

# The UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

14-23 July 2025, New York

## KEY FINDINGS

A decade after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) marks a pivotal moment to assess the world's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recent global crises have significantly hindered progress, underscoring the need for a more systemic and recalibrated approach to our shared goals. The HLPF theme — '**Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda**' — emphasises the need to anchor policies in science and evidence to address today's complex challenges.

The in-depth reviews of SDGs highlight the challenges in ensuring access to healthcare, gender equality, decent work, ocean protection, and effective global partnerships — the world is off track in all of these goals. In the EU, challenges or significant challenges remain for achieving them by 2030, especially for the environmental goals of land and ocean protection. Global challenges highlighted in the briefing include healthcare funding cuts, restriction of women's rights, limited labour rights in exploitative global supply chains, as well as marine ecosystems suffering from pollution and insufficient protection.

The world is at a critical point. Merely 17% of SDG targets are on track for 2030, while the rest show limited or reversed progress. Rather than accelerating their commitments, the largest international development donors are scaling back their budgets, with detrimental effects for the most vulnerable populations. Financing of the SDGs remains key, and the EU should hold to its commitments. The theme of this year's HLPF may create an atmosphere for the global community to find areas of cooperation in an increasingly fragmented world. With just five years remaining, the EU has the opportunity to lead with urgency, domestically and globally, to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement.

## HLPF 2025 – background and main issues

The purpose of this briefing is to provide support to the European Parliament delegation to the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations [High-Level Political Forum](#) on Sustainable Development, taking place 14-23 July 2025 at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters, New York City, under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).<sup>1</sup> This briefing provides an overview of the progress made on the SDG implementation by the global community and the EU, as well as key issues at stake in the meeting. The recommendations provided in the in-depth reviews of this briefing are drawn from the main reports introduced in the section 'Monitoring progress'.



The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)<sup>2</sup> is the strategic framework consisting of five distinct components (Planet, People, Partnerships, Peace, Prosperity), while the SDGs outline [17 goals](#). At the EU level, the 2030 Agenda is enshrined in the 2017 [Consensus on Development](#) and other EU instruments, such as the [Global Gateway](#) and [Team Europe Initiatives](#).<sup>3</sup> The HLPF is the main UN platform on sustainable development and holds a central role in the 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'. At the 2023 UN SDG Summit, leaders adopted a [Political Declaration](#)<sup>4</sup> to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda, calling for urgent action, major financing reforms, and stronger global cooperation. 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 implementation and review processes are supported by the **UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)**. This department organises a series of [Expert Group Meetings \(EGMs\)](#) ahead of the HLPFs.<sup>5</sup> The EGMs bring together a variety of experts from the UN system, academia, government, private sector and civil society to produce background notes to inform the discussions.

The SDGs under in-depth review in 2025 are:

- [SDG 3 \(Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages\)](#),
- [SDG 5 \(Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls\)](#),
- [SDG 8 \(Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all\)](#),
- [SDG 14 \(Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development\)](#) and
- [SDG 17 \(Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development\)](#).<sup>6</sup>

These SDGs are intertwined with the aims of, among others, the European Green Deal, the Just Transition Mechanism, the EU4Health Programme, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, the Roadmap for Women's Rights, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, as well as the external dimensions of EU policies and their impacts on its partners.

The theme for the HLPF 2025 is '**Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind**'. The [HLPF 2025 programme](#) starts with four days of focus on the reviews of the prioritised SDGs, from 14–17 July. Furthermore, the programme includes the **three-day ministerial segment of the Forum** from Monday, 21 to Wednesday, 23 July.<sup>7</sup> The High-level segment of ECOSOC will conclude the HLPF with the adoption of a negotiated Ministerial Declaration.<sup>8</sup> Three main reports will inform the discussions: the Secretary-General's annual [report on Progress towards the SDGs](#), as well as a [report on the theme of the HLPF 2025](#) and a [report on the long-term impacts of current trends](#) on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>9</sup>

[Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRs\)](#) are state-led reports that provide a platform for sharing lessons learned and challenges in achieving the SDGs. It is the formal reporting mechanism on the SDGs. At the HLPF 2025, 37 countries will present their VNRs – 10 will present for the second time, 23 for the third, and 4 countries for the fourth time.<sup>10</sup> Five EU Member States will be presenting their VNR, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany and Malta. In 2023, the EU presented its first collective EU-wide VNR. The reviews will take place from 18–23 July 2025.

