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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**EU Voluntary Review on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development**

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1. Introduction

The **first Voluntary Review of the European Union** – a Union of 447 million citizens and 27 countries – **on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development shows that the EU is fully committed to delivering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The 2030 Agenda is indivisibly linked to the Paris Agreement on climate change¹ and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development².

The European Union (EU) has firmly placed **sustainable development at its core** and is making efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda, both at home and around the world, by supporting partner countries in their implementation efforts.

Under the leadership of President von der Leyen, the Commission has presented an ambitious policy programme to deliver on sustainability in the EU and beyond. The SDGs are an intrinsic part of the President's political programme³ and lie at the heart of the policymaking on internal and external action across all sectors. With the von der Leyen Commission, the SDGs have been put at the heart of major deliverables such as the European Green Deal and Recovery and Resilience Plans. SDGs are mainstreamed in the European Semester cycle of economic and fiscal coordination with Member States⁴, the annual legislative work programmes and the Better Regulation toolbox. This has been set out in the 2020 document 'Delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals - A comprehensive approach⁵', and progress in achieving the SDGs is monitored annually by the European statistical office Eurostat⁶.

Externally, building on the European Consensus on Development⁷, all EU institutions and Member States are committed to support partner countries in implementing the SDGs. This is being taken further, together with the pursuit of EU priorities, in particular in the support of a sustainable recovery aligned with the SDGs through our new programming and Global Gateway.

Recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chain disruptions, and the energy crisis resulting from Russia's war of aggression, have further complicated progress⁸.

Against this backdrop, **this review renews the sense of direction for further efforts to build lasting peace, ensure a better future for people and the planet, and deliver more inclusive prosperity, including through partnerships**. As such, it is complementary to the national reviews that have been completed by all EU Member States.

The voluntary review has been conducted in line with the United Nations (UN) voluntary common reporting guidelines and is based on broad consultations. Details on how the EU is

¹ The Paris Agreement: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>.

² [Financing for Development - United Nations Sustainable Development](#)

³ President von der Leyen's [Political Guidelines](#): A Union that strives for more- My agenda for Europe

⁴ A framework for integrated surveillance and coordination of economic and employment policies across the EU

⁵ [delivering on uns sustainable development goals staff working document en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶ [Overview - Sustainable development goals - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ [European Consensus on Development \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁸ [2022 Report of the UN Secretary-General: Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

adding value to implementing the 2030 Agenda, both inside the EU and around the world, are available in the main accompanying document⁹, which comprises 17 dedicated SDG chapters and addresses the interlinkages between the SDGs, as well as in the statistical and analytical document¹⁰. This review also includes a specific document dedicated to the participation of young people¹¹ in implementing the 2030 Agenda at EU level, and a report on the consultation activities¹² undertaken as part of this voluntary review.

The EU and UN are indispensable partners sharing common values and objectives, including the 2030 Agenda. The EU is determined to protect and promote rules-based multilateralism, with the UN at its core, and international norms and standards in accordance with the UN Charter. With growing global instability halfway through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, there is an increased need for unity, coordinated diplomatic outreach, further cooperation with partners, and unprecedented investments. A number of vulnerable countries are particularly exposed to the challenges resulting from the multiplicity of crises. **Taking action to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs is more urgent than ever.**

Since 2015, the EU has made progress across all SDGs, although this has not always been even. According to the most recent data¹³, the **EU performed best on ensuring decent work and economic growth, reducing poverty and fostering peace, security and inclusive societies and institutions.** However, external adverse shocks are putting a strain on the post-pandemic recovery and progress on sustainable development in the EU and globally. Progress slowed down from 2020 as a consequence of the multiple crises, sometimes leading to a reverse in progress.

All of this comes on top of the underlying planetary climate and environmental crisis and rising inequalities. **More progress is needed on many SDGs**, in particular on those related to the protection and sustainable use of natural resources. The **European Green Deal** in December 2019 brought new impetus to climate policy and action at EU level. The **European Climate Law**¹⁴ broke new ground in 2021 by setting legally binding targets for the EU to reach climate neutrality by 2050 and to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels¹⁵. Implementation of the European Green Deal on the ground is gaining momentum and is expected to pick up speed significantly in the years to come.

Across the whole framework, particular attention needs to be paid to impacts on people in vulnerable situations. Overall, the situation currently remains challenging, and **further implementation efforts are still needed to achieve our collective vision.**

⁹ SWD(2023)700

¹⁰ SWD(2023)701

¹¹ SWD(2023)702

¹² SWD(2023)703

¹³ Eurostat portal on Sustainable Development Goals monitoring: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi>; also the Europe Sustainable Development Reports by the [UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/solutions-network/).

¹⁴ [EUR-Lex - 32021R1119 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1119/oj)

¹⁵ The level of the EU net domestic emissions in 2021 (latest data available) is broadly consistent with the trajectory to achieve these ambitious targets, but the speed of reduction needs to increase significantly.

2. Delivering on the SDGs in the European Union

A whole-of-government approach

The EU vision for sustainable development combines economic growth, a highly competitive social market economy that leaves no one behind, the respect for human rights and a high level of environmental protection. Sustainable development is also an objective of EU external action. The 2030 Agenda is implemented at EU level through an **integrated whole-of-government approach**¹⁶ that places the SDGs at the core of EU policy, legislation and funding. All EU actions and policies contribute to delivering on the SDGs and the degree of success depends on collective actions at all levels – EU, national, regional and local.

The Commission’s comprehensive or “**whole of government**” approach to implementing the SDGs comprises several strands as depicted in the Figure below:

Figure 1: *The EU’s ‘whole-of-government’ approach*



At the beginning of her mandate, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen put forward *A Union that strives for more*¹⁷ - the political guidelines for 2019-2024. The President’s political programme integrates the SDGs into all Commission proposals, policies and strategies. All of the 17 SDGs feature in one or more of the six headline ambitions announced. Moreover, all Commissioners will ensure the delivery of the SDGs within their policy area¹⁸.

The guidelines set out six headline ambitions: a European Green Deal; an economy that works for people; a Europe fit for the digital age; promoting our European way of life; a stronger Europe in the world; and a new push for European democracy. These priorities operationalise

¹⁶ [SWD\(2020\) 400 final: Delivering on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – A comprehensive approach.](#)

¹⁷ *A Union that strives for more*: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/43a17056-ebf1-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1>.

