

SUSTAINABLE GOALS



SDO Work Programme 2025-2028

Context and overall objective

The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) is an integral part of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and plays a central role in advancing the sustainability agenda within the European Union. Working closely with the Committee's sections, observatories and the Liaison Group with civil society organisations, the SDO promotes a balanced and integrated approach to sustainable development, ensuring that the economic, social and environmental dimensions reinforce one another and deliver tangible benefits for citizens.

The SDO's Work Programme 2025-2028 is being published at a decisive moment. With only five years left until the 2030 deadline, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has stalled. Globally, only 17% of targets are on track¹, while inequalities, environmental pressures and geopolitical tensions continue to grow. At the same time, misinformation and political polarisation have weakened public understanding and support for sustainability. This is not merely a communication problem but a social and political one: if the SDGs remain disconnected from people's daily realities, they cannot succeed.

Against this background, the SDO's overarching objective for 2025-2028 is to strengthen public engagement with sustainable development by showing its impact on daily life, local communities and economic opportunities. It aims to promote a renewed, positive narrative around the SDGs – one that links sustainability with opportunity, fairness, prosperity and quality of life for all. Through dialogue, cooperation with civil society and stronger policy coherence across the EU, the SDO will

¹ [SDSN Sustainable Development Report 2025](#).

work to re-establish the SDGs as a shared vision for Europe's future and to accelerate the transition to a fair, sustainable and resilient society.

Strategic priorities

Priority 1 – Reclaiming the sustainable development narrative

The SDO's first priority will be to work on winning back the public narrative on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Over recent years, misinformation, ideological distortion and politicisation have blurred the meaning of sustainable development. The debate has often become detached from people's concerns, reinforcing the idea that sustainability is an abstract agenda. The SDO will therefore **focus on reconnecting the SDGs with citizens, communities and businesses**, showing that sustainability is not a constraint but a source of opportunity, security and resilience.

Throughout this mandate, the SDO will promote a positive and inclusive vision of sustainable development that highlights **how the SDGs deliver tangible benefits**, like decent jobs, healthier environments, stable communities and a fairer economy. By engaging with civil society organisations, youth networks, social partners and local actors, the SDO will provide spaces for dialogue and exchange that rebuild understanding and ownership. The aim is to **make sustainability a shared societal project rather than a technocratic exercise**, helping the EU institutions and organised civil society to speak with a clearer, more unified voice about what sustainable development means in practice and why it matters for people's daily lives.

Priority 2 – Accelerating progress on the social SDGs

The SDO will emphasise the social dimension of sustainable development, recognising it as the foundation for achieving all SDGs by 2030. Social progress – through poverty reduction, decent work, equality, education, health and inclusion – is not only an end in itself but an activator for advancing economic and environmental sustainability.

By focusing on the social SDGs, the SDO will seek to **reinforce the link between people's well-being and the green and digital transitions**. Too often, the social aspects of sustainability are treated as residual or secondary to environmental targets. The SDO will work to ensure that they are recognised as drivers and accelerators. A society that is fairer, more cohesive and more resilient is better equipped to embrace change, invest in innovation, and protect the planet. This means strengthening the social contract within Europe – through quality employment, education, social protection and participation – and ensuring that the benefits of the transition are shared equitably across territories and generations. The SDO will thus advocate for a **Europe that advances sustainability through inclusion and justice**.

Priority 3 – Making the economy an enabler of sustainable development

The third priority will be to position the economy as an enabler and accelerator of the other two pillars of sustainability. Economic policy debates in the EU are becoming increasingly focused on competitiveness, industrial leadership and security, but these priorities must be aligned with

sustainability objectives rather than being seen as competing with them. The SDO will work to demonstrate that **economic renewal and sustainability can and must advance together**.

A dynamic, innovative and competitive European economy can become a powerful driver of the SDGs if guided by clear sustainability objectives and social responsibility. Investment in the green and just transitions, circular business models, social enterprises and sustainable finance can help Europe regain its leadership in sustainable technologies and responsible industry. The SDO will promote dialogue with social partners, enterprises, and civil society to explore how the economy can be mobilised to enable social inclusion and environmental progress. In doing so, it will highlight the need for coherence between economic governance mechanisms (such as the European Semester and the Multiannual Financial Framework) and the SDGs.