The EU and its Member States are represented as a united voice by the [Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations](#), which coordinates the EU's input to the UN to strengthen its capabilities in responding to global challenges.<sup>11</sup> The European Commission coordinates a shared EU position on the SDGs, supported by the Secretariat-General and DG INTPA. Monitoring their implementation, exercising democratic scrutiny and advocating for mainstreaming of the SDGs, domestically and externally, are tasks of the European Parliament (EP). Most work takes place in the Committee on Development (DEVE), the Committee on the Environment, Climate and Food Safety (ENVI), and the Committee on Budgets (BUDG). During the last parliamentary term, EP delegations participated in the SDG Summit in 2019, the Summit of the Future in 2024, as well as the ministerial segments of the HLPFs in 2022 and 2023. EP adopted reports on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in preparation of the missions, outlining the EP position to be presented at the HLPF.

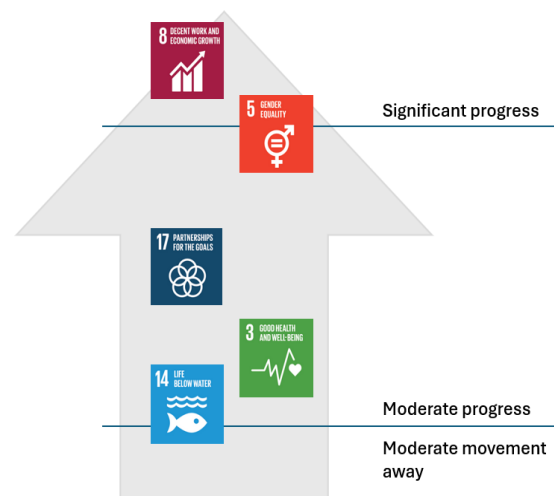
The HLPF 2025 was prepared through meetings of the UN Regional Commissions under the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development from February to April 2025. The **UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)** convened from 2-3 April 2025 in Geneva to assess progress, best practices and policy solutions on how to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in line with regional priorities. Furthermore, UNECE member States met for the 71st session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe on 9-10 April 2025 under the theme of '[Climate action and resilient infrastructure for a sustainable future](#)'.<sup>12</sup> Besides stressing that the infrastructure, which protects people and the environment in the future, requires regulatory decisions today, the roundtable discussed options to ensure the estimated US\$6.9 trillion annual investment needed for infrastructure by 2030.

### Key topics and 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**. With five years until the 2030 deadline, the in-depth SDG reviews will highlight actions for accelerating to meet the SDGs and unlock swift implementation. After the opening session on 14 July, a town hall meeting on '[Unlocking means of implementation: mobilizing financing and science, technology and innovation \(STIs\) for the Sustainable Development Goals](#)' will discuss options for countries to advance on a robust financing framework and bridge technological and digital gaps. The town hall meeting will discuss the uneven distribution of technological benefits, concerns about privacy and misinformation, and how the global community can learn from the outcomes and new commitments of the [Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development \(Ff4D\)](#) of June/July 2025. STIs are key to sustainable development, economic growth, enhanced productivity, health improvements, poverty eradication, and addressing environmental challenges.

During the **Ministerial Segment** in the second week, a majority of the VNRs will be presented, including those of EU Member States. After an opening speech by the UN and youth representatives, a general debate on catalysing change provides an opportunity to share lessons learned and to follow up on the [Pact for the Future](#) (see more in the section on SDG 17 of this briefing). Ensuring effective follow-up from the Pact will also be central to the discussion around regional perspectives on SDG implementation, asking the participants to bring forward ideas to leverage regional frameworks and regional action.

Figure 1. EU SDG progress (2019-2024)



Source: Adapted from [Eurostat Monitoring Report 2025](#).

The **in-depth reviews of the selected SDGs** take place from 14-17 July 2025. SDG 17 is treated as a mainstream goal across all sessions. The thematic sessions will discuss accelerating SDG achievement in African countries, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and middle-income countries, and measures for Small Island Developing States, as well as a message for local level stakeholders. Guiding questions for the sessions include how to build resilience against economic and environmental shocks, and how to expand financing through innovative public-private partnership models. Connecting the discussions to other intergovernmental processes is part of this year's HLPF, demonstrating the interconnectedness with the SDGs: the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), the Third United Nations Ocean Conference, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, and the Second World Summit for Social Development.<sup>13</sup>

The HLPF 2025 is also seen as an opportunity to build on the promises of the 2023 SDG summit and the 2024 Summit of the Future, with the inter-governmentally negotiated Pact for the Future. This year's theme puts the focus on financing and science, very timely in a world in which the global community is experiencing several setbacks when it comes to the distribution of development and climate finance, as well as the stability of science-based policymaking.<sup>14</sup>

## The EU's progress on delivering the SDGs

### Monitoring progress

In 2023, for the first time, the EU submitted a VNR together (the [EUVNR](#)), as a block.<sup>15</sup> The review lays down its commitments and actions of contribution and stresses the importance of continuation throughout multiple crises (the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, climate change and global inequalities). The review included a phase of planning, information and stakeholder engagement, and the compilation and coherence of the report. Critiques of the process came from civil society, stating that it had not been inclusive and open to citizen participation.<sup>16</sup> A consultation took place to inform the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) contribution to the EUVNR.<sup>17</sup> In the future, seeking active **contribution from civil society in Europe and beyond** was recommended, as well as a stronger position on structural changes and plans to mitigate external spillovers of EU policies.

