

SDGs Handbook

The Sustainable Development Goals in brief A Handbook for NGOs working in the area of economic & social rights

This short handbook is designed to introduce the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to European Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) active in the area of economic and social rights. It aims particularly at providing social CSOs willing to engage in national sustainable development processes, with a basic understanding of the 2030 Agenda, and the opportunities its goals, targets and indicators provide to advance social and economic rights.



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Section 1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals: what are we talking about?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States on 25 September 2015, provides a globally shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

At its heart there are the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**¹, which are a collection of 17 global goals. The goals are broad and interdependent, with a specific list of targets to achieve. The SDGs cover social, environmental and economic development issues including poverty, hunger, health, education, global warming, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanisation, environment and social justice.

Box 1 - The 17 SDGs

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent actions to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
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
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
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda recognises that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur sustainable economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. The SDGs are the fruit of the convergence of two processes:

- ▶ the **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which took place in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**. The Rio Conference was the start of many multilateral actions, including but not limited to the annual UN climate conferences. In 2012, the Rio +20 Summit came up with a new comprehensive action plan to make the world a better place through clear and practical measures for sustainable development. In their outcome document “The Future We Want”, Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of SDGs and to establish the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development;



1. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>



▶ the Millennium Declaration and **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** adopted by UN Member States in September 2000. The MDGs, which steered all development cooperation-related actions from 2000 to 2015, consisted of eight development goals, ranging from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015². The approach of the target date of 2015 called for a post-2015 framework to replace the MDGs. At the same time, there was a consensus that the scope of the MDGs would have to be broadened to reflect the global challenges such as growing inequalities within and among countries.

The convergence of the PostRio+20 and Post-MDGs led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Section 2. What are the main features of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The SDG framework goes far beyond the MDGs. Alongside basic development objectives like ending poverty and hunger, it sets out a wide range of economic, social and environmental objectives in an integrated approach based on human rights. The main features of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are:

▶ **A universal agenda** - The SDGs are universal goals that apply to all countries and involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike, taking into account different national realities. Countries are asked to build on current policy instruments and frameworks to meet the goals and targets, taking into account differences in national contexts and development levels. Achievement of any of the SDGs will require concerted global efforts to achieve all of them. **The 2030 Agenda is not about what the rich should do for the poor, but what all countries together should do for the global well-being of this generation and those to come.**

2. [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)

This means that the EU and its Members State also have to identify how far they are from meeting the targets and take action to close the gaps.

▶ **An interlinked and indivisible agenda** - Understanding the interlinkages between the various goals and targets, as well as the ways in which these can be leveraged during implementation to accelerate progress across multiple objectives, is central to the overall success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For example, key interdependences can be found between SDG 3 (Good health) and SDG 2 (No hunger):

- Health cannot be achieved without access to sufficient and quality nutrition;
- Food production and agricultural practices may affect health directly, including through improved soil and water quality, and indirectly through changes in incomes;
- Increasing agricultural productivity could harm health through, for example, damaging ecosystems.

The SD Agenda moves away from siloed approaches to development and balances the different dimensions of sustainability: economy, environment, society and governance, which translates into a framework focused on “people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships” (the so-called 5 Ps).

This means that there should be no cherry picking when implementing the Agenda and that comprehensive strategies should be developed.

Box 2 - The five “Ps”:





The outcome document for the SDG Agenda explains that the SDG framework will stimulate action on five key themes: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships, which are described briefly below:

People

“We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment³.”

Planet

“We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations⁴.”

Prosperity

“We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature⁵.”

Peace

“We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies, which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development⁶.”

Partnerships

“We are determined to mobilise the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people⁷.”

▶ **A pledge to leave no one behind** - In setting out to leave no one behind, all Member States understood that inequalities and acute deprivation will subside only when the furthest behind benefit to a greater degree and faster pace from government policies and investment.

The pledge to leave no one behind is a commitment to end extreme poverty in all its forms and to act explicitly to ensure that those who have been left behind can catch up to those who have experienced greater progress. Practically, the pledge means all governments must chart a new course aimed specifically at curbing inequalities between people, groups and places; correcting for legacies of discrimination and exclusion both between and within countries; and prioritising and fast-tracking progress among the furthest behind.

