

The UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

10-19 July 2023, New York

KEY FINDINGS

Midway of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2023 marks a pivotal point in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The impact of the multiple crises of the past years, as well as the interlinkages and synergies of the SDGs present both challenges and opportunities for a systemic approach towards our common objectives. For the global community not to lose the progress in this global decade of action, there is a need for the EU to take the lead, both in domestic policies and international cooperation. Conclusions point to the EU's progress on social-economic SDGs and notes insufficient progress on environmental objectives and global partnerships. Thus, there is a strong need for policy coherence, financing frameworks and political will to ensure the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the objectives set out in the Paris Climate Agreement.

The recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is at the centre of the discussions. The SDGs under in-depth review, namely SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 9, SDG 11 and SDG 17, are affected by both the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which have resulted in incalculable setbacks to the implementation of Agenda 2030. The cost-of-living crisis and the energy crisis underline the importance of the EU's Recovery and Resilience Plans and leadership in the implementation of the SDGs, particularly on environmental issues – from water scarcity and nutrient pollution, over a slow decarbonization of the transport sector, to meeting renewable energy demands. Accelerating the recovery from the pandemic and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the EU needs to act with a sense of urgency, cooperation, strong science-policy interface as well as public awareness.

HLPF 2023 – background context and main issues

The purpose of this briefing is to provide support to the European Parliament delegation prior to the 11th session of the [United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) between Monday, 10 July and Wednesday, 19 July 2023 at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters, New York, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ The HLPF will support the mid-term review of the implementation of the SDGs. This briefing provides an overview of the progress made on the implementation by the EU, as well as key issues at stake in the meeting.

The SDGs under in-depth are [SDG 6 \(Clean Water and Sanitation\)](#), [SDG 7 \(Affordable and Clean Energy\)](#), [SDG 9 \(Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure\)](#), [SDG 11 \(Sustainable Cities and Communities\)](#) and [SDG 17 \(Partnerships\)](#).² The SDGs are intertwined with the aims of the European Green Deal, the Circular



Economy Action Plan, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Water Framework Directive, etc., as well as the external dimensions of EU policies and their impacts on its partners.

The HLPF is the main UN platform on sustainable development and holds a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs at the global level. It was mandated in 2012 as a result of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The Future We Want". 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 2023 has been prepared through meetings of the UN Regional Commissions under the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in March-April 2023. The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) convened from 29-30 March 2023 in Geneva to assess progress, best practices and policy solutions on how to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in line with regional priorities. Furthermore, UNECE Member States met for the [70th session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe](#) on 18-19 April 2023 under the main theme of Digital and Green Transformations for Sustainable Development.³ In preparation, expert meetings on each SDG under review were convened by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) from March – May, with reviews also taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [HLPF 2023 programme](#) and the high-level segment of the ECOSOC includes the **three-day ministerial segment of the Forum** from Monday, 17 July – Wednesday, 19 July.⁴ The high-level segment of ECOSOC will conclude with a final day on Thursday, 20 July 2023. The theme for HLPF 2023 is **'Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels**. The meeting will focus on finding inclusive and effective measures for accelerating the recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to get back on track for achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are state-led reports that provide a platform for partnerships. VNRs allow for the sharing of experiences and lessons learned. At the HLPF 2023, [39 countries will present their VNRs](#) (in total 40 presenters with the EU), with 2 countries presenting for the first time, 37 for the second, and 1 for the third time.⁵ For the first time, the EU will be presenting its **first collective EU-wide VNR**. The EU VR was prepared by the European Commission, without involvement of the European Parliament. A full presentation of the EU VR will first take place at the HLPF. The reviews will take place from 14-19 July 2023.

The 2030 Agenda is the strategic framework consisting of five distinct components (Planet, People, Partnerships, Peace & Prosperity) while the SDGs outline 17 goals. 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 process will culminate with the SDG Summit 2023 taking place from 19-20 September 2023 in New York, as the second of its kind since the adoption of the 2030 agenda and is expected to produce a negotiated political declaration. It is a vital occasion for the EU to restate its strong commitments to the SDGs.

