

# Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), New York, 16 - 18 July 2018

## KEY FINDINGS

The SDGs framework has the potential to provide a useful overarching framework to further the debate on Europe's political priorities, with a view to pursuing social, economic and environmental sustainability both within the Union and globally. However, this requires increasing the political buy-in across sectors. There is a need to translate the SDGs into concrete sectoral political priorities, targets and actions for the EU, and to agree on a legitimate framework for delivering these priorities across Member States.

The July 2018 HLPF meeting constitutes a window of opportunity to assert influence on the implementation of SDGs in the EU, providing an opportunity to use a range of key current EU initiatives (e.g. the EU circular economy package, post-2020 biodiversity objectives and 2021 – 2027 EU budget) to advance the SDGs debate.

In the global context, it will be important to promote linkages between the outcomes of the 2018 HLPF, the forthcoming Global Sustainable Development Report, and other global process of relevance to the environment, including the UNFCCC, the CBD, UNEA, as well as the newly launched negotiations for a global Pact for the Environment. There is a need to set the stage for environment to become more at the heart for the following HLPF, especially in terms of the 4-year stocktake in 2019.

## The July 2018 HLPF – context and key issues

This briefing is intended to provide support to the European Parliament delegation prior to the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) to be held at United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York 16 - 18 July 2018. It provides an overview of key issues at stake in the meeting and progress made on the implementation of SDGs by the EU, with a particular focus on the SDGs to be reviewed in depth at the Forum (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15). The HLPF is the main UN platform on sustainable development that oversees the implementation of SDGs at the global level. The Forum was established in 2012 at the Rio+20 meeting as a successor to the Commission on Sustainable Development. It holds annual meetings under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council, with every four years a two-day meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the UN General Assembly.



**The theme of the 2018 HLPF meeting is "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies"** with a focus on an in-depth review of the progress in implementing the following SDGs: clean water and sanitation (SDG6), affordable and clean energy (SDG7), sustainable cities and communities (SDG11), responsible consumption and production (SDG12) and life on land (SDG15). As in every year's meeting, the status of establishing partnerships for SDG delivery (SDG17) will also be reviewed. In addition, the HLPF will also focus on discussing synergies and trade-offs between different SDGs. The theme for the July meeting touches on current policy issues of particular relevance to the ENVI committee (e.g. the EU circular economy package, post-2020 biodiversity objectives, and the 2021 – 2027 EU budget, at the heart of the SDGs debate.

**Voluntary national reviews (VNRs)** are state-led reviews of SDG implementation, undertaken by both developed and developing countries with a view to facilitate sharing of experiences, strengthening policies and institutions, and mobilizing multi-stakeholder support and partnerships. They are a mechanism to review progress towards achieving SDGs, and serve as a basis for discussions and assessment at the HLPF. Altogether 17 EU Member States have provided VNRs in 2016 (FR, DE, FI and EE) and 2017 (BE, CZ, DK, LU, NL, PT, SI, SE and CY). In 2018, six additional EU countries will be added to the list (GE, HU, IE, LT, LV, MT, PL, SK, RO and ES).

The next HLPF in 2019 constitutes a key milestone in the path to 2030 as it includes a four-year review process, including a Heads of State and Government segment. 2019 will also kick off a discussion on how best to reform the HLPF process, which is criticised for its inability to provide an evidence-based global stocktake, on the basis of which corrective collective action should be taken. 2019 will also be of particular importance for the European Union's approach to the SDGs; **the Council has invited the European Commission to prepare a VNR for submission to the HLPF in the 2019 meeting.**

## Delivering SDGs: review of EU's progress

### Political process, buy-in and monitoring

**The EU process on SDGs has so far been focused more on technical aspects of implementation (e.g. establishment of the indicator framework) rather than ensuring buy-in and sectoral mainstreaming at political level.** This sentiment is shared, for example, by the European Parliament in its resolution of 6 July 2017 on EU Action for sustainability<sup>1</sup>, which calls for mainstreaming the delivery of the SDGs across all EU policy areas, rather than for them to be considered something delivered by environment or development cooperation policies. This is also apparent when reviewing the proposal for 2021 – 2027 EU budget: the legislative proposals for spending programmes under the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) briefly mention but do not operationalise SDGs. In general, one of the key points of criticism of the implementation process and its level of ambition has been the lack of European targets for SDGs, leading to monitoring focussing on measuring incremental progress rather than delivery of the goals.

