents or documents that address these SDG targets which are not covered by the Eurostat report. Some proposals relate to general principles that are essential for sustainable development policies.

When formulating what should be done and what the priorities might be, the delegations were invited to keep in mind that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, as the global roadmap, address the most important challenges as agreed in 2015. However, not all issues crucial for sustainable development and the Agenda's underlying principle of leaving no one behind are explicitly addressed. In addition, the set of indicators used in the Eurostat report narrows the scope of problems tackled, thus not all aspects of the SDG targets are covered in the brief assessment.

Similar constraints apply to the general character of agreed formulations on goals and targets. It opens up the room for clarification and specification when reaching a consensus on how to address the overall goals of public policies (e. g. policy debates on which energy sources can be considered clean and under which conditions). Therefore, the SDGs should be maintained as the general framework for sectoral and thematic public policies driven by/respecting sustainable development principles.

## Stock-taking of the Council conclusions from June 2021 with emphasis on cross-cutting tools and mainstreaming

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be considered as the blueprint for many actions taken by the EU and its Member States internally and externally. SDGs represent a complex and holistic programme for tackling the most severe challenges our societies face while respecting the limits of our planet. According to the latest edition of the [Sustainable Development Report](#), the EU is distinguished not only by the highest performance on the SDG Index, making it the most advanced region but also by the international spillover effects. The globally uneven distribution of (negative) impacts of spillovers poses a real challenge. The interdependent preconditions of development were manifested during the Covid-19 crisis which wiped out more than four years of progress on poverty eradication worldwide.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic not only exposed the fragility of the value and supply chains on which the European Union economy depends (para 1), but hindered the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole as it hit the economic performance, in particular by increasing the inflation rate, negatively affecting the labour market, especially youth employment, and putting gender equality in danger. In addition, the unjustified Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has further hindered sustainable recovery and severely impacted food and energy security.

The holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda and sustainability itself requires an integrated and comprehensive approach, which should be embedded in strategic planning and integrated into all governmental instruments and mechanisms (para 6). However, this leads rather to the practice of labelling, tagging and cultivating what already exists. Many activities of the Commission, which are regularly presented at the Working Party meetings, are aligned with SDGs in different ways. Gradual adjustments and a gradual approach are mainly preferred instead of a fundamental change. The intention of having the SDGs at the heart of strategic planning may not be therefore fully reflected and fulfilled. This can be illustrated by repetitive calls upon the Commission to elaborate on an SDGs' implementation strategy first expressed in the Council conclusions "A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" approved on 20 June 2017.<sup>3</sup> This request was repeated in the European Council conclusions from 18 October 2018 as well as in two subsequent sets of Council conclusions from 2019<sup>4</sup>. Instead of a strategy, the Commission released the Staff Working Document "Delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – A comprehensive approach" intended to focus on delivering concrete actions that will bring tangible progress in the areas of the SDGs, i.e. whole-of-government approach and cross-cutting tools.<sup>5</sup> Although the request of the Council to have an implementation strategy has not been met, several policy initiatives can be considered ambitious and some of the new proposals ground-breaking (e.g. taxonomy for sustainable finance, due diligence, CBAM), supporting the EU's position globally as a forerunner in sustainability.

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<sup>2</sup><https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 10370/17

<sup>4</sup> 8286/19, 14835/19

<sup>5</sup> SWD(2020) 400 final

The conclusions contained two crucial calls on the Commission:

- 1) *to propose concrete actions to implement the SDGs, building on the [Staff Working Document](#) and the Commission President's headline ambitions, and to regularly compile the most important existing objectives, concrete measures and timelines of key transformative policies and to assess them in conjunction with the Eurostat's reports. This assessment should be presented twice in writing to the Council: before the mid-term evaluation of multiannual programming, i.e. in 2022<sup>6</sup>, and before the end of the legislative term, i.e. 20<sup>24</sup> (para 9 and 12). Besides that, monitoring and reporting for its internal and external actions were expected to be regularly submitted (para 7) including at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) through high-level presentations at regular intervals and the voluntary review in 2023<sup>7</sup>.*

The results are of a mixed nature. As written above, many important legislative and strategic initiatives have been introduced, but it is questionable whether or how they are motivated by performance in SDGs. The compilation of the current objectives and assessment of the transformative policies should be part of the EU Voluntary Review (hereinafter "EU VR"), and the Council should be attentive to what extent the EU VR delivers on the compilation side and contains forward-looking elements including for concrete actions to implement the SDGs whereas according to the current state of knowledge about structure and content of the EU VR concrete measures and timelines will very probably not be part of this complex assessment. The EU VR which is going to be presented at the HLPF in 2023 represents an opportunity, not only to assess the work done so far but also to engage collectively in defining a comprehensive, overarching and integrated strategic framework to support the EU's commitment as a frontrunner in the 2030 Agenda implementation process, internally and externally.

Nevertheless, the EU VR should not remain a mere progress report but should be seen as a forward-looking policy project and tool envisaging the pursuit of transformative policies. It is presumed that the EU VR in the form of a Communication accompanied by the Commission Staff Working Document should be followed by yet another more operational document, e.g. an Action Plan, in order to make concrete measures binding and reaffirm the commitment by the Commission and the Member States to pursue the 2030 Agenda.

Regarding regular monitoring and reporting at the HLPF, the European institutions and European Commission in particular are active. However, the side-events organised or co-organised by the Commission in the last three years were focused on concrete and timely issues rather than on reporting. At the same time, it is worth acknowledging the endeavour to shape the policy discourses at global level, in uncertain times marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

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<sup>6</sup> WK 3359/2021 REV 2 ADD 1

<sup>7</sup> SWD(2020) 400 final, p. 16.

2) *to engage in a regular structured dialogue with the Council in the context of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making (para 10-11).*

Since the adoption of the Council conclusions, there has been only one opportunity to put into practice what was set out, as this year's dialogue is not over yet. The Commission Work Programme (hereinafter "CWP") was presented at the Working Party's November meetings in 2021 and 2022. Consequently, the timeframe for the preparation of the Presidency Summary is relatively short and limited. The Working Party would therefore undoubtedly appreciate it if the dialogue adhered accurately to the Presidency Explanatory Note and started before the CWP adoption. The dialogue should, according to the aforementioned note, be based on the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making and consist of the following steps:

- Step 1 – The exchange of views on Eurostat's report would provide input to the Commission during the preparation of the Work Programme. However, there is no clear evidence that the Commission took account of the exchange of views following the presentation of the comprehensive and continuously developed Eurostat report. There is also very limited evidence that the Eurostat Report has been used in decision-making and what specific role it played in the preparations of the CWP.<sup>9</sup> Nor does the CWP address explicitly the European Commission's commitment to be guided by the 2030 Agenda and include any more substantive information on how current EU policies support SDG implementation which could be for example mentioned among other achievements which accompany the annual State of the Union Address. Moreover, neither last year nor this year have the State of the Union Address or the Letter of Intent mentioned any specific progress on the 2030 Agenda or SDGs in particular. The Commission recalled its statement of 21 June 2021, in which it underlines its openness to engage with the Council both before and after the adoption of its annual work programme on the implementation of the SDGs based on the annual SDG monitoring report published by Eurostat. This commitment to engaging before the adoption of the 2023 Commission work programme has been upheld, with the discussion on SDG progress at the WP meetings of 15 June 2022 and 5 September 2022 on the basis of the latest Eurostat report. Moreover, during its presentation of the 2023 Commission work programme on 17 November 2022, the Commission underlined the general and strategic nature of the CWP which focuses on presenting the key new policy initiatives, while outlining the various ways in which the SDGs are incorporated as part of the policy-preparation of Commission proposals, and the Commission would like to recall that its work programmes are drawn up in line with its institutional prerogatives;

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> Register of Commission Documents contains only 7 documents referring to the Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context: SWD(2022)82, COM(2021)740, COM(2021)662, SWD(2021)141, COM(2020)150, COM(2019)22, SWD(2018)166. These documents are 2 staff working documents, 2 communications, 2 acts and 1 impact assessment.

- Step 2 – The main contribution from the Working Party level to the regular structured dialogue with the Commission is the Presidency Summary reflecting the exchange of views between the Council and Commission on its Work Programme, which should then inform the Council's position on the Joint Declaration on Legislative Priorities. This step has not provided visible results in 2021, as neither the 2030 Agenda nor the SDGs are explicitly mentioned in the 2021 Joint Declaration. The Council should therefore increase its efforts in mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda in all its work across policy sectors and at all levels (as the interinstitutional dialogue is done at the level of Cooperation and Action). In this respect, the role of the forthcoming Presidencies will be particularly crucial, but at the same time, it is necessary to scale up the awareness that SDGs are supposed to be integrated into this process across all relevant institutions.

The reflection above points to the difficulties in the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda in all the Commission's work strands. Tackling the issue of SDG governance requires enhanced coordination not only among the institutions but also within them. Within the Commission, each Member of the College is responsible for the implementation of respective SDGs within their policy area (para 14). However, the set of responsibilities has not yet been publicly and transparently communicated in any detail and the practicalities of this coordination (such as possible overlaps between or gaps in the portfolios and DGs) have not been addressed. Therefore, the call for greater transparency in mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda within the Commission and EEAS has not lost its validity, while fully respecting their institutional prerogatives as regards their internal organisation and decision-making structures. Similar explicit coordination could be then systemically followed by various Council bodies across policy sectors, as currently, the collaboration with other working groups depends on the priorities of successive Presidencies. To conclude, the 'whole-of-government' approach at the EU level remains a long-term goal. To balance the perspective, it is necessary to mention that the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs could have been enhanced also within the Council, across preparatory bodies and formations. The effort to start a dialogue with other working parties has slightly faded away and became unprecedentedly complicated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, 47 sets of Council conclusions since 2021, out of a total number of 135 Council conclusions approved, referred directly to the 2030 Agenda and the sets of SDGs. This year it was 24 out of 88 Council conclusions (see Annex II).