1. Key topics & thematic discussions

The HLPF will provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on how to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda during this Decade of Action and Delivery. The in-depth SDG reviews will include ways to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic across all SDGs, the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs as well as the impact of other crises on the SDGs implementation. After the opening session, a **townhall meeting on 'overcoming the crises, driving transformation for the SDGs, and leaving no one behind'** will take place. The meeting will discuss the status of SDG implementation at the half-way mark, whether the responses to the pandemic and other crises

are not leaving anyone behind and helping to realise the 2030 agenda, the required transformations to do make this happen and the lessons learned from these crises.

The **in-depth reviews of the selected SDGs** take place from 10 to 13 July 2023. The crisis response techniques will be touched upon in the **thematic sessions**, exploring the subnational and local level in 'transforming from the ground up', as well as a session of resilience building of small island developing states and another 'towards inclusive transformation' with non-state actors.

The theme of HLPF 2023 is similar to last year, the pandemic, focusing on building back better and regarding potential trade-offs and not leaving anyone behind. One year on, the global community is experiencing several crises at once. While last year still involved measures and creating a recovery response, at this point the delegations can discuss how effective the recovery measures were, whether they supported or hindered the achievement of the SDGs and what lessons were learned. Furthermore, the geopolitical context worsened, impacting specifically SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 7 and SDG 16. Therefore, the added dimension of the energy crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, and overall inflationary pressures are adding to the need to tailored recovery measures, as well as monitoring abilities. If fitting, the HLPF could discuss the issue of data availability and accuracy, which suffered during the pandemic, and hindered the monitoring process. Along with building up financial commitment and capacities, the topic of representative data collection is vital to making informed decisions and directing funds and efforts into the right direction. For the EU, this includes refining indicators used to grasp all progress towards the SDGs, specifically those related to vulnerable groups of the population.⁶

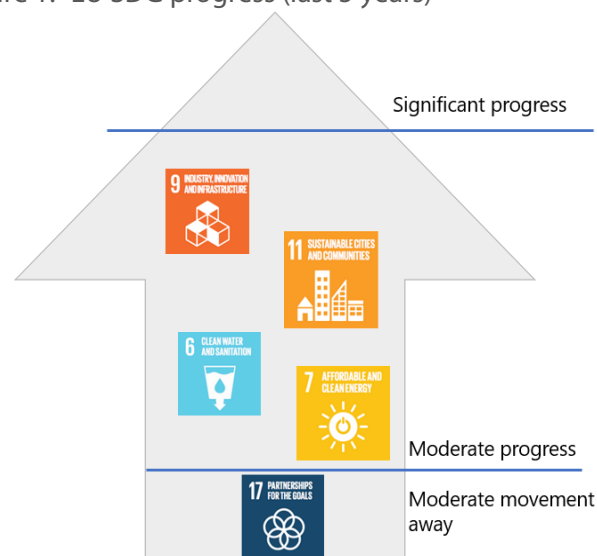
2. The EU's progress on delivering the SDGs

a. Monitoring progress

The [Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022](#) (ESDR) reiterates that Europe's greatest SDG challenges remain with the environmental goals, in the areas of sustainable food systems, responsible consumption and production, climate and biodiversity, and industry and innovation.⁷ Europe exhibits inequalities within countries (access and quality of services and opportunities), differences in SDG performance across European regions, as well as negative international spill overs (trade and financial flows). At the half-way mark, 2/3 of the SDG targets were achieved or are on track to being achieved in the EU. The report states that stagnation or even reversal of progress on socio-economic goals are the drivers of the EU's slow progress since 2019. The [Eurostat Monitoring Report 2023](#) presents statistical overview of trends for each SDG indicator.⁸ The findings are confirmed, whereby the progress towards socio-economic goals have progressed strongly, however the environmental objectives (SDG 13, SDG 15) as well as global partnerships (SDG 17) show insufficient progress.

While there seemed to be signs for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic on some indicators in 2021, the progress have been hindered by the war in Ukraine. In addition to the ESDR, an [in-depth analysis by the European Parliament](#) calls for immediate transformation in political commitment, SDG financing, citizens' empowerment and green recovery as, even though the EU should be a global leader on the SDGs, internal

Figure 1.- EU SDG progress (last 5 years)



Source: adapted from [Eurostat Monitoring Report 2023](#)

political commitment is lacking.⁶ In its 2020 Work Programme, the European Commission committed to aligning all work programmes with the 2030 Agenda.