Leaving no one behind is an overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Implementing the pledge, thus, does not imply a separate course of action but is intrinsic to the action required to achieve the SDGs. As people who are left behind are likely to include more than just the income-poor, countries implementing the pledge will need to go beyond single-factor metrics in order to understand the severity, multiplicity and distribution of disadvantages within their societies⁸.

▶ **SDGs stimulate cross-sectorial, multi-stakeholder partnerships** - The SDGs will only be realised through joint action across every sector and area of human activity. International organisations, national politicians, cities, businesses, public administrations, schools, youth groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), philanthropic organisations, voluntary groups and others are all challenged to act.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources are necessary to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries. The SDGs do not constitute a separate, stand-alone process but rather a framework for action on different streams of work in development and environmental protection. Any organisation whose



3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
8. What does it mean to leave no one behind?, A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation, July 2018, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/what-does-it-mean-to-leave-no-one-behind-.html>



mission is to end poverty and hunger, secure better access to basic services like health, education or energy, combat climate change, protect the natural environment, or promote peaceful, just and truly participatory societies, is in fact carrying out work that is relevant to SDGs.

Box 3 – Example of cross-sectorial CSOs alliance
Portugal: National CSO Coalition for Sustainable Development

In 2014 a Portuguese coalition of national civil society umbrella organisations was created, focusing on the preparation of a common position on the 2030 Agenda. This coalition has members that represent a broad group of different CSOs – NGOs, Local Development, Gender CSOs, Trade Unions, Youth CSOs, Environment CSOs. The coalition has organised two national consultation processes that included online questionnaires and local workshops where many different local organisations participated and gave their views and contributions regarding their expectations of the 2030 Agenda and its implementation and monitoring. These processes resulted in two reports that were very important in reinforcing Portuguese CSO advocacy work and mark a clear and unified position. The report presented in 2017 was referred to as good practice in the Portuguese Volunteer National Review at the 2017 High Level Political Forum⁹.

Other examples of cross sectorial CSO alliances – at National, European and Global levels – can be found online on the Make Europe Sustainable for All website <https://makeeuropesustainableforall.org/>.

► **Review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** - SDGs are not legally binding, but governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals. Countries have primary responsibility for the follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the Goals. Follow-up and review at the global level takes place at the **High-Level Political Forum**

(HLPF) on Sustainable Development. The Forum meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the [General Assembly](#) for two days. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda encourages Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven. These national reviews are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the HLPF. Regular reviews by the HLPF are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the active participation of civil society organisations (CSOs).

Since 2016, 29 European Governments (27 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) have presented their National Voluntary review:

2016

Ensuring that no one is left behind

Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Norway and Switzerland

2017

Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world

Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden

2018

Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland

2019

Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

Croatia, France and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The European Union itself has committed to present its report at the 2019 HLPF.



9. SDGs' implementation: Good practices from across Europe, CONCORD, <https://concordeurope.org/2018/09/25/sdg-good-practices-from-across-europe/>



Section 3. What about the social dimension of the SDGs?

Sustainable Development is not only about environmental rather than economic development. Indeed, the SDGs contain several social goals.

The table below demonstrates this by highlighting “social targets” or targets having a direct impact on social rights of citizens such as recognised in international human rights instruments and ILO Conventions¹⁰.

Table 1. Social goals

	Target									
Goal 1	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5					
Goal 2	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5					
Goal 3	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	
Goal 4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7			
Goal 5	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.6				
Goal 6	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6				
Goal 7	7.1	7.2	7.3							
Goal 8	8.1	8.2	8.3	8.4	8.5	8.6	8.7	8.8	8.9	8.1
Goal 9	9.1	9.2	9.3	9.4	9.5					
Goal 10	10.1	10.2	10.3	10.4	10.5	10.6	10.7	10.8	10.9	10.1
Goal 11	11.1	11.2	11.3	11.4	11.5	11.6	11.7			
Goal 12	12.1	12.2	12.3	12.4	12.5	12.6	12.7	12.8		
Goal 13	13.1	13.2	13.3							
Goal 14	14.1	14.2	14.3	14.4	14.5	14.6	14.7			
Goal 15	15.1	15.2	15.3	15.4	15.5	15.6	15.7	15.8	15.9	
Goal 16	16.1	16.2	16.3	16.4	16.5	16.6	16.7	16.8	16.9	16.1
Goal 17	17.1	17.2	17.3	17.4	17.5	17.6	17.7	17.8	17.9	17.1
	17.11	17.12	17.13	17.14	17.15	17.16	17.17	17.18	17.19	