In terms of aiming for a 'whole of society' approach (para 14), the Conference on the Future of Europe brought an important innovation in the form of an expanded citizens' assembly. This deliberative tool has the potential to increase citizens' involvement and engagement also in the future. However, it should be kept in mind that good governance consists of a combination of participatory, deliberative and expert, i. e. evidence-informed, approaches. In order to secure that no one is left behind, the design of the policy-making process should include (as much as possible) the perspective of the beneficiaries of public policies and emphasise enabling citizens' involvement and engagement in a systemic way and through transparent and structured, preferably permanent, mechanisms. Moreover, the '*whole of society*' approach to sustainability has benefited from the existence of the [Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs](#) and could profit from its relaunch. The decision not to prolong the mandate of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs after the publication of the discussion document "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030" in December 2019 carries the risk of fragmentation, narrowing the discussion on the individual policies, and failing to take into account interlinkages and spillover effects, despite the effort to widen the participatory and deliberative approaches through the Conference on the Future of Europe, establishing of the European Climate Pact, and enabling public consultations during the preparation of major policy initiatives.

With the experience from the Conference on the Future of Europe, further use of AI-driven Multilingual digital platforms may be considered to support the 'whole of society' approach.



In 2022, the SDGs have been further integrated into the European Semester (para 18). The guidelines on how to address and incorporate SDGs into the Semester have been continuously evolving since 2020 when the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (hereinafter 'ASGS') required a special section in the country reports on progress towards the SDGs for the first time. However, it should be noted that the lessons learnt from the gradual inclusion of SDGs into the well-established procedure of the European Semester were not reflected, or more precisely presented by the Commission and not discussed in responsible Council formations before the next edition of the ASGS is published. In presentation upon the publication of the 2022 Spring package and the Commission provided the first indications of broad continuity in the SDGs integration for the 2023 cycle, which was affirmed in ASGS for 2023. Further exchanges of views on experiences could be practical and advantageous for the Member States as well as for the Commission. In addition, it would also be useful to take a closer look at what the final shape of this integration should be.

The conclusions were underpinned by the need to react to the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis and highlighted the need for building back better. When it comes to sustainable recovery and undertaking urgent structural reforms and building back better and greener (Para 3, 4), 26 national recovery plans have been already approved by the Commission and their Country Implementing Decisions were approved by the Council, 21 pre-financing payments were disbursed, 17 operational arrangements were signed, 18 payment requests were submitted to the Commission and 8 payments were already disbursed. The national recovery plans reflect the particular needs of each Member State, thus their contribution to the SDGs is not only different in nature, but also could be vague or intangible. According to the preliminary [analysis of SDSN](#) from the last year, only three of the nine studied countries' recovery plans acknowledged the SDGs as a cornerstone of their approach. Therefore, the supportive effect of national recovery plans towards the SDGs implementation of national recovery plans can be further examined and reinforced. The targeted amendments to the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation to integrate specific REPowerEU Plan objectives that build on Fit for 55 proposals are very welcomed. Nonetheless, at the same time, an unprecedented inflation rate might challenge the successful implementation of some of the projects and their milestones already supported by the RRF.

The EU has taken important steps to build a sustainable finance system. Preceding the new [Strategy for Financing the Transition to a Sustainable Economy](#) (2021), the [Taxonomy Regulation](#) entered into force on 12 July 2020. It is meant to be complemented by delegated acts that set technical screening criteria for the different environmental objectives. The first EU Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act is applicable since January 2022. However, the EU Taxonomy does not set mandatory requirements for investors, notably with regard to environmental performance, with the only mandatory element being the disclosure requirements which are also introduced by a specific [Delegated Act](#), the [Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation](#) and the proposed [Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive](#). As a next step in building sustainable finance architecture, the taxonomy framework should be extended to cover social and governance sustainability objectives.



In November 2021 the European Commission introduced revised versions of the [Better Regulation Toolbox](#) and [Guidelines](#). The documents set general guidelines on better regulation together with concrete steps on how to carry out an impact assessment of new initiatives and proposals, monitoring as well as evaluation. The Toolbox introduced two main tools touching upon the topic of SDGs. Tool 18 focuses on the identification and assessment of impacts, and connects the potential impacts to relevant SDGs. Tool 19 then looks in more detail at how to incorporate the SDGs in the impact assessment, evaluation and proposals. The Guidelines stipulate that every final impact assessment report must contain a section assessing the impact of the proposal on relevant SDGs. The proposal itself should also cover SDGs in its explanatory memorandum through an assessment of impacts on and contribution to SDGs. While not every proposal and related impact assessments since November 2021 include a section on SDGs, it has become a more and more frequently used tool. Examples can be found in the newly presented Zero Pollution Package, such as the [Proposal for a Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe](#).

## Next Steps and Priorities

### At the Working Party level

- 1) Regarding working methods: seek to carry out discussion and exchanges on open/pending items in advance or during the elaboration of related legislation and initiatives so as to ensure meaningful input from the Working Party instead of just providing information on approved legislations or already published documents, thus, reduce the proportion of purely informational items on the agenda, as appropriate, or connect them with the interim evaluations of concrete tools and processes (e.g. the integration of SDGs into the European Semester).
- 2) Enhance the interinstitutional dialogue; reinforce participatory and deliberative approaches and aspects of dialogue, take advantage of the existing informal group of MEPs on the SDGs and regularly share views on the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- 3) In order to promote and enhance the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda, the Working Party for the 2030 Agenda should take an initiative to debate within the Council about how to monitor further steps and how to meet requirements in order to contribute to the fulfilment of particular SDGs stemming from the Council conclusions. In order to facilitate follow-up, a Voluntary Task Force (VTF) consisting of the members of the Working Party committing to taking part voluntarily could be set up to:
  - a. create and regularly update a “follow-up table”<sup>10</sup> which would serve for recording progress on concrete calls from the Council conclusions on the 2030 Agenda implementation that might also recommend specific next steps, state which entity is responsible for the various tasks, contain comments and could guide forthcoming Presidencies in mid-term planning;

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<sup>10</sup> See for example WK 12937/2022 INIT.

- b. analyse relevant Council conclusions more thoroughly to enhance policy coherence on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs across Council formations and possibly elaborate practical modalities for monitoring. Primarily, elements of the Council conclusions conducive to better SDG implementation could be mapped and added to the aforementioned “follow-up table”. Secondly, the TF could also identify possible contradictory elements among the Council conclusions and elaborate on how to tackle them.

It can be also considered to establish other voluntary task forces dealing with the proposed next steps.

- 4) Develop recommendations for the future new Commission based on the EU VR, outcomes of the UN Summit 2023 and further screen Council conclusions.
- 5) Keep position regarding 2020 SDG targets (see WK 12569/2020 REV 2) while seeking to align/update position based on related recent developments at the global level (e.g. for the biodiversity-related 2020 targets, take into account the outcome of the COP 15 of the CBD on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework) and push forward the UN reform (see WK 6534/2019 REV 2) in collaboration with WP CONUN.
- 6) In terms of the medium-term work planning and following the outcomes of the SDG Summit 2023, Summit of the Future 2024 and Strategic Foresight Reports, an internal dialogue should be initiated in collaboration with WP CONUN and other working parties on how to design the post-2030 agenda.

#### In relation to the European Commission

- 7) To adhere to what was agreed upon and follow the procedure of the regular structured dialogue and to encourage the Commission to inform regarding upcoming EU processes in advance in order to better assess how the 2030 Agenda is mainstreamed into proposed initiatives and strategies.
- 8) To ensure that the Eurostat report is used in policy-making at EU level.
- 9) To seek to steer the EU VR 2023 preparations, take an active part in the 2023 EU VR preparations and focus on the follow-up of EU VR, and use it as a catalyst for accelerated SDG implementation (e.g. through a joint declaration from the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission).
- 10) To support systemic meaningful stakeholder and civil society engagement, involvement and participation, especially to support the reestablishment of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on SDGs to better address interlinkages, tackle spillover effects and enhance the whole-of-society approach.

## Main areas of action in SDGs implementation

As already mentioned in the introduction, the achievements of the SDGs have been jeopardised by the Covid-19 pandemic. Progress on poverty eradication in the last four years has been wiped out globally and no country is on track to achieve the 2030 targets. Until now, the EU and Member States have made significant progress towards SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth, SDG 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure, SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG 3 Good Health and well-being. This positive performance has been affected over the last four years due to the pandemic and, most recently, the situation in Ukraine to some extent that has jeopardised the overall achievement of the SDGs and stalled poverty eradication. Due to the lagging of timely data, it is only possible to estimate which population groups are affected and to what extent. At the same time, interlinkages between the above-mentioned SDGs are at the heart of the European Green Deal, with a view to promote a just transition, while decisions to respond to the energy crisis, ensure food security, support Ukraine and bounce back economies and societal trust triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic have been taken in a timely and agile manner since the outbreak of a confluence of crises.