**According to the first annual monitoring report by Eurostat in 2017, the EU has made progress towards all the 17 goals. However, progress towards a given goal does not necessarily mean that the status of a goal in the EU should be considered satisfactory.** Furthermore, progress in some SDGs has been faster than in others and within certain goals the indicators show negative trends on sustainable development objectives. The Eurostat report concludes that over the past 5 years the EU has made significant progress at least in the following areas: health and wellbeing (SDG3), energy (SDG7), cities and communities (SDG11), consumption and production (SDG12) and life on land (SDG15). Moderate progress

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2017 on EU action for sustainability, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2017-0315>

was identified for eight SDGs: poverty (SDG1), education (SDG4) gender equality (SDG5), economic growth (SDH8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG9), and partnerships (SDG17). Finally, sufficient data was not considered to be available to assess trends for clean water (SDG6), climate (SDG13), life under water (SDG14) and peace, justice and institutions (SDG16).

**While the EU framework for monitoring SDGs can be considered relatively robust, it includes a number of shortcomings.** As indicated above, the EU indicator framework focuses on assessing and illustrating progress and trends, rather than identifying the remaining distance to delivery of the targets from the current status. Consequently, the monitoring outcomes do not allow conclusions to be drawn as to how the Union is positioned in terms of reaching a satisfactory status of a given goal. There is also a room for improvement regarding the set of indicators used, for example, addressing critical thresholds, focusing on material footprints and illustrating environmental externalities outside the EU (i.e. “spillover indicators”), or designing indicators for absolute decoupling within limits. When considered in the global context, the current set of EU indicators focuses primarily on the progress made by the EU within the EU and does not provide enough indication as to the EU’s contribution towards achieving the goals at the global level, including the adequacy and effectiveness of EU support to developing countries in implementing SDGs.

#### **Suggested recommendations for EU actions to support the delivery of SDGs:**

- Identify priorities across EU sectoral policies and agree on a legitimate framework for implementing these priorities to be adopted by all Member States.
- Focus on monitoring current status and distance to goals, rather than progress and trends.
- Continue efforts to improve the indicator set, including improving the input by researchers and other relevant stakeholders.
- Improve the monitoring and assessment framework to be more comprehensive, including explicitly identifying and assessing interlinkages between SDG delivery and including both domestic and external dimensions.
- As outputs, in addition to the monitoring reports elaborate outlook reports for proper projections, broader and qualitative assessments with additional data and knowledge taken into account.

## Review of SDGs with in-depth focus

### Clean water and sanitation - SDG6

**The 2017 Eurostat report shows progress for most issues on SDG6, except for water use, although challenges also remain water quality for some waters.** The EU indicators for SDG6 cover the following aspects: sanitation, water quality and water use efficiency. For sanitation the indicators include households with baths, showers and flushing toilets and household connection to sewage systems. The water quality indicators include biochemical oxygen demand in rivers (BOD), nitrate in groundwater (P), phosphate in rivers (N) and bathing sites with excellent water quality whereas water use efficiency is captured by water exploitation index (WEI).

It is to be noted that the Eurostat indicators are limited in their measurement of EU progress on SDG6. The choice of indicators ignores major progress in drinking water improvements in drinking water (Drinking Water Directive - DWD), sewage treatment (Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive - UWWTD) and wider water challenges for ecological status (Water Framework Directive - WFD). The relevant compliance reports

and EEA state of waters reports all provide much greater detail on key SDG6 targets. The above actions have been the focus for very large amounts of EU spending, particularly under the Structural and Investment Funds, so that reporting on their progress would seem an important communication point for stakeholders also in the SDG context.

**VNRs from EU Member States are largely positive in terms of drinking water and waste water treatment (i.e. the implementation of DWD and UWWTD) with further efforts noted as needed to address water efficiency and scarcity.** In general, Member States VNRs report on SDG6 in different ways, with reports generally covering issues different from those covered by Eurostat, in particular including wider health and sanitation issues. DK, NL, SI report on numbers of people with improved conditions due to the DWD and UWWTD. DE, PT report on the major problems in water bodies achieving WFD objectives. Some (DK, PT) report on water efficiency. No Member States report, however, provides a full quantitative assessment against all SDG6 targets.

Progress on SDG6 is an important contributor to other SDGs such as SDGs 3, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. There is also the potential for conflicts with other SDGs, in particular SDG2 (which links with the long-standing debate on the role of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) in influencing positively or negatively Europe's waters). The reporting does not, however, explore these interactions. A more integrated approach to understanding progress towards SDG6 and other interlinked SDGs collectively is, therefore, needed.

