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Progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

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EU Voluntary Review on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Introduction

This annex accompanies the EU Voluntary Review (EUVR) and is organised around 17 chapters providing a qualitative assessment of the progress made on achieving each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the policy and enabling environment as well as the most important means of implementing the SDGs at EU level. The EUVR is further supplemented by: i) a statistical and analytical annex, which presents quantitative information on relevant SDG indicators, synergies, trade-offs and interlinkages, ii) an annex highlighting the essential role of youth engagement in delivering the UN 2030 for Sustainable Development ('the 2030 Agenda'), and iii) an annex dedicated to the stakeholder consultation activities and the views of civil society.

This structure, inspired by the voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews (VNRs), is used to present the relevant information in an organised manner. It also makes for an accessible and transparent structure to present the strategic framework laid down in the EUVR, consisting of leading EU targets and commitments for each SDG.

The EU's goal of accelerating its twin green and digital transitions, as well as implementing the SDGs through its recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, is reflected across this EUVR. The EU is fully committed to becoming greener, more digital, more socially just, more inclusive and more resilient. The EU is fully committed to a human rights based approach in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

SDG integration in the EU policy framework

Together with partners across the world and a broad range of stakeholders, the EU played an active part in shaping the universal 2030 Agenda, which is fully consistent with EU values and policy objectives.

The Commission followed up on the adoption of the 2030 Agenda with a forward-looking approach outlined in the 2016 Communication: 'Next steps for a sustainable European future: European Union action for sustainability'[1]. This entailed assessing the state of play, identifying the most relevant sustainability concerns, and triggering the active integration of the SDGs in the European policy framework.

In 2019, the Commission adopted a reflection paper – 'Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030' – as part of the reflection process on the future of Europe. The reflection paper took stock of the main SDG-related EU internal and external initiatives, laid out an overview of the progress carried out since the 2030 Agenda was adopted, including the outcome of the reflections of a high-level multi-stakeholder platform, and presented scenarios for the future. The reflection paper also informed President Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines for 2019-2024.

The current 'whole of government' approach, placing the SDGs at the core of EU policy, legislation and funding, was detailed in the 2020 staff working document 'Delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – A comprehensive approach'[2]. The key strands of this approach are: designing and effectively applying deeply transformative policies; coordination of economic policies through the European Semester; the multiannual financial framework and the recovery instrument NextGenerationEU; mainstreaming the SDGs in policymaking using better regulation tools; ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development; EU engagement in the world; monitoring and reporting; and engagement of civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.

The preparation of the EU's first-ever Voluntary Review

Sustainable development requires a comprehensive and cross-sectoral policy approach and is ultimately an issue of governance, which needs to be pursued in partnership with all stakeholders at all levels.

The EUVR was prepared across several phases.

[1] COM(2016)739 final
[2] SWD(2020)400 final

- **Planning, collecting information, and engaging with stakeholders (February 2022 – December 2022)**. The coordination team liaised with the UN and engaged with stakeholders through various complementary work strands, which allowed for broad and transparent consultation during the drafting period (detailed in the synopsis report). Essential inputs in the preparation included the regular exchanges with Member States (including a questionnaire on SDG implementation) and other EU institutions, the views of civil society and the feedback received from the public through the 'call for evidence'.
- **Compiling and finalising the review (December 2022 – April 2023)**. All the draft elements of the Voluntary Review were brought together, made coherent and progressively streamlined, in parallel with continued dialogue with Member States and engagement with stakeholders.

Importance of addressing interlinkages between the SDGs in EU policymaking

In 2015, the global community agreed that the SDGs are universal, integrated and indivisible. The SDGs are interdependent by design, particularly through a complex network of interlinkages. These interconnections can be positive, negative, or of a mixed nature, and can occur at different geographical and temporal scales with different impacts. Given their interdependent nature, the 17 SDGs are best implemented in a comprehensive manner – all simultaneously – and this is precisely what the EU is aiming for with its whole-of-government approach.

The EU pays particular attention to such interlinkages and integrated actions that can create mutual benefits and meet multiple objectives in a coherent way. It is actively assessing synergies and trade-offs as it progresses towards sustainable development in an integrated manner, balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions. This is also a central requirement to fulfilling the commitment to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development.

This annex contains specific examples of how these SDG interlinkages are addressed at EU level. In fact, several EU targets and commitments, as well as related Eurostat indicators, are often relevant to several SDGs, although in this review they are mentioned in only one chapter for practical reasons. The statistical and analytical annex also contains illustrations of how the EU addresses SDG interlinkages in its policymaking and in the context of international partnerships.

SDG interlinkages: the case of the cultural dimension of sustainable development

Addressing interlinkages within the 2030 Agenda goes beyond connecting the headlines of the 17 goals, and requires a more granular understanding of the multiple interconnections across targets, having regard to the three dimensions of sustainable development. This is illustrated by the role played by cultural policies, as described in the Commission Report on the cultural dimension of sustainable development. Consistent with the multidimensional approach laid down in the 2018 European Agenda for Culture, culture is a cross-cutting driver of a range of interconnected targets under different SDGs. The various aspects of EU cultural policy action connect among others with social cohesion and well-being, education, participation, the protection of cultural heritage, professional mobility and employment in the cultural and creative sectors, and international cultural partnerships. In the case of the EU, the main actions to pursue the twin digital and green transition, and the various related SDGs to these headline ambitions, rely on a contribution from the cultural sectors in all their diversity. To take further this cross-cutting perspective, the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027 supports the EU policy approach on the cultural dimension of sustainable development under its various programme strands, including media, culture and cross-sectoral aspects.

Internal and external implementation, including policy coherence and spillover effects

Given the universality of SDGs and because the 2030 Agenda should be implemented globally, the EU is committed to implementing the SDGs internally and at the same time supporting its partner countries in their own

efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda. As such, each of the following SDG-specific chapters is organised around these two complementary internal and external dimensions.

The EU pays particular attention to ensuring that the internal and external dimensions of the SDGs are consistently addressed as two sides of the same coin. This EUVR therefore includes sections on 'internal/external coherence and policy coherence for development' at the beginning of the external section of each SDG chapter.

These sections address, among other things, the external aspects of EU policies, as a continuum with the internal section of each chapter, and then addresses the impacts on partner countries where relevant. In this manner, the EUVR integrates the reporting on policy coherence for development, having regard to the EU Treaties (Art. 208 TFEU). As stated in the Better Regulation toolbox, 'as part of the EU's commitment to ensure SDG implementation internally and externally, the assessment of potential impacts of internal EU policies and initiatives on partner countries is crucial. It must be applied in a manner that integrates the SDGs, given that they are a shared universal framework." Since policy coherence for development relates to the external impacts of internal policies, the EUVR is a vehicle to presenting this orientation in a clear and consistent manner.

Main elements on the internal implementation in each SDG chapter

The beginning of each of the sections on internal implementation aims to provide an honest overview of the state of progress across each SDG as well as the challenges. In some cases, progress towards achieving a specific SDG was not sufficient prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The accompanying impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, and the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have in many cases further hampered the level of progress. The pursuit of the SDGs remains challenging, but it is more important than ever to redouble efforts and ensure a sustainable and long-lasting recovery, which accelerates the green and digital transitions.

Central to each of the chapters is a strategic framework laying down the main targets and commitments set by EU policies that contribute directly to the progress made towards achieving each SDG. The selection of EU targets is based on a thorough screening of meaningful policy commitments, which are most often time-bound and accompanied by measurable elements, including indicators from the Eurostat annual monitoring report on SDGs. In this manner, the EUVR takes into account the views of those stakeholders who called for an integrated presentation of EU SDG targets in the EUVR. Additional information on the progress made on Eurostat indicators is found in the statistical and analytical annex.

The internal section of each SDG chapter then lays out the key initiatives, key enablers for implementing the SDGs within the EU (related to the UN Global Sustainable Development Report, including financial instruments and resources and leading research programmes), as well as main strands of stakeholder engagement relevant to each SDG, and illustrative examples of multi-level governance to stress the critical role EU Member States, cities and regions play in implementing the SDGs. The 'SDG mapper' tool (see statistical annex) provides useful complementary information for mapping EU policies Further information can be found on the relevant Commission websites. Besides, more information on action at national, regional and local levels is available directly from the VNRs of EU Member States and the voluntary local reviews of European regions and cities.

Main elements on external action in support of the SDGs

The EU and its Member States are determined to support the SDGs at global level. Each SDG chapter contains a part with a range of relevant details on the EU's external action. After a brief overview of global trends and after addressing the issue of internal/external coherence, each external section then describes the main orientations of EU external engagement, support provided to partner countries to implement the SDGs across our international partnerships, neighbourhood and enlargement policies, and humanitarian action.

This EUVR integrates the commitment to report every 4 years on the implementation of the 2017 European Consensus on Development to show EU support to partner countries in their efforts to progress in achieving the SDGs. In several chapters, the external sections focus on the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy as a

concrete vehicle for supporting the implementation of SDGs globally. It shows a range of EU actions that were carried out at regional and country level, including actions with Member States acting as Team Europe.

In terms of EU financial support for implementing the SDGs outside the EU, the section contains several strands of complementary information. It first highlights the support provided by EU institutions per SDG, as reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This contains some general messages on the interlinkages between SDGs in the design and reporting of EU actions, as shown graphically in the statistical and analytical annex. The EUVR also contains complementary information of the collective action of the EU and those Member States who report on the SDGs. Coordination is being stepped up with EU Member States, within the overall SDG reporting to OECD, to further improve the consistency in the way SDGs are reported.

For some specific SDGs, such as on climate change, biodiversity and gender equality, the respective chapters also contain statistical information from the reporting under existing OECD markers related to these cross-cutting policy issues. The preparation of the EUVR has shown there is scope to improve consistency between SDG reporting and the reporting under such specific markers, to be further addressed as part of the follow-up.

Looking ahead

As a whole, not only does the EU's Voluntary Review take stock of the progress made towards achieving each of the SDGs by laying out the main contributing policies and actions, but it also contains forward-looking elements. This EUVR lays out a number of EU initiatives that can contribute to advancing the achievement of the SDGs, which have yet to be launched. These initiatives, some of which are stemming from the Conference of the Future of Europe and the latest Commission work programme, are indicated in the relevant SDG chapters.

On external actions, this EUVR also highlights some of the expected work ahead, based on programming and the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy in support of the SDGs. This annex complements the forward-looking elements laid out in the main report, thereby putting together a range of actions that are planned to be carried out as a follow-up.

At the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the EU looks forward to exchanging best practices, as well as renewing our commitments to working among partners for mutual benefits as we advance together the 2030 Agenda.

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Poverty harms people's lives and hampers social inclusion, cohesion and well-being. Without effective educational, health, labour market and social protection systems, the risk of poverty is handed down from one generation to the next. This in turn leads to productivity losses and hampers inclusive and sustainable growth. To deliver on SDG 1 in an EU context, it is therefore necessary to tackle the multiple dimensions of poverty and social exclusion, such as income poverty, social deprivation and participation in the labour market, and to ensure that basic housing needs are met, while prioritizing the most vulnerable, as pledged in the leave no one behind promise.

Progress towards reducing poverty and social exclusion (SDG 1) in the EU has been significant. Between 2015 and 2020, fewer people have been affected by income poverty, suffered from severe material and social deprivation, or lived in (partly) jobless households. Poverty and inequality also remained fairly stable despite the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, an outcome linked to exceptional public intervention.

Challenges nonetheless remain in relation to further alleviating poverty, especially as regards the number of children who live in poor households. In addition, the recent energy and food price rises, further aggravated by the war in Ukraine, hit the poorest households the hardest as they spend a higher share of their disposable income on basic goods such as energy and food.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
Reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 15 million by 2030 compared with the situation in 2019, including at least 5 million children Set in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	In 2021, 95.4 million people, equalling 21.7% of the EU population, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This represents a substantial decrease since 2015, when 104.9 million people (or 24.0% of the population) were at risk. The number of children aged less than 18 who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion amounted to 19.6 million in 2021, corresponding to 24.4% of the population of this age group. This is a substantial decrease compared with 2015, when 22.3 million children were at risk across the EU. Poverty can also affect working people. The numbers of people at risk of income poverty despite being in work – the working poor – has generally decreased over recent years. In 2021, the in-work poverty rate was 8.9%, a decrease of 0.8 percentage points compared with 2015 when it stood at 9.7%.

	Since 2015, in the area of basic housing needs, the numbers have fallen of people overburdened by their housing costs (down from 11.2% in 2015 to 8.3% in 2021) or facing severe housing deprivation[3] (down from 5.3% in 2015 to 4.3% in 2020). If, over the next decade, the EU can maintain the pace of decrease currently observed, the overall poverty reduction target will be within reach. However, to meet the sub-target of lifting at least 5 million children out of risk of poverty or social exclusion, the pace would need to speed up during the decade.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 1 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

Addressing multidimensional poverty and basic needs is among the main priorities of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and its **Action Plan**. The plan turns the 20 Pillar principles into concrete actions to benefit citizens. It also proposes headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction for the EU to reach by 2030, a commitment confirmed at the Porto Social Summit of May 2021. The revised **social scoreboard** is the key tool to monitor progress towards its implementation. Delivering the European Pillar of Social Rights is a shared responsibility for the EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, social partners, and civil society.

Breaking the intergenerational cycles of disadvantage starts with investing in children to reduce the gap between children in need and their better-off peers. Adopted in 2021, the **European Child Guarantee** helps to ensure that, in the EU, every child in need has equal access to early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, housing and nutrition.

The Directive on adequate minimum wages, adopted in October 2022, aims at tackling in-work poverty, ensuring fair competition, stimulating productivity improvements, and promoting economic and social progress.

The Council Recommendation on access to social protection stresses the right to adequate social protection, regardless of the type and duration of their employment relationship, for workers and, under comparable conditions, the self-employed.

To also address poverty risks for people outside the labour market or in transition, the Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income calls on Member States to gradually bring income support to the level of national poverty thresholds and provides guidance on how to improve the coverage and take-up of these programmes.

The EU is also actively involved in ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality. In this respect, in June 2022, the Council agreed on a Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality**.** This provides guidance to all EU countries on how to address relevant employment and social aspects of the green transition.

The report of the high-level group on the **future of social protection and of the welfare state** in the EU develops a vision over the years to 2030 on how to improve social protection systems and the welfare state in the midst of ongoing and new changes.

The Commission also presented the **affordable housing initiative** in October 2020 as part of its **renovation wave strategy** for Europe; this aims to improve the energy consumption of buildings and to create green jobs.

The **social economy action plan**, adopted in December 2021, seeks to enhance social innovation, support the development of the social economy and boost its social and economic transformative power, including poverty reduction. It proposes a series of actions for the period 2021-2030.

Selected enablers

Financial resources, reforms and investments, in a people-centred approach, as well as science and innovation, are strong means to implement measures to support the SDGs in the EU. Within Cohesion policy, a budget of EUR 99.3 billion (2021-27) is dedicated to the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).** It provides a major contribution to the EU's efforts to end poverty and support social inclusion, because Member States are required to allocate at least 25% of their ESF+ resources to promote social inclusion. For example, the current programming period includes a specific ESF+ objective to promote the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma.

The **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived** (FEAD) specifically supports actions by EU countries in providing food, clothing and other essential goods to the poorest in society. It also provides support through non-material social inclusion measures. Since April 2020, FEAD could support specific measures for addressing the COVID-19 crisis. For people living on the streets of **Sweden**, the risks of exploitation, poor health, and hate crimes are particularly serious if individuals are from another country or culture. Supported through FEAD, the *Pentru Tine - För Dig* ('For you') project in Sweden gave marginalised people who were homeless vital information and the support they needed to find their way out of material deprivation and social isolation.

Beneficiaries of these EU funds must respect gender equality and non-discrimination principles.

The Regulation on the **common agricultural policy (CAP) strategic plan for 2023-27** also links the CAP to the SDG poverty reduction objectives by providing income support in remote areas. Poverty in rural areas decreased significantly from 30% in 2010 to 22.5% in 2021.

As part of the revision of the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS), the **Social Climate Fund** will address any social impacts that arise from the new system and will support those affected by energy and transport poverty in particular.

Long-standing EU initiatives were complemented by additional EU efforts to address the impact of the pandemic on the poorest households, including under the **Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative** (CRII and CRII+) taken in the framework of **cohesion policy**. Some Member States, through their **national recovery and resilience plans**, are investing in the modernisation and digitalisation of social benefit systems, which will improve their coverage. A few investments also focus on fighting energy poverty and on improving access to food and water sanitation for the poorest households. In addition, according to the Governance Regulation[3], the objective of Member States' National energy and climate plans is closely linked to addressing energy poverty and shall outline policies and measures to tackle it.

For example, **Portugal** has set up a new strategy to combat poverty through the development of a multidimensional, integrated, medium- and long-term approach. This reform is further complemented by specific investments in the most deprived metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. It provides a framework to support dedicated actions targeting specific groups, from children to older people, including the most vulnerable groups. For instance, it sets out conditions for the development and implementation of policies focusing on specific challenges of social exclusion and poverty at the local level. In addition, it also creates a single monitoring framework for poverty-related indicators.

Research and innovation actions under **Horizon Europe** explore the root causes and drivers of inequalities, social inclusion and poverty in Europe. The project **MapIneq** takes a life-course perspective to map and visualise drivers of inequalities. It seeks to understand how various socio-economic conditions, policies, societal changes and changes over the life course affect inequalities in the domains of family, health, education and work. The aim of the **Solutions to Tackle Energy Poverty (STEP)** project is to alleviate energy poverty by facilitating

[3] Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action.

behavioural change through trusted, tailored advice, provided directly to consumers in or at risk of energy poverty, and by implementing low-cost energy efficiency solutions in energy-poor households.

Another example is the project 'Plan for and evaluate the European Child Guarantee in **Luxembourg'** supported by the **Technical Support Instrument** under the call for 2022. The project aims at implementing the European Child Guarantee and reaching the objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its main goal is to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion. The project will provide Luxembourg with help to improve monitoring and evaluation tools and to conduct meaningful stakeholder consultations that are necessary for an envisaged action plan.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on its poverty reduction agenda in a collaborative approach. For example, through the **EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)**, the EU supports the **European Anti-Poverty Network** (EAPN). This is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks involving anti-poverty non-governmental organisations and grassroots groups, as well as European organisations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

In June 2021, European institutions, EU governments and civil society committed to working together towards combating homelessness in the EU. The **European Platform on Combating Homelessness** serves to trigger dialogue, facilitate mutual learning, improve evidence and monitoring, and strengthen cooperation among all players that work to combat homelessness. The platform offers an opportunity to engage and work with local players, including cities and service providers. This will enable all involved to better exchange their knowledge and practices, and identify efficient and innovative approaches, to make progress on eradicating homelessness.

To tackle societal challenges of poverty and social exclusion, the **European Social Innovation Competition** is supporting early-stage ideas and facilitating a network of radical innovators to shape our society for the better. It awards four prizes for the best socially innovative projects for a more inclusive, just and sustainable Europe. In 2022, social innovators tackled the 'future of living' and submitted proposals for affordable and sustainable housing districts.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. At national level, for example, **Latvia** launched its minimum income level reform in 2021. The establishment of a minimum income threshold and its periodic review ensures that households and people with revenues below that level can claim municipal social assistance, and they are entitled to a higher state minimum pension and state social security benefits. The minimum income reform applies to people in need, retired people and people with disabilities who receive the minimum benefits and pensions.

At local level, the city of **Košice** in **Slovakia** is committed to SDG 1 through a project co-funded by the European Social Fund and based on a Housing First approach. The project provides affordable housing and a range of support measures to 23 families - with the plan to double this number - enabling 150 people, both parents and children, to live more stable lives, with no stigma of homelessness. It focuses on helping individuals and families to find and maintain accommodation, matching families and young people with housing, social and healthcare services, and legal support.

EU external action

Global trends

While world poverty rates decreased from 27.7% in 2000 to 8.6% in 2018, 660 million people were still living below the poverty line in 2019, of whom 347 million were in least developed countries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN estimates that an additional 93 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2022, when

compared with pre-pandemic levels. These estimates are expected to be further revised upwards when taking account of the global impacts of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

As to the measures to prevent and combat poverty, despite the significant expansion of social protection programmes during the COVID-19 crisis, only 47% of the global population is covered by at least one social protection programme. In Africa, this rate falls to 17%.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Given the multidimensional nature of poverty, SDG 1 is closely interlinked with other SDGs. High in-work poverty rates show that employment does not necessarily prevent poverty, with about 21% of all employees worldwide living in poverty in 2021. To tackle this challenge and to ensure that European consumption does not contribute to poverty worldwide, the EU provides comprehensive tools to promote **decent work** in the EU and worldwide. The Communication on decent work worldwide includes EU policies and initiatives with outreach beyond the EU, EU bilateral and regional relations, the EU in international and multilateral fora, and its engagement with stakeholders and in global partnerships.

A key objective of the EU's international partnership policy is to promote decent work, including social protection, in line with the EU's strong commitment to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. This is also reflected in the **2017 European Consensus on Development**. The EU actively contributes to **International Labour Organization** processes of setting labour standards, supervising their application, and promoting their implementation.

Furthermore, specific existing and upcoming EU tools consist of legislative proposals to tighten the responsibilities of companies in their global value chains, such as the proposed **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive**.

The EU also recognises that child and family poverty is a key driver of child labour, which is a breach of both international labour rights and the rights of the child. The EU strategy on the rights of the child commits to making EU supply chains free of child labour, and to provide technical assistance to strengthen labour inspection systems. The proposed forced labour product ban aims to prohibit the entry into the EU market of products made with forced labour, including forced child labour. In parallel, EU development cooperation seeks to eliminate child labour in value chains through initiatives such as CLEAR Cotton, the Sustainable Cocoa initiative, and the recently adopted action in value chains with high child labour prevalence and exports to EU.

In addition, through sector-specific initiatives, the EU further promotes decent work and social protection in specific areas. Hence, the Farm to Fork Strategy aims at ensuring decent work in global food supply chains, including safe and fair working conditions and rights. The considerations of workers' social protection, their working and housing conditions, and their health and safety protection all play a major role in building fair, strong and sustainable food systems, which benefit all tiers of the value chain, including through poverty reduction.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions[4] reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 8.1 billion in projects contributing to SDG 1. The greatest share of the EU contribution to SDG 1 is accounted for by projects that target SDG 1 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to several other interlinked SDGs such as SDG 8, SDG 13, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5 and SDG 2. Other SDGs also contribute to SDG 1 as a significant objective. The main contributors are SDG 8, SDG 16 and SDG 2. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through

[4] Based on OECD methodology, this includes ODA as reported by the European Commission (Development Share of Budget and European Development Fund) and European Investment Bank.

public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) [5] of the EU to SDG 1 amounted to EUR 9.7 billion in 2021.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs[6] to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 17.8 billion to SDG 1. Financial flows from the EU and Member States to SDG 1 have a strong global component (41%). At regional level, support to SDG 1 predominantly focuses on projects in Africa (45%) and Asia (25%). There are also a substantial number of global contributions which target SDG 1 at a broader level (20%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

Eradicating poverty in all its dimensions, tackling discrimination and inequalities, and leaving no one behind are all at the heart of the EU's development cooperation policy and international partnerships, as laid down in the 2017 **European** Consensus **on Development**. Consistent with the EU Treaties and the EU's current external financial instrument, poverty reduction and attention to the most vulnerable segments of the population are at the forefront of all cooperation programmes.

In this context, and in line with partner countries' own policies and plans for eradicating poverty globally, the EU's priorities for its external actions contributing to SDG 1 and interlinked SDGs are to:

- reduce the overall number of people living in poverty;
- establish solid social protection systems, in particular for the most vulnerable; and
- create educational and economic opportunities to get people out of poverty.

To this end, the EU supports through its partnerships policies that seek to maximise positive social outcomes and impacts, notably for social inclusion and human development. The EU also promotes domestic resource mobilisation and redistributive public policies that enable the sharing of benefits of growth and improved access to opportunities. Given the multidimensional nature of poverty, the EU pays particular attention to the interlinkages between the SDGs, with actions that can create co-benefits and meet multiple objectives in a coherent way.

EU budget support is a modality of action that can be instrumental in supporting policy development aimed at benefiting the poor. It is estimated that, between 2014 and 2020, 75% of the EU budget support portfolio (around EUR 11.3 billion globally) contributed to achieving SDG 1. Social protection is at the core of these efforts, as it protects people along the life cycle from poverty and risks. Social protection also enables access to basic services, such as education, water, sanitation, and adequate nutrition. Social protection is contributing to the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy.

Poverty, conflict, fragility and forced displacement are deeply interlinked and must be addressed in a consistent and comprehensive way by addressing their various root causes. Tackling extreme poverty, especially in fragile situations, requires a strengthened link between relief, rehabilitation, and development. It further needs a multi-stakeholder approach, action at various levels, and sustained international engagement. EU and Member States actions operate in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, recognising the need for conflict-sensitive approaches to development. Social protection support measures, delivered through a combination of short-term humanitarian action and mid/long-term cooperation, directly contribute to achieving resilience, peace, stabilisation, and economic growth in countries in crises. The guidance package on social protection across the

[5] TOSSD is an international standard for measuring the full array of resources in support of the 2030 Agenda. TOSSD monitors all resources flowing into developing countries for their sustainable development. This includes official resources as well as private resources mobilised through official means. TOSSD also measures with no geographical restrictions all contributions to international public goods which provide global benefits such as for instance a stable climate or biodiversity. More details can be found on http://www.www.tossd.org

[6] At this stage, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden.

nexus is an EU initiative that generates and expands the body of knowledge in this area. The 2017 Joint Communication A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action aligns the EU approach with a broad definition of resilience and to the multidimensional fragility model developed within the OECD.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

Eradicating poverty is closely linked to social protection, designed to protect individuals and their families and to ensure they can meet their basic needs throughout their lives. Explicitly addressed in SDG 1, eradicating poverty and strengthening social protection is also instrumental in making progress towards other goals, including SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10.

Against this background, the EU supports human development and implements several **social protection initiatives**. The **Socieux+** programme is a demand-driven technical assistance facility aiming to enhance partner countries' capacity to design, manage, and monitor inclusive, effective and **sustainable employment strategies** and social protection systems. Implemented since 2013 in partnership with several Member States, it has supported the creation of comprehensive national social protection systems and employment and labour policies in 74 countries, by facilitating the exchange of knowledge and good practices between EU Member States and partner institutions around the world through targeted, short-term activities.

In addition, the EU, along with some Member States, has launched a new Team Europe Initiative to strengthen **social protection in Georgia**. It aims to improve and extend social protection services through facilitating access to social services at local level and supporting the development of social protection legislation.

Further, the initiative **'Improving synergies between social protection and public finance management'** aims to strengthen national social protection systems by addressing links with public finance management, including the mobilisation of domestic resources to tackle underinvestment in social protection. In 2021, this thematic programme supported the adoption of national social protection policies and laws in Nepal, Cambodia, Senegal and Togo. It also supported a response to the COVID-19 crisis that focused on vulnerable population groups, such as workers in the informal economy, in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Togo, Ethiopia, and Uganda.

In the context of the COVID-19 response and hence contributing both to SDG1 and SDG 3, the EU has been working closely with the **Nigerian** authorities and other partners on swift and effective action to combat the pandemic and its effects on the poorest and more vulnerable. Under the project 'A hand of fellowship: helping vulnerable communities in Nigeria', the EU has contributed to Nigeria's national response, channelled through the UN COVID-19 Basket Fund. The EU has also helped UNICEF to procure vital health supplies for infected people, while further containing the spread of the virus in the country.

The EU actively fosters social inclusion, in a manner closely interlinked with several SDGs. The **Team Europe Initiative on Demography and Social Inclusion,** as part of the **Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package**, will support **Uganda** in achieving its SDG targets related to the delivery of inclusive social services, with a particular emphasis on healthy lives and well-being, gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, and inclusive and equitable quality education. In line with SDGs 1 and 10, the EU and Member States will define support actions on the basis of national governance, and sub-national, community-based and geographical approaches. Youth will also be consulted during the formulation and implementation of the Team Europe Initiative.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually supportive and coordinated to ensure complementarity and deliver an impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 1. For illustrative purposes, Portugal contributes to the **reduction of poverty and vulnerability to food and nutritional insecurity in the southern provinces of Angola** through the project FRESAN, which addresses at the same time family agriculture, food and nutrition security, resilience, rural development, water and adaptation to climate change.

Looking ahead

The Conference on the Future of Europe showed broad support to the need to ensure the **full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**. This includes its relevant headline targets for 2030, at EU, national, regional and local levels, in the area of social protection and inclusion. EU citizens also called on the EU, Member States and social partners to work together to **end in-work poverty**, address the rights of platform workers, and ban unpaid internships.

The Commission will continue its work on essential services, with the aim to ensure the reliable provision of services fundamental for social or economic activities in many different sectors. To address in-work poverty, new **guidelines** will be published about **collective agreements** regarding the working conditions of solo self-employed people. The **quality framework for traineeships** will also be reviewed to ensure that traineeships provide for good-quality learning content and appropriate working conditions and should not be a substitute for regular jobs or a precondition for a job placement.

Globally, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate implementation measures to achieve SDG 1. This will include the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where poverty eradication and/or social protection are a shared priority, and joining partners in efforts to build nationally appropriate social protection floors, with a view to achieving universal social protection. The Commission will support a new regional Team Europe Initiative on Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa. It will also support the implementation strategy of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions. Through a new thematic programme under the Universal Social Protection 2030 initiative, the EU will also support the digital convergence initiative in pursuit of more inclusive and interoperable social protection information systems. The EU also supports the initiative to establish a global fund for social protection.

SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Various crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war against Ukraine and the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – have increased pressures on global food systems and placed food security at the top of the political agenda.

The EU is largely self-sufficient for key agricultural products. It is a main wheat and barley exporter and is able to cover a high share of its consumption for other staple crops such as maize or sugar. The EU is also self-sufficient for most animal products, including dairy and meat; the notable exception is seafood. Agricultural production trends have been favourable over the past 5 years. Labour productivity in the EU's agricultural sector has improved and public investments in agricultural R&D have increased. In addition, the area under organic farming has grown steadily.

Agricultural production in the EU does have some adverse impacts, most notably water use stress, rising nitrate concentrations in EU groundwater bodies, and the continued decline of common farmland birds and pollinators. The EU land area at risk of severe soil erosion by water has decreased slightly, as have the ammonia emissions from agriculture.

In the EU, 36.2 million people cannot afford a quality meal every other day. At the same time, it is estimated that around 10% of food made available to EU consumers (retail, food services and households) may be wasted. Reducing food losses and food waste has the potential to reduce the resources we use to produce the food that we eat and to address some food security challenges. Food accounts for around 45% of the environmental impacts of EU consumers. More than 80% of agricultural emissions are attributable to the livestock sector.

In the current EU food environment, most people are exposed and predisposed to unsustainable food choices and unhealthy eating patterns; these are closely related to an increased risk of non-communicable diseases. In 2019, 16.5% of the population aged 18 or over suffered from obesity, a 1.1 percentage point increase since 2014. Recent surveys show that one in three children aged 6-9 and 52% of the adult population in the EU are overweight or obese. Up to 70% of national health budgets were spent on the treatment of diseases linked to obesity. Indeed, obesity alone was responsible for reducing life expectancy by up to 4 years, reducing GDP growth by up to 4.5 percentage points, and consuming up to 7% of health budgets.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
At least 25% of the EU's agricultural land should be under organic farming by 2030 Set in the Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies	The area under organic farming increased by 55.6% between 2012 and 2020 and constituted 9.1% of the EU's agricultural land. However, greater progress will be required to meet the 2030 target.
The use of pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides should be reduced by 50% by 2030	In both cases, the target is a 50% reduction by 2030 compared with the baseline period of 2015-2017. The most recent data show that the use and risk of chemical pesticides declined by

Set in the Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies	14% from 2015-2017 to 2020 while the use of more hazardous pesticides declined by 26% over the same period.
Reduce nutrient losses by at least 50% by 2030, while ensuring that there is no deterioration in soil fertility Set in the Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies	The gross nitrogen balance was 46 kg per hectare of utilised agricultural area and gross phosphorus balance 1 kg per hectare of utilised agricultural area (EU average 2012-14). The EU average share of groundwater monitoring stations with nitrates concentrations above 50 mg/L was 14.1% in 2016-2019, slightly up from 13.2% in the period 2012-15.
Reduce the sale of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture by at least 50% by 2030 Set in the Farm to Fork strategy	By 2021, Member States had already achieved around one third of the overall Farm to Fork reduction target.
Ensure that at least 10% of agricultural area is under high-biodiversity landscape features Set in the biodiversity strategy and the Nature Restoration Law	Support provided by the EU common agricultural policy is allocated to around 2.86 million hectares for maintaining or preserving landscape features, which include habitats supporting the lifecycle of pollinators.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 2 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and in Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of policies in place that address or touch on the various aspects of SDG 2. This section provides an overview of some of the most recent and relevant initiatives.

The **EU's common agricultural policy** provides income support, market measures and rural development measures to safeguard farmers' income and to increase agricultural productivity in a sustainable way while protecting rural landscapes and the environment.

The **EU farm to fork strategy** for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, adopted in May 2020, aims at: i) ensuring that the food chain, covering food production, transport, distribution, marketing and consumption, has a neutral or positive environmental impact; ii) ensuring food security, nutrition and public health, including sustainable seafood production through sustainable aquaculture and fisheries; and iii) preserving the affordability of food while generating fairer economic returns in the supply chain, so that ultimately the most sustainable food also becomes the most affordable, fostering the competitiveness of the EU supply sector, promoting fair trade, and creating new business opportunities, while ensuring integrity of the single market and occupational health and safety.

The **biodiversity strategy** for 2030 aims to bring back at least 10% of agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features in order to provide space for wild animals, plants, pollinators and natural pest regulators.

An **EU contingency plan for food security in times of crisis** was published in November 2021. The plan aims to ensure a sufficient and varied supply of safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainable food to citizens at all times.

The March 2022 **Communication on safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems** presented a range of short-term and medium-term actions to increase global food security and to support farmers and consumers in the EU in light of rising food prices and input costs, such as energy and fertilisers.

The May 2022 **Solidarity Lanes Communication** set out an action plan to establish Solidarity Lanes to ensure Ukraine can export grain, but also import the goods it needs, from humanitarian aid to animal feed and fertilisers.

In June 2022, the Commission proposed a **Regulation for the sustainable use of plant protection products**. This seeks to support the Farm to Fork strategy and will establish a legal basis for the calculation and publication of progress towards both pesticide reduction targets in the Farm to Fork strategy.

The November 2022 **Communication on ensuring availability and affordability of fertilisers** presented a wide range of actions and guidance on how to tackle the challenges that EU farmers and industry, as well as partner countries , are currently facing.

In January 2023, the Commission published a staff working document that analyses the **main drivers of food security**.

Selected enablers

The **European Agricultural Guarantee Fund** has a budget allocation of EUR 291.1 billion. Up to EUR 270 billion will be provided for income support schemes, with the remainder committed to supporting agricultural markets.

For the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development**, the total allocation amounts to EUR 95.5 billion. This includes EUR 8.1 billion from the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument to help address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **EU4Health programme** is the key financial tool for protecting public health and fighting major public health threats. Under this programme, the EU will invest EUR 5.3 billion in actions with a view to complementing policies in EU countries and achieving 10 specific objectives, including health promotion and disease prevention.

The **Fund for European aid to the most deprived (FEAD)** supports actions by EU countries in providing food, clothing and other essential goods to the poorest in society. It also covers non-material social inclusion measures. In April 2020, new amendments to the FEAD Regulation entered into force, introducing specific measures for addressing the COVID-19 crisis.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** also supports measures to promote sustainable agriculture. For instance, Italy's recovery and resilience plan includes a measure to support a variety of investments in digitalisation, transport and innovation for the agri-food sector to reduce the costs of food production and promote precision farming and traceability. This action also aims to improve the sector's energy efficiency by increasing the use of electric vehicles and renewable energy.

The project ‘Enabling politically sensitive climate change impact assessments for the 21st century (POLIMPACT)’ is financed by a European Research Council grant under **Horizon Europe** 2021. Using cutting-edge methods, including dynamic statistical simulations, machine learning, and expert elicitation, the project will develop a new portfolio of empirically grounded and rigorously validated scenario projections on governance, conflict, and economic development. This will, for the first time, enable accounting for political sources of vulnerability in climate change impact assessments. If successful, POLIMPACT will initiate a major revision in climate change impact modelling, radically improving the quality and real-world relevance of climate change impact assessments for key social risks over the 21st century.

The objective of the BrightSpace project, funded under **Horizon Europe** 2022, is to design effective and sustainable strategies for assessing and addressing the challenges of EU agriculture to navigate within a safe and just operating space, including planetary boundaries. BrightSpace will provide a set of analytical instruments to experiment, analyse, and coordinate the effects of innovative governance structures and policies related to agriculture to navigate within a safe and just operating space. The project is expected to run from the end of 2022 to the end of 2027 and features 14 different partners from all over the EU.

Another example is the project 'Implementation and embedding a reform programme for the better regulation of food in **Ireland**' supported by the **Technical Support Instrument** under the call for 2021. The Irish agri-food

sector has been negatively affected both by Brexit, due to the high trade intensity with the UK, and by the coronavirus crisis. The objective of the project is to restructure food control systems in Ireland to strengthen the food safety, authenticity and competitiveness of its agri-food sector.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 2 in a collaborative approach. Some example are as follows.

- The EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste is a multi-stakeholder platform bringing together international organisations, Member States and actors in the food value chain. It aims to accelerate the EU's progress towards SDG target 12.3, by defining measures needed to prevent food waste, sharing best practice and evaluating progress made over time. The Platform has a sub-group dedicated to facilitating food donation.
- The **Advisory Group on Sustainability of Food Systems** will provide the Commission with stakeholder views on the sustainability of food systems.
- **The EU Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices** sets out the actions that actors 'between the farm and the fork', such as food processors, food service operators and retailers, can voluntarily commit to undertake to tangibly improve and communicate their sustainability performance.
- **EIT Food is** a Knowledge and Innovation Community with a unique combination of public engagement, education, innovation and support to new business models allows the partnership to tackle the challenges of healthier diets, circular food systems and ensuring food security and safety.
- Relevant stakeholders in the food supply chain are part of the **European food security crisis preparedness and response mechanism**.
- In 2022, the **EU organic awards** took place for the first time.

Multilevel approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 2 include the following.

- At national level, **France** has launched its national food programme (*Programme national pour l'alimentation* (PNA) for the years 2019 to 2023. The PNA aims at improving the nutritious quality and diversification of food distributed within the country, and at tackling food insecurity and food waste. This is achieved through a yearly call for projects to support local initiatives and associations, giving awards to outstanding initiatives, and a national communication campaign to promote the PNA.
- **Czechia** facilitates food donation and tackles food waste with the help of food banks. Food business operators may donate food on a voluntary basis. However, there is a legal obligation for food stores bigger than 400 m^2 to donate to charity organisations any safe food that cannot be sold. The Ministry of Agriculture is providing financial support to food banks in the form of subsidies. Thanks to these measures, more than 21 000 tonnes of food were saved in 2019 and donated to 100 000 beneficiaries. In 2020, Czech food banks registered a 60% increase in the number of people applying for food aid as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in 2021 they helped more than 200 000 beneficiaries. In Czechia, there are currently 15 food banks and they have collected food to a value of over CZK 425 million (over EUR 17 million).
- In **Sweden**, the Mistra Food Futures programme will create a science-based platform to enable transformation of the Swedish food system. It considers sustainability in all its three dimensions: environmental, economic and social.
- With the support of the EU, the city of **Maribor** in **Slovenia** has developed a project to deal with its internal waste while meeting the city's needs. Maribor uses biological waste, waste from green trimmings and excavation materials from construction to produce innovative urban soil with a tailor-made pilot production plant. The new urban soil is then made available for citizens to use for urban agricultural activities, increasing their food self-sufficiency and minimising the city's environmental footprint.

EU external action

Global trends

In recent years, the absolute number of people going hungry and suffering from food insecurity and malnutrition has been gradually rising. According to the latest State of Food Security and Nutrition report, as many as 828 million people worldwide were suffering from hunger in 2021 and almost 3.1 billion people could not afford a healthy diet in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed as many as 150 million more people into hunger, and the impacts of the war in Ukraine on food and fertiliser prices have significantly worsened the situation.

Conflicts, climate change and environmental degradation, and economic shocks have been eroding the resilience of food systems around the world. According to the Global Network Against Food Crises, an initiative founded by the EU, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme, a total of 205 million people were in food crisis, emergency or famine in 2022. This makes 2022 the fourth consecutive year of rising levels of acute food insecurity.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

A global systemic transformation is necessary to make food and agricultural systems sustainable and resilient. The EU is working actively with its international partners to develop pathways for the global food system transformation, including through better data and evidence-based policymaking. The EU also substantially contributed to the success of the UN Food Systems and the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) summits.

The DeSIRA initiative on the development of smart innovation through research in agriculture aims at contributing to a climate-relevant, productive and sustainable transformation of agriculture and food systems in partner countries. The EU pledged EUR 140 million to support CGIAR, the largest international network on agricultural research for development, in furthering **food systems research** to tackle hunger, preserve natural resources and improve livelihoods.

Furthermore, the EU Space Programme is providing innovative solutions to make agriculture more productive and sustainable. For example, **Earth observation data** provided by the Copernicus Land Monitoring Service helps national bodies in partner countries to monitor crop conditions, providing early warnings on failing crops and predicting crop yields. This enables a considerable improvement in how to use fertilisers, fuel and pesticides resulting in healthier food and a reduced environmental impact.

The EU is pursuing the **transition towards more sustainable food systems** consistent with actions in other key areas such as trade. With the launch of the Farm to Fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, the EU seeks to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of its food system and strengthen its resilience, and to ensure food security in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss. As the world's largest food importer, and in line with the EU trade policy review, the EU is also using its free trade agreements to stimulate and incentivise more sustainable practices by its trade partners. One example is the inclusion of a chapter on sustainable food systems in the free trade agreement (FTA) agreed with New Zealand and Chile and proposed in ongoing FTA negotiations with Australia and Indonesia. The EU will strive to promote international standards in relevant international bodies. It will encourage the production of agri-food products complying with high safety and sustainability standards, and will support small-scale farmers in meeting these standards and in accessing markets.

Furthermore, the recognition and protection of **geographical indications** are key aspects of trade agreements concluded by the EU with partner countries**.** Such recognition gives consumers a guarantee of authenticity and quality linked to its origin, reputation and know-how developed to produce genuine products.

Throughout the reforms of the common agricultural policy (CAP), the EU focused on providing income support to farmers and ensuring targeted measures aimed at environmental protection whilst minimising the risk of

creating distortions in global agricultural markets. The CAP contributes to the EU's international commitments by:

- focusing on an enhanced environmental and climate delivery, helping to secure resource efficiency and fight the consequences of climate change in the EU and globally;
- aiming to better use the potential of knowledge, innovation and technologies with a view to a more sustainable farming sector and to provide opportunities for rural economies;
- maintaining the very favourable terms of trade in agricultural products for partner countries , particularly for least developed countries; and
- encouraging non-EU countries, both through bilateral and multilateral initiatives, to add value to agri-food production, for example by adopting and developing systems for the protection of geographical indications or organic production.

As concerns environmental impacts, the EU is highly dependent on natural resources embodied in goods and services consumed within the EU. This is illustrated by the land footprint, an estimated amount of land needed to produce one unit of a given final product consumed in a country, regardless of where in the world this land was used. With regard to imported agricultural products, the EU's global farmland footprint, combining cropland used to cultivate crops and grassland used to produce meat and dairy products, represented around 4% of farmland worldwide in 2019. In addition, the EU's food demand is responsible for 5% of the EU's total CO_2 consumption-based footprint and the EU imports about 70% of its seafood consumption. These spillover effects take place both within and outside the EU, and therefore require high levels of policy consistency between internal and external actions (an issue described below in other areas, such as SDG 14). Measures such as the new Regulation on deforestation-free supply chains for a range of agricultural commodities and derived products mainly linked to deforestation and forest degradation aim at reducing the footprint of EU consumption linked to deforestation driven by land conversion for agricultural use.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 1.1 billion in projects contributing to SDG 2. The main share of the EU contribution to SDG 2 is accounted for by projects that target SDG 2 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs such as SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 13. Other SDGs also contribute to SDG 2 as a significant objective. The main contributors are SDG 1, SDG 13 and SDG 14. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 2 amounted to EUR 3.6 billion in 2021.

In terms of selected results of the assistance[7], EU assistance to food-insecure people reached 28 million people, while nearly 19 million women of reproductive age, adolescent girls and children were reached by EU-funded nutrition-related interventions. In addition, over 21 million smallholder farmers benefited from EU interventions aimed at increasing their sustainable production, access to markets, and/or land security.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 5.4 billion to SDG 2. EU and Member State funding to SDG 2 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (42%) and Asia (32%). The collective response as Team Europe to global food insecurity exacerbated by the war of aggression against Ukraine is supported by an envelope of around EUR 18 billion from the EU and its Member States for the period 2021-2024 which contributes to SDG 2.

7 Selected results from EU-funded interventions managed by NEAR (European Neighbourhood Instrument) and INTPA. Further information on scope and methodology in Chapter 6 of the Report on the Implementation of the European Union's External Action Instruments in 2021 (SWD(2022) 353).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The deteriorating situation on SDG 2 requires both longer-term and immediate life-saving responses. In terms of longer-term assistance, the EU focuses on actions targeting sustainable agriculture and seafood production, resilience of food systems, research and innovation, and nutrition. With regard to immediate action, the EU is a main provider of humanitarian food assistance. The EU applies a nexus approach to support synergies between the short- and long-term responses.

To accelerate progress in cooperation with Africa, the EU launched two major initiatives. One is on **sustainable agri-value chains**, which aims to boost public and private investments in African agri-value chains. The second is on **resilient food systems**, which supports African food systems to become more resilient to unfavourable trends, shocks and crises.

The fight against acute hunger and acute malnutrition is also at the centre of the EU's humanitarian interventions. Food assistance, where possible through cash transfers, addresses the most vulnerable. As for the immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition, these are addressed through nutrition interventions targeting the specific needs of vulnerable groups. A collective Team Europe commitment amounting to EUR 4.3 billion for 2021-2024 was made at the Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2021, of which the EU pledged EUR 2.5 billion, to address all forms of malnutrition in humanitarian and development settings.

In the current context of the Russian war against Ukraine and the ensuing increases in food and energy prices, the Commission took action to urgently support the most vulnerable groups in countries and regions affected by food price increases in north Africa, the Middle East, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa by increased commitments in humanitarian aid, short-term tailor-made support and actions facilitating trade and supporting food systems, while working through the multilateral system to tackle global challenges.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 2, inspired by the EU Farm to Fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system, in the framework of the European Green Deal, the EU and Member States are joining forces to support **Uzbekistan**'s agri-food sector and rural development through a Team Europe Initiative supporting private sector growth, job creation, inclusion, and climate change mitigation and adaption aiming for **inclusive and green growth**. The initiative supports the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy.

In **Rwanda**, under the Team Europe Initiative **Sustainable and Inclusive Agricultural Transformation,** the EU and Member States are supporting the shift towards market-oriented high-value cropping systems geared towards feeding the cities. This initiative, in support of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe investment package, also aims to contribute to food and nutrition security by supporting the agricultural transition to more climate-resilient and inclusive food systems.

The Team Europe Initiative **Climate-Smart Agriculture-Based Resilience Building** supports building a more resilient agriculture sector in **Zimbabwe**, combining smart agricultural practices with improvements on territorial planning and access to renewable energy at community level. Through climate-smart and environmentally conscious agro-ecological principles, the initiative aims to contribute to enhanced food security, economic and environmental resilience, and new export possibilities, all in support of the Global Gateway.

The EU supports nutrition and food security in Honduras as a response to the country's worsening inequality, poverty and food insecurity problems following the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 60% of the funds target food security and resilience in the most vulnerable regions, supporting food assistance, agricultural production, access to credit and markets and improved water infrastructure. Overall, the EU helped 39 vulnerable municipalities to develop food security and nutrition development plans, benefiting more than 700 000 inhabitants.

In **Benin**, EU budget support prompted a substantive **reform of the agricultural sector** and helped double the value of agricultural exports between 2014 and 2020 even despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2017, the EU has provided budget support to **Georgia's strategy for agriculture** and **rural development** contributing to a strengthened policy framework for rural development, improved agriculture, diversified rural economic opportunities, and an enhanced environment for a more effective impact on poverty alleviation.

EU **humanitarian funding for nutrition,** which aims at providing life-saving interventions to the most vulnerable populations, has targeted severely malnourished children such as in **Sudan**, as well as children under 5 years of age and pregnant and lactating women in many countries including **Syria**. Moreover, the EU supports WFP initiatives such as a voucher programme for fresh food with high nutritional values in Syria or emergency food distribution and cash in **South Sudan**. To help address the food and nutrition crisis in the **Sahel and Lake Chad regions of Africa,** which affects more than 38 million people, the EU has deployed a combination of humanitarian and development funding (as of April 2022, EUR 654 million committed for food security and resilience in the region over the period 2021-2024) implemented under a humanitarian-development-peace approach.

In a regional approach for **the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan)**, the EU supports UNICEF in a three-year partnership aimed at fighting **children's malnutrition** through improved access to efficient and integrated management of severe acute malnutrition.

In **Central America**, actions to address food security and nutrition needs, and the humanitarian response, have been concentrated in the Dry Corridor countries (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador) where the EU has provided food assistance as well as direct cash transfers, vouchers and in-kind assistance, while helping to build resilience.

In **Venezuela and Colombia,** the EU supports the WFP to address the food and nutrition consequences of the Venezuelan crisis. Actions tackle education needs, food insecurity and socio-economic vulnerabilities of affected populations, with a focus on children, and vulnerable indigenous and migrant populations.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 2, such as the following initiatives for illustrative purposes.

Apart from being a major funder of CGIAR, **Sweden** supports agricultural development projects targeting SDG 2 with strong interlinkages to other SDGs. Its **Beog-Puuto project** (Farms of the future) aims at restoring eroded abandoned farmland, increasing productivity in family farms, and strengthening resilience of 50 000 vulnerable households in dry areas in northern and eastern **Burkina Faso**. The **GROW** project in **Liberia** focuses on improving the quality of cocoa through training in good agricultural practices, setting up traceability systems, investment in organic certification, branding and marketing, partner coaching, and linking partners with international premium market buyers.

Germany's support to food security, agriculture and rural development ranges from action through global programmes to initiatives such as the establishment of **Green Innovation Centres** and **Centres of Excellence** in **15 African partner countries**. **Centres of Excellence on climate change and sustainable land management** have been established in Southern and West Africa. The **Sustainable Agricultural Supply Chain Initiative** brings together more than 70 stakeholders from the private sector, civil society and politics, with the aim of achieving more sustainability in global agricultural supply chains, notably in relation to resource efficiency and preventing deforestation, creating jobs and improving the incomes and living conditions of smallholders.

Looking ahead

The Commission will continue its work on strengthening food security and building sustainable and resilient food systems. For example, going forward, the Commission will table proposals on the following.

- A **general legislative framework for sustainable food systems**, which will aim to accelerate and facilitate the transition to sustainability. It will mainstream sustainability in food-related policies and across the entire value chain, from primary producers to consumers. In addition, the framework will help facilitate favourable food environments.
- Setting EU-level **targets as part of the EU's commitment to reduce food waste**.
- Revising **EU marketing standards for agricultural and seafood products** in order to update these standards and encourage the supply of more sustainable products to consumers.
- A new **soil health law** as announced in the EU soil strategy for 2030.

The Commission will also consider new areas of action, such as legislation for plants produced by certain new genomic techniques.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take determined actions to accelerate the implementation of SDG 2 globally. This includes promoting sustainability in the key multilateral organisations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), to support partner countries to ensure a sustainable future for the global food system[8]. Its action is undertaken through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture, is a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 2 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy at regional and national level, including the following initiatives presented during the sixth EU-Africa Summit as part of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package.

- **Sustainable Agri-Value Chains**: these aim to boost public and private investments in African agri-value chains, of which 95 have been identified so far in 23 sectors.
- **Resilient Food Systems**: these support African food systems in becoming more resistant towards unfavourable trends, shocks and crises.

In addition, while working towards the transition to sustainable food systems, the EU will continue to focus on short-term humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable.

[8] Notably the ongoing FAO work on Guidelines for sustainable aquaculture and the sustainable management of fisheries in regional organisations (see SDG 14 as well).

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Helping to ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages is a major priority for the EU. SDG targets related to this goal include the following:

- reducing the global maternal mortality ratio; ending preventable deaths of new-borns and children;
- ending the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis and other communicable diseases;
- achieving universal health coverage and access to safe, effective and affordable medicines and vaccines for all;
- strengthening country capacities for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks;
- reducing mortality from non-communicable diseases; and
- halving the health impact of air pollution and the number of road deaths.

While progress had been made in many of these areas in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic severely undermined some of these efforts by overwhelming healthcare systems in the EU and causing disruptions and delays in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases other than COVID-19. Life expectancy, which had been on the rise, decreased across the board, and we expect to see rising incidences of cancer, HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis (B and C), which can only be controlled effectively through timely prevention, diagnosis and treatment. There is also a dramatic rise in mental health problems, resulting from isolation, anxiety and fear during the pandemic, further exacerbated by continuing global crises.

Lifestyle-related risk factors such as poor diet and physical inactivity are fuelling the rising burden of obesity, including childhood obesity, and non-communicable diseases. This too was an impact of the pandemic, when many people were more inactive and resorted to unhealthy habits as coping mechanisms. Poor lifestyle choices directly affect the quality of life and life expectancy and they have a negative impact on national health and social systems. SDG 3 targets will only be met through sustained, concentrated efforts focused on relevant policy areas.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and well-being. SDG target 3.4 has been addressed at EU level in the **Healthier Together – EU non-communicable diseases initiative** dealing with key disease areas including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, mental health and	Trends in this area have been negative in the short term, with preventable mortality rising by 8.2%, from 166.3 per 100 000 population in 2015 to 180 per 100 000 in 2020. On the other hand, treatable mortality has fallen by 4.3%, from 95.9 per 100 000 population to 91.7 per 100 000 over the same period. In addition to these numbers, mental health also plays a significant role. In the EU in 2017, there were, on average, almost 10.5 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants resulting from

neurological disorders, chronic respiratory diseases, and health determinants.	suicide. The latest figures show that 84 million Europeans are affected by mental health issues (1 in every 6 citizens) and depression among young people has more than doubled in 2022. Disruptions in, and growing demand for, mental health support have challenged already-stretched mental healthcare services, resulting in nearly half of all young Europeans reporting unmet needs for mental healthcare in the spring of 2022.
By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases SDG target 3.3. has been addressed at EU level in the following: • **EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025** and the **EU Action Plan on Drugs** setting the reduction of the prevalence and incidence of drug-related infectious diseases as a priority area for the EU • **Regulation (EU) 2022/2371 on serious cross-border threats to health** which sets out common rules for epidemiological surveillance and includes HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis in the list of notifiable diseases subject to epidemiological surveillance. • In its prevention pillar, **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan** specifically addresses hepatitis B and the hepatitis C virus aiming to prevent cancers caused by infectious diseases, such as liver cancer.	Data across EU/EEA countries up to 2015 indicated increasing trends in rates of mortality from liver cancer (deaths attributed to hepatitis B and hepatitis C are estimated to account for around 55% of liver cancer deaths). Modelling has suggested that mortality due to viral hepatitis could increase if responses are not scaled up. Deaths due to HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis have been falling steadily in the EU between 2005 and 2020: deaths per 100 000 people fell from 1.8 to 0.6 for tuberculosis, from 1.3 to 0.4 for HIV/AIDS and from 1.7 to 0.8 for hepatitis. However, substantial inequities within and across the EU exist around the prevention and care of HIV, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis B and C. Resources have been diverted from SDG areas due to the COVID-19 pandemic and countries are still struggling to regain pre-pandemic momentum. Addressing barriers faced by key affected populations is essential for reaching the SDGs. Concerted efforts (service integration, cross-sectoral collaboration, sufficient financing, political commitment) are needed to ensure progress towards the SDG 3 targets.
Less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040, compared with around 25% today Major tools to implement SDG target 3.a at EU level include a **revision of the Tobacco Products Directive**, the **Tobacco Advertising Directive** and the **Tobacco Taxation Directive** as well as of the **Council Recommendation on smoke-free environments**. These are further supported by the strengthened implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate.	Smoking prevalence among the population aged 15 or over fell between 2006 and 2020, from 31% to 25%. Nevertheless, this still means a quarter of adults in the EU smoke. In 2020, more men (28%) than women (22%) reported that they smoke. However, the decline in smoking prevalence is less evident for women than for men, which can partially explain the narrowing gender gap in life expectancy.
Reduce the health impacts of air pollution by more than 55% (premature deaths) by 2030 SDG target 3.9 has been addressed at EU level in the **Zero Pollution Action Plan**.	Air pollution is the number one environmental cause of death in Europe. The number of life years lost due to exposure to air pollution by fine particulate matter has decreased over the years. The Third Clean Air Outlook of December 2022 shows that the 2030 target of the Zero

	Pollution Action Plan on health impacts from air pollution can be achieved. As the impacts of air pollution would still remain high, the Commission has proposed to revise the Ambient Air Quality Directives, including a closer alignment of EU air quality standards with WHO guidelines by 2030, and a 2050 zero pollution objective.
Halve the overall number of road deaths in the EU by 2020 compared with 2010, with a further 50% reduction target for deaths and injuries between 2021 and 2030. The target is set in the strategic action plan on road safety and the EU road safety policy framework 2021-2030.	Between 2010 and 2020, the number of deaths on EU roads fell by 36%, helped by a sharp decrease in 2020 due to lower traffic levels related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was short of the target of 50% fewer deaths over the decade. Early indications for the new decade (baseline year 2019, as agreed with Member States) are that the number of fatalities continues to fall but not at the pace needed to meet the 2030 target of 50% fewer deaths.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 3 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of policies in place that contribute to meeting SDG 3. Some of the most recent and relevant initiatives are set out below.