¹⁸ Mission letters are found under each Commissioner: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/timmermans_en

the transformations necessary to deliver on the SDGs, notably through the green and digital transitions, while leaving no one behind. The six Commission priorities are interconnected with the five Ps – **People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership** - of the preamble of the 2030 Agenda. This approach is also largely consistent with the focus on a short set of entry points for transformation recommended by scientists in the UN Global Sustainable Development Report¹⁹.

Figure 2: The strategy to deliver on the SDGs in the EU²⁰



The current strategy to fully deliver on the SDGs consists in advancing the headline ambitions through concrete initiatives set out in the annual Commission work programmes²¹. Since 2020, every Commission work programme put the SDGs at the heart of EU policymaking. The Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission on EU legislative priorities for 2023 and 2024²² includes a commitment to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The SDGs are thus mainstreamed into EU policies and they guide policymaking and law-making in the EU. Proposed legislation must include an assessment of how it contributes to delivering on the SDGs²³. Based on this overarching direction, the whole-of-government

¹⁹ [Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 | United Nations](#)
²⁰ In the figure, the SDGs are presented under a specific Commission political priority to which they are strongly associated, while noting that most SDGs contribute in varying degrees to several priorities.
²¹ More information on the Commission work programmes: <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-documents/commission-work-programme>.
²² Text of the Joint Declaration [here](#).
²³ More information about the Better Regulation agenda [here](#).

approach focuses on delivering concrete internal and external actions that will bring about tangible progress towards the SDGs.

The added value of the European Union

The voluntary review reflects the specific nature of the EU and various aspects of EU added value in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

- **Shaping policies and laws:** the EU shapes and implements a range of policies where it has competence and SDGs are mainstreamed into its policymaking.
- **Financing sustainable development:** the EU invests in sustainable development projects and programmes, both within the EU and in support of partner countries, in pursuit of the SDGs.
- **External action:** the EU is a major player on the international scene in support of multilateralism, human rights and sustainable development.

In terms of the EU budget, its multiannual structure provides stable long-term planning for achieving EU objectives and the vast majority of EU programmes funded under the budget contribute to the SDGs²⁴. For 2021-2027, the budget provides²⁵ over EUR 2 trillion (in current prices) to help rebuild a post-pandemic European Union, while significantly accelerating delivery on the SDGs in the EU and across the world. It contributes directly to a greener, more digital, more inclusive, and a more resilient Europe. More than 50% of this total amount will support the modernisation of the EU through the following: fair climate and digital transitions; preparedness, recovery, and resilience; and research and innovation.

The EU budget is channelling over EUR 378 billion to the EU's regions and cities, contributing to the progress of several SDGs. Most of this funding²⁶ is used to invest in regional and local development to help level up the economic, social and territorial disparities that still exist in the EU.

Working together as one Union towards the SDGs

The EU institutions work closely together to set the EU's agenda and to initiate and adopt EU laws, including for the pursuit of the SDGs. The **European Commission** draws up proposals for new European legislation that contribute to the SDGs and review the implementation by Member States of the legislative acts once adopted by EU co-legislators, the **European Parliament** and the **Council of the European Union**, which represents the national governments of the Member States. Both the European Parliament and the Council actively promote the implementation of the SDGs in EU policies, including through regular resolutions, conclusions and legislative acts.

The Member States have the primary responsibility for ensuring sustainable development at national, regional, and local level. This includes taking steps to integrate the SDGs into national policies and allocating resources to support their achievement. Member States report regularly on their progress towards the SDGs through their respective Voluntary National

²⁴ More information [here](#)

²⁵ Together with NextGenerationEU, the temporary instrument designed to boost the recovery.

²⁶ Cohesion policy funding: the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus and the Just Transition Fund.

Reviews²⁷(VNRs). Since 2016, all Member States have at least once presented a review in meetings of the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF). Of the 27 Member States, 23 have done it twice, including the nine Member States scheduled to present it again for 2023.

The **European Committee of the Regions** and the **European Economic and Social Committee** have made valuable contributions to this review. The **European Economic and Social Committee**, the consultative body that gives representatives of civil society organisations a formal platform to express their views, has set up a Sustainable Development Observatory, which is committed to fostering the active participation of citizens and civil society in making the shift towards a more sustainable Europe aligned with the SDGs. The **Committee of the Regions** works with all European territorial associations and networks active on SDGs and collaborates with international organisations, such as the OECD, to advance research and gather improved data on the local implementation of the SDGs.

Many **local and regional authorities** are increasingly engaging through **voluntary local reviews**, which help foster the delivery of SDGs close to citizens and often contain tangible commitments in support of the 2030 Agenda. So far, about one third of all local reviews have been adopted in the EU (41 out of 129)²⁸.

3. Key transformations – the EU’s highlights

The EU takes a comprehensive approach to delivering on the interconnected SDGs, advancing several of them through key initiatives and strategies.

Planet and prosperity – European Green Deal

The EU made moderate progress on **SDG 2** on sustainable agriculture, **SDG 6** on water, **SDG 7** on energy, **SDG 11** on sustainable cities, **SDG 12** on consumption and production and **SDG 14** on oceans. More progress is expected in coming years on **SDG 13** on climate action²⁹ and **SDG 15** on biodiversity on land.

Figure 3: Contribution to the SDGs of headline ambition ‘European Green Deal’



To make decisive progress on **climate action (SDG 13)**, the EU has recently agreed on a renewed regulatory and policy framework underpinning a higher climate ambition. The EU and its Member States have fully **met their international climate commitments** to reduce

²⁷ Map and links to EU Member States voluntary national reviews [here](#).
²⁸ More information about localising SDGs in the EU can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
²⁹ As measured against the more ambitious targets of the European Climate Law

greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020, compared with 1990. The **European Green Deal** strives to **make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050**. It is explicitly designed as an integral part of the strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs³⁰.

A solid advance was made on **SDG 12** on responsible consumption and production. The EU's resource and energy efficiency improved in recent years and the value added from the environmental goods and services sector³¹ has been growing. The EU has proven that green growth is possible: GDP growth can be achieved simultaneously with greenhouse gas emission reduction. However, the EU is still far from meeting its target of doubling the circular material use rate of materials coming from collected waste by 2030, compared to 2020. The EU's updated **circular economy action plan**³² sets out several key initiatives that will help the EU to reduce pressure on natural resources and create sustainable growth and jobs. Its implementation will be instrumental in closing this gap.