In terms of implementation in the global context, SDG6 was developed out of the work of several global actors. At UN level these were principally WHO, UNDP and UNEP, but the development agenda around drinking water and sanitation has long driven interventions by key global institutions. For example, in addition to WHO, UNDP and UNEP, the UN-Water Task Force on Indicators for SDG 6 includes FAO, ILO, UNECE, UNESCO (WWAP), UNICEF, UN-Water TAU and WMO.

UN Water<sup>2</sup> has reviewed the information sources to monitor progress for SDG6 and the roles the various international bodies can play in contributing to future measurement of progress. These include WHO, UNICEF, FAO's AQUASTAT, IBNET, UNSD, UNEP OECD World Bank, IBNET, WMO WHOS, GEF TWAP, ISARM TBA, OSU, RAMSAR Convention, UN-Water GLAAS. While many UN bodies are included, other key international organisations (e.g. OECD, World Bank) and Conventions (e.g. Ramsar) are important contributors to assessing SDG6 progress<sup>3</sup>.

SDG6 forms a significant focus for the work of the UNDP. This is expressed through individual development projects for drinking water and waste water in particular. UNDP does look for synergies between SDGs, for example its initiative on solar empowerment provides renewable energy sources to rural communities, but in particular it is focused on powering water systems, such as pumps for clean water sources.

So far none of the above identified key actors have published any tracking of their measures or the level of contribution towards SDG6 from specific quantitative measures.

### Suggested recommendations for EU actions to ensure EU and global delivery of SDG6

- The current ex-post evaluations of EU water policy should ensure full integration of SDG targets in the evolution and implementation of those policies.
- Sectoral policies of the EU (e.g. the CAP) should be amended to ensure they are consistent with delivery of all SDGs, including SDG6.

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<sup>2</sup> The United Nations inter-agency coordination mechanism for all freshwater related matters

<sup>3</sup> SDG6 Synthesis Report 2018. UN Water Task Force.

- Although EU development policy and external assistance has supported key elements of SDG6, it should be reviewed to ensure that it is fully targeted at where SDG6 needs are greatest in each developing country. EU support should also further aim towards the delivery of multiple SDGs, such as SDG6 (6.5) and SDG15.
- The EU should promote and support UN analysis to develop analysis and reporting of policy synergies between SDG6 and other SDGs and of policy conflicts between SDGs.

## Affordable and clean energy - SDG7

**The EU has made slow but steady progress toward meeting the SDG7 domestically, though further sustained effort is required to achieve the 2030 targets.** Internationally, progress is slower and the EU could help to make more progress in this area through enhanced engagement and financing. Achieving the SDG7 targets is linked directly to the implementation of the EU's 2020 and 2030 climate and energy packages.

The 2017 Eurostat report identifies the following progress on the 3 main targets at EU level. For energy services (7.1) Eurostat tracks the percentage of the population unable to keep their home adequately warm as an indicator to monitor practical access to affordable energy within the EU. There has been a slight improvement in this indicator in recent years, with 9.4% unable to heat their homes adequately in 2015 vs. 10.9% in 2007<sup>4</sup>. This indicator depends greatly on income level and the economic cycle, as well as building efficiency, including the lack of suitable heating systems and insulation, predominantly in southern countries.

For renewable energy (7.2) the Eurostat reports that the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption in the EU rose from 8.5% in 2004 to 16.7% in 2015.

For energy efficiency (7.3) the report notes that final energy consumption in the EU fell by 9.1% from 1192 million tons of oil equivalent (Mtoe) in 2005 to 1084 Mtoe in 2015, which is slightly below the 2020 final energy consumption target of 1086 Mtoe. Energy productivity (ratio between gross inland energy consumption and GDP) has improved steadily: between 1990 and 2015, energy intensity decreased by 1.7 % per year in the EU-28. A relative decoupling of economic growth from gross inland energy consumption occurred, as energy consumption grew more slowly than GDP.

As regards the EU's contribution to SDG7 at global context, between 2010 and 2015, € 27.5 billion of EU official development assistance (ODA) was committed for energy, representing 8% of all EU ODA<sup>5</sup>. Of the funding targeted at SDG7 targets, the vast majority went to support renewable energy (€ 1.6 billion/year compared to € 0.2bn for access and € 0.4bn for efficiency). Funding was primarily targeted to countries which already have high access rates, while least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) received only a small portion of ODA even though they include a large number of 'high-impact countries' offering easy wins that would make a significant difference<sup>6</sup>. In general, it is acknowledged that a major global funding gap exists for all three targets.