The EUVNR takes stock of EU internal and external action, 2030 targets and trends at the EU level. Moderate progress was noted for SDG 2 on sustainable agriculture, SDG 6 on water, SDG 7 on energy, SDG 11 on sustainable cities, SDG 12 on consumption and production and SDG 14 on oceans – all of which are supported by the European Green Deal. Lessons learned for the EU include a better integration of the SDGs in the budget cycle, further transparency and communication with citizens (highlighting the European Climate Pact), enhancing external partnerships, and, in line with the HLPF 2025, ensuring policy coherence through evidence-based policymaking. The year **2027 presents the next opportunity for the EU to prepare an EUVNR** for the next SDG Summit and to seek active participation by all stakeholders. The EP can be in a central position to push for and facilitate the engagement of civil society in the EUVNR 2027.

The [Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025](#) (ESDR)<sup>18</sup> is published annually by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), which is operating under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, mobilising global scientific and technological expertise to promote practical solutions for sustainable development. The report states that Europe's challenge remains with the environmental goals, in the areas of sustainable food and land systems, responsible consumption and supply chains via external negative spillovers. Both progress for peace and partnerships (SDG 16 and 17) have been partly reversed or experience slow progress. Europe exhibits stark differences in SDG performance across European regions (SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure). The [Sustainable Development Report 2025](#), launched by SDSN in June 2025, provides a worldwide overview.<sup>19</sup>

The [Eurostat Monitoring Report 2025](#) presents a statistical overview of trends for the SDGs in the EU, each covered by six main indicators.<sup>20</sup> The findings show that progress towards socio-economic goals has advanced strongly (SDG 8, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, SDG 4 on quality education), SDG 3 on health was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic but is recovering, moderate progress was most seen for SDG 5 on gender equality, and the environmental objectives are moving away from progress (including SDG 13).

The EP is central to monitoring and scrutinising the progress on the SDGs among the EU institutions. In the last years, an [in-depth analysis](#) was requested by the DEVE Committee which called for immediate transformation in political commitment, SDG financing, citizens' empowerment and green recovery.<sup>21</sup> The [study](#) that was considered the first 'comprehensive comparative overview' (requested by the DEVE Committee in 2019) provided an overview of the SDG governance of EU Member States.<sup>22</sup>

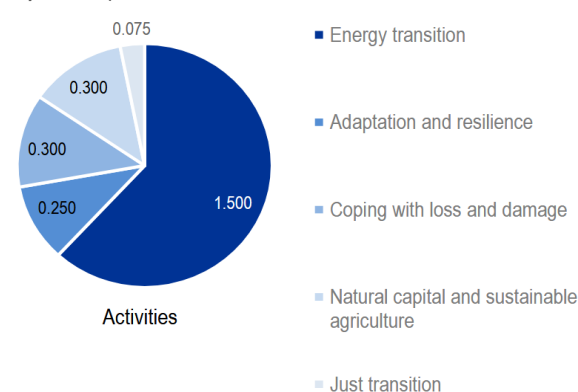
## EU legislative and political response

The EU uses several legislative tools to address the above-mentioned challenges. Key tools are the [European Green Deal](#) as an overarching guideline, [Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development](#), the [Better Regulation Toolbox 2021](#), and the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#). The European Commission, in its 2024/2025 Work Programmes, did not explicitly refer to the SDGs, and they are not a standalone objective. Clear reference to the SDGs in the EU's strategic documents would enhance accountability and transparency to EU citizens. With lower visibility of the SDGs in the last years, the ESDR recommends that the EU institutions issue a joint statement reaffirming the EU's commitment to achieving the SDGs. In its **resolution of 15 June 2023 on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals**, the EP recognised slow progress and put forward opportunities for cooperation.<sup>23</sup> Parliament will adopt a new resolution in light of the HLPF 2025,<sup>24</sup> the draft of which notes, among others, the extreme financing gap. The EP hosted the European Youth Event in June 2025, a biennial event bringing together youth, MEPs and other stakeholders to discuss, among other topics, the SDGs and sustainability. The topic of the HLPF 2025 on scientific policy making should feature in this discussion as well. Engagement on the SDGs is also found in the EESC, which requested a [study](#) taking stock of SDG 2 on sustainable food systems.<sup>25</sup>

