



Manual of European Environmental Policy

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The Sustainable Development Strategy, the Lisbon Strategy, and the Europe 2020 Strategy

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy

At the 'Rio + 5' Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 1997 the European Union (EU), like other signatories of the Rio Declaration, committed itself to producing a Sustainable Development Strategy in time for the 'Rio + 10' Johannesburg Summit in 2002. The Helsinki European Council in December 1999 invited the European Commission to 'prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy dovetailing policies for economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development'. In May 2001, the Commission presented a Communication on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development* ([COM\(2001\)264](#)) which identified six key challenges to sustainable development: climate change, public health, poverty, an ageing society, natural resource management, transport and land use management. The Communication set out actions to be taken together with a number of objectives, targets and measures relating to four of the six challenges (objectives and measures to address the threats of poverty and ageing had been agreed in the context of the Lisbon Strategy (see below) and are referred to in the annex of the Communication).

The EU Heads of State and Government meeting at the Gothenburg European Council in June 2001 pared down the Commission's proposal for an EU SDS to just four pages of procedures and principles¹. While welcoming 'the submission' of the Commission's Communication, EU leaders did not explicitly endorse its proposed targets and timetables, and focused on four of its priority themes – climate, sustainable transport, public health and natural resources management. The Council recognized sustainable development as a 'fundamental objective' of the EU set out in the Treaty and agreed 'a' strategy for sustainable development 'which completes the Union's political commitment to economic and social renewal; adds a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon strategy and establishes a new approach to policy making'. The Council endorsed a number of objectives and measures as 'general guidance for future policy development', identified objectives in the four priority areas, and expressed support for some of the policy measures put forward by the Commission. The 2001 Gothenburg Summit also recognized the need for a more developed external dimension of the EU SDS and in 2002, the Commission produced a separate add-on document *Towards a global partnership for Sustainable Development* ([COM\(2002\)82](#)) which sought to integrate this in the discussion.

The EU SDS was to be implemented by a process of annual stocktaking with all three dimensions of sustainable development reviewed at the annual Spring European Council, on the basis of the Commission's synthesis report, and as an addition to reporting under the Lisbon Strategy (see below). Apart from numerous concerns with the reviewing process (see below), criticisms of the EU SDS abounded. In particular, the EU SDS was not produced in a coordinated manner and did not adequately address key concerns, such as ecologically harmful subsidies paid to the energy, fisheries and agricultural sectors. In addition, the role of the EU SDS in relation to a growing number of initiatives taking forward Article 3 (former Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Community - TEC) of the Treaty of the European

Union (TEU) and Article 11 (former Article 6 of TEC) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (i.e. the [Cardiff process](#), the [Sixth Environment Action Programme](#), and the Lisbon process (see below)) was unclear. There was little thought given to the way in which these initiatives would interact and there was much debate (and confusion) over the relationship between the EU's overarching strategy for sustainable development, as set out in the EU SDS, and other cross-cutting EU strategies, in particular the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs². A review by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)³ found that the EU SDS 'had very little real impact on the environment', that only minimal action had been taken that was not already in the pipeline and in some areas such as transport no action had occurred at all. The EEB put the limited progress down to 'a lack of solid, robust obligation and commitments' while also noting the growing influence on the EU SDS of the Lisbon agenda and the EU's competitiveness drive.

A comprehensive review of the EU SDS initiated in 2004 led to the elaboration and endorsement of a 'renewed' EU SDS⁴ by Heads of State and Government at the June 2006 European Council. The so-called 'renewed' EU SDS was formulated as a single, coherent document, clearly structured around a set of overall objectives which were translated into several operational targets and specific actions. The renewed EU SDS aimed to form the 'overall framework within which the Lisbon Strategy, with its renewed focus on growth and jobs, provides the motor of a more dynamic economy', thus confirming that the EU SDS and the Lisbon Strategy were two separate complementary strategies, but that the EU SDS was the more overarching of the two. The political reality would prove the opposite however, with jobs, growth and competitiveness increasingly constraining developments in environmental policies.