Despite the initial ambition and intention of mainstreaming the SDGs across EU policymaking, politically agreed targets for SDG indicators are still missing, and civil society organisations pointed towards the failure to include the social and gender dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. Key stakeholder networks and social and environmental NGOs, such as the SDG Alliance = MEPs for Agenda 2030, Concord and SDG Watch Europe, 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. The latter has also pointed to the importance of the EU's [Voluntary Review as stepping stone](#) to an overarching EU Strategy with an action plan and adequate financing.

b. EU legislative and political responses

The EU uses a number of legislative tools to address these challenges. The new policy targets that will be used to guide progress towards the SDGs, specifically SDG 11 and SDG 12, include the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Road safety policy framework, the Fit for 55 Strategy to reach the 2030 climate targets in line with the Climate Law, and the RePower EU Plan to advance renewable energy and energy efficiency to reduce the EU's dependence on fossil fuels from Russia in the face of the war against Ukraine. Other key tools are the European Green Deal as overarching guideline, Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, the Better Regulation Toolbox 2021, and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. The commitment to integrate the SDGs into the European Semester was made in the EU President Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines.

The importance of achieving the SDGs for the outcomes of the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement was emphasised again in a report prepared by the [DEVE and ENVI committees](#), adopted on 23 May 2023.⁹ The report recognises the EU's slow progress in achieving the SDGs, opportunities for cooperation as well as financing gaps. EU leadership remains of importance for global efforts; therefore the Commission should present a concrete action plan and guide the Member States in avoiding negative spill-overs to the Global South.

c. Financing the SDGs

As part of the HLPF, financing crisis responses and investing in the SDGs will be discussed on Monday, 10 July 2023. How the global community will finance the transition necessary to achieve the SDGs remains a key challenge. The [financing gap](#) has widened from \$2.5 trillion to over \$4 trillion per year.¹⁰ A large number of low-and middle-income countries globally are in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress, which was worsened with the COVID-19 crisis. The [2023 Financing for Sustainable Development Report](#) reiterates that delaying investment in long-term sustainable transformation measures is not an option, and calls for scaling up development cooperation, fast-track national sustainable industry policies, and align the financial system with the SDGs.¹¹ The Bridgetown Initiative, aiming to create resources for developing countries on climate change mitigation and adaptation, was unveiled at COP27. The financial system is crisis-prone and short sighted, as expressed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. In April this year, a meeting for the [Bridgetown Initiative 2.0](#) produced six key action areas, including transformation to inclusive and equitable international financial institutions, as well as mobilisation of \$1.5 trillion per year of private sector investment.¹²

The need for private sector financing is stated in the European Parliament report on the delivery of the SDGs, calling for a proposal to include a [social taxonomy](#) in the EU Taxonomy¹³ In the EU, the main public financing tools are the Multiannual Financial Framework, NextGenerationEU and the Recovery & Resilience Facility (RRF). The RRF is the key tool for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery in the EU Member States. The RRF Scoreboard displays EU Member States' implementation progress of their recovery and resilience plans, showing common indicators to report and evaluate RRF and the national plans. The pandemic has added

financial burden, in particular for poorer countries with already limited financial and technological resources and shifted global and EU priorities.

The upcoming events where financing of the SDG will be a topic of discussion are the G20 Leaders' Summit, the SDG Summit, and High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development during the UN General Assembly high-level week in September, as well as the annual meetings of the IMF/World Bank in October and COP28 in November 2023.

In-depth review of the SDGs

1. SDG 6 – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The EU's progress on SDG 6 is described as moderate, and remains underpinned with both sustainable and unsustainable developments, with the most pressing issue being water quality and scarcity. The SDG aims to improve the access to safe drinking water, water quality and sanitation, but resource management, how we can increase water efficiency and protect ecosystems. In March of this year, these topics were the focus of the UN 2023 Water Conference convened by the UN General Assembly In New York. The first UN conference dedicated to water since 1977 produced a final document, the Water Action Agenda, summarising around 700 voluntary commitments. In preparation, the [EU had set a list of 33 commitments](#) to present at the conference.¹⁴ Data collection and monitoring efforts should also be supported, since 5 out of 11 target indicators remain without reported quantified information on their progress, according to the [UN World Water Report](#).¹⁵ The commitments, if implemented, can lead to a more integrated policy approach within the EU, and accelerate partnerships globally.