The **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**, launched in 2021, sets out a new EU approach to cancer prevention (including by vaccination), treatment and care through an integrated, health-in-all-policies and multi-stakeholder approach. It will work in tandem with the Horizon Europe Mission on Cancer, ensuring coherence between ambitious research goals and realistic policy aims. The EU4Health programme and other funding programmes have earmarked a total of EUR 4 billion for actions addressing cancer.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan has also put forward actions to help create a **tobacco-free generation** where less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040, compared with around 25% today. The Commission will continue to prioritise protecting young people from the harmful effects of tobacco and related products, especially given the growing popularity of emerging tobacco and nicotine products.

The **Healthier Together – EU non-communicable diseases initiative**, with a budget of EUR 353 million, was launched in 2022 to support EU countries in identifying and implementing effective policies and actions to reduce the burden of major non-communicable diseases and to improve citizens' health and well-being. Actions on the five strands are being taken forward under the EU4Health programme's annual work programmes for 2022 and 2023.

The **Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases**, adopted in 2018, calls for a multitude of actions with a common goal of increasing the uptake of vaccination across the EU in a life-course perspective.

Access to healthcare is one of the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan. Directive 2011/24/EU **on patient rights in cross-border healthcare** gives EU citizens the right to access healthcare in the EU and to be reimbursed. The Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030 aims to ensure that all people with disabilities can fully participate in society and the economy. Fostering the development of digital health services, the European Health Data Space promotes access to health data to improve healthcare, research and policymaking. The **European Care Strategy** promotes quality, affordable and accessible care services across the EU and supports the improvement of the situation both for care receivers and for the people caring for them, professionally or informally.

The **Zero Pollution Action Plan**, adopted in 2021, includes targets to reduce the health and environmental impacts of pollution by 2030. It also envisaged legislative proposals, including to implement stricter standards for industrial emissions and air pollution. Several of these proposals have been adopted in the meantime.

The **EU Road Safety Policy Framework** 2021-2030 establishes and underpins the EU's goal of halving the number of fatalities and serious injuries on European roads by 2030 as a milestone on the way to 'Vision Zero' – zero fatalities and serious injuries by 2050. The Commission has also proposed to revise the existing **Directive on Intelligent Transport Systems**. This will, inter alia, ensure that essential safety-related services are made available to drivers along the TEN-T road network.

The Commission has also pioneered a major safety **eCall** initiative. This aims to save lives by speeding up the emergency response times in the event of a road crash anywhere in Europe. This initiative requires all new cars sold in the EU to be fitted with eCall devices that use space data from Galileo and EGNOS, the EU Space Programme flagships for satellite navigation. The device will automatically dial the European emergency number 112 to alert rescue services in the event of an accident and provide the vehicle's exact location.

Selected enablers

The Commission has coordinated and continues to implement a common European response to the coronavirus outbreak. The key part of this response is reflected in the legislative package forming part of the **European Health Union**. The package aims to expand EU capacity for prevention, preparedness, surveillance, risk assessment, early warning and response, to address cross-border health threats and better protect EU citizens. It strengthens the EU health security framework (Regulation on serious cross-border threats to health), bolsters mandates of the key agencies, namely the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and provides for the functioning of the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) in times of crisis.

In the same vein, EU preparedness by implementing existing medical capacities under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) will be boosted through the rescEU reserve. To date, eleven medical stockpiles exist and comprise of countermeasures, equipment and relevant items to fight cross-border threats to health. This comes on top of the already existing assets in the field of medical evacuation and will soon be further complemented by four CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) stockpiling reserves and Emergency Medical Teams complemented by specialised care teams being set up under rescEU, and of the existing fully operational and deployable medical capacities included in the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP).

Moreover, resolute action has been taken to reinforce EU public health sectors and mitigate the socio-economic impact in the EU. Support to Member States was quickly mobilised to help them coordinate their national responses and contain the virus. In 2020, the Commission joined the **COVID-19 vaccine global access facility** to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines for everyone who needs them, and contributed EUR 400 million for vaccine purchasing.

In November 2022, **the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA)** published its first work plan for preparedness and response to health emergencies in terms of improving access to medical countermeasures. With a budget of EUR 1.3 billion, HERA can now start implementing actions, in collaboration with other services, to strengthen preparedness and response capabilities within the EU for medical countermeasures, address vulnerabilities and strategic dependencies, and contribute to reinforcing the global health emergency architecture in this field.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was also set up as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic; it has a budget of EUR 723.8 billion in loans and grants. These are not exclusively reserved for health, but health is one of six areas that the RRF will fund. According to the most recent figures, some EUR 43 billion will go towards health (8.6% of all funding planned under the RRF).

NextGenerationEU is a temporary recovery instrument with a budget of more than EUR 800 billion to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the coronavirus pandemic. Part of the budget is reserved for building a safer and healthier EU. All EU countries will be supported: to protect themselves against health threats; to invest more in research and innovation to develop vaccines and treatments; to modernise their health systems so that hospitals in every EU country have better access to new technology and to medical supplies; and to fund training for Europe's medical and healthcare professionals.

Cohesion policy funds proved to be the first port of call in helping Member States shouldering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. EU Member States made use of the extra flexibility provided through the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives (CRII and CRII+) to prioritise measures to increase spending on healthcare. Under the NextGenerationEU, a specific EUR 50.6 billion under the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) supported crisis repair measures through the 2014-2020 Cohesion policy funds. REACT-EU was the very first instrument to be used under NextGenerationEU, with the first payment made on 28 June 2021 to fund medical institutions, researchers, and vulnerable people.

The **EU4Health programme,** with a total budget provision of EUR 5.3 billion is the main financial instrument for funding the EU's health initiatives. The programme provided the necessary support in an emergency to address the pandemic, but it also aims to improve the general health of people living in the EU, reduce health inequalities, and strengthen health systems in general. It provides co-funding in the fields of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis B and C.

The **Horizon Europe Cancer Mission** call has a budget of EUR 60 million to design and conduct randomised investigator-initiated pragmatic clinical trials. The aim is to deliver effective and evidence-based treatment interventions for implementation by healthcare systems at the level of local communities, EU regions, Member States and associated countries, taking into account socio-economic and biological stratification, such as the biology of the disease, gender, cancer stage, and age. Investments are also planned to establish, scale up or improve primary cancer prevention programmes and to address underlying barriers that prevent their uptake and effective implementation.

The European Commission has also shortlisted 11 new projects worth EUR 120 million from **Horizon Europe** for supporting and enabling urgent research into the coronavirus and its variants. It will contribute to the Commission's overall action to prevent, mitigate and respond to the impact of the virus and its variants. The 11 shortlisted projects include 312 research teams from 40 countries, with 38 participants are from 23 countries outside of the EU. Among the projects are 'Cohorts united against COVID-19 variants of concern' and 'Clinical trials for therapeutics and vaccines'.

Under the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the 'Multi-country viral hepatitis community screening, vaccination, and care' project was launched in November 2022. The objective of this proposal is to scale up and adapt community-based viral hepatitis testing and hepatitis B vaccination models of care. It will put a particular focus on marginalised populations with a documented high incidence and prevalence, and will use diagnostic tools and patient-centred referral processes to reduce mortality associated with liver cancer.

Another example is the project 'Health impacts of air pollution' in **Slovakia**, supported by the EU **Structural Reform Support Programme** under the 2019 call. Slovakia is one of the Member States with insufficient air quality and has one of the highest concentrations of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$). Despite some improvements achieved before the project, the situation remained unsatisfactory and Slovakia lacked a deeper air quality analysis with estimates of health impacts at the micro level. The primary goal of the project was therefore to build a toolbox for cost-effective policies in order to improve air quality and thus reduce human health impact.

Stakeholder engagement

The Commission uses a range of different tools to engage with stakeholders over the lifecycle of public health policies. These include the following.

- The **EU Health Policy Platform** is an interactive tool to promote discussions about public health concerns, and share knowledge and best practices. The platform hosts thematic networks led by stakeholders, such as a network on HIV, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, and mental health.
- **EU Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) One Health Network** includes government experts from the human health, animal health and environmental sector, EU scientific agencies (ECDC, EMA, and the European Food Safety Authority) and Commission experts. The network aims to present national action plans and strategies, to share best practices, and to discuss policy options.
- The new **Commission expert group on public health** will advise the Commission on policy development and transfer of best practices related to major public health challenges. These challenges include non-communicable diseases and communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis, vaccination, and antimicrobial resistance. The aim is to promote coordination between Member States.
- In 2015, the Commission launched the **EU Health Award** to recognise the work of NGOs in stopping Ebola. Since then, the awards have expanded to NGOs and educational institutions seeking to promote communication and health literacy on cancer prevention among children and young people, to those seeking to prevent and reduce obesity, and to community-based initiatives alleviating the mental health impacts of COVID-19.
- The **annual EU Road Safety Results Conference** brings together Member State authorities, senior EU policymakers and the wider European road safety community to discuss progress made towards implementing Vision Zero (zero road deaths by 2050).
- The **EU Excellence in Road Safety Awards** celebrate the achievements of specific and measurable actions by organisations aimed at improving road safety across Europe.

Multilevel approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 3 include the following.

At national level, **Slovenia** is implementing an e-care project to improve the quality of life, autonomy and safety of older people in their home environment. The E-Home Care project is co-financed by the EU under the European Social Fund and runs until September 2023, with funding available for up to 5 000 EU beneficiaries. Thanks to technological solutions, individuals can rely upon free telehealth and telecare services and receive faster intervention in the case of accidents and other events.

At local level, an action by the city of **Thessaloniki in Greece** to implement SDG 3 is an EU-funded project dealing with the urban heat island effect and its impacts on human health, primarily human mortality. The project is developing a set of modelling systems for short-term prediction and for future projection, to define high-quality health warning systems related to heat. An online forecasting system and a mobile app are available for free to citizens and visitors. The network of dissemination includes the public health system, emergency services, civil protection, social services and GPs.

EU external action

Global trends

The improvement in coverage and quality of health systems and services in the period 2010-2022 has resulted in a slow but steady improvement of most health indicators, with sub-Saharan Africa systematically performing less well than the average. However, much of this progress has been halted or reversed since the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the EU and its Member States showed commitment to strive for equal access to vaccines and health technologies for partner countries, including improving manufacturing capacity and support to research. The latest 2022 UN report on SDGs underlined the pandemic's devastating impact, with deaths

directly attributed to COVID-19 of totalling 5.4 million people globally. But with nearly 15 million excess deaths during this period, the figure might actually be three times higher.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

The new EU Global Health Strategy launched in November 2022 guides global, regional and bilateral actions of the EU, its institutions and its Member States in supporting partner countries in a coordinated way. Using a Team Europe approach wherever feasible, it aims to design appropriate measures to regain lost ground and make substantial progress towards their respective national SDG targets on health.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) together with Member State national regulatory agencies and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and its Member State counterparts play a significant role in building capacity in partner countries. In this context, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) focuses on neglected diseases affecting people living in partner countries and promotes scientific cooperation between European researchers and counterparts in developing countries with a strong focus on Africa.

The EU responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting the establishment of ACT-A (Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator with COVAX as the vaccine-sharing structure) as a mechanism to promote global solidarity and justice. Throughout the pandemic, the EU was the world's first exporter of COVID-19 vaccines, having delivered more than 2.6 billion doses of finished vaccines to 168 countries outside the EU. The EU also supports national COVID-19 vaccination strategies in partner countries as well as the development of local pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity.

Additionally, global health funds and structures were directly supported at a large scale to support national efforts in partner countries around the world to strengthen their health systems to deliver needed services to safeguard people's lives. Among the funds and structures were the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), the global Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Health Organization (WHO). Translating the emergency measure ACT-A into a permanent solution to address Pandemic Preparedness and Response at a global level, the World Bank and the EU have together initiated the Pandemic Fund, which launched its first call for proposal to support countries in their national efforts to be better prepared for next global health threat. This will be complemented by a global platform to provide for Medical Counter Measures in times of future global health emergencies building on the experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the EU has been at the forefront of the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a proposal by a group of WTO members to waive parts of the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) in response to the pandemic, the EU has actively engaged in formal and informal discussions to work on a compromise outcome to be agreed by consensus at the WTO. The EU has also advocated for a comprehensive approach in relation to trade and health, which included elements such as trade facilitating measures, improved transparency, restraint from export restrictions, and expanding production capacity. This resulted in a WTO joint response to the pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics. It included a decision that waives certain obligations of eligible WTO members in respect of the TRIPS Agreement, and which allows developing countries to authorise a company to manufacture and export COVID-19 vaccines in a fast and simplified manner without the consent of the patent owner. The objective is to enable partner countries to scale up their production capacity and supply vaccines to other countries in the region. It should also support the establishment of manufacturing hubs that rely on supply chains in multiple countries.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

On the EU's longer-term support, EU institutions reported to OECD commitments of EUR 4 billion in projects contributing to SDG 3 in 2021. The largest share of the EU contribution to SDG 3 is accounted for projects that

target SDG 3 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs such as SDG 5, SDG 17, SDG 10 and SDG 9. Other SDGs also contribute to SDG 3 as a significant objective. The main contributors are SDG 1, SDG 6 and SDG 8. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 3 amounted to EUR 5.2 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance[9], from 2018 to 2021, 30 674 000 women of reproductive age were using modern contraception methods with EU support.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 11.3 billion to SDG 3. At regional level, support to SDG 3 predominantly focuses on projects in Africa (33%), Asia (21%) and America (9%). EU and Member State financial support for SDG 3 also has a strong global component (30%). This global component is partly explained by EU and Member State contributions to global funds in the health sector.

The EU and Member States have contributed a total of EUR 22 billion to the five main global health funds. The largest of these funds is the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) with a total EU contribution of over USD 17 billion. The GFATM does not only focus on the three illnesses, but it also includes components focused more broadly on strengthening health systems.

Moreover, the EU's Member States are among the most important and reliable funders of the WHO. They have pushed for a more reliable funding of the WHO's budget to make the WHO less dependent on short-term project funding or earmarked voluntary contributions. The EU has pursued for several years a project funded by multiple donors aimed at supporting the WHO's crucial role at country level on strengthening health systems for universal health coverage, which is at the centre of SDG 3. Additionally, there are numerous EU projects responding to the local requirements of WHO country offices to address specific needs for a specific disease or systemic health challenge.

The EU and several Member States are also among the main contributors to the UN Road Safety Fund, which carries out strategic projects to increase road safety to lower death rates arising from road-related accidents.

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

EU external policies in the field of health are guided by the World Health Organization's concept of '**health systems strengthening**'. This fosters national ownership of health strategies by aiming to sustainably improve the quality, coverage and affordability of healthcare and to enhance health systems. The end goal is to provide **equitable access to quality health services** and products, thereby achieving **universal health coverage.** This is to be enabled by sufficient health financing policies and the development of comprehensive health strategies in partner countries, with a focus on:

- investments in both infrastructure and the health workforce;
- the establishment of reliable health information systems;
- access to essential medicines at an affordable price; and
- encouragement of government leadership and ownership of health sector policies that serve the needs of the people and lead the way to the various SDG 3 targets.

The EU aims to promote and support a comprehensive and inter-sectoral approach to health, ranging from research and development of new health technologies, and taking action against global health related threats such as air pollution, antimicrobial resistance and climate change, to the continued fight against the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS at country level, or enhancing road safety efforts. Given the inter-

[9] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

linkages that these varying forms of support imply, the EU and Member States support partner countries in pursuing a 'health in all policies' approach.

Health is also a priority focus of the EU's humanitarian assistance, to limit preventable excess mortality, permanent disability and diseases associated with natural or man-made humanitarian crises. In fragile and heavily disrupted systems, humanitarian health funding contributes to the provision of primary healthcare, vaccinations, access to medicines and medical devices. An emergency health response to outbreaks and building national capacities for preparedness are important to cope with increased recurrence of epidemics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a key humanitarian contribution was providing vaccines in the 'last mile', an initiative led by Germany and the G7. Mental health and psychosocial support are an integral part of humanitarian health assistance in cases of sexual violence, mental disorders, trauma and high distress.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In Africa, the EU and Member States have launched **three regional Team Europe Initiatives on health as part of the Africa-Europe Investment Package supporting the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy**, with a combined commitment of EUR 400 million over 2021-2027. Firstly, the Team Europe Initiative on **Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies (MAV+) in Africa**, launched at the EU-AU Summit in February 2022, focuses on promoting the development of an African pharmaceutical industry and its integration into the global pharmaceutical supply chain. This will lead to enhanced future pandemic preparedness and the continent's increased self-sufficiency with regard to medicinal products.

Secondly, a regional programme on **Health System Strengthening** combines three different Team Europe Initiatives: (i) on sustainable health security using a One Health approach; (ii) on digital health for health systems strengthening and universal health coverage; and (iii) on African-based public health capacity through support to public health institutions. The third regional Team Europe Initiative relates to **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**, which are being taken further within the framework laid down in the 2017 European Consensus on Development[10]. The combined allocated budget for these three regional programmes during the budget cycle 2021–2027 is EUR 400 million.

EU bilateral support related to SDG 3 focuses on achieving **universal health coverage** through measures to strengthen health systems with a particular emphasis on primary healthcare services currently reaching the poor and vulnerable in the 28 partner countries. To this end, the EU's multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 commits EUR 1 billion for actions in partner countries. This is complemented by commitments for global actions over the same time period of EUR 1.2 billion with contributions to GFATM, GAVI, WHO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Another example of EU support is the EU financial contribution to the WHO initiative, **Health Security in Türkyie**, which aims at strengthening health security through integrated preparedness and response to epidemic threats of all origins in line with the International Health Regulations core capacities. The EU is also providing direct support to improve road safety in Africa at various levels, from local to continental, with actions such as data collection and management, traffic police training and post-crash care.

To help partner countries address urgent and longer-term needs linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, support to health increased substantially in 2020. The EU, Member States and European financing institutions, in a Team Europe approach, swiftly responded to the pandemic and committed EUR 46 billion, of which over EUR 5 billion was provided to the **COVAX Facility** to ensure fair and equitable access to safe COVID-19 vaccines for all, and over EUR 7 billion to the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator. The EU's support to the **COVAX Facility** ensured access to COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries (250 million vaccine doses by the end of 2021, making the EU and Member States the largest donor in this regard by 2021) and contributed to achieving global vaccine equity by securing vaccines for the 92 poorest countries.

[10] See paragraph 34, 2017 European Consensus on Development.

As part of a common European response to the outbreak of COVID-19 in **Eastern Partnership** countries, the **European Union Solidarity for Health Initiative** aims to address short-term emergency needs, and the longer-term structural impacts; it has a special focus on the most vulnerable countries that have weak health systems. The initiative supports **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine** and helps them to address better the needs of the most vulnerable people. Furthermore, the EU signed a state- and resilience-building contract with the government of **Kosovo**[11]. This focuses on the implementation of the fiscal measures set out in the government's economic emergency package to increase resilience and mitigate the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis in society.

Furthermore, also in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, several **EU humanitarian air bridge operations** took place in 2020. For instance, a total of 82.5 tonnes of life-saving material (personal protection gear, medicines, water purification equipment and family hygiene kits) was delivered to **Venezuela** to supply humanitarian partners in the field. More than 500 000 Venezuelans benefited from this aid, including children, women, and health professionals. In **Ethiopia**, the EU, with WHO and various emergency health agencies, has supported the response to COVID-19 and other outbreaks in conflict settings by ensuring access for operational agencies to vaccine pipelines, access for displaced and conflict-affected communities to public health campaigns, and the coordination of a common quality and timely response among emergency health actors.

In 2022, with its of **humanitarian aid**, the EU supported **Afghanistan's health and nutrition sector** to provide primary and secondary health. Since September 2021, the EU has delivered 840 tonnes of life-saving medical equipment through a dedicated **humanitarian air bridge** to Afghanistan, supporting the humanitarian operations of more than 15 partners (NGOs, UN agencies and international organisations) and reaching approximately 16.3 million beneficiaries in the country. In **Chile,** the EU has been providing emergency health services to refugees from Venezuela and other countries, providing life-saving/basic medical treatment and information on possibilities for further treatment and follow-up on more complicated medical issues at destination.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually supportive and are coordinated to ensure complementarity and a positive impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 3, such as the following illustrative initiatives.

Malta has contributed to the efforts to curb the COVID-19 pandemic by sharing more than 700 000 vaccines with countries in need, including Libya, Egypt, Rwanda, Ghana, Iran, Antigua and Ivory Coast. In addition, Malta supported Ghana, doctors were trained and the capacity of the local hospital in Kumasi was increased.

France's bilateral support to the health sector aims to fuel a virtuous circle for the achievement of various interlinked SDGs emphasising basic education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and the empowerment of girls and women; as well as to fight inequalities, improve care for older people, and mitigate the impact of urbanisation, pollution, and climate change on the health of populations. Among others, the French Muskoka Fund (FFM) implements high-impact interventions in nine countries in West and Central Africa (**Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo**). This joint programme aims to improve the health and well-being of women, newborns, children, adolescents, and youth and the rights of women and girls. France's funding (more than EUR 150 million between 2010 and 2020, another EUR 50 million committed over 2021-2025) is part of France's overall action in favour of maternal and child health and sexual and reproductive health and rights, which amounts to EUR 400 million.

Looking ahead

[11] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the International Court of Justice opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Implementing SDG 3 will require unwavering effort. In this respect, the recently adopted **EU Global Health Strategy** aims to improve global health security and deliver better health for all in a changing world. The strategy aims to strengthen the EU's leadership and reassert its responsibility for tackling key global challenges and health inequalities.

Tools and legislation are in place, like **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan,** that will help build a more secure, better-prepared and more resilient EU. It will not only help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cancer care and support structural improvements for a more sustainable cancer pathway, but will also help reach the WHO target of a 30% reduction in tobacco use by 2025 as compared with 2010. In 2023, a revision of the Tobacco Taxation Directive, an update of the Council Recommendation on smoke-free environments and a Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers are planned.

Healthier Together will also have long-reaching impact in the field of non-communicable diseases, particularly in the five key areas: health determinants; cardiovascular diseases; diabetes; chronic respiratory diseases; and mental health and neurological disorders.

Other proposals are also being drafted, including those addressing shortages and supplies of affordable medicines and reducing the environmental impact of pharmaceuticals.

The Commission expects to table proposals to revise EU pharmaceutical legislation to ensure faster access to quality, safe, affordable and greener medicines in all Member States. It is also looking to revise legislation on medicines for rare diseases and paediatric care. It is also considering proposals for innovative approaches to research and public procurement for antimicrobials and their alternatives.

In addition to reviewing existing work to make it more fit for purpose, the Commission will consider new areas of action, such as ways to promote participation in the European Public Health Week and studying the impact of legislation designed to create smoke-free environments.

The Commission has also announced its intention to present in 2023 a new comprehensive approach to mental health. This proposal responds to the Conference on the Future of Europe conclusions, which call for initiatives to improve the understanding of mental health issues and ways of addressing them.

To help meet the SDG target 3.6 of halving road deaths by 2030, the Commission proposed to revise the EU's rules on driving licenses and the rules for cross-border enforcement of road traffic offences in March 2023. The Commission is also planning to propose a revision of the EU's roadworthiness rules. All of these initiatives are expected to help bring about a reduction in preventable deaths and injuries.

On the external dimension, the EU aims to improve global health security and deliver better health for all in a changing world. The EU will continue to take actions to accelerate the strengthening of partner countries' health systems, thus contributing to achieving SDG 3 globally. The instrument NDICI - Global Europe will support the implementation of a range of concrete planned actions, such as the **regional Team Europe Initiatives on health** in Africa, notably the **Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, medicines & health technology products in Africa**, which aims to deliver on the **Global Gateway strategy**.

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

A skilled and culturally literate workforce is key for a prosperous and inclusive economy. Quality and accessible education and training systems are the foundations for lifelong learning, employability, innovation and participation in society. Implementing the measures to achieve SDG 4 in the EU focuses on basic skills, early childhood education and care, early school leaving, tertiary education, adult learning and digital skills.

Developments on SDG 4 indicate that the EU made substantial progress on meeting most 2030 targets, boosting participation in early childhood education, reducing the share of early school leavers, and increasing tertiary educational attainment.

Progress in other areas is more mixed. Adult participation in learning and share of adults with at least basic digital skills has not improved since 2015. One in five young Europeans still lacks adequate reading, maths or science competences. Reducing educational inequalities remains a major concern for the EU. The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds increased between 2015 and 2018, undoing the improvements of the previous years. School closures disrupting many children's and young people's access to quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the impact of the socio-economic background on the learning outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people, including those with a migrant or minority ethnic background.

Investing in skills will remain a crucial factor for ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital and green transition. The challenge remains to not only speed up progress towards achieving targets but also ensure that policies reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

2030 SDG targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
The share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15% by 2030 Set in the European Education Area strategic framework	**Reading** up from 20% to 22.5% (2015-2018). **Maths** up from 22.2% to 22.9% (2015-2018). **Science** up from 21.1% to 22.3% (2015-2018). Progress has stalled. The challenge posed by the persisting large share of low-achievers has yet to be resolved.
At least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care by 2030 Set in the European Education Area strategic framework	Participation in early childhood education increased slightly from 92% in 2015 to 93% in 2020. The EU is on track to reach this target.

The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9% by 2030 Set in the European Education Area strategic framework	The share of early leavers from education and training declined from 11% in 2015 to 9.6% in 2022. The EU is on track to reach the ambitious target given this steady long-term improvement.
The share of 25 to 34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45% by 2030 Set in the European Education Area strategic framework	Tertiary educational attainment increased from 36.5% 2015 to 42.0% in 2022. The EU is on track to reach the target given this long-term rise of tertiary education attainment.
Increase the share of people aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received formal or non-formal education and training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey[12] Set in the European Education Area strategic framework	There was an improvement from 10.1% in 2015 to 11.9% 2022. The approach to measuring adult learning will be thoroughly overhauled.
At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year by 2030 Set in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	37.4% of adults aged 25–64 participated in some form of education or training (last 12 months) in 2016 (last available data point).
By 2030, at least 80% of those aged 16 to 74 should have basic digital skills[13] Set in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	The share of adults with at least basic digital skills has made very limited progress between 2015 and 2019 (from 54% to 56%). In 2021, a measurement based on the new Digital Competence Framework showed a result still far from the target (54%).

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 4 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of policies in place addressing or touching upon the different aspects of SDG 4 in different education and training phases and systems. Ensuring that everyone can access quality education, training and lifelong learning is a key objective of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan. It sets out several targets in the area of education and skills.

European Commission President von der Leyen announced the '**European Year of Skills**'. The European Parliament and the Council agreed that it will last between 9 May 2023 and 8 May 2024.The European Skills Agenda launched in July 2020, is a five-year plan aiming to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and to put them to use by strengthening sustainable competitiveness.

[12] The methodology of this indicator is currently being revised. The new indicator will use a 12-month reference period instead of 4 weeks.
[13] The Digital Skills Indicator (DSI) has been revamped in its second edition, 2.0. The revised indicator is the result of work carried out in 2019-2022 within Eurostat's Information Society Working Group to modernise the indicator by adapting it to the revised conceptual framework (DigComp 2.0) as well as to keep it aligned with technological progress since the first version was published in 2015.

A Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021–2030, adopted in November 2021, highlights the need to significantly increase adult participation in formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)**,** adopted in February 2021, is an umbrella initiative that helps EU Member States work together to build quality and inclusive education and training systems that people with disabilities can access. It embraces a future-looking, comprehensive and people-centred vision of education.

The Reinforced Youth Guarantee, adopted by the Council in October 2020, aims to ensure that all young people under 30 years of age receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship within a period of 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

In the field of vocational education and training (VET), the Council adopted in March 2018 a **Recommendation on** a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship which aims to improve and further develop apprenticeships schemes in the Member States. Furthermore, the Council also adopted in November 2020 the Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience which defines key principles for ensuring that VET adapts swiftly to labour market needs and provides quality learning opportunities for young people and adults alike.

In June 2021, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council recommendation on Pathways to School Success. This is a flagship initiative to boost the inclusive aspect of education by reducing low-achievement in basic skills and increasing secondary education attainment.

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) is a renewed EU policy initiative to help Member States adapt their education and training systems to the digital age sustainably and effectively. The plan is key to achieving the European Education Area's vision and helps meet the goals of the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan and the '2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade'.

The **cultural dimension** of sustainable development is being promoted under a range of EU policies and programmes to support societal change and lessen the effects of green and digital transitions. The EU's actions in culture contribute to all dimensions of the SDGs, in line with the New European agenda for culture and the European framework for action on cultural heritage. EU policy harnesses the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and well-being by: i) promoting cultural participation, artists' mobility and the protection of cultural heritage; ii) boosting jobs and growth in the cultural and creative sectors through arts and culture in education, promoting skills and innovation in culture; and iii) strengthening international cultural relations through culture to promote sustainable development and peace. The need to preserve and promote the intrinsic value of culture and of artistic expression is also highlighted in the guiding EU cultural policy documents.

The Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development from June 2022 calls for Member States to establish the 'learning for the green transition and sustainable development' as a priority area in education and training policies. This will ensure that learners of all ages acquire the knowledge to live more sustainably, get the skills needed in a changing labour market and take action for a sustainable future. The Commission also released the European sustainability competences framework ('GreenComp') which sets out the skills and competences that all learners need to acquire for the green transition.

In April 2023, the Commission adopted two proposals for a Council Recommendation in the context of the European Year of Skills, with the aim to support Member States and the education and training sector in providing high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education and training to develop the digital skills of European citizens.

In higher education, the 2022 **European Strategy for Universities** aims to empower universities to manage the impact of, and find solutions to, present and future challenges, including the green and digital transitions. It

recognises that the higher education sector has a key role to play in helping societies manage the impact of climate change, live more sustainably and exercise socially responsible leadership.

Selected enablers

The **Erasmus+ programme** focuses on quality and inclusive education with over EUR 26 billion allocated for 2021-2027. Its projects contribute directly to achieving SDG 4 as well as other SDGs in the EU and abroad. Two compendia provide a valuable overview of supported projects that contribute to achieving the SDG in relation to inclusive education and citizenship.

As people age and are required to work longer, the European Social Fund Plus promotes the training, reskilling and upskilling of workers to prepare for the green, blue and digital transitions. The fund also recognises the need to improve structures, e.g. modernising the education system and creating stronger links between educational and training systems. The European Regional Development Fund and the Just Transition Fund also supports skills for smart specialisation and the upskilling / reskilling of workers and jobseekers in the context of a just transition.

The Digital Europe programme (DIGITAL) is the first EU financial instrument designed to bring digital technology to businesses and individuals. It focuses on building the EU strategic digital capacities and on facilitating the wide deployment of digital technologies.

The **2021-2027** Creative Europe **programme**, the only EU programme that targets the cultural and creative sectors, supports the EU's commitment to achieving the SDGs, in particular as regards their cultural dimension, under all three programme strands.

The research programme **Horizon Europe** supports EU priorities in education and training. For instance, the 'Emotion-Expressive Robot EmoSan' project (CybSPEED) designed by the Institute of Robotics of the **Bulgarian** Academy of Sciences is capable of imitating the movements of the human head in order to improve the pedagogical rehabilitation of children with special educational needs.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** will advance large-scale investments and reforms in education that have the potential to improve the resilience of EU Member States' education systems. For example, the **Romanian** national recovery and resilience plan aims to implement reforms to address various challenges across education levels. The plan envisages reducing early school leaving, building 110 kindergartens, training almost 20 000 staff in early childhood education and increasing the share of students taking higher technical education courses from 17% to 40%.

Another example is the project 'Promoting inclusive education: addressing challenges in legislation, educational policy and practice' in **Greece** supported by the **Structural Reform Support Programme** under the call for 2019. Greece needed assistance in developing the framework and guidelines, and in training staff connected to the new law introducing inclusive education practices. The provider helped the Greek Ministry of Education design and implement several provisions of the existing legislation as well of the Strategic Plan for the Equitable Access of Students with Disabilities to Education.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 4 in a collaborative approach through various stakeholder platforms such as those mentioned in the following list.

- The Education for Climate Coalition – a community for students, teachers and other stakeholders to develop innovative solutions for environmental sustainability. It encompasses art and science, taking stock of good practice and citizen science endeavours. It promotes community building along language lines, and helps run events, from small-scale workshops to big policy and practice forums.

- The European Education Area working group on learning for sustainability brings together experts from ministries of education, social partners, NGOs and international organisations working on ESD, sustainability and environmental education. The group works together on topics of common interest (eg teacher training, curriculum development, youth engagement) and regularly publishes key policies messages.
- The **Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training** promotes evaluation practices to improve evidence and identify investment features for education policies for better learning outcomes and equity. It helps Member States make the most of public resources invested in education.
- The Pact for skills was launched in November 2020 as a shared engagement model for developing skills. Companies, workers, national, regional and local authorities, social partners, cross-industry and sectoral organisations, education and training providers, chambers of commerce and employment services are involved.
- Since 2013, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) unites governments and key stakeholders with the aim of strengthening the quality, supply and overall image of apprenticeships across Europe, while also promoting the mobility of apprentices. These aims are promoted through national commitments and voluntary pledges from stakeholders.

Multi-level approach

Achieving the SDGs implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices from Member States in implementing SDG 4 include the following examples.

Czechia provides support to children with special education needs to improve their inclusion and development at school. This support includes providing teacher assistants and special aid professionals in schools, granting scholarships to students and promoting and adopting quality legislation.

Germany is committed to carrying out the necessary action that was put forward in the 2021 'Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)', to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Germany is setting up several programmes in technical and vocational education and training, and promoting lifelong learning for ESD in municipalities across Germany. Innovative ESD practices are being highlighted with national ESD awards promoting a whole-institution approach as well as a national endowed ESD prize encouraging the spread of these innovative practices.

At local level, **Finland's** six largest cities are committed to achieving SDG 4, as highlighted by the following examples. In Helsinki, schools are educating children on the environment and climate, providing knowledge on the circular economy and Agenda 2030. In Tampere, schools, up to secondary level, are offering subjects on eco-social consciousness and the relationship with nature. In Oulu, primary school teachers are active in sustainability education, including the organisation of an Agenda of Hope event focusing on education and sustainable development for children, young people, and education professionals.

EU external action

Global trends

Progress since 2015 to achieve SDG 4 has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, with an estimated 147 million children unable to attend school in 2020 and 2021[14].

[14] See UN SDG Report 2021 (page 34) and UN SDG Report 2022 (Page 33).

Internal/external coherence, including policy coherence for development

Education is key to achieving several SDGs, including ending poverty (SDG 1), reducing inequality (SDG 10), promoting gender equality (SDG 5) and promoting skills for employment (SDG 8). Due to the scale of its investment in education, the EU is a leader in promoting global transformation for this goal, including in the preparation and follow up of the **UN Transforming Education Summit** in September 2022, and pursues external objectives consistent with its actions within the EU. Through intensified engagement as Team Europe with partners, the **Global Gateway strategy** and its dedicated regional investment packages strengthen the way SDG 4 is implemented. This covers inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, and promoting learning mobility and the digital transition in and through education, as well as quality, equity, inclusion and gender equality in education.

In terms of coherence between internal and external actions, the European Education Area is a driver of reforms in partner countries (EU and Western Balkans Innovation Agenda), through the strengthened international dimension of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 with a budget of about EUR 2.2 billion from EU external cooperation instruments IPA III and NDICI[15]. In 2019, the EU was the top global destination for higher education, receiving 1.1 million students of the world's total of 5.5 million. The European Education Area serves as a global standard for quality and excellence thanks to actions supported under Erasmus+, such as the with its Jean Monnet actions, the Partnerships for Excellence (centres for vocational excellence and **Erasmus+** teacher academies), highlighting the attractiveness of European education and encouraging progress in accession countries.

Since 2015, **Erasmus+** has also allowed for short-term mobility between EU and other countries for students, researchers, and staff who study in a foreign university for 3-12 months and obtain credits recognised as part of their degree at home. A grant for staff mobility is also possible for 5-60 days. Erasmus+ mobility with partner countries outside the EU involves the movement of 40 000 students and staff per year. Of the 10 top academic disciplines covered by Erasmus+ mobility partnerships with partner countries, 9 are relate directly with one or several SDGs. The top three are business, engineering and economics which are linked to SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure. Women represent 54% of all participants. A key objective of Erasmus+ is to promote equity and inclusion by helping people from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special needs (over 400 participants from Asia and southern Mediterranean countries).

Erasmus+ also supports Capacity Building projects to improve the quality and relevance of higher education and of vocational education and training in EU partner countries worldwide, as well as high-level international joint masters degrees involving EU and non-EU higher education institutions.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 2.2 billion in projects helping to achieve SDG 4. The largest share of the EU's contribution to SDG 4 involves projects that target SDG 4 as the main SDG. These projects also make a strong contribution to other linked SDGs such as SDG 5, SDG 10 and SDG 8. The pursuit of other SDGs also contributes to SDG 4 as a significant objective. The main contributors are projects targeting SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 16. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 4 amounted to EUR 2.3 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of its assistance, EU support helped 38 million students enrol in primary education and 8.2 million students enrol in secondary education in 2018-2021.

[15] This budget complements the overall indicative financial envelope of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 which amounts to EUR 26.2 billion.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021, contributed EUR 9.4 billion to achieving SDG 4. EU and Member States' flows to SDG 4 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (34%), Asia (32%) and other countries in Europe (16%).

Part of the EU and Member States support to SDG 4 has been channelled through global education funds such as the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait – a UN global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. Up until now, EU and Member States' contributions to both of these funds have amounted to EUR 4.3 billion and account for 52% of all contributions received.

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

Education is essential for eradicating poverty and achieving the SDGs, including by ensuring that no one is left behind by reducing barriers to accessing quality education, including for girls, the poorest children or children with disabilities, and building skills[16]. The EU commitment to quality education and vocational training is embedded in a common vision on education being an enabler for achieving all SDGs, contributing to breaking intergenerational transmission of inequalities and promoting equitable, inclusive, greener and more digital societies.

In the face of the current global learning crisis and in line with partner countries' own policies and plans for developing education, the EU's priorities in the field of development cooperation are:

- **teachers**: focus on well-trained and motivated teachers;
- **equality** in education: education is one of the most effective ways to tackle increasing inequalities by focusing on inclusion, gender equality and digital innovation;
- **skills** for life and work.

The EU's partnerships in education promote education on all levels, by focusing on marginalised and vulnerable people. The EU is also working on improving health, nutrition and social protection.

The EU actions under the **NDICI** – **Global Europe** instrument aim to contribute with at least 20% of the official development assistance (ODA) funded under the instrument to social inclusion and human development, which includes education. The share of investment to education will increase from 7% to at least 10% of the EU's budget for international partnerships. The EU and its Member States in a Team Europe approach provide over half of the ODA allocated to education. The EU was particularly vocal on education partnerships and financing at the **UN Transforming Education Summit** in September 2022.

Education is one of the five investment priority sectors of the EU's **Global Gateway strategy** and **the Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package**. Several major regional education initiatives contributing to achieving various SDGs (including SDG 4) have been launched, such as: i) the **Regional Teacher Programme for Africa**, which aims at strengthening regional and national capacity to support teachers and the teaching profession; ii) **opportunity-driven skills and VET in Africa**, a Team Europe initiative seeking to achieve systemic and sustainable change in developing skills for employment creation; and iii) **Youth Mobility for Africa,** which is aimed at greater international and intra-regional mobility, increasing young people's skills and employability, as well as youth leadership. The **economic and investment plans** in the European Neighbourhood and Western Balkans also help develop people's skills and potential, including through promoting high-quality education and training.

The EU and its Member States are major contributors to global education initiatives, such as the **Global Partnership for Education** (where EU and Member States' funding represents 51% of the total), which aims to empower young girls and vulnerable groups through education. It focuses on providing good quality basic education and aims to transform education systems. The EU supports Africa with an integrated continental

[16] Council Conclusions 8856/21 of 14 June 2021, Strengthening Team Europe's commitment to Human Development.

approach to transformative education and training systems. The EU also supports **Education Cannot Wait** (EU and Member States fund 41.6% of total spending) and the **UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report** to strengthen national, regional and global accountability for education results.

The EU continues to be a strong advocate for the global approach for Education in Emergencies as part of its **humanitarian assistance**, also in the context of and as follow up to the UN Transforming Education Summit. Providing safe and quality education to the most vulnerable children affected by emergencies is a priority of EU humanitarian action, with the EU meeting its funding target of 10% of its initial humanitarian aid budget being allocated to Education in Emergencies since 2019 (which increased from 1% in 2015). Over 2015-2021, the EU's investment in education in emergencies-related activities enabled 12 million children and young people (50% of them girls) caught in crises to return to and stay in education through formal and non-formal pathways at primary and secondary levels. The EU also remains strongly focused on protecting education from attack and supporting the roll-out of the Safe Schools Declaration.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 4, with the COVID-19 pandemic, EU changed the focus of its education support programmes to provide emergency funding and ensure over 355 million children in 66 countries were able to continue their education. The EU strengthened its collaboration with global education funds, announcing EUR 700 million in support for the **Global Partnership for Education** and furthermore supported **Education Cannot Wait**. It actively contributed, in a Team Europe approach, to the reform of the Global Education Coordination Mechanism to ensure a joint, coherent and efficient global education aid structure in support of SDGs 4, 5 and 10.

Over 40 Team Europe initiatives with education and training components are being developed at country and regional level worldwide. In **Niger**, the Team Europe initiative **#nigergenerationsfutures** – *Emergence d'une économie inclusive et verte pour et avec les jeunes* supports a green and inclusive economy, offering young people and women opportunities to develop their skills. In **Kenya**, the Team Europe initiative on **Human Centred Digitalisation** will draw on the potential of digitalisation to create jobs, especially for young people. It will work on reducing the digital gap through e-education services. Another initiative following the Team Europe approach, is the **E-Youth** project in **Mozambique**, which is aimed at unleashing the full potential of Mozambique's young people through decisive action across public, social and private sectors to address education, employment and empowerment. In **Haiti**, the Team Europe Initiative **'Haiti: Invest in the future'** will focus on further improving the governance of the education system (access, quality, higher education through partnerships with European institutions, VET reforms). All the above-mentioned Team Europe Initiatives support the Global Gateway strategy and, for African countries, the Africa-Europe Investment Package.

The EU helps partner countries such as **Sierra Leone, Nepal or Lebanon** lessen the impact of the pandemic in order to reopen schools and ensure a safe return for staff and students, recover lost learning and transform education systems that ensure equitable access to education for all. In Lebanon, 90 175 children were reached, including those with disabilities. In **Tajikistan**, the EU supported the reform of continuous professional development for teachers, the piloting of the first ever national learning assessment in several grades and the finalisation of the reform towards a competency-based approach, resulting in over 63 000 teachers being trained and 72 school laboratories being set up. In **Cambodia**, following protracted school closures, the EU budget support for education and the Capacity Building Partnership Fund, managed by UNICEF, prioritised actions on inequalities by offering scholarships for up to 250 000 students in basic education per year, increasing operating funds for schools, building 750 new, healthy and climate-resilient classrooms.

In **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine**, the **Connecting Research and Education Communities** project (EaPConnect) is now in its second phase, bringing together the research and education communities from the EU and Eastern Partner countries, reducing the digital divide. In **Armenia**, a programme addresses education as a key priority for reform, with EU support mainly focused on i) Vocational and Educational Training (VET), ii) higher education, particularly through the Erasmus+ programme, and iii) the EU TUMO

Convergence Centre for Engineering and Applied Science. In **Georgia**, the EU uses the **Skills4Jobs programme** to address the country's constraints in better matching skills with labour market demands and providing a better quality of skills.

Through its humanitarian action, the EU has supported the education of **Syrian** refugees and Internally Displaced Persons as well as host communities in Türkiye, Jordan and Lebanon. In **Türkiye**, the EU's Conditional Cash Transfers for Education programme assists around 795 000 children, and EU humanitarian funding enabled 62 000 refugee children to be referred to education programmes. This helped to almost quadruple the overall enrolment rate of the refugee school-age population over 2014–2022. This led to the project being extended to include Afghan and Iraqi refugees and host communities and its scope being expanded to include early childhood, technical and vocational education, and activities to promote social cohesion and psychosocial well-being. In **Jordan**, the challenge of providing education to refugees was addressed through budget support (through the EU Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, 'Madad'). Measures implemented by UNICEF and local civil society organisations (CSOs) were funded to address the challenges of the vulnerable populations in question, and higher education scholarships were offered to Syrian refugees and vulnerable people in Jordan. In **Lebanon**, international and local NGOs provided support to refugees out of education as well as Lebanese children to get them back into learning and formal education. Refugees and vulnerable children also benefit from humanitarian programmes on Education-in-Emergencies, particularly in **Ethiopia, Bangladesh, South Sudan, Türkiye, Central America and Mexico**. Attention is focused on female participation (at least 50%) and often the support provided integrates child protection as well as back-to-school initiatives.

Furthermore, the EU has provided budget support to education and VET reforms in more than 20 countries over 2015-2021. For example, in **Jordan**, both education and VET have been supported since 2018 with projects and budget support to develop a workforce with skills, qualifications and capabilities. In **Tunisia**, support to education has also been long established and now aims to improve the sector's governance and digitalisation, the quality and access to primary and secondary education as well as the matching of skills to labour market needs. Meanwhile, the construction and redevelopment of schools for greener and better-digitally connected buildings is co-financed and implemented with the EIB.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually supportive and are coordinated to ensure complementarity and a positive impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 4, such as the following illustrative initiatives.

As the world's largest bilateral donor in the area of education, **Germany** relies on close cooperation between government and businesses to assist partner countries in establishing high-quality, inclusive, practice-based vocational training systems reflecting the needs of the labour market – with projects currently undertaken in countries such as South Africa, Vietnam, Indonesia.

Many Member States offer scholarships and specialised training, such as **Latvia,** which offers training programmes at its universities for young professionals working in public administration from countries in Central Asia and the Western Balkans.

Looking ahead

EU citizens have called on the EU and its Member States to establish by 2025 an inclusive European Education Area within which everyone has equal access to quality education and lifelong learning. Emphasis was given to the specific needs of young people being considered across all relevant policies in order to offer them the best possible conditions to study, work and start an independent life. EU citizens also expressed their wish that the EU ensures that everyone can benefit from digitalisation, by empowering them with the necessary digital skills and opportunities. The request for establishing the European Education Area was highlighted in Proposal 46 on education of the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The 2022 European Year of Youth has offered many opportunities for young Europeans to strengthen their skills and competences, and to increase their level of civic engagement. The 2023 European Year of Skills' activities and events will also target young people, particularly those not in education, employment or training (NEET). With only 15% of young people having undertaken studies, training or apprenticeships in another EU country, the Commission will propose updating the current EU learning mobility framework to enable learners to move more easily between education systems: a key step towards a European Education Area for 2025.

With the European Year of Skills, the Commission also proposes giving a fresh impetus to lifelong learning. In particular, the Commission intends to promote increased, more effective and inclusive investment in training and upskilling to harness the full potential of the European workforce, and to support people in changing from one job to another. Further attention will also be paid to matching people's aspirations and skill sets with opportunities on the job market, especially for the green and digital transition and the economic recovery. To improve digital skills, the Commission intends to help raise awareness of the benefits of and opportunities for studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics including for women, and improve the way digital skills are taught in education and training. More generally, the Commission will promote upskilling and reskilling opportunities, for instance, by highlighting relevant EU initiatives, including funding possibilities, to support their take-up, implementation and delivery on the ground.

The upcoming **Council Recommendation on social economy framework conditions** will include recommendations on supporting social economy in reskilling disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

On the external side, building on the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, the EU will help ensure the Summit outcomes are translated into tangible benefits at all levels. The EU will work on further promoting a coordinated approach on investments in education in partner countries, acting in a Team Europe approach so as to be a more effective driving force in the education sector at country, regional and global levels. It will continue to take determined action to help speed up the implementation of SDG 4 globally, including through rolling out a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where education is a shared priority. The EU will also continue stepping up coordination and improving the quality of the global response to education by strengthening a joint humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, building on the 10% investment target for education in both humanitarian and development instruments.

A tangible contribution to achieving SDG 4 (and other linked SDGs) will be the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy at regional and national level, including the following initiatives presented during the 6th EU-Africa Summit in February 2022 as part of the Global Gateway Africa Europe Investment Package, to be carried out in a Team Europe approach:

- the Regional Teacher Programme, to support at continental, regional and national level effective policies and practices for innovation, equity as well as digital and green transformation in teaching;
- opportunity-driven skills and VET in Africa, to equip young people with the skills they need to succeed in the labour market (including digital skills for employment);
- Youth Mobility for Africa, to promote youth exchanges and mobility between Africa and Europe.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Achieving gender equality is a major priority for the EU. It is a fundamental value enshrined in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis has continued. From the early days of the COVID-19 lockdowns, women's rights organisations noted a significant increase in reported cases of violence against women. As regards progress towards a gender-equal economy, the long-standing challenges related to women's participation in the labour market have continued. Women are still over-represented in lower paid sectors and occupations, and face constraints in professional choices linked to care responsibilities and gender stereotypes. The gender employment gap (10.6% in 2022) is mirrored in the gender pay gap (12.7% in 2021). The gender pension gap stands at 27.1%. With regard to gender balance in decision-making, women continue to be outnumbered by men in decision-making bodies in the political and economic spheres. Regarding women in politics, the proportion of seats in national parliaments held by women has decreased, from 33.1% in 2021 to 32.5% in 2022. Progress in improving female representation on corporate boards and in business leadership positions remains uneven across the EU but improved steadily in the reporting period. In 2022, around 32.2% of the board members of the EU's largest publicly listed companies were women, compared to 22.2% in 2015.

Despite these challenges, the EU has made considerable progress on measures to achieve SDG 5 since 2015, with significant legislative and policy developments that have the potential to become game changers for gender equality.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
Inclusive high employment rate Halve the gender employment gap, to achieve the target employment rate of 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 by 2030. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	The EU employment rate for men of working age was 80.0% in 2022, exceeding the rate for women (69.4%) by 10.6 percentage points.
Increased women's participation in digital transformation Europe's digital transformation, guided by the Digital Compass, pursues the EU target of 20 million employed ICT specialists, with	There is still a severe gender balance issue, in particular between women and men with more advanced ICT skills, with only 19% of ICT specialists and one in three science, technology, engineering and/or mathematics (STEM) graduates being women. This may affect the way digital solutions are devised and deployed. (Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), 2021.

convergence between women and men, by 2030.	
Gender parity of 50% at all management levels of the European Commission by the end of 2024.	As of September 2022, the share of women in management functions is 43.4% at senior management level, 46.6% at middle management level and 45.9% overall. This represents a significant increase compared to 2019, when the share of women was 36.6% at senior management level and 41.5% at middle management level.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 5 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of policies in place, covering different aspects of SDG 5. This section provides an overview of some of the most recent and relevant initiatives.

The 2020-2025 gender equality strategy sets the current framework for EU action to promote gender equality in the EU. The strategy is based on three main pillars: (1) freedom from gender-based violence and gender stereotypes; (2) thriving in a gender-equal economy; and (3) leading equally throughout society. The strategy takes a dual approach of gender mainstreaming combined with targeted measures and intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle supporting its implementation. A task force on equality was set up in 2019 to mainstream gender and other equality considerations into all EU policy areas. It includes representatives of all the Commission's Directorates-General and the European External Action Service and supports the work of the first EU Commissioner for Equality.

The Commission aims to lead by example in the field of gender equality: the first female President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen leads **the first gender-balanced College of Commissioners** (2019-2024).

The proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence adopted in March 2022 aims to improve the prevention of violence, increase protection of and support for victims and facilitate access to justice.

The Digital Services Act adopted in July 2022 will help to remove illegal content and protect women online.

The pay transparency directive adopted in April 2023 seeks to empower workers by providing concrete tools to claim their right to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. The Directive will strengthen the application of the equal pay principle by giving employers greater responsibility for implementing this.

The directive on adequate minimum wages for workers adopted in October 2022 will help reduce the gender pay gap and increase gender equality, as women are almost twice as likely to earn the minimum wage as men.

In November 2022, the co-legislators agreed on the EU's gender balance on corporate boards legislation. By 2026, large listed companies should aim to have at least 40% of their non-executive director positions or 33% of their non-executive and executive director positions held by members of the under-represented sex – for the time being, this refers overwhelmingly to women.

In September 2022, the Commission adopted the European care strategy to promote high quality, affordable and accessible care services across the EU and support Member States in improving the situation for care receivers and the people caring for them. This will help increase gender equality and promote women's participation in the labour market. One of the strategy's deliverables is a **recommendation to revise the 2002 Barcelona targets**. It aims to encourage Member States to increase participation in early childhood education and care to facilitate women participating in the labour market and improve the social and cognitive development of all children, but in particular children in vulnerable situations or from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Council adopted this recommendation in December 2022.

As of August 2022, the minimum standards for paternity, parental and carers' leave and rights set out in the Work-Life Balance Directive (adopted in 2019) had to be transposed by the Member States. These include the right to request flexible working arrangements, for example. The Commission is monitoring the implementation of the Directive in the Member States.

The Commission has also proposed to the Council to include hate speech and hate crime in the list of EU-wide crimes, which would allow the Commission to propose legislation criminalising all forms of hate speech and hate crime on all prohibited grounds of discrimination, including sex or gender.

While the gender equality strategy focuses on actions within the EU, it is consistent with the EU's external policy on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Selected enablers

The **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme** (CERV) includes gender equality and mainstreaming as a specific objective. It promotes gender mainstreaming structurally under all its activities and it supports organisations and projects promoting gender equality by a dedicated biennial call for proposals. The latest edition of the call, in 2022, focused on (i) equal participation and representation of women and men in political and economic decision making and (ii) tackling gender stereotypes, including with accent on youth, and in advertising and the media, and awarded 21 national and transnational multi-beneficiary projects, financially supporting organisations in 21 EU Member States. Even though the projects have entered their implementation phase only recently, they are promising. As an example, the project ***"Rewriting the story: tackling media gender stereotypes in political and public life"*** will directly address barriers to the fair representation and portrayal of women and men in political life. Working with frontline journalists, news media managers, journalists' unions and associations, gender experts, media self-regulatory bodies, women active in political life, academics and, crucially, the next generation of media professionals, the project will seek to initiate reforms in European media with regard to newsroom culture, policies and processes which improve the professional understanding and practices with regard to gender portrayal of women and men in political and public life.

In the 2021-2027 programming period more than 30% (EUR 111 billion) of all Cohesion policy funding under ERDF, ESF+, CF and JTF will support gender equality through direct measures or gender mainstreaming.[17]

Gender mainstreaming is a cross-cutting principle of all Cohesion policy funds, including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), under which the Member States have an obligation to programme targeted actions to promote gender-balanced labour market participation, equal working conditions, and a better work-life balance.

The regulation creating the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) recognises women as one of the social groups that have been worst affected by the COVID-19 crisis. One of the RRF's central objectives is to mitigate the social and economic impact of that crisis, particularly in relation to women. In line with the regulation, EU Member States should mainstream and promote objectives relating to gender equality throughout the process of preparing and implementing their recovery and resilience plans. Additionally, the regulation emphasises the importance of investing in robust care infrastructure, which is essential to secure gender equality and the

[17] Explore the gender equality planned investments in https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/datastories

economic empowerment of women. It allows more women to take part in paid work and therefore has a positive effect on GDP.