The renewed EU SDS focused on seven key challenges to sustainable development: climate change and clean energy; sustainable transport; sustainable production and consumption; conservation and management of natural resources; public health; social inclusion, demography and migration; and global poverty and sustainable development. The targets and objectives mentioned in the renewed EU SDS were to a large extent based on EU and Member State commitments at the time, for example under the Kyoto Protocol, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals; or reflected forthcoming policy developments at the EU level, for example on biofuels. The document contained one new target, which related to green public procurement, stating that the EU should aim to achieve in 2010 an 'average level of Green Public Procurement equal to that currently achieved by the best performing Member States'.

The renewed EU SDS stressed the importance of cross-cutting policies and activities, including education and training; improving communication and mobilizing actors; engaging stakeholders; promoting research and development; developing national income accounting systems to include satellite accounts; using appropriate economic instruments and coordinating EU financing instruments to promote sustainable development. A number of 'policy-guiding principles' were also referred to including the need to develop adequate consultation processes, enhance participation of citizens, improve dialogue and cooperation with business and social partners, promote policy coherence, and integrate the principle of sustainable development in policy making at all levels through Better Regulation instruments in particular impact assessments, ex-post assessments, and public and stakeholder participation. Given the side-lining of environmental issues in the Commission's annual synthesis reports to the Spring Council on progress in delivering sustainable development objectives (see below), the renewed EU SDS established a new reporting system whereby the

Commission would present a progress report on the EU SDS to the European Council every two years. A series of Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) are used to monitor the EU SDS in a report published by Eurostat every two years.

The Commission's first progress report on the renewed EU SDS was published in 2007 ([COM\(2007\)642](#)) noted that the implementation of commitments and impacts on the environment had been 'relatively modest'. However, the report noted that there had been significant progress regarding policy development at the EU and Member State levels, pointing in particular to developments on climate change and energy. The report also asserted that the EU's Better Regulation programme had contributed to ensuring coherence across policy areas, notably through the Commission's impact assessment system, concluding that the priorities set in 2006 remained valid and that further attention needed to be paid to implementation in all priority areas of the EU SDS. The first scheduled review of progress under the renewed EU SDS was dealt with summarily by Heads of State and Government at a Summit in December 2007. The Presidency Conclusions⁵ devoted only a single paragraph to the EU SDS review, in which the Council confirmed the validity of the objectives and priorities agreed in 2006 and stressed 'that the main focus should therefore be on effective implementation at all levels'. The Council Conclusions did not address the main challenges of the EU SDS individually but only dealt with process issues, stating that 'the governance structure and tools of the SDS, in particular in relation to monitoring of progress and best practice sharing, must be fully used and strengthened'. More specifically, the Council invited the Commission to present its next progress report in June 2009 together with a 'roadmap setting out the remaining actions to be implemented with the highest priority'. This seemed to imply that not all objectives and actions laid down in the renewed EU SDS have the same level of priority.

The Commission published its second review of the renewed EU SDS was published in July 2009 ([COM\(2009\)400](#)) and noted that despite some significant developments, particularly with regard to climate change, unsustainable trends persisted in a number of areas including biodiversity, natural resources, sustainable consumption and production and transport, and that the EU needed to intensify its efforts in several areas. The Commission's progress report also stated that the EU had 'successfully mainstreamed' the objective of sustainable development in many policy fields, with the EU's climate change and energy policies given as an example of the impact of the EU SDS on the political agenda. This appeared somewhat overstated given that the discussions on the climate and energy package hardly mentioned the EU SDS as a major policy driver⁶. While the Commission's 2009 report did not explicitly include a 'roadmap' of priority actions as called for by the European Council, it noted that the EU SDS 'could' focus on the EU's long-term goals in the following areas:

- Contributing to the shift to a low-carbon, low-input economy.
- Intensifying efforts for the protection of biodiversity, water and other natural resources.
- Promoting social inclusion.
- Strengthening the external dimension of sustainable development.