10. We hereby specifically took into account the right to health, education, housing, to food, to an adequate standard of living, to work, to social security, as well as the right to join trade unions, such as recognised in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and ILO Conventions.



Among all social goals, certain goals (such as SDG 1 – No poverty; SDG 2 – Zero hunger; SDG 3 – Good health; SDG 4 – Quality education – SDG 5 – Gender equality; SDG 8 – Decent work; and SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities) might “appeal” more to CSOs working in the area of Economic and Social Rights where they relate to the core functions of their activities/organisational objectives.

Are the Social SDGs and Targets relevant for Europe?

The latest Eurostat report provides an overview of progress towards the SDGs in EU Member States. Regarding social goals, the Eurostat report shows that¹¹:



SDG 1 calls for poverty in all its dimensions to be halved by 2030. SDG 1 ‘No poverty’ has shown diverse trends over the past five years. The EU made significant progress towards meeting the basic needs of its citizens. Fewer people face problems related to their homes, such as living in an overcrowded home or in a dwelling with a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundation or rot in window frames or floor, or without a bath, shower or indoor flushing toilet. The number of people unable to keep their home adequately warm has decreased as well. Furthermore, the number of people reporting an unmet need for medical care has decreased. In the area of multidimensional poverty, the number of people suffering from severe material deprivation has decreased and fewer people live in households with very low work intensity. Nevertheless, the share of people at risk of poverty after social transfers is increasing. Taken together, this means that despite recent improvements, the EU is still far from being on track to meeting its target of lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020. Indeed, regarding multidimensional poverty in the EU, in 2016:

- 118 million persons were at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
- 9.6% of employed persons aged 18 or over in work were at risk of poverty;
- 86.9 million persons suffered from “income poverty” (an increase of 3.6% since 2011).



Regarding SDG 3 – the Eurostat report suggests that the EU has made significant progress towards the areas covered by the indicators in SDG 3 ‘Good health and well-being’ (by assessing indicators such as life expectancy at birth; smoking prevalence; obesity rate; death due to chronic diseases; people killed in road accidents; people killed in accidents at work; and unmet need for medical care). Some of the data assessed are the following:

- Obesity rate in 2014 amounted to 15.9 % of the population aged 18 or over;
- Unmet need for medical care in 2016 amounted to 2.5 % of the population aged 16 and over;
- People killed in accidents at work in 2016 amounted to 1.5 per 100,000 employees.



Regarding SDG 5 - By 2030 end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere - both the gender employment gap (in total and for recent graduates) and the gender pay gap are important challenges to be tackled in all EU Member States. Also, while the proportions of women in national parliaments and in senior management positions of the largest listed companies have grown considerably, they still remain far from parity. Figures from the Eurostat report show that:



11. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/KS-01-18-656>



- the gender employment gap in 2017 was 11.5 pp to the disadvantage of women;
- the gender pay gap in 2016 amounted to 16.2 % of average gross hourly earnings of men;
- 31 % of women aged 20 to 64 were inactive due to caring responsibilities in 2017, compared to 4.5% for men;
- in 2018, 29.7 % of women had seats in parliaments, while 25.3 % of board members were female.



Regarding SDG 8 - Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all – Eurostat figures point to better performances in GDP per capita and to a decline in the number of young people not in education, employment or training. However, not all people have benefitted equally from these improvements, as many more women than men still remain economically inactive due to caring responsibilities. Similarly, the prevalence of in-work poverty has risen considerably in the EU since 2011:

- In 2016, the in work at-risk-of-poverty rate amounted to 9.6 % of the population aged 18 or over;

Furthermore:

- Inactivity due to caring responsibilities equalled 21.4 % of the inactive population aged 20 to 64 in 2017;
- 13.4 % of the population aged 15 to 29 were not in employment, education or training in 2017.



