

Opportunities and challenges for EU implementation of SDGs between 2018 – 2019

Annex to the “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), New York, 16 - 18 July 2018” briefing for the EP ENVI Committee (PE 619.026 – June 2018)

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The adoption of the 2030 SDGs in to the EU political framework has so far included the following key steps:

European Commission Communication “Next steps for a sustainable European future” (2016) and Multistakeholder Platform: The Communication outlined how the existing EU sectoral policies support the implementation of the 17 goals in the EU, both in terms of its internal and external policies. The Communication focuses on assessing the state of play and does not put forward any further actions needed to improve the level of implementation. A Multi-Stakeholder Platform to support the SDG implementation, chaired by F. Timmermans, was established in May 2017.

Council conclusions (June 2017)¹ and Working Party (November 2017): The conclusions call for a more ambitious approach to SDGs. They urge “the Commission to elaborate, by mid-2018, an implementation strategy outlining timelines, objectives and concrete measures to reflect the 2030 Agenda in all relevant EU internal and external policies”; and ask the Commission to identify existing policy gaps by mid-2018 to assess what more needs to be done until 2030. They also highlight the importance of a robust, systematic, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review of the SDG implementation. In November 2017, a Council Working Party was established to ensure proper follow-up, monitoring and review of the implementation at EU level.

Commission Reflection Paper “Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030” (2018, to be published): As a response to the 2017 Council conclusions, a reflection paper on further needs for SDG policy integration will be published towards the end of 2018. The results of this paper will be based on wide collaborative efforts with inputs from all Commission services and from the Multistakeholder Platform.

In general, one of the key points of criticism of the EU SDG implementation process and its level of ambition has been the lack of European targets for SDGs, leading to monitoring focussing on measuring incremental progress rather than delivery of the goals. There is also a room for improvement regarding the set of indicators used, for example, addressing critical thresholds, focusing on material footprints and illustrating environmental externalities outside the EU (i.e. “spillover indicators”), or designing indicators for absolute decoupling within limits.

When considered in the global context, the current set of EU indicators focuses primarily on the progress made by the EU within the EU and does not provide enough indication as to the EU’s contribution towards achieving the goals at the global level, including the adequacy and effectiveness of EU support to developing countries in implementing SDGs. Indicators for SDG17 include assessment of trends in EU official development assistance (ODA) but they do not capture relative contributions across different goals nor how

¹ A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Council conclusions (20 June 2017) (10370/17)

effectively funding is spent (e.g. whether it is targeted to projects and initiatives that support simultaneous delivery of multiple SDGs). Furthermore, while the EU indicators are “aligned as far as appropriate” with the global indicators, further alignment with the UN SDG indicator list is desirable to be able to provide results that can be easily interpreted in the global context². Currently only around half of EU SDG indicators (55 out of 100) are identical or similar to UN SDG indicators.

The proposal for indicators for the upcoming 2018 report include a number of improvements including, in particular, new or modified indicators for consumption and production (SDG12) and biodiversity (SDG14 and SDG15). The 2018 review does not, however, improve the overall alignment of EU indicators with the UN list nor does it provide any indicators for assessing EU’s contributions to achieving the goals outside its borders.

The sections below attempt to highlight key opportunities for the 2018 – 2019 period to improve the level of ambition in the EU, including monitoring of the progress made.

SDG6: Opportunities and challenges between 2018 – 2019

Most of the targets of SDG6 are addressed by EU water law, in some cases by legislation which has been in place for decades. In particular, the Drinking Water Directive (DWD), Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (UWWTD), Water Framework Directive (WFD) and others support individual SDG targets. Two points are important to make, however:

- Some aspects of SDG6 are largely of Member State competence – these concern the equity issues of the targets – who pays for what and how costs are distributed are not significantly affected by EU legislation or policy.
- The target date for ecosystem protection in target 6.6 is 2020. While the WFD is clearly the main legal driver for water ecosystem improvement in the EU, its timetable for delivery is longer-term.

There are two key direct EU policy developments significant for the future achievement of SDG6 in the EU – the evaluation of the UWWTD and the Fitness Check of water policy. The former is important as it can question the scope and detail of EU law regarding sanitation – such as whether smaller rural communities should be more effectively addressed by the legislation. The Fitness Check allows for interrogation of policy effectiveness for all SDG6 targets, but is most likely to raise issues regarding water-use efficiency (6.4), integrated water resources management (6.5) and protecting and restoring water-related ecosystem (6.6). The evaluation frameworks the Commission has established for both of these ex-post evaluations includes a consideration of how well these pre-existing EU laws will deliver the SDGs (not just SDG6).