The Commission's 2009 progress report also provided some initial reflections on the future of the EU SDS and its interaction with other cross-cutting EU strategies. While the report maintained that 'merging cross-cutting strategies does not seem feasible given the different roles they fulfil', it recognized that there is scope for clarification of the role of the EU SDS

in relation to other EU strategies and put forward a number of proposals in this regard including:

- Increasing synergies, and improving coordination/linkages with the Lisbon Strategy and other cross-cutting EU strategies.
- Streamlining or refocusing the EU SDS on its overarching nature to provide the general framework for policy making (it is not clear what difference, if any, is implied between streamlining and refocusing).
- Using mechanisms in the Lisbon Strategy to monitor implementation of the EU SDS.
- Expanding the scope of the EU SDS to reflect new and emerging challenges such as adaptation to climate change.

The European Council adopted conclusions on the Commission's progress report in December 2009. The Council Conclusions⁷ stressed that the EU SDS 'will continue to provide a long-term vision and constitute the overarching policy framework for all Union policies and strategies'. The Council noted that a number of unsustainable trends required urgent action, in particular 'to curb and adapt to climate change, to decrease high energy consumption in the transport sector and to reverse the current loss of biodiversity and natural resources' and that the shift to a safe and sustainable low-carbon and low-input economy will require a stronger focus in the future. The Council also stressed that future reviews of the EU SDS should more clearly identify priority actions needed. The Council Conclusions did not however address the relationship between the EU SDS and other overarching strategies such as the future Lisbon Strategy, and failed to indicate when a review of the SDS would be launched. Given attempts to integrate the EU SDS into the Lisbon Strategy processes and little effort to do the reverse, this provides further evidence of the greater political focus given to economic considerations than environmental ones.

The Lisbon Strategy

In March 2000, the European Council introduced an 'overall strategy' for economic and social renewal which aimed to boost economic growth and employment through a set of structural reforms. The ten-year Lisbon Strategy sought to make Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'⁸. Part of the motivation behind the Lisbon Strategy was to close the gap between the economic performance of Europe and that of the United States. The objectives of the Lisbon Strategy were to be pursued by a new 'open method of coordination', (see section on [Environmental Policy Instruments](#)), rather than the Community method, in which Member States define common objectives for delivery in the manner deemed most appropriate for their national circumstances. The key focus of the Lisbon Strategy was on competitiveness, economic growth and social cohesion. The subsequent adoption of the EU SDS in June 2001 was meant to add a third, environmental dimension to the Lisbon Strategy⁹. However, the fact that the Lisbon Strategy was adopted prior to the EU SDS isolated economic and social objectives from the broader sustainable development agenda and effectively pre-empted a truly integrated approach to the three pillars of sustainable development.

Starting in 2002, the annual Spring European Council meetings were to review progress in delivering environment and sustainable development objectives based on annual Commission synthesis reports and associated structural indicators. In November 2001, the Commission adopted a Communication on Structural Indicators which contained a set of 36 indicators,

including six environmental ones, to be reported in the 2002 Commission synthesis report. The Environment Council further developed this environmental component by identifying seven environmental indicators and by establishing an ‘open list’ of environmental indicators to be further finalized and developed for future selection. The final set of structural indicators, including environmental indicators, was presented at the Heads of State and Government meeting in Laeken in December 2001. The seven environmental indicators agreed by the Council covered greenhouse gas emissions (in absolute terms and compared with the objectives set out in the Kyoto Protocol), the share of renewable energies in electricity generation, the volume of transport per unit of GDP (passengers and freight), the split between different transport modes, exposure of urban populations to pollution in the atmosphere (number of days on which standard levels are exceeded), the volume of municipal waste collected, and the energy intensity of the economy (consumption of energy per unit of GDP). Some additional indicators relating to the sustainability of fisheries, the use of toxic chemical products and the quality of drinking water were listed for the Commission to consider in future years.