Gender equality is one of the central principles of **Horizon Europe** - the EU's key funding framework programme for research and innovation. When drafting project proposals, applicants must pay attention to gender equality from different angles in terms of human resources (balance between women and men in the research teams) and content (analysing and taking into account the gender dimensions of the content of the projects). Despite progress being made on gender equality in research and innovation under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, research and innovation organisations in the EU still need to better implement the EU's gender equality objectives.

The proportion of women graduating in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, which are better paid and have better career prospects than many other disciplines, is persistently lower than that of men. The underrepresentation of women in physics, for instance, profoundly affects the growth and future of the field by contributing to a loss of potential talent and deprives industry of the intellectual contribution of women with a physics background. The thesis of a project financed under the Horizon Europe's Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, "**Physics departments' culture, structure and gender inequality",** is that measures taken to increase representation will be effective only when they address the underlying hidden structures of the physics culture that contribute to gender inequality. The outcomes of this work will empower physics departments internationally to move beyond generic strategies and to implement tailored action plans to address gender imbalance by ongoing, collaborative self-reflection.

Another example of an EU-funded project on gender equality is the 'reducing the employment gender gap in the **Hungarian** labour market' project, supported by the **Structural Reform Support programme** under the call for 2019. A high and growing gender employment gap is persistently reported in Hungary, despite improvements in economic conditions. The employment rate is particularly low among women in the 25-39 age group who are raising children under the age of 3 years. The project aims to research and analyse the barriers to gender equality in employment and subsequent policy development through exchanges of best practice and stakeholder consultations that would help close the gender gap.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU has a dedicated agency for gender equality, **the European Institute for Gender Equality** (EIGE), located in Vilnius, Lithuania. EIGE works with EU, national, and international institutions and organisations to ensure EIGE's gender equality expertise and resources have the maximum impact on EU policies. EIGE works to follow and understand the specific needs of its key stakeholders.

For example, in October 2022, EIGE held its first Gender Equality Forum. The forum gathered high-level EU and national political decision-makers, practitioners and members of civil society to exchange views on the most pressing issues affecting progress in gender equality.

Open public consultations are instrumental during the preparation of major initiatives, such as the care strategy, to support the development of high-quality, achievable proposals by allowing interested parties to provide input and suggestions on the key challenges to be tackled by the initiative.

In July 2022, the Commission launched the EU Award for Gender Equality Champions, a new prize that recognises academic and research organisations that have achieved outstanding results in implementing gender equality measures.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 5 include:

- **Portugal** launched its national strategy for equality and non-discrimination for 2018-2030, to promote women's rights and eliminate discrimination. The strategy will be implemented through three action plans, focusing on: equality between women and men; preventing and combating violence against women and girls; and combating discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics.
- In **Cyprus**, to enforce the right to equal pay for the same work or work of equal value, a target of 300 inspections was set for 2021. These inspections are preventive, aiming to provide information to employers and employees on the applicable legislation and practical guidance for employers regarding compliance, but they also seek to identify cases of pay discrimination.
- At sub-national level, the La Rioja region in **Spain** adopted a specific law against gender-based violence. It promotes the inclusion of victims of gender-based violence in the labour market and set up a care network to ensure victims receive the care they need until they recover. The region works on education via a general communication campaign and training for specific audiences such as trade unions, and future professionals in the field of health, social services and education. La Rioja also created an inter-department responsible for integrating gender equality in all policies.

EU external action

Global trends

Instability, fragility, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, migration, forced displacement and the COVID-19 pandemic all exacerbate gender inequality and threaten the progress that has been made. Deep-rooted inequalities persist, including in access to basic services, and gender-based violence remains widespread. Some legal frameworks continue to be discriminatory. Civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, are facing shrinking civil, civic and democratic spaces. However, women increasingly take part in shaping global transformations, showing that positive change is possible.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

EU external actions mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment to pursue worldwide its own internal objectives, as illustrated in the context of trade. In the WTO, the EU has been a strong proponent of the 2017 Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment and is active in the WTO Informal Working Group on trade and gender. In 2022, the EU funded a project by the International Trade Centre that will help to apply a gender lens to the WTO's work.

Trade and sustainable development chapters in EU bilateral trade agreements contain commitments to implementing fundamental ILO conventions on non-discrimination in employment. In June 2022, the EU concluded negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement with New Zealand that includes, for the first time for the EU, a dedicated article within the trade and sustainable development chapter promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment, and a gender focus in the Parties' trade and investment relationship. The modernised EU-Chile trade agreement includes a dedicated trade and gender equality chapter and was politically concluded in December 2022.

Under the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), the EU monitors beneficiary countries' respect of the principles of core international conventions, including those promoting women's rights and gender equality. As one of its core values, the EU consistently promotes gender equality and women's empowerment across its internal and external actions, including its international partnerships, using gender mainstreaming, targeted actions, or political and policy dialogues with partner countries. The Commission is implementing its gender action plan III 2021-2025 **(GAP III)**, adopted in November 2020, which is aligned with internal action in the EU 2020-2025 gender equality strategy and sets its external priorities for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The five pillars around which the GAP III priorities are set are the following:

(i) Making engagement on gender equality more effective as a cross-cutting priority for EU external action, including the commitment to having 85% of new EU external actions contributing to SDG 5 by 2025 and to increase funding for gender-focused actions by requiring at least one such action per country.

(ii) Promoting, together with EU Member States, strategic EU engagement at multilateral, regional and country level, including through country-level implementation plans, of which 129 have been developed so far.

(iii) Focusing on key areas of engagement, including the elimination of gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, leadership and participation, and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, taken further within the framework laid down in the European Consensus on Development[18] .

(iv) Leading by example, by establishing gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top EU political and management levels.

(v) Reporting and communicating on results.

Among the initiatives with a particular focus on gender equality and combating violence, the Spotlight Initiative, launched in 2017, is a global, multi-year initiative by the EU and the UN to tackle violence and discrimination perpetrated against women and girls. By 2019, 90% of the EU's initial funding of EUR 500 million had been allocated and 12 countries had started implementing Spotlight programmes, most of them as part of the Spotlight Initiative Africa regional programme (SIARP). When the COVID-19 crisis hit the world in March 2020, the Spotlight Initiative was able in the first 6 months to boost prevention measures, strengthen services for survivors of violence and address the acute needs of women and girls facing intersecting forms of discrimination. The EU also works with other partner organisations in countering gender-based violence.

The EU ensures that gender and age considerations are taken into account in all its humanitarian aid operations. To ensure an effective and quality response, humanitarian action caters for the differentiated needs and capacities of women, girls, men and boys, while supporting their active participation. Supporting the prevention and response to gender-based violence is a priority. In 2022, the EU funded targeted humanitarian actions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence with approximately EUR 41.2 million. In addition, the EU continues to support the global initiative "Call to Action on the Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies", a global, cross-stakeholder initiative with more than 100 members, which aims to drive structural change in the humanitarian system to address gender-based violence. In addition, EUR 23.5 million went to targeted sexual and reproductive health services. In April 2023, the EU published its latest assessment report on its gender-age marker, showcasing that, for projects starting in 2021, 96% of all EU humanitarian aid 'strongly' or 'to a certain extent' integrated gender and age considerations.

The principle of empowering women to boost prosperity is also at the heart of the gender strategy adopted in 2016 by the European Investment Bank (EIB). The EIB's policy of 'protect, impact, invest' embeds gender equality and women's economic empowerment in all its activities both inside and outside the EU.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

There are two main sources of information to track support for SDG 5 and gender equality. As for all SDGs, EU support for SDG 5 can be estimated where this specific SDG field is highlighted in projects reported to the OECD-DAC. In addition, the tagging of the OECD policy marker on gender equality identifies actions that contribute to gender equality as a policy objective, which provides useful information in relation to SDG 5. The assessments

[18] See paragraph 34, 2017 European Consensus on Development.

made in preparing this review indicate that there is scope to increase the consistency between these complementary and related reporting tracks.

In 2021, EU institutions reported to OECD commitments of EUR 5.4 billion in projects contributing to SDG 5. The largest share of the EU contribution was made by projects focusing on SDG 5 as a significant objective, clearly underlining the cross-cutting nature of SDG 5. This SDG has been mostly associated with interventions where the main SDG was SDG 16, SDG 8, SDG 13 and SDG 4. A smaller share of the EU contribution comes from projects that focus on SDG 5 as the main SDG, where it is closely interlinked with other SDGs such as SDG 16, SDG 3, SDG 4 and SDG 6. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 5 amounted to EUR 5.9 billion in 2021.

For EU institutions, the data on the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker for 2021 shows that overall, the number of gender-responsive (marked G1 using the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker) and gender-targeted (marked G2) actions amount to 70 %. In total, EUR 9 263 million were committed to actions marked G1 and G2. In 2021, 4% of new actions amounting to EUR 243 million targeted specifically gender equality (market G2). Support for SDG 5 is projected to increase even further, with the commitment in the 2021-2027 EU multiannual financial instrument NDICI-Global Europe to mainstream gender in at least 85% of all new actions, including 5% of actions with gender equality as a principal objective.

Collectively, the EU and the Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 10.7 billion to SDG 5. EU and Member States flows to SDG 5 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (39%) and Asia (21%).

When it comes to the policy marker on gender equality, the EU and Member States reported EUR 36.8 billion to the OECD in projects with gender equality as a significant or principal objective in 2021. These projects account for 43% of new actions adopted in 2021.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

Some of the key gender transformative actions recently adopted by the EU in support of SDG 5 include the '**Breaking the Glass Ceiling' programme in Tanzania,** which aims to help increase freedom from all forms of gender-based violence in the public and private spheres, promote women's economic empowerment, including to benefit from green and digital opportunities, and enhance equality in public participation, leadership and decision-making. The '**Empower Women Prosperous Nepal**' programme is another example, and it particularly tackles negative social and gender norms, in order to support Nepal's human development.

The Commission and 10 EU Member States are working with African partners to develop a regional Team Europe initiative (TEI) in sub-Saharan Africa to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, taken further within the framework laid down in the 2017 European Consensus on Development[19], with a particular focus on adolescent and young women. The promotion of the same theme by non-governmental organisations for vulnerable adolescents is also supported by the Commission focusing on promotion by non-governmental organisations for vulnerable adolescents in 16 African countries from 2022. The Commission is also a long-standing partner of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), including by providing support for the UNFPA Supplies Partnership.

In **Ethiopia**, careful gender and age disaggregation is ensured in all humanitarian response operations. Most nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and health protection actions focus on women and children. For example, particular focus is given to girls' education. In **South Sudan**, through various partners, sexual and

[19] See paragraph 34, 2017 European Consensus on Development.

gender-based violence survivors are assisted both preventively and responsively, with health, psychosocial, legal and/or livelihood issues.

In the **Western Balkans and Türkiye**, since 2017 the EU funded programme "**Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Türkiye**" supports women and girls who are survivors of violence. The programme, which is implemented by UN Women, builds capacities and provides financial support to a wide network of women's rights organisations and service providers, aiming at the prevention and protection of women, in accordance with the standards in the Istanbul Convention. More widely in the enlargement region, many countries have adopted or amended their relevant legislation with the aim of converging with the EU *acquis* and international standards on gender equality and anti-discrimination. Special gender equality bodies have been set up, and national strategies and action plans have been adopted. Collection and reporting of gender equality data has improved through cooperation with EIGE, which has led to the publication of the gender indexes reports in Serbia (2016, 2019, 2021), North Macedonia (2019), Albania (2020), Montenegro (2020) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022).

Decent work and young women's entrepreneurship have been supported by 21 EU funded actions in the framework of the European Training Foundation (ETF), to support change in **Mediterranean and Eastern Partnership countries** (including Armenia, Ukraine and in conflict-affected areas of Georgia). In 2020, over 6 million women throughout the world were supported, especially in public and private investment for women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion. In 2021, the EU launched its support for the economic empowerment of women in partner countries, in partnership with Germany and the Tony Elumelu Foundation, supporting 2 500 African women entrepreneurs. Thanks to EU support, new signatories to the Women's empowerment principles (WEPs) increased to 500 new companies **in Asia** in 2020 (from 170 in 2019), and over 4 000 companies in **Latin America** (from 2 000 in 2017). This considerably improved gender-sensitive business culture and practices in the private sector, contributing to a level playing field for EU companies.

In the Neighbourhood East**,** the action for EU4Gender Equality 'Challenging gender stereotypes and practices in the EaP countries' adopted in 2019, has funded a project in cooperation with UN Women and UNFPA aiming at strengthening equal rights and opportunities for women and men through shifting social perceptions, increasing men's participation in caretaking and actions to prevent gender-based violence. Another project is working to increase **the** knowledge base and use of gender analysis in decision-making and reforms by governments and EU delegations to deliver effective and equal results for all.

In **Morocco**, the EU contributed to SDG 5 through budget support programmes and the provision of blended finance for an EBRD programme in support of women in business.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually supportive and are coordinated to ensure complementarity and a positive impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 5, such as the following illustrative initiatives.

By means of illustration, in **Tanzania**, **Ireland** funded and launched a 'social institutions and gender index', which is a dataset and reference point for formal and informal norms and practices around gender equality and discrimination. It also built the capacity of the national bureau of statistics to measure and understand these issues.

The **Dutch** SDG 5 Fund, for example, is one of the world's largest funds for the promotion of equal rights for women and girls in all their diversity, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, with EUR 500 million to be allocated for strengthening local capacity building in the area of lobby and advocacy over the 2021-2025 period. It is complemented by gender diplomacy and gender mainstreaming and a feminist foreign policy.

Finland has supported long-term work to change structures, norms and attitudes that maintain gender inequality in Nepal. Since 2016, a project related to menstrual hygiene has produced long-term results. Girls and women, who had previously to sleep in a cattle shed during menstruation, without access to the water points in their communities, now freely use water points and toilets in households. Changes in societal attitudes have reduced discrimination and generational shame around menstruation.

Austria, via its development bank OeEB, has been providing long-term financing to the Kashf Foundation in Pakistan, whose funds are used to finance local micro and small enterprises owned by women. OeEB's credit line has allowed the Kashf Foundation to open up to 155 further branches, thus reaching more women in a country with one of the highest gender gaps in the world.

Women's rights are strongly defended by **Estonia**, including with its call during the COP26 conference in November 2021 for greater involvement of women in leading the fight against climate change. Estonia's new Data for the Environment Alliance' global initiative, which aims to make high-quality environmental data easily accessible for all those in need, also aims to reduce the gender gap considering the availability of information and technology.

Looking ahead

The Conference on the Future of Europe, in line with the objectives of SDG 5, showed broad support to the continued promotion of gender equality across the array of EU policies, ranging from digital literacy to sports, and emphasised the need to take a gendered perspective on policy assessment, data collection, monitoring and EU funding activities. Calling for inclusive labour markets, people stressed the need to address the gender pay gap, women's representation in senior positions and support for women entrepreneurs in the business environment and women in STEM. Participants voiced support for the implementation and transparent monitoring of the EU gender equality strategy.

The EU is committed to implementing SDG 5 through implementing the 2020-2025 gender equality strategy. To this end, the Commission is currently negotiating with co-legislators on its proposal on combating violence against women and domestic violence and implementing other key initiatives set out in the strategy.

The EU is committed to gender mainstreaming in all pending, planned and future initiatives. Implementing another core component of the gender equality strategy, the EU will continue to include a gender equality perspective in all areas of policymaking, including through the Commission's task force on equality. For example, EIGE will support the EU's policy work with research into gender issues in relation to the European Green Deal. The resulting data will be made available in EIGE's 2023 gender equality index and will be used to mainstream gender into the 'Fit for 55' package. Other examples of gender mainstreaming include the EU's strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2021-2027 and the EU's strategy on combating trafficking in human beings (2021-2025). Gender mainstreaming will also continue in the EU's budget and funding programmes.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take action to accelerate the implementation of SDG5 globally. This includes through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes where gender equality is a shared priority and through mainstreaming this priority across its actions. By 2025, there will be a commitment for at least one action in each country focusing on gender equality as a principal objective. A tangible contribution to SDG5 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be made by developing the Global Gateway strategy, taking a Team Europe approach, which will actively integrate gender equality. The EU will furthermore continue to mainstream gender and age considerations in its humanitarian actions and will continue to provide targeted funding to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies, and to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services.

SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Clean water enables life on Earth, nature, human health, agriculture, energy, industry and transport. Good quality water should be available and affordable all year round for people and nature. Almost every EU household has access to safe drinking water and basic sanitary facilities, which constitutes a basic right recognised in the European Pillar of Social Rights. The quality of water services in the EU continues to improve. However, there are still differences in access to these services between and within Member States, especially between rural and urban areas to the detriment of rural residents and the poorest. The situation is still not ideal for some population groups[20]. Water quality in the EU is affected by pollution caused by industry, households and agriculture. Pollution and changes to the structure and flow of waterbodies affect the hydrological cycle and the sustainable reuse of water as well as marine ecosystems. The UN Water Conference has highlighted the interconnections between freshwaters, oceans and "green" water; the Commission is working on these links, not least on a future deliverable aimed at reporting on the actual status of EU's freshwaters and seas based on the latest River Basin Management Plans and marine measures.

Although progress was made throughout the 1990s, little change has been observed in the past 10 years. This indicates that EU's ground and surface waters have not yet reached good status. Efficient water use is also a growing concern due to climate change. Changing weather patterns cause more intense and frequent drought periods, lower water levels in summer and higher surface water temperatures. Besides the damage to ecosystems, droughts cause economic damage of up to EUR 9 billion a year. They cause lower crop yields and lower energy production. Water use efficiency has increased in Europe, but overall water availability is falling. Water stress is now on the rise in western and northern Europe as a direct consequence of climate change.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
Collection and treatment of urban wastewater was to be ensured at the latest by the end of 2005 for agglomerations of above 10 000 population equivalent (pe) and in some agglomerations with between 2 000 pe and 10 000 pe Urban Wastewater Directive	82% of Europe's urban wastewater is collected and treated in line with EU standards (source: European Environment Agency). In 2020, an estimated 1.8% of people in EU lived in a dwelling without its own indoor flushing toilet (source: Eurostat). This is 1.9 percentage points less than in 2010 (3.7%).
Protect human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by	23 million people or 4.5 % of the total EU population were not connected to a public water supply in 2018.

[20] For example, according to November 2022 data from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, one of five Roma households (22%) do not have access to tap water inside their dwelling, which is of particularly concern during a pandemic Roma in 10 European countries. Main results – Roma Survey 2021 (europa.eu).

ensuring that it is wholesome and clean, **and improve access to water** Drinking Water Directive	
Protect human health and preserve, protect, and improve the quality of the environment Bathing Water Directive	Bathing water quality in Europe remains high. The minimum water quality standards, determined primarily by two distinct bacterial values, are met in 93% of sites. The share of excellent sites grew continuously from when the Directive was adopted until 2015, when it stabilised at more than 80%. In 2021, it was 84.8% across Europe[21].
Achieve good environmental status of all bodies of surface waters and groundwaters by 2027 Water Framework Directive	Good status is comprised of four assessments: ecological status of surface waters, chemical status of surface waters, chemical status of groundwaters and quantitative status of groundwaters. In 2016, EU-27 countries had achieved 40% and 33% of surface waterbodies in good ecological and chemical status respectively; 90% and 76% of groundwaters achieved good quantitative and chemical status respectively.
Sustainable use of water: reduce water scarcity, measured through the water exploitation index 8th environmental action programme, COM(2022) 357 final	**Water scarcity** affected 29% of EU's territory during at least one season in 2019. **Water use efficiency** has increased in agriculture, electricity production, industry, mining, public water supply and tourism. Water consumption in these sectors was 16% lower in 2017 (the last year for which EU-wide statistics are available) than in 1995, while production in these sectors grew by 20% in terms of net value added. From 2000 to 2019, the total volume of water abstracted from surface water and groundwater fell by 15%, with the relative contribution of groundwater to the total volume abstracted increasing from 19% to 23%.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 6 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of legislation, strategies, policies, initiatives and tools in place to contribute to the implementation of SDG 6.

The Water Framework Directive is the EU's main legislation to prevent water pollution, ensure water is used and managed in a sustainable way, reduce water stress, and promote water resource efficiency.

The Drinking Water Directive aims at ensuring the quality and **accessibility** of drinking water**.** New requirements are now included to improve or maintain access to safe drinking water for all, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised groups, and to address leakages in water supply networks. A new Regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse for agricultural irrigation entered into force in June 2020. The new rules will apply from June 2023.

[21] Also relevant to SDG 14 and therefore covered in that chapter.

The Directive concerning urban waste-water treatment regulates the collection and discharge of domestic and industrial urban waste waters. A proposal for a revised directive was adopted in October 2022, to address remaining sources of pollution nutrients, micropollutants, and stormwater overflows) and the energy footprint of the water treatment sector and to lay down obligations for Member States concerning access to sanitation. The directive was accompanied by a proposal for the revision of the lists of surface water pollutants, which added several industrial chemicals, pesticides and pharmaceuticals and tightened standards for some of the listed pollutants.

The Groundwater Directive lays down quality standards and sets out measures to prevent or limit pollutants in groundwater. It sets quality criteria that take local characteristics into account and allows for further improvements to be made based on monitoring data and new scientific knowledge.

The zero pollution action plan launched in May 2021 sets out key measures to speed up water pollution reduction.

The Bathing Water Directive requires Members States to monitor and assess bathing water for at least two parameters of (faecal) bacteria.

Selected enablers

The **LIFE programme** is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. It includes integrated projects implemented on a larger territorial scale, aimed to help implement EU legislation, including in the area of water. The LIFE programme is a significant supporter of innovation projects relevant to SDG 6. Since 2015, the LIFE programme has funded 94 projects in support of SDG 6 for a budget of EUR 231 million, including on wastewater treatment, water quality, river basin management and innovation.

The 2023-2027 **common agricultural policy** is built around 10 key objectives, one of which is efficient natural resource management. This objective aims to foster sustainable development and efficient management of natural resources, such as water, soil and air, including by reducing dependency on chemicals.

NextGenerationEU, with an investment plan of more than EUR 800 billion, contributes to protecting the natural environment and achieving SDG 6. This includes improving water quality in rivers and seas and reducing waste and plastic litter.

EU Cohesion policy funds provide major investments in biodiversity, nature, and green infrastructure. Almost EUR 13 billion of the 2021-2027 programmes will be invested in water services and improved wastewater collection and treatment. Cohesion policy will provide EUR 6 billion of support for waste prevention, recycling and reuse of municipal waste; also circular production and consumption practices; and improving resource efficiency. As a result, 16.4 million more people (3.7% of the EU's population) will benefit from clean water supply.

The EU's research and innovation programme, **Horizon Europe**, dedicates EUR 1.15 billion of funding to projects related to SDG 6 in 2021-2024. Examples of projects recently launched include the 'Partnership Water4All' and 'Green.BOOST**',** which focus on the foundations to implement large-scale freshwater ecosystem restoration projects and investments. This can deliver sustainable e-flows, good status for surface and ground waters, better long-term water management, improved biodiversity and climate resilience. Another project is 'Stars4Water**'**, which aims to improve the understanding of how climate change affects the availability of water resources and the vulnerabilities for ecosystems, society and economic sectors at river basin scale. The project team will work with seven river basin organisations through a co-creation and living lab approach (contributing to SDG target 6.5).

Another example of an enabler is the project 'Analyses and action plan towards sustainable water services in Estonia' supported by the **Structural Reform Support Programme** under the 2020 call. Due to a highly fragmented utility sector and the low population density, significant price increases would be required to maintain the existing infrastructure in Estonia. However, these increases would not be affordable for households.

Moreover, Estonia lacks a sustainable funding strategy for the long-term operation and maintenance of its drinking water and wastewater treatment services. The project supports the preparation of a roadmap for the consolidation of the water utility sector. Consolidation is a prerequisite for a sustainable and socially acceptable financing strategy.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders are closely involved in developing and implementing EU water policy.

The EU's Water Framework Directive is being implemented through a 'common implementation strategy'. This strategy brings together all relevant stakeholders in several thematic working groups. This results in guidance documents for implementation and exchanges on best practices. It also serves as a source of ideas for further policy innovation.

As pollution has no borders and cooperation between different civil society actors is needed to tackle water pollution, the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform is also useful.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 6 include the following.

- Building on the successive Water Summits held in Budapest before and after the adoption of the SDGs, the revised **Hungarian** national water strategy aims to fully implement SDG 6, together with EU legislation, with a set of specific objectives to be attained by 2030, including on water management, quality, efficiency and governance.
- The city of **Veliki Preslav** in **Bulgaria** used SDG 6 targets to tackle local water supply challenges. This guided the city in planning their water management process – from bringing water to residential areas to implementing wastewater treatment solutions. Now the city can provide the necessary amount of drinking water to several villages through the recently completed main water pipeline. Abandoned water sources (shaft wells) have been restored and can be used as alternative sources of water.
- In **France**, the **Seine-et-Marne department** has made a concerted approach since 2006 to develop a departmental water plan. This approach has made it possible to obtain agreements on technical solutions, financing and associated action on all the relevant issues for Seine-et-Marne (drinking water supply, sanitation, aquatic environments, flood risks). Many players have been involved: the department, the Seine-Normandy Water Agency (AESN), the Regional Health Agency (ARS), the Association of Mayors of Seine-et-Marne, the Chamber of Agriculture for the Île-de-France region, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Seine-et-Marne, and 14 other partners.

EU external action

Global trends

The delay in progress on SDG 6 is alarming, in particular as increasing climate change effects will complicate challenges on water availability worldwide, with implications for peace, stability and displacement.

Access to water and sanitation is essential for human development and economic growth. However, access is under pressure due to rising global demand, combined with misuse, poor management, over-extraction of groundwater, contamination of freshwater supplies, and more variable weather patterns resulting from climate change. Although access to water and sanitation has continued to expand worldwide, most of the population living in Sub-Saharan Africa and least developed countries still have no access to basic facilities, increasing public health risks, especially for women, children and vulnerable groups.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

With implications across most SDGs, action on water and sanitation is an essential part of the EU's policy mix. At the **UN 2023 Water Conference** in March 2023, which was the first of its kind since 1977 and played a crucial role for mobilising stakeholders and sectors to catalyse political momentum on water to progress towards achieving SDG 6, the EU highlighted the strategic and cross-sectoral importance of water and sanitation, and supported the new Water Action Agenda, including through a set of commitments. The EU supports the emphasis on the need to ensure a comprehensive approach on water-related challenges, including for achieving food and energy security and climate objectives, and the acknowledgement of the critical links between addressing water stress and environmental protection, biodiversity and ecosystem preservation.

In this context, the Council conclusions on Water Diplomacy promote the use of water as a tool for peace, security and global stability, through which the EU aims to prevent conflicts and promote transboundary cooperation in regions where access to water is under threat, to ensure the effective and sustainable use and management of shared resources. The EU also joined the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition, spearheaded by UNECE, to promote transboundary cooperation on water.

The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and the role of water to maintain sustainable environmental, social, cultural and economic systems at global, regional and local levels are also promoted and protected by the EU, including in its external action. Considering its interlinkages with other SDGs, water can also help deliver on development priorities in different sectors, including food systems, health, energy and industry, and at different levels, from local to global.

EU water policy has a direct bearing on the quality of surrounding freshwater and marine water. For instance, the investment in wastewater treatment has reduced the concentrations of nutrients and other pollutants in the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea considerably. The removal of barriers in rivers has improved the conditions for migrating fish. Integrated river basin management, particularly further to the Water Framework Directive, has been used as an example for river basins outside the EU.

EU space technologies play a crucial role in optimising processing operations for higher quality drinking water. Copernicus, the EU's Earth observation programme, in particular the Copernicus Land Monitoring Service, systematically provides real-time information on the state of global inland waterbodies and their seasonal replenishment, lake and river water levels, temperature, turbidity and trophic state, including potential water availability from snow and ice cover. Better information and forecasts help many water managers adapt their strategies when dealing with water allocation, flood management, ecological status and industrial water use to mitigate the effects of climate change.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to OECD EUR 3 billion in commitments to projects contributing to SDG 6. The main share of the EU's contribution is for projects that target SDG 6 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, such as SDG 3, SDG 5 and SDG 11. SDG 13 and SDG 14. The EU also made a sizeable contribution to SDG 6 through projects targeting the SDG as a significant objective. The main contributors are SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 9. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 6 amounted to EUR 6.3 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance[22], the EU supported more than 17 million people with access to an improved drinking water resource and/or sanitation facility in 2018-2021.

[22] For the methodology on results, please see the description under SDG 2.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 5.8 billion to SDG 6. EU and Member State flows to SDG 6 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (51%), Asia (20%) and other European countries (14%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The EU's key priorities are to:

- support access to safe drinking water and sanitation, including ensuring timely and dignified access to sufficient and safe water and sanitation services for people caught in humanitarian crises;
- support the protection and restoration of freshwater ecosystems;
- support the protection and sustainable use of water resources, including by addressing pollution, water scarcity (e.g.., the circular economy) and the water-ecosystems-food-energy-climate nexus;
- strengthen water governance, including transboundary water cooperation as a catalyst for peace and security, and global governance.

The EU policy approach to water is multidimensional. The EU has integrated support to water and sanitation in partner countries across several policies, and these interlinkages are explicit in many key EU policy documents, such as the gender action plan or the Farm to Fork strategy. In the new consensus on development, the EU and Member States have committed to increasing access to water, sanitation and hygiene services and promoting integrated water resource management, conservation of water resources, and improved water use efficiency and recycling. The EU has now made explicit its global commitments on water in the context of the UN 2023 Water Conference and the recently adopted Water Action Agenda.

These main policy orientations are developed through several leading global and regional initiatives. The Team Europe initiative (TEI) **Transboundary Water Management in Africa** launched at the EU-African Union Summit, will contribute to the 2030 Agenda, notably SDG 6, by supporting transboundary water management in Africa to support development and regional integration. This TEI supports the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy. The EU (including the EIB) and seven EU Member States combine their efforts to contribute to policies and strategies (through improved knowledge, data and research), institutional capacities and frameworks, participatory processes and coordination for improved transboundary water management and key investments. A broad range of interlinked SDGs (in particular SDGs 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16) will also be supported through this TEI.

Following the EU's policy guidance, the EU has developed an integrated package to address some of the challenges affecting Central Asia by setting up a regional Team Europe Initiative for **Central Asia on Water, Energy and Climate**. This initiative's measures have strong interlinkages between SDG 6, SDG 7 and SDG 15. The ultimate goal is to support the region's transition towards a green economy, promoting food security, jobs, growth, and sustainable development, while maintaining climate neutrality and environmental sustainability. This TEI supports the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy.

The economic and investment plan (EIP) in the Western Balkans, through its Green Agenda and its Flagship 7 on waste and wastewater management, contributes to the depollution of water in the region.

The EU plays an active role in framing, advocating and implementing a global agenda for access to basic humanitarian services on **safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene** (WASH) in humanitarian crises, in collaboration with the EU MS, international partners and local actors. Ensuring that these services are available to the most vulnerable is essential in humanitarian aid operations, in particular in acute and chronic crises (e.g., operations in South Sudan and in the Sahel zone). And special attention must be given to the needs of women and girls. WASH-related assistance also contributes to disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness strategies by anticipating severe water scarcity crises, which have the potential to spark massive displacement (e.g., in Afghanistan). Adapted responses include water contingency planning, climate adaptation, groundwater level monitoring, and repairs and rehabilitation, including upgrading water systems.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In support of the implementation of SDG 6, water and sanitation are also among the priority investment sectors covered by the European Fund for Sustainable Development+ (EFSD+). Building on the EU's special partnership with Cabo Verde, the Team Europe Initiative '**To Green Cabo Verde',** delivered as part of the Global Gateway, will contribute to several SDGs (including 6, 7, 13, 2, 14). It will focus on investments (blending and guarantees under EFSD+), strengthening capacity through technical assistance and twinning, dialogue, cooperation and budget support. The measures will be based on four key green pillars: (i) green tourism and green jobs; (ii) sustainable energies; (iii) sustainable access to water and sanitation; and (iv) agriculture and the blue economy.

Similarly, in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the regional Team Europe initiative **Water and Zero Pollution** will continue supporting policy dialogue on water, including on water supply and sanitation, to refine national SDG 6 targets. In addition, innovative monitoring approaches are being deployed at the intersection of epidemiology and wastewater management. As a result, with **Austria** in the lead, the technical capacity for monitoring the SARS-CoV-2 virus in wastewater is being strengthened across the region (in **Armenia**, **Azerbaijan**, **Georgia**, and **Moldova**).

The EU's water operators partnerships (EU-WOP) programme is a 4-year initiative, led by the UN-Habitat's Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance and funded by the EU. The EU-WOP programme supports partnerships among **water operators** in partner countries and helps utilities acquire and apply knowledge, establish new practices and implement improved approaches

Greece is leading cross-border cooperation on integrated water resource management between **itself**, **Albania**, **North Macedonia** and the **EU.** This cooperation focuses on the protection and sustainable development of the Prespa Park Area in the West Balkans and provides an institutional framework and joint activities to address the serious pressure on the lakes caused by climate change and biodiversity loss.

In the neighbourhood region, support relevant to SDG 6 is also being provided bilaterally. For example, the **EU** supports **Georgia** in its efforts on environmental sustainability and improved living conditions in rural areas by contributing to increased access to improved and sustainable water supply and wastewater treatment in the semi-urban and rural areas of the Adjara region. The project supports the creation of centralised and decentralised water and wastewater supply systems in all the villages and settlements of the region's municipalities.

The **EU** provides safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene support through its humanitarian support through its humanitarian aid and Civil Protection Mechanism, with its main objective to save and preserve life and alleviate the suffering of populations facing severe environmental health risks and water insecurity in the context of anticipated, ongoing and recent humanitarian crises,, for example in **Venezuela**, **South Sudan** (focusing on the risk of waterborne diseases) and **Ethiopia** (focusing on ensuring access to drinking water and promoting hygiene and sanitation for displaced and host communities affected by crises).

Action by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 6, such as the following initiatives.

- **Hungary** contributes to achieving SDG 6 across the world. Examples include equipping schools in Ugandan refugee settlements with innovative drinking water systems, providing mobile purification systems to Kyrgyzstan, contributing to the reconstruction of Iraq's water utility and irrigation systems, strengthening Ukraine's flood management system, and supporting water management facilities in several Southeast Asian countries.
- To assist in tackling the challenges of drought and the increasing unpredictability of southwestern African water supplies (due to increased water consumption and climate change), experts from the **Danish** Environmental Protection Agency are working with **South African** authorities and Danish businesses

by offering solutions with both knowledge and products. This collaboration on sustainable water supply focuses on five specific areas: groundwater, water wastage, water efficiency in industry, water sector financing, and research and innovation.

- **Spain**'s Cooperation Fund for Water and Sanitation has developed programmes for institutional strengthening, community development and promotion of water and sanitation services in 18 countries in **Latin America and the Caribbean**. This is achieved through national strategies, hydrological plans, and updating legislation with the aim of supporting partner countries in the development of public policies and influencing the human right to water and sanitation. Action is focused on rural and peri-urban areas and aims to reduce poverty and inequality. Some of the regional administrations, such as Aragon, are also supporting SDG 6. This includes working in **Guatemala** and **Nicaragua** to provide families with household water systems and latrines and giving training on hygienic-sanitary habits and how to maintain sanitation infrastructures.

Looking ahead

Emerging challenges such as new pollutants and climate change require keeping EU water policy up to date. Implementation of existing legislation is also key to reaching the SDG targets.

Integrated water resources management, including through protecting, restoring and improving aquatic ecosystems and increasing the efficiency of water use in all sectors, is essential for economic development, health, food and energy security as well as climate objectives. The recent hot and dry European summers have underlined the need for Europe to become more water resilient to serve all legitimate water needs for health, nature and the economy, in a sustainable manner all year round. Restoring water availability will require efficient use of freshwater. This can be helped by applying volumetric pricing more widely, with appropriate social safeguards, setting water efficiency standards in agriculture and industry, and promoting the sustainable development of alternative water sources, such as wastewater reuse.

On the external side, the EU will continue to use water support initiatives as diplomatic and development tools. This will therefore contribute not only to SDG 6 but also deliver on many interlinked SDGs (including SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 4, 7, 9, 11, 17) at different scales, from local to global. In particular, the EU will further strengthen its commitment to SDG 6 as follow up to the UN 2023 Water Conference in March 2023. The EU will contribute to the WAA with a set of EU commitments, including improving access to water and sanitation, supporting multilateralism on water with the UN at its core, and strengthening transboundary water cooperation. This commitment includes further developing several Team Europe initiatives on water, which have been launched at regional and national level and will contribute to rolling out the Global Gateway strategy, such as the 'Water, Energy and Climate Change in Central Asia' and the 'Transboundary Water Management in Africa', launched at the EU-AU Summit.

In its humanitarian work, the EU will continue to take action in the WASH sector, particularly with other sectors, such as health, nutrition and shelter. The approach to water supply in humanitarian situations must be closely aligned with development approaches to ensure sustainability. In addition, the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations will be applied from 2023. These will promote sustainable access to water and limit water over-extraction and pollution of water sources from waste.

SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Energy transition is at the heart of the European Green Deal. Since 2015, solid progress has been and continues to be made towards SDG 7. The share of renewable energy consumption rose from 17.5% in 2015 to almost 22.1% in 2020, exceeding the target of 20%. In 2021, the share of renewable energy fell slightly to 21.8%. Similarly, the EU was able to achieve its 2020 energy efficiency target of a 20% reduction in energy consumption compared to 2007. However, in 2021, energy consumption bounced back after the COVID-19 pandemic; additional long-term energy efficiency improvements seem necessary to ensure the EU meets its current 2030 target of increasing energy efficiency by at least 32.5% compared to 2007.

Despite notable progress, challenges remain as regards energy poverty, further exacerbated by the energy price crisis experienced in the EU. The EU has managed to lower the percentage of the population that was unable to keep their home sufficiently warm; nevertheless, over 34 million people experience some sort of energy poverty.

The unprovoked Russian military aggression on Ukraine of February 2022 has reinforced the sense of urgency for the EU to ensure its energy security and end its dependence on Russian fossil fuels, while tackling the ongoing climate crisis. The EU's response to this crisis – especially through the **REPowerEU plan** - has already had an impact on energy supply, by diversifying energy imports, increasing the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, and increasing energy saving and efficiency efforts.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
32% of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001	The EU exceeded its 2020 target of 20% and is on track to achieve the current 2030 target of 32%. Negotiations among EU co-legislators ended in March 2023 with an agreement to increase the target to at least 42.5% in 2030 with the aim to reach 45%. The share of renewables in the electricity mix is expected to grow from 37% in 2021 to 69% in 2030.
32.5% of energy efficiency in primary and final energy consumption Energy Efficiency Directive (EU) 2018/2002	The EU achieved its 2020 target of 20% energy efficiency by 2020 compared to the 2007 scenario. Without the 2020 economic slowdown, most probably the EU would not have met its energy efficiency target. In 2021 and after the COVID-19 pandemic, energy consumption bounced back but still a decrease from the pre-pandemic levels was recorded. Additional long term energy efficiency improvements are necessary to ensure that the EU meets its 2030 target. Following the political agreement on the Energy Efficiency Recast proposal the EU binding target is a reduction of 11.7% of final energy consumption in 2030, compared with the energy consumption forecasts for 2030 made in 2020. This

	translates into an upper limit to the EU's final energy consumption of 763 million tonnes of oil equivalent and of 993 million tonnes of oil equivalent for primary consumption.
Reduce the share of households in energy poverty Set in the Directive (EU) 2019/944 on common rules for the internal market for electricity	The share of people unable to afford to keep their homes adequately warm fell to 6.9% in 2021 compared with 9.4% in 2012, despite a small spike in 2020 as a consequence of the economic slowdown linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Greening of buildings: by 2050, all buildings will have to be net-zero Energy performance of buildings Directive (EU) 2018/844)	Since 2005, energy consumption per EU inhabitant has fallen by 9.3%, with a slight downward trend in total household energy consumption offsetting a 2.8% increase in the population over the same period. The EU has launched a renovation wave across the EU to reach its target.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 7 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of legislation, strategies, policies, initiatives and tools in place to contribute to the implementation of SDG 7.

Energy Union: Adopted in 2015, **the Energy Union** strategy aimed to set an overarching EU framework to provide secure, affordable and clean energy for EU citizens and businesses. The seventh report on the state of the energy union, published in October 2022, highlighted the challenges that the energy sector faced in the previous 12 months. It took stock of the EU's energy policy response to the current energy crisis and provided an analysis of the progress made in addressing both shorter-term issues and the EU's long-term energy and climate goals.

Adopted in 2019, this package of eight laws aims to decarbonise the EU's energy system. It introduced 2030 targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency, set up the governance system for the Energy Union and rules for the energy poverty monitoring and prevention of energy poverty. Member States were required to establish a 10-year national energy and climate plan (NECP) covering the period 2021 to 2030, set their contribution to the EU's 2030 energy and climate targets, and set out a strategy, policies and measures to achieve them. In 2023, Member States will submit to the Commission their first progress reports and update their national energy and climate plans in order to reflect the rapidly evolving geopolitical context and the EU's higher ambition in terms of decarbonisation, which have resulted in a significant changes to the EU's energy and climate policy..

The **European Green Deal package**: This included amendments to nearly all the legislation under the clean energy for all Europeans package, notably reinforcing the provisions and the EU's ambition on renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings. It also put forward measures to set up a new decarbonised gas and hydrogen framework and a proposal to reduce methane emissions in the energy sector. The package is now at the final stages of negotiations between the co-legislators and should enter into force soon.

The REPowerEU Plan, launched in May 2022, sets out short- and long-term measures to phase out the EU's dependence on fossil fuels from Russia. These measures include diversification of supply, energy savings and efficiency, and an acceleration of renewable energy capacity. With the REPowerEU plan, the Commission proposed to raise the 2030 renewable energy targets from 40% and 45%. In March 2023 negotiations among EU co-legislators ended with an agreement to increase the target to at least 42.5% in 2030 with the aim to reach 45%. It is also accompanied by a recommendation to speed up permitting for major renewable energy projects and a targeted amendment to the Renewable Energy Directive introducing dedicated go-to areas for renewables and recognising renewable energy sources as an overriding public interest.

Beyond accelerating the deployment of renewables, the Commission also proposed to raise the EU's 2030 energy efficiency target from 9% to 13%. Negotiations among EU co-legislators ended in March 2023 with an agreement for an energy efficiency target of 11.7% in 2030 compared to 2020 scenario. Emphasising the principle of energy efficiency first is crucial both in achieving the clean energy transition and in phasing out our dependence on Russian fossil fuels.

Furthermore, in March 2023, the Commission published a **proposal for the reform of the Electricity Market Design** which has three main aims. The reform will make the energy bills of EU consumers and companies more independent from the short-term market price of electricity (very often driven by volatile fossil fuel costs). It will enable an accelerated deployment of renewables and the phase out of gas by facilitating further the integration of renewables in the electricity system, providing stable revenues for investors in renewable and low-carbon energy and improving conditions for the use of flexibility solutions such as demand response, and storage. Crucially, it also aims to improve consumer protection and further empower consumers. The Commission also proposed amendments to the **Regulation on wholesale energy market integrity and transparency (REMIT)** to provide better protection against market manipulation and abuse and enhance the transparency of the market.

As part of the REPowerEU plan, the Commission also proposed a number of amendments to the cohesion policy framework. This will enable Member States to use unspent funds under their 2014-2020 allocation to provide direct support to vulnerable families and small and medium-sized businesses to help them face increased energy costs (i.e. SAFE - Supporting Affordable Energy). This is a great opportunity for Member States to commit to investments and reforms pertaining to the acceleration of renewable energy projects permitting.

Projects of common interest **(PCI):** Through the Trans-European Networks for Energy linking the energy systems of EU countries, energy projects of common interest can benefit from accelerated permitting procedures and up to EUR 5.84 billion in funding from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), a financing instrument of EUR 33.71 billion (2021-2027) to support investments in EU infrastructure networks. CEF Energy is financing the better interconnection of energy networks to develop a single EU energy market and to support the clean energy transition. Since 2014, CEF Energy has provided funding of EUR 5.7 billion to support 154 projects. In March 2022, the Commission launched the first CEF call for renewable energy cross-border projects. In May 2022, the Commission launched a new call for key cross-border energy infrastructure projects for projects included in the fifth EU list of projects of common interest.

Other EU policies also support the energy transition. The **common agricultural policy** contains objectives and measures that support farmers to produce renewable energy, such as biogas or inputs for bioethanol production.

The European Pillar of Social Rights lists energy among the essential services to which everyone should have access. In 2020, the Commission issued recommendations on energy poverty as part of the renovation wave, proposing actions for Member States to alleviate energy poverty. In July 2021, the Commission adopted the Fit for 55 package, which includes specific measures to identify key drivers of energy poverty risks. As part of the package, a dedicated Social Climate Fund has been agreed so to abate the social impacts of the green transition on vulnerable households, micro-enterprises and transport users. In April 2022, the Commission established the Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group to help Member States in tackling energy poverty.

Selected enablers

The implementation of the **REPowerEU** plan will need additional investments of **EUR 210 billion** between now and 2027 to phase out Russian fossil fuel imports, on top of the financing needed to achieve the energy transition under the European Green Deal.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** is at the heart of the REPowerEU plan implementation, providing additional EU funding. This facility was developed in 2020 to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic. To date, around EUR 108 billion in financing has been allocated to clean energy and energy efficiency measures.

Cohesion policy funds also provides significant support to energy efficiency improvements in buildings and housing, renewable energy and energy infrastructure outside the Trans-European Energy Network (smart energy systems, grids and storage). It therefore contributes to the achievement of a decarbonised building stock by 2050, thus reducing energy consumption and creating savings for households affected by energy poverty. For 2021-27 programmes and the Just Transition Fund, around EUR 47 billion of EU financing (leading to EUR 68 billion with national co-financing). Such investments will provide essential support to tackling the current energy crisis by boosting energy savings (particularly in buildings) and increasing energy security for the future via the further deployment of renewable energy production. Cohesion policy has already contributed EUR 28 billion of similar investment in 2014-2020.

The following instruments, among others, also support the energy transition and REPowerEU plan objectives.

- LIFE Clean Energy Transition (CET) - In May 2022, the LIFE call for proposals made available EUR 98 million for energy efficiency and clean energy projects. This call covers REPowerEU objectives, such as reduction in fossil fuel consumption for heating and accelerated deployment of energy efficiency solutions in housing, businesses and the public sector.
- The Modernisation Fund will contribute to the investment needs of the 10 lower-income EU countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. It supports investments in generation and use of energy from renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, energy storage, modernisation of energy networks, and the just transition in carbon-dependent regions. The total revenues of the fund may amount to some EUR 14 billion in 2021-2030, depending on the carbon price.
- Since 2011, the EIB-managed ELENA facility supports the development of energy efficiency and clean mobility projects. With a leverage factor of 33, it has an impressive capacity to attract private financing. In 2021, EUR 35.8 million was allocated to 18 new projects. These are expected to generate around 500 gigawatt hours of energy savings per year.
- The **Social Climate Fund** will help mitigate the costs of the energy transition for vulnerable households, microenterprises, and transport users. It will provide a total of EUR 65 billion over 7 years in funding for the renovation of buildings, access to zero and low-emission mobility, or even temporary direct income support.
- The **public sector loan facility**, the third pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism, is now operational. It supports regions most affected by the energy transition through grants and loans to accompany their economic conversion.
- In 2023, the first ever cross-border tender will take place under the renewable energy financing mechanism. The tender will focus on solar photovoltaic projects. The mechanism will help unlock the EU's full renewable potential, and help Member States achieve the decarbonisation objective in a more cooperative manner.

The Horizon Europe programme allocated EUR 15 billion to support research and innovation in renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency, electrification of heating and cooling, and digitalisation of the energy system. For the energy performance of buildings, Horizon Europe is funding the following:

- the BUILD UP initiative, a portal for sharing knowledge on how to make buildings more energy-efficient;
- the 4RinEU project, which aims to provide new tools and strategies to encourage large-scale renovation of existing buildings and to promote the use of renewable energies (see Home improvements for the planet) and
- the **EIT InnoEnergy**, a Knowledge and Innovation Community, which brings together innovators and industry, entrepreneurs and investors in order to catalyse and accelerate the energy transition and build connections worldwide.

Another example is the project 'Facilitating renewable energy deployment in electricity sector of **Slovenia**', supported by the Technical Support Instrument under the 2021 call for proposals. Slovenia faces recurring difficulties to increase its share of energy from renewable sources. This affects the energy and climate transition as well as the economy as whole. The project aims to support the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning in addressing barriers to renewable energy deployment and strengthen related administrative capacity.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 7 in a collaborative approach, including through the following initiatives.

- The EU Sustainable Energy Week is the biggest event in the EU on renewables and energy efficiency, bringing together policymakers, industries and citizens.
- The EU Energy Day gathers key clean energy players to promote and strengthen cooperation on sustainable, secure and smart energy solutions.
- The European Sustainable Energy Awards aim to highlight individuals and initiatives that are contributing to Europe's clean and digital energy transition.
- The Energy Infrastructure Forum aims to remove technical and regulatory barriers to energy flowing freely across the EU, and to discuss major issues relating to infrastructure and EU energy policy.
- The Clean Energy Industrial Forum develops recommendations on how to strengthen the industrial basis and the EU value chain for renewable energy technologies.
- The Citizens' Energy Forum meets on an annual basis and aims to explore the consumer perspective and role in a competitive, smart, energy-efficient and fair energy retail market.
- In line with the European industrial strategy, launched in March 2020, aiming at supporting the twin transition to a green and digital economy, the EU is developing industrial alliances to accelerate the development of key projects that support the manufacturing of low-carbon energy technologies (batteries, hydrogen, etc.) and which will maintain the EU's leadership in innovative and green technologies.

Multilevel approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 7 include the following.

Greece is implementing an ambitious plan to remove lignite from the country's energy mix. This will facilitate the country's transition to a differentiated mixture of electricity production and to complete decarbonisation by 2028. The plan underpins the objectives set by the first national roadmap for transition to net-zero approved by the Hellenic Parliament in 2022.

To reduce the environmental impact of households, the **region of Nord-Vest in Romania**, with EU co-financing, invested over EUR 80 million in the thermal rehabilitation of over 4 572 apartments in old residential towers and multistore condominium buildings. Most residents of these buildings have low socio-economic backgrounds. These investments enhanced residential well-being, social equality and offset 10 033.45 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent annual emissions.

EU external action

Global trends

In the last 10 years access to electricity increased from 86.6% of the world's population in 2015 to 90.5% in 2020, but regional disparities remain wide. In 2020, 77% of those without access to electricity or over 568 million people, lived in sub-Saharan Africa. High energy prices led nearly 90 million people in Asia and Africa who had previously gained access to electricity to no longer being able to pay for their basic energy needs.

The deployment of clean energy reached a record high in 2021 globally, but, due to rising commodity prices and supply-chain bottlenecks, this trend has been reversed in many countries, in particular on the African continent. Only 2% of global investments in renewable energy in the last two decades were made in Africa, with significant regional disparities.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

In May 2022, as part of the REPowerEU plan, the EU adopted a new **external energy engagement strategy** with three interlinked objectives: ensuring the EU's energy security; providing support to partners that are impacted by Russia's aggression to Ukraine; and pursuing the global clean energy transition. Consistent with its internal policies, the EU will make use of all existing instruments to continue providing support to partner countries, particularly in Africa and the EU's neighbourhood, to help these countries to recover from multiple crisis, including in relation to energy, and to achieve an inclusive and sustainable growth. These are also the main objectives of the **Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package**.

Under the European Green Deal, and to support the EU's commitment to climate neutrality by 2050, the EU adopted in October 2020 **a strategy to reduce methane emissions** in all key sectors covering energy, agriculture and waste. A legislative proposal on reducing methane emissions in the energy sector followed in 2021.The highest methane emissions occur during production and transport of fossil fuels produced outside the EU, thus international abatement efforts are a priority for the EU. At the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference, together with the United States, the EU launched the **Global Methane Pledge** to gather international commitment to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030; 150 countries have now joined the pledge. .

Since 2015, the EU has been engaging with countries such as Japan and the USA, bilaterally and through multilateral fora such as the **Clean Energy Mission** or the **International Partnership for a Hydrogen Economy (IPHE),** to develop standards and uptake of a global hydrogen market. To increase renewable hydrogen imports by 10 million tonnes by 2030, the EU has started to establish **renewable hydrogen partnerships** (e.g. Namibia, Egypt, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Japan) to support the development of renewable energy, engage countries in the decarbonisation of their industry and supply the EU market with renewable hydrogen or derivative fuels.

To succeed, the green transition must be just and socially fair. This means reducing the social and economic impact of phasing out fossil fuels and offering new opportunities via green technologies while tackling issues like energy access, fossil fuel subsidies, skills development and distributional effects of the transition. The EU is supporting partners (such as the Western Balkans and Ukraine) to **engage in phasing out coal and is sharing its experience** of how it has been accompanying coal regions in their economic transition. The EU's experience will also contribute to the G7-led **Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs)** signed with South Africa, Vietnam and Indonesia to accelerate the coal phase-out, while supporting vulnerable communities that depend on it and contributing to the roll-out of Global Gateway investment priorities.

As part of the Clean energy for all Europeans package, adopted in 2019, the EU strengthened the **sustainability criteria of bioenergy,** applying to bioenergy produced in the EU and imported. These criteria aim to reduce the competition of bioenergy production with agricultural land and with high carbon stock preventing indirect land use change (ILUC). The limits set in the revised Renewable Energy Directive on the volumes of high ILUC-risk

bioenergy that can be counted towards the renewable target will gradually decrease to zero by 2030 and will lead to the sustainability of the global bioenergy market.

With regard to energy efficiency, the EU's contribution also involves measures promoting sustainable product design and consumption, notably the Commission's **proposal for an ecodesign regulation for sustainable products** and the related legislative package on 'making sustainable products the norm'. By setting common EU-wide minimum standards, the EU aims at reducing the negative environmental impacts of products along their value chains and increasing their energy and resource efficiency. The **EU energy label** has been a key contributor to the EU's energy efficiency target and contributes to the greening of the global appliances market beyond the EU.

In terms of volume, the EU is more or less self-sufficient in the material categories of biomass and non-metallic minerals, while it is a net importer of metal ores and fossil-energy materials.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 4.5 billion in projects contributing to SDG 7. The largest share of the EU contribution to SDG 7 is accounted for by projects that target SDG 7 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, mainly SDG 5, SDG 9, SDG 13 and SDG 14. A smaller but sizeable contribution to SDG 7 is accounted for by projects targeting the SDG as a significant objective. The main contributors are projects targeting SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 13. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 7 amounted to EUR 5.3 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance[23], the EU support improved access to electricity for 29 million people and contributed to the installation of 91 megawatts of renewable energy capacity, resulting in 95.8 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions being averted.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 8 billion to SDG 7. EU and Member State funding to SDG 7 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (49%), Asia (21%) and other countries in Europe (16%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

Promoting access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy is high on the EU's development cooperation agenda. This work links strongly with SDG 13 on climate action, but also with a range of SDGs, such as SDG 4 on education because access to sustainable energy in schools improves the quality of, and accessibility to, education. Similarly, it has strong connections with SDG 5 on gender equality since access to sustainable energy is a precondition for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Furthermore, it is connected to SDG 3 on health, particularly through electrification of health services, and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, and SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

Therefore, the EU and its Member States approach energy as a horizontal issue, strengthening the links between the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Special attention has been given to SDG 7 as an enabler for sustainable growth and human development. Due to the interconnectedness of energy issues and other SDGs, the EU and its Member States have used work across a range of SDGs to contribute to the objectives of improved access to energy, renewable energy generation, and energy efficiency, to achieve a sustainable balance between energy production and consumption while bolstering the fight against climate change. This has involved supporting political ownership, improved governance, and reform of the energy sector in partner countries, as

[23] For the methodology and results, please see the description under SDG 2.

well as promoting the use of digital technologies and boosting sustainable investment through innovative financing.

In this context and in line with partner countries' own policies and plans for affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, the EU priorities for its external actions contributing to SDG 7 and interlinked SDGs include:

- investing in sustainable energy **infrastructure**, including on renewable energy generation (including solar, wind, hydropower, sustainable biofuels), electricity transmission and distribution, and enhanced access to energy services;
- investing in **capacity building and skills** needed for the management of energy systems based on renewable energy, the development of energy communities, and for renewable energy value chains; and
- developing the **global renewable hydrogen market** to support the decarbonisation of heavy transport and industrial sectors.