Regarding SDG 10 - Reduced inequalities - Eurostat figures show that inequalities within countries — measured in terms of income inequality — have generally increased over the past few years in the EU. Income inequalities between the richest and the poorest groups of society have intensified, with the income share of the bottom 40 % of the population decreasing. Alongside the increase in the number of people earning an income below the poverty threshold (who are therefore considered at risk of income poverty), the average distance from the poverty threshold for those below the poverty threshold has grown considerably, making it more difficult for these people to escape this situation. Indeed:

- In 2016, 17.3 % of the population was income poor;
- The income share of the bottom 40% of the population amounted to 20.9 % of income;
- The at-risk-of-poverty gap amounts to 25 % (distance to poverty threshold).

These facts and figures demonstrate that much remains to be done, even within the European Union.

Moreover, in the light of the adoption, on 17 November 2017, of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at the Social Summit held in Gothenburg, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its targets and monitoring mechanisms, provides a supplementary tool for social NGOs to advocate and monitor the introduction of concrete policy measures, at national and European level, to ensure the full realisation of social rights.

Find the European Pillar of Social Rights, here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en





The overlaps and similarities between the EPSR and the SDGs allow both processes to complement and reinforce each other. An in-depth analysis of these connections is available here: <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Pub-2018-Towards-a-Social-Sustainable-and-Equitable-Europe.pdf>

At the European level, the [Report of the High Level Commission on Sustainable Equality](#) has identified ten policy changes to move towards sustainable well-being for all.

Five SDGs and human rights obligations - The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is grounded in human rights. The agenda explicitly references the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties throughout its text, and is informed by other instruments such as the Declaration on the Right to Development. Furthermore, the Agenda states that the SDGs “seek to realise the human rights of all¹²”.

The 17 SDGs directly or indirectly reflect human rights standards. When analysing the concrete human rights anchorage of each SDG and its corresponding targets, an interrelated web appears: the vast majority of the 169 targets are linked to core international human rights and labour standards. In other words, the 2030 Agenda and human rights are interwoven and inextricably tied together.

The following table shows two examples of how specific SDG targets are linked to core international human rights and labour standards instruments.

Box 4

Sustainable Development Goal 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”

Target 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

- The achievement of Target 1.3 derives from human rights obligations that Member States, having ratified the following instruments, have to fulfil: article 22 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**; article 9 of the 1976 **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**; the Social Security (Minimum Standards) ILO Convention, 1952 (No. 102)

Sustainable Development Goal 8 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”

Target 8.7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

- The achievement of Target 8.7 derives from human rights obligations that Member States, having ratified the following instruments, have to fulfil: the 1976 **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (Article 10 on the prohibition of child labour; the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**: Art. 32 – child labour; and the **International Labour Organisation** (ILO) Conventions concerning the elimination of child labour: the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

Operationally, this generates a number of opportunities: **human rights norms and mechanisms offer guidance for the implementation of the**



12. A/RES/70/1: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>



2030 Agenda, as it is underpinned by legally-binding human rights treaties. For example, human rights norms and institutions can constitute a bulwark against incoherent and unequal progress, and ensure accountability in the implementation of the SDGs.

The concrete linkages between human rights and SDGs are the starting point for:

- ensuring accountability in implementing the 2030 Agenda and other development partners in identifying human rights standards and principles of relevance to their SDG work;
- ensuring accountability in implementing the 2030 Agenda by developing integrated implementation strategies and actions to realise the SDGs and human rights of all;
- promote inclusive, transparent and participatory implementation processes of the SDGs, contextualising these approaches to the needs and rights of particular rights-holders; and
- identifying existing data sources that can guide and monitor SDG implementation¹³.

Section 4. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a tool for CSOs!

The purpose of many civil society organisations can be expressed in terms of SDG targets, drivers and outcomes. Many civil society groups are already implementing the SDGs, and have been since well before the goals were agreed. How can the SDGs add value to CSOs activities?

► Get started:

Mapping exercise: what's your contribution?