The Commission's synthesis report for the 2002 Spring Summit *The Lisbon Strategy – Making Change Happen* ([COM\(2002\)14](#)) included the seven environment-related indicators, however the total number of indicators had also expanded to 42. The report focused almost exclusively on economic and employment issues. Furthermore, the report proposed only three priority areas for future attention, none of which related directly to environment policy. The need for an increased proportion of environment indicators relative to the total number of structural indicators was again raised at the Environment Council in March 2002. At the 2002 Spring Summit, the European Council called for equal attention to economic, social and environmental concerns, thereby strengthening the environmental dimension of the Lisbon process. However, subsequent synthesis reports by the Commission tended to concentrate mainly on the economic and employment aspects of the Lisbon process, while consideration of environmental issues was largely marginalized. The 2003 Spring Summit recognized the limitations of the environment-related structural indicators and called for their improvement. The set of indicators used by the Commission to review progress ahead of the 2004 Spring Summit included a shortlist of just 14 indicators, including three environment related ones covering greenhouse gas emissions, energy intensity of the economy and volume of transport. At the Spring Summit in 2004, the European Council only briefly touched on these issues, calling for further cost-effective ways of implementing EU decisions in the field of climate change as well as improvements in energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy sources. The Council also called for an independent review of the Lisbon process including the identification of new measures to achieve its objectives and targets.

A high-level review of the Lisbon process was subsequently launched in 2004 parallel to, but clearly separate from, the review of the EU SDS. The final report of the high-level group, chaired by former Dutch Prime Minister, Wim Kok, recommended that the EU and Member States focus on growth and employment, implying that this would in turn bring about environmental and social progress¹⁰. The report downplayed the environmental elements added to the Lisbon Strategy by the EU SDS and focused on ‘the vigorous promotion of win-win environmental economic strategies’ through the development of eco-efficient technologies.

Following this review, in March 2005 the European Council re-launched the Lisbon Strategy narrowing its priorities to promoting growth and jobs and focusing efforts on ways to increase the EU's global competitiveness¹¹. Social and environmental considerations were

side-lined as the Lisbon Strategy concentrated on strengthening industrial competitiveness and ‘win-wins’ such as environmental technologies, energy efficiency and renewables. Other EU SDS priorities were dropped entirely. The Commission Communication to the 2005 Spring Summit ([COM\(2005\)24](#)) described the Lisbon Strategy as ‘an essential component of the overarching objective of sustainable development’ and maintained that the Lisbon Strategy and EU SDS were different but ‘mutually reinforcing’ strategies aimed at the same goal, but ‘producing their results in different time frames’. The 2005 Lisbon Strategy established new governance arrangements corresponding to three-year cycles. It sought to establish a new partnership between the Commission and the Member States (by increasing Member State ownership and clarifying the Commission's role as facilitator), simplify arrangements by priority setting using ‘integrated guidelines’, and streamlining procedures and reporting using single ‘national reform programmes’ which outline how each Member State will implement the Lisbon Strategy.

In April 2005 the Commission proposed a set of ‘integrated guidelines for growth and jobs’ for the 2005–2008 period¹² which were to be used by Member States in drawing up their national reform programmes. According to the Commission, these guidelines encompassed economic, social and environmental dimensions, even though they only related to jobs and growth objectives explicitly. References to the environment focused on those ‘resource and environmental challenges which, if left unchecked will act as a brake on future growth’. Integrated guideline 11, ‘to encourage the sustainable use of resources and strengthen the synergies between environmental protection and growth’ referred to the need to address climate change, improve energy efficiency and boost renewables; develop environmental technologies; use market-based instruments; remove environmentally harmful subsidies; and green public procurement. The objective of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 was also noted under integrated guideline 11, in particular the need to integrate biodiversity concerns in other policy areas. No references were made in the guidelines to environment/health issues, such as air pollution, water quality, and noise or issues concerning waste prevention and management. To ensure coherence between national reform programmes, the Commission also suggested that Member States follow a common approach¹³, with reports structured in two sections – an introductory part which outlined the broad political and socio-economic context and overall approach of the strategy and a core part which outlined policy responses to address the three overarching priorities which were macro- and micro-economic priorities and employment priorities (but not environmental priorities).