Energy is an investment priority of the **Global Gateway**, which is taking these commitments a step further, including by promoting green technology exchanges and strengthening energy security. In the framework of the Africa-Europe Investment Package, the **Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative (AEGEI), a Team Europe Initiative** launched on the occasion of the EU-AU Summit in February 2022, contributes to the Global Gateway by supporting Africa's green transition in the energy sector. It aims to increase electricity production and access to energy, promote energy efficiency, create a conducive regulatory environment for private investments, and advance market integration. The initiative is also aligned with and contributes to the African Union's Agenda 2063 ambition to increase renewable energy generation capacity in Africa by 300 gigawatts by 2030 and to secure access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy. The total combined sustainable energy budget in support of this initiative is estimated at more than EUR 3.4 billion in grants for the period 2021-2027, which is expected to leverage more than EUR 20 billion in investment. Current initiatives include the EU support to the development of an African Single Electricity Market and the Continental Power System Masterplan, which aims to build and invest in energy infrastructure, including electricity interconnections and transmission lines and connect the five African power pools.

The EU is committed to leading and speeding up the global green transition and supporting its international partners in the process. This includes working together on renewable energy, energy efficiency and savings, the circular economy, green growth, natural resource protection, critical raw materials, clean technologies, and future-proof infrastructure. Energy security and green transition are supported in **Ukraine, Moldova and the partner countries in its immediate neighbourhood**, including by accelerating implementation of the **Economic and Investment Plan**. Boosting investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and in phasing out coal are also core pillars of the **Economic and Investment Plans** for the EU's neighbourhood, and of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

Energy is also among the priority investment sectors covered by the **European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)**, which is a financing tool of the Global Gateway and the financing arm of the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - Global Europe and the Instrument for Pre-Adhesion III (IPA III). It de-risks investments with budgetary guarantees and thus attracts more private investment into emerging and developing country markets, and in this way supports the transformation towards sustainable energy systems.

Overall, by the end of 2021, the EU-supported sustainable energy activities in partner countries led to the creation of 31 megawatts of new renewable energy capacity. This enabled more than 29 million people to gain access to sustainable energy and energy services, and avoided 95.8 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions. By the end of 2020, the Commission had committed EUR 732 million to energy, 44.7% of which was in support of energy policy and 36% in support of renewable-sourced energy generation.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 7, renewable hydrogen plays a crucial role in the global decarbonisation effort, especially in hard-to-abate sectors. It is estimated that demand for global hydrogen and its derivatives will reach 22% of global final energy use by 2050. In 2022, the EU and **Namibia** signed a memorandum of understanding which envisages a close cooperation in the development of green hydrogen and critical raw materials by facilitating public and private investments in these sectors. Aligned with the priorities of the European Green Deal and RePowerEU plan, the **Team Europe Initiative on green hydrogen in Namibia**, **which contributes to the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy**, aims to foster inclusive green growth and access to sustainable energy.

Achieving clean and affordable energy systems is closely linked to SDG 13 on climate action. The EU provided technical support to many partner countries in their efforts to upgrade their **nationally determined contributions** in 2021 ahead of COP26, with a particular focus on the sustainable energy sector. Similarly, the Africa-EU Energy Partnership (AEEP) supports universal access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy in Africa, by providing an institutionalised platform for strategic dialogue between Africa and the EU in the energy sector, thus contributing to the implementation of SDG 7 and SDG 13.

Increasing the proportion of **renewable energy sources** in the global energy mix is a priority for SDG 7. Hence, in **Togo**, a Team Europe Initiative aims to build the country's renewable energy capacity and support the fulfilment of a national target of 100% electrification by 2030 with 50% renewable energy. The initiative supports the Global Gateway investment priorities on climate and energy, as efforts are directed towards the enhancement of energy efficiency, ensuring a green energy transition and strengthening the role of Togo as a fully-fledged actor in the West African power pool.

Access to **affordable and safe energy** sources is a key component of SDG 7, but is also directly related to other SDGs, including SDG 2 on zero hunger, SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on sustainable growth and SDG 10 on reduced inequalities. In **Mauritania**, for example, the Team Europe initiative on **transition towards green and blue** aims, in association with the private sector, to bring renewable energy to remote areas in order to stimulate employment opportunities, and sustainable and inclusive growth, thus contributing to SDG 8, SDG 2 and SDG, along with the commitments of Global Gateway and its Africa-Europe Investment Package. Similarly in Vietnam, the EU's programme for sustainable energy has improved households' access to energy in rural and remote areas and supported the shift towards a future of greener energy.

Given that 70% of global energy consumption occurs in cities, improving energy infrastructure is a key concern for urban areas and demonstrates the link between SDG 7 and SDG 11. For example, in Balti, **Moldova**'s second largest city, the district heating system was upgraded and modernised with the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P) fund. This project will reduce the energy bill of households in Balti and save about 18 300 tonnes of CO_2 each year.

In 2022, the Commission launched an Energy Support Package worth EUR 1 billion for its **Western Balkans** partners to address immediate, short-term and medium-term needs in the context of the ongoing energy crisis. Half of the funding was provided as direct budget support, and half invested through the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), a joint initiative of the EU, financial institutions, bilateral donors and beneficiaries, all working in line with the Team Europe approach to support the short- and mid-term investments in the field of renewable energy generation, green transition and energy efficiency in the region.

The **Green for Growth Fund** supported by the EU, advances energy and resource efficiency, and renewable energy, in **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine**. It leverages funds from the private sector and development banks, and provides refinancing for investments in energy efficiency and capacity building, consulting, and training and invests in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and

Team Europe Initiatives, Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 7, such as the following illustrative initiative. **Austria** contributes to UNIDO's Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centres (GN-SEC) platform and the regional Centres for Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency (Caribbean, Pacific, ECOWAS and Central American Integration System). Austria also supports the energy sector and its interlinkages with micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises development, climate change, and gender, by funding projects that tackle energy efficiency measures to reduce emissions and energy consumption as well as expand production capacities.

Looking ahead

In the coming years, the European Union will have to consolidate the implementation of the REPowerEU plan, addressing the triple energy security, price and climate crisis. In line with the European Green Deal, in 2023, the EU will strive to do the following.

- **Revise its renewable energy and energy efficiency targets**. In March 2023, the EU co-legislators ended with an agreement to increase the renewable energy target to at least 42.5% in 2030 with the aim to reach 45% and energy efficiency target of 11.7% in 2030 compared to 2020 scenario. This will be translated into law in view of achieving the Fit-for-55 objectives as well as the EU's energy security and resilience objectives of the REPowerEU plan.
- **Propose a 2040 climate target in 2024**. This target needs to be based on a thorough impact assessment and the Commission is starting the necessary analysis now.
- Adopt a **new regulation on methane emissions reduction** in the energy sector, including for imports of fossil fuels.
- Adopt a **revised directive for energy performance of buildings**, that will set in the law that all new buildings should be zero-emission buildings by 2030, and that existing buildings should be transformed into zero-emission buildings by 2050.
- Adopt a revised Electricity Regulation and Directive that will further integrate renewables, protect and empower consumers and accelerate the deployment of renewable energy.
- Adopt a revised Regulation on wholesale energy market integrity and transparency to provide better protection against market manipulation and abuse and enhance the transparency of the market.
- Adopt the **hydrogen and gas markets decarbonisation package** to enable the transition of the gas sector towards renewable and low-carbon gases, in particular biomethane and hydrogen, in view of reaching the EU's goal of climate neutrality in 2050.
- Adopt a **new directive on the taxation of energy products and electricity**. The aim will be to ensure that the taxation of energy products and electricity better reflects the impact they have on the environment and on health, by removing disadvantages for clean technologies and introducing higher levels of taxation for inefficient and polluting fuels.
- Create a **new European hydrogen bank** to kick-start the hydrogen market in the EU and beyond.

Member States will also submit **revised National Energy and Climate Plans** reflecting the rapidly evolving geopolitical context and significant changes to EU energy and climate policy, including REPowerEU objectives.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take focused actions to accelerate the implementation of SDG 7 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where affordable and clean energy is a shared priority.

Aligned with the REPowerEU plan and the European Green Deal, the EU will support the reconstruction and transition of Ukraine's energy system through the development of renewable energy. It will continue to support the energy transition and the integration of energy systems in Eastern Europe countries through the Energy Community.

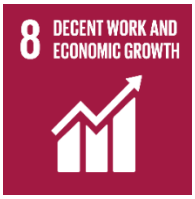
At multilateral level, the EU will continue to actively support the global clean energy transition, sharing policy and approaches in multilateral organisations such as the International Energy Agency, the International Renewable Energy Agency or the Clean Energy Ministerial, and supporting initiatives such as the Energy Efficiency Hub or the Global Methane Pledge. As an important part of the EU's external energy engagement strategy, the EU will continue to support coal regions in their transition internationally, with the setting up, with Germany, of a global platform for coal regions.

Aligned with the REPowerEU plan and the European Green Deal, the EU will support the reconstruction and transition of Ukraine's energy system through the development of renewable energy. It will continue to support the energy transition and the integration of energy systems in Eastern Europe countries through the Energy Community.

The EU aims to deploy a range of Global Gateway **flagship projects** on sustainable **energy infrastructure** as a contribution to SDG 7, SDG 13 and other interlinked SDGs. They will have a focus on renewable energy sources, electricity transmission and distribution, energy efficiency and enhanced access to energy services, as well the development of green hydrogen across the world. **Global Gateway** will be deployed at regional and national level through Team Europe Initiatives, such as the **Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative**. This will support Africa's green transition in the energy sector through improving access to energy services, increasing the share of renewable energy in Africa's energy mix, and supporting energy efficiency in the framework of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package

Additionally, through EFSD+, the EU aims to provide EUR 6.05 billion in financial guarantees to support 40 investment programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific. The guarantees are expected to generate more than EUR 50 billion in investments in key sectors of the Global Gateway, of which around 25% in renewable energy.

As to EU-funded humanitarian aid, the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations come into force in 2023. To meet these requirements, the use of clean energy in humanitarian interventions is essential.



SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

The EU aims to transform into a modern, resource-efficient, fair and competitive economy where there are no new emissions of greenhouse gasses by 2050, economic growth is decoupled from the use of resources, and no person or place is left behind.

The EU economy saw strong and continuous growth between 2014 and 2019. Over 14.5 million jobs were created in this period. The positive trend faltered in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the EU economy, boosted by Europe's recovery plan, bounced back strongly in 2021 and 2022. This was also seen in the labour market, with the EU's employment rate reaching a record high of 74.6%, although with a persisting gender employment gap. With the swift recovery, labour and skills shortages have exceed pre-pandemic levels. Adequate minimum wages are key to protecting low–wage earners from in-work poverty and to encouraging people into work.

However there are major uncertainties ahead due to ongoing inflationary pressures, tightening financial conditions and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Overall, GDP growth is estimated at 3.5% in 2022 and is projected to expand by 0.8% in 2023 and 1.6% in 2024 in the EU and employment by 1.8% and 0.1% respectively. Risks to the forecast for economic activity and inflation are heavily dependent on the evolution of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, developments in the energy markets and potential shocks to commodity markets. Employment growth is projected to have slowed down in 2022 and come to a halt in 2023. Long standing challenges remain to the labour market participation of women, young and older workers, people with a migrant background, persons with a minority racial or ethnic background, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 to be employed by 2030 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	The employment rate in the EU grew from 68.5% in 2015 to 74.6% in 2022. If the positive trend continues, the EU will be well placed to reach the target of a 78% employment rate by 2030.
Less than 9% of young people aged 15 to 29 to be neither in employment, nor in education or training by 2030 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	The proportion of young adults neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) continued to fall between 2015 and 2019. However, this trend was reversed with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing the share of NEETs to 11.7% in 2022. The short-term assessment shows that the EU is on track to achieve the target.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 8 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and in Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The **European Green Deal** is the EU's roadmap for making its economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas, and by making the transition just and inclusive for all. At the same time, the EU aims for an 'economy that works for people' - its social market economy encourages growth and aims to reduce poverty and inequality.

The European Pillar of Social Rights action plan outlines actions to implement the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights in a joint effort by the Members States and the EU, with the active involvement of social partners and civil society. It also proposes headline targets for the EU to achieve by 2030 in employment, skills and poverty reduction. The implementation of the social rights pillar is the EU's primary means of progressing towards the SDGs in the areas of employment, skills, and social protection.

Several legal initiatives were also set out at EU level. The most important of these is the Directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU adopted in October 2022, which improves minimum wages and aims to increase workers' access to minimum wage protection. The **reinforced Youth Guarantee** strengthens activation of all young people, and in particular those not in employment, education or training, and will help reduce social exclusion among young people.. The Youth Employment Initiative supports quality employment, further education, quality traineeships and apprenticeships.

The Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market aims to help people who have been unemployed for a long time to re-enter the labour market. The Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions in the EU complements existing obligations to inform each worker about their working conditions and sets new minimum EU standards on working conditions for all workers. The Recommendation on an effective active support to employment following the COVID-19 crisis (EASE) supports the transition from emergency measures to preserve jobs during the pandemic to new measures needed for a job-rich recovery.

The European Semester integrates the surveillance and coordination of economic and employment policies to promote sustainable economic growth, job creation, financial stability and sound public finances. Since 2018, the EU's Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) has emphasised the need to refocus the European Semester on integrating the SDGs and advancing competitive sustainability. From 2020 onwards, the ASGS has further specified that the European Semester should help implement the European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the SDGs.

Tools to effectively carry out this agenda have recently been revised in the light of the policy context after the COVID-19 crisis and with the war in Ukraine. In 2021, the Commission launched a review of the **EU economic governance framework** (see the Economic Governance Review), with the aim of improving the effectiveness of integrated surveillance and policy coordination in the EU. In April 2023, the Commission presented legislative proposals to implement the most comprehensive reform of the EU's economic governance framework since the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis. The central objective of these proposals is to strengthen public debt sustainability while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth. EU Member States will design and present plans setting out their fiscal targets, measures to address macroeconomic imbalances and priority reforms and investment over a period of at least four years. The proposals facilitate and encourage EU Member States to implement growth-enhancing reforms and investments in order to build the green, digital and resilient economy of the future. In this context there is an enhanced role for **national fiscal institutions** to be built over time.

The EU is also working to create the capital market and banking unions. A more integrated capital market could facilitate risk sharing and investment in businesses irrespective of their location, providing capital for the green and digital transitions and helping reduce the impact of financial shocks. Work on the Banking Union aims to make banks more resilient, to establish a European deposit insurance scheme and to create a more integrated single market for banking services.

Selected enablers

Financial resources, reforms and investments as well as science and innovation are strong means to implement the SDGs in the EU.

With the objective of boosting job creation and economic growth, the **Investment Plan for Europe** mobilised more than EUR 500 billion in investment in the EU in 2015-2020 through the budgetary guarantee of the **European Fund for Strategic Investments** (EFSI). This investment plan was followed by the **Sustainable Europe Investment Plan** (SEIP), which is the investment pillar of the European Green Deal. The plan aims to mobilise at least EUR 1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade.

The plan includes InvestEU, which is one of the Commission's main programmes to support the sustainable transition of the EU economy by providing financial guarantees to implementing partners. It will mobilise more than EUR 372 billion in public and private funding for debt and equity investments in EU companies across four policy windows: Sustainable Infrastructure Window, Research, Innovation and Digitalisation Window, SMEs Window, Social Investments and Skills Window. At least 30% of the InvestEU financing must contribute to climate objectives, and many of its financial products have a strong focus on sustainability.

Supporting investments for jobs and growth is a core priority of **Cohesion policy**. By the end of the 2021-2027 programmes' implementation, estimations show that GDP in certain Member States will be +3 to 4% higher than in a scenario without cohesion policy (with an even higher impact for some regions), with the creation of about 1,3 million additional jobs. The programmes are a direct response to the country specific recommendations addressed to Member States in the context of the European Semester.

Furthermore, over EUR 23 billion of Cohesion policy funds will be spent on helping SMEs to grow and improve their competitiveness. The **European Regional Development Fund** contributes to smart economic transformation by enhancing sustainable growth, competitiveness and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments and through financial instruments, by developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship, and investing in education and training infrastructure. The **European Regional Development Fund** has for the first time a dedicated specific objective of supporting skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in 65 000 SMEs.

With a budget of EUR 99.3 billion (2021-2027), the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** also makes an important contribution to the EU's efforts to promote employment and decent work, education and skills policies, and structural reforms in these areas. For example, the project 'Convergence between academic training and active life' in **Romania** helps students complement their academic knowledge with skills developed during good quality internships.

The Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) instrument has mobilised EUR 92 billion to help Member States fight the negative economic and social consequences of COVID-19 on their territory. The instrument proved effective in supporting short-time work schemes. SURE supported approximately 31.5 million people and 2.5 million firms in 2020, representing almost one third of total employment and firms in the 19 Member States that benefited. SURE continued to safeguard employment in 2021, in particular in the first half of the year, bb supporting approximately 9 million people and over 800 000 firms.

NextGenerationEU is the EUR 750 billion temporary (recovery instrument, implemented over 6 years, to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) makes EUR 723.8 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments made by EU countries. The RRF aims to finance reforms and investments with long-lasting impact, making the EU more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the **green and digital transitions**. The RRF is designed to help the EU achieve its target of climate neutrality by 2050 and sets Europe on a path of digital transition, creating jobs and spurring growth in the process. The reforms proposed in the national recovery and resilience plans tackle (a significant subset of) the challenges identified in the country

specific recommendations addressed to Member States in the context of the European Semester. Estimates suggest that, if well used, funds from NextGenerationEU could boost the EU's real GDP by around 1.5% in the long term and support the creation of new jobs.

In March 2023, the REPowerEU Regulation entered into force. The REPowerEU Plan, as the EU's response to the global energy crisis, recognises the role of the RRF for achieving secure, affordable and green energy. Under REPowerEU, the RRF will support Member States in putting forward additional reforms and investments to rapidly phase-out the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels, accelerate the clean energy transition, support the reskilling of the workforce, and address energy poverty. These new or scaled-up measures, to be included in dedicated REPowerEU chapters, will come on top of the already ambitious green agenda of the existing recovery and resilience plans, which already include support to environmental priorities such as the circular economy.

The RRF Scoreboard provides extensive information on the implementation of the facility. For example, the **German** recovery and resilience plan will contribute to major **multi-country initiatives aimed at strengthening European innovation and industry** in three strategic technological areas: hydrogen, microelectronics and cloud technologies. It is planned to implement these initiatives through Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs), which make it possible to bring together knowledge, expertise, financial resources and economic players from across the EU.

Another example is from the **Spanish** recovery and resilience plan. This is the **reform of employment contracts,** amending existing regulations on the use of temporary contracts, to promote the use of open-ended contracts. The plan also includes measures to strengthen and modernise public employment services and provide more efficient and targeted support to jobseekers. These include digitalisation and improving processes in the employment services, training staff, and recruiting temporary staff to face the effects of the crisis.

Research and Innovation actions under **Horizon Europe** explore how the EU can transform its economy to become more inclusive and sustainable. For example, in 2017-2020, the project InGRID-2 (Integrating Research Infrastructure for European expertise on Inclusive Growth from data to policy) supported joint research activities and research networks focusing on social inclusion and exclusion, the workplace and related social and labour market policies. In another project, a consortium of research institutions and national statistical institutes explored and harmonised indicators beyond GDP that measure sustainability and wellbeing (Makswell – MAKing Sustainable development and WELL-being frameworks work for policy analysis). Research projects are providing new understanding on labour market impacts and how the EU can ensure decent jobs and good social protection. The TransEuroWorkS project aims to provide information for policymakers by examining changes in work and social protection across Europe and the their impact on people.

Another example is the project 'Support to the tourism ecosystem: towards a more sustainable, resilient and digital tourism' in **Italy**, supported by the **Technical Support Instrument** under the call for 2022. Tourism is an important economic driver in Italy, but reforms are needed to overcome long-standing structural weaknesses and build the foundations for recovery. The main objective of this project is to strengthen the governance model and evidence base for tourism, and promote sustainable, resilient and digital tourism in Italy.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU take a collaborative approach to deliver on its agenda to promote decent working conditions. In the framework of the **European Semester** process, the **Structured Dialogue** provides an opportunity for the European Commission to engage with both employers and trade unions to discuss the issues, challenges, and possible policy responses on the economy, labour market and social protection.

To reflect collectively on new trends and best practices, the Commission also regularly organises annual flagship events, such as

- The Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth, provides a platform for civil society organisations and policymakers to discuss how to make the EU's economy work for all.
- The Brussels Economic Forum (BEF) is the flagship annual economic event of the European Commission, gathering high-level European and international policymakers, academics, civil society and business leaders to identify key challenges and debate policy priorities for the European economy.
- The EU Sustainable Investment Summit is the European Commission's flagship annual event on sustainable investment, bringing decision makers and stakeholders together to discuss key issues and challenges linked to the European Green Deal and its investment plan.
- The Annual Research Conference (ARC) is where European institutions exchange knowledge and engage in dialogue with researchers in academic institutions and think tanks, practitioners in civil society organisations and citizens. In 2022 the focus was 'how to turn green the European way: keeping cutting the edge while remaining social and fair'.

In 2022, the Commission also organized the first edition of the European Employment and Social Rights Forum, where stakeholders were invited to discuss the social dimension of the green transition.

While the green transition provides ample opportunities for good quality jobs, the transition requires new green skills. Therefore, the Skills for the Green Transition Award highlights best-practice initiatives to develop education, training and skills that support the shift towards a sustainable, clean, carbon-neutral circular economy and society.

Good quality apprenticeships and on-the-job training are key to ensuring new job opportunities and developing people's skills. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships Award recognise outstanding achievements by companies and their apprentices that help improve the quality, supply and overall image of apprenticeships across Europe.

The **European Entrepreneurial Region** (EER) is an award that identifies and rewards EU regions and cities with an outstanding and innovative strategy to encourage entrepreneurship through sustainable and credible initiatives with measurable targets. Cooperation with a broad range of stakeholders is essential to developing an entrepreneurial culture within a region. Since its creation in 2010, the EER label has been granted to 39 regions and cities from 17 EU Member States. The EER label for 2023 has been granted to Barcelona (Spain), Penela (Portugal) and Western Pomerania (Poland).

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. For example,

The Start-Up Nation programme in **Romania** supports citizens abroad who want to set up a business in their home country with grants of up to ROL 200 000 (approx. EUR 40 000). The maximum amount can be obtained if at least two full-time jobs are created through the project. The beneficiary company must bring a co-financing of at least 5% of the eligible costs of the project. The programme aims to help set up and develop SMEs and create new jobs. The programme has supported, among other things, investments in energy-saving installations and equipment, and systems that use renewable energy sources.

The regional government of **Wallonia** in Belgium has partnered with the Walloon business federation to increase awareness of the SDGs and encourage the private sector to implement them. The website 'Les SDGs pour les entreprises wallonnes' provides guidance to firms on integrating the SDGs into their business practices and models. For this purpose, two catalogues of actions that enterprises can take inspiration from have been published on the website.

Several European cities (including **Amsterdam**, **Brussels** and **Berlin**) are experimenting with the 'doughnut economy' model to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and encourage participatory processes to improve social conditions, while minimising climate and environmental impacts.

EU external action

Global trends

In 2010-2020, real GDP per capita grew steadily, if modestly, across the world, with low but rising unemployment rates in least developed counties. With the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, GDP growth slowed down considerably, job losses and the increase in numbers of people not in education, employment or training (NEET) have been unprecedented, with vulnerable groups, women and young people affected disproportionately. Workers in the informal sector and small firms have been hit particularly hard in the absence of well-established social protection systems. School closures have led to increased child labour and longer working hours of those already in work (see the UN SDG 2021 and 2022 reports). Recent developments, notably the impacts of the Russian aggression on Ukraine, have increased the threat to workers' livelihoods and working conditions and exacerbated inequalities in income and in the labour market.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Coherence between internal and external policies plays an important role in avoiding negative spillover effects in terms of growth and employment, and in ensuring a global spread of the economic recovery following the COVID-pandemic. The EU plays an active role in promoting sound and sustainable macroeconomic policies in non-EU countries, through economic diplomacy, bilateral relations and in multilateral forums such as the G7 and the G20. It also holds **regular dialogues on macroeconomic and structural policy issues** with candidate countries, EU Neighbourhood countries and most of the non-EU G20 countries such as Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

Through its active role as a **member of the G20**, the EU is able to promote its internal policies outside the EU. Examples of this include the **G20 Framework for Growth Working Group**, which was set up with the purpose of attaining strong, sustainable and balanced growth. In this working group, discussions touch upon the appropriate policy mix, macroeconomic developments and challenges, and the range of impacts of climate change and mitigation policies. Discussions also include the EU role in the employment strand of the G20. Furthermore, to ensure that growth is sustainable, the EU strongly **promotes the priorities** of the **European Green Deal** among its international partners. In this vein, the EU actively contributes to a **global effort on resource efficiency and decoupling growth from environmental degradation,** as described in more detail under SDG12.

Most recently, the EU has also been a strong driving force behind the **G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments.** It has ensured consistency between EU and international work on **fair taxation in the digital age,** and helped to bring together donors and creditors under the **G20 Compact with Africa.** The European Commission also proposed a series of measures to modernise and make the EU's Value-Added Tax (VAT) system work better for businesses and more resilient to fraud by embracing and promoting digitalisation.

As the EU economy is connected to millions of workers around the world through global supply chains, and as EU consumers increasingly demand socially and environmentally sustainable fair trade goods, the EU engages with the private sector as well as with governments in partner countries on responsible business conduct in global supply chains. In line with that, the EU fosters the provision of expertise in the area of employment and social protection in partner countries via the SOCIEUX+ technical assistance facility and promote decent work in specific sectors through programmes such as the 'farm to fork strategy', the 'raw materials initiative', 'better work' and the 'vision zero fund'.

Key partnerships with the UN and the OECD, in particular, have been instrumental for the EU in promoting international standards on responsible business conduct on a global scale, and in encouraging the uptake of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Tripartite Declaration, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in global supply chains.

The proposed corporate sustainability due diligence Directive aims to broaden the scope from voluntary standards in responsible business conduct to a horizontal legal framework to prevent, mitigate and end the adverse social, climate and environmental impacts of corporate activities across their value chains. It thus promotes policy coherence for development as it aims to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour and to anchor mandatory human rights and environmental considerations in companies' operations in non-EU countries as well as businesses from outside the EU that operate in the EU. Human Rights in encompass issues such as forced labour, child labour, inadequate workplace health and safety and the exploitation of workers. The proposed directive would further strengthen other measures such as the EU conflict minerals Regulation, which creates supply chain due diligence obligations for EU importers of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold, to ensure that imports of those minerals into the EU do not contribute to armed conflict and other associated human rights abuses along the supply chain. The regulation also aims to promote sustainable development in the countries concerned by encouraging responsible sourcing, including from conflict-affected and high-risk areas. In addition, with the Regulation for deforestation-free products, the EU aims to reduce the impact of deforestation on nature and people in non-EU countries by introducing stringent due diligence obligations for corporations.

The EU adopted its strategy on the rights of the child in 2021 and committed to a zero-tolerance approach to child labour in supply chains. In this context the EU adopted a new programme to address child labour in supply chains. The Commission has also adopted a **legislative** proposal to prohibit products made with forced labour from being placed on or exported from the EU single market[1]. The proposal builds on internationally agreed definitions and standards and covers all products, namely those made in the EU for domestic consumption and export, and imported goods, without targeting specific products, companies, industries or geographical locations. Furthermore, the Communication on decent work worldwide reaffirms the EU's commitment to champion decent work both at home and around the world.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to OECD commitments totalling EUR 8.2 billion in projects contributing to SDG 8, making it one of the largest recipients of EU development assistance along with SDGs 1 and 10. The largest share of the EU contribution is accounted for by projects that target SDG 8 as the main SDG. These projects also make a significant contribution to other interlinked SDGs, in particular SDGs 1, 5, 9 and 10. Other SDGs also contribute to SDG8 as a significant objective. The main contributors are SDGs 1, 9, 13 and 17. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 8 amounted to EUR 13.6 billion in 2021

The results of assistance[24] include more than half a million jobs that were supported or sustained by the EU. Further, nearly 800 000 firms and more than 2,6 million people had access to financial services with EU support in 2018-2021. In addition, nearly 2 million people benefited from EU-supported initiatives to give vocational education and training or develop skills. As for the enlargement region, in 2018-2021 the EU supported or sustained more than 1.8 million jobs, 1 082 535 firms had access to financial services with EU support, and the EU supported 23 public policies to strengthen revenue mobilisation, public financial management and budget transparency to strengthen the investment climate.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 12.5 billion to SDG 8. EU and Member State funding for SDG 8 in 2021 focused predominantly on projects in Africa (61%), Asia (14%) and non-EU countries in Europe (12%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

In relation to SDG 8, the EU helps partner countries to improve the conditions for equitable and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work. A core dimension of the EU's activity is to foster an improved

[24] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

business environment and investment climate to create conditions that are more conducive to private sector development and foreign direct investments.

In this context, and in line with partner countries' own policies and plans to achieve sustainable growth, the EU's priorities for its external actions that contribute to SDG 8 and interlinked SDGs include:

- making growth environmentally sustainable, including by fostering digitalisation and reducing carbon emissions;
- making growth socially sustainable, including by promoting decent work and human rights for workers worldwide, as well as responsible business conduct;
- making growth inclusive, by reducing inequalities.

Boosting investment in partner countries has been supported through the European fund for sustainable development (EFSD), set up in 2017 and providing EU budgetary guarantees covering up to EUR 5.1 billion of operations in 2017-2021. The fund was designed to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, namely by supporting sustainable and inclusive growth, creating decent jobs, promoting gender equality and empowering women and young people. The EFSD provides guarantees and blended finance to facilitate investment in the European Neighbourhood and in sub-Saharan African countries through activities to reduce risks for private investors in more challenging markets, with the goal of leveraging EUR 50 billion of investments.

The fund's successor, the EFSD+ and the external action guarantee, set up in 2021 with the capacity to provide EU budgetary guarantees covering up to EUR 53.45 billion of operations in 2021-2027, has evolved from a regionally focused approach to a global scope. It contributes to aim at eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development, prosperity, peace and stability, including by mobilising private sector financing.

In 2022, the Commission launched the first EFSD+ call for proposals (available envelope EUR 5.95 billion) under the Open Access Window. The EFSD+ Regional Operational Boards held in 2022 and January 2023 endorsed 55 proposals amounting to EUR 8.4 billion across world regions. Furthermore, in 2022 the Commission signed five guarantee agreements in sectors related to digital, financial inclusion, cities and MSME lending amounting to EUR 295 million.

Under the roll-out of the **Global Gateway strategy** across the world, including in the case of the Western Balkans and the Neighbourhood region through the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plans, the EU aims to mobilise up to EUR 300 billion of investments in 2021-2027 to boost smart, clean and secure links in the digital, energy and transport sectors, and to strengthen health, education and research systems, thus supporting the implementation of the SDGs.

Furthermore, **EU budget support** encourages the implementation of reforms and macro-economic stability and, together with macro financial assistance during the pandemic, provided countries with a lifeline for SMEs massively affected by lockdowns and with social protection for the most vulnerable people. EU budget support provides a platform for dialogue, including with the private sector, and a set of incentives for reforms, capacity development and policies to improve economic governance and the investment climate.

The EU also provides **aid for trade** assistance to support partner countries' efforts to develop and expand their trade as a way to grow their economy and reduce poverty. The respective policies and objectives are set out in the EU's aid for trade strategy of 2017, referred to in this report under SDG 17.

The EU's Communication on decent work worldwide highlighted the importance of fundamental labour rights, decent working conditions, protection of vulnerable groups and social protection for the achievement of the SDGs.

The scope of SDG 8 is particularly broad, and the main EU actions which ensure that growth in partner countries is sustainable, integrating environmental and climate considerations, are described in more detail in other chapters such as those on SDGs 12 and 13.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

Promoting sustainable growth and decent work is at the heart of SDG 8 while also being important for achieving other SDGs, such as addressing poverty (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), reducing inequality (SDG 10) and for ensuring responsible consumption and production patterns in global value chains (SDG 12).

In this sense, one project that is taking a particularly cross-cutting approach is the Team Europe initiative being developed to support **sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development in Iraq**. It will include actions to create decent jobs (including for young people and vulnerable groups), on economic governance, the economic empowerment of women, economic diversification, private sector development, entrepreneurship, the digital economy, the green economy, education and skills development.

Some initiatives focus on **young people and women**, thereby contributing to SDGs 4, 5 and 10. These include for example three Team Europe Initiatives which contribute to roll out the Global Gateway strategy, and the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package in particular, the #nigergenerationsfutures aims to provide Nigeriens, especially young people and women, with opportunities to develop their skills and engage in decent work, improving the business environment, facilitating access to financing, developing legal private businesses in promising sectors and increasing people's potential through education and healthcare, especially for girls.

In the same vein, the regional Team Europe Initiative '**Investing in young businesses in Africa**' supports and develops early-stage businesses by improved quantity and quality of financial instruments available and technical assistance. The Team Europe Initiative '**Europe-Benin: Sustainable growth and employment for young people**' which is also part of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe investment package aims to improve people's potential by using technical and vocational education and training and entrepreneurship as levers to transform the country's economic and social structure. The focus is on vocational training and on supporting the private sector on entrepreneurship and decent job creation, primarily for young people and women. In **North Macedonia,** the EU has supported educational reform and the entry of more than 26 000 young people into the labour market and further supports the country in addressing the mismatch between the educational offer and the demand in the labour market through a vocational education and training reform. The EU for Youth budget support, rolling out the youth guarantee, contributed to improving young people's skills and reducing youth unemployment from 30.5% in 2019 to around 25% in 2022.

The Team Europe Initiative '**Decent work**' in **Bangladesh** contributes to the Global Gateway's investment priorities and provides a socio-economic response to the impacts of COVID-19. This project aims to address cross-cutting issues by mainstreaming gender, a rights-based approach, the Green Deal and digitalisation. While it is focused on employment and decent work, its actions will span many areas such as education, social protection, the business environment, and accountability and transparency in economic governance. In 2021, the EU strengthened efforts to boost women's economic empowerment in partner countries by launching a new partnership with the Tony Elumelu Foundation that supports 2 500 African women entrepreneurs.

In contribution to SDGs 8, 12 and 13, the Team Europe Initiative **'Green Growth'** in **Malawi** supports Global Gateway investment priorities and aims to sustain agriculture, social stability and (youth) employment in Malawi. The main objective is to create jobs under a sustainable food systems approach focusing on agriculture diversification, environment and nutrition as growth enablers. The Team Europe Initiative 'Green Paraguay**'** under the Global Gateway, which aims to promote global climate action and the green transition, in line with EU's Green Deal. The initiative will build a strong EU-Paraguay partnership on environment and climate change and raise awareness among young Paraguayans to transition towards a more sustainable and resilient economic model in Paraguay. In addition, the Team Europe Global Green Bond Initiative will support partner countries in increasing and diversifying their access to private capital for an inclusive and sustainable transition.

In **Albania**, the EU's **2020-2024 social inclusion programme** responded to the emergency with measures providing economic aid and support to employees of SMEs affected by COVID-19, taking into account gender

and disability. A minimum salary was provided to 65 574 people from temporary closed small businesses during three months. The EU has also taken action to support businesses and workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby contributing to SDGs 1 and 12. Also in **North Macedonia**, thanks to EU for Resilience budget support, 4 558 companies benefited from EU funding and 4 824 persons in risk of unemployment preserved their jobs and professional activities. Similarly, in **Armenia**, the EU has supported socio-economic recovery and helped make the economy more resilient with the support programme '**COVID-19 Resilience Contract for Armenia**' (2020-2022). The programme provided much needed financial assistance through existing government schemes to over 2 million vulnerable people, as well as support in grants or loans to almost 20 000 SMEs. Also in Armenia, a **Team Europe Initiative – Resilient Syunik** – was launched in January 2023 to encompass various interrelated pillars: MSME development, skills and employment, education, social services, sustainable and green public infrastructure, good local governance and citizen engagement.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda, such as the following initiatives, which are included for illustrative purposes.

In line with the objectives of SDG 8, **Hungary** supports a cashew farm project in Kenya, which helps to provide a livelihood for 15 000 people and has created jobs through the development of processing activities.

Through a financial technology transfer agency, **Luxembourg** supports training programmes in **Kosovo, Cabo Verde, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Laos, Mongolia, Rwanda, Vietnam and West Africa**. In addition to transferring knowledge in the banking sector, this exchange is creating lasting international links between professionals in the sector.

Looking ahead

The Conference on the Future of Europe showed broad support for the EU to more actively support the shift to a sustainable and resilient growth model, consistent with the green and digital transitions and with a strong social dimension. The conventional macroeconomic indicators and GDP figures could be complemented with new indicators to address European priorities such as the European Green Deal or the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to better reflect the green and digital transitions and people's wellbeing.

The European Commission's 2023 annual sustainable growth survey recognises that, in light of the mix of challenges and risks to economic growth, economic and social policies must remain both coordinated and agile whilst maintaining their course towards long term objectives. This includes securing an adequate and affordable energy supply, safeguarding economic and financial stability, and protecting vulnerable households and companies. At the same time, more rapid action is needed to boost growth and create good quality jobs, and to deliver on the green and digital transitions. In this context, the EU is looking to reform its economic governance framework. This aims to strengthen debt sustainability and enhance sustainable and inclusive growth through investment and reforms.

To make progress in achieving the objectives of SDG 8 and in line with its reply to the outcomes the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Commission will take further action in the context of the Working Time Directive in the Member States to address evolving changes and challenges in the organisation of work, e.g. due to digitalisation. Further initiatives will also be proposed to make the EU's industries sustainable, digital and resilient, address demographic changes, in particular ageing and depopulation, and to tackle employment and labour shortages that result from the current geopolitical context.

The upcoming proposal for a Council recommendation on **social economy** framework conditions, announced in the action plan for the social economy adopted in December 2021, will also aim to create quality jobs, foster social and labour-market inclusion, and promote sustainable development through targeted recommendations to

Member States on how to recognise, support, and build on the contributions of the social economy towards these goals.

The Commission will also consider new areas of action, including via an integrated approach that looks **beyond GDP** to measure and monitor wellbeing, sustainability and resilience, as proposed in the 8th Environmental Action Programme. Insights from a recent report on the green employment and skills transformation demonstrate that there is an opportunity for the European Green Deal to create more decent jobs and increase workers' skills, in particular in skilled manual occupations. The development of the taxonomy of skills for the green transition will support a fair and sustainable transition by creating better and more diversified employment.

At the international level, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 8 globally, including by rolling out a range of multiannual programmes with partner countries in which sustainable growth and decent employment are a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 8 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy at regional and national level, including the Team Europe initiative **Investing in young businesses in Africa (IYBA)**, which helps young African businesses and entrepreneurs in their initial growth stages to access to medium-term and long-term finance.

SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Between 2015 and 2022, numerous challenges shook the EU on its path towards implementing SDG 9. In the face of these challenges, the EU showed the added value of its open strategic autonomy approach. The COVID-19 pandemic and political tensions, compounded by environmental and health issues, have challenged the resilience of the EU's infrastructure and industry. The question of supply and value chain resilience has only grown more pertinent in the context of the international order.

Furthermore, while industrial greenhouse gas emissions have decreased, they have not done so fast enough to curb the effects of climate change. The EU is working to keep its climate action goals within reach, including through reducing emissions by at least 55% by 2030. In order to achieve these goals, the EU also faces the immense challenge of organising the free movement of goods and people in the EU's internal market in an environmentally friendly way. Transitioning and transforming European industry requires a multi-pronged approach; this is why the EU Taxonomy for sustainable activities was put in place to help direct funding towards green investments.

Under pressure from these challenges, the EU's industrial landscape is undergoing a series of transformations, where the role of industry in our environmental, economic and societal well-being is acknowledged and acted upon.

Research and development (R&D) are essential to promoting innovation and sustainable industrialisation in the EU in line with SDG 9. R&D is key to making transportation and societal infrastructure (e.g. hospitals, schools and universities) more sustainable, and to developing new green infrastructures. At Member State level, R&D investments remains uneven, with R&D intensity varying from 0.5% to 3.5% of GDP in 2020. Only seven Member States reached their 2020 targets. These targets have been renewed for 2030.

According to the latest edition of the European Innovation Scoreboard, the score for EU's innovation performance increased by 9.9% between 2015 and 2022, mainly due to strong improvements in performance in broadband penetration, venture capital expenditure and international scientific co-publications.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
3% of GDP to be invested on EU research and innovation by 2030 Set in the European Research Area Communication and the European Research Area Pact	In 2021, EU research and development expenditure relative to GDP stood at 2.26 %, compared with 2.02 % in 2011.
35% of the overall Horizon Europe budget in support of climate action for the period 2021-2027	Total climate action related expenditure in 2021/22 was calculated *ex ante* at EUR 9.9 billion, equal to 37.2% of the total. For the period 2023-2024, the EU has dedicated EUR 5.67 billion (over 42% of the work programme's budget) to climate action objectives.

Set in Horizon Europe	
Doubling high-speed rail traffic by 2030 Set in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy	In 2019, the high-speed passenger activity represented 132 billion passenger-kilometres, an increase of 20% on 2015. This corresponds to an annual growth rate of 4.7% and would have put the EU on track to reach the 2030 milestone if it were not for the COVID-19 pandemic's severe impact on the transport system.
Doubling the rail freight traffic by 2050 Set in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy	In 2019, rail freight activity stood at 408 billion tonne-kilometres, an increase of 2.4% on 2015. This corresponds to a moderate annual growth rate of 0.6%. However, transport was one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
The multimodal Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) equipped for sustainable and smart transport with high-speed connectivity will be operational for the core network by 2030 and for the whole network by 2050 Set in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy	According to the 2020 progress report, significant progress was made in developing the TEN-T network in 2016 and 2017, both in technical compliance and financial investments. In any case, the major challenges of the TEN-T infrastructure network can only be met by a sound mix of funding and financial instruments. Further progress is to be expected during the years to come to meet the 2030 and 2050 objectives, as outlined in the 2020 Progress Report on the implementation of the TEN-T network.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 9 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

In support of achieving SDG 9, the EU has developed a 'twin digital and green transitions' narrative. This approaches the issues in a systemic way, with a wide range of policies in place addressing or touching upon infrastructures, industrialisation and innovation.

In order to reach the climate targets of the European Green Deal, the EU's "Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy" aims for a major revamping of infrastructure and sets various milestones for smart and sustainable transport modes. In particular, the Strategy states that there should be at least 30 million zero-emission cars in operation on European roads and more than 3 million publicly accessible recharging points deployed (see SDG 11). In order to achieve this goal, the Commission proposed a new Regulation on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure (AFIR) with binding targets for the rollout of recharging and refuelling infrastructure. Moreover, support to the digitalisation pillar of the sustainable and smart mobility strategy has also been promoted though investments for the digitalisation of all transport modes, including on board and fixed equipment for the European Railway Traffic Management System (ERTMS), Intelligent Transport Services (ITS) for road and Air Traffic Management (ATM), accompanying the green transition. In addition, the EU space-based technologies, such as Galileo and EGNOS, are key enablers for smart and sustainable transport, particularly for connected and autonomous driving. EGNOS can also aid in improving the safety and environmental efficiency of the aviation sector by enabling fuel-efficient landing and navigation solutions.

At the same time, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy aims at implementing an effective EU-wide and multimodal network of roads, railway lines, inland waterways, ports, airports and rail-road terminals. In 2021, the Commission proposed a revision of the TEN-T legal framework, strengthening technical parameters for all transport modes and including a proposal for extension of European Transport Corridors to neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans as well as Ukraine and Moldova. In addition, Member States are proposed to

collect and report monitoring data on such aspects as greenhouse gas emissions, air and noise pollution and congestion in all cities designated as urban nodes.

The EU is also transforming its industrial ecosystems with an updated Industrial Strategy for Europe and a novel approach to industrial transformation through co-created transition pathways. These pathways are involving industries, policymakers and stakeholders across entire value chains to work on identified gaps and fostering partnerships. So far, the Commission has adopted pathways for the tourism, proximity and social economy, chemicals, construction and textile ecosystems. To monitor twin and resilience transition of industrial ecosystems and the implementation of transition pathways, a new monitoring tool named the European Monitor of Industrial Ecosystems (EMI) has been created. The project will deliver a set of reports that support and Industrial Ecosystem analysis of industrial competitiveness, green and digital transition and resilience.

Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are key actors in transforming the EU's industrial landscape. Representing 99% of all businesses in the EU, SMEs are at the centre of the Commission's action and the 2020 SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe. The strategy aims to considerably increase the number of SMEs engaging in sustainable business practices as well as the number of SMEs employing digital technologies. In doing this, it is being supported by the Enterprise Europe Network, European Clusters network and European Digital Innovation Hubs (see below).

The Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 has set ambitious targets, including with respect to Europe's connectivity infrastructure and the digital transformation of businesses by 2030. With the development of a state-of-the-art connectivity system, *IRIS*^{2} (Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite), the EU will offer enhanced communication capacities to governmental users as well as to business users.

Europe seeks to make its transition sustainable and competitive by **fostering sustainable innovation** via the New European Innovation Agenda. This initiative aims to position Europe at the forefront of the new wave of deep tech innovation and start-ups, to develop new technologies to address the most pressing societal challenges, and to bring them to the market.

The new Innovation Agenda is completed by the new European Research Area (ERA). Based on excellent, competitive, open and talent-driven science, ERA will improve Europe's research and innovation landscape, accelerate the EU's transition towards climate neutrality and digital leadership, support its recovery from the societal and economic impact of the coronavirus crisis and strengthen its resilience against future crises.

The European Chips Act will ensure that the EU has the necessary tools, skills and technological capabilities to become a leader in this field, going beyond research and technology in design, manufacturing and packaging of advanced chips, to secure its supply of semiconductors and to reduce its dependencies.

Selected enablers

Financial resources, reforms and investments as well as science and innovation are strong means to implement the SDGs in the EU.

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of EUR 95.5 billion from 2021-2027. The programme helps implement the 17 SDGs, and boosts the EU's competitiveness and growth. It facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies in tackling global challenges. At the same time, it supports the creation and better dispersion of excellent knowledge and technologies, creates jobs, fully engages the EU's talent pool and optimises investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area. Under Horizon Europe, the **European Innovation Council** (EIC), with a budget of EUR 10.1 billion, aims to support game-changing innovations throughout the lifecycle, from early-stage research to proof of concept, technology transfer, and the financing and scale-up of start-ups and SMEs. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) drives innovation by bringing together organisations from the business, higher education and research sectors to find

solutions to pressing global challenges through offering support to entrepreneurial education, developing innovative projects and business creation and acceleration.

The **Connecting Europe Facility** (CEF) is a key EU funding instrument that supports the development of high performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European networks in the fields of transport, energy and digital services. In 2014-2020, CEF supported over 1000 projects on the trans-European transport network for a total amount of EUR 23 billion. The great majority of such projects concerned sustainable modes of transport such as railways, maritime transport and inland waterways, as well as alternative fuels infrastructure and intelligent traffic management systems. In 2021-2027, a further EUR 25.8 billion are available for projects aimed at completing the TEN-T network. Resilience of EU's infrastructure to climate change will be further strengthened with the extended climate-proofing requirements for new investments.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the **Cohesion Fund** also contribute to enhance mobility by developing a climate resilient, intelligent, secure, sustainable and intermodal Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), access to TEN-T, urban and cross-border mobility. EU cohesion Funds support regions and cities to reach the targets of climate neutrality and circular economy by 2050 and contribute to a just transition. Under the objective "A more connected Europe", European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the **Cohesion Fund** will dedicate around EUR 40 billion of EU funding to increase investment in the digital and green transition of the transport sector, while also continuing to improve connectivity and traffic safety, in line with the **Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy**.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility is instrumental in developing the EU Member States' research and innovation systems, with a real transformative impact should the efforts be maintained over time. The research and innovation investments in the Member States' recovery and resilience plans (with a budget of around EUR 50 billion) represent between 4% and 13% of each country's Recovery and Resilience Facility allocation, with only a few outliers and an average of about 10%.

Cyprus provides an example of how recovery and resilience plans are being used to reform the research and innovation system. The Cypriot plan includes ambitious reform to develop a comprehensive national research and innovation policy to support the innovation ecosystem and to strengthen the links between policymaking and implementation. The reform consists in the adoption of a national strategy for research and innovation, a related action plan, and the revised smart specialisation strategy, with the latter including priorities to build competitive advantages by developing and matching strengths to business needs.

The **Danish recovery and resilience plan** will provide funding to the public and private sectors to boost research and development, particularly in innovative green technologies. The programme will be structured around at least four public-private partnerships, called 'green partnerships'. These bring together research institutions, private businesses, public authorities and innovation actors to develop solutions to four mission-based challenges of reducing emissions in the transport, agriculture, food and waste sectors.

The 'PANOPTIS' project, with an EU contribution of EUR 5 million, aims to increase the resilience of road infrastructures in the face of unfavourable conditions such as extreme weather, landslides and earthquakes. By means of an application, the project combines climate change scenarios with simulation tools and data, using terrestrial and airborne sensors and advanced modelling tools.

The Horizon Europe-financed **'ECOS'** project ('EU SDG-driven Innovation Ecosystems: Stimulating economic growth and addressing innovation support imbalances in Europe and beyond') aims to build capacity to co-create and foster an inclusive EU SDG-driven innovation ecosystem, focused on the greatest social, economic and environmental needs of our time, thereby contributing to the realisation of the green and digital transition of Europe. The project provides capacity-building activities to enable the establishment of SDG-driven innovation ecosystems across project members, which can then be used to plan an interconnected and sustainable

ecosystem by delivering new research and data, facilitating knowledge exchange, and creating new collaboration and engagement opportunities within existing networks and beyond.

The **Horizon Europe Missions** emphasise the evolution of industrial, societal and cultural structures towards sustainability. One notable example, the Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission, is a partnership between the Commission and 112 European cities, each resolving to become climate-neutral by 2050, and to transform their economic and societal landscape to achieve this goal in a sustainable way.

Another example is the 'Startup Ecosystem Strategy' project in **Romania**, supported by the **Structural Reform Support Programme** under the call for 2020. Romania's innovative capacity ranked last in the EU in 2019, and public and private spending for research, development and innovation was one of the lowest, and the start-ups' survival rate was low. The project aimed to address the lack of an evidence-based strategic framework and tailored policy measures to support the development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, with a focus on innovative start-ups. The support was delivered through the exchange of good practices, recommendations, inputs and a pilot for the design of strategic planning to animate the Romanian entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 9 using a collaborative approach. For example, the European Research and Innovation Days is the European Commission's annual flagship R&I event, bringing together policymakers, researchers, entrepreneurs and the public to debate and shape the future of research and innovation in Europe and beyond.

The high-level expert group on the economic and societal impact of research and innovation (ESIR) provides evidence-based policy advice to the Commission on how to develop a forward-looking and transformative research and innovation policy. Its 16 experts provide independent advice on how EU research and innovation policy can best support the transformation of our economy and society throughout the social, green and digital transitions.

The **EU Industrial Forum** is the main platform for discussing industry challenges and co-developing opportunities and policy responses in an inclusive dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, including social and environmental partners. It informs industrial policies at European, national, regional and local levels and ensures that a coherent framework is in place for European industry to deliver sustainable jobs, growth and innovation in Europe. The **EU Industry Days** remain the EU flagship event for industry and a valuable moment for discussion with a variety of stakeholders.

The Connecting Europe Days brings together stakeholders involved in infrastructure development so to discuss transport and mobility and their role in achieving the ambitious goals set out in the EU Green Deal and the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. The next edition of the event will take place in early 2024, with discussions focused on the implementation of the revised TEN-T policy and the financial means needed to complete the core TEN-T network by 2030.

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), a support network for SMEs across the EU, provides a dedicated package of tailored services to help individual SMEs with a proven record of success to innovate and grow both within the EU and beyond. It is made up of more than 450 partner organisations in more than 40 countries, including chambers of commerce, innovation or enterprise agencies, regional development agencies, SME organisations, research institutes and technology centres. The EEN has recently introduced dedicated Sustainability Advisors to help SMEs make a successful transition to sustainability while growing internationally.

Horizon Impact Award is a European Commission initiative to recognise and celebrate outstanding projects that have used their results to provide value for society.

Horizon Prizes are challenge prizes (also known as inducement prizes) offering a cash reward to whoever can most effectively meet a defined challenge. The aim is to stimulate innovation and come up with solutions to problems that matter to European citizens.

The European Capital of Innovation Awards (iCapital) is an annual recognition prize awarded to the European cities that best promote innovation in their communities.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery requires ambitious action at all levels. Some good practices in implementing SDG 9 are set out below.

At national level, **Poland** has launched the Clean Air Priority Program (CAPP) in 2020 with the aim to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions of dust and other pollutants into the atmosphere. Through the programme, funding is granted to replace old solid fuel domestic stoves and boilers and modernise the heating systems of single-family houses. The programme earmarks more than 100 billion PLN and is implemented by local municipalities processing requests and awarding the subsidies to beneficiaries.

At local level, the city of **Braga** in **Portugal** created Startup Braga, its innovation hub, to support entrepreneurship with global ambition. The hub helps entrepreneurs in the creation, incubation and acceleration of start-ups, mainly in the areas of digital economy, health technologies, nanotechnology, biotechnology and sustainability. It is also giving access to a wide range of partners, mentors and investors. The hub's community now has 190 start-ups, responsible for the creation of more than 1 000 jobs, and has raised more than EUR 375 million in investment.

EU external action

Global trends

Infrastructure sits at the crossroads of many different sectors, from transport to digital transformation and from climate mitigation to green energy. It is an important element of the EU Global Gateway strategy. According to G20 estimates, the global infrastructure investment deficit will reach EUR 13 trillion by 2040. While mobile broadband communication has been a significant success story across most regions, some gaps in the poorest regions remain. The global manufacturing industry has progressed unevenly across different regions and countries, and its value added stagnated in the least developed countries following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

The EU's efforts towards SDG 9 also have important positive spin-off and synergetic effects. These particularly concern innovation that can benefit Europe and its partner countries alike, in areas such as sustainable infrastructure, transport, industrial transition, agricultural research and digital transformation.

In terms of positive externalities, Galileo and Copernicus have been instrumental in reinforcing and creating more resilient and efficient infrastructure across the EU, and EU space data is also being used to support innovation. This is combined with cooperation projects such as the creation of a regional Copernicus centre in Panama, which – through earth observation – will lead to mutual benefits for the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean countries in the areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation, food security, tracking of emissions and disaster risk reduction.

In addition, the EU's Global Approach to Research and Innovation encourages global cooperation across a whole range of thematic areas and across a wide array of non-EU countries. It does this by financing programmes such as Horizon Europe, which associate research bodies from EU countries with low and middle-income partner countries for R&I projects benefiting partner countries. Openness is a staple of the R&I framework programme,

where non-EU countries are encouraged to participate and are treated on an equal footing as EU countries in terms of access to funding once an association agreement has been signed.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to OECD commitments of EUR 5.8 billion in projects contributing to SDG 9. The main share of the EU contribution to SDG 9 is accounted for projects that target SDG 9 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, with the largest contributions going to SDGs 8, 11, 13 and 17. Projects targeting other SDGs also contribute to SDG 9 as a significant objective. The main contributors are projects related to SDGs 1, 3 and 8. When taking into account other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 9 amounted to EUR 12.3 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance,[25] 79 000 km of roads were supported by the EU through construction, rehabilitation and maintenance in the period 2018-2021.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 8 billion to SDG 9. EU and Member State flows to SDG 9 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (49%), Asia (21%) and other countries in Europe (16%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy is particularly relevant for the achievement of SDG 9. With sustainable and high-quality projects in the field of infrastructure, the EU is aiming to enhance the resilience and connectivity of its partner countries while enabling closer cooperation through sustainable, smart infrastructures. The EU aims to mobilise investments of up to EUR 300 billion between 2021 and 2027across different sectors reflecting the cross-cutting nature of SDG 9, notably digital infrastructure and transport, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research. The Global Gateway strategy follows a Team Europe approach and supports global infrastructure development in accordance with the key EU principles of democratic values, good governance and transparency and the **G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investments,** which the EU endorsed in 2019.

The Global Gateway strategy will support **development of a framework to promote high social, environmental and governance standards**, taking full account of climate change impacts, the transition to low-carbon economies, and financial sustainability and transparency, thereby contributing to a range of interrelated SDGs.

In this context and, in line with partner countries' own policies and plans to achieve SDG 9, **the EU's priorities** are:

- creating **climate-resilient and sustainable infrastructure**, including transport corridors and improved urban infrastructure; and
- ensuring **inclusive and human-centred digital connectivity**, including the roll-out and expansion of fibre-optic cables, especially in unserved areas, and the digitalisation of businesses.

Out of the EUR 300 billion in investments targeted under Global Gateway, Africa could benefit from at least EUR 150 million. On the margins of the EU-AU Summit, the **2022 Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package** was unveiled as one of the key areas of investment and focus. The 11 **strategic transport corridors** in Africa for increased mobility and trade aim to contribute to expanding internet access through fibre-optic connections, and to fostering satellite-based connectivity. Further, through the **EU-AU Data Flagship Initiative,** support is provided to develop green data centres to encourage progress towards a data economy in Africa.