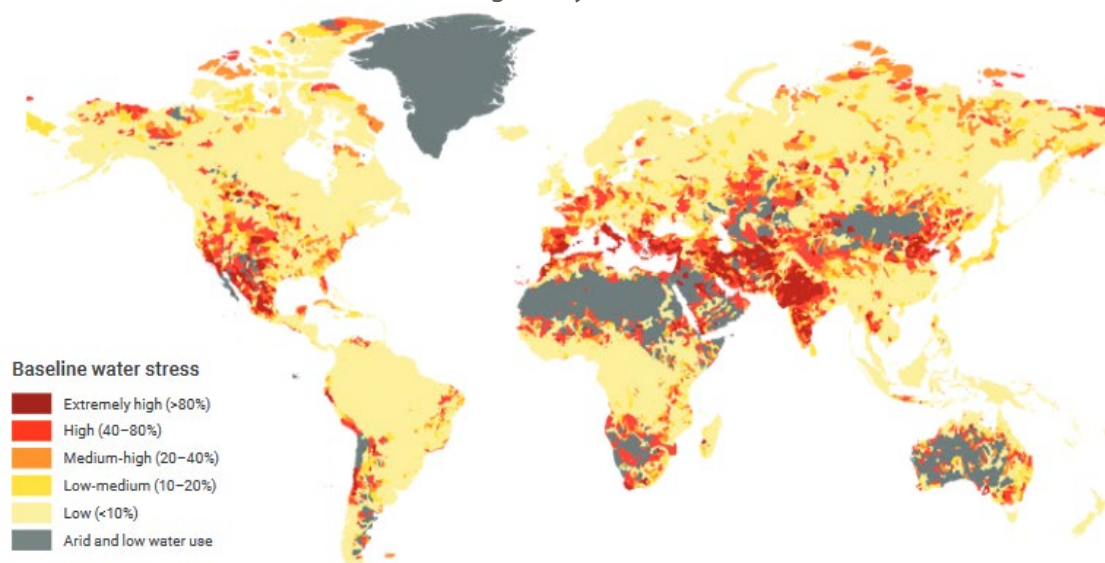
During a health crisis, the access to sanitation, especially hand washing facilities, is essential to contain infectious diseases. Worldwide, about 1 out of 4 people are not able to [wash their hands with soap and water](#) in their house.¹⁶ The share of the population in the EU that does not have [access to sanitation facilities](#) (bath, shower, indoor flushing toilet), is low at 1.5% in 2020 (fell from 2.2% in 2015).¹⁷ The variability is high across Member States and is linked to poverty rates. A high lack of basic sanitation among the population is registered in Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Latvia. In Romania, 21.2 % of the population did not have access to basic sanitary facilities in 2020.

The quality of water for consumption and in waterways in the EU has made improvements connected to improved wastewater collection and treatment in Europe over the last decades. While improvements has been made, [organic pollution by nutrients](#) remains a source of pressure on aquatic environments and groundwater, stemming predominantly from fertiliser use and animal waste.¹⁸ While this type of pollution has fallen since the 1990s, it still contributes to 28% of [EU surface water bodies](#) not being able to achieve good water quality.⁸ Nitrates also affect the EU's ground water, contributing to 18% of groundwater bodies by area across 24 Member States to be in poor status.

The EU faces dramatic challenges in the areas of water stress and efficient use. Water stress in Europe has increased in [frequency and area affected](#) in the past decades.¹⁹ Water stress is problematic for 30% of the total EU population and in around 20% of the European territory (2021), and is more prevalent in densely populated areas. According to the UN World Water Development Report, physical water stress is leading to endemic water scarcity. The availability of water per capita is an important factor to consider, and distinction must be made whether the issue is physical scarcity of water (quantity and quality to meet human needs) or economic scarcity (infrastructure). The resulting scarcity [affects at least 11% of Europe's population](#), particularly in the southern European Member States.²⁰

A lack of water can have effects on the sector of energy (SDG7). Water scarcity, particularly in rivers, affected the availability of cooling water for nuclear power plants in France, and hydroelectric power plants, which needed to be restricted in their activity in Portugal in 2022.