More progress is needed on **SDG 15** on terrestrial ecosystems, while the state of marine ecosystems has improved somewhat (**SDG 14**). In line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** of December 2022, the EU intends to protect at least 30% of its land areas and 30% of its sea areas by 2030. The **EU Forest Strategy for 2030**³³ put emphasis on the EU forest protection, restoration and sustainable forest management as contribution to SDG 15. The **EU Soil Strategy**³⁴ sets a medium-term objective for 2030 focusing on combatting desertification, restoring degraded land and soil. The proposal for a **Nature Restoration Law**³⁵ sets out binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems, particularly those with the most potential to capture and store carbon.

So far, progress on **SDG 6** on water has been mixed. Improved wastewater treatment has reduced organic pollution in European rivers, lakes and seas. At the same time, excess nutrients industrial pollutants, pharmaceutical residues, cosmetics and pesticides in water remain of concern. Although the hygiene situation is generally very good, differing levels of access to water services and sanitation continue among Member States, with some vulnerable groups at a disadvantage.

EU results on **SDG 2** on malnutrition and sustainable agriculture are mixed. Progress achieved has been put under pressure as a consequence of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Prices of agricultural goods have increased in the EU and globally. The EU has stepped up support to help those most affected by the devastating effects of rising food insecurity globally. Between 2020 and 2024, the EU is investing EUR 8 billion for food security worldwide. In the EU, action has focused on supporting farmers most affected by higher input costs. These measures have been combined with actions addressing structural changes to promote sustainable and resilient agriculture, fisheries and food systems as well as

³⁰ [COM\(2019\) 640 final of 11 December 2019](#)

³¹ The environmental goods and services sector is the part of the economy engaged in producing goods and services that are used in environmental protection activities and resource management.

³² [COM\(2020\) 98 final of 11 March 2020](#)

³³ [COM\(2021\)572 final](#)

³⁴ [COM\(2021\)699 final](#)

³⁵ [Nature restoration law \(europa.eu\)](#)

healthier diets as set out in the **Farm to Fork Strategy**³⁶. This strategy sets concrete targets to transform EU food systems by 2030 and promotes a global transition to sustainable food systems.

Also against the background of the **energy crisis** stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU has stayed the course on its path to decarbonisation. In 2022, the EU made great strides to diversify energy supplies, increase energy efficiency, and accelerate the roll-out of renewable energy. Nearly EUR 300 billion is available to support related investments in Member States. From August 2022 to March 2023, the EU reduced its consumption of natural gas by 18% compared with the average for the same months of the five previous years³⁷. Decarbonisation of energy systems is part of the structural long-term solution that is being rolled out. The 2030 targets for renewables deployment and energy efficiency are being revised upwards. With the proposal for a Net-Zero Industry Act, the EU is also taking steps to ensure that its net-zero industrial capacity is up to achieving its climate and energy goals. The most recent data included in the EU SDG indicator set do not yet fully reflect these effects, including the reduced energy supplies and related price spikes; nevertheless, significant progress towards **affordable and clean energy (SDG 7)** can be expected in the coming years.

In relation to **SDG 11** on sustainable cities, cities and urban areas are home to almost 75% of EU citizens. They provide many opportunities for employment, and economic and cultural activity, but many residents face environmental and social challenges. Housing issues, pollution and crime are some of the most serious challenges faced in urban areas. Sustainable and integrated urban development is crucial to deploy the green, just and digital transition and corresponding EU priorities at the local level, leaving no place behind. That is why the EU made three new voluntary commitments in 2022 to contribute to the acceleration of the delivery of the UN New Urban Agenda.

Climate neutrality

The **European Climate Law**³⁸, adopted in 2021, is unique in that it sets legally binding targets to reach climate neutrality by 2050 and to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels³⁹. Implementation of the European Green Deal on the ground is in its early stages, and we can expect the results to pick up significantly in the years to come.

Legislative proposals operationalise these 55% reduction targets across economic sectors. A cornerstone of this package is carbon pricing, in the form of the **EU Emissions Trading System**, which is the world's first major carbon market, and it remains the biggest one. EU institutions have recently agreed on strengthening and expanding emissions trading, reducing national emissions across the transport, building, waste, and agriculture sectors, ending the

³⁶ See more details here: https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en.

³⁷ Source: Eurostat. [Link](#)

³⁸ [EUR-Lex - 32021R1119 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁹ The level of the EU net domestic emissions in 2021 (latest data available) is broadly consistent with the trajectory to achieve these ambitious targets, but the speed of reduction needs to increase significantly.

sale of new CO₂ emitting cars in the EU by 2035 (with a flexibility for e-fuels), and increasing carbon removals through land use, forestry and agriculture.

Climate change and biodiversity protection need to be addressed on a global scale through concrete actions by all countries. In terms of financing, under the Paris Agreement, developed countries committed to mobilising around EUR 84 billion every year to support developing countries. The EU and its Member States are the world’s largest providers of public climate finance – EUR 23.04 billion in 2021.

Through its **international partnerships**, the EU pursues the objectives of the **European Green Deal** at global level and progress towards the relevant **SDGs**. Some 35% of the budget of the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-GE)⁴⁰ contributes to climate action (SDG 13), including through support for sustainable energy (SDG 7). The EU has also pledged to double its international funding for biodiversity (SDGs 15 and 14), in particular for the most vulnerable countries, in the 2021-2027 period. The EU has also stepped up its support on sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), water resources (SDG 6) and sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), including the circular economy in partner countries. As described further below, the EU is rolling out the Global Gateway⁴¹, its strategy for sustainable investments in infrastructure globally. This serves as its positive offer to partner countries to support the achievement of the SDGs, including through private sector mobilisation. This includes supporting infrastructure in sustainable energy and climate change, notably through flagships as the Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative, the initiative for green transition in Latin America and the Caribbean, or the Water, Energy and Climate Change initiative in Central Asia. These actions are undertaken following a Team Europe approach, which brings together the EU, its Member States, and national development banks, as well as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

People and prosperity – an economy that works for people and a Europe fit for the digital age

An economy that works for people

By helping economies grow and by reducing poverty and inequality, the EU is also making direct contributions to several interconnected SDGs. Significant progress was made on reducing poverty and social exclusion (**SDG 1**) and on the economy and the labour market (**SDG 8**). However, only moderate progress was made on reducing inequalities (**SDG 10**).