Interlinkages lie at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and are intrinsic to the SDGs. The integrated and indivisible nature of 17 Goals and 169 targets creates a complex matrix as systemic interlinkages have several facets – sectoral, spatial, or temporal. Without due considerations of the interactions between the SDGs, neither policy coherence nor any transformative transition can be achieved. The progress made so far can be reversed, which might threaten the EU and its Member States which are facing multiple crises. According to the Global Sustainable Development Report (2019), co-benefits prevail over negative externalities trade-offs.<sup>11</sup> The most significant trade-offs were linked with the interaction of SDG 2, 7, 8, and 13 with other goals.<sup>12</sup> A similar picture is provided in the latest issue of the Eurostat report; according to it, there are more positive than negative interlinkages, even though at the same time the correlations among indicators are weak as they monitor distinct phenomena.<sup>13</sup> Besides that, the Joint Research Centre launched a visualisation tool for SDG interlinkages aggregating existing research.<sup>14</sup> Despite all methodological obstacles, current multiple crises show clearly the need to tackle the complexity and nexus between energy, food and poverty and secure its accessibility and affordability while promoting and nudging new consumption patterns in order to facilitate a just transition without diminishing well-being and undermining of public trust.

The entangled nature of interlinkages at the global scale could be described in terms of spillover effects. It makes more visible how internal policies affect population and environment transboundary, or more precisely how they affect the ability of other countries to achieve the SDGs, and help to acknowledge and take the responsibility for external consequences of policies in place. However, the European Union and its Member States are ranked at the top of the Spillover Index (see para 1) and they are responsible for causing negative spillovers and therefore negatively affecting SDG implementation in third countries. These are embodied in trade and financial market practices in particular. Available data enable Eurostat to trace the impacts on greenhouse gas emissions (EU imports more CO<sub>2</sub> than exports), with farmland footprint (EU imports around 20 million ha cropland)

<sup>11</sup> See [Global Sustainable development Report \(GSDR\) 2019](#), p. 5-6, 21.

<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, mutual underpinning and positive correlations among SDG 1-8, 11, and 17 are presented in Havard Hegre, Kristina Petrova, Nina von Uexkull, „Synergies and Trade-offs in Reaching the Sustainable Development Goals,” Sustainability 12 (2020), <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/20/8729/htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Sustainable development in the European Union 2022, p. 349-354.

<sup>14</sup> <https://knowsdgs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/interlinkages-targets>

and material footprint (metal ores and fossil-energy materials).<sup>15</sup> However, striving for a twin transition may increase the demand for raw materials and increase environmental pressures.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, according to the latest SDSN report the negative spillover effects relate to exports of toxic pesticides and plastic waste, unfair tax competition and profit shifting as well.<sup>17</sup> Social impacts are still less documented. The SDSN estimates that unsatisfactory conditions in the textile industry cause several hundred fatal workplace accidents and thousands of non-fatal accidents every year.

The EU policies are equipped to decrease these spillovers and some of them have already begun to be designed to take them into account or produce positive spillovers too. It can be showcased by some key legislative proposals such as the Regulation on deforestation-free products reacting to the earlier support of biofuels which in turn has driven up tropical deforestation or the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism aiming at diminishing of risk of carbon leakage. In addition, there are time-tested tools in place as free recent trade agreements including Trade and Sustainable Development chapters and General scheme of preferences. The EU market is the most open to developing countries and a major destination for exports from low-income countries. Although the share of developing countries' exports has been increasing significantly, the share of African countries remains marginal (2.5% in 2020) and is overshadowed by Asia.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence is being negotiated, with the aim to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviours and anchoring human rights and environmental considerations in companies' operations and corporate governance. Moreover, the EU and Member States are the largest provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the world, investing in conflict-prevention and peacekeeping and the Global Gateway is meant to be an important tool for creating competition opportunities whilst ensuring the environmental and labour standards.

#### SDG 1 No Poverty

- to urgently address the high risk of an increase in energy poverty caused by the persistent energy crisis due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine
- to closely monitor the link between the rising inflation and at-risk-of-poverty rate and enhance consultations with social partners and other stakeholders for coordinated policy responses
- to pay special attention to the situation of single-parent households and persons living in (quasi-) jobless households since their vulnerability remains particularly high
- to promote further action on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market and common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems
- to work together to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to address the remaining gaps in minimum income protection in combating poverty and social exclusion with emphasis on age, gender, education, health and income inequalities

<sup>15</sup> Sustainable development in the European Union 2022, p. 343-348.

<sup>16</sup> Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Bermont-Diaz, L., Kloke-Lesch, A., Koundouri, P., Riccaboni, A. (2022). [Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022: Achieving the SDGs in a Multipolar World. SDSN and SDSN Europe](#). France: Paris.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> 8660/22

## SDG 2 Zero Hunger

- to urgently address the current food supply insecurity and soaring prices<sup>19</sup>
- to timely evaluate the 2014–2020 EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity and plan follow-up steps in this area<sup>20</sup>
- to introduce an EU protein transition strategy that encourages the cultivation of plant proteins for food and feed in the EU, as well as the use of other sustainable protein sources<sup>21</sup>
- to promote soon a revision of the existing animal welfare legislation as announced in the Farm to Fork Strategy<sup>22</sup>
- to support a timely introduction of a comprehensive framework for sustainable food systems in the EU by the Commission<sup>23</sup>
- to call on the Commission to include the emergency to diminish the reliance on artificial and foreign fertilisers in its forthcoming Communication on Fertilisers

## SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being

- to reflect on the major public health challenge, which the Covid-19 pandemic represents, in the EU policies
- to finalise the EU initiative on mental health and to monitor risks of mental health problems of European citizens, especially in connection with the pandemic and its measures
- to address the increasing obesity and overweight among European citizens together with unhealthy consumption patterns
- to support the research-based health policy, as well as the planned [European Health Data Space](#)

## SDG 4 Quality Education

- to enhance the performance of learners in reading, maths and science as well as in the competences related to sustainability and global citizenship<sup>24</sup>
- to support equal educational opportunities, eliminate inequalities based on the socio-economical background of learners as well as regional differences<sup>25</sup>
- to continue to support the lifelong learning and development of basic digital skills among EU citizens in particular<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> EUCO 21/22

<sup>20</sup> C(2022) 317 final, Annex I, p. 89.

<sup>21</sup> 12099/20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> 8693/21, 9850/21

<sup>25</sup> 8693/21

<sup>26</sup> 8693/21, 2018/C 189/01

## SDG 5 Gender Equality

- to counter back the negative impacts of Covid-19 on gender equality in terms of work-life balance and sexual and gender-based violence in the EU's policies<sup>27</sup>
- to keep the leading position in the external action of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences<sup>28</sup>

## SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation

- to further promote the implementation of the Urban Waste Water Treatment, Water Framework and Nitrates Directives in the Member States<sup>29</sup>
- to finish the review of the Bathing Waters Directive and adopt the proposals of the revised Water Framework and Urban Waste Water Treatment Directives in a timely manner<sup>30</sup>
- to actively engage in the UN Water Conference held from 22nd to 24th March 2023, and commit to ambitious outcomes and commitments to accelerate SDG6 implementation
- to continue to support the two Team Europe Initiatives on Transboundary Water Management in Africa, and Central Asia

## SDG 7 Clean Energy

- to reflect on the new threat to energy security by the Russian aggression in Ukraine and enhance the swift implementation of the REPowerEU strategic plan
- to continue to support the green transition of Europe's energy system in order to reach climate neutrality by 2050
- to enhance the mechanism supporting the strategic autonomy in order to secure critical minerals indispensable for the decentralization of energy and twin transition
- to continue to strengthen the monitoring tools of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory in order to advise Member States in their efforts to decrease energy poverty

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<sup>27</sup> 9850/21

<sup>28</sup> 9850/21

<sup>29</sup> SWD(2019) 701 final; SWD(2019) 439 final; COM(2021) 1000 final.

<sup>30</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-bathing/review\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-bathing/review_en.html);  
[https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-revised-urban-wastewater-treatment-directive\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-revised-urban-wastewater-treatment-directive_en); [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-amending-water-directives\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-amending-water-directives_en).



## SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

- to ensure the timely and successful transposition of the Directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU
- to ensure sufficient progress towards the 2030 targets set in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan
- to call on the Commission to launch an EU Action Plan that is focusing on shaping global supply chains sustainably, promoting human rights, social and environmental due diligence standards and transparency
- to timely adopt the proposal for a Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive

## SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

- to promote regular monitoring of whether the policy actions envisaged in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy are sufficient for the realisation of the EU transport policy objectives, or whether additional measures might be necessary
- to timely introduce the revision of the TEN-T Regulation, taking into account also the impacts of the Russian aggression against Ukraine
- to reach the target of R&D intensity increased to 3% of GDP
- to call on the Commission to ensure fast implementation of the New Industrial Strategy and to regularly monitor and report on the progress
- to develop and implement European Research Area actions in close cooperation with ERA stakeholders that address the main challenges to foster directionality, the twin transition and a resilient recovery

## SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities

- to initiate measuring of economic inequalities beyond income inequalities (e.g. wealth inequalities)<sup>31</sup>
- to launch an interactive tool to track the progress of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion in order to decrease the gap between EU and non-EU citizens, in particular in terms of the attained level of education and employment<sup>32</sup>
- to present lessons learned by applying the Temporary Protection Directive and possible improvement of the European migration and integration policy by the end of 2023<sup>33</sup>
- to promote policies reducing costs of remittances (create a database on remittances flows, ensure the institutional setting addressing remittances is fit for purpose, launch projects on financial inclusion and promote digital inclusion)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> SDG targets 10.2 and 10.3

<sup>32</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/ec-reveals-its-new-eu-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/ec-reveals-its-new-eu-action-plan-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027_en)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/04/ukraine-council-introduces-temporary-protection-for-persons-fleeing-the-war/>