In December 2007, the Commission issued a ‘Strategic Report’¹⁴ on implementation of the renewed Lisbon Strategy and made proposals for the following cycle (2008–2010). The report outlined a series of actions in four priority areas: investing in people and modernizing labour markets, business environment, knowledge (education, R&D and innovation), and energy and climate change. With respect to the fourth priority area, the report called on Member States to review economic instruments to ensure they contributed to climate change mitigation in a cost-effective way; to include energy efficiency as an award criterion for public procurement; to set mandatory energy reduction targets for government buildings; and to improve inter-connection of energy grids. Actions at the EU level included the adoption of legislative proposals to complete the internal electricity and gas markets and the climate change package; implementation of a sustainable industrial policy which focused on renewable energies and low-carbon and resource-efficient products, services and technologies; review the Energy Tax Directive [2003/96/EC](#) to link it more closely to the EU's energy and environmental objectives; and strengthening the requirements in the Directive on

the energy performance of buildings. On the basis of this report, European leaders launched the 2008–2010 cycle of the Lisbon Strategy in March 2008.

A Commission evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy ([SEC\(2010\)114](#)) concluded that it has had a positive impact on the EU even though its main targets (to achieve an employment rate of 70 per cent and for 3 per cent of GDP to be spent on R&D) was not expected to be reached. The Commission recognised a number of shortcomings which undermined the Strategy's effectiveness including weak links with other EU strategies and sector-specific initiatives, inadequate governance arrangements, unclear ownership, variable implementation of country-specific recommendations, and its inward-looking focus. Environmental issues have largely been marginalized in the Lisbon process, particularly after its re-launch in 2005 which focused attention on issues relating to jobs and growth. A limited number of 'win-win' environmental issues such as energy efficiency, renewables, and the development of environmental technologies have been incorporated in the Lisbon Strategy given their potential to increase competitiveness and create employment. However, other environmental issues referred to in the EU SDS, which was meant to form an overarching framework within which the Lisbon Strategy would operate, have largely been ignored. While sustainable development was perceived as a desirable objective of the EU, it was considered that its attainment depended primarily on achieving a dynamic European economy, thus making jobs and growth the immediate target, while the wider sustainable development objective was to be considered a more long-term goal that could be addressed sometime in the future.

The Europe 2020 Strategy

On 3 March 2010, the newly installed Barroso II Commission unveiled its much anticipated proposal for a successor to the Lisbon Strategy: the Europe 2020 Strategy ([COM\(2010\)2020](#)). In the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis, it is somewhat unsurprising that the short-term priority of the Strategy is to secure a sustainable exit from the crisis. In the longer-term, the Strategy aims to turn the EU into a *smart* (based on knowledge and innovation), *sustainable* (promoting resource efficient, greener and more competitive growth); and *inclusive* (high employment, delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion) economy. The Strategy sets five 'headline targets' at EU level (to increase employment, invest in research and development, meet the 20-20-20 climate and energy targets, improve educational performance, and combat poverty) which are to be translated into appropriate national goals and promoted through seven 'Flagship Initiatives'. The Initiatives include an 'Innovation Union' ([COM\(2010\)546](#)) aiming to develop a strategic approach to the EU's research agenda, a 'Resource efficient Europe' ([COM\(2011\)21](#)) aiming to support the shift towards an economy that is efficient in the way it uses all resources (see section on Overview of EU policy: Resource use) and an 'Industrial policy for the globalisation era' ([COM\(2010\)614](#)) which seeks to develop an industrial policy supporting the transition to greater energy and resource efficiency and promoting technologies and production methods that reduce resource use and increase investment in natural assets. Roadmaps produced as 'deliverables' under the 'Resource efficient Europe' Flagship Initiative include a [Roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050](#) and the [Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe](#).