Broadly, the EU will support African governments and their national and regional authorities in their efforts to ensure a well-regulated ICT ecosystem that fosters telecommunications investments and to protect end-users.

[25] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

Science, technology and innovation in Africa will be supported through partnerships with African regional centres of excellence, collaboration on earth observation and space technologies, and a joint AU-EU innovation agenda. Business development, with a focus on young people and women, is also an important part of the **Africa-Europe Investment Package**. As part of the **Invest in Young Businesses in Africa** initiative, the EU will implement up to 180 programmes aiming to help young African businesses to flourish. These programmes are expected to facilitate access to finance and improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Furthermore, as part of its **Economic and Investment Plans**, the EU has extended its Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to the Western Balkans, Türkyie, and the Eastern Partnership region, thereby fostering **sustainable mobility**.

Additionally, the EU is cooperating with the US under the **Trade and Technology Council** to support secure and resilient digital connectivity and information and communication technology and services (ICTS) supply chains in third countries, provided by trusted suppliers. After the creation of a dedicated taskforce on this issue, the EU and the US announced their support to inclusive ICTS projects in Jamaica and Kenya based on the common overarching principles. In addition, under the G7, the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment was launched to help partner countries create the essential infrastructure to better navigate global shocks such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

EU actions on SDG 9 also **contribute to the achievement of other SDGs** in Europe and the world.

In illustration, the **'Green Economy in Senegal' Team Europe initiative,** contributing to the Global Gateway investment priorities on digitalisation in relation to SDG 9, is closely **linked to SDGs 8, 11 (Sustainable Cities) and 15 (Life on Land)**. It aims to strengthen convergence between agro-industries, green agriculture, communications and services in the most important agro-ecological regions of Senegal and to improve the living conditions of people living in urban areas.

Equally interlinked with **SDGs 9, 8, 11 and 15** is the **'Smart, green and digital recovery'** Team Europe initiative in **Ghana.** The EU and eight Member States are supporting this Global Gateway initiative, which focuses on three thematic areas, namely sustainable inclusive growth, sustainable cities and urban governance, and agribusiness and the cocoa value chain. The support provided takes the form of expertise, capacity building, technology transfer, scientific cooperation, scholarships, twinning and covenants, innovative financing, and private and public partnerships.

By contributing to SDG 9, the EU supports a broad range of projects related to enhanced **connectivity and digitalisation**, in line with the EU's connectivity agenda. Using a Team Europe approach, a range of initiatives contribute to the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy.

Thus, the **'LAC Digital Alliance'** aims to launch a comprehensive political and cooperation framework for digital engagement (regulatory and policy issues, connectivity infrastructure, innovation, private sector cooperation and e-services and earth observation) with **Latin America**, **Central America** and the **Caribbean**.

The **'Human-Centred Digitalisation'** initiative in **Kenya** aims to boost inclusive, human-centric, gender-responsive and rights-based digitalisation. Actions under the project will support digital connectivity, jobs and skills and digital governance, benefiting youth, women, marginalised groups and unserved areas.

In **Central Asia**, the regional Team Europe initiative **'Digital Connectivity'**, launched at the EU-Central Asia Connectivity Conference, and which contributes to the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy. will be spearheaded by the EU's financing of the extension of the EU-financed Black Sea fiber-optic cable between the EU and Georgia to Central Asia via Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea to tackle the connectivity gap in the region.

The EU is also launching **'Digital Economy Packages'**. One such package is the **EU-Nigeria Digital Economy Package**, into which at least EUR 820 million will be injected by 2024. It will help Nigeria enhance secure

connectivity, digitalise public services, support entrepreneurship and build digital skills, while at the same time developing a human-centric, democratic governance framework for technology.

Besides digital connectivity, in relation to SDG 9, the EU has continuously supported the development of strategic multimodal transport corridors relying on **resilient cross-border infrastructure**. The **'Knowledge Hub–Global Gateway Support Mechanism'** action contributes to developing the connectivity agenda and applying good practices on quality infrastructure, in particular in the transport sector. Thus, in Ethiopia the **Road Sector Policy Support programme** supported the establishment of an efficient road network at federal, regional and rural levels and contributed to the maintenance of 28 000 km of roads in the country under the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package.

Several infrastructure projects under SDG 9 are further interlinked with Climate Action (SDG 13), Education and Culture (SDG 4) and Health (SDG 3).

The EU, together with some Member States, is supporting the **ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility**, part of the **ASEAN-Green Initiative**, **a regional Team Europe Initiative** developed in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank. This infrastructure fund initiative supports governments in Southeast Asia to prepare and finance infrastructure projects that promote environmental sustainability and contribute to climate change goals.

After the **Albanian** earthquake of November 2019, the EU launched two programmes to help the country recover from the shock and increase resilience to natural disasters. The **EU4Schools programme** has supported the reconstruction and repair of education facilities, while the **EU4Culture programme** has supported the rehabilitation of cultural heritage sites and associated economic activities to support tourism. The programme integrates accessibility with environmental protection, disaster risk reduction, and sustainability. In the **West Bank**, the EU supports communities with basic social and public infrastructure such as roads, schools, public parks, and public buildings

Through its **'Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, medicines & health technology products in Africa**' Team Europe Initiative, which supports the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy, the EU provided over EUR 3 billion to the COVAX Facility thus supporting **manufacturing capacity development** in Africa for enhanced pandemic preparedness, access to vaccines, medicines and other medical equipment, thereby contributing to SDG 9 in erm of industrialisation and innovation in addition to health objectives under SDG 3. The initiative is part of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 9. A few examples of such initiatives are set out below for illustrative purposes.

Estonia is actively involved in numerous **digitalisation** initiatives. Through the 'EGOV4UKRAINE' U-LEAD Project, Estonia supports **Ukraine**, in line with the country's administrative reform, by delivering a systemic e-government approach supporting decentralisation and improving the delivery of public services by local government.

The **Netherlands** focuses on providing partner countries with good, publicly accessible **infrastructure** which contributes to sustainable economic growth. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency administers bilateral programmes, which invest in the development and construction of public infrastructure, particularly in the water, energy, food security and healthcare sectors.

Spain's cooperation agency, AECID, addressed its priorities, such as zero hunger, water and sanitation, health and education through the ACERCA programme. ACERCA focuses on the creation of **creative industries** and innovation, with special attention paid to cultural industries as an engine of economic development and the training of professionals in the sector. **38 countries in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America** have already benefited from the programme.

Looking ahead

The **new European innovation agenda** aims to help the EU to develop new technologies to address societal challenges and bring them to the market. It will in particular:

- **improve access to finance** for European start-ups and scale-ups;
- enable innovators to experiment with new ideas through **regulatory sandboxes**;
- help create **'regional innovation valleys'** that will strengthen and better connect innovation players throughout Europe, including in regions lagging behind;
- attract and retain talent in Europe, for example by training **1 million deep tech talents**, increasing support for women innovators and innovating with start-up employees' stock options;
- improve the policy framework through clearer terminology, indicators and data sets, as well as **policy support to Member States**.

Concurrently, these innovations will be completed by the transformation of the European Industrial ecosystems towards sustainability and resilience. This transition is under way in many sectors. For example, to promote a sustainable textile industry and to achieve the EU Textiles Strategy, the proposal for a regulation on eco design and sustainable products will set binding design requirements for more sustainable and circular textiles. Similarly, the forthcoming revision of the **waste framework directive** in 2023 will introduce extended producer responsibility rules for textiles. The EU also aims to tackle the unintentional release of microplastics from textiles and to introduce mandatory green public procurement requirements for textiles.

To prevent supply chain disruptions or imbalances and to prepare for future market turbulences, the EU fosters strategic storage capacities for raw materials through its recently proposed **EU critical raw materials Act**. This act aims to ensure a strong and sustainable level playing field, avoid discrepancies across Member States and prevent possible disruptions along supply chains. It also aims to secure a sustainable supply of critical raw materials to support the green and digital transition and strengthen EU resilience.

In order to scale up its manufacturing of clean technologies, the EU has proposed the Net-Zero Industry Act. Regarding the act's international dimension, the Commission announced as part of the Green Deal Industrial Plan its intention to conclude **Net-Zero Industrial Partnerships** with non-EU countries covering net-zero technologies. These partnerships shall support the adoption of net-zero technologies globally and support the role of EU industrial capabilities in paving the way for the global clean energy transition.

These changes will go hand in hand with sustained and coordinated efforts to build infrastructure all around the world, both physical and digital: the adoption of the regulation establishing on the EU's secure connectivity programme for 2023-2027 (IRIS^2) follows up on the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe and in particular on its recommendations on access to digital infrastructure**.** The Commission is exploring ways to enhance the EU's and Member States' strategic autonomy and resilience by ensuring reliable, secure quantum-based encryption and cost-effective European connectivity capabilities.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 9 globally. Projects supporting the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy will in the long-term enable partner countries to gain strategic autonomy while creating new potential for global synergies. In line with EU and global targets on climate action, Global Gateway, as a climate-neutral strategy, aims to speed up sustainable development and recovery, create inclusive growth and jobs and transition to a cleaner and more circular global economy. A tangible contribution to SDG 9 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of Global Gateway **flagship projects** on **transport infrastructure** - including ports, road construction and modernisation/rehabilitation and public transport - and on **digital infrastructure** - including digital connectivity, network construction and roll out of optic fibre, data centres and 5G, such as:

- **'Digital Connectivity' in Central Asia**

- the **‘LAC Digital Alliance’**
- the **Strategic Corridors for an Enhanced and Greener EU-Africa Connectivity**
- the **ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility,** as part of the ASEAN-Green Initiative.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Tackling the various forms of inequalities is an essential part of the fight against poverty, improving social cohesion and fulfilling human rights. Delivering on SDG 10 in an EU context requires addressing inequalities within countries, inequalities between countries, and migration and social inclusion.

The trends on inequalities between EU countries show a continued long-term convergence of Member States in terms of GDP and income. EU citizens living in northern and western European countries had the highest gross disposable income per capita, whereas eastern and southern EU countries had the lowest. At regional level, in spite this upward growth path, a number of EU regions grows at a slower pace than the EU average. An increasing number of EU regions, primarily in southern Member States but also in North Western Europe, are currently in or at risk of falling into a "development trap".[26]

Income inequalities within countries had been decreasing in the EU between 2015 and 2019, before rising again in 2020. For example, the income received by the 20% of the population with the highest income was almost five times higher than that received by the 20% of the population with the lowest income. In a majority of Member States, there are important regional asymmetries in particular with regard to access to basic public services, labour market, competitiveness and productivity. These disparities are further accentuated in rural areas where access to basic public services remains generally a challenge.

Whereas the gap between the risk of poverty in urban and rural areas has narrowed in the EU in recent years, rural areas tend to be at higher risk of poverty due to out-migration, and limited access to services, weaker labour markets and educational opportunities.

EU-level developments in the area of SDG 10 since 2015 reveal a mixed but, on average, moderately favourable picture. Inequalities had been decreasing in the pre-pandemic years. Thanks to a prompt policy response, overall income inequalities and the risk of poverty or social exclusion remained broadly stable between 2019 and 2020 in most Member States.

However, the mid-term effects of the pandemic on poverty and inequality remain uncertain. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic affected different population groups and regions unevenly[27], revealing the underlying vulnerabilities and inequalities. Women who, in 2021 still earned on average 12.7% less than men, continue to shoulder the bulk of care responsibilities in the household and struggle to enter and remain in the labour market, with consequences also on their pensions. Migrants' participation in the labour market was also disproportionally affected.

The recent energy and food price rises hit the poorest households the hardest. The increases in fossil fuel, electricity and commodity prices, already noticeable in the second half of 2021, have been further aggravated by the invasion of Ukraine. They weigh particularly on the most vulnerable households, who have to spend a higher

[26] See Cohesion in Europe towards 2050: Eighth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion; Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.
[27] The coronavirus pandemic and fundamental rights: A year in review | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (europa.eu)

share of their disposable income on basic goods such as energy and food. Similarly, the twin transitions will have to be managed well to prevent rising inequality.

In parallel, the EU witnessed a substantial increase in migration into the EU in the pre-pandemic years, while the Ukrainian war has led to a new wave of displaced persons to the EU, in particular women and children. Successful integration of migrants is essential for future well-being, prosperity and cohesion in the EU and can only be achieved in cooperation between the European Commission, the Member States and a range of relevant stakeholders.

2030 Targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
Reinforce economic, social and territorial cohesion by redressing the main regional imbalances in the Union and address the problems of disadvantaged areas, with particular reference to rural areas 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy	The gap in the risk of poverty or social exclusion rate between cities and rural areas at EU level narrowed between 2015 (when it was 3.1%), and 2021 (0.6%).
Narrow territorial and social disparities between regions in the EU and promote the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households, and disadvantaged groups 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy	The coefficient of variation in gross household disposable income between Member States decreased by 3.8% between 2015 and 2020 (and by 11.3% since 2005). However, a clear north–south and west–east divide is evident when looking at the geographical distribution of GDP per capita and household income in the EU in 2020 (with EU citizens living in northern and western countries having the highest gross disposable income per capita).

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 10 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

Ensuring cohesion between EU Member States and reducing inequalities such as in economic performance, income and living standards, is one of the central objectives of the European Union.

The EU has a wide range of policies in place addressing different aspects of SDG 10. The EU also has several mechanisms that seek to promote economic and social convergence among and within Member States. The European Semester provides a framework for coordination of economic and employment policies across the European Union. The European Pillar of Social Rights puts forward a holistic approach for upward social convergence among Member States towards better working and living conditions. Established in 2017, the Pillar sets out 20 key principles to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems and to tackle inequalities. It serves as a new 'social rulebook' that ensures solidarity between generations and creates opportunities for all. The **European Pillar of Social Rights action plan** turns the principles into concrete actions to benefit citizens.

For example, the European Child Guarantee, adopted in June 2021, helps to ensure that in Europe every child in need has equal access to quality early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, housing and nutrition.

The Commission has also stepped up its efforts to help EU countries reduce inequalities from the outset, by publishing a Communication on '**Better assessing the distributional impact of Member States' policies**'

and a Communication on '**Harnessing Talent in EU's regions'**, addressing territorial disparities caused by the demographic transition.

The Just Transition Mechanism supports those regions that will be most affected by the transition to a climate-neutral society.

The EU is engaged in achieving a Union of equality. In line with this, the Commission adopted a series of strategies, namely the Gender Equality Strategy, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the EU anti-racism Action plan, the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These strategies are aimed at combatting racism, promoting Roma equality, inclusion and participation, promoting gender and LGBTIQ equality, and guaranteeing the rights of persons with disability. The Commission also adopted the EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish life setting out series of measures to prevent and combat all forms of antisemitism. The Commission has also proposed EU legislation to strengthen the independence, the resources and powers of equality bodies, the national bodies which assist victims of discrimination and promote equality[28].

Migrants and asylum seekers often constitute a particularly vulnerable group. To address this issue, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted in September 2020, aims to create faster migration processes and stronger governance of migration and border policies. The Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021 to 2027) sets out actions that support migrants' inclusion in education and employment, as well as access to health services and affordable housing. The EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals assists refugees, migrants and citizens of non-EU countries in profiling their skills and work qualifications to reception, employment and education services.

The **Temporary Protection Directive**, which was adopted following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, was triggered for the first time by the Council in response to the unprecedented Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Temporary Protection Directive defines the decision-making procedure needed to trigger, extend or end temporary protection, but also lists the rights for beneficiaries of temporary protection (e.g. residence permit, social welfare, medical care, education).

Additionally, in May 2022, under the lead of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the EU put in place the **Common Anti-trafficking Plan** to raise awareness among the displaced people and prevent trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Selected enablers

Financial resources, reforms and investments as well as science and innovation are strong means to implement the SDGs in the EU.

With EUR 392 billion for 2021-2027, and representing almost a third of the total EU budget, Cohesion Policy funds specifically target at strengthening sustainable economic growth and boosting social and territorial convergence.

Cohesion Policy also reinforces cooperation among Member States and between Member States and third countries through cross border, inter-regional and transnational cooperation actions including the contribution to EU macro-regional strategies.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), with a budget of EUR 214 billion, targets in particular less developed regions, intended to help to redress the main regional imbalances in the Union.

[28] COM/2022/688 final and COM/2022/689 final of 7 December 2022

The European Social Fund Plus **(ESF+)** is a key financial instrument as part of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and helping reduce inequalities. With a budget of EUR 99.3 billion (2021-2027), the ESF+ funds many thousands of projects to help people in difficulties and those from disadvantaged groups to get skills, jobs and equal opportunities. For example, the Diversity Promotion project, implemented by **Latvia**'s Society Integration Foundation, is educating thousands about the benefits of a diverse workplace and an inclusive society, with a series of nationwide activities.

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) may support asylum seekers by providing them with immediate relief and social assistance. For example, the Frostschutzengel 2.0 (Guardian angel against freezing) project provides multilingual health and social counselling to homeless German and EU mobile citizens in **Berlin**.

Integration within the EU is funded by several EU funds, mainly by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), but several aspects are covered by other funds and programmes (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF); Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV); Erasmus+ **;** European Solidarity Corps (ESC)). These funds are supporting integration measures tailored to the needs of third-country nationals, including education, effective and inclusive employment, skill-building, social inclusion, civil society organisations and other aspects of an inclusive and diverse society.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** contributes to the efforts to reduce inequality though several of its six pillars, chiefly social and territorial cohesion, but also health and economic, social and institutional resilience, policies for next generation and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. For example, in the context of the recovery and resilience plans, **Croatia** is introducing reform and investment to provide social mentoring to individuals at risk or already in a marginalised position in society. These measures will roll out a new individualised mentoring service at all social welfare centres in Croatia. This new service will focus on the integration of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum benefit, persons with disabilities, victims of violence, homeless people, migrants, Roma, young people departing the social welfare system, persons serving prison sentences and members of other socially vulnerable groups. The aim is to reach and benefit at least 30 000 users.

Research and innovation actions in **Horizon Europe** are supporting EU policy priorities in the field of reducing inequalities. For example, the ESSPIN project aims to investigate policy responses to social, economic and spatial inequalities arising in the EU in the context of emerging mega trends (such as climate change, urbanisation, energy, digital disruption and economic growth) and the challenges they bring. The Exit Project is fostering participatory multi-stakeholder processes across regions that are left behind and how inhabitants, institutions and organisations in these areas perceive, experience and counteract inequalities.

Another example is the flagship project on 'Welcoming and integration of Third Country Nationals in Member States' supported by the **Technical Support Instrument** under the call for 2022. The project aims to enhance the socio-economic integration of people fleeing the war in Ukraine and is centred on two axes: (i) facilitating access to the labour market through measures that support the recognition of certificates and diplomas issued, in accordance with Ukrainian laws and regulations; and (ii) facilitating social inclusion by improving the functioning of the existing integration centres for foreigners. Overall, the project is expected to result in building capacity for **Polish authorities** to allow those fleeing the war and requesting temporary protection in Poland to enjoy swift access to procedures and basic services such as accommodation, education and healthcare, and to gain access to jobs.

Stakeholder engagement

As a flagship initiative of the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, an Expert Group called 'Disability Platform' was established in October 2021. The group's aims are to: (i) bring together the focal points of the national UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRDP), organisations of persons with disabilities and the Commission; and (ii) function as a forum to exchange views on the UN's assessments of Member States' implementation of the UNCRPD. As a party to the UNCRPD, the European Commission meets regularly in a Conference of States Parties (COSP) to consider any matter regarding the implementation of the Convention (Art. 40 UNCRPD). The Commission has published a report on the implementation of the UNCRPD by the EU in April 2023 and it organises an annual conference for the European Day for Persons with Disabilities, gathering together organisations of persons with disabilities as well as high-level EU institution representatives.

The Commission also organises the Access City Award, which is an award recognising cities that have worked to become more accessible. It promotes equal access to urban life for people with disabilities and allows local authorities to promote and share their best practices.

The **New European Bauhaus Prize** is another Commission award which tackles inequalities by supporting sustainable projects that 'prioritise people and places that need it the most' and address the urgent needs of people and inequalities faced by territories, communities and individuals. The prize recognizes and celebrates existing beautiful, sustainable and inclusive projects and initiatives, and supports the younger generation to further develop emerging concepts and ideas.

To address gender inequality in research and higher education, the EU Award for Gender Equality Champions recognises and celebrates the outstanding results achieved in the implementation of gender equality by academic and research organisations.

EU integration efforts are supported by partnerships with all those involved: migrants, host communities, social and economic partners, civil society and the private sector. Established networks/partnerships include: the European Integration Network; the Expert Group on the views of migrants; the Committee of the Regions partnership on the Integration of Migrants; the annual European Migration Forum.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. For example, **Spain** adopted a reform to its labour market in December 2021 with the aim to put an end to precariousness and temporary employment in the country. Among others, the reform reinforces fixed-term contracts and reduces the time required to obtain the status of permanent worker.

The region of **Piedmont in Italy** is focusing on social innovation through its We.Care strategy. People and their network of relations, not social services, are at the centre of the strategy. It shifts focus from providing assistance to helping people contribute to the growth of the region. Actions combine social and labour policies and cover social services, local governance, collaboration between public and private bodies, development of entrepreneurial projects with social benefits, and corporate welfare. The final goal is to match social and labour policies with economic development.

EU external action

Global trends

Progress against the multidimensional goal of reducing inequalities has been uneven and put at risk by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially where social security systems and safety nets are weaker. Reduced labour income and remittances in a context of increased food prices and out-of-pocket expenses for healthcare hit low-income households hardest, while top wealth increased sharply (see World Inequality Report 2022). The impact

of the war in Ukraine increasingly aggravates the inequality gap both between and within countries. The effects are likely to disproportionately affect poorer countries, notably those dependent on imports of food and oil.

According to the UN SDG 2022 report, the world is currently enduring the highest number of conflicts since 1947. Approximately 25% of the world population is living in conflict-affected countries, with the number of refugees at a record high in 2021, 1 in 3 children living outside their countries of birth being child refugees, and forced displacement continuing to grow. The situation has been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, which added 6.5 million refugees to the 100 million people forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict or generalised violence (May 2022), an increase of 17.6 million people compared to end-2020 (see 2022 Global Peace Index).

The number of migrants worldwide continues to grow, from an estimated 272 million in 2019 to an estimated 281 million in 2020, and has increased more in Europe and Asia than in other regions. Migration management remains a priority for the EU, in line with SDG10 which seeks to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Reducing inequality is both an internal and external priority for the EU. Inequality is an obstacle to sustainable economic growth and to reducing poverty, and SDG 10 targets are thus highly interlinked with targets for poverty and growth (SDGs 1, 8 and 9), gender equality and inclusion (SDG 5), environmental sustainability (SDGs 6, 7, 11-15), health, nutrition and education (SDGs 2, 3 and 4), and conflict and access to justice (SDG 16).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated income and labour market inequalities worldwide and disproportionately affected women and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as young people and children, persons with disabilities, older persons, persons with a minority racial or ethnic background, migrant workers and workers in the informal economy. The EU approach to promoting decent work worldwide (see SDG 8) supports the universal concept of decent work as developed by the ILO, paying particular attention to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, thus supporting the reduction of poverty, social exclusion, and inequality through improving working conditions and living standards. This is also translated into sector strategies such as the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, which focuses on the protection of human rights, including labour rights and child labour, gender inequality and on promoting due diligence across supply chains in the textile sector.

In its international partnerships, the EU promotes the model it stands for, based on sustainability, focus on people and values, in order to tackle these global challenges and create shared prosperity. For example, the EU has been contributing to strengthening bilateral dialogues on migration and mobility and is starting new actions on decent employment, social protection and product safety for consumer protection at regional and national level.

On migration, the proposed Pact on Migration and Asylum of September 2020 links the internal and external aspects of the European approach to migration by balancing collective responsibility and solidarity. Enhancing the EU's internal processes are key parts of the Pact. More efficient and faster procedures, along with ensuring well-managed external borders and effective solidarity between the EU Member States, are important elements in making asylum and migration systems predictable and reliable. Regarding external aspects, the Pact emphasises that the EU promotes tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships with other countries. These partnerships address shared challenges such as migrant smuggling, managing legal pathways and tackling the effective implementation of readmission agreements and arrangements.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 8.5 billion in projects contributing to SDG 10, making it one of the largest recipients of EU development assistance along with SDGs 1 and 8. The main share of the EU contribution is accounted for by projects that target SDG 10 as a significant SDG. The main contributions come from projects targeting SDGs 1, 4, 8 and 17. Projects marked as contributing to SDG 10 as

the main objective also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, with a strong focus on SDGs 1, 5, 8 and 16. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 10 amounted to EUR 10.9 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance[29], from 2018 to 2021 more than 20 million migrants, forcibly displaced people or individuals from host communities were protected or assisted using EU support.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021, contributed EUR 21 billion to SDG 10. EU and Member State flows to SDG 10 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (36%) and Asia (18%). Support to SDG 10 also has a strong global component (31%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The reduction of inequality is a main priority of the EU's development policy, enshrined in EU treaties and the 2017 European Consensus on Development. It is rooted in the EU's commitments to promoting and protecting human rights (Council conclusions on addressing inequality in partner countries, 2019). The rights-based approach (RBA), and the EU Human Rights Dialogues with partner countries are central to addressing discrimination, promoting equal opportunities for all and improving inclusion, particularly of women, including through the use of digital technologies.

The EU's approach to reducing inequality reflects its complexity. In that context, the EU has developed an innovative inequality marker to enable better understanding, tracking and benchmarking the impact of actions on inequalities and to capture appropriately the multidimensionality of inequality. EU interventions will seek to reinforce their inequality-reducing effect and approach, focusing on benefits for the bottom 40% (poorest) or other socio-economically disadvantaged individuals, households or groups.

Equality initiatives in various regions and countries, notably with Team Europe, aim to nurture a strategic culture of cooperation around transformative actions that can have real inequality-reduction impact in partner countries.

The Commission recognises that social protection is an important policy tool for reducing inequalities, including inequality of opportunity. Through its geographic and thematic programmes on social protection, the Commission works with partner countries to help strengthen national social protection systems. Its thematic programme on **Improving synergies between social protection and public finance management** aims to demonstrate the impact of social protection on economic growth, encourage domestic resource mobilisation and help build gender-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection systems. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme focused on expanding coverage to large segments of the working population engaged in the informal economy.

With regard to migration and forced displacement, the EU and Member States developed a comprehensive and balanced approach to facilitate legal migration, protect migrants and refugees, prevent irregular and unsafe migration and help partner countries address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. The proposed EU Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to reduce unsafe and irregular routes and promote sustainable and safe legal pathways for those in need of protection (EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration 2021).

This is exemplified through the Team Europe Initiatives for the Central Mediterranean and the Western Mediterranean migration routes, which will offer support in the areas of legal migration and mobility, protection and asylum, prevention of irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, return, readmission and reintegration, and migration and development. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for 2021-2027 will support Member States' actions in this area, in a way that is complementary to the support provided to partner countries through the Global Europe instrument.

[29] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 10, **Equality Initiatives,** with inequality as their principal objective, include a Regional Team Europe initiative (TEI) in Latin America for inclusive and equal societies and country TEIs, such as in Kenya (human-centred digitalisation, also supporting the roll-out of the Global Gateway strategy), South Africa (employment in digital and green economy areas), Bangladesh (decent work), Burkina Faso (territorial inequalities) and Paraguay (digital, gender and social protection). The TEI in Paraguay aims to strengthen interlinkages between SDG10 and SDGs 1, 4 and 5 by supporting the digitalisation of the social protection system and education sector, and the promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination.

The **Regional Team Europe Initiative on Afghan displacement** responded to the Afghan regional displacement crisis covering Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian countries. A comprehensive approach was adopted, supporting strengthened policy dialogue, protection and sustainable reintegration for Afghans on the move in host countries, provision of basic services, access to health and education, the fight against smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings, and labour migration and mobility.

In the Guatemala-Mexico corridor and the Madagascar, Sri-Lanka and Pakistan-Arab States corridors, Global Action to Improve the Recruitment Framework of Labour Migration (ILO-EU 2017- 2021) aimed to prevent and reduce abusive and fraudulent migrant recruitment practices and increase the protection of migrant workers.

The European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDIF**)** (2019-2023) is the first EU-funded project to take a global approach to consolidate efforts on diaspora engagement for development. Through the facility, all actors in the diaspora-development ecosystem, such as diaspora organisations, partner countries, and EU Member States, receive support to engage and collaborate more effectively with each other.

In **Georgia**, the **Strengthening Development Impact of Migration in Georgia** (STREAMinG) project aims to unlock the positive impact of human mobility for the country's development processes. This is to be achieved by helping Georgian partners implement the 2021-2030 migration strategy and its 2022 and 2023 action plans, with a particular focus on mainstreaming the concept of migration and development into all sectoral areas, by ensuring achievement of SDGs and in line with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

EU assistance for **refugees in Türkyie** aims at addressing the challenges of leaving no one behind and providing a decent life to refugees, focusing on the inclusion of refugees in planning for the sustainable development goals, helping refugees and host communities to cope, and create better conditions for their sustainable integration and social cohesion. In addition, the EU-funded Complementary Emergency Social Safety Net (EUR 245 million) provides monthly cash assistance to **the most vulnerable refugees in Türkyie** (i.e., single parents, elderly headed families and households with one or more persons with disabilities) so they can meet their basic needs.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda (including SDG 10). An example of is set out below for illustrative purposes.

To combat the feeling of exclusion among young people and improve their prospects in the precarious security situation of the Diffa region in **Niger, France** is promoting social cohesion, income creation and socio-professional integration by supporting job and income-creating activities for some 10 500 young people, socio-educational, cultural and sports activities for personal and collective fulfilment and systems for training, mediation and integration and employment adapted to the local context.

Looking ahead

In the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, there was broad support for a stronger EU economy, social justice and jobs, stressing the importance of ensuring full implementation of the European Pillar of Social

Rights, including its relevant headline targets for 2030, at EU, national, regional and local level in the areas of 'equal opportunities and access to the labour market'. EU citizens emphasised in particular the need to reduce inequalities both between EU territories and within them.

In that respect, the Union of equality strategies will be fully implemented, building on the progress achieved already.[30] The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2020 contains several flagship initiatives such as the Disability Employment Package that was launched in 2022 as an initiatives to promote equality on the labour market and beyond. Another flagship initiative is the European Disability Card to promote free movement of persons with disabilities and allow for mutual recognition of the disability status and grant access to preferential conditions in services for short stays in other Member States. Another important flagship is the resource centre 'AccessibleEU' to facilitate implementation of EU law in the area of accessibility and capacity in accessibility expertise. These flagships will be fully implemented in the coming years. The EU also intends to strengthen its efforts in application, enforcement and awareness raising on EU rights on work-life balance, including parental leave.

Additional measures will also be considered to support regions in development traps experiencing persistent low growth, together with further work to make industry sustainable, digital and resilient, and to address dependencies. This work will notably seek to address the demographic transition – notably on ageing and depopulation – and consider ways to address employment and labour shortages reflecting the geopolitical context.

On migration, plans are under way for EU-wide awareness-raising campaigns, and for the launch of an EU skills profile tool for third country nationals.

Globally, the Commission will actively join partners in efforts to build nationally appropriate social protection floors, with the aim of achieving universal social protection. The EU will support the implementation strategy of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions. Through a new thematic programme on universal social protection 2030, the EU will also support the Convergence Initiative towards more inclusive and interoperable social protection information systems.

The EU will continue to take determined actions to accelerate the implementation of SDG 10 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where inequalities and/or migration are a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 10 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy at regional and national level, to be undertaken in a Team Europe approach, including to support investments and interventions that help create decent jobs and foster inclusive growth by including social protection measures. The Commission will support a new regional Team Europe Initiative on Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa. Led by several Member States, the new TEI will aim to address strategic and political gaps in Sub-Saharan Africa, including the severe underinvestment in social protection, large coverage gaps and weak administrative structures.

[30] The Commission regularly reports on progress achieved with the strategies. Key initiatives already adopted include: (i) a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms COM/2021/93 final (political agreement reached on 15 December 2022); (ii) a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence COM/2022/105 final; (iii) proposals to strengthen the role and independence of equality bodies COM/2022/688 final.

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

While European cities and communities provide opportunities for employment, economic and cultural activity, many inhabitants face environmental and social challenges. Housing issues, pollution (air, water, noise, waste), and crime are some of the most serious challenges faced in urban areas.

The EU supports transitions with the core objective of being socially inclusive, in order to leave no one and no place behind, by offering funding, capacity and knowledge-building support. Cities have an essential role to play in taking this process forward, in innovating, investing and mobilising, together with other levels of governance, in order to make urbanisation sustainable and ensure territorial cohesion.

The share of people overburdened by their housing costs or facing severe housing deprivation have fallen since 2015. In 2020, 4.3% of the EU population faced severe housing deprivation (compared to 5.3% in 2015) and 7.8% of the EU population were overburdened by their housing costs in 2020 (compared to 9.4% in 2019). In order to become climate-resilient and tackle the energy crisis, cities have to renovate and equip housing construction with renewable and clean energy sources and adopt sustainable waste management.

Cities and urban areas are home to almost 75% of EU citizens. Worldwide, cities account for more than 65% of energy consumption and for more than 70% of CO_2 emissions. For the EU to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and to become climate neutral by 2050, cities will have to transition to sustainable consumption modes and work towards the EU circular economy targets. In order to tackle pollution and halt biodiversity loss, cities will also have to accelerate their green transformation and reach the ambitious targets under the European Green Deal. At the same time, cities will also have to fully endorse sustainable urban mobility, including through widespread deployment of innovative solutions that cut emissions as well as through a much-increased focus on public transport, walking and cycling.

Urban road safety in the EU (which also links to SDG 3) is improving overall, but the pace is slowing. While EU roads are among the safest in the world, around 20 000 lives are lost in road-related crashes in the EU every year and up to six times the same number are seriously injured. On urban roads, around 70% of those killed are vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists).

People's safety is also compromised by experiences of harassment (also linked to SDG target 11.7 on access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces) – 29% of people in the EU have experienced harassment in the previous 12 months, according to a survey carried out by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy references	Trends
Significantly reduce total waste generation and halve the amount of residual (non-recycled) municipal waste by 2030	505 kg of municipal waste per capita were generated by EU residents in 2020, corresponding to 225 million tonnes of municipal waste. Since 2015, the waste generated per capita

A New Circular Economy Action Plan A Circular Cities and Regions Initiative	per year has increased by 25 kg. Despite this increase, the EU has clearly shifted to more recycling.
Reduce landfill to a maximum of 10% of municipal waste, by 2030 Circular Economy Action Plan	The amount of landfilled municipal waste has diminished, although more waste was generated. Indeed, it fell from 121 million tonnes in 1995 to 54 million tonnes in 2021 (-55%), corresponding to an average annual decline of 3.0%. The landfilling rate in the EU dropped from 61% in 1995 to less than 23% in 2021.
Recycling or preparing for re-use 60% of municipal waste by 2030 Waste Framework directive	Although there was an increase in municipal waste generated, the EU has shifted to more recycling. Indeed, the recycling rate of municipal waste has been increasing, from 27.3% (in 2000) to 49.6% (in 2021).
At least 30 million zero-emission vehicles in operation on European roads by 2030 and more than 3 million recharging points deployed Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy	In 2022, 3.39 million battery-electric vehicles and more than 4 000 hydrogen-fuel cell electric light-duty vehicles were registered in the EU. While considerable progress remains to be made to reach the target, market registrations of battery-electric vehicles have seen significant growth over the past 2 years and manufacturers report heavy investments.
35 million building units renovated by 2030 **At least double the annual energy renovation rate of residential and non-residential buildings by 2030 and to foster deep energy renovations** A Renovation Wave for Europe	About only 11% of the EU building stock undergoes some level of renovation each year. However, renovations of buildings very seldom also address buildings' energy performance. The weighted annual rate of energy renovations across the EU is low at 1%. Besides, deep renovations reducing energy consumption by at least 60% involve only 0.2% of buildings per year. In some regions, energy renovation rates are virtually absent.
Reduce the share of people chronically disturbed by transport noise by 30% EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil	Despite some improvements in perceived exposure to noise (20.6% of the EU population in 2010, 17.6% in 2020), 77 million people still suffered from noise disturbance in 2020. 70 million people from EU urban areas were estimated to be exposed to road traffic noise at 55 decibels or higher on annual average for day, evening and night in 2017.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 11 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of policies and initiatives in place addressing or touching upon the different aspects of SDG 11.

In 2016, EU Member States adopted the Urban Agenda for the EU which delivers on the UN New Urban Agenda at EU level and is supported by the European Commission. It tackles issues and challenges that are particularly impactful in cities by building multi-level governance partnerships. The first phase (2016-2021) produced 139 actions through 14 action plans, while the implementation of 46% of actions was finalised. The second phase (2022-2026) identified new priority themes in the Ljubljana Agreement and Multiannual Working Programme, namely: cities of equality, food, greening cities and sustainable tourism.

The new European Urban Initiative finances actions to experiment and develop transferable and scalable innovative solutions to urban challenges, improve cities' capacities to design and implement sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way, and promote knowledge sharing and capitalisation for the benefit of urban policy makers and practitioners.

The EU's **New Urban Mobility Framework**, adopted in December 2021, is designed to support EU cities in their efforts to reduce emission and improve mobility in a sustainable way. It aims to create an enabling framework for Member States, regions and cities to develop safe, accessible, inclusive, smart, resilient and zero-emission urban mobility well ahead of 2050. In this context, the framework promotes an increased uptake of high-quality sustainable urban mobility plans in cities, and paves the way for better monitoring of urban mobility policies.

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme enabling cities to work together to develop new, pragmatic and sustainable solutions to major urban challenges.

The affordable housing initiative is part of the Commission's Renovation Wave for Europe, which aims to promote greener buildings, create jobs and improve lives. In addition, principle 19 (Housing and assistance for he homeless) under the European Pillar of Social Rights is working towards ending homelessness in the EU. Principle 19 has also provided the impetus for the launch of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness.

The Green City Accord is a movement of European mayors committed to making cities cleaner and healthier. It aims to improve the quality of life for all Europeans and accelerate the implementation of relevant EU environmental laws. By signing the Accord, cities commit to addressing five areas of environmental management: air, water, nature and biodiversity, the circular economy and **waste, and noise. The** EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 sets a target for all cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants to have an urban greening plan, with measures to create biodiverse and accessible urban green areas.

EU funding such as the **Connecting Europe Facility**, **Cohesion Funds, Horizon Europe** and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** provide support to Member States in addressing sustainability challenges and improving road safety performance.

Overall, the **European Green Deal** is the blueprint for Europe's green transition, where all 27 EU Member States are creating new opportunities. The Zero Pollution Action Plan sets 2030 targets to reduce pollution of air, water and soil, and covers numerous policy initiatives with direct impacts on the urban environment. These include, for instance, the revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives and the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, but also a dedicated flagship on supporting urban zero pollution action.

The New European Bauhaus initiative connects the European Green Deal to the everyday life and living spaces. It is an environmental, economic and cultural movement, aiming to combine design, sustainability, inclusion (from valuing diversity to securing accessibility and affordability) and investment in order to help deliver on the EU's ambition for the green transition.

The European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews provides policy makers, urban practitioners and experts with a consolidated method and examples of indicators that European local and regional governments can use to monitor the achievement of SDGs and accordingly design sustainable urban development policies.

EU space services provided under the EU space programme are key enablers for smart cities, making urban planning more efficient. By using Galileo and EGNOS for navigation, positioning and timing, city services that are essential, for instance, for operating and managing public transportation, power supply, connectivity, waste management can be considerably improved at a lower cost. Copernicus, the EU's Earth observation system, provides valuable satellite images and insights about urban areas.

Selected enablers

Cohesion policy plays a central role in bringing Europe closer to its citizens and connecting local development needs and potential with EU and global objectives. Altogether Cohesion policy is the main EU financial instrument to support investments in sustainable urban development.

In particular for SDG 11 around EUR 30.7 billion of cohesion policy funding were invested in projects targeting the various dimensions of urban life – environmental, economic, social, and cultural – tackling issues ranging from improving air quality to providing cycle tracks and footpaths.

For the period 2021-2027 under the EU Cohesion Policy, more than EUR 19 billion will support place-based investments via more than 2 150 integrated territorial development strategies with enhanced ownership and the participation of local stakeholders and communities. Almost two thirds of this allocation is planned for investment aimed at fostering integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security within urban areas, while one third will pursue such objectives in non-urban areas. For example, 2 million m^2 of public buildings will be energy renovated, 33 km^2 of open space will be created or renovated in urban areas, and around 3 800 cultural or tourism sites will be supported.. Also in 2021-2027, the **European Urban Initiative** will support innovation, capacity and knowledge-building in urban areas of all sizes. In addition, **the model financial instrument** to support the **New European Bauhaus** aims to assist managing authorities in setting up financial instruments to support New European Bauhaus projects and to leverage public and private resources.

Portugal's 'Instrumento Financeiro para a Reabilitação e Revitalização Urbanas' (IFRRU 2020) provides a notable example of a national-level financial instrument intended to support urban renewal across the country. It targets the improvement of buildings that are more than 30 years old, abandoned industrial spaces and units, social housing (including private units within a social housing building) and public space. IFFRU uses EUR 102 million of European Structural Funds resources to mobilise EUR 1.4 billion of public and private financing for urban development, with the aim of generating a total investment of around EUR 2 billion.

In **Lithuania**, the recovery and resilience plan supports the green transition through reforms and investments of EUR 185 million in energy efficiency renovations of buildings in order to foster a sustainable urban environment and EUR 293 million in generation and storage of renewable energy. Furthermore, EUR 293 million will be invested in sustainable mobility supporting the replacement of polluting road transport vehicles, improving public transport services and establishing charging/refilling infrastructure for vehicles using alternative fuels.

The Climate-neutral and Smart Cities Mission under Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation, will invest a total of around EUR 350 million in research and innovation actions linked to the Mission's goal in the period 2021-2023, addressing clean mobility, energy efficiency and sustainable urban planning. The Mission has selected 100 cities from all EU Member States and 12 additional cities from countries participating in Horizon Europe to become climate neutral by 2030 and to act as experimentation and innovation hubs that enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050.

Driving Urban Transitions (DUT) is a European partnership of more than 60 partners from 27 countries, involving national and regional policy makers, funders and urban-related policy agencies to invest in urban R&I and strengthen a European innovation eco-system for urban transitions. DUT aims to create a strong community around urban transitions and to establish a well-known research and innovation platform that will help cities become more sustainable, inclusive and liveable.

EIT Urban Mobility, a Knowledge and Innovation Community supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology since January 2019 aspires to become the largest European initiative transforming urban mobility and encourage positive changes in the way people move around cities in order to make them more liveable places.

Another example is the 'Developing innovative mobility solutions in the Brussels-Capital-Region' project supported by the **Structural Reform Support Programme** under the call for 2020. The objective of the project was to assist the Brussels-Capital Region in developing a regulatory framework for 'mobility as a service'. The region has recently established 'Good Move' - a sustainable urban mobility plan to address congestion and pollution. Developing shared mobility integrated with public transport was a key part of the strategy. Its success depends among others on establishing an efficient 'mobility as a service' system under an effective regulatory framework.

The EU, through the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) cooperated with a group of Human Rights Cities and practitioners from civil society and academia to develop a Framework for Human Rights Cities in the EU. The Framework, released in 2021, looks at the foundations, structures and tools that can help cities integrate human rights in a holistic and sustainable way in their work. FRA is rolling out a practical guidance on the framework in all EU languages to help local authorities to design and implement their own step-by-step policies and strategies of the framework.

Stakeholder engagement

The **European Week of Regions and Cities** is the biggest annual event in the EU dedicated to regional policy. The latest edition in 2022 welcomed around 20 000 participants. During this four-day event, regions and cities showcase their capacity to create growth and jobs, implement EU cohesion policy, and prove the importance of the local and regional level for good European governance.

The **European Mobility Week** is the European Commission's flagship awareness-raising campaign on sustainable urban mobility culminating in the popular Car-Free Day. It promotes behavioural change in favour of active mobility, public transport, and other clean, intelligent transport solutions. The EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK Award is presented to local authorities which have excelled in raising awareness about sustainable urban mobility.

The Cities forum is a biennial event which brings together urban stakeholders for exchanges and dialogues, particularly around the Commission's framework for enabling sustainable urban development as part of cohesion policy, and other relevant urban initiatives.

The CoP-CITIES is an initiative open to stakeholders (cities and networks of cities, international and intergovernmental organisations and research bodies) to share practices, tools and knowledge over sustainable urban development.

The Intelligent Cities Challenge is a Commission initiative that supports 136 cities in using cutting-edge technologies to lead the intelligent, green and socially responsible recovery.

The European Commission's Green capital and leaf awards recognise and reward cities across Europe for their efforts to improve the environment, and thus also the quality of life, in cities.

CIVITAS is one of the flagship innovation initiatives that supports cities in making smart and sustainable urban mobility a reality. CIVITAS fosters political commitment and boosts collective expertise, equipping cities to put mobility at the centre of decarbonisation and providing peer exchange, networking and training opportunities.

Urban Mobility Days is a biennial conference that provides a unique forum for policymakers, academia, civil society representatives and urban transport practitioners to discuss the way forward for a sustainable, innovative and equitable urban mobility in Europe.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery requires ambitious action at all levels. Some good practices in implementing SDG 11 include the following:

Sweden has put in place a dedicated Council to support municipalities in the implementation of SDG 11. The Council for Sustainable Cities is a forum consisting of 12 government agencies, administrative boards and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Its task is to support the municipalities in their work, with the aim of spreading knowledge and creating opportunities for collaboration on sustainable urban development.

In **Spain**, the Federation of Provinces and Municipalities (FEMP) works, in cooperation with authorities at multiple levels, to advance in the process of to implement locally the 2030 Agenda at the local level. This includes the development of the 2030 Agenda 2030 Localization Handbook, which is the basic tool for local entities In Spain to work under the same parameters for the localization of the SDGs in local initiatives involving a range of local actors.

In the **German** region of **North Rhine-Westphalia**, the 'Global Sustainable Municipalities' project has since 2016 led 39 local authorities to systematically draw up and implement local sustainability strategies and reports. Some of these were presented at the 2022 High-Level Political Forum as voluntary local reviews. To complement SDG-driven sustainability management and achieve impact-oriented monetary control, five local authorities have connected their budget with the SDGs. 172 localities are involved in this project today from across Germany.

EU external action

Global trends

Many of the EU's partner countries are facing rapid urban expansion. By 2050, an estimated seven out of ten people will live in urban areas. While cities can be drivers of economic growth and lead to a more efficient use of resources, rapid, often unplanned, urbanisation creates multiple challenges. In 2020, approximately one in four urban dwellers, approximately 1 billion people, lived in slums with inadequate access to basic services. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than half the urban population live in slums. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing disparities in urban settlements.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

With regard to the external dimension of EU policies addressing SDG 11, in September 2022, the EU contributed actively to G7 Ministers' adoption of the first G7 communiqué on urban development. It provides for a common understanding around the key principles and actions needed for urban development policy, extending the principles established at EU level under the New Leipzig Charter, and promoting integrated and sustainable urban development.

Further, at UN level, on the occasion of the adoption of the New Urban Agenda at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016, the EU and its Member States pledged to extend their action on international urban and regional cooperation.

The EU also presents the European mission on climate-neutral and smart cities as a commitment. The EU aims to support 100 cities as hubs of experimentation and innovation for the green and digital transition by 2030 and for an inclusive post-pandemic recovery. In turn, these cities will model and inspire similar transformations for cities around the world. This is complemented with the dedicated Urban Transitions Mission which aims to deliver at least 50 large-scale, integrated demonstration projects in urban environments around the world, by 2030.A key EU-led platform that addresses both SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 11 is the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate Action (GCoM). The European Commission and UN-Habitat co-chair this initiative, which is the largest global alliance for city climate leadership, built upon the commitment of over 11 500 cities and local governments. These cities hail from 6 continents and 142 countries and in total represent more than 1 billion people. Based on current targets and actions, GCoM cities and local governments could collectively reduce global emissions by 1.9 $GtCO^2e$ annually in 2030 compared to a business-as-usual trajectory. Reducing CO_2 emissions also implies the reduction of pollutant emissions, which is co-beneficial for SDG 11 targets and indicators.

On pollution and waste at municipal level, the EU has started implementing several waste-oriented initiatives, such as the circular cities and regions initiative, the EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil and the circular economy action plan (see SDG 12).

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to OECD EUR 3.7 billion in commitments for projects contributing to SDG 11. The biggest share of the EU contribution to SDG 11 is accounted for by projects that target SDG 11 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, with the largest contributions going to SDGs 5, 9 and 13. Other SDGs also contribute to SDG 11 as a significant objective, with the main contributors being SDGs 1, 8 and 13. When taking into account other official flows, private funds mobilised through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 11 amounted to EUR 7.7 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance,[31] in the period 2018-2021, 234 countries and cities developed climate change and/or disaster risk reduction strategies with EU support. and 125 countries and cities implemented them with EU support.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021, contributed EUR 7.4 billion to SDG 11. EU and Member State flows to SDG 11 in 2021 were distributed across all regions with projects in Africa (34%), Asia (26%), other countries in Europe (19%) and America and the Caribbean (14%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

In the context of SDG 11, the EU recognises that sustainable urbanisation is an essential tool to make sustainable development a reality at local and urban levels and has embraced the principles of the New Urban Agenda. At the occasion of the UN high-level meeting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in April 2022, the EU undertook a voluntary commitment to enhance support to external cooperation and international partnerships in the field of urban development.

In the EU's international partnerships, urban development contributes to achieving a range of high-level strategic objectives and initiatives, in particular Global Gateway and the external dimension of the Green Deal.

In this context, and in line with partner countries' own policies and plans for making human settlements and cities sustainable and inclusive globally, the EU's priorities for its external actions contributing to SDG 11 and interlinked SDGs include:

- to ensure that EU support to cities and urban development is effectively framed in the context of wider initiatives, in particular Global Gateway, the European Green Deal and Team Europe;
- to contribute to mobilising finance for investment in sustainable urban development, in particular in the context of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) and wider efforts aimed at strengthening the eco-system for urban finance;
- to advance an integrated approach to urban development, encompassing productive, sustainable and inclusive patterns of urbanisation.

Following the programming exercise for the 2021-2027 period, partnerships with more than 30 countries in national programmes and/or within Team Europe initiatives target urban development and cities, either as a priority on its own or as part of a wider priority, e.g. the Green Deal. This is a major shift compared to the EU's last programming period (2014-2020), where only one country had a specific reference to urban development (Haiti in the context of reconstruction).

Mobilisation of funds for investments in urban infrastructure remains a major challenge. EFSD+ is structured in what are called 'investment windows', with one of these targeting sustainable cities. The EFSD+ will support the mobilisation of finance through guarantees, seeking to mobilise additional sources of finance and blending, which

[31] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

will make lending more affordable. Thus, blended finance may facilitate investments in urban infrastructure that may have large social or environmental benefits but not necessarily the capacity to generate revenue. Other avenues of engagement include the **Partnership for sustainable cities** programme and the **Global Covenant of Mayors** initiative.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In addition to pursuing SDG 11, making cities and human settlements inclusive and sustainable is closely interlinked with various SDGs, including SDG1 on fighting poverty, SDG8 on sustainable growth, SDG10 on reducing inequalities, SDG9 on innovation and resilient infrastructures and SDG13 on climate action.

Linked to the twin green and digital transition and hence contributing to SDGs 9 and 13, the EU launched the Smart Green ASEAN Cities (SGAC) programme. This will help ASEAN Member States anticipate the substantial pressure from the high urbanisation by focusing on green and smart solutions through digitalisation and the use of technologies. It is part of the EU-ASEAN Global Gateway investment package.

In a similar vein, the EU and Member States are implementing the 'Sustainable Rwandan cities fit for the digital age**'** Team Europe initiative. The initiative supports the Global Gateway African-Europe Investment Package priorities on transport by seeking to promote green urbanisation models, green private investments, e-government and digital services and new data collection models and monitoring processes in urban areas. The objective of this TEI is to tap into the potential of Rwandan cities to drive innovation and spur the creation of jobs fit for the 21st century. Furthermore, the '**Flood prevention and informal settlement upgrading in the city of Kigali'** programme will contribute to improving climate adaptation and inclusive urbanisation in the city of Kigali.

The **European mission on climate-neutral and smart cities** supports 100 cities as hubs of experimentation and innovation for the green and digital transition by 2030 and for an inclusive post-pandemic recovery. In turn, these cities will model and inspire similar transformations for cities around the world through initiatives such as the **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** (GCoM).

Further, the Partnerships for sustainable cities programme was launched in 2018 and now counts in a total of 57 city-to-city partnerships ongoing in 34 countries. The cities hail from EU Member States and partner countries. The programme's aim is to promote integrated urban development through partnerships built between local authorities of EU Member States and partner countries in accordance with the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. Partnerships address the same specific objective.

On a global level, the International Urban and Regional Cooperation Programme (IURC), a joint programme launched in 2021, supports cooperation between cities and regions to work on sustainable solutions to common urban and territorial challenges, with particular attention being paid to the green and digital transitions and the inclusive post-pandemic recovery.

In **Tanzania**, the EU is supporting a large urban national programme which will, among other objectives, seek to advance investments in a number of secondary cities, offering blending/guarantees combined with a budget support component, which will foster a policy dialogue on subnational funding arrangements.

In relation to SDGs 1, 8 and 9, several initiatives link urbanisation and infrastructure to people's living conditions and sustainable growth for businesses. For example, the **EU4 Integrated Territorial Development in Georgia** budget support programme is a Team Europe Initiative supporting Global Gateway investment priorities which promotes more balanced territorial development and aims at improving living standards and conditions for the inhabitants of four focal regions. The programme targets different areas such as basic infrastructure, SME development, and human capital.

In addition, urbanisation is one of the main drivers of disaster risk. The EU is strengthening **disaster preparedness** in urban contexts with its humanitarian partners, with urban preparedness indeed being one of the 2021-2024 funding priorities in the field of disaster preparedness.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 11. A few such initiatives are set out below for illustrative purposes.

Romania actively supports cities by a range of initiatives, such as undertaking feasibility and design studies and developing action plans for the improvement of waste-water treatment, public transport systems and public lighting systems in several cities in **Moldova**; participating in the development of tourism in Alexandria, **Egypt**; participating in the development of smart, secure and sustainable urban development in Lusaka, **Zambia**; and in smart metropolitan development for social and family housing in Harare, **Zimbabwe**.

Germany supports sustainable urban development projects in **Ecuador** reinforcing the capacity of local, regional and national governance bodies to steer sustainable urban development and promoting good local governance and civic engagement. Germany is also supporting projects to make cities climate smart in other countries, such as **Bangladesh, Chile, India** and **South Africa** among others. Projects focusing on local authority financing, urban mobility and sustainable urban infrastructure and services such as waste processing and disposal, water supply and sanitation are being undertaken in countries such as **Mexico, India, Tunisia** and **Albania**.

Looking ahead

To support SDG 11, in 2022 the Commission proposed to implement a new provision called **Supporting Affordable Energy (SAFE)** - allowing a more flexible use of cohesion policy funds allocations for 2014-2020 to help Member States, regions and territories to support vulnerable households and companies and to preserve jobs. SAFE is part of **REPowerEU** which is the European Commission's plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030, in light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Other issues under discussion include:

- focusing on building an innovative environment to ensure the most effective development of regions and cities
- communicating the importance of sustainable development with local stakeholders, including municipal councils, officers and citizens, and promoting deliberative tools
- continuing to reduce regional disparities and supporting economically and socially vulnerable areas
- encouraging cities and regions to apply the SDGs to their local areas and promote greater engagement in SDGs Voluntary Local Reviews.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 11 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries, with sustainable cities, human settlements and/or transport are a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 11 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of **Global Gateway** at regional and national levels. This is to be undertaken in a Team Europe approach, e.g. targeting through Global Gateway **flagships projects** urban transport **infrastructure**, including on electric mobility and on sustainable public transport. The EU and its Member States also continue to implement their Voluntary Commitments to deliver on the New Urban Agenda.

SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

The high quality of life in Europe has been made possible through increases in income, production and consumption, which have tended to go hand in hand with more resource extraction and processing and related environmental impacts. This has resulted in a somewhat mixed situation concerning SDG 12 over the past few years, with some positive changes but also some persistent trends that need to be reversed.

In the EU, buildings are responsible for around 50% of resource extraction and consumption and 40% of our energy consumption. Buildings equally account for more than 30% of the EU's total waste generated per year and 36% of greenhouse gas emissions. Meeting SDG 12 also means safe management of chemicals. Despite a slight drop in 2020, consumption of hazardous chemicals has increased since 2015. On the other hand, the use of chemicals declared 'substances of very high concern' has dropped by up to 97%, indicating that risk management measures are working.