<sup>34</sup> SDG target 10.c

## SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

- to implement Flexible Assistance to Territories (FAST - CARE), a package of mostly legislative changes aimed at both assisting beneficiaries and providing greater flexibility in the disbursement of allocated subsidies, allowing to mitigate the effects of the current refugee crisis and address some of the adverse economic impacts of Russia's aggression against Ukraine<sup>35</sup>
- to focus on building an innovative environment to ensure the most creative development of regions and cities
- to communicate the importance of sustainable development with local stakeholders, incl. municipal councils, officers and citizens, and promote deliberative tools
- to continue to reduce regional disparities and support economically and socially vulnerable areas<sup>36</sup>
- to encourage cities and regions to localise the SDGs and promote greater engagement in SDGs Voluntary Local Reviews<sup>37</sup>
- to support cities' transition to carbon neutrality (building on the EU Climate Law objectives, the new EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change and the Fit for 55 proposals) and circular economy

## SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production

- to thoroughly implement all the related strategies and elaborate on their evaluation schedule
- to finalise the revision of the Waste Framework Directive on time<sup>38</sup>
- to call on the Commission to introduce the REACH framework revision proposal as soon as possible<sup>39</sup>
- to promote sustainable public procurement practices at all levels, encourage companies in their transformation towards sustainable practices and integration of sustainability information into their reporting cycle, and ensure access to relevant information and awareness about sustainable development<sup>40</sup>
- to be actively engaged in the intergovernmental negotiations to adopt an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, promoting circular economy approaches and acting on the entire life cycle of plastics
- to adopt an ambitious framework for the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 at the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L.2022.275.01.0023.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A275%3ATOC>

<sup>36</sup> 9796/22

<sup>37</sup> 9850/21, para 31, 21

<sup>38</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/waste-framework-directive-revision-2022-02-14\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/waste-framework-directive-revision-2022-02-14_en)

<sup>39</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/reach/reach\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/reach/reach_en.htm)

<sup>40</sup> SDG targets 12.6 – 12.8

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48827/st06941-en21.pdf>

### SDG 13 Climate Action

- to thoroughly implement all of the relevant strategies and elaborate on their evaluation schedule to meet the carbon neutrality goal by 2050 and the GHGs reduction target by 2030
- to elaborate thoroughly on enhancing the Do No Significant Harm principle as a crucial proposition for targeting public expenditures<sup>42</sup>
- to support the current interinstitutional negotiations on the legislative proposals under the Fit for 55 package, their timely adoption and swift implementation
- to adhere to the collective commitment of developed country parties to mobilise \$100 billion per year and work towards reaching the climate finance mobilisation goal as soon as possible and through to 2025 from a wide variety of sources and continue working with other developed country Parties to swiftly implement the Climate Finance Delivery Plan<sup>43</sup>

### SDG 14 Life below Water

- to support acceleration and the successful conclusion of negotiations for an Implementing Agreement under UNCLOS for the protection of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), which has not been achieved in August 2022
- to support the adoption of the global target of 30x30 for seas and oceans (i.e. 30% of sea areas under protection by 2030) in the context of an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework at the CDB COP15 (Montreal, December 2022)
- to monitor and support environmental policies with the ongoing work-streams in JRC, the EEA and others on the planetary boundaries (e.g. freshwater use, land use change, ocean acidification) and the Union consumption footprint with regards to Basel Convention objectives
- the EU and the Member States in a Team Europe should play a leading role in global marine water protection

### SDG 15 Life on Land

- in line with the recent proposal of the EU Nature Restoration Law, to promote the elaboration of National Restoration Plans, or ensuring the implementation of existing National Plans, will be a crucial element for scaling up existing efforts to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and improve the state of ecosystems;<sup>44</sup> it is important to set goals that are ambitious yet realistic – taking into account financial, environmental and climatic conditions
- to secure an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework at the CDB COP15 (Montreal, December 2022) and to translate it effectively into national policies via the quick update of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- to elaborate on the evaluation schedule for all relevant strategies mentioned below

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<sup>42</sup> 12935/22

<sup>43</sup> 6120/22; [International climate finance \(europa.eu\); 12935/22.](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/12935/22)

<sup>44</sup> Conclusions on Biodiversity – the need for urgent action (11829/20).

## SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

- to take advantage of the CoFoE and to build a deliberative democracy infrastructure in line with European Democracy Action Plan
- to bring the negotiations of the Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence to a conclusion as soon as possible
- to strengthen peace-making activities of the EU regarding the unjustified Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in line with the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crisis

## SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals

- to fulfil the commitments of the volume of ODA (0.7% of GNI total, 0.20% GNI+ LDCs)<sup>45</sup>
- to continue improving the effectiveness and visibility of the EU development cooperation<sup>46</sup>
- to meet the target of at least 20% of ODA for human development and social inclusion in the new European Consensus on Development, as well as the targets under the NDICI – Global Europe<sup>47</sup>
- to support technology transfer and innovations in external action<sup>48</sup>
- to enhance and practice policy coherence for sustainable development<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 11303/22

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem; 9336/22

<sup>47</sup> 8856/21

<sup>48</sup> 10125/22

<sup>49</sup> 9850/21

## Annex I: Assessment of the selected SDGs and related policies



### SDG 1 No Poverty

Member States of the European Union have made in recent years considerable improvements in all poverty dimensions monitored. The share of people being able to meet their basic needs increased in the past five years. The Council conclusions from 2021 recognized that the Covid-19 pandemic had severe socio-economic consequences, nevertheless, the exact impact of this crisis on SDG 1 is not known since the 2022 Eurostat data still do not fully reflect the pandemic effects. However, the Eurostat data show that in the five-year period up to 2020 in the area of multidimensional poverty fewer people were affected by income poverty, suffered from severe material and social deprivation or lived in (quasi-)homeless households. In 2021, 95.4 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which is more than one million people less than in the previous year.<sup>50</sup> Particularly affected by poverty and social exclusion are children and young people, with 28 % of people of the age group 20 to 24 years and 24.2 % of children living in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion. SDG 1 is strongly interlinked to both SDG 10 Reduced inequalities and SDG 5 Gender equality. Women are more affected by the risk of poverty than men. Single parents, who are mostly women, face higher rates of living in a household with low work intensity, at-risk-of-poverty or material deprivation. In the area of basic needs, the share of people overburdened by their housing costs or facing severe housing deprivation has fallen since 2015.<sup>51</sup> Within the EU considerable differences in poverty rates still exist. In light of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the following persistent energy crisis and inflation, it is going to be an even bigger challenge to maintain good results in SDG 1, especially in terms of energy poverty.

Globally, Europe is home to the most equal societies and the highest social and work conditions protection. The EU has a wide range of policies in place that address multidimensional poverty and basic needs. [The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived](#) (FEAD) supports EU countries' actions in providing the most essential goods, such as food and clothing, as well as non-material social inclusion measures to the poorest in society. [The European Pillar of Social Rights](#) promotes upward convergence towards better living and working conditions. [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) sets a target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 15 million by 2030. The proposal for a [Directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union](#) should improve working and living conditions. Finally, [the reinforced Youth Guarantee](#) and [the European Child Guarantee](#) help to reduce poverty or social exclusion among young people and children by e.g. supporting their access to education.

<sup>50</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living conditions in Europe - poverty and social exclusion#Key findings](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion#Key_findings)

<sup>51</sup>[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)659870\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU(2020)659870_EN.pdf)



## SDG 2 Zero Hunger

The Council urged in its 2019 conclusions on sustainable development that “main policy foundations for a sustainable future include (...) the sustainability of the agriculture and food system (...)” (para 20).<sup>52</sup> In 2022, in reaction to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the Council also approved conclusions touching on the topic of food security. In this document, the Council “calls for effective international coordination to ensure a comprehensive global food security response”.<sup>53</sup>

When looking at the indicators for SDG 2 there have been favourable trends in the viability and sustainability of agricultural production in the EU and public investments in agricultural R&D. Similarly, the percentage of organic farming is also increasing, with 9.1% in 2020. Nevertheless, more efforts need to be made to reach the 25% target by 2030. While the use of more hazardous pesticides declined, the pace remains too slow to reach the 2030 50% reduction target. The EU land area at risk of severe soil erosion by water and the amount of ammonia emissions from agriculture have slightly decreased. More negative trends can be seen with the rising nitrate concentrations in EU groundwater bodies and the decline of common farmland birds. Moreover, the number of people with obesity in the EU also increased.

The issue of sustainable agriculture production is covered by the Common Agricultural Policy together with the EU Farm to Fork Strategy (2020). The Strategy covers various topics from the use of chemical pesticides or fertilisers to setting the targets for the share of farmland used for organic farming. In its 2020 conclusions, the Council welcomed the adoption of the Farm to Fork Strategy, as it should contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.<sup>54</sup> However, it also stressed the need for efficient and cost-effective administration and implementation of the Strategy, together with the introduction of monitoring and evaluation tools. The conclusions also touched upon the external dimension of this topic and suggested that EU trade policy should promote commitments in terms of organic farming. An essential step in this matter could be the inclusion of mirror clauses in EU trade agreements as they ensure the reciprocity of standards for imported agricultural products. Another important Strategy covering this topic and also introduced in 2020 is Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 which looks more specifically at the connection between agriculture and wild animals and plants.

A couple of directives cover the environmental impacts of agricultural production, such as the National Emission-reduction Commitments Directive and Nitrates Directive, as well as the new EU soil strategy for 2030. The National Emission-reduction Commitments Directive sets reduction commitments for five main air pollutants by 2030. According to the [2022 evaluation](#), 14 Member States still need to reach the targets for at least one of the pollutants, with the biggest challenge being the reduction of emissions of ammonia. More still needs to be done for the implementation of the [Nitrates Directive](#) as since 2012 the groundwater quality is increasing only slowly.