CSOs shall first and foremost undertake a mapping exercise – if not already done – to assess their alignment with the SDG goals and targets. This involves exercises in mapping SDG targets against organisational objectives, assessment processes and core functions. This would facilitate the assessment of the direct realisation

of SDGs, and would facilitate consideration of the contribution of CSOs to monitoring, and to the representation of the interests of specific groups in the advancement of the SDGs¹⁴.

Identifying institutional opportunities: who does what?



CSOs can engage directly with national government ministries and subnational bodies, UN agencies, and other entities created by these institutions to implement and monitor the SDGs. Therefore, a useful exercise is to identify which entities are officially mandated or perhaps informally tasked with coordinating national efforts on the SDGs. It should be noted that the ecosystem of SDG institutions will vary significantly from one country to the other.

It is also worth emphasising, however, that while one department may be responsible for the overall coordination of national SDG delivery efforts, policies and interventions around specific goals or process under the broader SDGs umbrella will likely be the responsibility of particular agencies or offices, such as the Ministry of Health for SDG3 and National Statistical Office for the monitoring of progress on the SDGs.

Then, once the department leading on the agenda or the CSO's particular SDG of interest has been identified, it will be necessary to ascertain what mechanisms for engaging civil society exist. These can be both existing mechanisms and new ones specifically brought in for the SDGs. In some cases, a dedicated team or focal point will have been appointed to coordinate civil society engagement. If this information is not readily available, existing contacts within government will likely be able to help you out.

► Take action:

Advocacy at national level



No matter which social issue civil society organisations are dealing with, there is probably a target and/or an indicator that



13. Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Lessons learned and next steps, The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2018

14. LONG Graham, How should civil society stakeholder report their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?, Technical paper for the UN DESA



can be referred to when formulating demands to policymakers. The SDGs are a useful global agenda to address a multitude of local and topical issues.

For example, a proposal for a more social-friendly alternative to policy decision X led by a CSO (e.g. new proposal for regulation of labour market in country XXX – contracts targeting the youth) is likely to be aligned with your government’s obligation to meet target Y (e.g. target 8.3 on decent job creation) of Sustainable Development Goal Z (e.g. SDG 8).

Figure 1. Alignment of advocacy priorities at national level with SDGs

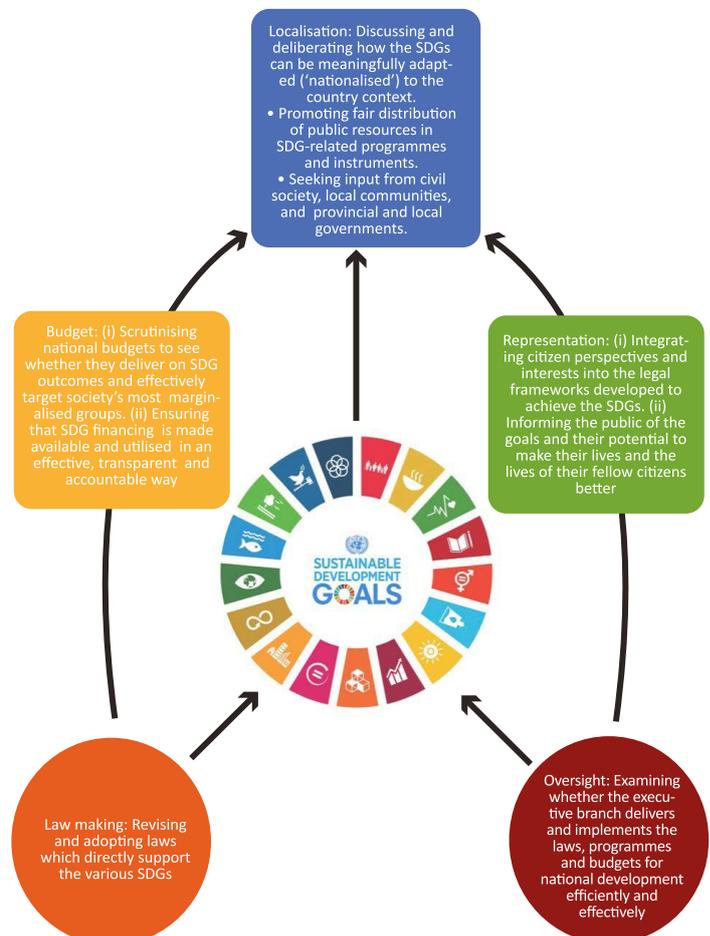


Linking the advocacy strategy of a CSO to Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development can reinforce this strategy and enhance the possibility of it being heard by policymakers.

