

Sustainable Development Observatory Work Programme 2023-2025

Context and overall objective

The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) is an integral part of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and plays a crucial role in advancing the sustainability agenda within the European Union (EU). Closely coordinated with the NAT Section, the main objectives of the SDO are to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whilst giving full consideration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions, and the balance between them.



As we continue our journey towards a more sustainable future, the SDO's work programme will serve as a roadmap for promoting and monitoring sustainable development across various sectors and policy areas. One of the primary objectives of the SDO is to enhance policy coherence and integration, ensuring that sustainability considerations are systematically integrated across various policy domains in a balanced way.

As a result of the multiple crises, we see a stagnation on SDG implementation. However, we only have seven years left to achieve the SDGs as laid out in the Agenda 2030. Failure to implement the SDG principles of social inclusion, clean energy, responsible consumption and production, and universal access to public services will lead to even more crises and geopolitical rivalries. Failure to implement the SDGs will also be harmful for business and future competitiveness: according to the latest report of the World Economic Forum¹, environmental and social crises will dominate global risks in the years to come.

¹ [World Economic Forum report.](#)

The EESC has welcomed the EU's commitment to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development² by producing the first EU Voluntary Review (VR), a comprehensive assessment of the EU's progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has prepared a specific contribution that was annexed to the VR. For this contribution, the EESC consulted civil society organisations to gather input on the EU's internal and external implementation of the SDGs.

Within the framework of this work programme, the SDO intends to focus on several key areas that are essential for achieving sustainable development in the EU as leverage points for SDG implementation, as detailed below.

Furthermore, the SDO will place a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement and participation, particularly with young people. Recognising that sustainable development is a collective responsibility, the SDO actively seeks to involve businesses, trade unions, civil society organisations, academia, think tanks and other relevant stakeholders in its work. By promoting dialogue and collaboration, the Sustainable Development Observatory aims to harness the collective expertise and perspectives necessary to formulate and implement policies effectively while respecting the specific characteristics of the real economy to ensure that the targets are actually achievable.

Specific areas of the Sustainable Development Observatory's work for SDG implementation

To facilitate the implementation and assessment of the SDGs, various groups have put forth sets of "Six Transformations"³ that offer a more practical and comprehensive framework. These transformations serve as entry points to civil society organisations to align their strategies and operations with sustainable development objectives. **The Sustainable Development Observatory intends to focus on the following six key areas for transformation in six public half-day meetings during the upcoming mandate:**

1. **Sustainable and just economies:** This transformation focuses on building strong economic systems that are profitable as well as environmentally sustainable and socially equitable, while ensuring sound financial practices and responsible fiscal policies. Business and civil society organisations can promote adoption of sustainable practices throughout value chains, promote responsible consumption and production, and support initiatives that address economic and social inequalities, while putting decent work and the just transition at the forefront of its reflections. This area ties in with the EESC's work on the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP), with the Ad Hoc Group on the European Semester, and with all Legislative Works sections.

2. **Sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition:** This transformation emphasises the need for sustainable agriculture, food security, and healthy diets made up of high quality agricultural products. We need to strengthen the agri-food system so that it continues to respond efficiently by consolidating its strategic role in the green transition. A more sustainable and equitable agri-food system will lead to more balanced rural/urban development. We therefore support this transition by adopting sustainable

² [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#).

³ These include *The World in 2050* (TWI2050, 2018), Sachs et al. (2019), and the UN independent group of scientists, appointed by the Secretary-General (2019).

farming practices, reducing food waste, promoting access to nutritious food and supporting local food systems. The SDO will continue its cooperation with the Permanent Study Group on sustainable food systems in this area, in particular with a joint meeting.

3. **Energy decarbonisation with universal access:** This transformation centres around transitioning to clean and renewable energy sources while ensuring universal access to energy. Civil society organisations can support renewable energy technologies, improve energy efficiency in their operations, and support initiatives that expand access to clean energy for all. The SDO's work in this area will tie in closely with the EESC's TEN section.