Figure 4: Contribution to the SDGs of headline ambition ‘an economy that works for people’



EU **economic governance** enables it to coordinate actively and effectively the

⁴⁰ [Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe \(eur-lex.europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu)

⁴¹ [Global Gateway \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

implementation of the 2030 Agenda across the 27 Member States under the European Semester – a framework for integrated surveillance and coordination of economic and employment policies across the EU. The EU’s Annual Sustainable Growth Survey outlines an economic policy agenda to mitigate the negative impacts of shocks in the short term and to continue efforts to support sustainable and inclusive growth and increase resilience in the medium term, while maintaining flexibility to tackle new challenges. The approach is structured around the four dimensions of competitive sustainability (fairness, environmental sustainability, productivity, and macroeconomic stability). The European Semester integrates the implementation of the SDGs. This includes annual country reports for all Member States⁴² - each highlighting progress and challenges in implementing measures for the SDGs - and a comprehensive statistical monitoring report, providing an in-depth review of EU progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Overall, the objectives set by the SDGs regarding employment, education and skills, working conditions, fighting poverty and inequality, and promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion are being pursued at EU level through implementing the **European Pillar of Social Rights**⁴³ and building a **Union of equality**. Adopted in March 2021, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan⁴⁴ sets three ambitious EU headline targets for 2030 in the areas of employment, skills, and poverty reduction. These targets include a 78% employment rate (for those aged 20 to 64), a 60% participation rate in training among all adults, and reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including at least 5 million children (compared with 2019). With a total budget of more than EUR 99 billion, the **European Social Fund Plus** is a key financial instrument for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Economic growth and employment are addressed in **SDG 8**. The EU economy grew by 5.4% in 2021, after a COVID-19-related drop in 2020. It is estimated to have grown by 3.5% in 2022 and to do so by 0.8% in 2023⁴⁵. The EU employment rate reached a new record high of 74.7% in 2022 and labour markets have remained strong since. Unemployment and long-term unemployment had already been on a decreasing trend since 2014. If this positive trend continues, the EU will be well placed to reach its employment target of 78% by 2030. However, the labour market situation of young people is less positive. The **Youth Guarantee**⁴⁶ has enabled access to the labour market or education for more than 24 million young people since 2013.

In relation to **SDG 1**, the number of people in the EU at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell substantially from 104.9 million (or 24% of the EU population) in 2015 to 95.4 million (21.7%) in 2021. The number of children at risk fell from 22.3 million in 2015 to 19.6 million in 2021. However, considerable differences in poverty rates remain among EU countries.

⁴² [2022 European Semester: Country Reports \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴³ [The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁴ [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁵ [Winter 2023 Economic Forecast: EU Economy set to avoid recession, but headwinds persist \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁶ The reinforced Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. See more information [here](#).

Also, rural areas tend to be at higher risk of poverty due to out-migration, and limited access to services, weaker labour markets and educational opportunities. Regarding **SDG 10**, the income gap between the poor and the wealthy in the EU also remains large and the social inclusion of the unemployed, migrants, minorities or people with disabilities remains a challenge.

Fighting inequalities and leaving no one behind

Leaving no one behind is a central commitment in the 2030 Agenda. Inequalities are an underlying challenge cutting across all the SDGs.

The EU is determined to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and social exclusion, and reduce inequalities. The **Treaty on the European Union** lays down that the EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The commitment to leave no one behind is reflected in EU's internal and external policies, including by applying a rights-based approach and enhancing the focus on combating inequalities.

Building a **Union of equality**, with a fairer and inclusive society, free of any discrimination, is a EU priority. The **Union of equality** is based on policies and actions creating the conditions for everyone to live, thrive and lead without discrimination. This has resulted in the adoption and implementation of strategies and action plans that speak directly to meeting the SDGs, including specifically goals 1, 4, 5, 8 and 10. Many of these are mentioned in this section on the EU's highlights and are further detailed in the accompanying document (SWD(2023)700).

Concrete action has been taken at EU level through policies to promote and ensure fairness and solidarity in the European social market economy. Reaching those furthest behind first requires disaggregated data to monitor the commitments and to design policies for the most vulnerable and marginalised population groups. Certain population groups, such as children, people with disabilities, immigrants, and Roma, are at greater risk of poverty⁴⁷. The EU regularly collects data pertaining to people's socio-economic outcomes through its statistical office ([Eurostat](#)) and its specialised agencies, including the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights ([FRA](#)), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions ([Eurofound](#)), and the European Institute for Gender Equality ([EIGE](#)).

To ensure the full participation of people with disabilities, the **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030** aims to improve the lives of those with disabilities during this decade, in the EU and beyond, including in humanitarian crises.

Leaving no one behind and fighting inequalities is also at the centre of EU **international partnerships** and is part of the objective of fostering sustainable development. Through its

⁴⁷ Focus chapter of the Fundamental Rights Agency on [Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU: a matter of human and fundamental rights](#) (June 2019).

international partnerships, the EU is giving priority to combating inequalities and promoting sustainable and inclusive societies. One general objective is to capture the multidimensional contribution to combating inequalities in the design, benchmarking and monitoring of its programmes. EU action also aims to combat inequalities at policy level, such as by improving social protection systems and fiscal frameworks and addressing inequality in the face of climate change and environmental degradation. Several equality flagships are being pursued across the globe and across sectors: from social cohesion to decent work, and from just transition to human-centred digitalisation.

Through its **international partnerships**, the EU supports partner countries in improving the business and investment environment, private investment, increasing financial inclusion, and promoting trade and trade facilitation for sustainable development and value chains (SDG 8, 9, 10). It promotes decent work by improving social, labour, and environmental sustainability (SDG 8), promoting gender equality (SDG 5) and the empowerment of women and youth, combating inequalities (SDG 10), and improving vocational and educational training policies and systems (SDG 4). Under the **Global Gateway** strategy, the EU has already launched several projects in a Team Europe approach, with the capacity to leverage multiple sources of funding including private sector investments. These include the EU-African Union Investment Package flagships on transport strategic corridors, in Western, Central and Eastern Africa, which will contribute to a range of interrelated SDGs.

A Europe fit for the digital age

To successfully deliver on the 2030 Agenda and to remain competitive on the global stage, the EU is transforming its industry and infrastructure to become greener and more digital, and its economy to become more circular. The COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the benefits of digitalisation in our everyday lives and why digital transition is the way forward. The digital and green transitions go hand in hand and mutually support each other's potential.