## Financing the SDGs

Financing for the SDGs will be discussed at the HLPF on the first day. How the global community will finance the transition necessary to achieve the SDGs remains the key challenge, as financing gaps are growing, reiterated by the [2024 Financing for Development Report](#).<sup>26</sup> Large-scale sustainable investment is crucial, requiring strong policy frameworks to incentivise private investment and an alignment of public spending with the SDGs. From 30 June to 3 July 2025, the UN will hold the [Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development \(FfD4\)](#) in Seville<sup>27</sup>, taking stock of global financing frameworks (Monterrey Consensus, Doha Declaration, and Addis Ababa Agenda) and presenting an internationally negotiated and agreed outcome. The [OECD's Global Outlook Report](#) identified three priorities for the conference, including aiming for a feasible outcome which restores trust, updating the FfD4 framework, and reinforcing monitoring for greater accountability.<sup>28</sup> The outcome could be an ambitious package of reforms of the international financial architecture.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 2. Projected annual climate financing needs by 2030, in US\$ trillion



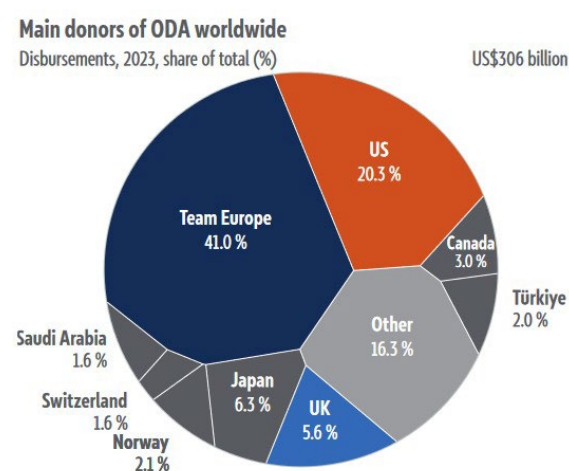
Source: OECD, [Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2025](#).



The FfD4 gathering is key, as the financing gap has widened to over US\$4 trillion annually in 2023 (60% SDG financing gap, US\$ 2.5 trillion of the gap in developing countries) and the SDGs are 'severely off track'.<sup>30</sup> **By 2030, without reforms, the gap could widen to US\$6.4 trillion.** Particularly after the pandemic, the scissory effect – rising needs and declining resources, intensified. By 2030, the financing gap could widen for climate financing, including adaptation finance for flood and coastal protection (SDG 7, 13 – by US\$2.4 trillion (Figure 2)), water and sanitation (SDG 6, 13 – by US\$ 500 billion), infrastructure and innovation (SDG 9 – by US\$ 400 billion), food and agriculture (SDG 1, 2, 12 – by US\$300 billion), biodiversity (SDG 15, 14, 13 – by US\$300 billion) and the health and education sector (SDG 3 and 4 – by US\$100-600 billion).<sup>31</sup> The FfD4 conference is timely amid significant cuts in international aid. As an overview, official development assistance (ODA) from countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) represented 0.33% of these countries' combined gross national income (GNI), amounting to US\$212.1 billion.<sup>32</sup>

Traditionally, the **US and the EU are the largest providers of foreign aid** (Figure 3). Due to an order by the President of the United States, in March 2025, 83% of USAID programmes were suspended, also leading to funding of various UN agencies being halted. Funding cuts are severely impacting food programmes, health care, emergency responses and programmes reducing gender-based violence.<sup>33</sup> Neither Team Europe nor other funders can fill this US\$60 billion funding gap. Lowered commitments by EU Member States add to the global financing problem (see Table 1).<sup>34</sup>

Figure 3. Main donors of ODA (2023)



Source: Pichon, E., et. al. (2025); *Cuts In US Development Assistance* EPRS.

Table 1. Estimates and expectations based on ODA reductions across European donors

	Germany	France	Belgium	Sweden	Netherlands	United Kingdom
Expected cut (US\$)	~9.2 billion	~2.57billion	~ 800 million	~300 million	~ 316 million	~ 2.2billion
Expected % of GNI	~ 0.6 (2024: 0.67)	~ 23% reduction vs 2024 (2024: 0.48)	~ 25% reduction in 5 years (2024: 0.48)	~0.88 from 1 (2024: 0.79)	~0.44% (2024: 0.62)	~ 0.3 in 2027/2028 (2024: 0.5)
ODA 2024	32.42	15.43	3.22	5.01	7.52	17.97
main areas (US\$ billion)	(global health, education, agriculture)	(global health, education, agriculture)	(in-donor refugee costs, emergency response)	(global health, agriculture, education)	(global health, agriculture, education)	(global health, education, agriculture)

Source: Author from [OECD, Donor Tracker](#), Pichon, E., et. al. (2025).

The [NDICI-GlobalEurope \(NDICI-GE\)](#) is the main financing tool underpinning the **Global Gateway** initiative, with the European Fund for Sustainable Investment. It corresponds to the areas of financing needs, with both physical and soft infrastructure (health and education solutions). However, the Global Gateway may not be sufficient to support **highly fragile and conflict-affected countries**, as these can lack predictability and calculable risks for stable investments.<sup>35</sup> EU development cooperation, in the absence of the United States, may need to further expand programmes on gender equality, health and democracy, and work towards a strategy which better supports inclusive goals.

