The UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the Sustainable Development Goals, 5-15 July 2022, New York

KEY FINDINGS

In this Global Decade of Action, the High Level Political Forum 2022 is an auspicious moment post-COVID-19 to focus on our common future and design the kind of world we want our children to inherit. The inextricable links, synergies and interdependence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become clearer over the past few years, presenting an opportunity for a more holistic and systemic approach to accelerating the SDGs and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the Sustainable Development Solutions Network survey of government efforts for the SDG and the Six Transformations scorecards, the Sustainable Development Report 2022 finds that only 9 EU Member States have a high commitment and 6 countries have a low commitment to the SDGs. Even among the top-rated countries in Europe, the assessment made by the Climate Action Tracker shows that the **strategies and actions of those governments are insufficient to achieve the objectives set out in the Paris Climate Agreement**.

Evidence from the latest reports on SDGs progress in the EU and globally show a continuing downward trajectory in environmental and social inequalities brought about by incoherent policies that have largely ignored the consequences of unsustainable economic growth strategies. It is thus imperative that policy and financial frameworks are aligned. If we are to reverse this trajectory and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, we must fully endorse the premise that full participation of women at every level and access to quality education for all are essential in the efforts to reach all other SDGs targets.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have resulted in incalculable setbacks to the implementation of Agenda 2030, highlighting the imperative for swift and comprehensive alignment of the SDGs and Agenda 2030 with the Recovery and Resilience Plans for "Building-Back-Better" in the wake of the pandemic and the ongoing political upheaval on Europe's doorstep. The subsequent disruption of the global food and energy systems have also become strikingly apparent as has the interconnected nature of peace, security, food, health, agriculture, environment and energy, demonstrating the need for self-sufficiency and more robust, resilient systems. A similar level of urgency, collaboration, cooperation and strong science-policy interface as well as public awareness are needed now to realise the 2030 Agenda. This level of coordination across sectors and governance structures will require unprecedented cooperation and participatory governance approaches, where the EU can provide a leadership role in the acceleration of Agenda 2030 both regionally and globally.

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HLPF 2022 – background context and main issues

The purpose of this briefing is to provide support to the European Parliament delegation prior to the 10th session of the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) between 5 – 15 July at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters, New York, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN. It provides an overview of key issues at stake in the meeting and progress made on the implementation of the SDGs by the EU, with a particular focus on the SDGs to be reviewed in depth at the Forum. It also provides an overview of tools and pathways available to accelerate the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which has relevance for all areas of DG ENVI's Committee, on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. The link to policy priorities include SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), with the former linking to all of the SDGs. SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) connect to the European Green Deal, Biodiversity, the Circular Economy, public health, food safety, air and water quality, the use of chemicals and pesticides, and SDG 17 (Partnerships) encompasses the the external dimensions and impacts of EU policies on the EU's global partners.

The HLPF is the main UN platform on sustainable development and it has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs at the global level. Annual meetings are held under the auspices of the UN ECOSOC, with a two-day meeting every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government, under the auspices of the UN General Assembly. The HLPF 2022 has been prepared by the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and convened by the Regional Commissions in March-April 2022. The Regional Fora assessed progress and exchange knowledge, best practices and policy solutions on how to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the recovery from COVID-19.

The HLPF 2022 programme and the high-level segment of ECOSOC includes the **three-day ministerial segment of the Forum** from Wednesday 13 July to Friday 15 July 2022. The high-level segment of the ECOSOC will then conclude with a final day on Monday 18 July 2022. Furthermore, ahead of the 27th United Nations Climate Change conference (COP27), the EU will take the lead with the European Green Deal for the European SDG Summit on 10-12 October 2022 which will convene business sustainability industry leaders worldwide in continuing to address the question of how to build a green and inclusive Europe.

At EU level, the 2030 Agenda is enshrined in the Consensus on Development and other EU policies, most recently, the Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives. The theme for HLPF 2022 is **'Building back better from the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'** with an in-depth progress review of the above listed SDGs.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are part of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These state-led reports provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of Major Groups and other stakeholders. VNRs allow for the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. 45 countries will present their VNRs at this year's HLPF, with 12 countries presenting for the first time, 29 for the second, 3 for their third review and two countries for the fourth time. The majority of VNRs will be presented during the three-day ministerial segment. The EU will deliver a high-level side event at HLPF on Global Gateway with a focus on education. The SDG Summit 2023 will include a four-year review process of SDGs progress and a Heads of State and Government segment. The EU will be presenting its first EU-wide VNR.

