

DIALOGUE CYCLE 2025 on 'Sustainable Development Goals'

Reflection paper on The next steps of SDGs implementation and civil society's involvement

Background

Ten years after its adoption by the UN General Assembly and the beginning of the implementation processes in all countries, the significance and importance of the 2030 Agenda, and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, is beyond dispute. All efforts now need to focus on using the SDGs again as a universal compass towards sustainability, to defend them against backlashes and to push harder for improving and enhancing policies and measures. We need to go beyond an 'SDG by SDG' approach by making the SDGs mainstream in EU, national and subnational policies through an integrated and holistic approach, and by better addressing trade-offs and enhancing policy coherence.

Against this background of required acceleration, implementing the SDGs requires even stronger political commitment at all levels and the participation of civil society. For the SDGs to be effective, they must be localised and actively supported by communicating and engaging with citizens, civil society organisations, the private sector and other stakeholders, national, regional and local authorities, academia and media. The upcoming International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development (IVY 2026) should be harnessed to increase engagement with and recognition of SDGs.

While the European Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) have been instrumental for SDG implementation, they have lost priority at EU level. In any case, a continued commitment is needed, including for the post 2030 perspective. At the same time, the role and work of civil society has been less prominent, with limited ability to scrutinise and advocate for the SDGs. Lack of transparency leads to citizens and stakeholders being unaware of progress made and policy measures taken. Since the end of 2019, there has been no formal mechanism for civil society to monitor the implementation of the SDGs by the EU.

The EU's 1st Voluntary Review (EU VR)¹ on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda reflected the need to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, specifically through the structured, regular and meaningful involvement of civil society and other stakeholders. During this process, the EESC facilitated an interactive exercise, providing CSOs with the opportunity to collaborate in the analysis and development of recommendations. The EESC, having served as a convening space, should continue to do so in the coming years, as it can serve as a valuable Forum for the involvement of European civil society organisations with European institutions, thereby improving transparency, re-expanding shrinking civic space and advancing the SDGs.

¹ [SDG-Report-WEB.pdf, EESC Contribution to the EU-level Voluntary Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.](#)

Objectives of the Forum for SDG implementation:

- To provide a **structured and inclusive space** for European civil society to be involved with European institutions, particularly the European Commission, as well as the European Council and European Parliament, to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, including through the commitments made in the EU Voluntary Review.
- To engage organised civil society in **meaningful dialogue and consultation** with the European institutions, particularly the European Commission, which should ensure the follow-up of civil society's recommendations.
- To **foster and increase synergies** and share positive examples and good practices between different civil society organisations and networks, with national, regional and local authorities and other stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and in developing a perspective beyond 2030.
- To strengthen **accountability and transparency** mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs at EU level, recognising the EU's role as a duty bearer in ensuring their fulfilment.
- To ensure that the **delivery of the EU's priorities**, such as the European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Clean Industry Deal, the Environmental Action Programmes, the European Semester, the post-2027 MFF (including the Common Agricultural Policy), the Global Gateway etc., is fully coherent with the SDGs.
- To advise and produce **recommendations** on the approach to the overall governance and implementation of the goals, with a particular focus on the findings/recommendations from the 1st EU VR, including areas where we might share a common interest such as culture, and developing a post 2030 perspective, along with the UN SG Pact for the Future.
- To support, advise and participate in **the monitoring of the EU's implementation of the SDGs**: a) advising and producing recommendations on the 2nd EU VR, and other key documents, b) advising on how to build further on the annual Eurostat report, which could be further contextualised with other insights, research and follow up actions, where progress is insufficient and c) allowing independent research and relevant stakeholders to contribute data.

The EESC, in collaboration with several civil society organisations, will agree on a proposed structure and stands ready to work hand in hand with these organisations, and the Commission, for its functioning.