## In-depth review of the SDGs

### SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being

Good health is a prerequisite for quality of life and social participation. In the last five years, the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic, a mental health crisis and the proliferation of other zoonotic diseases. The **effects of the pandemic** are only now truly coming to light in data, showing how it undid nearly 10 years of progress in life expectancy.<sup>36</sup> In response, the World Health Organisation (WHO) countries adopted a global instrument ('Accord') in 2025 to improve prevention, preparedness, and response to future pandemics at the global level.<sup>37</sup> At this stage, the **world is not on track to achieve SDG 3**. Challenges remain for most EU countries, and some are facing significant challenges. The international development budget cuts, both in individual nations' funds (including USAID and several European countries) and in contributions to the UN, are already having significant negative impacts, risking the reversal of progress on global health. Access to medicines and vaccines (childhood vaccines, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and malaria treatment, etc.) is disrupted, and funding is being reduced for essential services like immunisation and primary care.<sup>38</sup> According to recent findings, over 2.2 million additional TB deaths and 10.6 million additional TB cases globally could occur by 2030 if funding freezes continue.<sup>39</sup> Related to SDG 5, many sexual and reproductive health programmes have been halted (for instance, due to the termination of US funding agreements for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), ultimately compromising women's reproductive rights and affecting maternal, newborn and child health.

Globally, **moderate progress towards SDG 3** can be recorded, nevertheless, major challenges remain. For instance, the **under-five years deaths are historically low but without progress**, 35 million children will die before their fifth birthday by 2030.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, essential health coverage is not accessible to more than half of the world's population, the costs per household are rising, and progress since 2015 has been minimal. In the EU in 2023<sup>41</sup>, 2.4% of the population aged 16+ reported **unmet needs for medical care** (increase of 0.6% since 2018) due to financial reasons, waiting times (overwhelmed health systems) or lack of access in the close vicinity, with much greater challenges recorded for certain population groups, such as people with disabilities, LBGTIQ+ people, and racial discrimination. **Road accidents and tobacco use** are among the most common causes or influences for deaths within the EU. In 2023, 20.380 people were killed in road traffic, which is a decreasing trend but insufficient to reach the goals. Tobacco use, one of the single most preventable diseases, contributes to 16% of all deaths among 30-year-olds, above the global average of 12%. In a recent EU survey, measures aimed at controlling the use of tobacco products and e-cigarettes were generally favoured by Europeans. 24% of those respondents say they currently smoke.<sup>42</sup> While tobacco use is declining, the use of e-cigarettes and vapes is rising, especially among young people.<sup>43</sup> In the EU, a wide variety of policies aim at keeping the population healthy, including: **EU4Health programme** (main financial instrument), **Horizon Europe**, **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**, **Zero Pollution Action Plan**, **European Pillar of Social Rights**, **European Care Strategy**, **EU Global Health Strategy**, as well as road safety, farming and food safety rules.<sup>44</sup> The EP's recently created SANT Committee plans to focus on mental and neurological health, after it will have completed several own-initiative reports, including on an EU action plan for rare diseases, a comprehensive women's health strategy, an assessment of the implementation of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, modernised rules for cross-border healthcare, and a strategy for cardiovascular diseases.<sup>45</sup>

Discussing SDG 3 at the HLPF will prepare the global community for the [World Health Summit 2025](#) in Berlin, Germany, from 12–14 October.<sup>46</sup> Global health leaders will gather to discuss innovative solutions for better health and well-being in an increasingly fragmented world, and propose science-based collaboration. Shortly prior, on 25 September, Heads of State and Government will meet for the fourth **UN High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing**.<sup>47</sup> Both meetings mark unique opportunities for the global community, especially the EU, to renew and reinforce their (funding) commitments.

### Recommendations for EU action on the domestic and global achievement of SDG 3

- Invest in primary health care, digital health tools, and cross-border collaboration under the EU4Health Programme; promote decent working conditions for the care and health workforce;
- Address health inequalities within the EU (income groups, vulnerable groups, gender);
- Prepare intensely for climate-related health threats (heatwaves, air pollution, etc.);<sup>48</sup>
- Reinforce EU external action through making use of the EU Global Health Strategy.