National parliaments are in that regard particularly sensitive to the SDGs and their implementation, and provide a good opportunity for civil society organisations to advocate for their cause. Parliamentary committees on SDGs, where they exist, can provide a critical avenue for CSOs to influence legislation. Given their oversight mandate, CSOs can also feed them with reports on whether progress is being made or not so they can hold the Executive to account. They also play a critical role in national and sub-national budget allocations and are therefore a key target for advocacy.

In their work on national development and political processes, legislatures and CSOs play complementary roles. Through different means, parliaments and CSOs both play a role in keeping the government accountable as key oversight actors while creating feedback loops between government and citizens. Both can work to ensure participation of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised people in the decision making process. Both have at their disposal different, but complementary, powers and tools to push for change. In all these objectives and functions, they can support and facilitate each other’s work. The SDGs therefore offer an opportunity of dialogue and reflection about the routes towards sustainable development at the national and sub-national level. A parliament committed to the SDGs may be a receptive forum for presenting and debating CSO inputs, be it data, citizen testimonies, expert analysis, advocacy messages or educational materials¹⁵.

Figure 2. Parliaments and the SDGs



15. Engaging parliaments on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: representation, accountability and implementation. A Handbook for civil society, <https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Engaging-parliaments-on-the-2030-Agenda-and-the-SDGs.pdf>



Given their proximity to communities and citizens, cities and local governments have the ability to be more responsive to and more inclusive of their needs. It is at this level where the majority of planning and delivery of services related to SDG issues will take place, and it is also the level at which sustainable development outcomes and progress (or lack thereof) will appear most apparent. Furthermore, cities and urban environments have their SDG strategy/action plan, and may therefore have a dedicated institution or plan for implementing and monitoring it that can be identified and engaged with. Local perspectives/data collection and campaigning can therefore highlight both persistent challenges and innovations related to SDG progress (or lack thereof). Therefore even if mechanisms for feeding local realities up into national SDG monitoring and accountability are weak or absent, the SDGs provide a useful framework for holding local authorities to account.

Table 2. Planning tool for CSOs. Assessing your objectives before engaging with policy-makers

What is it that you want to achieve: what is your issue?	How can you frame it using the 2030 Agenda or specific SDGs?
How do you propose to achieve it? What is the change you are seeking to achieve? Which processes will need to be targeted for the change to happen?	Law-making, adequate funding, or policy implementation/enforcement?
Which actors can help you champion your cause?	Government ministries, parliamentarians, local governments, CSO coalitions, public figures? How do they relate and what are the synergies between people, policy processes and in influence?
What institutions to engage: at what level are the SDGs issues decided at?	Sub-national governments and legislatures may play a key role in establishing and localising the SDGs
What action can your target audience take to further this cause?	Public statements of support; introduction of new laws/policies; promotion of such proposals throughout the process; raising public attention; ...

Source: Engaging parliaments on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: representation, accountability and implementation. A Handbook for civil society

Involvement in National Development Plans & national platforms or technical working groups

Some countries have or will set up or adopt National Commissions for Sustainable Development to develop revised national development plans/

strategies to incorporate the SDGs and new climate commitments. These commissions themselves are often multi-stakeholder in nature, are relatively independent from but well connected to government, and usually contain clear mechanisms for engaging civil society. Therefore, where these plans exist, they will likely include a clear mandate and mechanisms for civil society participation in their design and delivery. And in cases where they are absent, the SDGs represent a unique opportunity to advocate for their creation and could therefore be a worthy advocacy target for civil society, especially if successful practices from other countries can be brought to the fore.