Achieving SDG 12 also plays a fundamental role in addressing the climate action objectives under SDG 13, including those set by the Paris Agreement, and for achieving SDG 6 on water and SDG 15 on biodiversity on land.

The estimated gross value added in the EU's environmental goods and services sector has risen by more than 18% since 2015, accompanied by an 8% increase in jobs in these sectors. The higher in the waste hierarchy we act, the more jobs are created, with one study showing that when processing 10 000 tonnes of waste, you can create 1 job by incinerating, 36 by recycling and 300-800 by repairing and re-using it.

In order to be resilient to crises, food systems must be sustainable. This requires redesigning our food systems, which today account for nearly one third of global GHG emissions, consume large amounts of natural resources, and result in biodiversity loss and negative health impacts. EU agriculture is responsible for 10.3% of the EU's GHG emissions. In the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food waste (131 kg/inhabitant) are generated annually, with an associated market value estimated at EUR 132 billion. While this is the first EU-wide monitoring of food waste, these data seem to indicate some progress in reducing food waste as compared to previous estimates (FUSIONS, 2016), but not at the level required to reach the global SDG Target 12.3 of halving food waste by 2030.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
Significantly decrease the amount of raw material needed to produce the products consumed in the Union 8th Environment Action Programme and Circular Economy Action Plan	The EU's overall demand for the extraction of raw materials induced by the consumption of goods and services (material footprint) has decreased by 2% since 2015, reaching 13.7 tonnes per capita in 2020.

Significantly decrease the EU consumption footprint 8th Environment Action Programme and the Circular Economy Action Plan	The EU consumption footprint is persistently high, and it transgresses the planetary boundaries for several impact categories. In 2020, this statement is valid for four specific impact categories.
Significantly reduce the total amount of waste generated by 2030 Circular Economy Action Plan and Zero Pollution Action Plan	In 2020, the EU generated 2153 million tonnes, equivalent to 4.8 tonnes per capita, indicating a decrease of around 4% on 2014.
Specific targets to properly manage Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) by collecting, treating, recovering, preparing for re-use, recycling WEEE Directive	The amount of electrical and electronic equipment placed on the market grew by 62.2% from 2012 (7.6 million tonnes) to 2020 (12.4 million tonnes). Collected WEEE increased from 3.0 to 4.7 million tonnes in the same period (+57.8%), while treated (recovered, recycled, prepared for re-use) WEEE grew from 3.1 to 4.6 million tonnes (+49.1%). Specifically, recovered WEEE grew by 65.1%, and WEEE recycled and prepared for reuse grew by 61.7% in the same period.
Recycling targets for plastic packaging waste: 55% by 2030 Directive (EU) 2018/851 on waste (revised) and COM proposal to revise PPWD of 30.11.2022	In 2020, the EU recycled 38% of plastic packaging waste. The amount of plastic packaging not recycled has increased by 3.4 kg per inhabitant since 2010 due to the greater increase in the absolute amount of plastic packaging waste generated (+23% during 2010-2020).
Doubling the circular material use rate by 2030 compared to 2020 (% of the overall material use) Circular Economy Action Plan	The EU is making more use of secondary raw materials, which represented 11.7% of overall material use in the EU in 2021. The circular material use rate has increased by 0.4 percentage points since 2015.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 12 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has a wide range of policies and laws in place addressing the different aspects of SDG 12. This section provides an overview of some of the most recent and relevant initiatives.

The Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) of March 2020 delivers the Green Deal's commitment to sustainable growth by promoting circularity in product design, encouraging sustainable consumption and waste prevention, and by keeping resources in the EU economy for as long as possible. To deliver on these commitments, several key initiatives were presented in March and November 2022.

The Proposal on the Ecodesign Regulation for Sustainable Products aims at reducing negative environmental impacts of products along their value chains and improving the availability of information on product characteristics, notably through a digital product passport. It also aims to boost the demand for sustainable products (e.g. via mandatory green public procurement criteria) and address unsustainable business practices (such as the destruction of unsold consumer goods).

The **Proposal to Empower Consumers for the Green Transition** will help consumers make informed choices and protect them against false green claims. It is complemented by the Proposal for a Green Claims Directive. Together, they are expected to lead to an increase in the purchasing of products which do not deceive consumers as to their environmental impact. Both initiatives are expected to better protect consumers against unfair

commercial practices such as greenwashing or non-transparent voluntary sustainability labels, which are not compatible with the green transition.

The EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles aims to help consumers make more sustainable choices, fostering the consumption of durable, repairable and recyclable textiles free of hazardous substances. The review of the Textiles Labelling Regulation may introduce mandatory elements on the label such as sustainability and circularity parameters.

The Commission also put forward in March 2023 a proposal for a **directive on common rules promoting the repair of goods**, which will result in savings for consumers and reduce waste, among others.

The Proposal to revise the Construction Products Regulation lays down harmonised conditions for the marketing of construction products and improves the quality of the European technical standards by including more sustainability indicators.

The **Proposal for the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation** addresses the ever-rising trend in packaging waste, which also impacts climate change. This is linked to a **Policy framework for Bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics.** The Batteries Regulation will help ensure that batteries and accumulators can play their essential role in many products, appliances and services. Every year, approximately 800 000 tonnes of automotive batteries, 190 000 tonnes of industrial batteries, and 160 000 tonnes of consumer batteries enter the European Union. Many of the components of these batteries and accumulators could be recycled, avoiding the release of hazardous substances to the environment and providing valuable materials.

The export of waste to non-EU countries amounted to 3 million tonnes in 2021, an increase of 77% since 2004. While trading waste can have a positive impact on the economy, the uncontrolled movement of waste can have detrimental environmental consequences. The **Proposal for the Waste Shipment Regulation** is intended to improve the EU system to supervise and control shipments of waste within its borders, and with non-EU countries.

The Radio Equipment Directive introduces a common charging solution for electronic devices. It will bring significant savings in terms of e-waste and CO_2. As of 2024, all new devices (for laptops the deadline is 2026) will have to be equipped with a USB-C charging port.

The EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability is part of the Green Deal's Zero Pollution ambition. It creates a shift towards new chemicals and materials that are inherently safer and more sustainable for humans and the environment, from production to end of life.

The EU Farm to Fork Strategy (see also SDG 2) confirms the EU's commitment to achieving the global target of halving food waste by 2030 and reducing food losses along the production and supply chains.

Selected enablers

Financial resources, reforms and investments as well as science and innovation, are strong means to implement the SDGs in the EU. As regards sustainable consumption and production, the **investment gap** in Europe for the circular economy and waste ranges between an estimated EUR 13 billion and EUR 28 billion per year, depending on the ambition levels of circularity to be achieved. A series of programmes and instruments have been mobilised in recent years to support the transition to sustainable consumption and production models. **Horizon Europe and LIFE** have supported innovation and market replication, focusing on the development of indicators and data, novel materials and products, substitution and elimination of hazardous substances based on a 'safe by design' approach, circular business models, and new production and recycling technologies, including exploring the potential of chemical recycling, keeping in mind the role of digital tools in achieving circular objectives.

Support from **Cohesion policy** has enabled deep transformation to a level closer to citizens (waste management infrastructure). Cohesion policy funds are at the core of the efforts to help regions implement circular economy

strategies and reinforce their industrial fabric and value chains, helping them also to put in place separate collection systems and recycling infrastructure, innovation in circular economy and cooperation across borders. The InvestEU programme includes the circular economy as one of its areas of intervention - in its investment windows and especially in its Sustainable Infrastructure window. Moreover, the Commission has adopted several guidance documents for InvestEU implementing partners (such as the EIB Group, EBRD, other international financial institutions and national development banks) on how to identify priority investments, with circular economy projects being among the priorities. Under InvestEU, a new natural capital and circular economy initiative will mobilise investments for at least EUR 10 billion over the next 10 years. Lastly, an InvestEU Advisory Hub will provide appropriate support and technical assistance to applicants and investors, including on circular economy.

Under the EU's **Horizon** budget, the 'Cityloops' project brings together seven European cities – **Apeldoorn, Bodø, Mikkeli, Porto, Seville, Høje-Taastrup** and **Roskilde** – to pilot a series of actions to close the loop of two of the most important waste streams in Europe: construction & demolition waste, and bio-waste. The 2021 'Increasing circularity in textiles, plastics and/or electronics value chains' project demonstrates and deploys at large scale innovative solutions and designs for increased quality, non-toxicity and durability of secondary materials and demonstrating circular business practices.

Under the **Single Market Programme**, action grants were awarded for EU Member State and stakeholders to improve measurement of food waste and help implement food waste prevention initiatives.

Another example is the 'Technical Support for the preparation of circular economy roadmap for the **Slovak Republic**' project, supported by the **Structural Reform Support Programme** under the call for 2020. Slovakia was facing severe challenges in transitioning towards a circular and climate-neutral economy. In particular, its performance on waste management was well below the EU average, characterised by a high level of landfilling. In addition, Slovakia was at risk of not meeting the 2020 EU recycling targets. The project aimed at creating a coherent policy framework including concrete measures that would enable the country to transition to a circular economy and meet its contribution to a carbon-neutral economy.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 12 in a collaborative approach. For example:

The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, a joint initiative of European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee, brings together a wide range of stakeholders to share best practices and address challenges. The platform bridges existing initiatives at local, regional and national level, and supports implementation of the circular economy in general.

The High Level Construction Forum brings together the EU construction ecosystem, stakeholders and Member State authorities. Its meetings facilitate the process to co-create a transition pathway towards a green, digital and resilient construction ecosystem.

The Transition Pathway for Tourism is a plan jointly created with actors in the tourism ecosystem. It details key actions, targets and conditions to achieve the green and digital transitions and long-term resilience of the tourism sector. This includes pledges submitted by EU stakeholders on their concrete commitments. So far, over 180 commitments and pledges (which include the TUI group, booking.com and Costa Cruises) have been published.

The EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste is a multi-stakeholder platform bringing together international organisations, Member States and actors in the food value chain including food banks and other NGOs to accelerate the EU's progress towards SDG Target 12.3. The Platform helps define measures needed to prevent food waste, share best practice and evaluate progress made over time.

The EU Code of Conduct on responsible food business and marketing practices is a voluntary industry initiative, facilitated by the Commission, that enables EU associations and individual companies to support the seven objectives of the Code (for associations) or pledge concrete commitments (for companies). The Code's objectives relate to increasing the uptake of healthy and sustainable diets, of sustainable internal processes and of sustainable supply chains.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 12 include:

The '**GR-eco Islands' initiative** (linking SDG 12 with SDGs 7.2, 10 and 13), which is a strategic initiative aiming to transform Greek islands into innovation labs and models of the green and circular economy, energy autonomy, digital innovation and eco mobility. Key pillars of the initiative, which builds on the high renewables potential of Greek islands and takes into account their sensitive natural ecosystem, include: (i) the promotion of sustainable waste and water management based on circular economy principles by increasing reuse and recycling; (ii) the development of zero-pollution schemes; (iii) the electrification of transport; (iv) the green transformation of agriculture and tourism (both key sectors for the local economy), and (v) the promotion of renewables and energy efficiency practices. The initiative will also seek to develop sustainable port and other infrastructure facilities through targeted support and custom-made programmes to fit each island's special characteristics and needs, devised by the Ministry of Environment and Energy. These interventions at the very local level will produce transferable results that can be duplicated in other remote and secluded areas worldwide.

At local level, the city of **Warsaw in Poland** is actively promoting the circular economy through its #Warszawa2030 Strategy and educational campaigns such as the 'Separate waste properly' campaign, the Warsaw Recycling Month and webinars. In addition, Warsaw is investing in infrastructures such as the Recycling and Ecological Education Centre, a sorting plant and the creation of a biogas plant. The city intends to expand its system of municipal waste collection points based on the type of waste, with a special focus on repair and reuse points.

In **Finland**, a number of cities are carrying out pioneering work to promote the circular economy, in close partnership with different stakeholders. For example, the region of **Tampere** is fostering a network of cleantech and circular economy clusters. Meanwhile, the city of **Turku** (which submitted a Voluntary Local Review in 2020) aims to be climate neutral by 2029 and has a circular economy roadmap aiming for a 'resource wise' future with zero emissions, meaning no waste and sustainable use of natural resources, by 2040.

EU external action

Global trends

The planet's natural ability to regenerate is hampered by a nearly fourfold increase in global use of materials in the last 50 years. The extraction, cultivation and processing of material resources (biomass and food, non-metallic minerals, metals and fossil fuels) are responsible for more than 90% of biodiversity loss and water stress impacts, half of climate change emissions and one third of health impacts. Today we only recycle 8.6 % of what we use, which leaves a massive circularity gap of over 90%. In only 2 years, global circularity wilted from 9.1 % in 2018 to 8.6 % in 2020.

Between 2000 and 2019, total domestic material consumption (DMC) rose by 65 % across the world, driven by increased demand in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, while remaining relatively stable in other areas, including Europe and North America. The adoption of sustainable consumption and production policies has been slow and uneven.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Achieving the objectives under the 2030 Agenda and in particular SDG 12 requires moving from linear, highly resource-depleting systems with high emissions, waste generation and high impacts on ecosystems and natural capital, towards circular, less wasteful systems that use resources more efficiently and sustainably, while providing work opportunities and a high quality of life. This requires systemic change in consumption and production patterns at home and globally. The EU is determined to lead the transition at the global level. Reducing the consumption footprint and increasing the circular material use rate is a particular priority, which should also be seen in the context of the European Green Deal's recognition that access to resources is a strategic security consideration for the EU.

The 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan emphasises that the EU cannot deliver alone the European Green Deal's ambition for a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and circular economy. The action plan also confirms that the EU will continue to lead the way to a circular economy at the global level and use its influence, expertise and financial resources to implement the 2030 Agenda in the EU and beyond.

The European single market provides a critical mass enabling the EU to set global standards in product sustainability and to influence product design and value chain management worldwide. Within the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan has led to revised regulations in areas such as chemicals, construction products, packaging, textiles and plastics (as pointed out above). More will be forthcoming under the Sustainable Products Initiative, including the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, and the proposal for a revised Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence. These new regulations aim to make sustainable products the norm in the EU and reduce the negative environmental impacts of products along their value chains. As EU imported products need to comply with these regulations, they have a significant impact across the world.

Producers and consumers, including in partner countries, face a potential cost from the emphasis on sustainable and responsible production and consumption throughout global value chains and on companies being transparent about the risks they face from sustainability issues and their own impacts on people and the environment. To address the social dimensions of unsustainable supply chains, the EU's Decent Work Worldwide Communication, adopted as part of the Just and Sustainable Economy Package, sets out internal and external policies to promote decent work worldwide. A new legislative initiative to prohibit products on the EU market that are made with forced labour is currently under preparation. In addition, where required, the EU supports governments, civil society and businesses in partner countries in their efforts to adapt policies, rules and value chains to these new regulations.

In relation to the challenges for a circular economy, marine plastic pollution is a worldwide phenomenon. To **prevent plastic pollution throughout the entire plastics lifecycle**, the EU and its Member States have been among the sponsors of a resolution by the United Nations Environment Assembly to launch an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to develop by the end of 2024 an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The EU's objective is to move from linear to circular plastic production and consumption within and outside Europe. The EU also introduced in 2021 rules on the export, import and intra-EU shipment of plastic waste, based on the Basel Convention. As above, this affects partner countries' trade with the EU. To help identify trade policy actions that could contribute to a transition to a resource efficient and circular economy, the EU has co-sponsored and been actively engaged in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions and the WTO Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade. In addition, the EU is actively working with like-minded WTO Members to address fossil fuel subsidy reform in the WTO in order to rationalise and phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption.

The Commission's proposal for a new Regulation on waste shipments in November 2021 is expected to tackle the illegal export of waste and waste challenges to non-EU countries. It aims to do this by guaranteeing that

waste is only shipped outside the EU if managed in an environmentally sound manner in the countries of destination, thus addressing as much as 15%-30% of total waste shipments, currently believed to be illegal. The proposed regulation is also intended to boost the market for secondary materials and circular economy. This will also encourage non-EU countries to reform their approach to waste treatment, should they desire to continue importing EU waste.

Finally, the 8th Environment Action Programme, Article 3(s) and Circular Economy Action Plan aims to significantly decrease the EU's material footprint, i.e. the amount of raw material needed to produce the products consumed in the EU, which represented 6.4% of worldwide material extraction in 2020. This will potentially have a considerable impact on the extraction of raw materials and associated export activities in partner countries.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 1.7 billion in projects contributing to SDG 12. The largest share of the EU contribution was made by projects targeting SDG 12 as a significant objective, clearly underlining the cross-cutting nature of SDG 12. This SDG has been mostly associated with interventions where the main SDG was SDG 2, 8, 9 or 13. A smaller share of the EU contribution is made up of projects that target SDG 12 as the main SDG, which is closely interlinked with SDGs 5, 8, 9 and 13. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 12 amounted to EUR 4.8 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance[32], in the period 2018-2021 the EU support contributed to 24 000 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises applying sustainable consumption and production practices.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 3.7 billion to SDG 12. EU and Member State flows to SDG 12 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in Asia (30%), followed by Africa (26%), other countries in Europe (19%) and America and the Caribbean (15%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

In relation to SDG 12, and in line with commitments under the **EU Circular Economy Action Plan** implementing measures, the EU is stepping up its engagement at global, regional and bilateral levels with non-EU countries, especially with low- and middle-income countries, to support the sustainability transition and facilitate compliance with the new rules. In this context, and in line with partner countries' own policies and plans for sustainable consumption and production patterns, the EU's priorities are to:

- **make sustainable products the norm**, including by leading international efforts to reach a global agreement on plastics in line with the objectives of the European Plastics Strategy, and by ensuring that Free Trade Agreements reflect the enhanced objectives of the circular economy;
- **support partner countries** in transitioning to green and circular economies through the development of enabling policies, support to the adoption of green and circular business practices, enhanced access to finance and knowledge and capacity development;
- **address sectors that use most resources and where the potential for circularity is high**, such as electronics and ICT, batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food, water and nutrients.

In 2021, the EU together with UNEP and UNIDO, launched the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency **(GACERE)** during the fifth meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). GACERE is an alliance that promotes initiatives related to the circular economy transition, resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production. In addition, the EU formally joined the **African Circular Economy**

[32] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

Alliance and **the Circular Economy Coalition** of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2022 as a strategic partner.

To support the transition to sustainability in partner countries, the EU has launched **the 'SWITCH to Green Initiative'** to facilitate the transition to an inclusive green economy that generates growth, creates decent jobs and helps reduce poverty while reducing environmental impact. It supports SWITCH programmes in Africa, Asia and the Mediterranean, the SWITCH to Circular Economy Value Chains project, to the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on sustainable consumption and production (10YFP) and the One Planet Network, as well as the Green Economy Coalition (GEC). This is complemented by programmes like AL-INVEST Verde and EU4Environment (in Latin American and the Caribbean and Eastern Neighbourhood regions) that the EU also supports.

Current **G7/G20** processes of particular interest in advancing the global transition to a circular economy include the G7 Alliance on Resource Efficiency (launched in 2015 under German Presidency) and the G20 Resource Efficiency Dialogue (launched in 2017, also under German Presidency). The Commission launched a Partnership Instrument support contract in 2018 for 'Environmental Diplomacy in G7/G20' to facilitate the EU's engagement in relevant environmental activities and encourage greater ownership of environmental issues within these forums, including through workshops.

EU policy action also addresses the social dimensions of SDG 12. The EU supports globally responsible business conduct and sustainable production and consumption in global supply chains. This includes the promotion of decent work worldwide (Decent Work Worldwide Communication) and of human rights and environmental due diligence throughout global supply chains (Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive).

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 12, the EU has set up several regional programmes to support the switch to more sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns. A 2018 Strategic evaluation of EU international cooperation on SCP concluded that EU actions had resulted in significant green economy policy reforms taking shape in over 45 partner countries and achieved high impact in terms of uptake of SCP practices and increased levels of investments by micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), contributing to the creation of green jobs, and leveraging over EUR 1 billion in investments. For example, SWITCH-ASIA funded 143 projects in the region, supported the uptake of SCP practices by the private sector and facilitated the exchange of information among stakeholders, thus making a significant contribution to the implementation of SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth. In illustration, the SWITCH-Asia 'Mata Kali' project, has worked towards encouraging young people in Indonesia to start their own businesses in the sustainable fish processing sector, thus strong interlinkages with SDGs 8 and 14.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU4Environment programme is contributing to **Global Gateway** investment priorities with strong interlinkages between SDG 12, SDG 7 on energy and SDG 13 on climate change. It has helped public and private actors adopt circular economy principles and practices, enterprises to adopt more resource efficient, cleaner production, and the legislative framework to align with the EU *acquis* in areas such as green procurement (in **Georgia** and **Moldova**) and waste management (in **Armenia, Georgia, Moldova** and **Ukraine**).

In Africa, to transform production and consumption methods , the **Team Europe initiative 'Cacao Durable' in Côte d'Ivoire,** contributing to the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package priorities, pools efforts for sustainable transformation of the cocoa value chain by addressing at the most appropriate level (regulation, voluntary trade agreements, etc.) the economic, social, environmental and political dimensions of this structural transformation in the context of SDG 12. By supporting the monitoring of deforestation, the TEI also addresses climate change and environmental issues and the implementation of SDGs 13 and 15. In Kenya, the **Team Europe initiative on green transition** similarly addresses several interlinked SDGs: it aims to contribute to the

reduction of waste, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by promoting the adoption of sustainable approaches to production, consumption, recycling and logistics.

In Asia, the **Team Europe** initiative (TEI) in **Vietnam** for a '**Climate-resilient, low-carbon circular economy'** contributes to the Global Gateway strategy in three ways. First, it enhances climate resilience by supporting the climate-proofing of infrastructure, livelihoods, investments and production. Secondly, it promotes low-carbon development thus supporting Vietnam's achievement of nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Thirdly, it strives to transform the economy towards a more circular model. Hence, the initiative has strong linkages between various SDGs including 8, 9, 12 and 13.

The '**Green initiative in South-East Asia'** TEI, which also directly contributes to the Global Gateway investment priorities, embodies synergies between the European Green Deal and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. It promotes the joint commitment to a lasting and sustainable transformation towards circular, climate-neutral and environmentally sustainable economies and resilient ecosystems. The TEI targets the regional, sub-regional and country levels via actions on clean, affordable and secure energy (SDG 7), the circular economy (SDG 12), biodiversity and sustainable landscape (SDG 15), sustainable food systems (SDG 2), green and smart cities, and horizontal issues such as pollution, ensuring a just transition, climate change and migration (SDGs 8 and 13).

Similar interlinkages among SDGs can be found in the Latin America and Caribbean region, where in the framework of the Global Gateway, the EU and its Member States, through a Team Europe initiative support **Ecuador's economic green recovery.** The initiative facilitates sustainable private and public investments and stimulates innovation and productivity, in particular in carbon neutral circular and bioeconomy, clean technology and eco-business. The initiative does not only assist Ecuadorian citizens but also support European business investments in Ecuador.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 12. A few such initiatives are set out below for illustrative purposes.

In the context of global supply and value chains, the **PREVENT Waste Alliance** was founded by Germany to help ensure that waste is minimised across the world, harmful substances are eliminated, and resources are managed in circular patterns. This multi-stakeholder platform's mission is to advance the circular economy in low- and middle-income countries. The Alliance includes around 390 member organisations from more than 70 countries that are jointly committed to promoting sustainable practices for secondary raw materials, including their collection, recycling and deployment in partner countries. So far, innovative solutions to prevent waste and progress towards circularity have been tested in 15 countries.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 11. For illustrative purposes, the **Netherlands** supports sustainable production and trade initiatives, through partnerships and agreements on international responsible business conduct, improvement projects in partner countries, private sector instruments, economic diplomacy, trade policy and efforts to strengthen the role of women in trade. In this context, the Netherlands has funded civil society actors such as Solidaridad, the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), Fair Wear and the Rainforest Alliance, which facilitate working directly with farmers, small producers and large companies to move towards sustainable production (in Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique). Furthermore, through the Fund for Responsible Business, the Netherlands encourages companies to work with civil society organisations to tackle the risks and abuses in their value chains.

Looking ahead

To protect future generations, the EU must decouple economic growth and human well-being from virgin resource use and subsequent negative environmental impacts. It needs to move to a regenerative economic model based on the polluter pays principle, which returns to the planet more resources than used.

Implementing a circular economy will reduce demands for primary resources and energy, thus reducing dependencies and increasing the resilience to shocks such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is particularly important as the demand for key raw materials in renewables and e-mobility will increase multiple times from 2030 to 2050[33].

In 2023, the Commission intends to put forward several proposals aimed at deepening the circular economy. The Commission will review the **Waste Framework Directive** to introduce food waste reduction targets which will contribute to reaching the global SDG target 12.3, as well as presenting legislation on sustainable food systems, including food sustainability labelling. In this context, the Commission will also propose provisions on textile waste management with the aim to ensure a higher level of circularity. Moreover, it will propose measures to reduce unintentional releases of microplastics into the environment and revise the REACH legislation.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 12 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where sustainable consumption and production patters are a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 12 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of **Global Gateway** and its dedicated regional investment plans at regional and national level, including through the Team Europe initiatives highlighted above.

[33] In-depth reviews of strategic areas for Europe's interests.

SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Through the **European Green Deal**, the EU is progressing on SDG 13 and has made strong commitments to address the climate crisis domestically and internationally. It has set itself the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and reducing net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990.

The EU and its Member States have met their international climate commitment under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): to achieve, by 2020, a 20% reduction in GHG emissions compared to 1990 levels. Total GHG emissions, excluding land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) and including international aviation, fell by 32%.

The EU is supporting its Member States in adapting to the impacts of extreme weather and becoming climate-resilient through the updated **Climate Adaptation Strategy**. All Member States now have **a national adaptation strategy or plan**. The EU is also working to predict and measure the impact of climate disasters more accurately.

The EU and its Member States, acting jointly, submitted their updated **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)** to the UNFCCC in December 2020, setting out a binding target of a net domestic reduction of at least 55% in GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. Member States are required to develop 10-year **national energy and climate plans**. Each country must submit a progress report every 2 years. Member States are also required to submit national long term strategies looking forward to 2050.

EU funds and instruments increasingly support the green and just transition, as seen in the Sustainable Finance Action Plan, EU taxonomy, Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation, Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, European Green Bond Standard and Benchmark Regulations among others.

Progress is being made on international climate finance, and although the global collective goal of mobilising USD 100 billion a year for partner countries has not been met by the donor countries as a whole, the EU and its Member States remain the world's largest provider of climate finance, with total EU contributions reaching EUR 23.04 billion in 2021.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
By 2030, reduce net greenhouse gas emissions at EU level by at least 55% compared to 1990 European Green Deal European Climate Law	The EU and its Member States have met their international climate commitment under the UNFCCC to achieve, by 2020, a 20% reduction in GHG emissions compared to 1990 levels. By 2020, total GHG emissions, excluding land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) and including international aviation, fell by 32%.since 1990. For all main sectors and gases,

	except buildings, emissions are expected to remain below pre-pandemic levels, continuing the overall downward trend of the past 30 years. Overall, EU emissions in 2021, including LULUCF and international aviation, were 29.7 % lower than 1990 levels, broadly consistent with the trajectory to achieve the EU 55% reduction target by 2030. However, the speed of reduction needs to increase significantly.
Contribution of the sectors covered by the EU emissions trading system (ETS) of 62% in 2030 compared to 2005 **Emission reductions of 42 % in 2030 compared to 2005 for the sectors of buildings and road transport** Set in the ETS Directive	By 2021, the EU ETS had driven emissions from stationary installations down by 34.6%[1] against 2005 levels. In parallel, Member States have raised over EUR 100 billion in auction revenues since 2013, available for further climate action and energy transformation. In 2021, EU ETS emissions increased slightly compared with 2020, reflecting both the economic recovery from COVID-19 and the developing energy crisis. While 2021 emissions remained on a downward trend compared with 2019 pre-pandemic levels, more action is needed in ETS sectors to meet the 2030 climate target. [1] Update reflecting the departure of the UK from the EU and the ETS.
Overall ambition of the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) is increased by 11 percentage points from -29% to -40% (compared to 2005) Set in the Effort Sharing Regulation	Since 2013, EU-wide emissions in the effort sharing sectors have been below the annual limit. Emissions covered by the Effort Sharing Decision were 16.3% lower in 2020 than in 2005; the EU overachieved its 2020 target by 6 percentage points. All Member States met their effort sharing obligations in all years between 2013 and 2019.
Net removals by the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector of 310 million tonnes CO_2 equivalent in 2030 **Member-State-level binding targets for 2030** **A budget for 2026-2029** Set in the LULUCF Regulation	In the EU, LULUCF emits less GHG into the atmosphere than the CO_2 it removes through biogenic processes, but recent years have seen a decline in this natural carbon sink. For 2013 to 2020, Member States committed to accounting for additional action in LULUCF, in reported GHG emissions and CO_2 removals, to assess the target under the Kyoto Protocol. GHG net removals by LULUCF has been increasing by 10,15% from 1990 to 2021, based on the final 2021 GHG inventory. A strong positive initial trend in 1990-2006 (68,3%) was reversed between 2006 and 2021. The net removals were 230,0 Mt CO2-equivalent in 2021, well below the target proposed.
55% CO_2 emission reduction target (i.e. 100% zero emission vehicles) for new cars and 50% for new vans by 2030 compared to 2021 **100% CO_2 emission reduction target for both new cars and vans by 2035**	Average CO_2 emissions per km from new passenger cars registered in the EU fell by 9.4% between 2015 and 2020. Since 2021, data are collected according to a new procedure and figures are not comparable to the period 2015-2020. In 2021, average CO_2 emissions per km from new passenger cars stood at 116.3 g/km. The

CO2 emission performance standards for cars and vans	share of zero-emission vehicles in newly registered passenger cars rose from 0.4% in 2015 to 5.3% in 2020, even though the share differs considerably across the EU Member States.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 13 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

To deliver on the 2030 target and the climate neutrality target, in July 2021, the European Commission tabled the **Fit for 55 Package (FF55)** of legislative proposals. This package reflects the increased ambition in horizontal and sectorial legislation, particularly for industry, transport, buildings, land use, and the internal energy market. It includes dedicated measures aimed at ensuring the sufficient availability of alternative fuel infrastructure – notably electric recharging infrastructure – as well as the increased use of sustainable fuels in aviation and maritime transport, in addition to support measures for the green just transition, through the new **Social Climate Fund** and enhanced **Modernisation Fund** and **Innovation Fund.**

A new **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism** **(CBAM)** will put a carbon price on imports of a selection of products to create a level playing field that incentivises producers in non-EU countries to green their production processes.

Alongside mitigation actions, the importance of adaptation measures cannot be overstated. The **EU's 2021 Adaptation Strategy** has begun delivering results and achieving important milestones in a broad range of policy fields such as, for example, the adoption of new guidance on how to climate-proof future infrastructure projects. The research and innovation initiative 'Mission on Adaptation' is making good progress; 118 regions and local authorities have signed the associated Charter to date and 12 calls for funding have been launched. The **EU Action Plan for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** includes adaptation measures at both the EU and international level, linking these to disaster risk-reduction and management strategies. Additionally, the **EU Civil Protection Mechanism** provides assistance for Member States dealing with emergencies following a natural disaster.

Selected enablers

In 2020, the EU adopted the **European Green Deal Investment Plan** (EGDIP). The plan will mobilise EUR 1 trillion in sustainable investments before 2030. A selection of financing mechanisms are outlined below.

At least 30% of the current **Multiannual Financial Framework** will be spent on climate objectives. Other spending programmes also have climate spending targets of at least 30%. These include **Horizon Europe** (35%), the **Cohesion Fund** (37%), the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** (30%), the **Connecting Europe Facility** (60%), and the **LIFE programme** (61%).

The **Innovation Fund** funds the rollout of innovative low carbon technologies. It is financed by the EU ETS and will provide over EUR 38 billion in the coming decade. **The Modernisation Fund** (EUR 51 billion) and **Social Climate Fund** (EUR 72.2 billion) assist Member States with investment in energy systems, energy efficiency and clean mobility among others.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU launched its **NextGeneration EU**. Through the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, consisting of EUR 338 billion in grants and EUR 385.5 billion in loans, at least 37% of the resources in the national recovery and resilience plans must be allocated to climate action and the green transition. The national recovery and resilience plans have allocated 40% of this planned expenditure to achieve the EU climate objectives.

The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund** will provide more than EUR 94 billion for climate action, a substantial increase from the EUR 56 billion invested in the 2014-2020 programming period.

The **Just Transition Fund** **has an EU contribution of EUR 19.2 billion for investments by 2027** for carbon-intensive regions to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the green transition.

InvestEU will spend 30% of its EUR 372 billion budget on climate objectives. Furthermore, 60 % of the investments under the Sustainable Infrastructure Window will be spent on climate and environment.

The **Horizon Europe programme** will allocate at least 35 % of its EUR 95.5 billion budget to climate action and the green transition through the Climate, Energy, and Mobility work programme.

The **Horizon mission for adaptation to climate change** supports EU regions, cities, and local authorities in building resilience against the impacts of climate change. By 2030, at least 150 European regions and communities will be climate-resilient.

The **Horizon Europe** Health Cluster aims to promote healthy societies in Europe. In this regard, the CATALYSE programme aims to catalyse climate action in Europe and to protect public health through the provision of new knowledge, data and tools. It is in the process of developing an indicator framework, quantifying health co-benefits, developing forecasting tools and strategies, and providing evidence and training on the most effective strategies.

EIT Climate-KIC, a Knowledge and Innovation Community supported by European Institute of Innovation and Technology since 2010, has a common ambition to create a prosperous, inclusive, climate-resilient society with a circular, zero-carbon economy, where the long-term impact is to achieve deep decarbonisation and strengthen climate resilience through innovation. EIT Climate-KIC takes urgent actions to combat climate change and its impacts primarily through integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning as well as by strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and national disasters.

Another example is the project for ‘Pilot implementation of the national plan for integrated wildland fire management’ in **Portugal**, supported by the Technical Support Instrument under the call for 2021. The afforested lands provide goods and services for local villages and communities and foster prosperity. The aim of the national plan is to protect people and their property from severe rural wildland fires, developing at-risk territories and ensuring proper care for ecosystems.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders are at the heart of climate action and the EU is committed to providing them with channels for input and dialogue. Since young people will be acutely affected by climate change, it is vital that their voices are heard. For that reason, the EU is engaged in active dialogue with young people and exploring new forums where young people youth can engage directly with policymakers.

The **European Climate Pact** gives people in the EU a platform for designing new climate initiatives, amplifying activities, sharing knowledge, and showcasing solutions. Over 4 million pledges have been made by EU citizens to shape a climate-friendly society.

The **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** fosters the engagement of cities and local governments in climate action, leading to a fairer, climate-neutral Europe. In 2022, there were over 10 000 signatories to the Covenant committed to reducing GHG emissions by 55% by 2030.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery requires ambitious action at all levels. Some examples of good practices in implementing SDG 13 are given below.

In **Finland**, a network was launched in 2008 bringing together municipalities, regions, businesses, members of the public and experts to find ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Coordinated by the Finnish Environment Institute, the Towards Carbon Neutral Municipalities network facilitates knowledge exchange regarding good practices in climate change mitigation, supports the municipalities in their climate action and creates demand for climate-friendly products and services.

The city of **Vienna in Austria** uses participatory budgeting to accelerate climate action and strengthen democracy. The Vienna Climate Teams put out public calls ideas for climate action. 1100 ideas have been submitted and checked by city experts, who selected 238 for a co-creation workshop where members of the public and experts clustered ideas into 102 projects. A representative jury of members of the public selected 19 winning projects. These will be financed by the city and implemented within 2 years. In 2022 and 2023, the project covers six districts with a budget of EUR 13 million.

EU external action

Global trends

Insufficient progress has been made on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. According to the 2022 UN SDG Report, based on current national commitments, by 2030 global emissions could have increased by almost 14% compared to 2010. Over the last two decades, the number of low- and middle-income countries exposed to climate extremes increased from 76% to 98%.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Climate action is a central part of the EU external policy toolbox and strongly linked with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Climate diplomacy remains a core component of EU foreign and security policy and is increasingly important for the EU's international engagement. The EU participates actively in the UNFCCC processes in support of SDGs 13 and 7.

To support the transition of partner countries to a climate-resilient, net-zero emissions economy, the EU organises climate dialogues and regional and bilateral cooperation activities, including high-level dialogues on climate change with the US, Canada, India, Japan, South Korea and others. A major vehicle for climate diplomacy is the EU Climate Dialogue (EUCDs) project. The objective of such dialogues is to project the European Green Deal priorities abroad and to make EU knowledge and experience available to major economies outside Europe in order to facilitate action by them to implement the Paris Agreement.

As part of its efforts to implement the external aspects of the European Green Deal, the EU seeks green alliances with key partners who share the EU's ambitions and the objective of climate neutrality by 2050. The alliances involve a commitment to cooperate on climate action through facilitating the green transition by reducing emissions, phasing out fossil fuel energy, deploying low-carbon technologies, and supporting mitigation and adaptation efforts. The EU has signed Green Alliances with Japan and Norway and a Green Partnership with Morocco.

The EU and several partner countries established 'The Coalition of Trade Ministers on Climate' to foster global action to promote trade policies that can help address climate change through local and global initiatives. The Coalition aims to build partnerships between trade and climate communities to identify ways in which trade policy

can help address climate change. It will promote trade and investment in goods, services and technologies that help mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The EU supports science-based decision-making by offering information and by basing decisions on the latest available science. In this regard, the EU's scientific lighthouses such as **Copernicus** and the **European Marine Observation and Data Network** provide data and information on an open access basis to inform climate services (e.g. remote sensing, smart weather stations and artificial intelligence). These instruments are powerful tools for monitoring implementation of the Paris Agreement objectives and NDCs. This is particularly important for partner countries , where monitoring tools and early warning systems are often insufficient.

Commitments and accounting under the Paris Agreement and UNFCCC cover greenhouse gases in the country where they are emitted. There is increasing focus on the impacts of **consumption and production** on greenhouse gas emissions. Further research is required to understand the overall dynamics of the impact of imported and exported goods and services on global emissions. Current estimates of technology-adjusted consumption-based emissions for the EU suggest that these follow a similar trend to the production-based emissions accounted for under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement. Eurostat is also working on statistics on GHG emissions associated with EU trade in goods and services.

While it provides technical assistance and support to partner countries to decarbonise their economies, the EU is ready to explore possibilities for dialogue and cooperation with low- and middle- income countries regarding implementation of the **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism,** having regard to policy coherence for development. The EU is committed to ensuring that trade contributes to sustainable development and combatting climate change. All modern EU trade and investment agreements include trade and sustainable development (TSD) chapters, including provisions on the implementation of global climate commitments.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

There are two main sources of information to track support for SDG 13. As with other SDGs, EU support for SDG 13 can be estimated where this specific SDG field is marked in projects reported to the OECD-DAC. In addition, the OECD climate mitigation and adaptation markers, which are the basis for climate finance reporting to the UNFCCC and under the EU Governance Regulation, can be used to identify measures that contribute to fighting climate change and SDG 13. The assessments made in preparing this Review indicate that there is scope for greater consistency between these complementary and related reporting tracks.

In 2021, EU institutions reported to OECD commitments amounting to EUR 5.8 billion in projects contributing to SDG 13. A substantial proportion of the EU contribution was from projects targeting SDG 13 as the main objective. These projects also contribute to several other interlinked SDGs such as SDGs 5, 7, 8, 9 and 11. EU support for SDG 13 also includes a significant number of projects targeting SDG 13 as a significant objective, clearly underlining the cross-cutting nature of SDG 13. This SDG has been mostly commonly associated with interventions where the main SDG was SDG 1, 8, 16 or 17. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 13 amounted to EUR 11.8 billion in 2021. In terms of selected results of assistance[34], EU support contributed to 95.8 million tons of CO_2 emissions averted in the period 2018-2021.

Collectively, the EU and Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021, contributed EUR 16.2 billion to SDG 13. EU and Member State flows to SDG 13 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (35%), Asia (25%), America and the Caribbean (14%) and other countries in Europe (14%). There is also a global component (12%). A significant share of this contribution to SDG 13 has been provided through global thematic funds such as the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund or the Clean Technology Fund. Considering the five

[34] For the methodology and results, please see the description under SDG 2.

main global climate funds, EU and Member States contributions to global funds related to SDG 13 is estimated at EUR 15.7 billion.[35]

As for the reporting on climate finance for developing countries, this is based on annual reporting by EU Member States under the EU Governance Regulation. This reporting complies with the relevant reporting requirements under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement and uses the OECD-DAC mitigation and adaptation markers (the 'Rio Markers'). Under this reporting system, in 2021 the EU and the 27 Member States reported a cumulative total of EUR 23.04 billion committed from public sources to support developing countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

EU Member States are important donors to global funds supporting the fight against climate change. The EU Member States account for approximately 60% of global contributions to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the largest global fund focusing on climate. EU Member States' contributions to the GCF account for USD 9.4 billion out of a total donor contribution of USD 15.8 billion. EU Member States have also made sizeable contributions to the Strategic Climate Fund and the Clean Technology Fund (CTF). Significant contributions have also been made to the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and the Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) established under the UNFCCC. EU commitments on adaptation have translated into a EUR 100 million contribution to the Adaptation Fund (with EUR 80 million earmarked for sub-Saharan Africa), making the EU and its Member States the biggest contributor to the fund, with more than EUR 350 million committed.

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The EU continues to be at the forefront of international efforts to promote sustainable and inclusive development, in line with the external dimension of the **European Green Deal**, with climate change a central theme. The European Green Deal is Europe's blueprint for implementing a sustainable recovery model to 'build back better' globally, together with the European Consensus on Development and the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation 2021-2027. Reflecting this ambition, the EU set itself the target of dedicating 30% of the NDICI-Global Europe financial envelope to climate spending for 2021-2027. This target will be exceeded after the announcement by the Commission President, in her 2021 State of the Union address, of an additional effort of EUR 4 billion, taking the figure to 35%. The EU's new Global Gateway strategy is expected to make a major contribution to the green transition. Being particularly geared towards climate mitigation, it represents a major economic opportunity for low and middle-income countries.

The EU remains an active voice in the international arena in promoting the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient economies. The EU is also committed to international cooperation and supporting partner countries' own policies and plans for climate action including those related to climate adaptation (in line with the 2021 EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change) or with a focus on climate mitigation towards decarbonisation and energy transition. By working closely with international organisations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the EU plays an important role in the advocacy and design of concrete measures such as the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) aimed at reaching science-based global emission reduction goals consistent with the Paris Agreement.

Climate change and the environment are being integrated by the EU into all its policies and interventions. Continuous support is provided for implementation and upgrading of NDCs and **national adaptation plans** globally, and for commitment to **the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** (SFDRR) 2015-2030. In 2021, the Commission supported international climate governance, sustainable energy transition, the global pledge on reducing methane emissions, phasing out of coal and the just transition as well other environmental actions. This included direct support for 60 countries, for the design and implementation of their NDCs. Ongoing

[35] The calculations consider total EU and Member State historical contributions to the following funds: Adaptation Fund, Clean technology Fund, Green Climate Fund (GCF), Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF) and Strategic Climate Fund (SCF).

initiatives in the fields of renewable energy, resource efficiency, circular economy, sustainable urban development and health resilience also supported the implementation of SDGs 3, 7, 11, 13 and 17.

Several Team Europe initiatives (TEIs) address climate change as a priority. The TEI on climate change adaptation and resilience in Africa, part of the Global Gateway Africa-EU Investment Package, is a leading example in this field with the EU and selected Member States joining efforts by bringing together existing and new programmes, including current contributions to global climate funds, under African leadership. Other relevant TEIs include **the DeSIRA programme** which addresses the development of smart and climate-resilient agriculture in Africa, Latin America, and Asia; and projects on water, energy and climate in Central Asia; the **Africa-EU Green Energy initiative and the EU-Pacific Green-Blue Alliance,** which also contributes to the objectives of Global Gateway.

The EU's overall policy frameworks for its neighbouring regions are enshrined in the Economic and Investment Plans (EIPs). The **EIP for the Western Balkans** aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region and speed up economic convergence with the EU. It is accompanied by guidelines for implementing the Green Agenda in line with the EU Green Deal. Close to EUR 30 billion in funding is expected to be mobilised through grants, guarantees and preferential loans to the region. Similarly, the **EIP for the Eastern Partnership** aims to mobilise potential investments of up to EUR 17 billion across all policy sectors through the EFSD+ and other financial instruments, with green transition playing a central role.

In 2021, the EU and the US launched the **Global Methane Pledge** in an effort to slash methane emissions by 30 % by 2030 compared to 2020 levels. So far, 150 countries have joined the pledge, and more than 50 countries have developed national methane action plans or are in the process of doing so. The EU action plan focusing on energy, agriculture and waste, contributes to various SDGs, such as 2, 7 and 12. The EU also supports the **establishment and operationalization of the International Methane Emission Observatory (IMEO)** in collaboration with various international agencies.

In its Communication on the EU's Humanitarian Action of 2021, the Commission highlighted that climate change also has a humanitarian impact. By 2050, over 200 million people could need humanitarian assistance every year due to climate-related disasters. As climate and weather-related crises are increasing in both frequency and severity, the EU humanitarian budget allocated for disasters caused by natural hazards has steadily grown over the years. To this end, climate and environmental resilience are one of the priorities for the dedicated budget line for preparedness in the EU humanitarian aid budget for 2021-2024. At the same time, the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations will be applied from 2023. These will contribute to climate change mitigation by reducing emissions from EU-funded humanitarian aid.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 13, the EU and its Member States are actively supporting climate finance initiatives benefiting partner countries. By way of illustration, the joint V20/G7 initiative of a **Global Shield against Climate Risks** offers financial and social protection to the most vulnerable countries dealing with climate-related loss and damage. Including strengthened coordination within the global climate and disaster risk finance and insurance (CDRFI) architecture, this initiative was launched at COP27, with Germany already pledging EUR 170 million. The **InsuResilience Global Partnership** is an international alliance that promotes the scale-up of climate and disaster risk finance and insurance solutions (total EUR 1 billion contributed by all donors, with the majority provided by EU Member States). Similarly, the multi-country risk pool **African Risk Capacity**, supported by several Member States and the European Commission, enables African Union Member States to take out insurance policies for droughts and tropical cyclones.

The EU also funds the **African Adaptation Initiative**, an African Union-mandated initiative in which African partners are taking the lead as key facilitators for Africa's action on adaptation and in averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage on the continent. Strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related

risks and natural disasters aims to reduce inequality within and between the most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change, while reducing the expected large-scale migration.

The intensity and frequency of natural hazards and disasters is expected to increase due to climate change. To address this, the Intra-ACP **Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Programme** (EUR 100 million) provides a coordinated response by non-state and state actors to reduce the impact of natural hazards and disasters and increase the overall resilience in 79 African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries. To track change, the **Global Monitoring for Environment & Security (GMES) & Africa,** an EU-African Union joint initiative, aims to strengthen and further develop infrastructure for more coherent Earth observation data by adapting Copernicus Earth Observation Programme data and services to African needs.

To strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of partner countries, the EU and its Member States have proposed several initiatives that contribute to the Global Gateway and the priorities set out in its dedicated regional investment packages. A Territorial Team Europe Initiative **'Green Deal and Resilience in the Septentrion'** in Cameroon aims to reduce the long-term risk of security and territorial crises and prevent the effects of climate change and the degradation of natural resources. To improve the climate ambition and resilience and recovery in coastal regions, **the Green-Blue Alliance in the Pacific,** a TEI launched in 2022, supports mitigation and adaptation efforts in 15 Pacific Island countries and 3 French Overseas Territories, by mainstreaming and enhancing climate ambition and disaster risk management, and developing a stewardship model reconciling biodiversity, environmental protection, and restoration with sustainable development. In the field of energy, the **TEI on green energy transition** in Bangladesh, contributing to Global Gateway investment priorities, aims to support the building of a power system for maximum coverage of the country's energy demand through renewable energy. It does this by promoting public and private investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency measures.

The Commission also supports climate and environmental resilience as one of the priorities for preparedness in EU humanitarian aid in, for example, **Bangladesh, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Region** (linking it to disaster preparedness), **Madagascar** (nexus with food and nutrition), **Central America and Mexico** (disaster and conflict preparedness), **Cuba** (drought management), and **the Caribbean** (disaster emergency management with the World Food Programme).

Action by the EU and its Member States is mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 13. Some of these are described below.

On the margins of PreCop26, **Italy** hosted the **Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition** event, which then evolved into the Youth4Climate initiative, an **annual event** to empower youth activities. Co-led by Italy and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this **virtual platform for knowledge-sharing and training promotes climate action** through the identification and support of concrete and advanced solutions led by young people.

France has been supporting **Mexico's** national effort to reduce gas emissions by 50% by 2050 by providing **climate loans** for forest preservation and ecological territorial development, climate change economics and the adaptation of agriculture to climate change, and by supporting Mexico's energy transition, focusing on water governance and water and power infrastructure renovation and rehabilitation.

Under the **Sahel climate programme**, **Belgium** is helping to restore about 10 000 h of land to fertility through investments in better rainwater storage and tree planting. The aim is to support sustainable local solutions and

protect existing ecosystems, including the Great Green Wall project. By combating desertification, local communities can continue to ensure their food security in the longer term.

In 2019, at the UN Climate Action Summit, **Greece** launched the initiative '**Addressing climate change impacts on cultural and natural heritage'** to raise awareness and strengthen cultural and natural resilience to climate risks.

Looking ahead

Domestically, the EU will continue to deliver on the European Green Deal and work towards SDG 13 by implementing packages of climate and environment measures. These will aim, in particular to speed up renewable energy infrastructure deployment and other sustainable solutions in industry, transport and buildings and to promote sustainable agriculture and land use through carbon removal certification – a regulatory framework to reward land managers for carbon sequestration, in full respect of ecological principles ('carbon farming').

The implementation of the Energy Union and Climate Action Governance Regulation has established a flexible but transparent and cooperative system between the EU and its Member States. In the coming 2 years, Member States will submit their updated national energy and climate plans to reflect new legislation and geopolitical developments. Their adoption will be a major step towards implementing the energy and climate transition, while also ensuring movement towards the objectives of the European Green Deal and the REPowerEU Plan, including supporting local communities and households in this transition.

On the external side, the EU will work on further promoting a coordinated approach to investment in climate action in partner countries. It will continue to take resolute action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 13 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where climate action is a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 13 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of **Global Gateway** at regional and national level through Team Europe initiatives, such as the one on climate change adaptation and resilience in Africa as part of the Africa-Europe Investment Package. Under the external dimension of the European Green Deal, the EU is also negotiating a Green Partnership with South Korea.

Similarly, the Green-Blue Alliance in the Pacific is another Team Europe initiative launched in 2022 that will support Global Gateway investment priorities at regional level. The EU is also committed to working with other developed counties to urgently implement the 'Climate Finance Delivery Plan: Meeting the USD 100 Billion Goal' by 2023. The EU has committed to the Glasgow goal of at least doubling the collective provision of climate finance for adaptation by 2025 from 2019 levels. The EU will also work on averting, minimising, and addressing loss and damage as a result of climate change, and on achieving the Glasgow goal on finance for adaptation. The EU aims to deploy a range of Global Gateway **priority flagships projects** on urban transport **infrastructure** as a contribution to SDGs 13, 11 and other interlinked SDGs, including on electric mobility and sustainable transport.

Speeding up the green transition is necessary to tackle the climate crisis and to strengthen global economies and geopolitical security. Climate action remains at the core of global politics and recent shocks to energy systems prove the need for resilience against international pressures. The food and energy crisis sparked by Russian aggression in Ukraine has increased the need for renewable sources of energy and resilience against global shocks to the energy markets. The EU remains committed to achieving SDG 13 on climate action within the EU and is supporting partner countries with their implementation goals through development cooperation.

SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

SDG 14 is the compass of EU's ocean policy and there are no significant policy gaps in the EU policy framework.[36] Building on a comprehensive set of policies and legislation, the EU recently renewed its agenda on international ocean governance (target 14.C) for a sustainable blue economy and a sustainable fisheries policy. Progress is being made towards sustainable fishing in the North-East Atlantic Ocean and Baltic Sea, and the EU pursues an effective zero tolerance approach towards illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (target 14.4), while the area designated as marine protected areas (MPAs) (12%) has already exceeded 10% of EU waters (target 14.5).

However, many other SDG 14 targets are unlikely to be met by the agreed timelines. The good environmental status defined by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive has not been achieved. Regarding pollution (target 14.1), 46% of European coastal waters suffer from eutrophication caused by excess nutrients. High concentrations of at least certain contaminants are found in all European sea basins and in seafood. Marine litter, notably plastics, is present in all compartments of the marine environment. Between 2014 and 2019, the total volume of underwater noise more than doubled in EU waters. Maritime traffic is a major source of continuous underwater noise, while oil and gas and offshore renewables are the main source of impulsive noise.

The loss of biodiversity has not yet been halted in Europe's seas (target 14.2). Across European seas, seabed habitats are under significant pressure from fishing, coastal developments and other activities.

Together with the landmark Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted in December 2022, (see more details in the chapter on SDG 15), the agreement on marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction concluded in February 2023 will aim to protect 30% of international marine waters.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends
Achieve a Good Ecological/Environmental Status in coastal waters by 2027 and marine environment by 2020 Water Framework Directive (WFD) Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)	In 2020, good environmental status was not achieved for all descriptors (quality parameters) of the marine environment, as defined by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). In 2018, 58% of surface waters (rivers, lakes and transitional and coastal waters) had not achieved the WFD's 'good ecological status'[37], which would be one of the reasons the MSFD's objective has not been achieved. Nevertheless, there have been drastic improvements in terms of the determination of good environmental status, the knowledge base, data availability and

[36] Assessment of the existing EU policy tools in the field of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 and other ocean-related Agenda 2030 targets (europa.eu).
[37] Ecological status of surface waters in Europe (europa.eu)

	monitoring mechanisms and methodologies for the marine environment.
Legally protect and effectively manage at least 30% and strictly protect at least 10% of EU sea area EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 Birds Directive and Habitats Directive	In 2021, 9% of the EU's seas were **protected** areas under the Natura 2000 network, with an additional 3% covered by national protection schemes. Only 1% of the sea area is strictly protected and many marine protected areas are still not effectively managed. Significant activities related to marine-based **restoration** have been implemented, yet an estimate of the restoration area is not available. It is clear, however, that the EU did not meet the voluntary target to restore at least 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2020, which was included in the previous EU Biodiversity Strategy .
Reach Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for fish stocks regulated under the Common Fisheries Policy by 2020. **Adhere to zero-tolerance policy towards illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing**. EU Common Fisheries Policy	MSY was achieved for major commercial fish stocks. In 2020, the overall ratio of fishing mortality to MSY level (F/FMSY) fell below 1 in the Northeast Atlantic for the first time (overfishing occurs when F/FMSY≥1). Other stocks remain overfished and/or outside safe biological limits. In the Baltic Sea, due to the dire environmental situation and a history of overfishing, habitat loss and declines in fish biomass have been recorded. In the Mediterranean, steps towards the MSY objective were observed, with a decrease of F/FMSY below 2 for the first time since 2003. However, the state of most stocks in the Mediterranean and Black Seas remains critical.
50% reduction of nutrient losses, of the use and risk of chemical pesticides, of the use of the more hazardous ones, and of the sale of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture. **50% reduction of plastic litter at sea and 30% reduction of microplastics in the aquatic environment** Zero Pollution Action Plan Priority Substances Directive Farm to Fork Strategy Proposal for a Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides	Progress towards the -50% **nutrient losses** is measured with the help of three indicators. Firstly, the gross nitrogen balance (kg per ha utilised in agricultural area) slightly increased in the EU-28 from 2008 to 2015. Secondly, data on nitrates concentration in the EU show that groundwater quality has improved over the past 30 years. Thirdly, the gross phosphorus balance (in kg per ha utilised in agricultural area) slightly decreased from 1.7 to 1.6 from 2008 to 2015. The Gross Nitrogen Balance was 46 kg/ha of utilised agricultural area and Gross Phosphorus Balance 1 kg/ha of UAA (EU average 2012-14). The share of groundwater monitoring stations with nitrates concentrations above 50 mg/L was 14.1% as EU average in 2016–2019, slightly up from 13.2% in the period 2012-15. Under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), a threshold value for **beach litter** was agreed on in 2020. Monitoring activities provided beach litter data for several years but harmonised methodologies for their collection and assessment have only recently been put in place; collection and

	processing of recent data is being finalised, which will make it possible to identify trends. For **microplastics**, a baseline for quantities is being set, while work will continue throughout 2023 on baselines and threshold values for seafloor macro litter, floating macro litter and micro litter and threshold values.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 14 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

An important body of legislation is in place to achieve the goal of preserving coastal and marine environments, notably: the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, the Invasive Alien Species Regulation, the Bathing Water Directive, the Urban Wastewater Directive, the Nitrates Directive, the EU waste law, the Directive on Single Use Plastics and the Port Reception Facilities Directive.