The HLPF was mandated in 2012 as a result of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The Future We Want". The format and organisational aspects of the Forum are outlined in General Assembly resolution 67/290. The HLPF is the main United Nations platform on sustainable development and it has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs the global level. General Assembly resolutions 70/299 and 75/290 B provide further guidance on the

follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda is the strategic framework consisting of five distinct components (the five Ps of sustainable development: Planet, People, Partnerships, Peace & Prosperity) while the SDGs outline 17 goals, each with corresponding global targets to support the realisation of Agenda 2030.

1. Key topics & thematic discussions

The in-depth reviews of the five key SDGs will also include the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all SDGs and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs. After the opening session, a town hall meeting on "building back better and advancing the SDGs" will take place. The topic of discussion will be the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs and whether recovery measures are addressing tradeoffs, spillovers, leaving no one behind and advancing the 2030 Agenda. The thematic discussions will include topics such as '*Acting at local level*' which will explore subnational and local dimensions. Cities and regions have a major part to play in implementing the SDGs, and shared experiences on voluntary local reviews of SDG implementation are highly beneficial for HLPF participants. HLPF will provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on how to advance the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda during this Decade of Action and Delivery, as part of ensuring sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the pandemic.

2. The EU's progress on delivering the SDGs

Key findings in the 2021 European Sustainable Development Report (ESDR), from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) highlight that Europe's greatest SDG challenges are in the areas of agriculture, climate, biodiversity and sustainable diet. It also notes that although Europe is the global leader for the SDGs, it does not account for international spillovers and the impacts of its global policies. In its 2020 Work Programme, the European Commission committed to aligning all work programmes with the 2030 Agenda. However, despite the initial ambition and intention of mainstreaming the SDGs across EU policy-making, the European Green Deal, which is the Commission's flagship policy for sustainable development in the EU, has been widely criticised by NGOs and Civil Society Networks for failing to include the social and gender dimensions of the 2030 Agenda.

Key stakeholder networks and social and environmental NGOs including SDG Watch Europe, the MEPs for SDGs Alliance and Concord have been calling upon the Commission for an overarching strategy for the SDGs that includes a roadmap with time-bound targets and milestones that outline the most effective pathways to achieve the SDGs. They have also been calling for the reinstatement of the Multi-Stakeholder Platform since its cessation in 2018. The European Commission's Thematic Programme for CSOs 2021-2027 shows an increased effort to actively engage and strengthen civil society by fostering more inclusive CSO participation in dialogue and capacity-building. This is backed up by proposed funding of 1.5 billion euro. It marks a concerted shift in attitude towards participatory governance and commitment to "leave no one behind".

EU President Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines committed the European Commission to integrate the SDGs into the European Semester, embedding the SDGs in EU's economic framework underpinned by the 2021 EU Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS). The ASGS focuses primarily on the implementation of the Recovery & Resilience Facility (RRF), a key pillar of NextGenerationEU. The RRF is the main recovery tool to support the EU's stabilisation from the COVID-19 pandemic, helping Member States to implement reforms and investments. It aims to contribute €723.8bn in current prices (€385.8bn in loans and €338bn in grants) to help achieve the SDG annual funding gap and meet OECD's estimate from the Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2021 that COVID-19 caused an overall decline in resources of USD 700 billion. Yet, an increase of USD 1 trillion will still be required to close the SDG annual funding gap in developing countries which was USD 2.5 trillion before the pandemic and could increase by 70 % post-COVID-19 to USD 4.3 trillion (EUR 3.7 trillion). The RRF is structured around six pillars: green transition; digital transformation smart, sustainable, inclusive growth; social and territorial cohesion; health, economic, social and institutional resilience; and policies for the next generation to supports the EU in its target of climate neutrality by 2050. To date, EU MS have allocated almost 40 % of their budgets to climate and over

26 % on the digital transition across the 22 RRPs approved to date. This exceeds the EU's agreed targets of 37 % for climate and 20 % for digital spending. The RRF Scoreboard displays EU MS RRP implementation progress, showing common indicators to report and evaluate RRF and the national plans.

Eurostat's Monitoring Report 2022 presents a statistical overview of trends for each SDG indicator. Despite the EU's leadership in many areas of SDGs implementation with significant or moderate progress in some SDGs, many of the biggest challenges are not addressed and some key issues show insufficient progress or movement away from the Sustainable Development objective, according to SDG Watch Europe. The ESDR 2021 found that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, no European country was on track to achieve all 17 SDGs by 2030. Furthermore, achieving a European lifestyle for a global population of 10 billion people in 2050 would require the natural resources of at least two planet Earths.