## SDG 5 – Gender Equality

Gender equality underpins the progress of all SDGs. UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarks that:

*'In the face of a surge in misogyny and a rollback of women's reproductive rights, governments have explicitly committed to removing the legal, social and economic barriers that prevent women and girls from fulfilling their potential in every sphere.'*<sup>49</sup>

In most parts of the world, **significant or major challenges remain to achieving SDG 5**, as gender discrimination remains embedded in all economies and societies. The HLPF 2025 Expert Group meeting underlines that none of the targets are being fully met on the **30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration**.<sup>50</sup>

In the **EU, a positive trend or moderate increase** can be noted, however, the efforts are **not on track to achieve SDG 5 by 2030**. At the current pace, it would take another 60 years to achieve gender equality. 15 Member States have significant or major challenges with the targets, and none have achieved the SDG targets. The key EU policies and reports focusing on gender include: **Istanbul Convention, EU Strategy on Victims' Rights, EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, Strategic framework for European cooperation in Education & Training, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan**, and the **Gender Action Plan III**. The EP published a [briefing](#) in 2024 on accelerating progress on SDG 5. In 2024/2025, the EU unveiled the 2025 Report on Gender Equality, the **EU Roadmap for Women's Rights** and the **Directive on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence**.<sup>51</sup> A new gender equality strategy is planned for 2026.

Discriminatory laws and legal gaps continue to prevent women from accessing their human rights. Globally, **sexual and reproductive rights and bodily autonomy** have been restricted or reversed, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities.<sup>52</sup> In the EU, a Joint Research Centre brief found that views of young women and young men are increasingly polarised, partly due to online trends promoting toxic sentiments. For instance, with gender roles at home and work, young men's views are more similar to those of older men and women, while young women have the most egalitarian views.<sup>53</sup> Women experience a higher workload in **childcare, homeschooling and care work**, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unpaid care work is mostly performed by women; nine times more women than men are unable to join the labour market due to these responsibilities.<sup>54</sup> Violence against women persists in Europe and worsened during the pandemic. According to an **EU-wide survey on gender-based violence from 2024**, one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence in adulthood (including threats), one in six have experienced sexual violence (including rape) and one in five women have faced domestic violence.<sup>55</sup> Globally, 736 million women and girls aged 15 years or older have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their



lifetimes, and a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes, according to the UN Women's Rights Review 2025.<sup>56</sup> In May 2024, the **EU adopted crucial legislation to end violence against women**, providing a comprehensive legal framework and recognising for the first time that it is an obstacle to achieving gender equality. However, it missed out on establishing an EU-wide definition of sexual assault and rape and on regarding specific needs for protection and assistance of migrant women.<sup>57</sup>

Women's full and effective **participation in decision-making** worldwide is stagnating. Within the EU, it has been increasing (33.4% in 2024 vs 21.1% in 2003); however, it differs drastically between Member States, with the highest participation in the Nordic countries. The EU is currently on track to meet the goal of 40% participation in boards. The attainment rate and performance in tertiary education were higher for women (11.2% higher than for men in 2024). The above-discussed factors of inequalities lead to a **gender pay gap** of 12.0% in the EU in 2024, according to Eurostat.<sup>58</sup> Even though this represents a new record low, it also means that the proportion of working-age men in employment still exceeds that of women.

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

- Call for a stronger gender perspective in the reform of the global financial architecture at the FfD4 and HLPF to close the US\$360 billion annual deficit in spending on SDG 5 by 2030;
- Monitor the implementation of the EU Directive 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence;
- Advance and safeguard sexual and reproductive health rights amidst an international backlash;
- Fill critical data gaps to attain reliable trend data, for instance, through regional, international and citizen-generated data programmes.<sup>59</sup>

## SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

Opportunities for full employment, decent work and well-paid jobs contribute to the prosperity of countries and individual well-being. In recent years, a wave of job losses occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly affecting informal and low-wage workers, youth and women. Other threats to global economic growth are rising trade tensions, geopolitical strains and conflicts. Consequently, **SDG 8 is currently off track**, with the highest rate of stagnation or regression among the SDGs under review at HLPF 2025, particularly in least developed countries. Global compliance with labour rights has deteriorated, as noted by the UN EGM as particularly troubling (restrictions on freedom of association and collective bargaining, increased incidence of child and forced labor, and persistent discrimination in employment), with one-third of International Labour Organisation (ILO) member states' compliance declining.<sup>60</sup>

According to the EU's VNR 2023, ensuring decent work and economic growth has been one of the SDGs where significant progress can be observed within the EU. **Unemployment reached an all-time low**, dropping by 5.7% between 2013 and 2024 for the 15–74 year olds, according to Eurostat. The pandemic deeply affected youth employment at the time, which has recovered in the last years to 11.0% of people aged 15–29 not being employed or in education in 2024, the lowest value recorded. In addition, the **rate of fatal accidents at work fell** by 28.1% since 2010, thanks to efforts to ensure high minimum requirements in occupational health and safety at work.<sup>61</sup>

The EU's main instruments in the context of employment and growth include: **Sustainable Europe Investment Plan** under the European Green Deal, **European Social Fund Plus**, **Youth Employment Initiative**, **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan**, **Directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union**, **Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU**, **Communication on Decent Work Worldwide**. The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF) under **NextGenerationEU** distributed valuable loans and Grants to EU Member States post-pandemic.<sup>62</sup> A recent Court of Auditors special report found that the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) labour market

reforms, while implemented as planned, could not yet lead to structural change on the EU's labour markets.<sup>63</sup> Recently, the EP voted in favour of new rules to improve the gig economy and platform workers' working conditions, the **EU Platform Workers Directive**, ensuring fair classification of employment status and access to social protection.<sup>64</sup> At all times, the EP Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) also monitors progress on SDG 8.