By framing competitiveness as the capacity to create long-term value for people and the planet, the SDO will **help to reorient Europe's economic narrative towards one that empowers rather than undermines sustainable development**.

Priority 4 – The SDGs for rural development

Rural areas are among the territories where the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development are most visible. They face depopulation, an ageing population, loss of services and growing vulnerability to climate change, but also hold immense potential for innovation, community-led action and green transformation. During this term, the SDO will examine how the SDGs can be used as a **practical tool to guide the renewal of rural areas across the EU**, helping local and regional authorities to align their policies, investments and partnerships around shared sustainability objectives.

Many of these challenges are closely tied to the **transformation of Europe's agricultural and food systems**, which remain at **the heart of rural economies**. Sustainable agriculture is essential for achieving the SDGs: it supports food security, protects natural resources, strengthens biodiversity and contributes to climate adaptation and mitigation. Innovative farming practices, like regenerative agriculture, circular bioeconomy approaches and resilient local food systems, can create quality jobs and reinforce the economic and social fabric of rural territories. Ensuring the active involvement of farmers, agricultural organisations and rural civil society will therefore be crucial to turning the SDGs into practical tools for territorial development.

This work will focus on promoting integrated rural-urban development, strengthening territorial cohesion, and building local resilience through inclusive governance. The SDO will look at how rural communities can use the SDGs to identify priorities, attract investment, and connect social, environmental and economic goals – from access to services and jobs to the sustainable use of natural resources. These efforts will also contribute to wider EESC reflections on sustainable food systems, the bioeconomy and the just transition in non-urban regions.

Priority 5 – Preparing for the post-2030 Agenda

With the 2030 deadline rapidly approaching and most of the global goals off track, reflections on the future of the international sustainable development framework are already underway. Over the next

two years, governments and stakeholders will begin shaping the post-2030 Agenda, which will be officially discussed at the 2027 UN SDG Summit. The SDO intends to play an active role in this process, ensuring that the voice of EU organised civil society is heard clearly at an early stage.

The SDO will launch a **structured reflection process on the future of the global sustainable development framework after 2030**. This process will explore how a new agenda could build on the experience of the SDGs, which principles and lessons should be preserved, and how its governance, scope and targets might evolve to reflect emerging global challenges. The objective is to facilitate a broad and inclusive dialogue with organised civil society, gathering their expectations, concerns and ideas about the next phase of global sustainability efforts. The SDO will synthesise these contributions to support the Committee's input into the EU's preparations for the post-2030 discussions, ensuring that the perspectives of European civil society are fully reflected in the debate.

Cross-cutting aspects and collaboration

Cross-cutting issues are fundamental to the SDO's approach. During this term, the SDO will step up cooperation within the EESC and beyond. It will also work more closely with the Liaison Group, offering a structured platform for civil society dialogue on sustainability. The SDO will continue to engage actively in international processes such as the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), ensuring that civil society perspectives from Europe are represented. Young people, women, and marginalised groups will be at the centre of participation efforts, with inclusive events and dialogues designed to bring new voices into the sustainable development debate.

The SDO will also call for the preparation of a **second EU Voluntary Review (EUVR)** of the SDGs. As with the first EUVR, we stand ready to coordinate and prepare the **contribution of organised civil society**, ensuring that their perspectives are fully reflected in the EU's reporting.

The priorities of the SDO are closely aligned with those of the EESC President's work programme, *Civil Society at the Heart of Europe – Delivering together a Union of Opportunities, Security and Resilience*², with the NAT section work programme, and with the work of other NAT structures, including the Permanent Group (PG) on sustainable food systems, the PG on the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) and the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP). The SDO will complement and support these priorities by promoting sustainable development across the Committee's work and by engaging with section presidents and rapporteurs to ensure consistency and collaboration on sustainability-related initiatives.

Expected outcomes

By implementing this work programme, the SDO will help **rebuild public ownership of sustainable development, promote the social dimension as a driver for progress, and reaffirm the economy as an enabler of sustainability**. It will strengthen the EESC's role as a bridge between citizens, civil society and EU institutions, ensuring that the EU remains a credible and committed leader in implementing the 2030 Agenda and in shaping the future of global sustainable development. Through

² [Civil Society at the heart of Europe](#).

inclusive dialogue and concrete action, the SDO will contribute to a Europe that is fairer, more sustainable and more resilient.