The EU has a number of legislative and policy tools in place to address these challenges, including Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, the Better Regulation Toolbox 2021 and initiatives such as the European Green Deal, the Climate Law and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. The main financial instruments are the Multiannual Financial Framework, NextGenerationEU and the RRF. However, the EU is still not on track and without an overarching strategy with key milestones and time-bound targets, there is no certainty as to whether these mechanisms are sufficient to deliver the kind of transformative change required to fully implement Agenda 2030. Despite the significant barriers to overcome and the scale and pace of action required, a systemic approach with enhanced vertical and horizontal cooperation and collaboration and key leverage points can act as a catalyst to radically shift in trajectory to ensure the EU is on track to meeting its commitments under the global Agenda.

3. Acceleration strategy & roadmap for SDGs implementation & realisation of Agenda 2030

Multi-level, multi-stakeholder and participatory governance mechanisms that better reflect the complexity of the challenges facing the EU are needed for the delivery of the SDGs. The pandemic has highlighted a number of ways that Centres of Government (CoGs) have mobilised in response to the crisis, demonstrating a high capacity for adapting and leveraging institutional governance mechanisms, policy and financial frameworks and working closely with the scientific community in the rapid rollout of evidence-based policy.

a. The Six Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

The Six Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals outlines a strategic and system-level approach for the organisation and implementation of the SDGs, recognising the deep, deliberate, long-term structural changes in resource use, infrastructure, institutions, technologies and social relations that must be undertaken in a short period of time to deliver on Agenda 2030. The Six Transformations provides a strategic framework to organise and direct policy initiatives to support the implementation of Agenda 2030 by recognising the inherently interconnected nature of the SDGs, PCSD and the European Green Deal. At the heart of the Six Transformations is the recognition that all 17 SDGs can be achieved through six major societal transformations, by grouping them. They are guided by the twin principles of leaving no one behind and ensuring circularity and decoupling.

Figure 1. – The Six Transformations

Source: SDSN The Six Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, 2019.

The Sankey diagram illustrates the contribution of each Transformation towards the 17 SDGs. The thicker the line, the greater the contribution of that Transformation to meeting the SDGs (Figure 2).
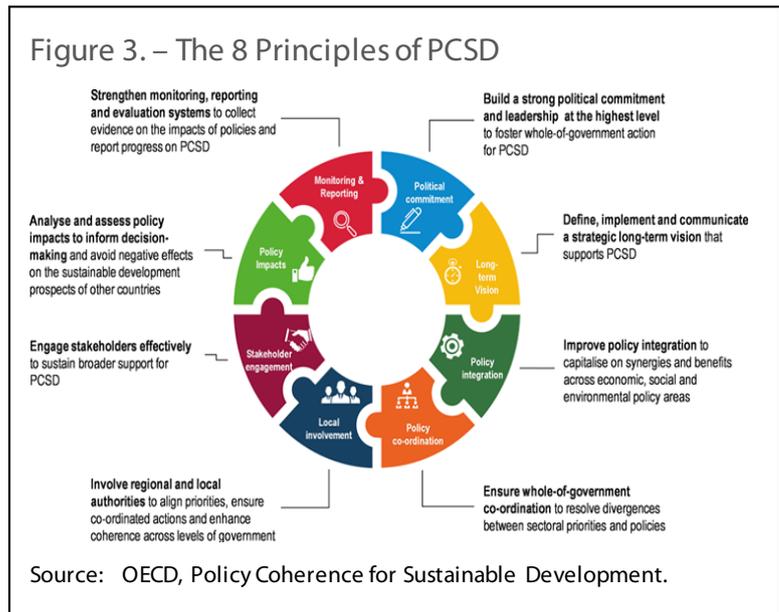
Recommendations for EU action to accelerate implementation of the Six Transformations

- Adopt the Six Transformations as the overarching strategy for Agenda 2030 in the EU.
- Focus on Transformations 1. (*Education, Gender & Inequality*) & 4. (*Sustainable Food, Land, Water & Oceans*), which offer the highest potential for leveraging SDGs acceleration across interventions in the context of EU strategies and the focus of this year's HLPF.
- Develop a corresponding roadmap for a Sustainable Europe 2030 with binding time-bound targets, milestones and comprehensive indicators to ensure accurate, disaggregated and transparent reporting in collaboration with MEPs, & EU Member States (MS), academia, NGOs and civil society.
- Ensure all policy process and financial frameworks facilitate the Six Transformations in the EU and globally.