The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, the EU's new approach for a **sustainable blue economy,** and the **common fisheries policy** (CFP), which underwent deep reform in 2013, contribute to the sustainable use of marine resources, to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to preserving biodiversity.

These policies are complemented by other EU initiatives such as the Circular Economy Action Plan, the EU Plastics Strategy, the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan and the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles.

In 2022, the Commission adopted criteria and guidance for the identification and designation of additional protected areas. Under the **Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, Member States are expected to submit pledges for new areas to be designated. These pledges will be discussed in biogeographical seminars in 2023.

In early 2023, the Commission proposed an important set of measures to improve the sustainability and resilience of the EU's fisheries and aquaculture sector, including a Pact to foster sustainable, science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management, an Action plan to protect and restore marine ecosystems and an action plan to foster the energy transition in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Selected enablers

The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) supports the achievement of SDG 14 through support in implementing the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the EU maritime policy and the EU agenda for international ocean governance. Between 2021 and 2027, EMFAF has a total budget of EUR 6.108 billion. Here is an example of a project under EMFAF's predecessor, the European Maritime and Fisheries fund (EMFF):

- The Maricap aquaculture project promoted small-scale, sustainable and virtuous aquaculture in Capraia, a remote island in Tuscany that used to be dependent on fishing and seasonal tourism. New high-skilled and well-paid jobs were created in ecologically sound and sustainable marine aquaculture.

The Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) has funded more than a hundred marine projects since 1992. For the period 2021 to 2027, LIFE has a total budget of EUR 5.43 billion. It supports the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directive, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and other EU maritime-related policies. Examples of projects include:

- Integrative, Innovative and Participatory Management for Natura2000 Network in the Marine Environment (LIFE INTEMARES) is one of the largest marine environment conservation projects in

Europe. It integrates various funds, policies and actors across Spain's national network of marine protected areas to bolster critical knowledge of management practices, improve the monitoring of habitat types and species, and guarantee the conservation of marine species and habitats with sustainable socio-economic development.

Copernicus, the EU's flagship for Earth observation, and the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODNET) will be key to providing ocean data and observations in the EU and worldwide. The EU is a top provider of ocean science, with up to 85% of all funding being provided by its Member States. Under Horizon Europe, about EUR 350 million annually is earmarked from the EU budget to contribute to this over the 2021-2027 period. In addition, for 2021-2023, the 'Restore Our Ocean and Waters by 2030' mission will receive about EUR 110 million each year.

The Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 Mission will support the aforementioned targets and protect some 25 000 km of free-flowing rivers. It also aims to make the blue economy climate-neutral and circular with net-zero maritime emissions. In addition, it will heighten citizens' awareness and scientific knowledge (target SDG 14.a) and strengthen ocean observation through a European digital twin of the ocean.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 14 in a collaborative approach. For example,

- The Fisheries Advisory Councils are stakeholder-led platforms which provide the European Commission and EU countries with recommendations on fisheries management.
- The European Maritime Day is an annual event during which Europe's maritime community meet to network, discuss and outline joint action on maritime affairs and a sustainable blue economy.
- The EU Marine Strategy Coordination Group for the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and involving Member States brings together key stakeholders and the European Commission.
- The #EUBeachCleanup campaign, co-organised by the EU and the United Nations around World Coastal Clean-up Day every year in September is a key event to raise awareness about marine litter.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 14 include:

Ireland's Programme for Government-Our Shared Future (2020) commits to achieving 10% MPA (marine protected area) coverage of the maritime area as soon as is practicable and 30% coverage by 2030. To that end, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is developing specific new legislation to underpin and enable the identification, designation and management of MPAs.

Community-led local development (CLLD) is supported by the EU in coastal and fisheries areas. Fisheries local action groups (FLAGs) are partnerships between fisheries actors and other local private and public stakeholders to address their area's needs, involving thousands of local stakeholders. In the 2014-2020 period, 348 FLAGs were operational under the EMFF in 19 Member States and supported over 10 000 local projects with EUR 440 million of EMFF funding. Examples of projects include:

- **Marine protected areas under fishers' surveillance:** fishers are helping enforce protection measures and halt poaching in the region's oldest fisheries marine reserve, Cabo de Palos, Spain. Its improved protection has led to an increase of endemic species.
- **A coastal management plan by local fishers and fish farmers**. They have been actively involved in designing a coastal stock management plan for the Emilia-Romagna coastline, focusing on three local high value species identified by the sector at regional level.

The **Flanders Marine Institute in Belgium** promotes marine knowledge creation through interdisciplinary research and collaboration at all levels. The principle of co-design is central in its approach, with collaboration with other marine research groups, citizens, policy makers and industrial partners. Its InnovOcean Campus hosts partners from the global and European level to Flemish marine research institutes, provincial authorities. The institute connects local to global across all ocean-related SDGs.

EU external action

Global trends

In relation to SDG 14, the increasingly adverse impacts of marine pollution and climate change, combined with overfishing, are jeopardising recent gains in protecting portions of the world's oceans. Cumulative impacts threaten organisms and ecosystem services, and hence food security, tourism and coastal protection. Between 2009 and 2018, the world lost about 14% of its coral reefs, and the oceans are also under increasing stress from multiple sources of pollution, which is harmful to marine life and eventually makes its way into the food chain. Trends for marine ecosystems' status are in general not positive. However, the efforts made by governments to protect these environments, and especially their key biodiversity areas, increased from 2000 to 2020.

The rapidly growing consumption of fish (an increase of 122% between 1990 and 2018), along with inadequate public policies for managing the sector, have led to depleting fish stocks. Almost half a billion people depend at least partially on small-scale fisheries, which account for 90% of employment in fisheries worldwide. Nearly all small-scale fishers (97%) live in partner countries and many face high levels of poverty and lack broader social and economic development opportunities.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Concerning the external dimension of EU policies on oceans in relation to SDG 14, the EU is strongly committed to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The EU's **International Ocean Governance** agenda embodies its renewed commitment to strengthening implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda, and particularly synergies between SDGs 14, 2 and 6, interlinking marine, water and food security aspects.

As part of this agenda, the EU commitment to an ambitious renewed set of marine biodiversity targets was instrumental to the conclusion in December 2022 of the Kunming-Montreal agreement on a **post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework**, which provides the new framework for pursuing all targets under SDG 14. Similarly, the EU supported an ambitious UNCLOS Implementing Agreement on the protection of **marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)** (targets 14.2 and 14.4), agreed in March 2023. The EU was also a driving force behind the launch of negotiations that will address pollution through a legally binding global **agreement on plastics** (target 14.1) and is committed to reaching an agreement by end-2024. Furthermore, the EU is advocating for the designation of two new MPAs in the **Southern Antarctic**.

As part of EU efforts of coherence between internal and external actions, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive emphasises the need for EU Member States to cooperate with their neighbours in the four marine regions, notably through the **Regional Sea Conventions**. Four Regional Sea Conventions cover EU marine waters: (i) The Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment in the **Baltic Sea** Area (HELCOM); (ii) The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the **North-east Atlantic** (OSPAR); (iii) The Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the **Mediterranean** (UNEP-MAP); and (iv) The Convention on the Protection of the **Black Sea** Against Pollution (Bucharest Convention). The EU is a contracting party to the first three and is actively engaged in ensuring a shared understanding of the ambition for marine environmental protection across the marine regions.

As regards fisheries, since 2012 the EU has applied the core principles of the CFP – promoting responsible and sustainable fisheries – at international level. EU Member States have ratified or acceded to implementing agreements of UNCLOS such as the 1995 **UN Fish Stocks Agreement** and joined global efforts to prevent

illegal fishing under the Agreement on **Port State Measures** to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing (target 14.4). The EU financially supported and actively participated in the negotiations that led to the conclusion of the **FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Transhipment**, which is another important tool to combat IUU fishing.

At regional level, the EU plays an active role in 18 **Regional Fisheries Management Organisations** (RFMOs) to foster sustainable fisheries conservation and management measures (target 14.C). Through its voluntary financial contributions, the EU has been instrumental in developing sound stock status assessments, monitoring fishing activities and preventing marine pollution in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

In all marine areas surrounding the EU, it cooperates with riparian countries using relevant international forums. As a member of the **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean** (GFCM), over the last 5 years the EU successfully promoted the adoption of 75 conservation and control measures which have already started to bear fruits. In the Arctic, the EU has been a leading proponent of, and is a party to, the Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the **Central Arctic** Ocean.

The EU also ensures that its trade policy is consistent with SDG 14. The EU was active in the negotiations that successfully resulted in the new **WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies** at the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference on 17 June 2022, delivering on SDG Target 14.6. The EU is committed to achieving a complementary agreement in the continued WTO negotiations on the outstanding issues. The EU has also engaged in, and contributed to, discussions of the WTO Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade with the aim of developing new products and services that can contribute to preventing pollution from reaching the marine environment and provide innovative solutions through a multi-stakeholder approach. Moreover, in recent years, the EU has ensured that the bilateral free trade agreements concluded with non-EU countries include a sustainable development chapter in which fisheries and aquaculture are an integral part.

Science is fundamental to the sustainable management of the ocean. The EU advocates science-based fisheries management in all international forums. More broadly, it is committed to the **UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030**. The EU is a strong partner in the Future of the Seas & Ocean Initiative (FSOI) of the G7 and the GEO Blue Planet initiative linking ocean and coastal information with society. The EU is cooperating with key partners on both sides of the Atlantic to build an All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance. The IOG Agenda also encourages the creation of an Intergovernmental Panel for Ocean Sustainability.

In relation to impacts on developing countries and policy coherence for development, the EU zero tolerance policy for **IUU fishing** entails a strong dimension of dialogue with countries in all regions of the world, most of them developing and least developed countries. Before taking any measure to restrict imports of fisheries products, the primary aim is to address shortcomings and improve the fisheries control system as flag, coastal, port or market states (indicator 14.6.1). When the EU considers that the control systems in place in non-EU countries exporting fishery products to the EU are deficient, it takes action to encourage change. These actions have proved instrumental in triggering positive reform in most of the countries concerned and have facilitated that countries with poor monitoring and controls systems and, sometimes, flag of convenience status, have progressed towards greater cooperation and respect for international obligations.

To carry out and sustain such reforms, many countries receive **financial technical assistance** to upgrade their fisheries governance frameworks. For example, in 2021 the CAPFISH Programme supported **Cambodia**'s efforts to combat IUU fisheries by helping it become a party to the FAO Port State Measures Agreement and the UN Agreement on straddling and migratory fish stocks and prepare and implement the new Fisheries Law.

Managing fisheries sustainably at international level goes beyond fighting IUU fishing. The EU also works bilaterally with partner countries to promote sustainability, while fully recognising the role of fisheries in the livelihoods of coastal developing countries and the challenges they face to set up performing fisheries management and monitoring policies.

To this end, the EU considerably adapted its **Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs)** with 13 partner countries in Africa and the Pacific[38], six of which classify as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and seven as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). These agreements grant EU vessels access to fisheries surpluses in the exclusive economic zone of partner countries and support sustainable fisheries management, including small coastal fisheries, with a yearly contribution of EUR 135 million from the EU. These ensure that EU fishing is based on the best available scientific knowledge and transparency standards and strengthen fisheries governance in partner countries by applying EU standards for monitoring and control of fishing operations and social provisions for fishers. Partner countries derive additional economic benefits by supplying goods and services to EU fishing vessels and through jobs on-board and in the processing industries (estimated at 20 000).

EU and Member States financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 314 million in projects contributing to SDG 14, which makes it the smallest SDG when measured by the volume of funding. The largest share of the EU contribution is made up of projects targeting SDG 14 as a significant objective, clearly underlining the cross-cutting nature of SDG 14. This SDG has been mostly associated with interventions where the main SDG was SDG 2, 8, 6 or 13. A smaller share of the EU contribution is made up of projects that target SDG 14 as the main SDG. These projects show significant interlinkages with SDGs 1, 2, 5 and 13. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 14 amounted to EUR 2.9 billion in 2021. In terms of results of the selected assistance[39], a total of 543 000 km^2 of marine areas was under protection with EU support in the period 2018-2021.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 1.1 billion to SDG 14. EU and Member State flows to SDG14 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in America and the Caribbean (27%), Asia (27%) and Africa (14%). SDG 14 also has a significant global component (24%).

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

In relation to SDG 14, the sustainable management of oceans, seas and marine resources is an increasingly important aspect of international partnerships and cooperation. The EU promotes an integrated approach to effectively address the drivers of ocean degradation, while linking food security, nutrition and livelihoods with natural resources preservation. The Commission committed to investing up to **EUR 1 billion** for ocean and coastal biodiversity and climate, including for the high seas (2021-2027).

This cooperation takes place within a dense network of ocean-related relations with several regions. The technical and financial support provided promotes monitoring and assessment of the state of the marine environment and measures to protect and improve it.

In the Southern neighbourhood, increasing attention is being given in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean and the Barcelona Convention to protection of natural resources, promotion of sustainable fisheries, reduction of marine pollution, in particular plastic pollution, and protection biodiversity in the **Mediterranean**. At the same time, a strategy for the Western Mediterranean between the northern and southern riparian countries fosters sustainable development of the blue economy. Regional support programmes contribute by acting either on the causes of biodiversity loss or on the preservation of endangered ecosystems. For example, the **IMAP-Marine Protected Area (MPA) project** on achieving good environmental status through MPAs has strengthened and further developed the MPA network, and the Water and Environment Support

[38] Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome e Principe, Gabon, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar and the Cook Islands.
[39] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

project has provided technical assistance and training on depollution of the Mediterranean Sea, notably on plastics.

Sustainably managing and protecting marine resources is also part of the Green Agenda for the **Western Balkans**. With the support of the EU, the region is exploring avenues to strengthen cooperation. For instance, the EU is helping Albania develop its circular economy, which will have a positive impact on reducing marine pollution, especially plastics, to protect biodiversity and sustainably manage its fisheries.

Similarly, the EU works closely with its neighbours in the **Black Sea** in the context of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and aims to join the Bucharest Convention. Support was given to an environmental monitoring project (EU4EMBLAS) implemented together with UNDP that focused on SDG 14 and used novel techniques to assess the state of Black Sea biodiversity and screen for the presence of more than 65 000 chemical substances. Several wide-reaching awareness and beach litter clean-up campaigns were carried out.

With **African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP)** countries, under the extended Cotonou Agreement the EU continues to work with each region on areas including sustainable blue economy and sustainable fishing as joint areas for cooperation. Over the years, cooperation significantly expanded from support to sustainable fisheries to a wider set of interconnected issues including water, biodiversity and climate adaptation.

Several **regional programmes** strengthen ocean governance, promote a sustainable blue economy and improve ocean protection within a coordinated regional approach. EUR 180 million have been allocated to five regional ocean programmes. The aim is to foster regional collaboration and capacities to implement regional fisheries management measures, to boost the joint fight against IUU fishing and to strengthen regional scientific and monitoring and control systems.

For instance, under **PESCAO**, a **Western African** fisheries and aquaculture policy is being developed and the coordination of ECOWAS Member States and stakeholders is improving. Under **ECOFISH**, EU support is strengthening capacity to fight IUU fishing in the Eastern Africa-Southern Africa-Indian Ocean region. The **EU and Sweden** are funding the **Pacific European Union Marine Partnership Programme (PEUMP)**, which is an extensive multi-sectoral programme that supports sound ocean and coastal governance, with a focus on biodiversity protection and sustainable use of fisheries and other marine resources. For its part, the **FISH4ACP** programme contributes to unlocking the potential of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in 12 ACP countries while minimising detrimental effects on natural habitats and aquatic resources.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 14, using a Team Europe approach, the EU and Member States support 18 countries and overseas territories in the Pacific Region through the regional TEI Green Blue Alliance for the Pacific. As part of this initiative, support is provided to integrated ocean management to sustain livelihoods in the region.

In addition, in recent years, the EU has launched various water-sensitive programmes and projects. In **Namibia,** a capacity-building project supports the development of environmentally sustainable, climate-resilient inland fisheries and aquaculture. In **Tanzania**, the EU supports the **'Blue economy'** TEI, focusing on: (i) environmental protection and climate-resilient sustainable management of coastal ecosystems; (ii) support to sustainable and job-intensive businesses in the blue economy, including productive uses of the marine and coastal ecosystems; and (iii) transformative governance and policy reforms. An EU budget support programme in **Guyana** focused on improving integrated coastal zone management by enhancing disaster risk management and resilience to flooding, as well as on integrating gender equality into the sector.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 14. A few examples of such initiatives are set out below for illustrative purposes.

Croatia has been supporting Albanian institutions by establishing a mutual network for risk prevention and incident management, in order to mitigate risks of marine pollution and to strengthen Albanian response capacities in fighting oil and HNS (hazardous and noxious substances) spills.

As a member of the **Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans** joint initiative, implemented in a Team Europe approach by 21 EU Member States, **Belgium** is supporting the **Kenya** Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) for biological, chemical and oceanographic research in the **Western Indian Ocean**, notably through the donation of a research vessel, the provision of training activities and monitoring marine upwelling zones in support of measures promoting sustainable fishing practices.

Spain's Galicia region and Mozambique collaborate on strengthening fisheries and aquaculture in Mozambique to improve food and nutritional security. The Pe1xan MZ project is financed with funds from the Regional Government of Galicia (Spain) and aims to contribute to improving the living conditions of the communities of Namaacha and to financing the Centro Tecnológico del Mar-Fundación Cetmar, with the Fundación Ayuda en Acción and the Direção Provincial da Agricultura e Pescas as partners.

Looking ahead

As set out in the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** and the **EU Farm to Fork Strategy**, many of the framework policies and legislations relating to SDG 14 are being reviewed. Recognising a clear need for enhanced marine restoration efforts, the **EU Nature Restoration Law** is being negotiated, together with a new regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides. The aim is to restore 20% of land and sea areas by 2030 and reduce by 50% nutrient losses and the use and risk of chemical pesticides. As part of the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the **Urban Wastewater Directive** and the lists of **surface and groundwater pollutants** are being also updated. In addition, the EU is set to conclude its revision of EU **fisheries control** system.

Looking further ahead, the EU will prepare a legislative framework for sustainable food systems, which should address the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. An **integrated nutrient management action plan** will be adopted in early 2023, addressing nutrient pollution in an integrated manner across sectors. New measures will be proposed in 2023 to address the **unintentional release of microplastics** into the environment and the chemicals legislation (under the REACH regulation) will be applied to restrict **intentionally added microplastics**. These initiatives will also help address **marine litter**.

Additionally, the Commission will make a proposal to boost **ocean observation** and is evaluating the performance of, and possibly reviewing, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Furthermore, the Commission has launched a fitness check of the **polluter pays principle**, which will look at how well the EU applies the principle and should provide the basis for recommendations on how to better implement it.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 14 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where marine and coastal resources and fisheries is a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 14 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy and its dedicated regional investment plans at regional and national level, to be undertaken in a Team Europe approach. In relation to global oceans governance, the EU will advocate swift ratification and implementation of the three recent landmark agreements on fisheries subsidies (WTO), a framework on biodiversity (under the CBC) and on marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (under UNCLOS).

SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

Europe's nature is in decline, with more than 80% of protected habitat types assessed as being in poor condition[40]. Drivers for this decline include changes in land and sea use, the direct exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. While both the EU's forest area and terrestrial protected areas have expanded slightly, pressures on biodiversity continue to intensify. The expansion and intensified use of agricultural land and the doubling of urban areas since 1992 have come at the expense of forests, wetlands and grasslands.

The global situation is equally bleak for biodiversity. However, the EU land area at risk of severe soil erosion by water has shrunk slightly since 2010 and the chemical condition of freshwater has improved.

In response to these challenges, the COP-15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in December 2022, with four goals and 23 targets to be achieved by 2030. Parties committed themselves inter alia to protecting 30% of land and inland water and 30% of coastal and marine areas, restoring 30% of degraded ecosystems, significantly increasing the area of natural ecosystems, addressing land- and sea-use change through 100% of spatial planning, reducing the rate of introduction and establishment of invasive alien species by 50%, and reducing by half food waste as well as excess nutrients lost to the environment and overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals. Harmful incentives must be identified by 2025 and reduced by USD 500 billion per year thereafter. Biodiversity financing from all sources has to increase to USD 200 billion, including a USD 30 billion increase of international biodiversity financing by 2030. To track progress, a monitoring framework was adopted, including an initial set of 27 headline indicators to be reported by all Parties.

2030 targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trends 2015 – 2023
Legally protect and effectively manage at least 30% and strictly protect at least 10% of the EU's land area EU biodiversity strategy for 2030	From 2015 to 2021 data available seem to suggest an increase in protected area coverage. Percentage of terrestrial protected areas have increased from 19.7% to 26.4%, however, parts of this increase might be due to improved data-availability. The progress has slowed down in recent years, but the EU seems nevertheless to be on track to meet its 30% target by 2030.
Reverse the decline of pollinators by 2030	In recent decades, European wild-insect pollinators such as bees, butterflies, hoverflies and moths have dramatically declined in occurrence and diversity in Europe. Many species are also on the verge of extinction. According to the European

40 See Figure 3.4 page 41 in State of nature in the EU — European Environment Agency (europa.eu).

EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 EU pollinators initiative	Red List, around one in three bee and butterfly species has a declining population, while around one in ten are threatened with extinction.
Increase the degree of connectivity in forest ecosystems with a view to creating and integrating ecological corridors EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 and 8th EAP monitoring framework.	The average degree of connectivity in forest ecosystems decreased from 72.64% in 2000 to 72.43% in 2018 for the EU27. The trends from 2000 to 2018 are stable at EU27 level but are quite different at national level. For example, Spain showed the highest decrease in connectivity, of 3.1%, while Latvia had an increase of 2.1% in the same period.
Strictly protect all primary and old growth forests EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 EU forest strategy for 2030	Primary and old growth forests cover about 3% of total EU forest area. They are vital for their rich biodiversity, their capture and storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide, and provision of critical ecosystem services.
Reach no net land take by 2050 EU soil strategy for 2030	Despite a reduction in the last decade (land take was over 1000km^2/year between 2000-2006), land take in EU28 still amounted to 539 km^2/year between 2012-2018.
Plant at least 3 billion new trees in the EU, in full respect of ecological principles, by 2030 EU biodiversity strategy for 2030	By April 2023, more than 10.6 million trees were planted as part of the 3 Billion Trees Pledge.
Make significant progress in remediating contaminated soil sites by 2030 EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 EU soil strategy for 2030	In 2016 (latest available data), 1.38 million potentially contaminated sites were registered on an estimated total of 2.8 million. 115 000 contaminated sites were remediated in the EU. Based on current projections, at least 166 000 additional sites are expected to need risk reduction measures or remediation.
Combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world by 2030 EU soil strategy for 2030	During the period 2000-2021, on average 4.5% (ca. 146,000km^2) of the EU was affected annually by droughts due to low precipitation, high evaporation and heatwaves. The extent of intense drought impacts showed increasing tendency in the EU indicating worsening ecosystem conditions
Ensuring forest restoration and reinforced sustainable forest management for climate adaptation and forest resilience by 2030 EU forest strategy for 2030	The EU share of forests slightly increased by 0.9% between 2015-2018. Over 2013-2018, only about 14% of forest habitats were in good conservation condition, although forests experienced the most improvement Only about 2% of the forests are considered undisturbed by man, but almost 24% of forests are in areas protected for the conservation of biodiversity and landscape, considerably more than several decades ago. The share of forests designated for landscape

	and for biodiversity conservation has increased by 8% and 65% respectively in the last 20 years.

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 15 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

As a key pillar of the **European Green Deal**, the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 by establishing a larger EU-wide network of protected areas, by implementing an ambitious EU nature restoration plan and by tackling global biodiversity challenges. The Commission's proposal for a Nature Restoration Law calls for binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems, particularly those with the most potential to capture and store carbon. The **revised EU pollinators initiative** addresses the decline in pollinators. The **Birds Directive** and the **EU Habitats Directive** respectively aim to protect all wild bird species and their habitats and to ensure the conservation of a wide range of rare, threatened or endemic habitat types as well as animal and plant species.

The **EU forest strategy for 2030** sets out concrete actions to improve the quantity and quality of EU forests and strengthen their protection, restoration and resilience. It includes a roadmap outlining how to achieve the commitment of at least 3 billion additional trees, including through clear criteria for tree planting, counting and monitoring. The **Deforestation Regulation** seeks to ensure that products, whether sourced in the EU or from non-EU countries, sold on the EU market do not contribute to global deforestation, thereby aligning EU internal and external policy.

The **EU soil strategy for 2030** sets out concrete measures to protect and restore soils and ensure they are used sustainably, with a target to ensure that by 2050 all soils in the EU are healthy. It also includes a medium-term objective for 2030 focusing on combatting desertification, restoring degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, which are increasingly affecting the European continent.

Europe's common agricultural policy (CAP) sets requirements to protect utilised agricultural areas against soil erosion. The common agricultural policy has the potential to mitigate the negative impacts of unsustainable farming management and contribute to halting biodiversity loss. The EU Farm to Fork Strategy aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly, and contribute, among others, to reversing the loss of biodiversity.

Selected enablers

The EU biodiversity strategy announces ambitious spending targets: at least EUR 20 billion per year should be unlocked for spending on nature; a significant proportion of the 30% of the EU budget dedicated to climate action will be invested on biodiversity and nature-based solutions and under Invest EU, a dedicated natural-capital and circular-economy initiative will be established to mobilise at least EUR 10 billion over the next 10 years, based on public/private blended finance.

Compared to the 2014-2020 period, where the EU's biodiversity-related expenditure reached EUR 85 billion (or 8% of its overall expenditure), the **EU budget 2021-2027** is projected to allocate EUR 112 billion thanks to the mainstreaming of biodiversity throughout the EU programmes, with the ambition of reaching annual spending levels of 7.5% in 2024, increasing to 10 % in 2026 and in 2027. A new tracking has been developed to track biodiversity expenditures in EU's multiannual financial framework (for most instruments), as well as tools to help Member States apply **sustainability proofing** across EU funds and programmes, in line with the Green Deal pledge to Do No Significant Harm (DNSH).

The LIFE Programme is the EU's key funding instrument for environmental and nature conservation projects, with a budget of EUR 5.4 billion for the period 2021-2027. The LIFE sub-programme for Nature and Biodiversity plays an important role in restoring and safeguarding the condition of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems.

For example, since 1992, 363 LIFE projects have restored thousands of peatlands through rewetting across Europe. In **Belgium**, 40% of peatlands have been restored and in **Lithuania**, the conservation status of degraded bogs has improved thanks to LIFE. LIFE projects have supported both restoration work on the ground and measures to encourage paludiculture, apply innovative financial mechanisms and enhance the benefits provided by peatland ecosystems for health and wellbeing, carbon storage, water filtration and storage, flood protection, recreation and biodiversity habitat. Furthermore, LIFE projects under **Circular Economy and Quality of Life**, **Climate Mitigation and Adaptation** and other sub-programmes contribute to developing tools and solutions that also benefit biodiversity. LIFE agricultural projects develop good practices for **soil protection and conservation**, technologies and decision support tools for farmers. Through over 200 environment and climate projects, the LIFE Programme is helping make the **transition to a food system** that is fair, sustainable, healthy and environmentally friendly – key components of the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy.

Under the 2021-2027 Cohesion policy, the programmed contribution to the objectives of the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** reaches 6% (EUR 16.6 billion) of the ERDF, CF and JTF total allocation. This substantial increase compared to the 2014-2020 period reflects the renewed commitment to the protection and preservation of nature and biodiversity.

Under **Horizon Europe** there is a commitment to dedicating EUR 1.6 billion to support R&I under the 2021-2022 work programme and €1.7 billion under the 2023-2024 work programme in the area of protection and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity. Examples of projects recently launched include:

- 'SUPERB': the largest-ever funded forest research project allocating more than EUR 90 million for protection, restoration and sustainably managed forests.

- 'PantEOn - A Multi-Scale Earth Observation Indicator System for Land Degradation Assessment of Transitional Mediterranean Climates': The project aims to obtain evidence about the long-term evolution and regime-shifts due to climate change of the functional and structural properties of Mediterranean ecosystems. This evidence is crucial for the identification of ecosystem resilience thresholds & the development of land degradation indicators.
- 'B4EST - Adaptive BREEDING for productive, sustainable and resilient FORESTs under climate change': B4EST's goal is to increase forest survival, health, resilience and productivity under the impact of climate change on forest vulnerability, while maintaining genetic diversity and key ecological functions, and fostering a competitive EU bio-based economy.

Another example is the project 'Framework for assessment of effectiveness of biodiversity conservation measures in **Estonia**' supported by the **Technical Support Instrument** under the call for 2021. The project aims to provide the Estonian Environmental Board with a methodology to assess the effectiveness of their biodiversity conservation measures. The support measures focus on the development of a methodology and testing it on 20 natural protected sites, the provision of a management plan to support the implementation of the methodology, capacity building for conservation specialists and a roadmap for the digitalisation of processes.

The **EU Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity** works to enhance the knowledge base, facilitate its sharing and foster cross-sectorial policy dialogue for EU policy making in biodiversity and related fields.

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 15 in a collaborative approach. For example,

- The **EU Biodiversity Platform** is an operational steering group between the Commission, the Member States and stakeholders for the coherent and coordinated implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.
- The **EU Business @ Biodiversity Platform** provides a forum for dialogue and policy interface to discuss the links between business and biodiversity at EU level. Its around 300 members include businesses from a broad variety of sectors and countries, EU trade associations, NGOs, public authorities, governments and international organisations. It supports the integration of biodiversity and natural capital into decision-making process of a critical mass of businesses and financial institutions, for example through natural capital accounting, a methodology for the quantitative measurement of ecosystem services and their values and their incorporation into the accounting systems of a company).

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 15 include:

The Forest Carbon Farms pilot project implemented by the **Polish** State Forests between 2017 and 2026 concerns new practices in forest management to support CO_2 sequestration, accumulation, and issuing of carbon credits. Operationalisation of the implementation version of the carbon forests project is planned for 2022-2035. As of 2022, the additional amount of CO_2 sequestered by the pilot project is over 936 thousand tonnes of organic carbon, equivalent to 1 tonne of CO_2 that will be accumulated in forests and soil.

At local level, **Tallinn**, the capital of **Estonia**, banned pesticide use and encourages the use of plants that are suitable for pollinators. It has 2 100 hectares of protected areas and is creating two green corridors (14 km and 9 km) for animals to move between different green areas. The city promotes biodiverse landscaping to citizens and city developers with a plant catalogue which rates 900 plants according to their value for pollinators. New parks and neighbourhoods come with embedded communal food growing possibilities. In 2022 Tallinn had 129 educational gardens in schools and kindergartens.

EU external action

Global trends

Terrestrial ecosystems are under immense pressure. The main direct drivers of biodiversity loss – changes in land and sea use, overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species – are making natural biodiversity disappear quickly. Deforestation, forest degradation and the overall extinction risk of species in selected taxonomic groups are increasing at alarming rates. In 2020, the proportion of forest area in the total land area stood at 31.2%. In the last two decades, the world lost 100 million ha of forest area, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa and LAC. Over the same period, the Red List Index, which measures extinction risk of major species groups and serves as an indicator of the state of global biodiversity, deteriorated by 10%.

On the other hand, at global level, progress has been made on safeguarding sites to improve biodiversity, which is a key requirement for environmental sustainability. Between 2000 and 2020, the protected area coverage of terrestrial and freshwater key biodiversity areas increased from 29% to 42%. Similarly, increased efforts are made to halt land degradation and accelerate the restoration of degraded land. As of July 2021, commitments to land restoration are estimated at 1 billion hectares. In November 2020, the G20 launched an initiative to restore 50% of all degraded land by 2040.

Internal/external coherence including policy coherence for development

Under the European Green Deal (EGD), the EU committed to supporting the achievement of SDG 15 both internally and in partner countries. Relevant internal actions, as well as European consumption, potentially have an impact on the use of terrestrial ecosystems, deforestation, biodiversity and land degradation in partner countries.

Deforestation, of which 90% is provoked by the expansion of agricultural land, is a main driver of climate change and biodiversity loss. The EU contributes to deforestation in non-EU countries by consuming a significant share of products associated with deforestation and forest degradation. As a matter of policy coherence, and in line with the EU's responsibility in ending deforestation and forest degradation, the EU is finalising its work on a Regulation on deforestation and forest degradation free supply chains, which will guarantee that products bought, used, consumed or exported by the EU do not contribute to global deforestation and forest degradation, whether legal or illegal. The mandatory due diligence rules for companies wanting to place these commodities on the EU market are accompanied by dialogue in all the relevant bilateral and multilateral fora, such as the Cocoa Talks with West African countries, and, where needed, by development cooperation funds.

To address illegal logging and improve forest governance, the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) is a mechanism whereby partner countries can issue licenses that guarantee that their timber products meet the EU timber regulation requirements, after having signed Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) to improve governance and regulatory frameworks leading to greater transparency and accountability, as well as sustainable forest management. VPAs have so far been signed with 5 African, 2 Southeast Asian and one Central American country, with the system being fully operational so far only for timber from Indonesia. In addition, at the UNCCC COP27 the EU signed five Memoranda of Understanding for Forest Partnerships, the new and holistic EU cooperation framework for joint work on forests in the framework of the global gateway strategy, aiming for sustainable forest management, job creation through the value chains, reduction of deforestation, and facilitating trade in legal and sustainable wood products between partner countries and the EU.

Increased internal biodiversity ambition led the EU to integrate the High Ambition Coalitions in view of the negotiation of a **global agreement at CBD COP-15**. The EU pledged to double its external financing for biodiversity, representing EUR 7 billion between 2021 and 2027 to support partner countries in the implementation of the new global targets. This will notably materialise through flagship initiatives such as NaturAfrica, which promotes a landscape approach that works for biodiversity and land resources, drawing inspiration from the internal Natura 2000 network. Furthermore, the recently established EU Knowledge Centre on Biodiversity, in charge of tracking domestic progress against the EU biodiversity strategy 2030, will also support a global knowledge platform which will track progress against the global agreement.

The EU also strengthened its response to another major driver of global biodiversity loss, **the illegal trade of species,** by revising in 2022 the EU wildlife trafficking action plan to scale up enforcement measures, resulting in more seizures and prosecutions. The EU has provided substantial funding for capacity building and international action against wildlife trafficking in support of local communities and platforms for international action against wildlife trafficking, such as the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime.

Pollution of land and water, notably from hazardous pesticides and chemicals, is another main driver of biodiversity loss. The EU strengthened its internal policies, notably through the **farm-to-fork and chemical strategies**, which will both have consequences outside of the Union. More specifically, compliance with EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and food safety standards is fundamental for partner countries, as agricultural products, fish, and timber account for a large share of the traded goods. In addition, SPS systems that protect human, animal and plant health are critical to any agricultural value chain, and have a positive impact on domestic, regional and international trade. The 2020 chemicals strategy for sustainability sets the objective to ensure that hazardous chemicals banned in the EU are not produced for exportation; and the zero pollution action plan set an EU integrated vision to achieve by 2050 a toxic-free environment within and outside the EU borders.

More generally, the evaluation of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 recognised that although the strategy is in line with Agenda 2030 and relates to various interlinked SDGs (14, 15, 12, 13), a more integrated, coherent approach to supporting biodiversity and sustainable development in EU external action could have brought even more synergies and benefits. The evaluation highlights the centrality of natural capital in societal wellbeing and prosperity, and thus achievements in relation to water, climate and life on land and underwater are a precondition for the achievement of all other SDGs.

EU and Member States financial support for SDG implementation and results

There are two main sources of information to track support for SDG 15. As with other SDGs, EU support for SDG 15 can be estimated where this specific SDG field is marked in projects reported to the OECD-DAC. In addition, the OECD biodiversity and desertification markers can be used to identify measures that contribute to SDG 15 (although also actions related to other SDGs such as 14). The assessments made in preparing this Review indicate that there is scope for greater consistency between these complementary and related reporting tracks.

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 4.3 billion in projects contributing to SDG 15. A significant share of the EU contribution is accounted for by projects that target SDG 15 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, with the most important ones being SDG 5, SDG 12 and SDG 13. The EU also contributes to SDG 15 through projects targeting the SDG as a significant objective, highlighting the cross-cutting nature of SDG 15. This SDG has been mostly associated with interventions where the main SDG was SDG 2, SDG 8, SDG 13 and SDG 16. In terms of results of the selected assistance[41], a total of 75 million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems are under protection with EU support, while for 69 million hectares EU support contributed to the sustainable management of such ecosystems in the period 2018-2021.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 8.7 billion to SDG 15. EU and Member States flows to SDG 15 in 2021 predominantly focused on projects in Africa (44%), Asia (17%) and America and the Caribbean (15%). EU and Member States flows to SDG 15 also have a strong global component (15%). Some of the funding for SDG 15 is accounted for by contributions to global funds. In the case of SDG 15, the most relevant global fund is the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) which has dedicated biodiversity and land degradation windows. Since the GEF was launched in 1991, EU and Member States have contributed approximately EUR 10.6 billion to the fund (46% of all contributions received).

As to the OECD desertification and biodiversity markers, which another source of information to track support for SDG 15, the EU and the 27 Member States reported to OECD EUR 8.2 billion in commitments for projects targeting desertification and biodiversity in 2021. Projects targeting desertification or biodiversity as a significant objective contributed EUR 5.8 billion to this figure, while the remainder is accounted for by projects with desertification or biodiversity as the main objective.

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

The European Green Deal contains an external dimension which explicitly refers to key strategies such as the **biodiversity strategy 2030**, the farm **to fork strategy** or the **EU forest strategy for 2030.** Through these strategies, the EU is stepping up its engagement with non-EU countries, at global, regional and bilateral level, to make progress towards SDG 15. In this context, the main EU priorities are to:

- Support partner countries across the world to achieve the new global targets adopted in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, fight environmental crime, and tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss.
- Promote the concept of forest partnership to address in an integrated way the several challenges forests are facing and develop innovative and sustainable financing to support forests in partner countries.

The EU further prioritised environmental (and climate) resilience in the funding allocation for disaster preparedness for the period 2021-2024, ensuring that humanitarian action contributes to environmental resilience.

[41] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

The EU has also developed specific actions such as the **NaturAfrica** initiative, contributing to the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package designed to protect wildlife and key ecosystems while creating economic opportunities in green sectors and better livelihoods for local populations using the 'landscape approach'. NaturAfrica aims to improve the livelihood of 65 million people, sequestering up to 21 billion tons of carbon, stabilising 3 million km² of land and ensuring water security.

In the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, continuous EU actions on land restoration and alternative livelihoods development support the **African-led Great Green Wall initiative**, to which the EU has pledged over EUR 700 million/year in 2021 in support of Global Gateway objectives under the Africa-Europe Investment Package. The EU will support a mosaic of bottom-up initiatives to reverse land degradation, sequester carbon and support small-scale farmers and food entrepreneurs to make agri-value chains more resilient. As an example, one million hectares of degraded land will be restored across 8 countries under the **regreening Africa programme**, notably through the application of agroforestry and farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR). In fact, the Regreening Africa initiative is now close to fulfilling its goal of restoring 1 million hectares of degraded land and reaching 500 000 households with sustainable land management and agro-ecological techniques that improve their livelihoods.

Further, the EU provides support to the **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA)** with the aim of linking networks of small-scale farmers and their institutions to global and regional mechanisms involved in research and innovation for crop diversity so that PGRFA materials and data, knowledge gained, and lessons learned are exchanged in both directions. The visibility of PGRFA innovations for food systems will serve for evidence-based policy and planning, with particular emphasis on equity, resilience and promoting cooperation at different levels.

The EU is mainstreaming **biodiversity** across all its interventions; for example, in the food systems area, the promotion of integrated and agro-ecological approaches contributes to the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, including agro-biodiversity.

The EU Member States are also a key source of funding for the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) which focuses on **biodiversity** protection, nature restoration, pollution reduction and climate change response in developing countries. EU Member States have contributed approximately half of the USD 22 billion in contributions received by the GEF. Through grants and blended finance, the GEF has mobilised another USD 120 billion in co-financing for more than 5 000 national and regional projects. In addition, it has supported 27 000 community-led initiatives through its Small Grants Programme.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 15, in Papua New Guinea, a Team Europe initiative jointly assessed needs and identified the **forestry-climate change-biodiversity-renewable energy** nexus, with a particular focus on **environmental governance** and the **generation of sustainable jobs and growth**, as a critical area for PNG's development where Team Europe can be the partner of reference. This action contributes to Global Gateway and several SDGs (including 15, 13, 8 and 16). Support will be provided for mapping and data, governance and policy development, capacity development, infrastructure, investment promotion, policy/political dialogue and awareness and mobilisation.

The Team Europe initiative **Green Deal in the Lao PDR** brings the EU, its Member States and other partners together to contribute to Global Gateway objectives and to pursue several SDGs (including 2, 15 and 13) through the support areas with high potential for climate-adaptation and mitigation action, including farm to fork (e.g. agriculture, value chains, food safety, nutrition), forest partnership (e.g. forest restoration, biodiversity, livelihoods, watershed management) and complementary areas (such as infrastructure and connectivity, energy, tourism and green cities).

The EU and its Member States are proposing to support Cambodia with a TEI for **sustainable landscapes, forests and agriculture, in line with the country's plan to make agriculture the main driver for economic recovery.** This TEI, with an indicative support amount of EUR 375 million (including blending operations), will contribute to Global Gateway objectives and pursue several SDGs (including 2 and 15) by supporting a more sustainable use of natural resources, combining protection and increased incomes for the rural population.

The Team Europe initiative '**Alliance verte: un partenariat pour les hommes, la nature et une économie' verte in the Democratic Republic of the Congo** will contribute to Global Gateway and a range of SDGs (including SDG 15, 8 and 5) by promoting a fair green economy and the protection of biodiversity in priority areas at country and regional levels, joining EU existing efforts with those of 6 Member States already active in protected areas, biodiversity and sustainable forests. Private sector development and the role of women will be at the centre of this initiative.

In the Pacific Islands region, the multi-donor **Kiwa Initiative,** which supports the use of nature-based solutions for climate resilience by preserving biodiversity, launched its first project in 2021 aiming to establish an agro-ecological farms network. The **Voice for Mekong Forest** project, implemented by RECOFTC, worked to promote forest governance in several Mekong countries bringing together stakeholders **from Lao, Thailand and Vietnam**, and has supported the drafting of legal texts to regulate community forests.

In the context of its humanitarian actions, the EU has supported **Bangladesh** in providing Rohingya refugees with access to liquefied petroleum gas for cooking while supporting reforestation efforts in and around the camps to restore deforested land, and has supported **Djibouti, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda** with a project that will promote ecosystem restoration and sustainable forest management for enhanced energy access and livelihood resilience in displacement settings.

Together with **Austria**, the EU supports the development of **sustainable mountain tourism & organic agricultural production in Georgia** by working with local authorities and public and private sector stakeholders to improve small and medium enterprises' capacities, scale up their activities and improve the business environment, as well as create new income opportunities in the two growth sectors of mountain tourism and organic agriculture.

In **North Macedonia**, the EU promoted the sustainable use of natural resources and improved the management of protected areas in an inclusive, professional and sustainable way. The programme was implemented in partnership with UNDP, the management authorities of protected areas, municipalities and local civil society organisations, in 24 locations in protected areas, some of which will be future NATURA 2000 sites. In total, 241,755 ha of protected areas today benefit from improved management.

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 15. By means of illustration, under the **Sahel climate programme**, **Belgium** will help to make about 10 000 hectares of land fertile again through investments in better rainwater storage and in planting trees. The aim is to support sustainable local solutions and protect existing eco-systems, including the Great Green Wall project. By combating desertification, local communities can continue to ensure their food security in the longer term.

Looking ahead

Key EU policy instruments related to SDG15 are under development. As set out in the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, the Commission proposal for an **EU Nature Restoration Law,** under negotiation, sets the target to restore 20% of EU land and sea areas by 2030. This will also provide the basis for the EU to deliver on the restoration target set by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. As a follow-up to the **EU Soil Strategy**, a proposal for an **EU Soil Health Law** is under preparation, to be published in 2023 with the aim to

ensure healthy soils by 2050. A legislative proposal on **Sustainable Food Systems**, also envisaged for adoption in 2023, aims to accelerate and facilitate the transition to sustainable and resilient food systems. As a follow-up to the **EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy** and the EU **Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, an **Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan** is being finalised for adoption. It will also contribute to the 50% reduction target set at global level. As part of the implementation of the **EU Forest Strategy**, the Commission will publish in 2023 its proposal for a **Forest Monitoring and Planning Law** to provide a comprehensive picture of the state and use of forests in the EU and facilitate forest planning and forest policy decision-making.

The Commission intends to publish an assessment of progress in the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 in March 2024. The report will provide an overview of implementation efforts, gaps and challenges, and reflect on the effectiveness of EU biodiversity governance. In 2023, the Commission intends to publish a fitness check of the polluter pays principle. In addition, the EU will continue to work on the EU Regulation on deforestation-free supply chains, to ensure that key goods placed on the EU market will no longer contribute to deforestation and forest degradation in the EU and elsewhere.

The Commission will work with the Member States to step up implementation of the **Regulation on Invasive Alien Species** and other relevant legislation and international instruments. The aim is to ensure that the introduction and establishment of alien species in the EU environment is minimised and where possible is eliminated, while established invasive alien species are managed.

In 2022, the Commission proposed legislation on ecosystem accounting with the goal of producing national and EU-wide ecosystem accounts in the second half of the decade. Ecosystem accounts measure the condition of ecosystems alongside their extent and the ecosystem services they provide to society and the economy. The ecosystem services covered by the proposed legislation include wood and crop provision, pollination of crops, the removal from the atmosphere and storage of carbon, and nature-based tourism. The EU proposal is fully aligned with the UN standard SEEA-EA. As one of several monitoring systems, the accounts will also feed into EU's reporting under the new COP-15 monitoring framework. Setting up a system of ecosystem accounts is the EU contribution to the SDG Target 15.9: to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, and accounts, with the indicator (Indicator 15.9.1: defined as implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting).

The Commission will continue to work on the implementation of COP15 commitments in accordance with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including to protect 30% of land, inland water, coastal and marine areas by 2030, restore degraded ecosystems and reduce pollution risks to biodiversity.

On the external side, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of SDG 15 globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries where terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity a shared priority. A tangible contribution to SDG 15 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be the deployment of the Global Gateway strategy and its dedicated regional investment plans at regional and national level, to be undertaken in a Team Europe approach. In the framework of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package, the Commission will support African partners through the deployment of initiatives such as **NaturAfrica** and the **African-led Great Green Wall initiative**.

In addition, the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations come into force in 2023. These will promote the sustainable management of forests in and around humanitarian settings, the restoration of degraded land and the halting of biodiversity loss in humanitarian contexts.

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

EU internal action

Overview and challenges

The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail[1]. The EU's key objective is to promote peace, its values and the wellbeing of its people, offering an area of freedom, security and justice[2].

The founding values and objectives of the EU are therefore fully in tune with SDG 16, and the actions taken by the EU to protect and promote fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy contribute to the implementation of SDG 16. In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe.

In the last several decades, the EU has become a safer place to live – but Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine brought back war to its borders. Deaths due to homicide or assault and the perceived occurrence of crime, violence and vandalism in European neighbourhoods have fallen considerably. At the same time, government expenditure on law courts has increased in nominal terms but remained stable in relation to GDP and total government expenditure. The perceived level of independence of the justice system has improved marginally and trust in EU institutions has increased, following a drop after the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index the EU scored 64 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) in 2021, 21 points more than the world average score. Some 10 EU Member States are in the top 20 countries perceived least corrupt in the world.

Nevertheless, threats to the rule of law challenge the legal, political and economic basis of the EU. Crime remains a threat, and corruption is a particularly big challenge. Some findings point to a degradation of civic space throughout the EU, a trend further accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2030 Targets and trends at EU level

Target and policy reference	Trend
Make sure that all public powers act within the constraints set out by law, under the control of independent and impartial courts and in accordance with the values of democracy and fundamental rights The Rule of Law Mechanism	53% of EU inhabitants rated as 'very good' or 'fairly good' the independence level of courts and judges in their country in 2022 (+3% higher than 2016). The 'very bad' or 'fairly bad' ratings fell by 3% in the same period (35% in 2022).
Fight corruption in the private sector, involving European officials or national officials of Member States	According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the EU scored 64 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean) in 2021. EU countries continued to rank among the least-corrupt globally in 2021

Convention against corruption involving public officials and combating corruption in the private sector framework	and made up one half of the global top 20 least-corrupt countries, although many differences persist among Member States.
Foster access to democratic participation and trust in democracy European Democracy Action Plan	The confidence of citizens in EU institutions such as the European Parliament, European Commission and European Central Bank is increasing since 2015, despite a fall in 2020 (coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic).

More details on indicators and trends for SDG 16 can be found in the statistical and analytical annex and Eurostat's monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.

Key initiatives

The EU has several instruments, and mechanisms at its disposal to help overcome challenges to different aspects of SDG 16.

In 2020, the Commission reinforced its toolbox to promote and protect the rule of law with the European Rule of Law Mechanism. This provides a process for an annual dialogue between the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament together with Member States and national parliaments, civil society and other stakeholders on the rule of law, based on an annual rule of law report. The 2022 Rule of Law report includes specific recommendations for all EU Member States, aimed at assisting them in implementing reforms, advancing positive developments and identifying where further improvements or follow-up action to recent changes or reforms may be needed.

A key tool in the EU's rule of law toolbox is the new Regulation on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the EU budget. This Regulation makes it possible for the Commission to propose measures to the Council to protect the EU budget in case of rule of law breaches in Member States when they affect (or seriously risk affecting) the sound financial management of the EU budget in a sufficiently direct way. It covers both the long-term budget and NextGenerationEU.

Fighting corruption is one of the pillars of the rule of law. With the adoption of the Stockholm Programme, the European Commission was given a political mandate to monitor the fight against corruption and to develop a comprehensive EU anti-corruption policy. In EU legislation, the fight against corruption is covered by the 1997 Convention on fighting corruption involving officials of the EU or officials of Member State and the 2003 Framework Decision on combating corruption in the private sector.

EU Member States implement national anti-corruption strategies and coordinated anti-corruption policies required by international law[3]. In line with international standards[4] and EU law[5], the EU and its Member States aim at eliminating obstacles to criminal investigation, prosecution, and the application of dissuasive sanctions for corruption.

The European democracy action plan, adopted in December 2020, aims at empowering citizens and building more resilient democracies across the EU by promoting free and fair elections, strengthening media freedom and countering disinformation.

As part of its implementation, the Commission adopted an initiative to fight against abusive litigation (SLAPP) targeting journalists and rights defenders. The initiative aims to provide civil procedural safeguards for cross-border situations and to recommend best practices also to national level, as well as European supporting measures.

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights** of the European Union (the "Charter") is not just any instrument of EU law. It enshrines the fundamental rights that everyone in the EU should enjoy and reiterates the principles on which the EU is founded, namely democracy and the rule of law.

The Charter has helped to better promote and protect people's fundamental rights and has triggered new EU legislation directly protecting and promoting certain key rights. The new rules on data protection, gender equality, protecting whistle-blowers, fair trial and defence rights, and victims of crime are key examples[6]. The Commission also put forward a proposal to revise the Digital Services Act with new rules to curb illegal content, including hate speech online. Additionally, the Commission tabled a proposal on artificial intelligence, which aims to ensure a fundamental rights approach in the design and rolling out of artificial intelligence. The case-law of the Court of Justice of the EU ('the Court') invoking the Charter has developed significantly[7] in a wide range of policy areas[8].

In December 2020, the Commission adopted a new strategy on **strengthening the application of the Charter** of Fundamental Rights in the EU to make sure people can effectively enjoy their fundamental rights in their daily lives. The Commission presents a thematic annual report on the application of the Charter in the EU, focusing on areas of strategic relevance governed by EU law and which looks more closely at the Charter's application in the Member States. Together with the annual Rule of Law report, the annual Charter report will contribute to further upholding fundamental values in the EU.

Concerning the need to develop the area of freedom, security and justice, improving the effectiveness of justice systems in Member States has been identified as a key component for structural reforms in the European Semester. With the help of the EU justice scoreboard, the EU monitors the efficiency, quality and independence of Member States' justice systems.

The EU has a wide range of policies in place that address or touch on personal security. They are covered by the **EU security union strategy 2020-2025,** which identified as priorities: a future-proof security environment, tackling evolving threats (e.g., cybercrime, modern law enforcement, hybrid threats), protecting Europeans from terrorism and organised crime and a strong European security ecosystem. There are many sectoral strategies regarding the issue made in the same time period, e.g. the **EU agenda and action plan on drugs**, the **EU action plan on firearms trafficking**, **a counter-terrorism agenda for the EU**, the **EU cybersecurity strategy**, the **EU strategy on combating trafficking in human beings**, the **EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse, and the EU strategy to tackle organised crime**.

The European Commission proposal for a revision of the **EU Anti-trafficking Directive** to strengthen the EU rules to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims also feeds into SDG 16 given that over 50% of the victims of trafficking in the EU are EU citizens.

Selected enablers

The Justice programme (running from 2021 to 2027) provides funding to support judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters such as training for judges and other legal practitioners and effective access to justice for citizens and businesses. It contributes to the further development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law, including independence and impartiality of the judiciary, and on mutual recognition, mutual trust and judicial cooperation. It is strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights.

The Citizens, equality, rights and values programme (CERV) protects and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights by supporting civil society organisations active at local, regional, national and transnational level. It aims to sustain and develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law. That includes a vibrant and empowered civil society, encouraging people's democratic, civic and social participation and cultivating the rich diversity of European society based on our common values, history and memory. CERV also aims to promote the rights of the child and prevent violence against children, young people, women and other groups at risk.

Promising research is carried out under Horizon Europe. For example, the project **PushBackLash** has as objective to systematically explore the present-day contestation of gender equality issues and policies. Approaching democracy from a global feminist perspective, the project employs a rigorous, comparative, multi-method design. To develop sustainable solutions, it brings together gender activists, EU experts and researchers

from several fields of political science, anthropology, communication and media, philosophy, sociology and social psychology.

Another example is the project 'Strengthening Access to Justice in **Latvia** (Phase II)' supported by the Technical Support Instrument under the call for 2021. The project is connected to the Mediation Directive that calls for the establishment of mediation and legal aid services and development of an effective online dispute resolution system. This domain is relatively weak in Latvia and the 'traditional' way of rendering justice suffers from workload and delays. Therefore, the project's objective is to enhance access to justice through an improvement of legal aid, mediation and online dispute resolution systems as well as the professionalisation of involved personnel.

The **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights** (FRA) was set up to provide independent evidence-based assistance and expertise relating to fundamental rights in the domain of European Union law. It collects data and information on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU, which supports EU institutions and bodies as well as Member States in their policy-making. This includes data relevant under SDG 16, such as the extent and nature of violence and harassment experiences within the EU, including the general population as well as selected groups such as immigrants, Roma, LGBTIQ people and Jewish people to analyse intersectional experiences. FRA dedicated the focus chapter of its 2019 Fundamental Rights Report to the interrelationship between the human and fundamental rights framework and the SDGs of the global Agenda 2030 in the context of Member States' and the EU's internal policies. It takes a closer look at the SDGs related to reducing inequality (SDG 10) and promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Stakeholder engagement

The EU delivers on SDG 16 in a collaborative approach. For example:

- To prepare its **annual rule of law report**, the Commission carries out targeted stakeholder consultations, which are published with the consent of the stakeholder. The list of contributions to the third edition of the rule of law report published in July 2022 includes the Council of Europe, the Fundamental Rights Agency, and the United Nations Human Rights Office.
- The **EU Network for Children's Rights** was launched in March 2022 with the aim of reinforcing dialogue and mutual learning between the EU and the Member States on children's rights. The network supports the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the EU strategy on the rights of the child.
- To prepare the **annual thematic report on the application of the Charter**, the Commission carries out targeted consultations with relevant stakeholders. The 2022 report, which focused on "A thriving civic space for upholding fundamental rights in the EU", was prepared based on the results of consultations of international organisations, the European networks of NHRIs (ENNHRI) and Equality bodies (EQUINET), civil society organisations at EU and national level.
- The '**Have Your Say' portal** is a one-stop shop for citizens' engagement at EU level.
- The **European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought** is the highest tribute paid by the European Union to human rights work. It gives recognition to individuals, groups and organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to protecting freedom of thought.
- The **European Citizen's Prize** recognises initiatives that contribute to European cooperation and the promotion of common European values. Awarded each year by the European Parliament, the prize goes to projects organised by citizens or organisations that encourage mutual understanding and closer integration between people in the EU, cross-border cooperation that builds a stronger European spirit, and EU values and fundamental rights.
- **Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Award** - Mayor of Gdansk Paweł Adamowicz focused his activities on fostering solidarity, the integration of migrants and minorities, dialogue with civil society, and the promotion of fundamental rights on the ground. He was assassinated on 13 January 2019. The establishment of this award is a homage to and recognition of everyone who works with courage and integrity against intolerance, radicalisation, hate speech, oppression and xenophobia, those who promote equal opportunities, social integration and fundamental rights.

