



Summary and analysis

On 29 November the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a public debate to examine Eurostat's first annual report on the Sustainable Development Goals, called *Sustainable Development in the European Union: 2017 Monitoring Report of the Sustainable Development Goals in an EU context*. Stakeholders from civil society and policy makers attended the event. Two panels were held to offer analysis and reflection on the report's choice of indicators, method of analysis and its conclusions. Special emphasis on the monitoring of SDG implementation was discussed, along with EU policy gaps and policy barriers that require attention if the EU is to meet the 17 Goals by 2030.

Panellists included EU policy-makers from the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament, and the Estonian Permanent Representation to the EU, as well as NGOs, trade and business leaders with broad EU network coverage working on one or more areas of the three pillars of sustainable development. Panelists and participants had the opportunity to express their views and concerns about the general lack of overall EU ambition and progress thus far.

Ms. Mayer, from Eurostat, began with a presentation of the Eurostat package on the SDGs and how the report was conducted, including the methodology for the choice of 100 indicators distributed across the 17 SDGs and the rationale behind the analysis and findings in the report. The package has four deliverables. The Monitoring report, which contains one thematic chapter for each SDG, provides in-depth analysis.



The SDG brochure, with a visual presentation of the results, provides key insights in the report. The online database and statistics, provide additional information. For the report, the methodological approach used focusses both on short term (5 years) and long term (15 years) calculations of trends for each indicator (where possible) and an overall trend at SDG level. To calculate these trends, where no quantified target exists, the annual "growth" rate of the indicator is compared with a defined threshold (1% per year). The report is the first of an annual exercise to monitor the implementation of SDGs at EU level until 2030. Using a barometer icon to present the state of play of the SDG achievement in the EU, the results show that indicators show either a moderate progress (SDGs 10, 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 17, and 4) or significant progress (SDGs 3, 15, 11, 12, and 7). Nevertheless, for four SDGs indicators (6, 13, 14, and 16) it was not possible to calculate a trend because a time series was not available for more than 25% of the indicators in these categories.

Ms. Brenda King, President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory, introduced the panelists of the first panel: **Ms. Céline Charveriat** of IEEP, **Ms. Ingeborg Niestroy** of SDG Watch, **Ms. Lorena Sorrentino** of CSR Europe, and **Mr. Benjamin Denis** of ETUC.

SDG Watch representative, **Ms. Ingeborg Niestroy** pointed to the inadequacy of Eurostat's report indicators, "selecting the indicators, while being a technical procedure, is very political". The annual indicator selection needs to be more open to the input of civil society. She said that there should be a call for a full revision with complementing other types of knowledge and indicators with non-state actor contributions. **Ms. Céline Charveriat** called for "targets based on science, not on what is politically feasible at the time." She said that the report suffers from a number of limitations such as data gaps, and no analysis of these gaps. It is neither based on planetary boundaries nor on fair shares of the carbon budget. Moreover, the short term trends might be over emphasized.



The panelists expressed the real challenges faced by society to spur citizens to action on the Goals, citing the lack of EU strategy and a supportive, clear EU strategy, along with an overall lack of communication on the goals. **Ms. Mayer** commented that the next step in the process will be to have a review of the indicators firstly with an internal consultation within the Commission and then a consultation with external entities.

During the second panel, **Ms. Brenda King**, asked the representatives of various levels of government: "Which policy gaps need to be addressed based on the SDGs outcomes to date?"

MEP Seb Dance, **Ms. Kristi Klaas**, **Mr. Arnoldas Abramavičius** discussed the priority areas for EU's action on SDGs. **Ms. Klaas** recalled that there is an expectation for a higher level of policy



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coherence of EU policies regarding the SDGs. **MEP Seb Dance** of S&D said that "We need to point out policy proposals as they come up that run contrary to achieving the SDGs".

Ms. King opened the floor for the public to address Eurostat, policy makers and non-state actor representatives.

Some of the views and concerns expressed:

- There was some criticism on the 'rosy' picture angle the Eurostat report presented, which stated that all goals were improving to some degree.
- Using different methodologies yield completely different results. For example, it is clear that when EUROSTAT's SDG report is compared with the EU SDG Dashboard by SDSN, two different pictures arise on the state of play of on many of the goals.
- The many goals, targets and indicators need to be better explained and the report hides this complexity. As well, a lack of comparability between the EU and MS countries is a problem.
- Civil society could complement the Eurostat report by giving qualitative analysis and deeper levels of data that are not being captured.
- An alignment of EU and national policies to support an implementation action on a path towards meeting the SDG was a key request.
- Others pointed out that the various levels of governance in the EU (regional, Member State, EU) do not seem to have a coordinated way to support local actions by stakeholders and this is slowing down the ability to progress.
- It was pointed out that the report lacks an external policy dimension.
- It was suggested that indicators could be used to influence the Multi Annual Financial Framework so as to mainstream the SDG's.
- Importance of the annual revision of the indicators by Eurostat and a call for this revision to be as broad as possible, both in terms of the actors consulted and the scope of the revision, was underlined.

Ms. King, called for the establishment of a system where civil society and other stakeholders could engage with decision makers. She added that bottom up and top down processes had to be linked.

Key take-away messages:

- 1) Mainstreaming of SDGs at EU policy level is needed, both to ensure policy coherence and address any EU policy that might run contrary to achieving the SDGs.
- 2) SDGs are achieved on the ground by non-state actors. The EU and Member States need to set up policy frameworks and communication strategies to spur citizens to actions on those goals.
- 3) The annual revision of the Eurostat study must be an opportunity for broader dialogue with civil society on which indicators should be included and what the target for each of these should be.

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