Figure 2. – Sankey Diagram

Source: SDSN The Six Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, 2019.
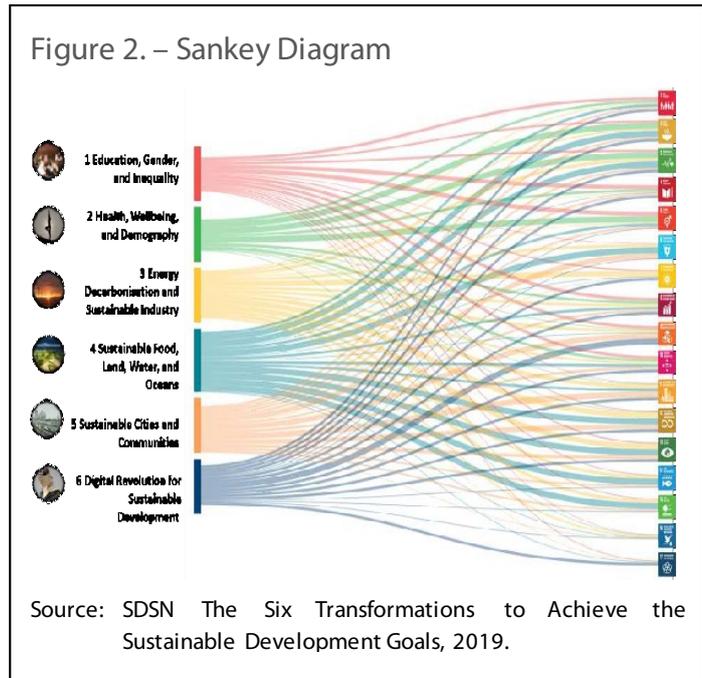
b. Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development to Deliver on SDGs

SDG 17 includes the target (17:14) on promoting Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD). PCSD is a framework for analysing the synergies and trade-offs between and across sustainable development policy throughout all stages of the policy making process and ensuring inclusive, participatory and transparent decision-making. In their 2019 Report 'Governance as an SDG Accelerator: Country Experiences and Tools' the OECD states that in order to have a truly integrated and indivisible approach to sustainable development, policy coherence can be a **cornerstone of the governance of sustainable development.** PCSD can support EU Member States in aligning their policies and ensuring inclusive,

Figure 3. – The 8 Principles of PCSD

Source: OECD, Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development.

participatory governance to enhance and accelerate the realisation of Agenda 2030. PCSD can support governance and improve the policy science interface across the environmental, economic and social dimensions of EU & Member State policies and strategies to maximise synergies, minimise trade-offs and negative spillover effects.

Recommendations for EU action to accelerate the implementation of PCSD

- Adopt PCSD as the pan-European holistic approach to policy-making to ensure policy coherence across the EU and align national and EU-wide policies with the Six Transformations across EU MS.
- Adopt PCSD at the highest level of governance, both in the EU and at MS level to ensure that the EU delivers on its commitment to PCSD by mainstreaming it across all its flagship initiatives, including the Green Deal. Political commitment to PCSD is vital and should be coordinated at the highest level of government, while Member States should establish inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms to foster synergies and manage trade-offs of both internal and external policies.
- MS should develop indicators for PCSD in coordination with key stakeholders. Common key PCSD indicators could feed into the European Semester reporting cycle and annual Eurostat Report as a mechanism to track MS progress and aligned EU-wide progress on PCSD.

c. Financing the SDGs

Ensure that the SDGs are embedded in all EU MS COVID-19 recovery plans and national budgets, highlighting the interlinkages between the SDGs, including both domestic and external dimensions. EU Financial frameworks, such as the EU Semester, must also be aligned with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

d. The European Voluntary Review (EUVR)

Recommendations for enhancing the delivery of a successful and inclusive EUVR

- The EUVR should be prepared ahead of the UN's SDG Summit in September 2023, with the full participation of all stakeholders to reflect the collective effort of the EU and its MS to SDG implementation
- Make the EUVR an annual event, so that it could serve as the participatory platform to engage all stakeholders in every country to coordinate EU-wide progess on the SDGs targets.
- The EUVR should address governance and institutional issues (e.g. Better Regulation and policy coherence for sustainable development), as well as monitoring and reporting issues.
- Subsequently, the data should then feed into the annual Eurostat process for inclusion in the Monitoring Report on the SDGs, which would ultimately provide specific, disaggregated data, for example on gender in relation to education and environment.
- Re-instate the Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) for the rest of the mandate as a mechanism to deliver a "whole-of-EU" approach and facilitate the EU MS in the promotion and delivery of the EUVR. To ensure effective participatory policy-making, the MSP should be institutionalized and remain in place and active until the end of 2030, beyond the four-year political cycle.
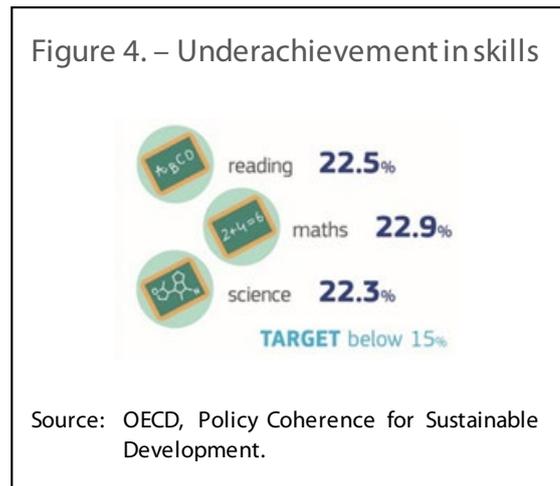
In-depth review of the SDGs