In other policy areas, the development of EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the period from 2021 will be critical in how far agricultural activity in the EU contributes to, or hinders the delivery of, SDG 6 objectives. Wider decisions on the EU post-2020 budget in the context of the 2021 – 2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) are also important, in particular the degree to which EU Cohesion Policy and its funding for regional development continue to support sustainable water management. Other EU policy developments, such as on climate adaptation, circular economy (e.g. water reuse), are also important.

EU external policy has a long history of support to different elements of SDG6 through development cooperation and external assistance – both from EU funds and individual MS budgets – particularly for infrastructure support (water supply and sanitation), but also for taking forward integrated water resource management. The EU should continue with this leading role in all of these strands, with particular focus on ensuring the 2021-2027 MFF continues to provide financing for the opportunities. In this regard, seeking synergies with other SDGs (e.g. SDG15) should be encouraged. Targetting of EU external assistance should, of course, take account of the specific needs identified during reporting from individual countries. The EU

² [Eurostat SDG 2018 indicator set](#) (April 2018)

framework for water diplomacy forms a key avenue for setting priorities for supporting the delivery of SDG6 with EU partner countries the future.

SDG7: Opportunities and challenges between 2018 – 2019

The ambition level and implementation of a number of proposed or recently adopted pieces of legislation will be instrumental to whether the EU is able to meet the SDG7 goals by 2030. The EU's 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy as well as the Energy Union Strategy and related legislation, particularly the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union, Energy Efficiency Directive, proposals on the new electricity Market Design, Renewable Energy Directive, the Effort Sharing Decision, the Energy Efficiency of Buildings Directive, and the Strategy for low-Emission mobility will all play a major role in the EU's SDG7 performance. In addition, the funding and rules established under the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 will be critical to helping the EU meet its domestic goals and help the international community deliver on the SDG goals by 2030

Achieving the SDG7 goals will have important synergies and potential trade-offs for many other SDGs, notably SDGs 1 (poverty), 2 (hunger), 3 (health), 6 (water), 8 (economic growth), and 13 (climate change).³ SDG7 is an important enabling goal which could inter alia improve conditions for education, food production and storage, health provision and disease prevention, economic opportunities, and water availability, as well as lead to major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Care needs to be taken to avoid major cost increases in energy, displacement of food crops, excessive use of water or other economic distortions which might impair other SDGs.

SDG11: Opportunities and challenges between 2018 – 2019

The importance given to urban issues in the EU has increased considerably in the recent years, with Cohesion Policy (e.g. proposals for the 2021 – 2027 MFF) and the Circular Economy Package playing a key role in supporting urban sustainability agenda in the future. A greater political importance was given to the urban dimension in the EU in the 7th Environmental Action Programme⁴, including it as one of the priority objectives (Priority Objective 8 "*Sustainable cities: Working together for Common Solutions*"). An increasing number of EU policies feature an urban dimension, in particular in the context of sustainable development, recognising the importance of addressing urban challenges and ensuring the well-being of urban environments. In 2017, 149 countries were developing national-level urban policies.

The Urban Agenda for the EU⁵, adopted in 2016, emphasises the role of cities in Europe to stimulate growth, liveability and innovation. The agenda brings together Member States, the European Commission and cities to strengthen the role of cities and the urban dimension in EU policies, to generate a greater impact on urban areas.

The urban theme is the core of Cohesion Policy⁶ which financially supports the improvement of areas key to achieving the targets of SDG11. Up to 2020, over EUR 100 billion is being invested to support urban development: mobility, energy efficiency, urban renewal, research and innovation capacity, and regeneration of deprived communities. For the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Commission is proposing a 5% reduction in funding for Cohesion Policy. However, 6% of the European Regional Development Fund is proposed to be earmarked for sustainable urban development.