Regarding the obesity levels in the EU, the main tool in the last few years was the EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity 2014–2020, which should be evaluated in the near future, together with Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan (2021), which stresses the importance of preventing obesity from a young age.



## SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being

The Covid-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on global health and well-being. The 2021 Council conclusion welcomed the significant contribution of Team

<sup>52</sup> 14835/19

<sup>53</sup> EUCO 21/22

<sup>54</sup> 12099/20



Europe members to the Access to COVID Accelerator (ACT-A), including its vaccine pillar COVAX, and the proposed EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism. The conclusions also recognized the European Union's important contribution to health system strengthening in the partner countries (para 40). The rapid spread of Covid-19 has led Member States to implement preventive measures such as stay-at-home policies or other community and physical distancing, which have negatively impacted the mental health of EU citizens. Despite the fact that the 2022 Eurostat Report does not fully reflect the impact of the pandemic, the health determinants monitored are not directly affected by Covid-19 and show largely positive developments. Almost 70% of the EU Population perceived themselves to be in good or very good health in 2020. Moreover, the years of life lost due to exposure to air pollution by fine particulate matter and accidents at work have fallen in recent years. Yet trends in lifestyle-related risk factors are mixed, while the share of smokers continues to fall, the share of obese and overweight people has risen in the EU. Trends in access to health care are still favourable, even though the share of people reporting unmet needs for medical care has stagnated in the past years.

The pandemic showed the importance of coordination among EU Members States to protect people's health. The future [European Health Union](#) will improve EU-level protection, prevention, preparedness and response against health hazards of European citizens. The main financial instrument to fund the Union's health initiatives, which was adopted as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, is the [EU4Health programme](#). [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#) addresses cancer through prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, and improvement of the quality of life of cancer patients and survivors. Several EU Directives aim to protect citizens from smoking ([Tobacco Products Directive](#), [Tobacco Advertising Directive](#), [Tobacco Taxation Directive](#)). In order to prevent premature deaths linked to air pollution two initiatives were launched, [Clean Air Policy Package](#) and [the Zero Pollution Action Plan](#). The planned [European Health Data Space](#) will promote access to health data for better health care, research and policy-making. Access to health care for every EU citizen is one of the principles of [the European Pillar of Social Rights](#). A new initiative on mental health is expected to be presented in 2023.



#### SDG 4 Quality Education

The Council conclusions from 2021 have emphasized the importance of 'transformative education' to empower citizens to contribute to the objectives of SDGs (para 2). Moreover, the Council recognizes the importance of the youth dimension in the 2030 Agenda and the role of children and youth as agents of change and meaningful interlocutors in decision-making processes and governance platforms, in line with the SDGs, the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-27](#), the 11 EU Youth Goals 2019-27 (para 31) and the launch by the European Commission of the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027 as called for by the [2020 Council conclusions](#).<sup>55</sup> The Council Conclusion on Youth Action Plan in EU external action from November 2022 underlines that young people worldwide are essential and reliable partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.<sup>56</sup> According to the 2022 Eurostat report, the share of children participating in early childhood education has grown slowly. While concerning participation in education, the EU is on track to meet its 2030 targets for early leavers from education, the proportion of low-achieving learners in reading, maths and science is increasing. Additionally, the share of adults with at least basic digital skills is stagnating. The report pointed out disparities at the local and regional levels.

<sup>55</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8629-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>56</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15322-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

The umbrella initiative in the area of education on the EU level is [the Education European Area \(EEA\)](#), which coordinates education initiatives to build inclusive and resilient education systems. Four out of the seven [EEA strategic framework targets](#) to achieve by 2030 are used to monitor progress in basic and tertiary education in the EU. Basic and tertiary education are supported by the European Social Fund and its successor, the [European Social Fund Plus](#). Additionally, the reinforced Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that young people receive a good quality offer of employment and continued education. In this regard, the Council acknowledges especially the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-27 and the 11 EU Youth Goals 2019-27 (para 31). Moreover, the [European Skills Agenda](#) aims to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and put them to use by strengthening sustainable competitiveness. The [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021–2027\)](#) is a renewed Commission's policy initiative to support the sustainable and effective adaptation of the education and training systems of Member States to the digital age. Furthermore, European Commission published '[2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade](#)' with the target of at least 80 % of people aged 16–74 with basic digital skills. The European Commission has called 2022 the [European Year of Youth](#). Finally, the EU Member States are the largest development partner to education and training in the world, underpinning the commitment to the 2021 Paris Declaration on Investing in the Futures of Education. They promote ambitious action in multilateral fora and have taken a positive part in the Transforming Education Summit organized in September 2022 in New York. The EU dedicates 10% of its humanitarian aid budget to education in emergencies. The Global Gateway strategy further strengthens the EU's investments by mobilizing much-needed additional resources for enabling environments for teaching, training, and learning at all levels.



### SDG 5 Gender Equality

The 2021 Council conclusions mention that „promotion of women's and girls' human rights a priority in all areas of action“ (para 2). Conclusions recognize the particularly negative impact on SDG 5 by Covid-19 (para 3). The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment and full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences (para 3). The Council emphasized that there is a strong need for sexual and reproductive health, rights and universal access to comprehensive sexuality education and healthcare services in this area (para 3). Moreover, gender equality and the full empowerment of all women and girls are seen as core objectives of the EU's external action. Finally, the Council conclusions also note the existence of the Joint Communication by the European Commission and the High Representative on the third Gender Action Plan (GAP III) (para 28).

The Eurostat report indicates a positive development in the gender gap of employment, of pay in unadjusted form and for inactive population due to caring responsibilities. Women's share in leadership positions continues to increase as shown by considerable growth in both the shares of women in national parliaments and senior management positions, even if women are still underrepresented compared to men. In the area of education, the gender gap is reversed, with more young women than men attaining secondary and tertiary education. Nevertheless, the girls' and young women's underrepresentation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics mirrors enduring gender stereotypes and inequalities in education.<sup>57</sup>

The main tool to narrow the gender gaps within the EU countries is [The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#). This strategy presents policy objectives and actions to make significant progress towards a gender-equal Europe. As well as for SDG 10, the Member States have the obligation to programme targeted actions aimed at promoting gender-balanced labour market participation, equal working conditions, and a better work-life balance under the [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#). Moreover, Commission proposes measures to ensure [equal pay for equal work](#). [The Work-life Balance Directive](#) aims at helping women and men reconcile work and caring responsibilities and promote gender equality. [The Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training \(2021–2030\)](#) promotes equity, inclusion and success for all in education. The EU and its Member States promote gender equality in their external action as an overarching priority: in this regard, the European Commission's GAP III was welcomed through Presidency Conclusions by 24 Member States. The benchmark for international standards in sexual and gender-based violence is the Istanbul Convention and the [EU Strategy on victims' rights \(2020–2025\)](#). Sexual and gender-based violence is also a subject of the [European Parliament resolution](#) on the situation of women with disabilities.



## SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation

The Environmental Implementation Review 2022 stressed the importance that “the protection of water resources and dependent ecosystems, as well as the availability of a clean water supply, are fundamental to human existence, the economy (water fuels all economic sectors) and sustainable development, as well as our environment”. The

Council stressed too that the importance of access to safe drinking water as well as sanitation is a human right which entitles everyone without discrimination adhering to the “leave no one behind” principle. Moreover, “water, sanitation and hygiene and health are key for successful epidemic preparedness and response”.<sup>58</sup>

According to the Eurostat report, SDG 6 indicators show a mixed picture and overall rather neutral progress in the implementation of this goal. While the number of people with access to appropriate sanitation facilities is increasing, the data on water quality in the EU shows a less satisfactory image with the increase in the concentration of nitrate and phosphate in the rivers and groundwater. Additionally, the report pointed out disparities at the local and regional levels. When looking at the indicator of inland bathing sites with excellent water quality, a moderate movement away from the goal can be seen.

Parts of SDG 6 are addressed by EU legislation, such as the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, Water Framework Directive, Drinking Water Directive, Nitrates Directive and Bathing Water Directive. However, there are still significant gaps in the implementation of these directives in the EU Member States. While the [Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive](#) has positive effects in reducing loads of

<sup>57</sup> [SHE Figures 2021: Gender in Research and Innovation](#), p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> 14108/21

targeted pollutants and improving the quality of water bodies while contributing to ensuring the safety of bathing water sites, the implementation remains delayed because of various problems, e.g. insufficient investments, such as the lack of resources and administrative capacity. The [Water Framework Directive's](#) implementation is also delayed. Even though the deadline was 2015, still only less than half of the EU's water bodies have a good status. However, the directive contributes to slowing down the deterioration of water status as well as reducing chemical pollution. Over the 30 years since its adoption, the [Nitrates Directive](#) surely helped to cut the levels of water pollution. However, the progress is currently lagging as since 2012 the groundwater quality is increasing only slowly. The [Drinking Water Directive](#) entered into force on January 2021 and it defines essential quality standards for human consumption of water, the Member States will have two years to transpose it into their national laws. The [Bathing Water Directive](#) is currently undergoing a review, with an open public consultation that was conducted at the beginning of 2022.

In the last couple of years, several new initiatives and strategies related also to the topic of clean water and sanitation were adopted. These are e.g. 8th Environment Action Programme, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, Farm to Fork Strategy, Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil action plan and EU strategy on adaptation to climate change. As all of these initiatives are fairly new being introduced between the years 2020 and 2022, their impact will need to be assessed in the upcoming years. Since 2023 new rules will apply under the Regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse for agricultural irrigation aiming to reduce the risk of water shortages in agriculture and ensure stable food production (SDG 12).



### SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy

While measures against the Covid-19 pandemic have helped to put the EU on track towards its 2030 energy efficiency target, we still lack data which would reflect the effects of the recent developments related to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The unjustified Russian invasion of Ukraine has introduced heightened uncertainty to European energy security as well as the economic situation, which is also reflected in the rising energy prices. The five-year trend in access to affordable energy was in 2020 favourable, however, it is unsure what will show the 2022 data on the share of people who cannot afford to keep their homes adequately warm. In 2020 more than 22 % of the energy consumed in the EU came from renewable sources. The EU's primary energy consumption has seen a general downward trend since 2005, decreasing 17,4 % in 2020 over the whole period of 15 years. In the long term, the EU has increased its energy productivity. Nevertheless, despite the continuous growth in renewable energy sources, fuel imports from non-EU countries remained an important source for meeting the EU energy needs, contributing 57.5 % of gross available energy (GAE) in 2020, with Russia being the main supplier. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union imposed on Russia several packages of sanctions imposed and the supply of natural gas from Russia steadily decreases<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU\\_imports\\_of\\_energy\\_products\\_-\\_recent\\_developments#Overview](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments#Overview)

The main EU action towards SDG 7 is defined by [the European Green Deal](#) with its ‘[Delivering on the European Green Deal](#)’ package which envisages the decarbonisation of Europe’s energy systems in order to reach climate neutrality by 2050. To reach the new EU climate target for 2030, the Commission proposed an interconnected set of measures in the area of energy, transport, taxation and climate policies [Fit for 55](#). Energy efficiency, which is defined by [The Energy Efficiency Directive](#), is by the European Commission seen as a priority across all sectors with the goal of improvement of energy efficiency by at least 32.5 % by 2030 compared to 2007. [The Renewable Energy Directive](#) aims to increase the share of renewable energy sources. A new strategic plan [Fit for 55](#) aims to reduce the EU’s dependence on energy imports, particularly from Russia. Access to affordable energy is secured by [The European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and monitored by [the EU Energy Poverty Observatory](#), which seeks to help Member States in their efforts to decrease energy poverty.



## SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

The 2021 Council conclusions reaffirmed the Council’s stance on “the importance of strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development to promote (...) occupational health and safety and decent work” (para 26). Furthermore, the 2020 Council conclusions on Human Rights and Decent Work in Global Supply Chains stressed, that “promoting decent work is also an essential element for sustainable production and consumption, combating poverty and hunger, strengthening social protection, supporting gender equality and reducing inequalities”.<sup>60</sup>

According to the Eurostat report, the EU’s economy and the labour market seem to be recovering after the pandemic. In 2021, the real GDP per capita significantly increased, however, it remained slightly below the pre-pandemic levels. Moreover, in 2021, the employment rate increased to the new highest level and the share of young people neither in employment nor in education or training decreased. Nevertheless, the share is still higher than the set 2030 target and the progress remains insufficient. A positive development is also observable in the number of fatal work accidents and the in work at-risk-of-poverty rate which have been declining. On the other hand, the long-term unemployment rate slightly increased in 2021, yet it remains below 2018 levels.

Various financial instruments aim to ensure sustainable economic growth and recovery of the EU after the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, NextGenerationEU or the Recovery and Resilience Facility. In terms of initiatives, the area of employment is covered mainly by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, which sets targets for the share of the employed population as well as young people neither in employment nor in education or training for 2030. The [Council welcomes](#) the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as the targets for 2030, which are in line with the SDGs. Other important initiatives are the Council Recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market and the Recommendation on Effective Active Support to Employment following the Covid-19 crisis. In terms of financing, quality employment and further education are covered by the European Social Fund Plus and Youth Employment Initiative.

<sup>60</sup> 13512/20



In February 2022, the Commission published its [Communication on Decent Work Worldwide](#) which is an important and welcomed step in reaffirming the EU's to champion decent work both at home and around the world. The area of decent work under SDG 8 is further covered by the [Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU](#) (2019), which should have been transposed to national law in August 2022, the [Directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU](#) (adopted in October 2022) and EU strategic framework on health and safety 2021 – 2027. The [proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work](#) (2020) as well as the [proposal for a Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive](#) (2022), are currently going through negotiations.



## SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

The 2019 Council Conclusion stress “that the EU's competitive edge depends on the resilience and health of its citizens and, as such, on ensuring the sustainability guided European framework for education, science, technology, research, innovation, digitalisation, culture and sport which are the prerequisites and enablers for achieving an ever more sustainable EU economy, and its integration into global sustainable value chains, to meet the SDGs”.<sup>61</sup> Further highlighted is the importance of the areas covered by SDG 9 in the post-pandemic recovery. The Council views the Covid-19 pandemic as “an opportunity for using the recovery efforts to make European industry, and in particular SMEs including microenterprises, more competitive and resilient, and thus contributing to the long-term competitiveness of the EU through embracing the green and digital transition, in line with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030”.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the Council conclusions on the New European Research Area stress the “significant role of R&I in delivering on Europe's recovery while enabling and accelerating the digital and green transition, strengthening resilience and crises preparedness and supporting Europe's competitive edge”.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, most of the SDG 9 indicators show favourable trends. R&D expenditures are increasing. The same goes for the share of R&D personnel in the labour force, the share of young people with tertiary education and the number of patent applications. Improvements are observable also in the air emission intensity of the manufacturing sector, as well as the gross value added of the environmental goods and services sector. Mixed results can be seen in the area of sustainable infrastructure, as both passenger and freight transports have shifted further away from environmentally friendly transportation modes, while the share of households enjoying high-speed internet connections has increased.

Regarding R&D, the EU has set a long-standing goal of reaching 3% of GDP in its R&D intensity. This goal is strongly supported by the Council, e.g. through its [Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe](#). Moreover, Council sees the international R&I cooperation as an important tool “to promote democratic values and cooperation for peace, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, access to the most up-to-date knowledge as well as collaboration between and circulation of talents in the world, especially young researchers”.<sup>64</sup> The European Research Area, the EU research and innovation programme Horizon Europe, the European Education Area and the European Education Area strategic framework are among the most important initiatives focusing on research, innovation and education.

<sup>61</sup> 8286/19

<sup>62</sup> 12756/20

<sup>63</sup> 13004/20

<sup>64</sup> 10125/22



In 2021, the EU adopted the [Updated New Industrial Strategy](#), which among other objectives aims to support the industry shift towards climate neutrality. The sustainable infrastructure in the EU is covered mainly by the [Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy](#), the [Action Plan to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail services](#) and the [Trans-European Transport Network \(TEN-T\)](#) policy, which is supposed to be [revised](#) soon. The future of the EU's digital transformation is covered by the [2030 Digital Compass](#), which also sets a target that all European households should be covered by a gigabit network by 2030.



## SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities

The Council highlighted the contribution of the Porto Summit to reducing inequalities and as a new impetus to the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan which represents the most important initiative towards social justice and reducing inequalities in the EU (para 26-28).

According to the recent EU SILC Survey – based on better representativity of the sample population – the gap between the rich and the poor in the EU is generally wider and the progress in reducing inequality is much smaller than was suggested by the data previously available. The poverty gap is the same case. The fact that the data reflect the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic only partly yet and do not mirror other dimensions of inequality (e.g. wealth inequality) should attract attention. Data on the risk of poverty according to the type of area (urban, rural) and data on economic disparities among EU countries show a mixed picture. A clear north-south and west-east divides are still evident when looking at the geographical distribution of GDP per capita and household income in the EU in 2020. When it comes to the integration of migrants from outside the EU, the gap between home-country nationals and non-EU citizens remains considerable. The global inequalities are not considered in the Eurostat Report in the context of SDG 10.

The EU has a wide range of policies in place that address or touch on the different aspects of SDG 10 while overlapping with other SDGs (e.g. The European Pillar of Social Rights, and the Just Transition Mechanism). [The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) (2021) outlines various concrete actions to further implement the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017). At least partial progress in reducing inequalities was reached through the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive or ongoing negotiation of the Directive on Pay Transparency and Equal Pay. In contrast, there has been no progress on the horizontal Equal Treatment Directive. The main challenges of relevant existing directives were described and summarized in the Joint report on the application of Racial Equality Directive and Employment Equality Directive (2021), but a clear follow-up has not been observable yet. Following the proceedings of the Porto Social Summit, the headline targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights have been aligned with concrete four SDG targets.

The Just Transition Mechanism aims to support those who will be most affected by the transition to a climate-neutral society. [Council Recommendation](#) on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality provides policy guidance for addressing the relevant employment and social aspects linked to the transition although reducing inequalities might be rather side-effect of intended interventions. The revised European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund Plus are supposed to reduce inequalities too, regional as well as individual. The 2021–2027 EU Cohesion Policy aims to correct imbalances between countries and regions and thus reduce inter-regional and inter-country inequalities.

The [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) (2021, hereinafter “NPMA”) was created as a reaction to the “migration crisis” in 2015. It aims to create faster migration processes and stronger governance of

migration and border policies. Most of the NPMA initiatives are strongly focused on preventing irregular migration (e.g. A renewed EU action plan against migrant smuggling). However, regular or legal migration is also targeted through the Commission proposals for a Long-term Residents Directive (recast) and single permit directive (recast) from April 2022. After the start of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, the Temporary Protection Directive was activated to provide rapid and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021, builds on the achievements of the previous action plan from 2016) sets out actions that support migrants' inclusion in education and employment, as well as access to health services and affordable housing. The EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals assists refugees, migrants and citizens of non-EU countries in profiling their skills and work qualifications for reception, employment and education services.



## SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

The Council conclusions acknowledges generally that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda has to take place at all levels, respecting the principle of subsidiarity. In supporting regional and local authorities and cities, Urban Agenda for the EU and cohesion policy in particular play a salient role.<sup>65</sup>

The quality of life in municipalities, as measured by severe housing deprivation, exposure to noise and the occurrence of crime, violence and vandalism in the neighbourhood, has clearly improved over the past few years. Meanwhile, the decrease in years of life lost due to exposure to air pollution by fine particulate matter has slowed down, indicating only moderate progress toward the 2030 EU target. The situation in the field of sustainable mobility is unsatisfactory, which is illustrated by the continuing high share of cars with internal combustion engines and the stagnating share of buses and trains in inland passenger transport and by the fact that the target of halving the total death toll on EU roads over the past decade was missed, with cyclist fatalities getting even worse. Trends in the environmental impact of municipalities are less clear-cut. Whereas settlement area per capita has increased, pointing to a significant movement away from the SDG objectives, the recycling rate of municipal waste has increased but slowed down in the last few years. However, the share of the EU population connected to at least secondary waste-water treatment plants has been steadily growing.

The EU has a variety of tools and policies connected to SDG 11, however, the main responsibility lies on the Member States. The European Urban Initiative supports urban areas with, among other things, policy development and communication on sustainable urban development. In the 2021–2027 period, [at least 8 % of the ERDF resources](#) in each Member State must be allocated to priorities and projects selected by cities themselves, based on their own sustainable urban development strategies.

Besides that, achieving SDG 11 is fuelled by individual initiatives such as New European Bauhaus or European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats and policies such as A renovation Wave for Europe. For mobility, there is a Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, Guidelines for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning or Commission's communications ["Europe on the move"](#) which reflects Europe's ambition of making rapid progress towards putting in place, by 2025, a clean, competitive and connected mobility system integrating all means of transport and spanning the entire Union. Finally, the efforts of cities towards overall carbon neutrality, are being intensified and should be further acknowledged and supported by central governments.

<sup>65</sup> 14835/19



## SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production

The Council urged in its 2019 conclusions on sustainable development that “main policy foundations for a sustainable future include a decisive transition towards a circular economy, including non-toxic material cycles (...), as well as safe and sustainable low carbon energy, buildings and mobility sectors, while fostering European cohesion” (para 20).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, in 2019 the Council approved conclusions on the circular economy which urged the Member States and the Commission to “integrate the circular economy into all relevant policies and strategies, (...) and make it one of the cornerstones of the long-term vision of the Union's industrial future”.<sup>67</sup>

According to the Eurostat report, the indicators covering SDG 12 are showing mixed trends in the last few years. Both EU's material footprint and consumption of hazardous chemicals have grown since 2015. On the other hand, the average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions efficiency of new passenger cars has improved significantly in 2020. While the generation of waste has grown since 2014, an increase in recycling can be observed.

The [Waste Framework Directive](#) (2018) is one of the legislations touching upon the topics under SDG 12. In the first half of 2022, a series of broad consultations was conducted, as a new revised and more targeted version of the directive is planned to be introduced in 2023.

In the last couple of years, several strategies dealing with various aspects of SDG 12 were adopted, such as the EU industrial strategy, the 8th Environment Action Programme, the 2021 Zero Pollution Action Plan, New Consumer Agenda, Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability or Circular Economy Action Plan. A newly proposed package on Circular Economy was introduced in March 2022 and includes e.g. the [Proposal for a Directive on empowering consumers for the green transition](#). The announced revision of the REACH framework, that aims to ensure better and earlier identification of the intrinsic properties of chemical substances, was postponed and it is desirable to finish it without any significant delay.

At the international level, the EU and the Member States are actively engaged in the intergovernmental negotiations process to elaborate and adopt an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, launched with the adoption of the landmark resolution at UNEA 5.2 in February 2022. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions efficiency of cars is covered by the [Sustainable Smart and Mobility Strategy](#), which sets targets for the number of zero-emissions vehicles in the EU, and also the [‘Fit for 55’ proposal](#) that sets the CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards for new passenger cars and vans. The legislation under this proposal will review Regulation (EU) 2019/631, as the emission standards set out in this document will not be able to ensure the needed reduction to reach the new 2030 emission reduction target.

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<sup>66</sup> 14835/19

<sup>67</sup> 12791/19



## SDG 13 Climate Action

The implementation of the European Green Deal as highlighted in the 2021 Council conclusions on sustainable development is strongly connected to SDG 13. On the topics covered by this SDG the former Council conclusions from 2019 additionally urged that “the main policy foundations for a sustainable future include a decisive transition towards a circular economy, including non-toxic material cycles, striving for climate neutrality, in line with Paris Agreement, protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, tackling climate change (...)” (para 20).<sup>68</sup>

The data from the Eurostat report reveal that the overall assessment of the SDG 13 indicators is moderately positive, with some mixed tendencies in climate mitigation, adaptation and finance. While between 1990 and 2020 the net greenhouse gas emissions in the EU were reduced by 31%, even greater progress is needed to meet the 55% target for 2030. Additionally, the carbon removals achieved by the land use and forestry sector are declining. Positive trends can be seen in the indicators on the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions efficiency of new passenger cars as well as the EU's contribution to climate finance for developing countries. On the other hand, monetary losses from weather- and climate-related disasters increased in recent years.

The European Climate Law should significantly contribute to achieving SDG 13, as it translates the European Green Deal's goal to become climate-neutral by 2050 into a legally binding framework. Another target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% below 1990 levels is legally covered by the Fit for 55 legislative package. This target should be strengthened up to 57% as announced by Frans Timmermans at the COP27.<sup>69</sup> With regard to adaptation, the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change adopted in 2021 covers all related aspects for ensuring resilience to climate change impacts coupled with the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme which entered into force in 2022 and the EU Action Plan for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Another important aspect of SDG 13 is climate financing. It is welcomed that the tracking methodology for climate spending has been developed, despite the differences in interpretation of its results. While the Commission stated that it reached its goal of spending at least 20% of the 2014-2020 budget on climate action, [the European Court of Auditors reported](#) that the actual amount was only around 13% (EUR 216 billion of the EU budget with an annual average of 20.15%). The new multiannual financial framework, approved in December 2020, sets an overall climate target of 30% of total expenditure for the EU budget 2021-2027. Climate change is one of the priority areas for external cooperation underlined in the new NDICI – Global Europe, which also includes a 30% spending target. Acceleration of climate action is driven by the Recovery and Resilience Facility with the target of 37% of spending dedicated to climate mitigation and adaptation measures. Besides that, the Innovation and Modernisation Funds play an important role in supporting energy and social transition.

Financial support by the EU Member States towards developing countries is provided under the joint goal to provide 100 billion USD per year in line with the Paris Agreement. Moreover, the European Commission announced at COP 27 the EU and some Member States would dedicate more than 1 billion USD to adaptation (of which 60 million USD would be specifically dedicated to loss and damage), through existing and new adaptation programmes. In connection with the external dimension, another important initiative is the [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism](#) regulation, which is part of the Fit for 55 package and on which the Council adopted a general approach in 2022.<sup>70</sup> This mechanism aims

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<sup>68</sup> 14835/19

<sup>69</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_22\\_6974](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_22_6974)

<sup>70</sup> 7226/22

to avoid carbon leakage by targeting imports of carbon-intensive goods and promoting carbon pricing policies to fight climate change in the partner countries.



#### SDG 14 Life below Water

The Council stresses that habitat alteration, biodiversity loss, over-exploitation of marine resources and pollution from both land- and sea-based sources are among the most important general pressures affecting the environmental status of EU marine waters.

According to the Eurostat report, SDG 14 indicators show a mixed picture. Europe's marine ecosystem continues to be at threat from organic and chemical pollutants from human activities, as well as marine litter and noise pollution. Surface seawater acidity continues to increase, and in 2020 reached a new unprecedented high pre-industrial level. Nevertheless, the coastal bathing sites with excellent water quality are improving as well as the fishing stocks indicator. The expansion of the marine protected areas is in progress too.

Several legislations cover SDG 14, such as the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) which was set up to enhance the sustainable development of its maritime economy while better protecting the EU's marine environment and which will be reviewed by 2023 considering the state of implementation of EU laws addressing key pollution sources and the need to reduce plastic and other litter, underwater noise and contaminants. [The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive](#) works across borders and sectors to ensure human activities at sea take place in an efficient, safe and sustainable way. Legislation for SDG 6 is also relevant for SDG 14, such as [the Water Framework Directive](#) namely in its part for coastal waters, or the [Bathing Water Directive](#) (see above), in a "source-to-sea" approach. The EU is also a signatory to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal that includes the preservation of the marine environment.

Tightly connected with SDG 14 are also initiatives and strategies touching upon the topic of sustainable use of the ocean, seas and marine resources (e.g. [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) or the [Habitats](#) and [Birds Directives](#), [the Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil action plan](#) and the [EU strategy on adaptation to climate change](#)).

At the international level, the EU and the Member States aspire to the successful completion of the intergovernmental negotiations for an implementing agreement under UNCLOS for biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/59787/st13975-en22.pdf>





## SDG 15 Life on Land

When it comes to SDG 15, last year the Council stressed “the need for a strong environmental dimension in order to live up to the 2030 Agenda ambition as well as the implementation of the European Green Deal” (para 29). While there is a reported decline in severe soil erosion and a slight increase in the share of forest areas and terrestrial protected areas, the decline in the common bird index and grassland butterfly index indicates the continuing threat to biodiversity loss and the ecosystem’s stability. The results of the water pollution are mixed, with a decrease in biochemical oxygen demand occurring alongside an increase in phosphate concentrations in rivers. The conservation status of ecosystems and biodiversity in the EU is unfavourable, and the negative spillover effects of EU consumption on global biodiversity are significant.