4. SDG 4 – Quality Education *(Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all)*

Across the European continent, challenges remain on the path to achieving SDG 4. Underinvestment in education is a persistent and growing problem and skills shortages risk impeding the EU's ability to grow, innovate and recover sustainably and achieving equality in education presents a major challenge. 15 countries have significant challenges and 6 countries experience major challenges. In the EU, there is an overall positive trend in adult learning, partly in basic and tertiary education, however, regional differences in tertiary education are more apparent. Trends in the EU have also been unfavourable for educational outcomes and skills. According to the Education and Training Monitor Report, the EU is not on track to achieve its targets in education, of which reading, maths and science are continuously deteriorating (insufficient skills of 22.3-22.9 % respectively of 15-year old pupils, compared to the target of 15 %). Eurostat

2022 reports that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a faster digital transition in terms of online-learning options, but remote learning did not reach all students equally, depending on socio-economic factors.

The proportion of low achieving pupils in reading, maths and science as measured in the OECD's PISA study increased between 2015 and 2018, moving the EU further away from its target of reducing these shares to 15 % by 2030. In addition, the share of adults with at least basic digital skills is stagnating, making the achievement of the target of raising this share to 80 % by 2030 unlikely. PISA is OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment that measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges and has been adopted by 95 participating countries).

Figure 4. – Underachievement in skills

reading **22.5**%

maths **22.9**%

science **22.3**%

TARGET below 15%

Source: OECD, Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development.

The pandemic has prompted countries worldwide to rethink and redesign education systems and it is imperative that equality in education is considered as the world adapts to online and distance learning. Key policies the Commission is pursuing to help young people fulfill their potential as agents of change include: The European Strategy on the Rights of the Child, European Child Guarantee, Conference on the Future of Europe and plans for a new Child and Teen Participation Platform. The New European Bauhaus initiative is a creative and interdisciplinary, cross-cultural initiative connecting education, the European Green Deal and environment with funding opportunities for projects inspired by art and culture, aesthetics, inclusiveness and sustainability. The Digital Education Action Plan and the Structured Dialogue on Digital Education and Skills are instrumental in accelerating the EU's ICT competencies and skills. The fundamental role of education in the transition towards a greener society is vital. The pandemic presents a vital opportunity to integrate the SDGs by equipping learners with knowledge-sharing opportunities, attitudes and skills to live within planetary boundaries, to practice and act upon environmental sustainability, climate change, biodiversity loss and gender equality. A proposal for a European Council Recommendation on Education for Environmental Sustainability, supported by the European Commission Staff Working Document and a new European competence framework on sustainability.

Recommendations for EU action to accelerate EU and global implementation of SDG 4

- Establish a task force to address the issues of Education, Gender Equality using the Six Transformations 1. (*Education, Gender & Inequality*).
- Focus on cross-cutting socio-economic policy areas to increase wellbeing and academic performance, post- COVID-19.
- Actively promote an enhanced uptake of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects, in particular, for girls.
- Align European green curricula with the European Green Deal, and the European Competence Framework, the European Skills Agenda and the Youth Guarantee to promote civic engagement in Nature and environmental activities and increase employability in the green economy.
- Mobilise EU and national EU funds for investment in infrastructure, training, tools and resources to increase resilience and preparedness of education and training for the green transition.
- Establish learning for environmental sustainability as a priority area in education and training policies and programmes to support and enable the sector to contribute to the green transition.
- Address inequitable access between rural and urban populations to digital connectivity through the Digital Education Access Plan.

5. SDG 5 – Gender Equality *(Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls)*

Gender equality is a key driver to delivering on the SDGs and underpins the progress of all SDGs. The EU policies focusing on gender include: 2022 Report on Gender Equality, Istanbul Convention, EU Strategy on Victim's Rights, EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Strategic framework for European cooperation in Education & Training, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, Eurostat 2022 SDGs Monitoring Report and the Gender Action Plan III.