4. **Urban and peri-urban development:** This transformation focuses on creating sustainable communities, enhancing mobility and providing affordable housing. Civil society organisations can contribute by developing sustainable infrastructure, promoting public transportation, supporting affordable housing initiatives and revitalising urban spaces. They can thus play a crucial role in bridging the urban-rural divide and promoting inclusive and sustainable development that everyone can benefit from. This is closely linked to the NAT section's work on the Rural Pact and the important role of rural areas in ensuring holistic and well-balanced sustainable development.

5. **Human well-being and capabilities:** This transformation encompasses education, skills development, decent work, innovation and digitalisation. Civil society organisations can contribute by investing in employee training and development, promoting fair working conditions, fostering innovation and leveraging digital technologies to enhance productivity and inclusivity. This area lends itself to cooperation with the Labour Market Observatory and the Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market.

6. **Global dimension:** This transformation pertains to the preservation and sustainable management of global environmental resources. We need to ensure true reciprocity of standards and carefully consider spillover effects when it comes to trade agreements, especially in an increasingly competitive and open global context. Civil society can engage in responsible resource extraction, reduce pollution and waste, support conservation efforts and work with stakeholders to address environmental challenges on a global scale as it becomes urgent to take action. The SDO will contribute towards this process at global level by cooperating with the EESC's Ad Hoc Group on UNFCCC/COP.

By adopting these six transformations, the Sustainable Development Observatory can provide a forum for civil society actors involved in implementing and monitoring the SDGs at EU level. The EESC has concrete experience in facilitating such exchanges and empowering civil society. It is through such concerted efforts that we can achieve meaningful and lasting progress towards a more sustainable future with thriving businesses, a prosperous society and a healthy planet.

The interconnectivity between fundamental rights, environmental degradation and climate change is clearly defined in the SDGs and will be highlighted in the work of the Observatory, in collaboration with the Ad Hoc Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law.

Cross-cutting aspects

Cross-cutting aspects play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the SDO's work. Important aspects for consideration:

Integrating youth and women into the work of the SDGs and organising inclusive events:

Recognising the importance of engaging youth in sustainable development efforts, it is essential to actively involve young people in the work on the SDGs. This can be done by providing platforms for youth participation, including their perspectives in decision-making processes and empowering them to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. Moreover, the organisation of inclusive events means ensuring gender balance on our panels and a gender perspective, as well as promoting diverse representation not only in terms of geography but also of expertise and different backgrounds. This helps foster a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to addressing sustainability challenges.

The vital role of water: Preserving health, human rights and sustainability

The Blue Deal promoted by the EESC underlines the crucial importance of water management and conservation. Water is not only a limited and precious resource, but also a fundamental driver of health and human rights. Access to clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental human right, and good water management is directly linked to public health. Ensuring the quality and availability of water is not only essential for safeguarding human health, but also for preserving ecosystems and biodiversity, which are an integral part of sustainable development. Moreover, by addressing water, air and soil together with integrated strategies, we can create comprehensive solutions that not only protect our environment, but also promote the health, dignity and rights of citizens around the world. The SDO will raise awareness of the importance of clean water, air and soil and promote good practices at its events, in cooperation with the CCMI.

Cooperation with other sections of legislative works/CCMI, and with the other observatories:

Collaboration and cooperation are crucial for a holistic approach to sustainable development. In the case of the Sustainable Development Observatory, it is beneficial to engage and collaborate with all sections/CCMI and observatories within the EESC. This cooperation allows for the exchange of relevant opinions, expertise, and perspectives from different fields, promoting interdisciplinary dialogue and shared cross-cutting objectives and strengthens the overall impact of the SDO. By leveraging the knowledge and insights from various sections, the SDO can provide a more comprehensive and informed analysis and concrete recommendations on sustainable development issues.

By integrating youth into the work on the SDGs and promoting inclusive and gender-balanced events, as well as fostering cooperation within the EESC and its stakeholders, the Sustainable Development Observatory can enhance its effectiveness, relevance and impact in advancing sustainable development within the European Union. These transversal aspects contribute to a more diverse, participatory and comprehensive approach to addressing sustainability challenges and achieving the SDGs while creating mutually beneficial opportunities for civil society.

With this work programme, the Sustainable Development Observatory aims to harness the energy, expertise and passion of civil society organisations to speed up progress towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and create a more sustainable and equitable world for all.