

Civil Society Spotlight Report

“HOW FAR IS EUROPE FROM ACHIEVING THE SGDS?”

2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

The EU and its Member States were a driving force behind the negotiation and adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the framework of the United Nations. Therefore, the leadership in the EU needs to make the Goals a reality, at home and globally. The EU has the power to pass transformative laws and command the resources needed to drive the transition towards social justice and environmental sustainability.



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This civil society spotlight report, prepared by the civil society organizations that are members of the consortium of the REAL DEAL project and members of SDG Watch Europe, explains why the EU's SDG reporting creates an illusion of sustainability and flags up serious gaps and challenges in the implementation of the SDGs. In addition, it and makes concrete policy proposals for bringing them to life with real stories and suggests key recommendation the EU can, with a bit of political will, easily use to create the transformation we need.

The objective of the spotlight report is to:

- Analyse the gaps that remain towards achieving the SDGs and the United Nations 2030 Agenda
- Identify Europe's shortcomings and disconnections from other relevant processes and exchange views on how to address these issues and strengthen the SDG Implementation.

The collaboration among civil society organizations involved in the report demonstrate their commitment to evidence-based information and transparency in Europe. These principles are essential for guiding policy and fostering the democratic and participatory culture that we as civil society organisations value and wish to see reflected in Europe's future policymaking.

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HIGHLIGHTS

from the 5 Ps for sustainable development

PEOPLE

The SDGs declare the world's determination "to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment."

PLANET

The SDGs set a goal to protect the planet "so it can support the needs of the present and future generations." Nearly every day we are seeing just how connected – and fundamental – climate change is to global development.

PROSPERITY

The SDGs aim to "ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social, and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature."

PEACE

The SDGs rightly note that "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." Therefore, they set out goals to foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

PARTNERSHIPS

The SDGs call for "a spirit of strengthened global solidarity." Problems that cross geographies and sectors require collaboration that does as well.

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CIVIL SOCIETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Each of the five thematic chapters of the report highlight interrelated points for civil society on how to address gaps and challenges identified in the EU's implementation of the SDGs. The recommendations below are overarching recommendations directed towards policymakers at EU level.

01 **Overarching Strategy: Introduce an EU Strategy for SDGs**

The EU must adequately follow up on the European Voluntary Review with a costed-action plan and overarching strategy on the SDGs. This bold EU strategy should contain clear and measurable targets set to reach the SDGs in the EU and MS by 2030, as well as a structured dialogue mechanism between the EU executive and civil society, to hold public servants accountable for their sustainability commitments. The strategy must also ensure adequate financing for the attainment of the SDGs and a thorough overhaul of the global financial architecture to direct fiscal resources towards the most vulnerable. The EU must show clear responsibility and accountability for SDG governance structures.

02 **Wellbeing Economy: Replace GDP with indicators on wellbeing**

Wellbeing indicators should be developed to guide EU decision-making and track Member States' performance. EU governance and accountability should be improved to foster a sustainable transition towards a Wellbeing Economy. Policy making process needs to be transformed to enable meaningful participation and be truly democratic. Policies that incentivise businesses which are positively affecting wellbeing should be adopted. Furthermore, legislation that enshrines the rights of future generations should be adopted. Wellbeing indicators must not merely be an add on to existing economic governance but must replace an economic system designed to grow exponentially.

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03

Live within our means: Reduce the European material footprint

Increase ambition and efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by rapidly changing course on climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and the EU's footprint on the rest of the world. SDG performance on environmental goals is currently the furthest behind, and yet Europeans continue to consume vast quantities of resources, with the EU-27 consuming twice the size of its biocapacity. Therefore, the EU must do more on the unsustainable practices in the continent, the impact of EU policies on other regions and the implications of our social and economic model and how to overcome them. A key step is to introduce a target for a reduction in EU material footprint of 70% by 2050. The EU should not only focus on decarbonisation, but also on dematerialisation and reversing unequal ecological exchange with other countries.

04

Social Justice: Truly leave no one behind by prioritising redistribution

Support proposals for redistribution and management of existing resources via a global commons for all people, favoring the reduction of the ecological footprint and greater contributions from the richest people by putting the last first. SDG implementation can be financed through the taxation of extraction and consumption of non-renewable resources, with a focus on progressive taxation that is sensitive to the welfare of marginalised and low-income people, for instance through the taxation of overconsumption and luxury goods and services. Elimination of corporate tax incentives and the phasing out of harmful subsidies, such as for fossil fuels and heavily polluting industries, remains paramount. Fiscal policies can be a powerful instrument to reduce social inequalities, eliminate discrimination and promote the transition to sustainable production and consumption patterns and should be leveraged as such. Key issues for sustainable development, such as tackling corruption, preventing war and conflict, and protecting our environment will not happen without a transition to a global feminist wellbeing economy that places people over profit and prioritises an economy of care.

05

Stay on track: Improve EU monitoring on the structural and systematic gaps

The EU VR must go beyond a report on the status quo of EU sustainability policies or a presentation of what the EU is doing well. Rather, it needs to analyse the structural and systematic obstacles, trade-offs and gaps the EU is facing to realise the SDGs and transform the EU politically, socially and economically. Monitoring must be rooted in the current political climate, without an honest analysis of the political challenges Europe and the globe is currently facing, otherwise it will not be able to serve as an adequate roadmap to achieving the SDGs by 2030. Monitoring should be innovative, inclusive and participatory, involving key stakeholders, citizens, and civil society. If the EU does not step up to lead by example in honest stocktaking and reporting, the whole sustainable development agenda is at risk.

06

Lead by example: Ensure Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) must be a key concept that the EU remains committed to. The achievement of the SDGs will not be successful without a holistic approach that unifies and leverages the synergies between major EU legislative frameworks including the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal. The EU must ensure that all policies genuinely account for their direct and indirect social and environmental impacts, including their impacts upon women, the majority of the world's population, and structurally excluded persons. An intersectional approach to EU policymaking will also be paramount in addressing the gaps. At the sectoral level, sectors with wide-ranging societal harms such as fossil fuels and the arms industry should be vastly limited in their activities, and EU governments should ramp up their investments in health, social care, universal public services and housing.



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European Environmental Bureau
European Movement International

European Youth Forum
FBW PartDem

Fiscal Matters Coalition
Gender-Centru, Moldova
GreenFormation

ICLEI-Local Governments for
Sustainability Europe

International Network of Liberal
Women

Italian Alliance for Sustainable
Development-(AsViS)
Lifelong Learning Platform

Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform
Nyt Europa

SDG Watch Europe
Social Platform

SOLIDAR

Trilateral Research

Women Engage for a Common Future
Well-being Alliance

World Benchmarking Alliance
Women's UN Report Network Europe
World Wildlife Fund

Youth & Environment Europe



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