For all categories, a positive trend or moderate increase can be noted, however the efforts are not on track to achieve the SDG 5 by 2030. In Europe, 17 countries have significant challenges with the targets, for three countries major challenges remain, and none have achieved the SDG targets. The attainment rate and performance in tertiary education was higher for women (11 % higher than for men in 2021). However, the employment gap currently stands at 10.8 % in favour of men in 2021. The difference can be clearly observed in the higher rate of women working part-time between the age of 20-64, being at 28.3 % in the same year. This additional factors of inequalities in career progression, access to work and stigmas, leaves a gender pay gap of 13 % in the EU in 2022.

Violence against women is another area that has been exacerbated by COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, 736 million women (15 and older) were sexually and or physically assaulted, of which 243 million by partners. Women also experienced an increased workload in childcare, home schooling and care work during the pandemic. Unpaid care work is mostly performed by women, who spent 31 % more time than men on unpaid care and domestic work tasks during the pandemic, which impacts mental health. Short-term closures of schools required parents (in most cases women), to take over educational responsibilities, showcasing another overlap with SDG 4.

Globally, the 2021 UN Women report highlights that the pandemic has reversed progress in increasing the rights and opportunities of women. The number of employed women declined by 54 million in 2020 and 45 million women left the labour market altogether. In 2020, over 100 million women aged 25-54, with small children at home have been out of the workforce globally. 736 million woman and girls aged 15 years or older have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetimes. By 2030, up to 2 million cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) are projected due to COVID-19-related service disruptions. Discriminatory laws and legal gaps also continue to prevent women from accessing their human rights. Data collected in 95 countries identified that 50 % lack quotas for women in national parliaments, 63 % lack rape laws based on the principle of consent, 50 of the 95 countries surveyed continue to restrict women from working in certain jobs or industries. Only 19 % of countries and areas with data have a comprehensive system to track how budgets respond to gender priorities, therefore, limiting the allocation of public resources for implementation of laws and policies. Women hold one in four parliamentary seats, globally and have 36 % of elected seats in local deliberative agencies. Efforts must be strengthened to ensure laws, policies, budgets and institutions advance gender equality.

Recommendations for EU action to accelerate EU and global implementation of SDG 5

- Gender mainstreaming in public policy and budget processes must continue to be a top priority.
- Develop a comprehensive framework to effectively combat violence against women to support the EU directive on combating violence against women & domestic violence, which is aligned with the Istanbul Convention.
- Halve the gender employment gap by 2030 through the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.
- Increase access to formal early childhood education and childcare in order to enable women to participate fully in employment.
- Ensure that the proposal for the EU's Women on Boards Directive becomes EU law.
- Develop a mechanism to track gender expenditure at EU Member State level.

6. SDG 14 – Life Below Water *(Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development)*

The health of marine and coastal ecosystems is vital for Europe's social and economic wellbeing, providing food, employment, energy and health benefits for millions of people. Monitoring SDG 14 in an EU context looks into trends in the areas of ocean health, marine conservation and sustainable fisheries.

The Eurostat SDG 2022 report shows that improved data availability from the sector now allows an assessment of trends in most SDG 14 indicators for Europe's seas, demonstrating that marine conservation efforts have increased and fishing activities in EU waters appear to have become somewhat more sustainable (Article 17 of the CFP in line with SDG 14 target 14.9 – small scale fisheries). Overall, however, trends in ocean health are still very challenging as Europe's marine ecosystem is continuously under threat from multiple sources – organic and chemical pollutants from hazardous substances, illegal fishing practices, depletion of fish stocks, excessive nutrients from the agricultural use of phosphorous and nitrogen, plastics, overfishing, eutrophication, waste, sewage, noise and air pollution, plastic waste and microplastics.

Oceans are the world's largest active carbon sink and marine ecosystems also have a particularly high potential to capture and store carbon, and to prevent and reduce the impact of climate-induced disasters. The EU has a wide range of policies to protect, conserve and restore the four marine regions that EU Member States share: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the North-East Atlantic Ocean. These include the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of this sector, The Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Habitats Directive, Birds Directive, Directive on Single Use Plastics, EU Biodiversity Strategy, Zero Pollution Action Plan for Air, Water and Soil, EU International Ocean Governance Forum, International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) and the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change. Many States have ratified or acceded to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (168 parties) and its implementing agreements (151 parties for the 1994 Part XI Agreement and 91 parties for the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement). Although EU Member States have implemented these instruments through legal, policy and institutional frameworks, progress is slow – particularly in least-developed countries. Globally, due to initial lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries experienced a 40 % to 80 % decline in fish production, with small-scale fishing communities hardest hit. The pandemic also led to a dramatic reduction in tourism, causing substantial income losses for coastal and island communities.