German Sustainable Development Strategy and civil society

In the design of the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the government organised five dialogue conferences; developed an online consultation platform to gather inputs from CSOs; presented the Draft Strategy at the RNE Annual Conference; organised a day-long multi-stakeholder meeting with government officials; organised a second online consultation on the draft strategy; and included written contributions in the strategy. Furthermore, Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN) were created to link up the sustainability initiatives at federal, state and municipal level supra-regionally; and to establish new forms and platforms for sustainable development actors (civil society, academia, business, local authorities, etc.) to work hand in hand. The four RENN currently report to a network comprising 20 partners from the 16 German states. Each individual RENN sets its own thematic focal points¹⁶.

National, state and even municipal commissions will often have more technical working groups, including those that are multi-stakeholder, to discuss specific SDGs and issue areas. Ministries might also convene thematic discussions in which civil society could contribute according to their areas of expertise¹⁷.



16. Sustainable Development Strategies - From Design to Monitoring: Civil Society's Role - Related Presentations, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/sustainable-development-strategies-design-monitoring-civil-societys-role/presentations>

17. <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Guide-for-engaging-governments-of-the-SDG-MA.pdf>



Monitoring the achievement of SDGs



One way to conceive the role of CSOs is to view them as one of several agents who bring about the outcomes envisioned in the 2030 Agenda. This contribution of CSOs to realisation stresses their role in service delivery, but also their expertise in designing and employing means of implementation. That specific expertise – or the representation role played by some CSOs for a vulnerable group in society - can be used by civil society organisations to follow-up a Member State commitment to the achievement of specific targets/indicators.

CSOs can actively take part in the existing mechanisms in place at national level to follow-up progress by country X in the achievement of Goal Y – and/or indicator Z. The need for sustained, rigorous multi-stakeholder review is built into the 2030 Agenda as integral to implementation and accountability. Review, monitoring and follow up structures and processes at all levels have their own section of the 2030 Agenda, and the principles for such processes notes that “they will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders”, clearly indicating the role of CSO reporting in this context.

CSOs can contribute in various ways to monitoring efforts:

- by developing “shadow” reports to government reports – acting in multi-stakeholder platforms or in “thematic coalitions”;

In Bangladesh, the Disability Alliance on SDGs consulted with people with disabilities and their representatives, and then prepared an additional national report aiming to ensure the engagement of the persons with disabilities into the VNR process. Their paper explores progress, gaps and way forward on SDGs implementation for the persons with disabilities.

<http://bdplatform4sdgs.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/VNR-Report-on-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Issues-and-Concerns-of-Persons-with-Disabilities.pdf>

- by acting as data providers in the monitoring of targets and indicators, providing useful input to the official reporting mechanism of the government;

Denmark – Effective and inclusive partnerships in monitoring

The national statistical bureau, Statistic Denmark, has been given the mandate to monitor the implementation and realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Denmark and thereby provide data on the UN’s 232 global indicators to the UN global monitoring mechanism. To do this, Statistic Denmark has invited every interested actor to join a statistic and monitoring partnership on the SDGs to gain expert knowledge on the data needed to be delivered to measure the indicators as well as expert knowledge on the quality of data. The participants in the partnerships are civil society organisations, private sector representatives, municipalities, representatives of academia, and many more¹⁸.

- by helping identify “those left behind” and include these groups in policy planning, programme implementation and procedures of measurement (for example, by exploring possibilities of having disaggregated data);
- by auditing policies for policy coherence – and identifying where work could leverage synergies across the SDGs and other instances where there might be a tension between objectives and/or means employed to reach those objectives;

In the framework of the EU-funded Make Europe Sustainable for All Project, the Global Coalition Against Poverty (GCAP) Italy has developed an analytical report on Policy coherence for Sustainable Development in Italy, by taking into account regulatory framework for human rights, and focusing exclusively on poverty in favour of adopting a conceptual framework of inequality,

https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/IT_EN_GCAP-Italia-Report-IT_EN_Introduction-and-Executive-Summary1.pdf

18. SDGs’ implementation: Good practices from across Europe, CONCORD, <https://concordeurope.org/2018/09/25/sdg-good-practices-from-across-europe/>



- by engaging with governments to push for better compliance on specific goals.

The Trade Union movement has been active in producing independent country assessments of country implementation, monitoring implementation with a thematic focus on issues such as decent work. Country spotlight assessments give quick indicators of transparency, consultation and social dialogue in SDG implementation, and identify marginalised groups¹⁹.