Figure 2. – Annual baseline of water stress (globally)



Source: [UN World Water Development Report 2023](#)

Recommendations for EU action on the domestic and global achievement of SDG6

- Enforce the ecological targets of EU water policies on the issue of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution in European river basins and the resulting pressures on fresh and coastal waters.
- Create a systemic EU-wide approach to assessing both physical and economic water scarcity.
- Commission a wide-reaching and systemic analysis of drivers for water stress, pressures and impacts, connecting to the water-energy-food nexus.

2. SDG 7 – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

The SDG for energy is set with the indicators of access to energy services, increasing the share of renewable energy as well as improving energy efficiency. Achieving SDG 7 is important to achieve global climate mitigation goals, and directly relates to SDG 1 and SDG 5. The most vulnerable are disadvantaged globally in energy access, and progress was weakened or reversed due to the ongoing crises, particularly the war on Ukraine and the climate crisis.

The ESDR notes that the EU has progressed on these matters, more so for the long-term trend than short-term. The EU monitoring data of SDG 7 does not yet take the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine into account, making a statistical assessment of the impact on the affordability of energy complex. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sudden change in business-as-usual through [measures and restrictions of daily life](#), and thereby a decrease in energy consumption of around 8% from 2019-2020.²¹ Meeting the EU's 2020 target was likely influenced by the consumption patterns resulting from the pandemic. This shift in energy consumption increased the share of renewable energy in the gross final energy consumption during these years but is expected to be partly reversed. Similarly for [energy efficiency](#), Eurostat projects a positive short and long-term trend for energy productivity, meaning the measure of GDP per unit of energy input (Euro per kilogram of oil equivalent, kgoe), has constantly increased from EUR 6.3 per kgoe in 2005 to EUR 8.5 per

kgoe in 2021⁸. The EU revised the Energy Efficiency Directive to reduce final energy consumption by 11.7% in 2030.

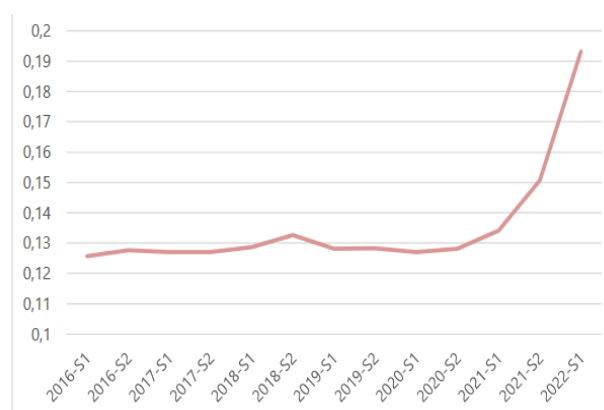
At the Petersberg Climate Dialogue in Berlin in May 2023, the EU pushed for a global target for renewable energy rollout, which gained support from international climate officials in preparation for COP28. At the same time, international public finance supporting clean energy in developing countries has decreased over the last years. For the EU, increasing the share of renewable energy will provide a sustainable energy source and decrease its dependency on imports of fossil fuels. The Renewable Energy Directive is aiming at renewable energy making up 42.5% of gross final energy consumption by 2030. In 2021, the share of renewables amounted to 21.8%, with electricity as the highest share, followed by heating and cooling, and lastly transport.²² The share in overall consumption is projected to grow, thanks to investment cost reductions, supply chain improvements, technology efficiency as well as support schemes. As measured by the International Energy Agency (IEA), the [cost of renewable energy](#) has fallen to a point where it is comparable to fossil fuels.²³

Nevertheless, fossil fuels continue to cover over 50% of the [EU's energy demand](#). 41.9% of the EU's electricity production is linked to combustible fuels, including natural gas.²⁴ These raw materials are largely acquired through imports (55.6% of gross available energy (GAE) in 2021).⁸ The invasion of Ukraine has led to a setback for SDG 7 overall, including compromising the transition to renewable energy through the increase of metal and gas prices. The latter were due to the deliberate reduction of [gas supplies](#) by Russia via pipelines, and the expensive journey of acquiring gas by other means and building terminals, including LNG imports.²⁵ The EU reacted with legislative initiatives including REPowerEU to end fossil fuel dependence from Russia, as well as [Member State measures](#) amounting to EUR 657 billion since September 2021.²⁶

Consequently, the access to energy, especially affordable energy, was impeded. In 2021, energy prices in Europe soared, which can be traced back to the shortened gas supply and a mismatch between supply and demand after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted.