Safeguarding Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) through the establishment of protected areas or other effective area-based conservation is an essential contribution towards SDGs 14. and 15. The designation of a new network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) will help the EU achieve its marine biodiversity commitments and ensure that 30 % of EU marine space is protected by 2030. Two sites in Antarctic Southern Ocean (3 million km2 in size), constitute the world's largest Marine Protected Area, which will make a significant contribution to the global dimension of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. In the context of 'building back better', a good example is Spain's Medes Islands Marine Reserve, which saw fish biomass (the mass of living biological organisms in a given area or ecosystem) recover by **500 % in comparison to nearby unprotected areas**.

A report from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) on Gender in Maritime Affairs and Fisheries notes that the maritime industry is predominantly a male-dominated activity. Following on from its 2014 Resolution on specific actions in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) for developing the role of women, EUP adopted a resolution 'Fishers for the Future' (September 2021). The resolution acknowledges that women still lack sufficient economic and social recognition for their role in the industry. The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) for 2021-2027 enables EU countries to finance measures that support women in the seafood sector. In May 2022, the European Commission launched the "Women in the Blue Economy" funding call to increase the participation of women in the Blue Economy, in line with the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendations for EU action to accelerate EU and global implementation of SDG 14

- Adopt the Six Transformations and PCSD to implement an integrated ecosystem-based approach for sustainable management across all sectors of the Blue Economy.
- Include the Blue Economy in the creation and evaluation of national Recovery and Resilience Plans funded by NextGenerationEU.
- Establish an outright moratorium on the use of bottom-trawling including in all marine-protected areas (MPAs), in order to support the ecological balance of fish stocks.
- EMFAF should provide effective support for the transition to more selective and less damaging fishing techniques for EU fishing fleets.
- Support an international moratorium on deep seabed mining.
- Measures should be developed to step up efforts to improve global fisheries governance, through mechanisms such as the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), at both EU and Member States levels.
- Ensure the integration of climate adaptation and mitigation goals in EU Sustainable fisheries partnership agreements and in Regional fisheries management organisations decision-making processes.
- Strengthen collaboration and coordinate actions with ongoing multilateral fora, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other related international and multilateral processes, to promote the protection, conservation, sustainable management and restoration of marine and freshwater biodiversity, while contributing to other SDGs.
- Ensure that all fisheries and aquaculture products consumed in the EU are produced through sustainable systems in the food chain and are aligned with the objectives of the Green Deal.

7. SDG 15 – Life on Land *(Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss)*

Europe faces its greatest SDG challenges in the areas of environment, sustainable food and agriculture, climate and biodiversity and gender equality. The link between the European Green Deal, and the SDGs highlighted in the 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP), forms the basis for achieving the environment and climate-related objectives defined under the UN 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

The EU has a number of policies and initiatives in place to support the delivery of SDG 15. Targets, including European Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy, EU Forest Strategy, Water Framework Directive, Soil Strategy for 2030, EU Habitats Directive, Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Pollinators Initiative, EU Birds Directive, the EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil', the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), EU Nitrates Directive and EU Drinking Water Directive.

However, these interdependent policy areas are handled independent of one another, by separate Directorate Generals (DGs) in the Commission and committees in Parliament. A strategy for effective food system governance and a "whole-of-EU" approach for policy coherence across environment, agriculture, the marine, health, trade, development cooperation, gender, education, research and innovation can maximise synergies and minimise trade-offs between these areas. Food systems are interconnected webs of processes, activities, and drivers that, if not carefully and comprehensively managed, can lead to negative spillovers both geographically or in the future.

In 2021, the EU's Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) called for urgent reform of food systems to drive COVID-19 recovery and system-based approaches and coherent policies for governing food systems overall. Other advocates for sustainable food system reform include the cross-party MEPs Sustainable Food Systems Group, the EESC, the European Committee of the Regions that adopted an opinion 'Towards a Sustainable EU Food Policy', the Commission's Joint Research Centre that developed a Sustainability Food Compass and the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the SDGs, which called for a cross-sectoral taskforce to develop a Common Food Systems Policy to address the lack of gender dimensions and the 'silo effect' regarding the CAP. The 2019 IPES-Food report Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union maps out a new governance architecture for food systems in line with the 2030 Agenda and a clear vision of the required policy reform to deliver fair, equal, sustainable food systems, where agro-ecological principles are applied to optimize interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment. Agroecology supports the

Figure 5. – Realigning policy tools across multiple sectors under a common food policy

Source: IPES 2019 report Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union.

achievement of multiple targets within each of the SDGs and presents a highly effective response to guide the sustainable transformation of our food systems and reconcile the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability.