The number of newly adopted strategies focusing on biodiversity and the improvement of ecosystem services is encouraging. Besides established legislation (such as Birds Directive, Habitat Directive, and Water Framework Directive), several new strategies and initiatives are already in the legislative process (Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, Zero Pollution Action Plan including the new Zero Pollution Package presented in October 2022 proposing amendments to current EU legislation on water and air pollution, or Initiative on Pollinators). In this regard, it is appropriate to acknowledge in particular the introduction of the Soil Strategy for 2030 which had been awaited for several years, the New EU forest strategy for 2030 and the Nature Restoration Law. Significant advancement was made in forest protection this year, in particular on the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with products placed on the EU market and on addressing commodities and products contributing to deforestation and forest degradation.

Moreover, the Common Agriculture Policy has the potential to mitigate the negative impacts of unsustainable farming management and contribute to halting biodiversity loss. Real progress and transformative effectiveness of existing measures, should be properly assessed in the [interim evaluation planned for 2026](#). It should be accompanied by the implementation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme (to 2030), especially with the development and more practical use of environmental and ecosystem accounting.

With the rapid development of sustainable finance, it can be hoped that the integration of the ecosystem perspective will help to tackle environmental risks leading to exceeding the planetary tipping points. In this regard, the attention of the Member States should be paid to further elaborate on the practical use of the Do No Significant Harm Principle in state budgeting as the counterpart of EU taxonomy for sustainable activities whose scope is limited to the banking sector and private financial entities. At the international level, the EU and Member States support the adoption of an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework at the COP 15 of the CBD, in Montreal, in December 2022, and commit to the target of 30 per cent of land and seas under protection by 2030 as stipulated by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.





## SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The Council conclusions underlined good governance as one among four levers of change critical for achieving SDGs and welcomed efforts in the Better Regulation agenda which included a number of improvements to mainstream the SDGs to help ensure that every legislative proposal contributes to the 2030 Agenda (para 17). The

Council adopted the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises and emphasized the linkages between sustainable development, humanitarian action and conflict prevention and peacebuilding in 2018.<sup>72</sup>

Life in the EU has become safer over the past few years, and in all likelihood over the whole period since 2002. Deaths due to homicide or assault and the perceived occurrence of crime, violence and vandalism in European neighbourhoods have both fallen considerably. However, some aspects should be paid attention to. Deaths due to homicide in the EU show a remarkable gender gap. Death rates due to homicide remain about twice as high for men, but while men have a higher overall risk of being killed, women have a significantly higher risk of being killed by their intimate partners or family members. Moreover, data show that women are much more likely to be a victim of intentional homicide and sexual offences than men.

Some shadows are seen on an otherwise bright trend in government expenditure on law courts too. Expenditure has increased since 2005. But it is questionable whether it relates proportionately to better access to justice. Furthermore, when viewed as a share of total government expenditure, spending on law courts remained stable.

Since 2004, the EU has seen a considerable decline in levels of trust in three of its main institutions (the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Central Bank). The deepest fall was observed in 2015. Between 2016 and 2019, confidence in the EU institutions had been on the rise, until dropping again in 2020 by 2–6 percentage points, depending on the institution. The 2021 data indicate that the EU institutions have regained some of the trust. Throughout the years, the European Parliament has remained the most trusted of the three institutions surveyed.

The EU has a wide range of policies in place that address or touch on personal security. They are covered by [EU Security Union Strategy 2020 - 2025](#) which identified five priorities: a future-proof security environment (e.g. critical infrastructure protection and resilience, or cybersecurity), tackling evolving threats (e.g. cybercrime, modern law enforcement, hybrid threats), protecting Europeans from terrorism and organised crime and a strong European security ecosystem (e.g. cooperation, or strengthening security research and innovation). There are many sectoral strategies regarding the issue, made in the same time period, e.g. [EU Agenda and Action Plan on Drugs](#), [EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking](#), [A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU](#), [EU Cybersecurity Strategy](#), [EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings](#), [EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse](#), [EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime](#)).

The EU monitors the efficiency, quality and independence of Member States' justice systems (EU Justice Scoreboard), reduces illicit financial flows (AML directives) and promotes rule of law and ensures equal access to justice for all.

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<sup>72</sup> 5413/18

Some topics relating to SDG 16 have been not considered in the Eurostat Reports although the EU is very active in these areas and the activities are crucial for trust in institutions monitored by Eurostat indicators. More attention should be paid to the effectiveness and transparency of institutions (target 16.6) and the participatory approach. Responsive, participatory and representative decision-making (target 16.7) is promoted by the [European Democracy Action Plan](#) and actions like The Conference of the Future of Europe. Finally, the EU engages in peace-making and peace-keeping which are named in the title of SDG 16. Initiatives such as [An EU in support of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration of former combatants](#), or [EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\)](#) can be mentioned, as well as initiatives at the border of internal security and peace e.g. [framework for coordinated EU response to hybrid campaign](#) and relating efforts including [foreign information and manipulation toolbox](#). In the context of the unjustified Russian war has been proven an irreplaceable role of the [European Peace Facility](#).



### SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals

In terms of partnership for goals, the Council conclusions emphasized the effectiveness of development cooperation (para 36) and encouraged Multilateral Development Banks to report on how their activities contribute to the achievement of

SDGs (para 41).

The overall assessment of SDG 17 remains stable, despite the EU's official development assistance to gross national income (GNI) ratio reaching a new record high in 2020 (0.50%). In 2019, the EU's ODA to least developed countries accounted for 0.10% of GNI, following a period of stagnation since 2013. The EU has thus not progressed towards its 0.20% target over the past few years. Imports from developing countries — despite a fall in 2020 — remained higher than five years earlier. Overall financial flows to developing countries have decreased in recent years. The picture is unfavourable when it comes to financial governance as the EU debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratios have risen strongly because of measures implemented to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. A shift in the tax burden from labour to the environment has not taken place yet.

The European Consensus on Development adopted in 2017 enabled the alignment of development cooperation policies, initiatives and programmes with the SDGs. Since then, progress has been made by the EU and its Member States in implementing the Consensus and in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as the international blueprint for poverty eradication and sustainable development across the world.

The new NDICI-Global Europe instrument simplified the external financing architecture. Furthermore, the Commission has adopted a [Road map](#) to enhance its effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact. Coordination has been improved and the commitment to development cooperation strengthened through the [Team Europe approach](#). Furthermore, [Team Europe Initiatives](#) have proven to be good examples of what we do together concretely on the ground. The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) helps to mobilise private-sector financing and through the GSP+ also maintains “duty-free and quota-free” market access to LDCs as set out in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA). Additional finances that are aimed at infrastructure investments will be mobilised through the [Global Gateway strategy](#). Several priorities related to investment and trade with developing countries are also outlined in the Trade Policy Review adopted in 2021 and the strategy for Africa adopted in 2020.

The EU contributes to the global Aid for Trade initiative and provides preferential treatment to 126 countries eligible for EU ODA. As noted in the latest [Report on the Generalised Scheme of Preferences](#), GSP+ beneficiaries have made progress in the effective implementation of the 27 international conventions listed in the arrangement. However, the impact of the global pandemic on trade has been dramatic. EU27 imports from developing countries declined by almost EUR 100 billion (-16%) from EUR 621.6 billion to EUR 522.9 billion between 2019 and 2020.

The EU, its Member States and the European Investment Bank are together the biggest contributor of public climate finance to developing economies, providing EUR 23.4 billion in 2020. Additional private capital for environmentally sustainable investment is planned to be mobilized through the International Platform on Sustainable Finance. In 2021, the EU renewed its Multilateralism Strategy to further the cooperation on global challenges such as peace and security, human rights and the rule of law, sustainable development, public health and climate change.

## Annex II: SDG References in the Council conclusions from 2021 and 2022

This section contains a list of all Council conclusions from 2021 and 2022 with any explicit reference to the 2030 Agenda or SDGs in the text. The number in brackets is the number of references to the 2030 Agenda or SDGs in the text. The data were obtained from the SDG Mapper tool, which was developed by the JRC and DG INTPA.

### 2021

1. [ST\\_10393\\_2021\\_INIT\\_en.pdf](#) (10) [EU priorities at the United Nations during the 76th United Nations General Assembly, September 2021 - September 2022 - Council Conclusions \(12 July 2021\)](#)
2. [ST\\_10629\\_2021\\_INIT\\_en.pdf](#) (1) [A Globally Connected Europe - Council Conclusions \(12 July 2021\)](#)
3. [ST\\_10726\\_2021\\_INIT\\_en.pdf](#) (1) [Council Conclusions on the implementation of the National Firearms Focal Points \(NFFPs\) in the EU Member States ¶ Council Conclusions \(13 July 2021\)](#)
4. [ST\\_12203\\_2021\\_INIT\\_en.pdf](#) (1) [Climate finance ¶ Council conclusions on climate finance \(5 October 2021\)](#)
5. [ST\\_12594\\_2021\\_REV\\_1\\_en.pdf](#) (2) [Preparations for the United Nations Framework on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\) meetings \(Glasgow, 31 October - 12 November 2021\) ¶ Council conclusions](#)
6. [ST\\_13243\\_2021\\_INIT\\_en.pdf](#) (1) [Council Conclusions on the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#)
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