The ESDR notes that challenges remain on this indicator but that it is on track to achievement. However, as it is the case in the Eurostat report 2023, the data does not take into account the immense energy price increases of 2022-2023. The percentage of the share of the [population not being able to adequately warm their house](#) in relation to poverty status decreased from 7.5% in 2020 to 6.9% in 2021.²⁷ In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, around a fifth of the EU population below the poverty threshold suffered from [energy poverty](#).²⁸ Inflationary pressures drove a cost-of-living crisis, strongly affecting those with a lower income as well as inequalities related to the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap (SDG 1 and 5).²⁹

Figure 3. – Electrical prices for household consumers in kWh (EUR)



Source: Eurostat in IEEP (2023).

Recommendations for EU action on the domestic and global achievement of SDG 7

- Establish economic incentives for investing further in renewable energy capacities and energy efficiency, in order to be able to continue the path towards independence energy imports.
- Follow-up on global pledge on renewable energy from the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, in preparation for COP28 in Dubai, November 2023.

- Acting on measures against energy poverty, including support in the form of direct transfers to most vulnerable groups to take precedence over broad support measures operated through tax reductions. National particularities must be accounted for in policy measures (income, gender, age, and location of the targeted groups).

3. SDG 9 – Building resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

After the pandemic brought industrial activity to a standstill, [global manufacturing production](#) has mostly recovered with a 7.2% increase in 2021.³⁰ High-technology industries with diversified sectors and strong infrastructure have shown more resilience in the crisis and a better standing in the recovery. Nevertheless, [the pandemic impacted SMEs](#) in the EU resulting in 1.4 million jobs being lost, and 60% of SMEs reporting a decline in turnover in 2020.³¹ A key component to recovery is Research and development (R&D) and innovation that drive competitiveness, digitalization, low-emission mobility and infrastructure that withstand climatic changes. According to the Eurostat monitoring report 2023, the EU made significant progress towards achieving SDG 9, however insufficient advancement is seen in sustainable mobility and transport.

Sustainable infrastructure is key for a competitive economy. The [decarbonisation of the sector](#) has proven more challenging and slower than others in the EU.³² The Sustainable and Smart Mobility plans to move passenger and freight transport to rail and waterborne options, still road transport with fossil fuel engines dominates. In 2021, the EU's share of freight transport on rail and inland waterways accounted for 22.7%.⁸ The [passenger transport by car](#) dominates with 82.9%, while transport by rail only accounts for 7.8%.³³ The use of public transport dropped during the pandemic, with a decline of use of buses and trains for transport from 17.5% in 2019 to 12.8% in 2020.⁸

Connectivity to the internet with fibre connections or other networks is now accessible to 70.2 % of households in 2021, compared to 25.2% in 2016. Still, more can be done to level the [gaps to internet access](#) between urban and rural areas.³⁴

Innovation for sustainable and resilient economies and societies is dependent on [investment and progress in R&D](#), measured by spending, personnel, patent applications and tertiary educational attainment, whereby the EU showed overall progress. 67 500 patent applications from within the EU were submitted to the European Patent Office in 2022, the share of R&D personnel in the workforce increased to 1.5% in 2021, and 2.2% of GDP was spent on R&D of the 3% target.²⁸ Still, women remain underrepresented in research roles, particularly in the business enterprise sectors (SDG 5).

R&D will play a vital role in the transformation of industry sectors to reduce environmental pressures and produce green technology solutions, as envisioned in the new European Industrial Strategy. The importance lies with the [size of the sector](#), as EU industry employs around 35 million people, and made up 22% of total net emissions in the EU.³⁵ Emission intensity of fine particular matter slowed down to 12.5%, showing strong economic performance but not progress on sustainability. At the same time, we can see environmental goods and services (EGSS) increasing, as the sector grew both in [employment and GDP](#), from 1.7 % of GDP in 2004 to 2.5 % in 2020.⁸