Figure 5: Contribution to the SDGs of headline ambition 'a Europe fit for the digital age'



Good progress was made on **industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9)**. EU actions focus on modernising its industries and infrastructure by making them greener and more digital. Strengthening digital infrastructures is a key pillar of the **Digital Decade**⁴⁸, the programme that sets out the EU strategy for digital transformation. Productivity is highest in certain sectors, such as digital and clean tech, which are expected to be the growth sectors of the future. To make sure they can thrive in Europe, the EU has adopted a Green Deal industrial plan⁴⁹, proposed legislation on artificial intelligence, and regulated data services and markets in a human-centric way. With the European Chips Act⁵⁰, the EU will mobilise more

⁴⁸ [COM\(2021\) 118 final of 9 March 2021](#)

⁴⁹ The Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age is a plan to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and support the fast transition to climate neutrality. More details here [COM\(2023\) 62 final of 1 February 2023](#).

⁵⁰ [COM\(2022\) 45 final of 8 February 2023](#)

than EUR 43 billion in public and private investments and set out measures to prepare, anticipate, and swiftly respond to any future supply chain disruptions, together with Member States and international partners. Facilitating and simplifying access to financing, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises, and a favourable regulatory framework are essential to lead the way in the green and digital transitions. Space technology in the form of satellite navigation and earth observation is also being used to improve the resilience and sustainability of agriculture, use of land and sea resources, and transport.

At the same time, the EU is fostering innovation with its New European Innovation Agenda⁵¹, which aims to position the EU at the forefront of the new wave of deep-tech innovation and start-ups within the European Research Area. The EU's key funding programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe, with a budget of EUR 95.5 billion for 2021-2027, helps deliver on all 17 SDGs and boosts the EU's competitiveness and growth. These measures are starting to pay off. The number of patent applications to the European Patent Office has grown. However, the EU's research and development intensity has grown only modestly, reaching 2.27% in 2021, some distance away from the 3% target for 2030.

Education and training, skills and children

The younger generation is a driving force in the implementation of sustainable development. Caring for the younger generation helps their development and growth. Targeted measures are combined with strong social services.

Leaving no one behind also requires breaking the intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, an objective pursued by the new **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**⁵² and the **European Child Guarantee**⁵³. The latter guarantees effective access of children in need to key services such as care, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing.

Digitalisation also brings children opportunities and benefits, but risks too. The new **Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids**⁵⁴ aims to ensure that children are protected, respected, and empowered online. The Commission also proposed new **EU laws to prevent and combat child sexual abuse online**.

On **education and training (SDG 4)**, starting from a high level, the EU has seen moderate progress overall. On the one hand, the EU has made significant progress in early childhood education, reducing the numbers of early school leavers, promoting apprenticeships schemes in vocational education and training (VET) and increasing tertiary educational attainment. The EU is already home to close to 5 000 higher education institutions and has 18 million tertiary education students. Within the EU, 57.2% of all tertiary education graduates in 2020 were women⁵⁵. On the other hand, adult participation in learning, and the share of adults with

⁵¹ [COM\(2022\) 332 final of 5 July 2022](#)

⁵² [COM\(2021\) 142 final of 24 March 2021](#)

⁵³ [Council Recommendation \(EU\) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee](#)

⁵⁴ [COM\(2022\) 212 final of 11 May 2022](#)

⁵⁵ Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Tertiary_education_statistics.

at least basic digital skills, have not improved notably since 2015, and one in five young Europeans still lacks adequate reading, mathematics, or science competencies.

After the **European Year of Youth** in 2022, 2023 is the **European Year of Skills**, with the aim of promoting increased investments in training and upskilling, ensuring that skills are relevant for labour market needs, and by matching people’s aspirations and skills with opportunities. The European Year of Skills will specifically boost SDGs 4, 8 and 9. The **Erasmus+ programme**, contributes to improve the quality and relevance of education systems through learning mobility, institutional cooperation and capacity building worldwide. At global level, building on the **2022 UN Transforming Education Summit**, the EU will follow up with determined action across various **priorities on education**, such as the training of teachers, enhancing equality and inclusion, in education and promoting skills. The EU provides collectively as Team Europe more than half of the support to global funds on education, such as the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait.

Through its **international partnerships**, the EU supports partner countries in the digital transition. The Digital for Development Hub⁵⁶ is a new form of global digital cooperation with the EU which supports regulatory frameworks on digital and data, and digital skills. Through the Global Gateway, the EU supports digital infrastructure innovation globally, and related action on education and research, notably through flagships such as the Digital Alliance with Latin America and the Caribbean or the Digital Connectivity initiative in Central Asia.

People and peace – promoting our European way of life and a new push for European democracy

Promoting our European way of life

Security, justice and strong institutions are key enablers for inclusive and socially fair economic growth. Benefiting from a robust rule of law framework and solid institutions, the EU made strong progress towards **SDG 16**. The EU also recorded good progress until 2020 towards the goals on health and well-being (**SDG 3**) and, despite the setback caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the positive trend is resuming.

Figure 6: Contribution to the SDGs of the headline ambition ‘promoting our European way of life’



The foundations of a European Health Union have been laid to better protect the physical and mental health of EU citizens, to equip the EU and its Member States with the means to prevent and address future pandemics, and to improve the resilience of the EU’s healthcare

⁵⁶ Link [here](#).

systems. The EU4Health programme⁵⁷, with a EUR 5.3 billion budget for 2021-2027, is strengthening health systems. Under the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan⁵⁸, supported by EUR 4 billion in funding, of which EUR 1.25 billion comes from the EU4Health Programme, cancer prevention, research, and patient care are being strengthened.

To protect everyone in the EU, the Commission has set out a new **Security Union Strategy**⁵⁹. This contributes to the peaceful and inclusive societies targeted by **SDG 16**. The strategy focuses on priority areas where the EU can help Member States in fostering security for all those living in Europe. The strategy is crucial in reducing all forms of violence, ending abuse and trafficking, and fighting organised crime and terrorism.

The **rule of law is a fundamental value** of the EU⁶⁰. The EU has gradually strengthened its toolbox to promote and protect the rule of law in the EU⁶¹. The toolbox includes both preventive and reactive instruments, including, for instance, the annual Rule of Law reports⁶², which allow to identify and address issues in EU Member States, or infringement procedures when rule of law issues constitute breaches of EU law⁶³. The **European Rule of Law Mechanism**⁶⁴, with the Rule of Law reports at its centre, is a preventive tool, designed as a yearly cycle of close dialogue among EU institutions, together with Member States, national parliaments, civil society, and other stakeholders, to ensure monitoring and to deliver recommendations. The Commission also adopted a strategy on strengthening the application of fundamental rights in the EU⁶⁵ and reports annually on the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights⁶⁶, while the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency reports annually on the Charter's implementation on the ground.

The proposed **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**⁶⁷ aims to ensure that migration is managed in an effective and human way, with fair and efficient asylum rules. Furthermore, the external pillar of the Pact supports partner countries in managing migration across migration corridors, including cooperation with countries of origin, transit and destination.