Reporting as key tool to monitor achievement of targets/engagements of Member States...

CSOs reporting on SDGs.

- CSO reporting at the regional level

Civil society, structured to a degree via major groups or constituencies, has already self-organised at regional level to engage in the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development. There might be an expanded role for the regional level as a site of CSO reporting and deliberation, with wider participation from CSOs across the region self-organising for reporting and dialogue. The regional level might be a valuable space for particular pragmatic reasons – for example, regional forums might be less expensive for CSOs to attend, lower the language barriers faced by speakers or provide spaces for more interactive dialogue (given the constraints of the HLPF schedule) whilst still allowing for contrasting national contexts and region-wide issues to become clear²⁰.

- CSO reporting on Member States engagements at the global level through VNRs

The Voluntary National Reviews process presents CSOs with opportunities to:

- » Ensure stronger CSO coordination at the national level around tracking SDG implementation. CSOs can jointly advocate for a cause and build or strengthen the national CSO coalition on SDGs;

- » Push forward united implementation, by reaffirming that all 17 SDGs and their targets are integrated and indivisible and that governments are responsible for delivering on all their commitments by 2030;
- » Breakdown silos and open doors. VNRs can open new channels for dialogue with the government and build a platform for regular exchange around the implementation of SDGs, by involving all stakeholders and ensuring the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable are heard.

CSOs can play a role in calling on their government to conduct a VNR; finding out about opportunities for involvement; plan involvement with other CSOs; participate in national consultations; review the VNR report; engage at the HLPF by developing messages during the VNR presentation; and follow-up global discussions²¹.

Raising awareness on SDGs



After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015, the SDGs have been called the “People’s Agenda”. The first step in ensuring that no one is left behind is to raise awareness for, and understanding of, the SDGs. CSOs and other stakeholders can play an important role in developing activities that aim to disseminate information regarding the SDGs. In this regard, some actions have already been developed and implemented by different stakeholders.

In 2016, the Estonian National Foundation of Civil Society dedicated their annual conference to the SDGs and to the 2030 Agenda. The conference brought to the stage the best practices on how NGOs can contribute to SDG implementation.

The Estonian NGO Mondo, which is an organisation that focuses on humanitarian aid, development cooperation and global education, initiated a publication that was dedicated to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and was published as a supplement to national newspapers²².

19. ITUC’s Agenda 2030 Hub, <https://www.ituc-csi.org/2030-Agenda>

20. LONG Graham, How should civil society stakeholders report their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?, Technical paper for the UN DESA 21. http://sdgtoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/VNR_handbook_2018.pdf

22. Communication and Awareness Raising in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: Activities and Challenges, ESDN Quarterly Report, April 2017, https://www.sd-network.eu/quarterly%20reports/report%20files/pdf/2017-April-Communication_and_Awareness_Raising_in_the_Implementation_of_the_2030_Agenda_and_the_SDGs.pdf



SDG Watch Europe is an EU-level, cross-sectoral civil society alliance. Its aim is to require governments to take responsibility for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The work of SDG Watch Europe is organised in four interlinked Work Strands: Strand One: Joint high-level advocacy and policy coordination for ambitious and integrated EU SDG implementation; Strand Two: Monitoring, accountability and review of European SDG implementation across all sectors; Strand Three: Engaging CSOs and citizens – at local, national and EU level; Strand Four: Innovating, Reflecting, Experimenting and Learning together.

Strand Three focuses on how to get CSOs and citizens engaged in this global discussion. It aims to reach out to CSOs, in order to raise awareness, increase their engagement and help build the capacity of SDGs implementation at different levels and ensure a bottom-up approach.

In this regard, and among other actions, the coalition organised a delegation of 22 representatives that participated in the events in the run up to the EU Summit on 25 March 2017, which marked the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties. The logic behind this initiative to participate in the EU Summit is that civil society mobilisation, including events, workshops and marches, provides an ideal context in which SDG Watch Europe's members are able to network with other CSOs, strengthen the visibility of the SDGs at the European level, and to convey the message of putting the 2030 Agenda at the core of a new narrative for Europe²³.



23. <https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/>

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