Recommendations for EU action on the domestic and global achievement of SDG 9

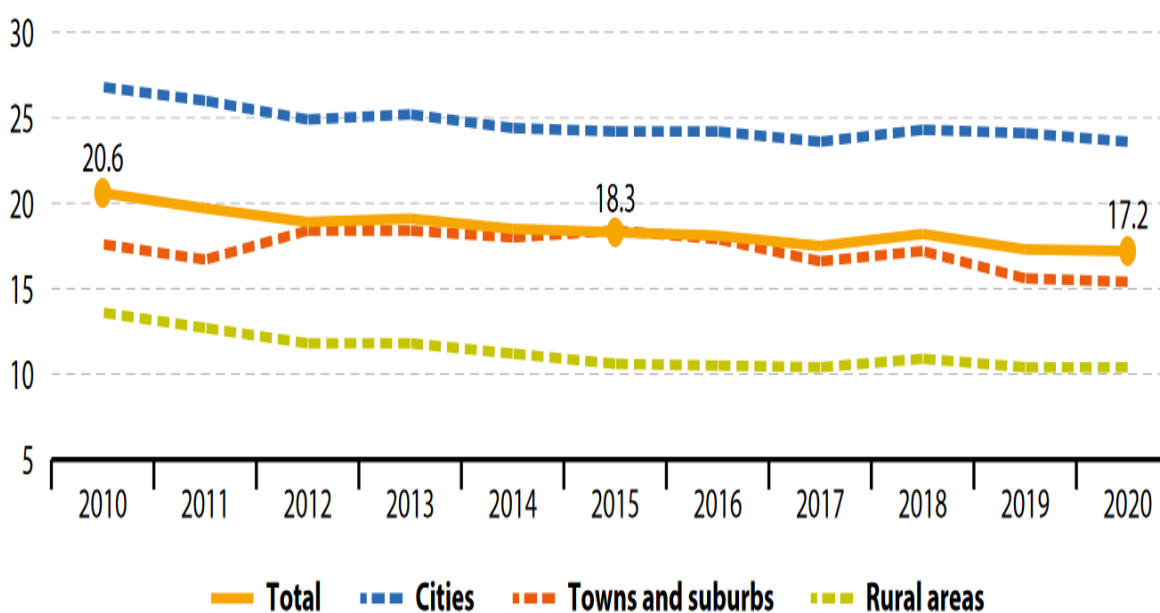
- Develop a strong focus on the decarbonisation of the transport sector, relating to SDG 9 and 11.
- Advance internet connectivity with fibre or other networks to a larger number of the EU population, particularly in rural areas.
- Ensure connection of R&D advancement with progress on SDG 5.

4. SDG 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Achieving SDG 11 sees cities globally being spaces which offer equal access to services, housing, energy, green spaces and transport, have little environmental impact and efficient resource use. Local and regional government played a pivotal role in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and showed that the organisation and resilience at local level is key to approaching a crisis and the recovery process. The EU has made modest progress in achieving sustainable cities in the last years, with challenges remaining for access to green spaces and air pollution, and a negative trend for transport and mobility goals. The EU population lives predominantly in urban areas (around 325 million people), and 40% of the population lives in cities. Settlement areas are continuously increasing, and soils are being sealed, at the expense of functioning ecosystems. For each EU inhabitant, 703.4 square metres (m²) of land was covered by settlement area in 2018. The trend sees 80% of the [EU population living in cities](#), who should live with a high quality of life.²⁸

Issues remaining are deteriorating infrastructure, high inflation, and pollution. The current cost-of-living crisis presents a risk of the housing cost overburden rate rising (the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs represent more than 40% of disposable income). From 2020 to 2021, the rate increased from 5.6% to 6.2% for a two-adult household, and from 20.1% to 21.9% for a single household. While significant progress to improved [housing conditions](#) were made, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a danger, especially for the 4.2% of the EU population experiencing housing deprivation (2020).²⁸ The percentage of [people living in houses with leaking roofs and damp structures](#) increased from 12.7% in 2019 to 14.8% in 2021.³⁶

Figure 4. – Population living in households with noise pollution, by degree of urbanisation



Source: [Eurostat Monitoring Report 2022](#)

The pollution in cities accounts for air, waste and noise pollution. In 2011, 19.7% of the EU population noted [noise disruptions](#) around their household, compared to 17.6% in 2020.³⁷ In rural areas, 10.4% would complain about noise from the street or neighbours, with a much [larger proportion in the cities](#) (23.6%) (in 2020).²⁸ The data for the last years is not yet available, which makes it unclear whether the decrease was based on the lockdowns, and whether noise pollution has returned to higher levels. Noise levels from [transport \(road, rail, airports\) affect EU citizen's health](#), whereby around 5 million were highly sleep disturbed and 18 million people were highly annoyed by environmental noise.³⁸