Solidarity to face the pandemic

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, about 1.7 million excess deaths were recorded in the EU⁶⁸. **Overcoming the pandemic through science and solidarity** has been a top priority. Through the EU vaccines strategy, more than 1.7 billion doses of vaccines against

⁵⁷ More information [here](#).

⁵⁸ More information [here](#).

⁵⁹ [COM\(2020\) 605 final of 24 July 2020](#)

⁶⁰ Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

⁶¹ Commission Communication, *Strengthening the rule of law within the EU*, COM(2019) 343.

⁶² [Rule of law mechanism \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶³ https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/applying-eu-law/infringement-procedure_en

⁶⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/rule-law-mechanism_en.

⁶⁵ [COM\(2020\) 711 final of 2 December 2020](#).

⁶⁶ [https://commission.europa.eu/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights/application-charter_en](https://commission.europa.eu/aid/law-making-process/applying-eu-law/infringement-procedure_en).

⁶⁷ [COM\(2020\) 609 final of 23 September 2020](#)

⁶⁸ Between January 2020 and December 2022, compared with the average number of deaths registered during the period 2016-2019.

COVID-19 have been delivered to all corners of Europe, 86% of the adult population in the EU has been fully vaccinated against the disease, and thousands of lives have been saved.

Globally, the EU is one of the lead donors in **COVAX**, the COVID-19 vaccine global access facility. Between November 2020 and June 2022, the EU exported over 2.2 billion doses of vaccines to a total of 167 countries, of which 478 million doses were donated through COVAX to countries in need, particularly across Africa. The EU's humanitarian aid also specifically focused on ensuring access to vaccines for the most vulnerable not covered by national vaccination programmes. The EU provides collectively as Team Europe substantial support to global funds on health and promotes the reinforcement of global governance on health, notably WHO. To improve global health security, the new **EU Global Health Strategy**, adopted in November 2022, guides EU action for ensuring better preparedness and response to health threats. Looking ahead to 2030, it aims to regain the lost ground on SDG health targets by focusing on strengthening health systems, universal health coverage, primary healthcare, public health and health determinants.

Through its **international partnerships**, the EU promotes the respect of human rights and the pursuit of human development objectives and the principle of leaving no one behind, targeting people living in the poorest and most vulnerable situations and crisis contexts, notably on health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), social protection (SDG 1) and gender equality (SDG 5). The EU puts the fight against poverty at the heart of its international cooperation, mainstreaming it as a cross-cutting objective. The EU is giving greater priority to fighting inequalities by building inclusive and sustainable societies (SDG 10). At least 20% of the budget under the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe will contribute to human development. The EU undertakes transformational Team Europe initiatives with a focus on human development, such as 'Manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines & health technology products in Africa' and 'Teachers training initiative in sub-Saharan Africa' and provides dedicated support to global actions.

A new push for European democracy

Under the new push for European democracy, the EU is taking major actions contributing directly to **SDG 5** on gender equality, **SDG 10** to reduce inequalities and **SDG 16** to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Figure 7: Contribution to the SDGs of headline ambition 'a new push for European democracy'



To tackle discrimination in the EU in line with **SDG 10** and **SDG 16**, the Commission adopted the EU anti-racism action plan⁶⁹, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality,

⁶⁹ More information [here](#)

inclusion and participation⁷⁰, the LGBTIQ equality strategy⁷¹, the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life⁷² and the [Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#)⁷³. In addition, the Commission is fully engaged in combating any form of hate speech and hate crime, which are illegal under EU law⁷⁴.

In terms of public participation, the Commission is committed to **giving EU citizens a greater say** in what the EU does and how it works for them; this is consistent with **SDG 16**. The EU is actively encouraging the participation of citizens, businesses and stakeholders in the EU policymaking process. Anyone – not just EU citizens – can provide feedback online throughout the entire policymaking cycle via the Commission’s Have Your Say portal⁷⁵, which has also been used for this voluntary review. Overall, the Commission has published more than 5 000 feedback opportunities and received more than 3 million contributions. The Conference on the Future of Europe⁷⁶ was a unique opportunity for structured debates with citizens on key priorities, including how to deliver on the SDGs. More than 750 000 participants shared and debated close to 19 000 ideas. Building on the success of the Conference on the Future of Europe, citizens’ panels are now part of the Commission’s policymaking in certain key areas. The Conference led to commitments for new policy initiatives often contributing to a range of relevant SDGs. In 2023, the new generation of citizens’ panels will deliberate on initiatives on food waste, learning mobility, and virtual worlds.

The year 2022 also marked the 10th anniversary of the European Citizens’ Initiative⁷⁷. This provides a significant means of taking active part in EU policymaking, by which citizens can directly call on the Commission to propose new EU legislation.

The European democracy action plan⁷⁸ is designed to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU by **promoting credible, transparent, and inclusive elections, strengthening media freedom, and countering disinformation**. In 2023, a year ahead of the next European Parliament elections, the Commission will present a defence of democracy package, which will focus on transparency, electoral matters, boosting the civic space, and promoting inclusive and effective engagement by public authorities with civil society organisations and citizens. All of these, aim to bolster democratic resilience from within the EU. The package will also be able to consider several democracy-related proposals made by the Conference on the Future of Europe as regards citizen engagement in policymaking.

⁷⁰ More information [here](#)

⁷¹ COM(2020)698 final

⁷² [COM\(2021\)615 final](#)

⁷³ [COM/2021/615 final](#).

⁷⁴ 2008 [Framework Decision on combating certain forms of expressions of racism and xenophobia](#).

⁷⁵ Have Your Say portal: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say>.

⁷⁶ More information [here](#).

⁷⁷ More information [here](#).

⁷⁸ [COM\(2020\) 790 final of 3 December 2020](#)

Given that disinformation and information manipulation have a major adverse impact on democratic society, the EU's work will continue to focus on disinformation and interference, with freedom of expression safeguarded as one of the highest values of our societies.

Gender equality

While the EU is a strong promoter of gender equality and has made significant progress in the last decades, additional efforts are needed through various actions.

The **Gender Equality Strategy**⁷⁹ for 2020-2025 delivers on a major component of this commitment towards a Union of equality. With it, the EU aims at achieving a Union where women and men freely pursue their chosen paths in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and equally participate in and lead society. Gender equality also plays a key role in education, sustainable economic growth, and reduced inequalities. The number of women occupying leadership positions has increased and the disparities between men and women in the labour market have narrowed. However, gender gaps remain significant, and gender-based violence is still a fact of life.