Recommendations for EU action to accelerate EU and global implementation of SDG 15

Recognising the inseparable interlinkages and synergies between the SDGs, The Six Transformations and PCSD should be adopted at the highest level of governance at both EU Member State and EU levels as the primary mechanism for the realization of SDG 15 through the CAP and EU Green Deal policy development, to foster synergies, manage trade-offs and prevent spillovers across all initiatives and policy processes under the European Green Deal.

- Ensure the CAP is fully aligned with the EU Green Deal, fully addresses gender, providing adequate support for women farmers and undocumented workers.
- Ensure that adequate human, technical and financial resources are made available for women agroecological and organic farmers.
- Strengthen food security and sustainable rural livelihoods by ensuring fair prices for farmers.
- Ensure that both agroecological and organic farming practices and gender equality goals are mainstreamed across the relevant departments and ministries at Member State level.
- To implement the SDGs, the European Commission needs a "whole-of-Commission/whole-of-society" work programme approach that covers the EU Green Deal, PCSD and the Six Transformations, which should be embedded in the Recovery and Resilience Plans.
- Activate a harmonised and SDG-aligned monitoring framework for the Green Deal using two types of indicators: (a) indicators measuring the distance to targets and (b) indicators monitoring means of implementation. Indicator development must be an inclusive, participatory and transparent process, in which civil society and the scientific community play an active role to ensure indicators are addressing the EU's key sustainability challenges.
- Establish EU Green Deal 'clusters' and inter-departmental working groups for the 'Six Transformations' to achieve Agenda 2030.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals *(Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development)*

The EU is uniquely placed to accelerate progress on SDG 17. However, to achieve the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda requires a strong level of participatory engagement and a genuine political reset. Collaboration with civil society organisations and EU citizens at large is a highly relevant factor in the delivery of the SDGs, which was made possible in the past by the Multi-Stakeholder Platform for the SDGs at the institutional level at the Commission. However, in 2019, the mandate was not renewed and consequently, this resulted in the marginalisation of civil society. However, the SDGs Alliance MEPs for Agenda 2030 in its draft report on the implementation of the SDGs, calls for the Commission to adopt an new, high-level EU SDG implementation strategy, preceded by a broad public consultation process and an annual review of the Eurostat SDG indicator set with the systematic participation of civil society organisations. On March 3, 2021, the European Committee of the Regions launched its network of regional hubs comprising 280 regions and 80,000 regional and local authorities that monitor the implementation of EU policies on the ground and make sure the voices of hundreds of regional and local stakeholders are considered when EU policies are evaluated. This presents a key opportunity to extensively promote PCSD and the SDGs and a Common Food Policy for Europe, within the context of the Resilience and Recovery Plans and the European Green Deal.

Recommendations for EU action to accelerate EU and global implementation of SDG 17

- Strengthen coordination between EU institutions & EU MS to enhance participatory governance.
- Mandate Member States to report on the SDG indicator 17.14.1 as part of their national reporting towards Eurostat, to be included in the annual Sustainable Development Report. This could be complemented by EU-funded civil society shadow reports in Member States, focusing on the (negative) impacts of domestic policies and practices on the Global South. The EU and Member States should also consider developing more evidence-based indicators, like the consumption-based spillover indicator included in the Eurostat report.
- Reinstate MSP for participatory governance & policy-making initiatives.
- Promote the mainstreaming of SDGs across CORs & regional hubs.
- Enhance coordination between EU institutions and EU Member States.
- Strengthen CSOs and global partnerships by providing greater opportunities for participation and governance in terms of policy-making processes.
- Utilise PCSD to address EU spillovers & tradeoffs to leverage EU Green Deal as a diplomacy tool.
- Advocate for PCSD at national, local, regional and global levels & institutionalise by providing support and capacity-building for countries to fully utilise the PCSD framework and the Better Regulation Toolbox.

Conclusion

This halfway point in the political cycle is a pivotal moment for the EU. In order to deliver on both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement Climate targets, gender and education must be mainstreamed through SDG 14 and 15 as we will not reach climate targets without the full participation of women and youth. The responsibility now lies with EU MS in the European Council and MEPS to initiate swift and bold action with full participation and collaboration of civil society to initiate these recommendations. The tools are fully available and now, it is time to deliver our collective vision for a sustainable future.