³ International Council for Science, (2017), A Guide to SDG Interactions: From science to Implementation, <https://www.icsu.org/cms/2017/05/SDGs-Guide-to-Interactions.pdf>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013D1386>

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda-eu/what-urban-agenda-eu>

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/

The adoption in 2015 of the Circular Economy Package requires the active role of cities, as well as regions, Member States, businesses and citizens, to make circular economy a reality. The priority areas included in the package (plastics, food waste, critical raw materials, construction and demolition, and bio-mass and biobased products) are all ones where actions at regional and municipal level can play an important role. Circular economy considerations can be incorporated by local and regional authorities into their purchasing decisions through green public procurement. If well implemented, measures aimed at supporting and accelerating the transition to a circular economy can lead to substantial improvements in urban environments. For instance, adequate waste collection and treatment as a responsibility of municipal authorities can contribute to leading the way in the implementation of SDG11. New measures outlined in the EU Plastics Strategy could also contribute to improving cities' management of plastics waste.

The objectives of SDG11 are strictly linked to other SDGs and a number of synergies across policy areas can be identified. For instance, current EU legislation on waste management present the potential for better implementing adequate waste management in urban settlements, with positive implications on health (SDG3). The new rules for waste management recently accepted by the Council introduce legally binding targets for the treatment of municipal waste, incentivising progress from cities to meet the targets. Similarly, climate action (SDG7 and SDG13) can have important implications on air quality in cities. EU binding targets on energy efficiency, renewables and GHG emission reductions are set out in the 2020 Climate & Energy Package⁷ and in the 2030 Climate & Energy Framework⁸. As major contributors to GHG emissions, cities are key actors in leading the way towards delivery of the targets.

At the local level, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy⁹, an alliance of cities and local governments in Europe and beyond, promotes voluntary actions to combat climate change and build a resilient, low emission society. Through its objectives, the initiative can stimulate improvements in air quality and energy efficiency in cities, as well as contribute to global climate action. In addition, the Covenant has recently launched an agenda for city research and innovation to help realize the Paris Agreement and implement SDGs 11 and 13.

It is estimated that one-third of the 231 indicators in the Global Monitoring Framework developed by the Statistical Commission can be directly linked to urban policies and can be measured at a local level. Given the variety of factors determining the sustainability and resilience of our cities and communities and the relevance of the urban dimension to sustainable development, progress on SDG11 is an important contributor to all other SDGs – in particular health and well-being (SDG3), education (SDG4), decent work and economic growth (SDG8) and action on climate (SDG13).

The European Commission recognises the important role played by local authorities in tackling urban challenges, and is working towards this objective in a number of ways. Since 2008, the European Commission has operated the European Green Capital Award¹⁰ and the Green Leaf Award¹¹, two initiatives to promote and reward the effort of cities in improving their urban environment, stimulating other cities to act in the same way. In addition, a new "Green city tool"¹² was developed as a self-assessment and benchmarking tool for cities, providing information and advice on how cities can become greener and more sustainable.

SDG12: Opportunities and challenges between 2018 – 2019

Among key determinants for future success on SDG12 in the EU will be actions taken as part the Circular Economy Action Plan, including the funding made available to support its implementation under the

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2030_en

⁹ <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/about/>

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/about-the-award/>

¹¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/europeangreenleaf/index.html>

¹² <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/greencitytool/home/>

2021-2027 MFF. The Communication for the Action Plan (COM/2015/214 final) explicitly states: “this action plan will be instrumental in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, in particular Goal 12 of ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.” The action plan notes the need to address all aspects of a product’s life cycle in order to achieve a circular economy – including product design, production processes, consumption, waste management, and developing markets for secondary raw materials. In addition, the action plan identifies a number of priority areas where there are specific challenges, these are plastics, food waste, critical raw materials, construction and demolition, biomass and bio-based products.

In 2018, relevant developments for the Circular Economy package were the publication of the EU Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy (COM/2018/028 final), a Communication on the Interface between chemicals, products and waste legislation (COM/2018/032 final), the Monitoring Framework for the Circular Economy (COM/2018/029 final), as well as a report on Critical Raw Materials¹³. In February 2018, the EU approved four legislative proposal within the “waste package”, these aim to increase re-use and recycling of waste.¹⁴

In the proposed 2021 – 2027 MFF the EU is expected to make investments available through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund to support Member States in activities related to the circular economy and natural resource management. Further funding is also potentially available under the LIFE programme to support the shift towards a circular, resource- and energy-efficient, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. For the 2021-2027 period ERDF, Cohesion Fund and LIFE have Commission proposed budgets of 226.3, 46.7, and 5.5 billion EUR respectively. A further 650 billion is proposed to provide investments to support the circular economy, as well as other issues, as part of InvestEU (replacing the European Fund for Strategic Investments).¹⁵