VNRs from EU Member States suggest that some countries face challenges in achieving SDG7 targets. In 2017, Belgium and Sweden reported a major challenge regarding the use of renewable energy in the

<sup>4</sup> 2007 figure refers to EU-27.

<sup>5</sup> EUEI, (2018), 2030 Agenda: Review Process of SDG7 on Energy, [http://www.euei-pdf.org/sites/default/files/field\\_publication\\_file/euei\\_policy\\_brief\\_-\\_5\\_-\\_sdg7\\_review\\_process\\_0.pdf](http://www.euei-pdf.org/sites/default/files/field_publication_file/euei_policy_brief_-_5_-_sdg7_review_process_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> EUEI, (2018), 2030 Agenda: Review Process of SDG7 on Energy, [http://www.euei-pdf.org/sites/default/files/field\\_publication\\_file/euei\\_policy\\_brief\\_-\\_5\\_-\\_sdg7\\_review\\_process\\_0.pdf](http://www.euei-pdf.org/sites/default/files/field_publication_file/euei_policy_brief_-_5_-_sdg7_review_process_0.pdf)



transport sector, while the Czech Republic listed improving energy efficiency in consumption and production as a challenge. However, Belgium, Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Portugal highlighted measures to increase solar power. Cyprus, Belgium, Luxembourg and Slovenia noted initiatives to optimize the energy efficiency of buildings.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of implementation in the global context, according to a recent joint analysis by the “custodian agencies” for SDG7, the International Energy Agency (IEA), World Bank, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), WHO, and the UN Statistical Agency, the world is not on track to achieve SDG7<sup>8</sup>. Sustainable Energy For All (SE4ALL), an independent, quasi international organisation set up by the UNSG to support implementation of SDG7 has also contributed to assessing progress on SDG7, notably regarding finance for energy access. The 2017 report found insufficient funding to meet the access goal, particularly with regard to cooking access, despite recent prioritisation of the goal in some key countries and multilateral donors<sup>9</sup>.

While overall progress falls short on meeting all targets, real gains are being made in certain areas. Increased focus by Multilateral Development Banks, initiatives by the custodian agencies, and falling prices for renewables are making a major difference. Expansion of access to electricity in poorer countries has recently begun to accelerate, with progress overtaking population growth for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa. However, there are still around 1 billion people without access to electricity globally, and present policies will leave many hundreds of millions still without access in 2030.

Energy efficiency globally continues to improve, driven by advances in the industrial sector. Global gross domestic product (GDP) grew nearly twice as fast as primary energy supply in 2010-15. However, progress continues to be slow in low income countries, where energy intensity is higher than the global average. IEA data shows that progress has slowed significantly in terms of global energy intensity in 2016 and 2017, and on average still falls short of the 2.7% annual improvement needed to achieve the SDG target.

Renewable energy is making impressive gains in the electricity sector, although these are not being matched in transportation and heating – which together account for 80 percent of global energy consumption. Overall, the pace of installation will need to increase significantly in order to reach a “substantial” share of the global energy mix by 2030. It stood at 10% globally, counting only modern forms of renewable energy such as geothermal, hydropower, solar and wind.

Lagging furthest behind is access to clean cooking fuels and technologies – an area that has been typically overlooked by policymakers. Use of traditional cooking fuels and technologies among a large proportion of the world’s population has serious and widespread negative health, environmental, climate and social impacts. About 2.8 billion people rely on polluting fuels to cook their daily meals, a number which has not changed since 2000. Without greater ambition, 2.3 billion will still remain without clean cooking access in 2030.

Since 2010, China’s progress in renewable energy alone accounted for nearly 30% of absolute growth in renewable energy consumption globally in 2015. Brazil was the only country among the top 20 largest energy consumers to substantially exceed the global average renewable share in all end uses: electricity, transport and heating. Installation of renewable energy capacity has increased rapidly in the United States in recent years, rising from 10.5% of generation in 2010 to 18% in 2017. This trend appears to be holding for the time being despite the Trump administration’s stance in favour of fossil fuels.

