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## Global SDG assessment shows the EU needs to step up its efforts



The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Stiftung non-partisan foundation have released their **Sustainable Development Report 2019**.

The report details countries' progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Index ranks 162 countries<sup>[1]</sup> according to their overall score on all 17 SDGs, while the dashboards show countries' progress on each SDG. The report also includes detailed country profiles.

### Background



Offices and international organisations to monitor the SDGs globally. This includes regional monitoring

efforts such as the Eurostat's *Sustainable development in the European Union – Monitoring report* on progress towards the SDGs in the EU context, published annually since 2017.

However, contrary to the Eurostat report, the SDR uses both official and non-official data sources, such as research centres and non-governmental organisations. Indicators differ from the *EU SDG Indicator* set.

The SDSN report uses 114 indicators, with 85 selected to allow for worldwide comparisons and 29 specific to OECD countries. For the first time, this year's report was audited by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC).

## Ranking

Regarding overall SDG performance, the Sustainable Development Index 2019 ranks Denmark, Sweden and Finland at the top; the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, and the Central African Republic rank last out of the 162 countries assessed.

However, ranking high relative to other countries does not mean that SDG achievement is satisfying.

The highest-ranking country, Denmark, scores 85, meaning that it is on average 85% of the way to the best possible outcome across the 17 SDGs; but it scores red on SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 14 (Life below water).

In general, irrespective of their level of development, countries all over the world are losing ground in many areas.

## Worst performers

Four years after the Paris Agreement – and within a year of the *2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets* – the report's findings paint a gloomy picture of environmental SDGs.

Countries' worst performances are on SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land) – notably, no country obtained a 'green rating', which acknowledges the achievement of an SDG, on SDG 14.

High-income countries obtain their worst ratings on both SDG 14 and 15, and tend to perform poorly on SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) as well. Despite strong environmental policies and *successful conservation stories*, the *EU has significant progress to make* to achieve these SDGs.

The report also highlights the significant environmental and socioeconomic spillover effects generated by high-income countries, such as deforestation, tax havens, or tolerance for poor labour standards in international supply chains. These spillovers are partly responsible for high-income countries' poor performances on SDGs 12, 14 and 15.

The EU has a responsibility in monitoring the effects of its policies beyond its borders, and the lack of spillover effects' assessment has been *identified as a major gap* of the Eurostat report.

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In this context, the lack of progress on SDG 13 (climate action) becomes even more concerning, as [climate change has been recognised as a threat multiplier](#) and is foreseen to spawn increased conflicts in the near future, through dwindling resources and forced migrations. To support global delivery of the 2030 Agenda, the EU should step up its efforts to address this issue, by [integrating environmental security into its foreign and security policies](#).

Finally, SDSN and Bertelsmann Stiftung stress the need for deep transformations worldwide to achieve both the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

The report outlines six SDG transformations that can help governments develop an optimal SDG implementation strategy, by addressing synergies and trade-offs across SDGs.

Recognising [interlinkages between SDGs is essential](#) to identify crosscutting policy actions that can accelerate progress towards multiple goals simultaneously.

### Significant gaps

The report's perhaps most important finding is the significant gap between SDG rhetoric and action.

While all governments made promises in 2015 on implementing the 2030 Agenda, the report found that only 18 out of the 43 countries surveyed mention SDGs in their central budget documents.

Several EU Member States – including Austria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden – do so, but most don't, including the European Union itself. This is a key gap that the EU needs to act upon, by adopting the overarching SDG strategy presented as a possible scenario in the EU Commission reflection paper [‘Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030’](#).

### Next steps

The Sustainable Development Report has come out just ahead of the [UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (HLPF), taking place in New York on 9 July. This year's edition will review SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

The HLPF will be followed by the [UN SDG Summit](#) in September, which in turn will be the first of its kind since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Heads of State and Government will gather at the UN headquarters in New York for two days to review progress on all 17 SDGs, assess gaps in implementation, and accelerate action towards achieving the Agenda.

For the EU, the New York SDG Summit represents a significant opportunity to position itself as a global leader in achieving the 2030 Agenda, by taking stock of its current deficiencies in implementing the SDGs and presenting a strategy for accelerating action within and beyond its borders.

The recently released [programme](#) of the Finnish Presidency of the EU Council is a welcomed step towards