The European Sustainable Development Report 2025 notes that 17 EU Member States have significant challenges in achieving SDG 8 (including Spain, Germany and Finland), and for four countries, major challenges remain (Ireland, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece) – with challenges for all particularly on **fatal work-related accidents and modern slavery embodied in imports**. On this note, the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 states that the global average **level of national compliance with labour rights** (increased violations and restrictions on civil liberties, union formation, etc.) declined by 7% between 2015 and 2022, largely in Asia. Forced labour is still prominent in global supply chains (28 million people worldwide<sup>65</sup>), which end up in the EU. In 2024, the EU Forced Labour Regulation entered into effect, creating a general prohibition against marketing or exporting goods produced from forced labour, requiring due diligence.<sup>66</sup> Other EU due diligence rules for corporate sustainability are currently being simplified (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), which may impact the **EU's strength in driving better business practices**. Towards 2030, the EU should further strive for ethical and sustainable economic growth and reduce its material footprint. In 2023, the **EU's raw material consumption rose above pre-pandemic numbers** and reached 6.39 billion tonnes, according to Eurostat.<sup>67</sup> Raw material extraction is both deeply intertwined with labour standards and sustainable levels of resource extraction.

### Recommendations for EU action to accelerate EU and global implementation of SDG 8

- Safeguard workers' rights, social justice, and inclusive employment opportunities, especially for women and youth;
- Ensure a Just Transition and job creation through green and digital transitions;
- Foster macroeconomic strategies globally with employment and social protection goals and ensure fiscal frameworks that enable social investment;
- Advocate for reforming financial systems and institutions to allow countries to invest in decent work without austerity, and to tackle economic uncertainty and trade tensions at the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the HLPF.

## SDG 14 – Life Below Water

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. Although EU countries progressed in the areas of ocean health, marine conservation and sustainable fisheries in the last five years, the **majority of regions worldwide have major challenges ahead in achieving SDG 14, and progress is stagnant**.

Europe's marine ecosystem is continuously under threat from multiple sources of human activities – 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. The EU has a wide range of policies to counteract these issues, among others, the **Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)**, **Marine Strategy Framework Directive**, **Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD)**, **EU Blue Economy Strategy**, **EU Biodiversity Strategy**, **Zero Pollution Action Plan for Air, Water and Soil**, **Habitats Directive**.<sup>68</sup>

Oceans are the world's largest active carbon sink, marine ecosystems have a particularly high potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of climate-induced disasters. However, the oceans' chemistry and capacity to do so are fundamentally changing. **Ocean acidification is projected to double or triple by 2100**, unless CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are significantly reduced.<sup>69</sup>

Humans are also responsible for **eutrophication of water, meaning pollution from organic and chemical pollutants**, including excessive nutrients from agriculture and municipal waste-water. According to Eurostat, 43.000 km<sup>2</sup> of EU marine waters were affected by eutrophication in 2024, corresponding to 0.61% of the EU's exclusive economic zone, a slight increase in the past years.<sup>70</sup> The world pledged to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 in 2022 at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15)<sup>71</sup>, through **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** – right now it's the case for merely 8.3%, and only 2.8% are being effectively managed.<sup>72</sup> In the EU, 12.1% of its marine area was protected in 2021. MPAs protect marine ecosystems, coastal habitats and biodiversity through managing or banning fishing and mining. For protecting biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction, the **UN Member States adopted the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement 2023)**<sup>73</sup>, filling critical gaps left by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea<sup>74</sup> and introducing provisions for sustainable management of biodiversity in high seas and the deep seabed. For a swift implementation, over 40 countries came together in the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction High Ambition Coalition (BBNJ HAC), co-chaired by the EU, Palau and the Seychelles. Therefore, the EU is well placed to provide leadership and collaboration in this area.