While the **principle of equal pay for equal work** is set down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU⁸⁰, a gender pay gap still exists⁸¹. The new **binding pay transparency measures**⁸² will provide for more transparency and effective enforcement of the equal pay principle. The EU had also adopted **new rules to ensure gender parity on the boards of listed companies**.

In March 2022, the Commission proposed EU-wide rules to **end gender-based violence against women and domestic violence**⁸³. The proposed rules would criminalise rape based on lack of consent, female genital mutilation and cyber violence, and strengthen victims' access to justice.

Through its **international partnerships**, the EU pursues these objectives at a global level. In relation to SDG 16, governance, peace and security provide the foundation of the EU's external engagement for sustainable development. Progress on this SDG has a multiplier effect on all SDGs. The EU implements a human rights-based approach in delivering on the 2030 Agenda, anchoring its actions in the protecting, respecting and fulfilling human rights⁸⁴. It acts to support rule of law, public participation, non-discrimination and equality, and accountability, including dedicated action to support civil society and human rights defenders. The EU actively promotes youth empowerment and participation, including through its Youth Action Plan on external action. The EU also contributes to SDG 5 externally, by mainstreaming gender equality in its international partnerships and ensuring that at least 85% of all its external actions are gender-responsive. It also takes decisive action together with the

⁷⁹ [COM\(2020\) 152 final of 5 March 2020](#)

⁸⁰ [Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#).

⁸¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en

⁸² More information [here](#).

⁸³ [COM\(2022\) 105 final of 8 March 2022](#)

⁸⁴ SWD(2021) 179 final of 30 June 2021.

UN, such as through the Spotlight Initiative. It furthermore ensures that EU-funded humanitarian action is gender and age sensitive by means of its own humanitarian gender-age marker. As such, a recent assessment showed that in 2021 96% of humanitarian funding took gender and age considerations into account to some or a large extent.

Partnership – a stronger Europe in the world

The EU objectives, notably the twin green and digital transitions, and the pursuit of the SDGs, cannot be achieved without engaging with partner countries and at multilateral level.

Figure 8: Contribution to the SDGs of the headline ambition ‘a stronger Europe in the world’



Supporting partner countries in the implementation of the SDGs became a central objective of EU international partnerships with the 2017 **European Consensus on Development**⁸⁵. Eradicating poverty, tackling discrimination and inequalities, and leaving no one behind are at the centre of our international partnerships, which aim to foster sustainable development by supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This determined action in support of the SDGs, combined with EU priorities, is being taken further through programmes under NDICI-Global Europe, the main external financial instrument (including its investment arm, the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus). Partnering with the private sector is critical to mobilise the financial investment needed to progress towards the SDGs. The EU promotes innovative financial instruments, such as blending of private and public sources and providing guarantees to support private investments in partner countries, especially countries most in need.

Global Gateway, launched in December 2021, is the EU’s offer and effective contribution to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership (**SDG 17**), with a view to pursuing the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, while contributing to the Paris Agreement. Global Gateway helps promote greater public and private investments in sustainable connectivity, notably through transport, energy and digitalisation infrastructure, and related people-to-people connections (in health and education). To support at the global level the green and digital transitions together with the SDGs, Global Gateway is being rolled out by the EU and its Member States in a Team Europe approach. In partnership with partner countries, Global Gateway aims to leverage multiple sources of funding including private sector investments, to help narrow the global investment gap. The EU aims to collectively mobilise up to EUR 300 billion in investments by 2027, with half of this across Africa. Each individual Global Gateway initiative financed by the EU budget will identify and integrate the relevant SDGs at all stages – from design to implementation and reporting.

Figure 9: Global Gateway and the SDGs

⁸⁵ More information [here](#).



Overall, the EU and its Member States are the **leading donors of official development assistance (ODA) globally**, collectively providing EUR 92.8 billion in 2022 (based on preliminary OECD figures), which accounts for 43% of global assistance. This corresponds to 0.59% of their collective gross national income (GNI). They stay committed to reaching their collective target of providing 0.7% of GNI as ODA by 2030 in line with the 2030 Agenda.

The EU and its Member States, in a Team Europe approach, have supported partner countries towards sustainable recovery aligned with the SDGs. For this purpose, they provided EUR 47.7 billion from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic up to the end of 2021. This is accompanied by efforts to mobilise the private sector to leverage investments for transformational impact.

The EU is strongly committed to effective **multilateralism**, with the UN at its core, in particular in implementing the 2030 Agenda globally. This includes engaging with the UN, the **G7** and **G20** groups of nations, the **World Bank Group**, the **International Monetary Fund**, the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** and others in this collective effort. This also means **strengthening global governance** where it is most needed, notably for global public goods, which need to be protected and managed collectively to progress towards the SDGs. The EU is leading efforts to deliver on climate reduction and mitigation, biodiversity protection and ocean governance. These efforts and partnerships will support the implementation of several SDGs given their interconnected nature.

Policy coherence for development

Policymakers in the EU need to consider external impacts on partner countries when implementing domestic policies. This requirement in the EU Treaties is generally known as ‘policy coherence for development’. It is highlighted in the 2017 European Consensus on Development as a crucial element of the EU’s strategy to achieve the SDGs.

This requirement is now implemented in the context of advancing the 2030 Agenda globally. Its focus has broadened beyond the traditional five strategic challenges (trade and finance,

climate change, food security, migration, and security) to reflect the new and interrelated dynamics of the SDGs. Reporting on policy coherence for development has become part and parcel of a comprehensive reporting on SDG implementation and is therefore addressed in this voluntary review.

The EU aims at developing common approaches with key partners to foster reliable partnerships and alliances in a global context, thus contributing to strengthening the **rules-based global order** and international law. This includes support to international human rights and international humanitarian law and their effective implementation, which is a condition for making progress towards the SDGs, an objective particularly apposite on the 75th anniversary of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. The EU and its Member States are the major donors worldwide in support of democracy, rule of law and the respect for human rights. Furthermore, EU Member States were also instrumental in the adoption in April 2023 of a UN Human Rights Council resolution reaffirming the centrality of human rights in the efforts to put the SDGs back on track.