Transport is a contributing factor to air pollution, industrial activities and heating with fossil fuels. The EU aims at reducing air pollution by 55% by 2030 (Zero Pollution Action Plan), in comparison to 2005. In 2019, 4% of EU citizens in urban areas were exposed to [high levels of air pollution](#), meaning above the EU's fine particulate matter 2.5µg/m³ limit value.³⁹ Road traffic and consequently air pollution declined during the pandemic, however they have returned to business-as-usual levels. During the lockdowns during the pandemic, citizens appreciated green spaces. In 2012, 7.6% of the EU population did not have [access to green urban areas in their neighbourhood](#), compared to 5.7% in 2018.⁴⁰ To keep these spaces and cities overall clean, the EU has a target to recycle 60% of municipal waste streams by 2030. Despite the fact that the recycling rate increasing from 27.3% in 2000 to 49.6% in 2021, the trend has slowed down in 2016 and the EU goal was missed.⁸ Recycling and wastewater treatment form part of SDG 6 as well (see above).

Recommendations for EU action on the domestic and global achievement of SDG 11

- Ensuring progress on sustainable mobility (for SDG 11 and SDG 9). To lower pollution levels and climate impacts, clean public transport opportunities must be supported widely.
- Following up on living labs of sustainable communities.
- Expanding urban green spaces, especially in light of the experiences made by citizens during the pandemic.

5. SDG 17 – 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. In the Eurostat report of 2023, SDG 17 is in second last place in terms of progress, after SDG 15 Life on Land, having moderately moved away from achieving the goal. In particular, the decreasing financing going to developing countries, connected to section 2.c of this briefing, should be noted. In April 2023, the ECOSOC Financing for Development (FfD) Forum was held in New York to discuss emerging challenges and policies for advancing finance for long-term sustainable development priorities. In the final report, it is stated that the SDG Summit and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development should take the recommendations forward and include in its proceedings the need for ensuring coherence and fostering complementarity in discussions as they relate to financing for sustainable development. Financing is interlinked with the achievement of all SDGs and is core to reinforcing global partnerships. Besides Official Development Assistance (ODA) and EU financing, the Eurostat 2023 report also notes a negative trend for general government gross debt and the share of environmental taxes. The increase in public debt due to the pandemic and the resulting crisis management was part of this impact whereby the previous progress in reducing public debt was halted. The EU's target is to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on ODA, however only 0.49% were spent in 2021.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic saw higher donor efforts across the EU, still only four EU countries achieved the target.

Collaboration with civil society organisations and EU citizens at large is a highly relevant factor for achieving SDG 17. The SDG Alliance - MEPs for Agenda 2030 has called for an EU SDG implementation strategy, where civil society plays a role in the process (public consultation, Eurostat indicator). In the Parliament's draft report on the implementation of the SDGs, the call for a permanent platform for structured and regular engagement with civil society is reiterated, as well as the importance of avoiding negative spillovers to countries in the Global South.

Recommendations for EU action on the domestic and global achievement of SDG 17

- Strengthen coordination between EU institutions & EU MS to enhance participatory governance.
- Push for coordination on ODA and EU financing to developing countries.
- Promoting a resilient and sustainable financial system.

- Strengthen CSOs and global partnerships by providing greater opportunities for participation and governance in terms of policy-making processes.

Conclusion

This year, the HLPF will take stock of SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 9, SDG 11 and SDG 17, at this critical half-point mark in the delivery of the Agenda 2030. The EU will, for the first time, present a common VNR, which should be followed closely by the EU institutions and civil society. The theme of the forum remains focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby the global community this year can reflect on the measures and the impact on the advancement of the implementation of the SDGs. While the EU made progress on SDGs related to socio-economic challenges, there need to be greater efforts in facing environmental challenges. The in-depth review demonstrated that action is required to tackle water pollution and water scarcity, to reduce environmental pressures on ecosystems caused by industry and urban settlement expansion, and to advance the decarbonisation of the transport sector to reduce GHG emission, air and noise pollution. In order to deliver on both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement climate targets, EU Member States in national governments, in the Council of the EU and the MEPs in the European Parliament have the opportunity to initiate and support 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.

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