

# Tracking SDG Progress: Achievements and Challenges in Europe and Northern America

## I. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all [1]. These goals are essential for Europe and Northern America [2], as they address some of the region's most pressing challenges.

Europe and Northern America have made significant progress toward achieving the SDGs. Some of the notable achievements address poverty, health, education, and affordable clean energy.

### A. *SDG 1: No Poverty*

The proportion of people living in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 a day) in Europe and Northern America is less than 1%. However, income inequality remains an issue in some countries in the region [3].

### B. *SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being*

Life expectancy at birth in Europe and Northern America is high, with an average of 78 years. However, there are significant differences in health outcomes across the region, with some countries experiencing higher rates of premature death, non-communicable diseases, and mental health disorders [4].

### C. *SDG 4: Quality Education*

Almost all children in Europe and Northern America have access to primary and secondary education. However, the quality of education varies, and there are persistent disparities in educational outcomes among different groups, such as disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

### D. *SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy*

Europe and Northern America have made progress towards increasing the share of renewable energy in their energy mix. In 2018, renewable energy accounted for around 18% of total energy consumption in Europe and 10% in Northern America. However, fossil fuels still dominate the energy mix, and significant variations exist in progress made across regional countries [5].

However, there are also areas where progress has been slower or more uneven. Some of the challenges are reduce inequalities, responsible consumption and production, climate action and life on land.

### A. *SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities*

Despite progress in reducing poverty rates, income and wealth disparities exist in Europe and Northern America. Women and marginalized groups such as immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities face higher poverty rates and economic insecurity [5].

### B. *SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production*

Europe and Northern America have high levels of consumption and waste, contributing to environmental degradation and climate change. The region generates about 25% of the world's municipal waste, and only a small percentage is recycled [6].

### C. *SDG 13: Climate Action*

Europe and Northern America have made progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The European Union has set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels [7], [8]. However, the region still faces significant challenges related to climate change, including rising temperatures, sea level rise, and extreme weather events.

### D. *SDG 15: Life on Land*

Europe and Northern America still face significant challenges related to environmental degradation, including pollution, loss of biodiversity, and overuse of natural resources. Almost half

of Europe's freshwater bodies are in poor ecological condition, and around a third of the region's land is degraded [9].

Europe and Northern America have made progress towards SDGs, setting a standard. However, some regions exceed them in few areas. For example,

- Extreme poverty has declined globally, but significant regional differences remain. In 2020, the excessive poverty rate was highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (34.5%), followed by South Asia (9.9%) and East Asia and Pacific (3.3%) [10]. However, in recent years, several countries in Asia and Latin America have made significant progress in reducing poverty rates.
- In 2020, the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption was highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (18.5%), followed by Africa (7.8%) and Asia (6.9%) [11]. Many countries in these regions, such as Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Kenya, have made significant progress in transitioning to renewable energy sources.
- Nordic countries, such as Iceland, Finland, and Sweden, consistently rank highly in the gender equality index. However, several other countries, including Norway, New Zealand, and Spain, have also made progress in promoting gender equality [12].

Europe and Northern America may not be on track to achieve some of the Sustainable Development Goals due to a lack of political will, economic and social inequality, environmental degradation, migration and refugee crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Regional governments may not prioritize certain SDGs or allocate sufficient resources to support their implementation, and despite high economic development, significant disparities in income and wealth persist. Environmental challenges, migration and refugee crises, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are substantial obstacles that could have long-term effects on progress toward the SDGs.

Stakeholders hold differing views on progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Europe and Northern America. Governments prioritize and allocate resources differently in pursuit of SDGs, with Nordic countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and Finland making significant progress, while others like Italy and Greece lag. Civil society organizations express concerns about inadequate investment in sustainable agriculture and infrastructure. The private sector is divided, with some businesses leading efforts towards sustainable practices, while others prioritize profit. Academia experts vary in their opinions; for instance, public health experts may be optimistic about progress towards SDG 3, while environmental science experts may be critical of progress towards SDG 13. Citizens in Europe are most concerned about unemployment, poverty, and inequality, while North Americans prioritize climate change and the environment [13].

The indicators utilized by the United Nations (UN) and its partners to measure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include poverty rates, income inequality, social protection coverage, maternal and child mortality rates, life expectancy, access to health services, enrolment, completion, and literacy rates for education, gender pay gaps, political representation, and access to reproductive health services for gender equality, greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy consumption, and energy efficiency for clean energy and climate action, access to public transportation, green spaces, and affordable housing for sustainable cities and communities, and official development assistance (ODA), private sector investment, and technology transfer for partnerships for sustainable development [14], [15].

These metrics help monitor progress towards the SDGs in Europe and Northern America and identify areas where more action and investment are needed for a sustainable future.

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