The [Third United Nations Ocean Conference](#) took place from 9–13 June 2025 in France, to adopt the [Nice Ocean Action Plan](#)<sup>75</sup> – titled “Our ocean, our future: united for urgent action” – a political declaration accompanied by a registry of voluntary commitments from states, businesses, and other stakeholders. Financing for the blue economy was discussed in a side-event – the Blue Economy and Finance Forum.<sup>76</sup> The EU joined the conference with renewed commitments, including the EP's 2024 resolution on the EU Action Plan: Protecting and Restoring Marine Ecosystems for Sustainable and Resilient Fisheries.<sup>77</sup>

The latest EU action on oceans is [the European Ocean Pact](#), formally introduced at the UN conference and including the involvement of the EP. It shall act as a single reference framework for all ocean-related EU policies, with key priorities being the protection and restoration of ocean health, boosting the EU's blue economy, advancing research on oceans, enhancing maritime security and defence, strengthening ocean diplomacy and supporting coastal and island communities in the EU and the world. The Pact includes a pledge to propose a new European Law on the oceans by 2027, and evaluate the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the Common Fisheries Policy. In reaction, the European Bottom Fishing Alliance (EBFA) sees policy contradictions, for instance with the Commission's proposed phase-out of bottom fishing in MPAs, and welcomed the ocean research strategy.<sup>78</sup> In a joint statement, environmental NGO warn that it lacks concrete measures, and does not outline concrete pathways to implementing and enforcing existing legislation.<sup>79</sup> In this light, the EU has an opportunity play an active role beyond Nice, pushing for clear targets, financing, and accountability mechanisms for ocean protection.

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

- Expand and effectively manage Marine Protection Areas (MPAs), provide long-term funding to guide their creation and establish an outright moratorium on the use of bottom trawling, including in all MPAs, to support the ecological balance of fish stocks;<sup>80</sup>
- Continue to support an international and science-based moratorium on deep-seabed mining at the International Seabed Authority (ISA), as called upon in the European Parliament resolution of February 2024 on Norway's recent decision to advance seabed mining in the Arctic;<sup>81</sup>
- 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 European Green Deal.

## SDG 17 – Partnerships for Goals

Global collaboration is fundamental for achieving the SDGs. Nevertheless, **UN States are not on track, progress is stagnant, and significant challenges remain.** Only Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries are on track, influenced by regional collaboration and transparency, strong and institutionalised engagement of civil society organisations and regional alliances against common issues.<sup>82</sup> Most EU countries have achieved a moderate increase in achieving SDG 17. The EU is on track for the indicators of statistical performance, shifted profits of multinationals and the corporate tax haven score, and access to technology has progressed, specifically access to high-speed internet. The Eurostat 2025 report also notes a negative trend for general government gross debt and the share of environmental taxes.<sup>83</sup> To achieve the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda requires a **strong level of participatory engagement and a collaborative approach** beyond EU borders. In particular, the decreasing financing going to developing countries should be noted. Since the reporting period for the 2025 Eurostat report ends in 2023, the statistics do not reflect the recent political changes in US politics and the Official Development Assistance reduction of some EU Member States. The EU's target is to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on ODA, and 0.56% was spent in 2023, linked partly to support for Ukraine.<sup>84</sup> Financing is interlinked with achieving all SDGs and is core to reinforcing global partnerships.

In November 2025, the second **World Summit for Social Development** will adopt political documents to address gaps and recommit to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action, agreed at the first World Summit on Social Development in 1995, and provide momentum towards implementing the 2030 Agenda.<sup>85</sup> Last year's [UN Summit of the Future](#) (September 2024) led to the adoption of the '[Pact for the Future](#)', including 56 action commitments to revitalise multilateral cooperation, and working toward a responsible and sustainable digital future.<sup>86</sup> It includes a commitment to reform the UN Security Council, with an emphasis on improving representation. Critique comes from a lack of concrete targets and financing options, particularly for climate change, and reaffirming existing commitments rather than driving world leaders forward. While it's the lowest common denominator, the EU should support and monitor the pact's implementation and reassess its relationship with the Global South.

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

- Strengthen civil society organisations and global partnerships by providing greater opportunities for participation and governance;
- Reaffirm and accelerate the commitment to reaching the 0.7% GNI target for ODA, prioritising sustainable development and climate finance;
- Monitor and support the implementation of the UN's 'Pact for the Future'.

## Conclusion

This year, the HLPF will take stock of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17, at this critical time with five years left to deliver on the Agenda 2030, and the world being severely off track. The theme is science and inclusivity, creating an atmosphere for the global community to find areas of cooperation in an increasingly fragmented world. Financing of the SDGs remains key, and the EU should not retract its commitments. According to the 2025 Sustainable Development Report, merely 17% of SDG targets are on track for 2030, while the rest show limited or reversed progress. International development finance cuts of 2024/2025 negatively impact the progress of the SDGs. Sustained action is required to, among others, ensure global access to vital medicine and vaccines (SDG 3), to enforce protection against domestic violence and attacks on reproductive rights (SDG 5), to ensure decent work through stronger labour protections and supply chain due diligence (SDG 8), and to halt pollution and destruction of marine ecosystems (SDG 14). To meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, EU Member States and EU institutions should collaborate with civil society (SDG 17) to ensure the effective implementation for a sustainable future.

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