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<sup>7</sup> pp. 20-22. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis\\_Report\\_VNRs\\_2017.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis_Report_VNRs_2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> IBRD, World Bank, (2018) Tracking SDG7: the energy Progress Report, Executive Summary, [https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/executive\\_summary.pdf](https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/executive_summary.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> SE4All, (2017), Energizing Finance: Scaling and Refining Finance in Countries with Large Access Gaps, [https://www.seforall.org/sites/default/files/2017\\_SEforall\\_FR4\\_PolicyPaper.pdf](https://www.seforall.org/sites/default/files/2017_SEforall_FR4_PolicyPaper.pdf)

## Suggested recommendations for EU actions to ensure EU and global delivery of SDG7

- The EU should scale up and ensure implementation of policies to expand European renewable energy use and improve energy efficiency, particularly in the areas of transport and heating/cooling, and address distributional issues where possible.
- The EU should significantly scale-up ODA and other forms of international and financial assistance for SDG7, particularly for access and efficiency targets, and also in LDCs and SIDS.
- The EU should place particular emphasis on expanding access to clean cooking fuels and technologies in developing countries.

## Sustainable cities and communities - SDG11

**Based on Eurostat's 2017 report SDG Monitoring Framework<sup>10</sup>, SDG11 is among the goals on which the EU has made the most progress.** The Eurostat's SDG11 indicators determining the sustainability of cities and communities include quality of life, sustainable transport and adverse environmental impacts.

General progress has been observed in the EU across most of the above indicators. However, it is difficult to provide an overall figure as differences persist between urban, suburban and rural areas. There has been an increase in the perceived housing quality; however, noise exposure remains a relevant issue. Some progress has been observed on public transport, with improvements in road safety and a reduction in people killed in road accidents. The improvement is, however, off-track in terms of reaching the 2020 target of halving this number. Overall, access to public transport is not available to all EU citizens. Progress has also been made on waste management, with both short and long-term trends showing a clear shift towards more sustainable modes of waste treatment in Europe. As regards air quality, a negative trend was observed between 2000 and 2014, a period that witnessed a 6% increase in the weighted annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). In the short term, this trend has been partially reversed, through air quality improvements. However, the annual mean of PM<sub>2.5</sub> continues to be above the WHO's recommended level, and areas with substantial air pollution remain across Europe.

VNRs from EU Member States support the EU level findings and suggest that countries are facing challenges on urban air quality, highlighting the importance of green and/or accessible public spaces. Access to transport remains a priority, with some countries reporting transport as the largest expenditure after housing (e.g. Portugal). Challenges and objectives are reported by countries on adequate housing, regarded as the foundation for a cohesive society. Additional issues reported by countries include: waste management; safeguarding cultural heritage; development of smart cities; and the role of cities in reducing GHG emissions and climate adaptation.

At global level, the UN Sustainable Goals Report 2017<sup>11</sup> shows large differences across regions on the factors determining the sustainability of urban settlements. Overall, there has been a reduction in the proportion of people living in slums, 5% between 2000 and 2014. However, the absolute number of people in slums has increased, with a particularly critical situation in Sub-Saharan Africa (56%) compared to very low numbers in Europe and North America. Global figures from data on municipal waste collection show that 65% of urban dwellers are served with collection systems. However, figures at regional levels differ substantially, with European coverage much higher than Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia. Striking differences are observed across regions on air quality – with European levels much worse than Australia and New Zealand but better than Latin America and Asia.

<sup>10</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/8461633/KS-04-17-780-EN-N.pdf/f7694981-6190-46fb-99d6-d092ce04083f>

<sup>11</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2017/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2017.pdf>

A number of UN agencies are actively involved in developing tools for implementation and providing assistance to countries and cities. In particular, UN-Habitat was designated as the custodian agency for 8 of the indicators covered by SDG11, and as supporting agency for other 5 indicators. The Global Monitoring Framework<sup>12</sup> referred to above was developed by UN-Habitat in collaboration with UNESCO, WHO, UNISDR, UN Woman, UNEP and UNDP with the aim of providing definitions and metadata for all indicators covered by the urban goal. UN-Habitat also put forward the City Prosperity Initiative<sup>13</sup>, an indicator framework which allows cities to quantify, identify and report their progress in becoming more prosperous, therefore presenting the potential to provide a global framework for indicators and targets of SDG11.

Given the potential impact of urbanization on land use and food security, FAO is also engaged in addressing urban resilience. With the aim of achieving more inclusive food security and nutrition policies, FAO supports countries, government as well as stakeholders at national and city level in building multi-level governance and the necessary institutional capacities<sup>14</sup>.