While most of the policy developments related to the circular economy action plan relate to domestic issues in the EU, it has been acknowledged that sustainable consumption and production objectives rely on improvements in sustainability in value chains across the globe.¹⁶ With the UN the EU is engaged with relevant programmes in developing countries via initiatives such as the 10-year framework programmes on sustainable consumption and production (10YFP) as well as the Switch to Green initiative, including Switch Asia, Switch Med, and Switch Africa. Some funding is also available to third countries via Horizon 2020, supporting research and innovation. The EU Strategy for Plastics explicitly acknowledges the global dimension of plastics both in terms of a growth in global demand and supply, and the transborder issues of waste management and pollution. In 2018, the European Commission will launch a project to reduce plastic waste and marine litter in East and South-East Asia.¹⁷

Successful delivery of SDG12 will be dependent on many of the other goals. There are existing EU efforts to join thinking on sustainable consumption and production with other policy areas, such as climate change mitigation – for example this can already be seen in the 7th Environmental Action Programme”. There are strong synergies with SDG12 and SDGs 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 15. Water and energy are both key inputs into production processes, and efficiencies will help to address water shortages and energy demand. Goal 8 on “sustainable, inclusive and sustainable” economic growth will need to be closely integrated with SDG12. A key challenge will be to move towards a new model of growth which is not based on material extraction and environmental degradation. Productive industries and consumption are key drivers of GHG emissions and so greater efficiency can help combat climate change. And lastly, consumption drives impacts on biodiversity including deforestation and land degradation.

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/27327>

¹⁴ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/02/23/eu-ambassadors-approve-new-rules-on-waste-management-and-recycling/>

¹⁵ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c2bc7dbd-4fc3-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1.0023.02/DOC_2&format=PDF

¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/devco/item-detail.cfm?item_id=612347&utm_source=devco_newsroom&utm_medium=Website&utm_campaign=devco&utm_content=The%20Circular%20Economy%20to%20the%20EU%20domestic%20experience&lang=en

¹⁷ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2df5d1d2-fac7-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

SDG15: Opportunities and challenges between 2018 – 2019

Discussions on EU's post-2020 biodiversity targets are speeding up, providing a key opportunity to ensure synergies between SDG15 and the future regime for nature conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems. Integrating SDG delivery as an objective of the post-2020 biodiversity objectives could help to improve mainstreaming of conservation priorities to EU sectoral policies, in particular with sectoral integration being identified as one of the key shortcomings of the current strategy. This does, however, require greater buy-in across all policy sectors to delivery of the SDGs (see earlier).

The lack of financial resources has been identified by several assessments as the key hinderance for implementing – and achieving – biodiversity conservation in the EU¹⁸. While financing the implementation of conservation actions is a national-level responsibility, contributions from the EU budget play an important role in supporting actions across all Member States. The proposals for the 2021-2027 EU budget foresee that funding under LIFE would increase, however there are also fears that the cuts to other funding streams, and the agricultural policy in particular, could translate to diminished EU funding for biodiversity. Consequently, in the upcoming negotiations it will be important to ensure that the post-2020 EU budget provides adequate and appropriate opportunities to finance biodiversity. Furthermore, it will need to be ensured that none of the other actions financed from the EU budget pose negative impacts on biodiversity.

EU free trade agreements (FTAs) contribute to the economic and social development of third countries and thus they are commonly considered as a means to support the delivery of SDGs in the global context. With a number of new FTAs in the pipeline (e.g. with Australia), there is an opportunity improve the integration of biodiversity into these agreements (as per the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy Target 6) with a view to prevent negative impacts of trade on nature and ecosystems and the delivery of SDG15¹⁹.

Finally, progress in implementing key EU biodiversity initiatives can be used to support the development and adoption of further indicators for SDG15. Additional indicators covering, for example, the regulation of invasive alien species (IAS) and the EU pollinator initiative launched in June 2018 could be adopted. Furthermore, the integration of SDG15 into EU development cooperation should be assessed, to determine EU's contribution to achieving the goal in the global context. The Results Framework for monitoring EU development cooperation outcomes, adopted in 2015, provides a good basis for this.

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/docs/Kettunen_2017_financing_biodiversity.pdf

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/pdf/scoping_study.pdf