On 17 June 2010, the European Council formally endorsed the Europe 2020 Strategy and confirmed the five headline targets of the Strategy. The headline target on climate change reaffirms the pre-existing 20-20-20 objectives. No new targets in the field of resource efficiency, energy consumption, or biodiversity and ecosystem services were included as

called for by the Parliament¹⁵ The European Council also gave its political endorsement to ten integrated guidelines for economic and employment policies. The guidelines set out how Member States should operationalise the Strategy's objectives and targets. Integrated guideline 5 relates to 'improving resource efficiency and reducing greenhouse gases' and calls on Member States to *inter alia* put measures in place to promote the decoupling of economic growth from resource use and make efficient use of their natural resources¹⁶

Progress in implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy at both EU and Member State level is pursued via the EU's new cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination (the 'European Semester') and is to be closely followed by EU leaders.. Each cycle lasts for six months and follows the same procedure:

- The new cycle will begin in January of each year with the publication by the Commission of the Annual Growth Survey which will assess the main economic challenges facing the EU, and from 2012 will report on national targets and progress towards the headline targets.
- Based on this, the Spring European Council will provide guidance on the main challenges ahead.
- Taking this guidance into account, Member States are to finalise their National Reform Programmes (NRPs) setting out proposed actions to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy at the national level. NRPs and Stability and Convergence Programmes (SCPs) prepared under the Stability and Growth Pact are to be submitted simultaneously to the Commission by mid-April of each year for assessment. The Commission will assess these country programmes, evaluate progress towards the headline targets, and present country-specific policy recommendations by late May/early June.
- Based on the Commission's assessment, by June/July, the European Council will issue country-specific recommendations to Member States based on the Europe 2020 integrated guidelines and provide guidance on budgetary policy under the Stability and Growth Pact. Progress towards the five EU headline targets will be measured by eight headline indicators. Additional indicators will be used to evaluate developments with regard to the main objectives and Flagship Initiatives of the Strategy.

The Commission's first Annual Growth Survey was presented in January 2011 ([COM\(2011\)11](#)). An accompanying progress report on the Europe 2020 Strategy ([COM\(2011\)11-A1/2](#)) noted that on the basis of the preliminary national targets set out in draft NRPs submitted by Member States in November 2010, the EU is likely to fall short of the EU level headline targets. The report recognised the risk of setting national targets which focus on the short term and do not provide sufficient reform trajectories for the period to 2020, particularly in the current context of economic uncertainty and fiscal consolidation. However, the report concluded that these gaps can be closed in the coming years and called for priority to be given to making progress on structural reforms at the national level and on growth enhancing measures within the Flagship Initiatives.

On 7 June 2011, the Commission adopted 27 sets of country-specific recommendations and one for the Euro area as a whole. Overall, the Commission concluded that Member States have sought to reflect EU priorities in their programmes however these programmes were found to lack ambition and specificity in a number of cases. The Commission noted on the basis of the national commitments, that the EU is on track to achieve its targets for *inter alia* emissions reduction and for renewable energy; however additional efforts are required for

reaching targets in the areas of *inter alia* employment, research and development, and energy efficiency ([COM\(2011\)400](#)). The Commission's recommendations were subsequently adopted by the Council and can be viewed [here](#).

The Commission presented the 2012 Annual Growth Survey on 23 November 2011 ([COM\(2011\)815](#)) which noted that Member States had not done enough to implement the measures committed to at EU level. The Survey called for *inter alia* more attention on the design and structure of Member States' tax systems including measures to broaden the tax base, e.g. through the elimination of environmentally harmful subsidies and for the shifting of taxation away from labour towards taxation which is less detrimental to growth, e.g. environmental taxation.

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