### Suggested recommendations for EU action to ensure EU and global delivery of SDG11

- Integration of urban planning and management into all relevant policy priorities (e.g. EU Plastics Strategy, Waste Package, Climate & Energy Framework).
- Ensure better access and utilisation of European funds for cities, such as the delivery of the 6% of the ERDF investments to sustainable urban development.
- Better understanding and acknowledgment of regional differences on SDG11 is needed to better direct EU's financial support.
- Better monitoring on cities' progress in delivering key objectives of SDG11.
- Promoting tools for cities which aim at stimulating progress and create incentives for cities with different backgrounds and performance (e.g. self-assessment).
- Promoting knowledge sharing on the role and implications of the urban dimension on other policy objectives.
- Promoting city-level action to contribute to progress on other SDGs.

### Responsible consumption and production - SDG12

**The 2017 Eurostat report indicates positive progress across all of monitored areas and related indicators.** The report<sup>15</sup> focused on assessing SDG12 under three sub-themes: decoupling environmental impact from economic growth, energy consumption, and waste generation and management. Resource productivity is used as one measure of responsible consumption. This was 2.07 EUR per kg in 2016, an improvement of 17.3% since 2011. The Eurostat report (pp. 242-245) also notes the limitations of this measure, both with respect to the impacts of the financial crisis and the resource intensity of imports to the EU economy., Real progress in this area may therefore be less significant than the data suggests.

In addition to the Eurostat monitoring framework, the EU's circular economy policies and monitoring framework are very relevant for the implementation of SDG12. The EU monitoring framework for circular economy comprises four areas covered by 10 indicators, three of which partly overlapping with the Eurostat indicators (waste generation, recycling rates, and in part the indicator on self-sufficiency for raw materials). Data on material consumption, waste generation, waste recycling and circular material use are given on a

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<sup>12</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/sdg-goal-11-monitoring-framework/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/city-prosperity-initiative/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/goals/goal-11/en/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/8461633/KS-04-17-780-EN-N.pdf/f7694981-6190-46fb-99d6-d092ce04083f>



dedicated Eurostat page, providing EU wide and MS level data.<sup>16</sup> Evidence shows that while waste management practices are improving, for example the share of landfilling has decreased by half since 1995, waste generation as a whole has remained stable, showing little decoupling of the economy from resource use.

VNRs from EU Member States suggest that countries face challenges in achieving sustainable consumption and production. In 2017: Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden all reported their ambitions to develop circular economies to address SDG12. Several Member States also noticed the economic benefits which could be gained from more sustainable production patterns. Portugal, Sweden and Slovenia, all note the value of green public procurement.<sup>17</sup> A less optimistic outlook on SDG12 from Member States compared to the Eurostat SDG Report, likely reflects the difficulty in accurately measuring sustainable consumption and production with the available data.

At the global level, the UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017 notes that the global material footprint is growing and that Europe has one of the highest per capita material footprints - 20.2 tonnes per capita in 2010 compared to 2.5 tonnes per capita in Sub-Saharan Africa. It notes that local improvements in Domestic Material Consumption (DMC) in many parts of the world are linked to the shift of manufacturing and rapid industrialisation in Asia and Africa. Furthermore, the SDG Progress report of the Secretary general of the UN Economic and Social Council, notes that in absolute terms DMC has grown globally from 1.29 to 1.41 kg per USD – indicating a growth in resource use per unit of economic output.

The SDG Index, produced by the SDSN, identifies SDG12 as one of the greatest challenges for Europe and other OECD countries. This report includes information on “spillover indicators” which are designed to illustrate cross border environmental externalities. EU MS often perform amongst the worst globally on issues such as CO2 and biodiversity loss embodied in trade.<sup>18</sup>

Work on sustainable consumption and production has largely been led by UNEP, but a number of other agencies such as FAO, UNDP and the ILO have also been active. For example SDG12.3 addresses food waste, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) led initiative Save Food addresses food loss and food waste at the global level.

A number of UN conventions, to all of which the EU is party, are relevant to SDG12, particularly those addressing the challenges linked to pollution, waste, chemicals and climate change, notably Basel Convention on hazardous wastes, Rotterdam Convention on hazardous chemicals and pesticides in trade, Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants, Kyoto Protocol on climate change and Montreal Protocol on protection of ozone layer.