Open, rules-based, and fair **trade** is a key tool for promoting sustainable development, and for increasing prosperity and well-being. The EU takes an active role to set a strong trade agenda to set the highest possible global standards and contribute to the implementation of the SDGs internationally. Sustainability and the advancement of the SDGs are also at the core of the EU's Trade Policy Review⁸⁶ for the coming years. Each new comprehensive bilateral trade agreement between the EU and its partners contains a trade and sustainable development chapter promoting strong commitments for the climate, environmental and labour protection, and gender equality. The EU is also pursuing a new generation of investment agreements that aim to facilitate sustainable investment and include strong commitments on international instruments on human rights, labour standards, environmental preservation, and good governance. These commitments are also at the heart of the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences, notably through the special incentive arrangement on sustainable development and good governance (GSP+). The EU's Anti-torture Regulation also reflects the EU's commitment to the eradication of torture and the death penalty.

The **World Trade Organization** (WTO) must contribute to ensuring a sustainable, green, and inclusive global recovery from the pandemic, where the recovery is aligned with the SDGs. The EU was active in the negotiations that successfully resulted in 2022 in the **WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies**, thereby addressing an explicit objective laid down in the 2030 Agenda.

The effective implementation of the SDGs also requires that workers enjoy decent working conditions globally. The EU is already taking strong action to promote decent work worldwide, and the elimination of child labour and forced labour, consistent with the SDGs. Key partners in this regard include the **International Labour Organization**, the **OECD** and the **G7** and **G20**.

⁸⁶ [COM\(2021\) 66 final of 18 February 2021](#)

The EU plays an active role in promoting sound and sustainable macroeconomic policies at global level and in partner countries. It does this through economic diplomacy and macroeconomic dialogues as part of its bilateral relations, including in multilateral for a such as the G20.

4. Lessons learnt and looking ahead to 2030

Several valuable lessons learnt provide the basis for renewed actions to accelerate the delivery of the 2030 Agenda within the EU and in its international partnerships.

Strong institutions and evidence-based law-making to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development

The whole-of-government approach to making progress on the SDGs ensures political oversight and coordination at all levels. The EU will ensure that its ambitious initiatives are effectively implemented on the ground at national, regional, and local level. The economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions of sustainable development are integrated at all stages of policymaking in a balanced manner. The Commission's Better Regulation framework⁸⁷ requires that the impact assessment of every legislative proposal identifies how the EU action will contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. The impact assessments and evaluations address interlinkages, synergies, and trade-offs between the relevant SDGs.

Leveraging the power of the budget

The EU budget is an effective instrument to deliver major progress on the 2030 Agenda. The EU has already made progress in integrating the SDGs into its budget cycle. In the case of international partnerships, SDGs are actively integrated in the design of projects and programmes, in results frameworks (in combination with EU priorities) and in annual reports on the implementation of the EU's external action instruments.

Communicating better with citizens and a whole-of-society approach

Delivering on the SDGs is not only a matter for public authorities; it also requires the full participation of civil society and the private sector. For SDGs implementation to be effective, they must be actively supported by communication that engages with citizens, national, regional, and local authorities, media, civil society organisations, the private sector, and stakeholders on the ground. The benefits should be clearly presented, while remaining challenges should be addressed in a transparent manner. The sustained involvement of civil society organisations, social partners, national, regional and local authorities, and EU-level organisations, including the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, are important for mobilising the national-level stakeholders and regional communities that are key to the SDG delivery. In this regard, the European Climate Pact⁸⁸ facilitates interaction with citizens and organisations on how climate action can support progress towards SDG 13 and a range of interrelated SDGs.

⁸⁷ More information [here](#).

⁸⁸ European Climate Pact: <https://climate-pact.europa.eu/>.

Monitoring and reporting

At a global level, the EU actively participates in the annual meetings of the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), which is the main platform to follow up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This voluntary review will be presented at the 2023 HLPF meeting as the EU's contribution to this shared universal peer review effort.

The Commission also reports regularly on progress towards the SDGs across EU internal and external policies and actions. Each year, Eurostat publishes a report covering progress towards the SDGs, based on the most relevant SDG indicators at EU level.

EU engagement on SDGs in the world

The EU is committed to supporting the accelerated implementation of the SDGs at global level, including in relations with partner countries and at multilateral level. EU international partnerships and the EU's main external spending instrument, NDICI-Global Europe, include priorities that encompass the whole 2030 Agenda and its principles, in particular leaving no one behind. The EU's Global Gateway strategy will directly contribute to making progress on a range of interlinked SDGs. The EU supports discussions on the international finance architecture with a focus on the reform of multilateral development banks to ensure that they are fit for purpose and to make progress towards the SDGs.

Looking ahead

- Further to the revised Better Regulation framework, the EU will ensure that legislative proposals contribute to delivering on the SDGs.
- The EU will take further the commitment to inform on the implementation of the SDGs in all relevant Union programmes.
- Building on their contribution to the preparation of the voluntary review, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions will continue to play a key role as platforms to regularly exchange with stakeholders on SDG implementation.
- The EU will regularly improve its SDG indicator set, including addressing external spillover effects, and will further integrate SDGs across its reports.
- The EU will continue to actively integrate the SDGs in the implementation of Global Gateway flagships and sustainable infrastructure investments, while stepping up efforts to mobilise private sector mobilisation in support of the SDGs.
- The EU will make greater effort to address inequalities across its external actions, by helping to build inclusive and sustainable societies.

Conclusions

This review presents the broad range of actions that the EU has put in place across all its policy areas to deliver on the SDGs, and commitments directly contributing to the SDGs.

Despite challenges and recent crises, the EU is fully committed and engaged in action to make progress on all SDGs and will continue to monitor them.

Through its whole of government approach the EU will promote cooperative solutions, as has been done previously to overcome the pandemic, to accelerate the economic recovery, to support Ukraine and to achieve sustainability at home and abroad. At the same time, European national, regional, and local authorities, social partners, civil society organisations, the private sector, and stakeholders on the ground need to continue to work together to address remaining challenges and find solutions that promote the SDGs. This is to be done in a whole-of-society approach that leaves no one behind.

The **SDG Summit in 2023** provides an opportunity for the global community to review the state of progress towards the SDGs and regain political momentum to accelerate the delivery. The SDG Summit can also advance proposals from the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda to speed up the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The 2024 Summit of the Future proposed by the UN Secretary-General and the SDG Summit share the same overall objective, which is to create the conditions for a sustainable, equitable and inclusive future, with the 2030 Agenda as our shared roadmap. The EU looks forward to a successful SDG Summit, bringing together all countries and stakeholders to agree on ambitious concrete actions to speed up implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The EU is committed to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a common direction for enhanced efforts across the globe toward sustainable development, fairness and prosperity.