Multi-level approach

SDG delivery implies ambitious action at all levels. Good practices in implementing SDG 16 include:

Austria has introduced a series of initiatives and measures to protect victims of violence. Among these is the Violence Protection Summit held in 2021 to spread awareness among the population, the 2021 law prescribing compulsory violence prevention consultation for perpetrators, and the 2020 legal reform to protect victims of cyber violence.

The city of Jihlava in **Czechia** implements SDG 16 by making its policymaking inclusive. The first step was to join a supporting network. Jihlava followed the methodology of the EU funded URBACT Global Goals for Cities network for developing a strategic plan aligned with SDGs and defining a systematic participatory approach. Jihlava benefited from exchanges of good practices and expert advice and training. It worked and exchanged with 150 experts, 20 companies, 1 300 citizens and 1 110 children from the city to co-create a sustainable plan for the city.

EU external action

Global trends

Peace and security are vital for sustainable development and, conversely, sustainable development is key to maintaining peace and development. With the highest number of conflicts worldwide since 1947[1] and a sharp deterioration of 2002 indicators of the Global Peace Index (political instability, political terror scale, neighbouring country relations and refugees) and indicators of democracy, the rule of law and bribery, together with the rise in internally displaced people, achieving SDG 16 seems further away than ever before.

Internal / external coherence including policy coherence for development

In relation to SDG 16, the EU internal security has been increasingly linked to addressing the external dimension of security. From the Strategic Compass to the Security Union Strategy and other related strategic policy documents, EU action is underpinned by a broad toolbox covering the internal-external nexus, based on a whole-of-society approach and on close cooperation with strategic partners, including non-EU countries, civil society actors or international organisations. The EU external policy instruments play an important role in supporting this approach and for working with partners on priorities under SDG 16.

Curbing illicit financial flows to increase domestic resource mobilisation is a key component of the Commission's support for partner countries. When it comes to addressing money laundering and financing of terrorism, the Commission is mandated to identify high-risk non-EU countries having strategic deficiencies on their regime on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism. The Commission is also a member of the Financial Action task Force (FATF), the main international body concerned with combating money laundering, the financing of terrorism and other threats to the integrity of the international financial system. In the tax area, the Commission cooperates with all international organisations, which work on reducing aggressive tax planning opportunities and tax evasion, such as the Inclusive Framework on domestic tax base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) and the Global Forum on transparency and exchange of information (see also SDG 17).

The Commission has also supported specific initiatives in this regard under its Addis Tax Initiative commitment, including through a Team Europe approach. The Commission supports developing countries' increased participation in international tax fora and promotes double tax agreements between Member States and developing countries. In particular, the Commission has developed a toolbox which recommends strategies to Member States on how to assess the spillover effects of their tax treaty policy. This issue is regularly discussed in the EU Platform for Tax Good Governance, which is an advisory expert group composed of representatives of civil society and EU Member States.

The EU list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions is a strong instrument to address tax good governance concerns with non-EU countries and an additional example of policy coherence for development. Good governance in the tax area is of mutual benefit for developing countries and for the EU and its Member States. It supports the sovereign rights of governments on public revenues and contributes to the efforts made at international level to combat tax evasion and tax avoidance. The EU list is regularly updated based on a set of criteria for good governance. These criteria relate to tax transparency, fair taxation and the implementation of anti-BEPS minimum standards. To support the efforts of jurisdictions engaged in the process, the Commission is closely engaged in dialogue with them on relevant technical matters and has used its various available tools to provide dedicated technical assistance and training needed for developing countries to meet international standards.

Moreover, the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance under the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) grants preferential access to EU markets to certain countries on the condition that they fulfil, ratify and effectively implement a number of international conventions on sustainable development, including on human rights and good governance.

EU and Member States external financial support for SDG implementation and results

In 2021, EU institutions reported to the OECD commitments for EUR 3.9 billion in projects contributing to SDG 16. The largest share of the EU contribution is accounted for by projects that target SDG 16 as the main SDG. These projects also contribute to other interlinked SDGs, with the largest contributions going to SDG 5, SDG 10 and SDG 17. Other SDGs also contribute to SDG 16 as a significant objective. The main contributors are SDG 4, SDG 8 and SDG 17. When taking into account also other official flows, private funds mobilized through public intervention and support to international public goods, the Total Official Support to Sustainable Development (TOSSD) of the EU to SDG 16 amounted to EUR 5.2 billion in 2021.

In terms of selected results of assistance[42], in 2018-2021 the EU supported 56 countries in the improvement of their electoral process and supported the development and revision of 1 600 government policies, with the participation of civil society organisations. The EU also funded the assistance directly provided to 129 000 victims of human rights violation and supported legal aid interventions directly benefiting more than 5.8 million people. Through its interventions, the EU also supported 988 000 individuals in situations of post-conflict peace building and/or conflict prevention.

Collectively, the EU and those Member States that reported on SDGs to the OECD in 2021 contributed EUR 14.9 billion to SDG 16. The EU and Member States flows to SDG 16 target all regions, with a stronger focus on Africa (38%) and Asia (24%), America (11%) and other countries in Europe (11%). It also has a strong global component (15%) which is explained by the importance of multilateral actors and processes in SDG 16.

Main policy orientations and initiatives for external engagement

In relation to SDG 16, in line with partner countries' own policies and plans for building effective accountable and inclusive institutions, the EU's priorities, underpinned by its global strategy on foreign and security policy, encompass:

- peace and security, with a focus on conflict risks-early warning and analysis, humanitarian response, conflict mediation and resolution, and post-conflict recovery;
- human rights and democracy, and
- the rule of law.

In line with UN efforts, the EU follows an integrated approach to conflicts and crisis, from conflict prevention to crisis management and peacebuilding. It has adopted a comprehensive approach using the entire breadth of its

[42] For the methodology on results, see the same section under SDG 2.

policies and tools (diplomatic, financial, security, trade-related, sustainable development actions and humanitarian aid) to this end. These include prompt acting on prevention, responding responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation and avoiding premature disengagement, while promoting the importance of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Responsibility to Protect, the promotion of local ownership, inclusiveness, and the resilience and sustainability of supported actors, by engaging with national and local authorities, communities and civil society. The approach also integrates the 'women, peace and security' action plan as one of its key priorities, articulates disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) around a people-centred approach, and implements the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, under which humanitarian, development and peace actors work hand in hand to find and deliver collective outcomes to reduce overall vulnerability and unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict, and ultimately ensure the protection and well-being of populations and build their resilience to shocks. The EU uses different funding instruments (geographical, thematic and rapid response under NDICI) as well as actions under its common foreign and security policy (CSFP), complemented by actions under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020) aiming for stabilisation, reconciliation and peace processes in partner countries and regions.

Conflict sensitivity is incorporated into the EU's external action, in particular in fragile contexts. The 2017 European Consensus on Development recognises that poverty, conflict, fragility and forced displacement are deeply interlinked and must be addressed in a coherent and comprehensive way. The EU, despite many challenges, continues to be seen and perceived in most parts of the world as a key international actor in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, with significant added value regarding its different tools and approaches.

The promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a cornerstone of EU external action, implemented in a concerted and coordinated approach with Member States. Resources and expertise support inclusive and transparent governance in partner countries, such as illustrated by the important initiative on parliamentary capacity strengthening (2019) using a peer-to-peer approach, by facilitating exchanges with EU Member State parliaments.

As upheld in the European Consensus on Development and enshrined in the Global Europe Regulation, the EU implements a human rights based approach (HRBA) to international partnerships. The aim is to ensure that all EU development actions are anchored on the following key principles: apply all human rights for all (universality), meaningful and inclusive participation, non-discrimination and equality, accountability and rule of law for all and transparency and access to information.

The EU counterterrorism agenda (2020) aims to reinforce international cooperation across four main pillars (anticipate, prevent, protect, and respond). The EU Global Facility on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism remained a key tool to assist partners in complying with international standards. In April 2021, the Commission presented a new strategy to tackle organised crime for 2021-2025.

The fundamentals of the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions, together with public administration reform and socio-economic stability, are at the core of the EU's enlargement policy and determine the overall pace of accession negotiations. In the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, stabilisation in political, economic and security terms is the main driver for the EU engagement with partner countries.

Examples of EU actions (with a focus on Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives)

In relation to SDG 16, responding to EU-Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) shared challenges in the area of security and justice, the regional LAC Team Europe Initiative on security & justice partnership aims to leverage the transformative impact of EU-LAC cooperation on the rule of law and the fight against transnational organised crime by joining forces with EU Member States, Commission DGs, the EEAS, EU specialised agencies, and OLAF. Actions will support LAC's overall rule of law environment, the consolidation of structural regional and

intercontinental cooperation networks to fight against serious and organised crime, and a priority focus on bi-regional cooperation on the main 'lines of business' of LAC organised crime.

On law enforcement and judicial cooperation, EU regional projects include, for instance, the Euromed Police project implemented by CEPOL, in cooperation with EUROPOL. It aims at enhancing institutional capacity to protect EU neighbours' citizens against transnational serious and organised crime. The Euromed Justice project, on the other hand, is a capacity-building initiative designed to develop a sustainable cross-regional mechanism of judicial cooperation in criminal matters between EU member states and the south partner countries (SPCs), as well as EU Justice and Home Affairs Agencies.

In the Western Balkans, in 2018 a Regional Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition was signed as well as an EU-Western Balkans Regional Action Plan (JAP) on Counter-Terrorism and countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE). Regional projects provide dedicated support to their implementation as well as to the reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters, countering radicalisation in prison, exchanging knowledge for practitioners, policy makers and researchers (mirroring the Radicalisation Awareness Network activities in EU Member States). Other initiatives include regional campaigns such as Block the hatred, Share the love, launched by the Council of Europe with EU support in response to the rise in hate speech and the glorification of war crimes in the region, and which reached over 1 500 000 people. The Commission has continued to support civil society organizations advocating for Good Governance and Anti-Corruption in Southeast Europe, while working with OSCE and the Council of Europe on several projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of the judiciary to investigate and adjudicate corruption, financial crime and organised crime cases.

Within the Eastern Partnership framework, a regional programme on the **fight against organised crime i**s being implemented in partnership with CEPOL, Europol and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNCRI) aiming at strengthening strategic and operational police cooperation between the region, the EU and its Member States and at increasing capacities to trace, freeze, seize, confiscate and recover assets linked to criminal activities.

Across regions, the EU assisted partners in the design and implementation of reforms in the fields of **good governance, the rule of law, judiciary reform, and the public safety and security sector,** including border management and counterterrorism. The Commission's budget support has been an important tool used in support of SDG 16 with EUR 4.4 billion in support of SDG 16 as a main objective in 74 countries and more than EUR 15 billion as a significant objective in 271 countries in 2014-2021. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily slowed down engagement in the security area, although the demand for greater accountability and advancement in reforms remained high. In 2022, more than 20 Team Europe initiatives focusing on security aspects are proposed for co-funding, 60 on resilience and 15 on peace. Examples of EU action in support of SDG 16 include support for public administration reform in the **Dominican Republic**, **Georgia**, **Ukraine**, **Albania**, **Serbia, Kosovo**, **Montenegro** and **Tunisia**. Support for public finance management was provided for 14 countries over 2014-2021 in the form of budget support and associated technical assistance across all regions.

Similarly, the EU supports **justice reforms** focusing on institution and capacity building, promoting alternative dispute resolution, measuring and enhancing the independence, effectiveness and transparency of the judiciary, and improving the penitentiary system. Programmes have spanned the **Southern** and **Eastern Neighbourhood**, the **Western Balkans**, **West Africa** and the **Caribbean regions**. In **Albania,** for example, EU budget support and technical assistance facilitated the increased pace of the vetting process for judges and prosecutors, under the supervision of the EU-funded International Monitoring Operation (IMO). In **Armenia**, support for justice and anti-corruption contributes to strengthening the integrity and accountability of the judiciary. In **Jordan**, the EU supported the independence, accountability, specialisation and efficiency of the judicial power, including ensuring better access to the justice system for Syrian refugees and vulnerable populations. In **Georgia**, the EU supports the project Civil Society Action for Promoting Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for the development of legal services and effective advocacy with a special focus on women with disabilities and ethnic minorities.

The EU also funds regular peer reviews of **national justice systems**, notably in enlargement countries, as part of accession negotiations. Within the Eastern Partnership framework, a third phase of the Partnership for Good Governance programme is being implemented in cooperation with the Council of Europe and targeting the strengthening of the Rule of Law within thematic priority areas such as **anticorruption** and combating money laundering/terrorist finance, key judicial reforms, and combating discrimination. A Governance Progress Board programme for the Eastern Partnership Countries has been launched in cooperation with GIZ and aiming at enhancing evidence-based policy through improved monitoring of good governance and rule of law reforms.

The EU has been supporting multiple actions focusing on crisis response, conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness, and for addressing global and trans-regional threats. Key ongoing crisis response actions include **Afghanistan, Myanmar**, **Syria**, **Ethiopia**, **Central African Republic** and **Venezuela**. In **Ukraine**, crisis response actions have spanned humanitarian law, assisting Ukrainian authorities and key stakeholders in protecting civilians, and preparing early recovery of liberated areas and preventing further escalation of violence. A regional conflict transformation programme (EU4Dialogue) has been implemented in a number of Eastern Partnership countries. The EU has also been supporting UN-led peace processes in **Yemen**, **Syria**, **Libya**, and the **Central African Republic**.

Support for national reconciliation processes is another facet of support, such as support for the **Colombian Truth Commission** or, in **Central African Republic**, support for national peace and reconciliation processes. An action in **Iraq** supports the digitisation of evidence of crimes committed by Da'esh in order to increase prosecutions of Da'esh members for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

Through its **Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions**, the EU assists partner countries in conflict prevention, combating organised crime & smuggling, reforming national security sectors, border management and monitoring the judicial system and the rule of law. For instance, the **EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya** (EUBAM Libya) supports the national authorities in developing state security structures, border management, law enforcement and criminal justice.

EU non-proliferation and disarmament (NPD) actions also contribute to SDG 16 by promoting the universalisation and implementation of international treaties and conventions on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The same objective is pursued by the **European Special Representatives (EUSRs**), independent CFSP entities that support EU diplomatic work in key regions and countries. In **Kosovo**, the EU Special Representative supports the country's commitment to the rule of law, the protection of minorities and the protection of cultural and religious heritage.

Another area of support is decentralisation. In **Togo,** for example, a Team Europe initiative is proposed to support **Togo's decentralisation and local governance,** combining EU and Member State efforts through capacity building, budget support and decentralised cooperation, to consolidate the decentralisation process at national and local levels, and strengthen the role of town halls in grassroots development and their involvement in the stability and security of Togo.

On **humanitarian assistance**, the EU together with its Member States remains a key donor and intervenes not only in large-scale humanitarian crises – like **Ukraine**, Syria, **Afghanistan** or **Ethiopia** – but also in forgotten crises, i.e. those of severe and protracted character that do not attract media attention, and where the level of international aid to affected populations is insufficient.

Under the **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum**, tailor-made migration partnerships were initiated or strengthened with several countries in Africa and Asia. The EU and its Member States are also pooling efforts to reinforce their impact in supporting democracy worldwide with a global Team Europe initiative on **democracy,** with better targeted, more strategic and more visible actions and a shared and increased knowledge base.

Between 2014 and 2020, the EU provided support for its partners in the **Western Balkans** and Eastern Partnership countries to support prevention and repression of corruption and the fight against organised crime and money-laundering, and it continues to do so under the new financial framework for 2021-2027.

Between 2014 and 2020 the EU allocated funds to support the active involvement of civil society and media organisations in decision-making and in key sector reforms in enlargement countries through the **Civil Society Facility** and **Media Action Programmes**. For the period 2021 and 2023, these allocations total EUR 218 million. More specifically in the area of freedom of expression, the EU supported the promotion of media pluralism, media freedom, development and implementation of media policy and regulation, financial sustainability, safety of journalists, fact-checking, fight against disinformation, support to public broadcasters, new media development, professional and ethical standards of the media and self-regulation, just to name a few key areas of work

Actions by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated to ensure complementarity and impact in support of the SDGs. In addition to acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda including SDG 16, such as the following initiatives for illustrative purposes. Several Member States provide support for partner countries to implement SDG 16 across the world, including by sharing best practices in organising public administration, state institutions or local government reforms. Scholarships are an important instrument for supporting the development of partner countries. For instance, in relation to the European Partnership countries and the Western Balkans, **Latvia** and **Poland** support the training of young professionals in public administration. **Poland** also supports capacity building in local investment plans, decentralisation, democratic change and good governance, entrepreneurship and private sector development. In addition, **Latvia** supports capacity building in such areas as anti-corruption, justice and regional development. **Croatia** supports countries in the EU integration process by providing experts with relevant experience of the accession process to transfer knowledge. **Slovenia** actively supports countries in the areas of administrative law, public finance management, central banking and reform management.

Looking ahead

In 2023, the Commission will put forward a **defence of democracy package** to strengthen action under the European democracy action plan to promote free and fair elections, including by developing civic space and citizen participation to bolster democratic resilience from within. It will include proposals to protect our democracies and strengthen trust by defending our democratic system from outside interests. The Commission plans to propose measures to update our legislative framework for fighting corruption.

In July 2023, the Commission will adopt the fourth edition of the annual rule of law reports with specific recommendations addressed to all Member States. As part of the European rule of law mechanism the report informs the continued dialogue with Member States, the Council, the European and the European Parliament. By the end of 2023, the Commission will also publish its annual report on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU. The report monitors progress in the areas where the EU has powers to act, showing how the charter has been taken into account in actual cases, notably when new EU legislation is proposed.

The Commission also plans to adopt a new anti-corruption package, update the anti-corruption legislative framework and include corruption in the sanctions toolbox to promote good governance practices.

The Commission is strengthening its online engagement to facilitate citizens' participation in European policymaking. The upgraded Have Your Say portal will be a single-entry point bringing together all information on citizens' engagement tools and processes that run in the Commission, including the new generation of citizens' panels. This new online hub will not only integrate key features of the Conference's multilingual digital platform, such as direct exchanges between citizens in all EU official languages thanks to eTranslation, but will also host online polls and online participatory events.

On the **external** side, the EU will continue to take determined action to accelerate the implementation of **SDG 16** globally, including through the roll-out of a range of multiannual indicative programmes with partner countries, which include shared priorities such as peace, security, good governance, the rule of law, democracy and human rights, and through mainstreaming this priority across its actions. The support is also in the form of thematic programmes under NDICI, notably the Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy and the Thematic Programme on Civil Society Organisations. A tangible contribution to SDG 16 (and other interlinked SDGs) will be made through the deployment of Global Gateway, to be undertaken in a Team Europe approach, which will actively integrate these enabling conditions.

SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Introduction

Due to the unique nature of SDG17, this chapter reflects the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA, 2015) and the EU Report on Investing in Sustainable Development (ISDR), which documents how the EU, its Member States and European development financial institutions are implementing the agenda to support partner countries through financial and non-financial means of implementation to progress towards the SDGs. It includes where appropriate within each section information on how these challenges are addressed within the EU.

Target and policy reference	Trends
The EU is collectively committed to provide 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) as official development assistance (ODA) within the timeframe of the 2030 Agenda 2017 European Consensus on Development	The EU and its Member States' collective ODA as a share of GNI stood at 0.59% in 2022 (based on preliminary OECD data).
The EU undertakes to meet collectively the target of 0.15 – 0.20% of ODA/GNI to the least developed countries (LDCs) in the short term, and to reach 0.20% of ODA/GNI to LDCs within the timeframe of the 2030 Agenda 2017 European Consensus on Development	The EU and its Member States' collective ODA to LDCs as a share of GNI stood at 0.11% in 2021.
All European households to be covered by a gigabit network by 2030 Set in the 2030 Digital Compass	The uptake of high-speed internet coverage has improved considerably over a short-term period in the EU. While only 25.2% of EU households enjoyed such connectivity in 2016, this share has risen considerably, reaching 70.2% in 2021. If high-speed internet rollout continues at this pace, the EU will reach 100% coverage well ahead of 2030. Connectivity has also improved in rural areas. Between 2016 and 2021, the share of rural households with a fixed high-speed internet connection increased from 7.7% to 37.1% across the EU.

To achieve the SDGs and the Paris Agreement objectives, the EU promotes its international partnerships in support of neighbouring countries, developing countries and emerging economies, notably in making the necessary investment. The EU and its Member States, acting in a 'Team Europe' approach, have been at the forefront of supporting partner countries through a range of financial and non-financial means of implementation to help meet the SDGs, notably in terms of supporting domestic resource mobilisation, innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable finance and initiatives ensuring debt sustainability.

Since 2020, the EU and its Member States stepped up their commitment to working better together to ensure coordination and consistency and to better contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by initiating action at national, regional/multi-country or global level with a '**Team Europe**' approach. A concrete manifestation of this new approach consists in the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs), which are developed based on joint analysis to identify critical priorities that are limiting development and where a coordinated and consistent effort by Team Europe would ensure a transformative impact.

Further, reinforcing this Team Europe approach, the **European Financial Architecture for Development** (EFAD) was also improved (in response to the June 2021 Council Conclusions), with the aim of broadening its impact, efficiency, and visibility, with a view to deliver a sustainable recovery contributing to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. This includes involving European, national, public and private actors and leveraging the entire European financial development sector, encouraging the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to work together more effectively and efficiently, and to strengthen their cooperation with the European development finance institutions in a Team Europe approach.

Importantly, the EU's **Global Gateway strategy**, launched in 2021, aims to deliver on the twin green and digital transitions through sustainable infrastructure investment in support of the SDGs around the world to strengthen notably digital, transport, health, climate and energy, and education/research. Operating under the Global Gateway framework and focusing on its priorities, there are currently over 160 TEIs endorsed all over the world, including through dedicated regional investment packages such as the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package.

Sustainable finance

The EU has shown strong leadership in promoting sustainable finance within the EU as well as globally and in partner countries, with the objective of channelling private investment towards sustainable economic activities, businesses and projects. The financial sector in the EU and beyond needs to play its role in achieving the Paris agreement objectives. The transition to a sustainable economy is both challenging and indispensable, with massive payoffs in terms of green job and business opportunities. Domestically, the EU has taken major steps to build a sustainable finance ecosystem with the 2018 Sustainable Finance Action Plan followed by the 2021 Sustainable Finance Strategy. One of the building blocks of the strategy is the EU taxonomy establishing a list of environmentally sustainable economic activities and identifying six environmental objectives. A first part of the Taxonomy Regulation on sustainable activities for climate change adaptation and mitigation objectives entered into force in 2022, with additional action scheduled for 2023.

Another building block pertains to sustainability-related disclosure requirements through the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR) as well as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). These apply to financial market participants and certain companies. A set of tools including the EU Climate Benchmark Regulation, applicable since 2020, and the EU Green Bond Standard, recently agreed by the European Parliament and the Council, is also part of this sustainable finance ecosystem.

Externally, low and middle-income countries face massive investment needs to finance their sustainable development, which increased with the COVID-19 pandemic despite a record high level of ODA and a quick recovery of Foreign Direct Investment and remittances levels (UN SDG Report 2022). Only 20% of global financial assets are held in developing countries. On the positive side, a change of just 1.1% in the allocation of the total financial assets could provide sufficient funds to fill the yawning SDG funding gap according to OECD.

In recognition of these challenges and opportunities, the EU and its Member States contribute to the acceleration of private financial flows to partner countries, which is critical to collectively deliver on global sustainability commitments. A high-level expert group (HLEG) has been formed in 2022 to advise the Commission on transformative and innovative action the EU can take to help scale up sustainable finance in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Its recommendations will inform a comprehensive Commission strategy.

The European Commission is also seeking to help LMICs develop markets for sustainability-related instruments such as **green bonds**. Green bonds are a useful tool to attract, at scale, private investors to sustainable investment such as green (infrastructure) projects, therefore enabling countries to meet Paris Agreement objectives and to achieve a lasting, sustainable recovery. To this end, a Team Europe Global Green Bond Initiative is expected to be launched in 2023, under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

The European Commission is also supporting, through the **EUROCLIMA+ programme**, the development of the **Latin America and Caribbean Common Taxonomy Framework**. This will help ensure regional and global interoperability, while allowing for local contextualisation. In **South Africa**, the European Commission and the National Treasury of South Africa compared the EU taxonomy and the South African green finance taxonomy, so that investors can more easily identify investment that could be considered green by both South Africa and the EU. This will help reduce their transaction and research costs and facilitate cross-border flows for the green and sustainable transition. Moving forward, in 2023, the European Commission will set up a Sustainable Finance Advisory Hub to help stakeholders in partner countries develop sustainable finance frameworks, including standards and the issuance of sustainability-related financial instruments. This will be in line with international good practice and building on the EU experience.

In addition, the EU and its Member States participate in many international sustainable finance initiatives and fora, with the purpose of exchanging best practices and increasing global consistency, cooperation and interoperability. These include the **International Platform on Sustainable Finance** (IPSF) and the **G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group**.

Measures taken by the EU and its Member States are mutually reinforcing and coordinated, to ensure that they complement each other and have impact in support of the SDGs. As well as acting together with the EU through joint programming and Team Europe Initiatives, EU Member States carry out their own projects in support of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 17. Some initiatives implemented by Member States are presented in the various sections of this chapter for illustrative purposes.

For instance, the **Netherlands** catalysed private capital towards the SDGs using innovative finance, such as an SDG-Focused Emerging Market Credit Fund, in which pension funds invested without any use of blended finance, allowing capital to be raised to finance private sector projects in LMICs, together with IFIs and DFIs.

Domestic public resources

Over the last decade, worldwide government revenue as a share of GDP has remained stable (around 30%) but regional data show a clear downward trend of public revenues in LDCs, even though these are the main sources of public investment and the provision of basic services to their citizens. Illicit capital flight and tax havens cost low-income countries USD 200 billion a year in lost corporate tax revenues.

At international level, a significant effort is being made by the EU and its Member States to reduce illicit financial flows and **fight tax avoidance and evasion worldwide** (addressed also under SDG 16), which disproportionately affects developing countries. Via its list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions, the EU has engaged in enhanced bilateral dialogues on good tax governance with countries around the world, including developing countries.

As a result, dozens of developing countries have joined leading international forums such as the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes (Global Forum) and the Inclusive Framework against Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS IF), as well as becoming parties to the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters. These reforms are beneficial for domestic resource mobilisation (DRM) directly and indirectly, as they provide for new tools to secure tax revenues and expand the tax base. The EU also helps the Global Forum and the BEPS IF to help developing countries implement DRM-relevant standards. In addition, in 2021, close to 140 countries around the world, including EU Member States and developing

countries, agreed to a reform of the international tax framework and joined the G20/OECD statement to address the tax challenges arising from the digitalisation of economy. They did so by setting a minimum effective level of taxation (Pillar 2) and by re-allocating parts of the profits of the world's largest multinationals to market jurisdictions (Pillar 1). This agreement will help bring about a level playing field in international taxation and boost tax revenue collection, which is paramount for increasing public investment and improving the business environment.

In terms of domestic public resources, the EU and its Member States are committed to the EU's '**Collect More and Spend Better**' strategy. They have substantially increased their support for domestic revenue mobilisation and public financial management, through global, regional, and country-level initiatives, and these have benefitted over 90 partner countries.

At country level, the EU and Member States support the improvement of tax policy and tax administration, public financial management and governance, and have more than doubled their support for technical cooperation in these areas since 2015. Budget support has been particularly significant in these efforts, not only by providing technical assistance, policy dialogue and incentives for reform, but also by integrating these aspects as eligibility criteria for the support, thus reinforcing the dialogue and incentives around these issues.

The EU and its Member States are the second-largest provider of budget support after multilateral organisations. In 2019, Commission payments for DRM amounted to EUR 98 million, of which 63% was channelled through budget support indicators, and 37% through projects. According to data from the IMF, African countries where the Commission introduced such DRM indicators saw increased ratios of tax revenue to GDP by 2 percentage points on average between 2015 and 2019.

By way of illustration, a Team Europe Initiative supports domestic resource mobilisation in **Mexico,** which faces high levels of structural inequality across regions and population groups. Since a fairer and more efficient taxation system can help to address inequalities and promote social cohesion, the TEI seeks to improve the capacity and transparency of the Mexican tax administration across the federal and state levels.

In **Cameroon**, where 75% of the wood purchased locally is of illegal origin, the EU has promoted fiscal reforms through a budget support programme, accompanied by strong policy dialogue, donor coordination and technical assistance. Analysis of the fiscal revenue in the timber sector revealed a financing gap of EUR 72 million in uncollected fees and undeclared revenue by local companies active in the timber sector. These results steered a national debate on increasing controls, creating the political space to introduce incentives for the private sector to operate legally (see EU budget support trends and results 2021).

Domestic and international private business and finance

With regards to domestic and international private business and finance, the EU and its Member States put a strong focus on private sector development as a cross-cutting means of building resilience and promoting the creation of decent jobs in LMICs. EU assistance to private sector development has grown by 65% over the last decade, supporting investment and policies to improve the regulatory environment for private sector development, including access to capital. Importantly, the EFSD+ supports sustainable investment worldwide by leveraging private capital to complement direct external cooperation grants, including blending and guarantees to support micro, small & medium enterprises (MSMEs), notably in rural areas and for women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the EU and its Member States have taken important steps to support remittances as an important source of sustainable investment. Some progress has been made in reducing the costs associated with the transfer of remittances from the EU to partner countries, but globally current costs remain well above the 2030 target of 3%. Progress in low-income and lower middle-income countries in increasing access to credit for MSMEs, or boosting Foreign Direct Investment flows, essential for sustainable investment, has also been uneven and slow. The pandemic has affected developing economies proportionately more in terms of its toll on human and physical capital, investment, and economic growth, than in higher income countries.

The EU is working on harnessing the development potential of the private sector through multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the **EU-Africa business forum**, which facilitate the identification of bottlenecks for private sector development and trade. Through Global Gateway, the EU mixes grants, soft loans and guarantees aimed at crowding in private sector investment and brings in new bodies such as the export credit agencies.

Additional funds will also be leveraged through EFSD+, which will make available EUR 40 billion in guarantee capacity, for a variety of sectors, in addition to several billion euro in blending grants. The European Commission will set up a Business Advisory Group on the Global Gateway. This group will ensure private sector involvement, be easily accessible and will serve to discuss the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy.

By way of illustration, the EU supported financial inclusion in 60 countries, assisting MSMEs and individuals to access financial products (such as credit, insurance, leasing). Blending operations were the most common instrument used by firms to access finance.

International development cooperation

The EU institutions[43]provided EUR 22 billion of official development assistance (ODA)[44] overall in 2022. Their ODA to least developed countries (LDCs)[45] amounted to EUR 3.6 billion in 2022[46]. From a Team Europe perspective, the EU and its Member States are collectively by far the largest donor of ODA worldwide, providing 43% of global ODA in 2022. Their collective ODA amounted to EUR 92.8 billion in that year, corresponding to 0.59% of collective gross national income (GNI). They have collectively provided EUR 16.5 billion of ODA to LDCs in 2021, equivalent to 0.11% of their collective GNI. Although some Member States already exceeded their individual targets, more effort is needed to meet the collective and individual targets and to collectively provide 0.7% of GNI as ODA and 0.2% of GNI as ODA to the least developed countries (LDCs) by 2030.

ODA provided by the EU and its Member States' is made more effective by adopting joint programming processes, to achieve a better division of labour by collectively reducing fragmentation and sharing the coordinating workload at sector or policy area level. The approach supports joint implementation such as Team Europe Initiatives. Support delivered as Team Europe in response to the COVID 19 pandemic amounted to EUR 47.7 billion of disbursements (of which EUR 24.9 billion came from the EU institutions) up to the end of 2021, to help partner countries cope with the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences.

A good example of putting in practice Team Europe and Global Gateway is through twinning and TAIEX. These peer-to-peer institution-building instruments bring in EU Member States public sector expertise in support of partner country reform processes, supporting the implementation of the SDGs. TAIEX and twinning are well established in the EU enlargement and neighbourhood countries.

Over 600 TAIEX events take place every year and over 100 twinning projects are ongoing. The implementation of TAIEX and twinning in INTPA countries started in 2020. Twinning projects are ongoing in Zambia, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia, Dominican Republic, Madagascar and Rwanda. With the lifting of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the number of TAIEX INTPA events increased strongly from mid-2022 onwards. 70 events in more than 30 countries have been implemented so far, covering all the SDGs.

Furthermore, the Global Gateway strategy, brings together a 360-degree package through a mix of grants, concessional loans and guarantees to de-risk private sector investment, as well as a number of operational tools such as technical assistance, policy and economic dialogue, trade and investment agreements and standardisation. The goal is to create better conditions for quality investment.

[43] Includes the European Commission and European Investment Bank (EIB).
[44] This is measured on a grant equivalent basis in line with OECD methodology. For 2022, figures are based on preliminary ODA data.
[45] This is composed of bilateral net ODA to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), imputed multilateral ODA to LDCs and regional ODA known to benefit LDCs, in line with OECD methodology.
[46] Preliminary data.

Complementing ODA, the EU and its Member States also used innovative financing mechanisms, such as leveraging private capital through blending or guarantees. This mobilised nearly EUR 10 billion of additional resources in 2020, close to 15% of EU ODA in 2020. They have also developed a roadmap for a more inclusive and coordinated European Financing Architecture for Development (see EFAD in the introduction).

Consistent with the overall decision that at least 20% of the EU budget is spent on **climate finance in 2020** and a commitment to reach 30% by 2027, the EU budget includes an additional EUR 4 billion for climate finance for partner countries until 2027, such as the substantially increased funding for supporting biodiversity and disaster risk reduction. The EU has been helping and encouraging major economies and partner countries to successfully execute their climate change mitigation and adaptation policies. Many cooperation mechanisms have been put in place by the Commission in this respect, in an effort to accelerate the decarbonisation of partner countries. For instance, the Commission, with Member States, as part of the D4D Hub Team Europe Initiative, is developing measures to ease the green and digital twin transitions in partner countries.

Gender equality (SDG 5) is a core value of the EU and a universally recognised human right enshrined in international conventions. To track gender equality, all development cooperation projects are scored according to the three-point system of the OECD/DAC, under which an action scoring 0 ("gender not targeted") must be justified. The political commitment that 85% of all development cooperation programmes must be gender responsive is reiterated in the Gender Equality Action Plan III for 2021-25.

International trade as an engine for development

Facilitating trade and financial integration play an important role in driving growth and supporting sustainable development. The EU is at the forefront of the global efforts to reform the WTO, to reassert its relevance and effectiveness in ensuring that trade remains open and fair. Sustainability and the advancement of the SDGs are also at the core of the EU's trade policy review for the coming years.

Progress on trade globally is poor, with the share of least developed countries (LDCs) in global merchandise export sticking to around 1%. Whilst the EU has become the main export market for LDCs, their share in EU imports remained at about 2% from 2010 to 2020, while the target of doubling the share of LDCs' exports worldwide by 2020, from its value of 1% in 2011, has not been met.

Within the EU, the customs union contributes to the implementation of the SDGs, through facilitation of trade and supporting enforcement of key policy measures in international trade in goods and supply chains. In 2022, the Commission began preparations for a comprehensive customs union reform package, which would continue to strengthen the contribution of customs in a range of areas, such as the facilitation of legitimate trade (contributing to SDG 8), the detection and prevention of imports or exports which contravene relevant EU rules on such on waste, chemicals, or safe and sustainable product design (contributing to SDG 12), or the protection of territorial ecosystems (e.g. from imports which are products of deforestation) and protection of biodiversity (through helping detect traffic contravening CITES) (contributing to SDG 15).

The EU and its Member States are jointly the world's largest donors of aid for trade, representing 40% in 2020 (Aid for trade annual progress report 2022), which is seen as a key tool for supporting developing countries' sustainable integration into the world economy. The collective commitments of the EU and its Member States amounted to EUR 22.9 billion in 2020 (an increase of 22% from 2019). The European Commission accounts for 38% of this share and the Member States for 62%. EU's aid-for-trade is relatively more directed towards Africa than other regions, and 13% to LDCs. The EU has committed itself to increasing this share in the coming years, in line with the SDGs. Key areas of action have related to women's economic empowerment, environment and biodiversity protection, and digitalisation.

As regards **international trade as an engine for development**, the EU has fully implemented the Bali package which contains advances in the Doha Development Agenda agreed at the 9th WTO Ministerial Conference. The

Bali package includes the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, which is designed to lower global trade barriers while implementing special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries.

The EU's trade bloc offers an extensive network of free-trade agreements and arrangements, with unilateral preferences for developing countries, as well as autonomous trade and development policy tools with the objective of supporting the implementation of the SDGs. By way of illustration, the EU negotiated several economic **partnership agreements** with 14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and 4 free trade arrangements with countries in Northern Africa. Exports to the EU27 from the LDC countries covered by EPAs has increased on average by 8% between 2010 and 2021, and by 13% in the last year. This increase in exports has been accompanied by an increase in the share of manufactured products over total exports for Comoros and Mozambique.

In 2021, the EU supported the implementation of the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement**, notably through the African Trade Observatory and the Harmonised System for the classification of products. These efforts are further supported through a dedicated Team Europe Initiative as part of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package, as well as through the launch of a High-Level Dialogue on Trade and Economic Integration.

All modern EU trade agreements include **Trade and Sustainable Development** (TSD) chapters with a broad set of commitments based on international labour and environmental standards. The EU regularly engages with TSD partner countries by means of dialogues on labour rights and environment-related commitments, as well as related cooperation projects. For instance, in Vietnam, the EU continued to engage closely with the authorities (a) to support the implementation of the country's new Labour Code, in force since 1 January 2021 (which allows the creation of worker representative organisations), and (b) to advance Vietnam's labour commitments on the ratification and effective implementation of the ILO fundamental conventions. On 22 June 2022, the Commission adopted a new Trade and Sustainable Development strategy promoting a priority-based engagement with partner countries, enhanced participation and support for civil society, as well as a stronger focus on implementing and enforcing TSD commitments. This included the possibility to suspend trade preferences in serious instances of non-compliance with the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work, or in cases of failure to comply with obligations that materially defeat the object and purpose of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The EU's **Generalised Scheme of Preferences** (GSP) grants unilateral trade preferences reducing or eliminating import tariffs on goods exported from developing countries to the EU market. The objective is to increase trading opportunities, reduce poverty and create jobs based on international values and principles relating to sustainable development. The EU's GSP covers 67 beneficiary countries, of which 46 are LDCs benefiting from the Everything-But-Arms (EBA) arrangement. The 2018 GSP Mid-Term Evaluation showed that the EU's GSP is helping eradicate poverty (by expanding exports from countries most in need) and promote sustainable development and respect for human rights in beneficiary countries. For example, in 2021 over EUR 22 billion worth of imports into the EU from LDCs used EBA preferences (66% of all goods imported from LDCs). On 22 September 2021, the Commission proposed a new GSP regulation introducing targeted improvements that aim to better respond to the evolving needs of developing countries and reinforce the scheme's social and environmental impact.

Debt and debt sustainability

While rising public debt levels were already a cause for concern at the end of last decade, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war have triggered a massive increase in debt accumulation and have exacerbated the risk of debt crises. This highlights the need for more progress in ensuring **debt sustainability**, which will require efforts from the entire global community.

The EU recognises the importance of responsible lending and borrowing practices and has supported efforts within existing initiatives such as those promoted by the G20, the Paris Club, the international financial institutions and the UN. Some EU Member States have enacted laws to stop vulture funds from undermining efforts to

restructure debt. In broad terms, the measures aim to protect partner countries from having their assets seized by creditors who bought the debt when the debtor was in or near default. In addition, since the IMF endorsed their use in 2014, collective action clauses have been included in almost all new sovereign bonds.

More generally, the EU and its Member States have been leading efforts to manage debt and debt sustainability for vulnerable low-income countries and provided substantial liquidity support to them through the G20-Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), to help manage the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also supported the adoption and implementation of the G20-Paris Club Common Framework for Debt Treatment beyond the DSSI, which ensures a coordinated multilateral approach for countries in debt distress.

Further, they provided financial and technical support to World Bank and IMF facilities set up to address debt crises (notably the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust) and to build debt management capacity (through the Debt Management Facility – which aims to help develop medium-term debt management strategies, increase transparency and enable countries to manage more complex debt portfolios). The EU and its Member States are similarly exploring the possibility of using debt-for-SDG swaps that could link debt relief and investment in exchange for firm commitments to the SDGs, in view of a green, digital, fair and resilient recovery.

In the framework of its bilateral cooperation, the EU is implementing budget support programmes offering grants under 230 contracts with 95 countries and territories. On average, the budget support accounts for about 40% of national cooperation with partner countries. Macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability are an integral part of the conditions, analysis and policy dialogue for the programmes, which include building capacity to improve debt management and transparency. If the risk of debt distress increases, mitigating measures can be designed, together with the national authorities, to address the situation. EU budget support has also enabled access to debt relief for LDCs in fragile situations.

Addressing systemic issues, including enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development

The pandemic has again illustrated the value and strength of multilateralism, the need for international cooperation between countries in addressing systemic issues, and for countries to assess their policies' impact on all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental) and take measures to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development.

The EU and its Member States have done this in their national policies as well as at the EU level. The European Commission's system of better regulation contributes effectively to ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development, It seeks to address interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs between the three dimensions of sustainable development by identifying and assessing the contribution made to the relevant SDGs in all impact assessments legislative proposals and evaluations.

Externally, and as an important contribution to the broader commitment to policy coherence for sustainable development, the EU pursues the principle of policy coherence for development (PCD), derived from the EU Treaties and enshrined in the 2017 European Consensus on Development. It seeks to enhance the positive effects and minimise the negative impacts of EU policies on partner countries, promote synergies between EU policies and so increase development effectiveness.

The Commission has integrated the concept of PCD in its overall work to implement the 2030 Agenda. It is specifically followed up through the process of the European Commission's annual planning of new legislative and non-legislative initiatives as well as through the political adoption process for each initiative. These processes allow for timely information-sharing and internal dialogues to ensure, by dint of all relevant departments being properly involved, that the external impacts of these new initiatives are taken into account. The different EU Commissioners in charge of external relations are also aligned and coordinated with a view to having the external dimension and impact of EU internal policies on non-EU countries taken more into account.

Member States are responsible for ensuring that their national policies observe PCD and are aligned at EU level through their own coordination mechanism. Although the relation with the broader concept of policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) that emerged with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda may have caused some confusion with the concept of PCD derived from the EU Treaty, Member States generally show strong political commitment to PCD, with 19 of them codifying such commitment in a national development strategy or related guidelines, policies, action plans and legal frameworks, and 7 Member States adhering to a "whole of government approach" and strong non-governmental stakeholder consultations in the process of PCD coordination. However, progress remains to be made in incorporating into policymaking the practice of carrying out advance evaluations of policy impacts on partner countries, as well as in periodic reporting on PCD.

By way of illustration of actions undertaken within Member States, **Italy** has defined a National Action Plan (NAP) for policy coherence for sustainable development, which became operational in July 2020, including by pursuing a 'nexus' approach needs to be implemented as one of the pillars of the 2030 Agenda. This NAP provides coherence tools aiming at strengthening the system of institutional relations, vertical and horizontal, as well as multi-actor participation, and it has the objective of strengthening in Italy the fundamental role that governance plays for sustainable development.

In 2022, **Malta** launched a funding instrument to support initiatives for sustainable development carried out by non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations. The Sustainable Development Fund for voluntary organisations implemented by the Ministry for Environment, Energy and Enterprise allocates EUR 50,000 to projects that have the potential to cover activities and initiatives in line with the SDGs.

Germany has established a mandatory impact assessment for laws to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development. The joint rules of procedure for the German Federal Ministries require every draft law or ordinance to undergo a sustainable development regulatory impact assessment before being put to a vote. Ministries are responsible for performing the assessment procedure, assisted by the eNAP electronic tool (launched in 2018).

The Basque Country region in **Spain** is working with local authorities and socio-economic stakeholders to implement the SDGs. It created the Multi-stakeholder Forum for Social Transition and the 2030 Agenda to establish an inter-institutional SDG governance and facilitate public, private and social collaboration and participation, and prepared five voluntary subnational reviews. The city of Bilbao hosts the **Local Coalition 2030**, which promotes activities at local and regional level, including engagement with stakeholders and private sector, to localise the implementation of the SDGs.

The EU and its Member States have also supported partner countries in their own efforts to put in place institutional mechanisms to increase policy coherence for sustainable development.

At international level, the EU and its Member States have been the largest contributor to the multilateral system and the largest provider of core contributions to multilateral organisations for the entire period under review. The 2021 Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism highlights the importance the EU places on close partnerships with multilateral organisations, including to help implement the SDGs.

Science, technology, innovation, digitalisation and capacity building

Information and communication technologies (ICT) underpin global efforts to accelerate human progress, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies. ICT have continued to expand significantly, but less than 30% of the population have access to the internet in the poorest regions of the world.

The broad thrust of EU action to develop science, technology and innovation within the EU – to support the implementation of the SDGs – is illustrated in the chapter on SDG9. In addition, the EU is the world's second largest provider of ODA for **science, technology and innovation** to partner countries, reaching almost EUR 1 billion in 2019.

Regarding digitalisation, in early 2021, the Commission published its Communication '2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade', committing to building strong international digital partnerships. This is complemented by the **global Team Europe Initiative Digital 4 Development (D4D) Hub** (which is contributing to the rollout of the Global Gateway strategy) – a strategic multi-stakeholder platform that fosters digital cooperation between the EU, its Members States and global partners, thereby contributing to the **Global Gateway Priorities**.

D4D saw its first operational regional component start working in 2021 with the African Union, through the African Union European Union (AU EU) D4D Hub Project. Additionally, a core outcome of the work by African partner countries and the AU is the emergence of regionally harmonised data economies, bringing the benefits of data use closer to citizens and businesses through the newly launched TEI Data Governance in Africa.

The D4D Hub has also launched its cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Asia Pacific and Central Asia. EU commitments for digital transformation in the LDCs grew extensively, contributing to the 2020 commitment to provide widespread internet access in the LDCs. Tackling the digital divide is crucial, and global digital partnerships are one of five priority areas for the EU's external cooperation. The EU launched several new initiatives in 2020 to promote digitalisation in partner countries.

The EU engaged with international partners on regulatory and ethical matters to promote the responsible development of trustworthy **artificial intelligence** (AI) at global level. The initiative prepares the ground for global coalition-building on human-centric AI, in accordance with universally recognised values. In 2021, the project supported reinforced policy dialogue with partners, such as Japan, Canada and Australia, with the aim of facilitating knowledge exchanges and regulatory convergence.

Space technologies are used as innovative support for meeting the SDGs. The EU applies space technologies to better understand and protect wildlife, forests and biodiversity. For example:

- the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) provides tailored information products to worldwide users on key indicators such as temperature, sea ice and CO2 levels;
- the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS) uses near-real-time observations of the location and intensity of active wildfires, to estimate pollutant emissions that may impact biodiversity in the affected areas;
- and a digital platform shows real-life testimonies from scientists and users across the world about innovative ways to contribute to the achievement of a given SDG.

In 2018, it was found that about 40% of the 169 indicators underpinning the 17 SDGs are reliant on the use of space-based science and technology.

Capacity-building is central to boosting innovation in partner countries and the EU and its Member States increased their funding for **scholarships** for students from developing countries by 45% between 2014 and 2019; they now account for almost 90% of donors' total ODA spending on scholarships.

By way of illustration, the European Commission supports the **Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area**, a multilateral funding programme involving EU Member States, Horizon Europe associated countries and Mediterranean partner countries, on an equal footing of co-ownership, co-management, and co-funding. Through **Horizon Europe** – the EU's main research & innovation programme – the EU continued to mobilise Indian participation in global research partnerships, with projects aimed at strengthening global climate systems (SDG 13), renewable energy systems (SDG 7), crop disease management and agri-systems (SDG 2) and vaccine research (SDG 3).

Another example under Horizon Europe is the EU's SDG-driven innovation ecosystems project, which aims to provide capacity-building activities to help partner countries set up an SDG-related innovation environment

across the private sector (investors, start-ups, SMEs) public sector (governments, EU agencies, development banks), academia (research, knowledge, R&D) and non-profit sector (NGOS, philanthropy, social enterprises) in Italy, France Portugal, Member States in Central/Eastern Europe and Israel.

Data monitoring and follow-up

There is broad international consensus on the importance of **data monitoring and follow-up** on SDG indicators, so that the SDGs and their targets can become a management tool to help countries in designing better policies and action, reinforced by adequate resources and effective implementation strategies. National statistical services are an important part of the SDG framework but they remain weak and underfunded. In partner countries, only 4 out of 46 (8%) countries reported having fully funded national statistical plans in 2020. Global ODA support for data and statistics has remained stagnant in recent years, with only 0.3% of total ODA dedicated to this area.

The EU and its Member States are supporting and pushing for improved follow-up and monitoring of the SDG commitments in multiple ways. They disbursed EUR 110 million in 2018-20 to over 50 partner countries for statistical capacity building. EU institutions are among the largest providers of funding for data and statistics, strengthening partner country capacities to produce and disseminate statistics, including for effective SDG monitoring, and thereby increasing accountability. Support focuses in particular on statistics for key economic and social variables.

The European Commission's statistical office, Eurostat, is supporting the quality, reliability and harmonisation of official statistics in **Africa at national, regional and continental** levels including with management of PAS (Pan-African Statistics) programs (currently PAS II). **Eurostat** continues to support the development and use of statistical tools (such as **Snapshot**, assessing national statistical systems), through the 'Guide to statistics in European Commission development cooperation', tools to support compilation of national accounts (ERETES), trade statistics and the assessment of national statistical systems (Eurotrace) as well as fostering international standards for the exchange of statistical information (SDMX). Workshops, bilateral targeted assistance, methodologies, guidelines, peer reviews and support for the production of continental trade statistics are provided, to tackle the specific statistical needs of partner countries.

The disruption of established lifestyles by recent crises has also reignited the debate on what kind of economic growth is desirable and what actually matters for **human wellbeing** in a world of finite resources. To support policies aimed at improving the wellbeing of all people and the planet, for both current and future generations, discussions and work on "**beyond GDP**" are ongoing in the Commission. Furthermore, the "**Beyond Growth 2023 Conference - Pathways towards Sustainable Prosperity in the EU**", organised by the European Parliament in May 2023, contributes to the objective of shifting the discourse towards future-oriented economic policymaking and the benefits of indicators that go beyond GDP for a European economy that is healthy in a broad sense, in line with the European Green Deal objectives and the SDGs.

The EU also works to increase the accessibility and transparency of statistics on its international partnerships. This includes the EU Aid Explorer, which provides additional transparency on EU and Member States' spending.

The EU also played a key role in developing the statistical tool 'Total Official Support for Sustainable Development' (TOSSD). TOSSD aims to measure all resources for the SDGs, beyond the flows captured in ODA, including non-concessional flows, resources mobilised from the private sector, support from emerging donors, etc. The measure has been developed and is being fine-tuned by a task force of statisticians and development policy makers from recipient and provider countries (including six EU Member States) and international organisations. TOSSD is now recognised as a data source for SDG indicator 17.3.1 and has been adopted by the UN Statistical Commission. Ensuring that even more development providers report using the TOSSD methodology will further improve the success of this tool and its relevance.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission are collaborating on a project to advance the analysis and evaluation of the extent to which city-to-city partnerships are contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. As part of this joint initiative, the OECD is developing a monitoring and evaluation framework for city-to-city partnership to localise the SDGs, including a self-assessment framework to assess how these partnerships are consistent with the ten G20 Rome High-Level Principles on city-to-city partnerships for localising the SDGs, and a set of indicators to assess their progress towards the SDGs. The list of indicators considered in the framework proposes a specific focus on SDG 11 and in particular SDG 17, for which most existing SDG indicator frameworks have gaps in terms of indicators and data coverage.

Several Member States support the development of **statistical capacities** in partner countries. For example **Portugal** is supporting this in the Portuguese-speaking community, especially the **PALOP countries and Timor-Leste**, as is **Denmark** in **Morocco, Ghana and Vietnam**.

Slovenia has established the International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) under the auspices of UNESCO. One of its projects – **IRCAI GLOBAL TOP 100** – releases a list of 100 projects that address problems related to the 17 SDGs, with the application of artificial intelligence across all geographical regions. The goal is to scope and showcase solutions from around the world and contribute to the SDGs by creating the world's largest sustainable solutions platform, helping these solutions grow and become even more effective and efficient.

Looking ahead

As outlined above, progress on SDG 17 has been negatively affected since 2020 as a consequence of the consecutive global crises, with rising debt burdens. However, acting in a **Team Europe** approach, the EU will continue its efforts in leading the way to pursue the various complementary targets of SDG 17. The purpose of ensuring the provision of sustainable and value-based support is at the centre of the EU commitment to implement SDG 17 through its international partnerships. This approach is pursued through the actions undertaken under the **NDICI - Global Europe**, for the 2021-27 multiannual financial framework, and the continued EU effort to explore innovative solutions, and is notably reflected in the **Global Gateway strategy** and its dedicated regional investment plans..

As regards **sustainable finance**, the EU is committed to continue implementing the strategy for financing the transition to a sustainable economy. The EU will also be developing a comprehensive strategy to scale up sustainable finance in low- and middle-income countries, with the support of a high-level expert group (HLEG). The EU will continue to (i) support efforts to scale up green bonds in our partner countries, as they are a key tool for mobilising private investors to make sustainable investments and (ii) help support our partner countries build a conducive environment for sustainable finance.

The EU and its Member States will continue working towards their collective and individual **commitments on ODA** in the timeframe of the 2030 Agenda, to collectively provide 0.7% of GNI as ODA and 0.2% of GNI as ODA to the least developed countries (LDCs) by 2030.

To **combat international tax evasion and avoidance**, the EU recently confirmed its support for the Inclusive Framework on BEPS (tax base erosion and profit shifting), to help developing countries (also through technical assistance) implement international tax standards, with a focus on the two-pillar solution. The EU and its Member States will maintain their support for the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes and continue working with partner countries in their efforts to implement tax good governance standards. These efforts will be supported through the rollout of major partnership initiatives, including the Team Europe Initiative on Fighting Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) in Africa, both on tax and non-tax related IFFs, building on ongoing cooperation with the African Union Commission on combatting IFFs.

In the field of **trade**, the EU will continue its efforts to support financial integration as an engine for development. The EU ensures sustainability by including commitments in trade agreements to respect international labour and environmental conventions. The EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences is widely recognised as the world's most generous regime of unilateral trade preferences for developing countries and the EU continues working to reinforce the scheme's contribution to sustainable development.

Another aspect is rising public debt levels, which were a cause for concern at the end of the last decade but have been further triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the risk of debt crises for low and middle- income countries. Unsustainable debt puts countries on a difficult path and can be a clear obstacle to sustainable development. To counteract this trend, the EU supports for instance the OECD Debt Transparency Initiative, which aims to set up a database and reporting system to record private lenders.

Furthermore, **innovation, research** and capacity building for **monitoring and support for data** and statistics is key. Tackling the digital divide is crucial, and global digital partnerships are a main priority area for the EU's external partnerships. Investing in digitalisation infrastructure will be a priority of Global Gateway deployment. The EU will keep improving SDG monitoring and supporting partner countries with data and statistics. As described in various SDG chapters, the EU provides capabilities for partner countries to use satellite and remote sensing monitoring, notably through the Copernicus programme.

The EU will also continue to make further efforts to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that go "**beyond GDP**". These ongoing efforts contribute to the commitments made to this end in the European Pillar of Social Rights and the 8th Environmental Action Programme and to delivering on SDG target 17.19.

Finally, strengthening **policy coherence for sustainable development** is a central part of the EU's approach to governance, for implementing the SDGs. This includes ensuring that all EU policies contribute to the achievement of SDGs in partner countries (traditionally described as 'policy coherence for development'). The European Commission will therefore use its system of Better Regulation, recently reinforced in relation to SDG integration, to better consider the external implications of internal policies and their significant impact on countries outside the EU.