The UN Environment International Resource Panel (IRP) was established in 2007 to monitor resource use worldwide. Analysis from the IRP is closely related to the objectives of SDG12; their research covers “Decoupling, Cities, Water, Metals, Land and Soils, Food, Trade, Resource Efficiency, Green Technology and Global Materials Flows”.<sup>19</sup> Their research demonstrates that Europe and North America benefit from the consumption of materials extracted elsewhere, a phenomenon of outsourcing of environmental impact which is anticipated to increase in the future.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that the use of domestic material consumption in the measurement of Resource Productivity by Eurostat for SDG12 is inadequate for assessing the

<sup>16</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/circular-economy/indicators/monitoring-framework>

<sup>17</sup> pp. 20-22. [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis\\_Report\\_VNRs\\_2017.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis_Report_VNRs_2017.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.sdgindex.org/assets/files/2017/2017-SDG-Index-and-Dashboards-Report--full.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.resourcepanel.org/reports>

<sup>20</sup> pp. 28-29 <http://www.resourcepanel.org/file/904/download?token=Yvoil2o6>

sustainability of Europe's consumption, as it poorly accounts for materials extraction and production outside of the EU.

In May 2018 an expert group meeting focused on SDG12 was organised by UNDESA in consultation with UNEP and the FAO, in order to prepare for the HLPF in July. It noted that achieving SDG12 requires changes in both the demand and supply side of the economy, which in turn require changes in behaviour and in the way economic development is pursued. Issues covered were the relation between sustainable consumption and production, and climate action, sustainable transport, ocean action, plastic pollution, and food loss and waste.<sup>21</sup>

### Suggested recommendation for EU actions to ensure EU and global delivery of SDG12

- Improve monitoring and reporting of resource use, including the developing official statistical tools to account for embodied and transboundary impacts of consumption in Europe. Eurostat has proposed to include more relevant indicators to account for such impacts, however the introduction of these new indicators is currently "put on hold".
- Develop policies to reduce Europe's dependency on resource extraction both in the EU and overseas – i.e. to prevent externalities linked to outsourcing.
- Develop stronger legislation to address food waste, including better integration between food and agricultural policies (including the CAP).
- Continue work on the interface of chemicals, product, and waste legislation, to facilitate the development of secondary markets for plastics as well as other materials in Europe.
- Develop policy measures to increase the implementation of Green Public Procurement across the EU
- Develop education for the environment which identifies the negative impacts of consumption and waste. Promote alternative metrics to economic and development to GDP, embedding nature protection and wellbeing into headline political priorities.
- Mainstream circular Economy issues with Europe's ODA.

### Life on land - SDG15

**The EU's progress in achieving SDG15 in its own territory has been ambiguous and further efforts are required to achieve the 2030 targets.** The 2017 Eurostat report focuses on assessing progress through three different aspects: ecosystem status (i.e. river and ground water quality and forest cover), land degradation (i.e. artificial land cover and soil erosion) and biodiversity (i.e. common bird index and the sufficiency of terrestrial sites designated under the EU Habitats Directive). While the indicators for ecosystem status, including river and ground water quality and share of forested areas, all indicate positive trends, there seem to be limited signs of success to curb land degradation with the total artificial land cover growing faster over recent years (2012 and 2015) than the previous period (2009 – 2012) and with artificial land cover per capita also experiencing a slight increase since 2012. The report estimates that if current trends continue, within a century Europe will have an additional artificial surface roughly comparable to the size of Hungary.

As for biodiversity, the short term trends seem to indicate slight positive developments both in terms of the level of bird conservation and designation of terrestrial sites, with an increase of 0.7 % in common bird species numbers over the past five years and the sufficiency of designated terrestrial sites under the EU Habitats Directive considered high<sup>22</sup>. However, the long-term trends in bird conservation remain negative:

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<sup>21</sup> see: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17953SCP\\_EGM\\_conc\\_note\\_23042018\\_for\\_distribution2.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17953SCP_EGM_conc_note_23042018_for_distribution2.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> 92% sufficiency index, including number, extent, distribution and representativeness of sites.

since 1990 the index of common birds has fallen by 12.6 % with common farmland birds experiencing a larger decline, with a reduction of 31.5 % compared to the 1990 baseline. In addition, contrary to the trend in common bird species numbers, common farmland birds have continued to decline by 4.8 % in the past five year period. Furthermore, while the coverage of EU's terrestrial protected area network might be considered sufficient, the majority of these protected habitats (77 %) and protected non-avian species (60 %) remain in an unfavourable conservation status.

**As regards the EU's contribution to SDG15 in the global context, while some progress has been made over the past 5 years increased efforts are needed.** The mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy in 2015 concludes that while there is progress in achieving the EU target to help avert global biodiversity loss (Target 6) this progress is at an insufficient rate and therefore increased efforts are needed to meet the target by its 2020 deadline<sup>23</sup>. In particular, further efforts are needed to reduce the impacts of EU consumption patterns on biodiversity at global level, to help to adjust markets signals so as to support biodiversity conservation, and to improve the contribution of EU trade agreements to conserving biodiversity. In addition, there is a need to step up EU efforts to screen its development cooperation funding to minimise any negative impacts of EU funded interventions on biodiversity and ecosystems.

In general, the outcomes of monitoring progress in delivering SDG15 are dependent on the indicators used and data available. It could be argued that the current set of indicators used by Eurostat is limited, for example lacking indicators for a number of key ecosystems (e.g. agricultural systems and inland waters other than rivers) and focusing on quantity (i.e. area coverage) rather than quality of ecosystems. This has been acknowledged by Eurostat and the forthcoming 2018 monitoring report is expected to include a number of new or suggested indicators to complement the monitoring, including trends in grassland butterflies and growth of forest stock.

In terms of implementation in the global context, progress on delivering SDG15 is closely interlinked with the delivery of global biodiversity goals established under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The current framework of global objectives – called the Aichi Targets<sup>24</sup> - is set until 2020. While progress has been made on several areas, results such as the regional reviews by International Panel on Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity (IPBES) indicate that biodiversity is still in decline. For example, the coverage of the protected area network has been increasing however the effectiveness of these areas continues to suffer from inadequate implementation in practice<sup>25</sup>. Consequently, it is becoming commonly accepted that the 2020 biodiversity goals will not (all) be met, with the discussions now gearing up to define new targets beyond the 2020 benchmark. Concrete proposals for the post-2020 objectives are yet to be adopted, however many stakeholders seem to advocate for a close alignment with the SDG framework.

#### Suggested recommendation for EU actions to ensure EU and global delivery of SDG15

- Ensure the adoption of ambitious and measurable post-2020 biodiversity objectives with explicit synergies for delivering a range of SDGs (e.g. SDG3 and SDG6).
- Ensure that support to ecosystem and biodiversity conservation from the 2021-2027 MFF will match the financing needs at EU level.
- Step up the efforts to improve the integration of biodiversity considerations into the EU trade agreements (Target 6 of EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy), both in terms of assessing possible impacts of trade on ecosystems and biodiversity and ensuring that these impacts are duly addressed in the trade agreements.

<sup>23</sup> <https://biodiversity.europa.eu/mtr/biodiversity-strategy-plan/target-6-overview>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ipbes.net/event/ipbes-6-plenary>

- Improve the monitoring of EU progress in / contributions to achieving SDG15 in synergy with implementing the EU IAS Regulation, the EU Pollinator Initiative and the Results Framework for development cooperation.

## Conclusions

**The SDGs framework has the potential to provide a useful overarching framework to further the debate on Europe's political priorities, with a view to pursue social, economic and environmental sustainability both within the Union and globally.** However, this requires increasing political buy-in across sectors. There is a need to translate SDGs into concrete political priorities, targets, and actions in the EU, and not to limit the focus on technical aspects of implementation, such as indicators, only.

The July 2018 HLPF meeting constitutes a window of opportunity to assert influence on the implementation of SDGs in the EU, providing an opportunity to use a range of key current EU initiatives (e.g. the EU circular economy package, post-2020 biodiversity objectives and 2021 – 2027 EU budget) to advance the SDGs debate.

**In the global context, there is a need to ensure that environmental sustainability is fully integrated within global, regional and national SDG implementation.** Therefore, it will be important to promote linkages between the outcomes of the 2018 HLPF, the forthcoming Global Sustainable Development Report, and other global process of relevance to the environment, including the UNFCCC, the CBD, UNEA, as well as the newly launched negotiations for a global Pact for the Environment<sup>26</sup>. Setting the stage for environment being at the heart for the following HLPF is crucial, especially in terms of the 4-year stocktake and the heads of state segment in 2019, ensuring the EU provides an evidence-based report to the 2019 HLPF and facilitates meaningful participation of civil society within this process.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/events/un-environment-event/high-level-discussion-global-pact-environment>