EUROPE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2025

SDG Priorities for the New EU Leadership

Includes the SDG Index for the European Union, its member states, and partner countries

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK
A GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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List of Acronyms

CBAM: Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

DAC: Development Assistance Committee

EESC: European Economic and Social Committee

EFTA: European Free Trade Agreement

ESDR: Europe Sustainable Development Report

EU: European Union

FFD4: 4th Conference on Financing for Development

GCSI: Global Commons Stewardship Index

GFA: Global Financial Architecture

GNI: Gross National Income

JRC: Joint Research Centre (European Commission)

LNOB: Leave No One Behind

MFF: Multiannual Financial Framework

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SDSN: Sustainable Development Solutions Network

SILC: EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions

STEM: Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

TIMMS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

UNGA: United Nations General Assembly

1. Introduction: The new EU leadership (2024–2029) and the SDGs

In a context where the new EU leadership – European Commission, Parliament and Council of the EU—has recently been established for the period 2024–2029, this sixth edition of the European Sustainable Development Report (ESDR) presents an updated narrative report and database to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2030 Agenda in Europe. Since 2019, the ESDR has presented the SDG Index and Dashboards for Europe and provided an annual overview of the EU's progress towards the SDGs. It builds on the methodology of the global SDG Index which has been statistically audited in 2019 by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC). This year's edition covers 41 individual European countries: 27 EU member states, 9 Candidate countries, 4 countries in the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) and the United Kingdom. The report and SDG Index database highlight areas of success as well as opportunities for further improvement and use the data to compare the progress of European sub-regions. The data and findings build on several rounds of consultations conducted since 2019 with scientists, experts and practitioners from across Europe, made possible in large part through the long-standing cooperation between the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

The new leadership of the EU has reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the SDGs and 2030 Agenda on several occasions in the second half of 2024. Although the SDGs were not mentioned explicitly in the Political Guidelines of the current President of the European Commission (European Commission, 2024c), the mission letters shared with all the Commissioners in September 2024 (European Commission, 2024a) specify that *"As we head to 2030, each Member of the college will ensure the delivery of the EU targets and objectives defined for that year, as well as of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals within their policy areas. The college as a whole will be responsible for the implementation of the Goals."*

The previous European Parliament has issued several SDG resolutions (European Parliament, 2019) and established an informal SDG alliance. The European Council Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 further emphasizes:

> *"The European Union shall continue to be the strongest supporter of the international legal order, steadfastly upholding the United Nations and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. In particular, the European Union will pursue efforts to promote global peace, justice and stability, as well as democracy, universal human rights and the achievement of the* **Sustainable Development Goals in all international fora**. *We will strive for a reformed multilateral system, making it more inclusive and more effective."*

The SDSN has argued for many years that the **SDGs are largely an investment agenda** notably into human capital (education, health, social protection, others) and physical infrastructure (renewable energy and grids, access to technology, others) (Sachs et al., 2019). The Draghi report (European Commission, 2024b) presented in September 2024 also emphasizes that the long-term prosperity and competitiveness of Europe must build on an ambitious investment plan and calls for additional annual investment of €800 billion EUR notably to advance the green and digital transformations. At the same time, budget pressures and political divides are mounting, and such a massive scale-up in investments can only be achieved via collective action and collaboration across EU member states. At the global level, an EU member state—Spain—will host in June 2025 the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4). This conference represents an important milestone to advance the reform of the Global Financial Architecture (GFA) and to unlock further private and public capital to support the achievements of the SDGs.

Globally, 3.3 billion people (or around 40% of the world's population) live in countries that spend more annually on interest payments than on health and education (UNCTAD, 2024). Debt burden and servicing also represents a major barrier to advance climate mitigation and adaptation in many developing countries.

Overall, and as argued in last year's ESDR2023/24 (Lafortune et al., 2024), peace and global cooperation are the fundamental conditions to achieve sustainable development, in Europe and globally. In a multipolar world, characterized by rising geopolitical tensions across superpowers, the EU and its member states should leverage all diplomatic channels and build coalitions with countries and alliances that aim to promote peace and sustainable development. Previous editions of these reports have introduced the concept of **SDG/Green Deal Diplomacy** (SDSN & IEEP, 2020). The UN Charter (1945) but also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the SDGs remain crucial instruments that can help promote a global dialogue between the EU and the rest of the *multipolar* world.

As such, the 10 recommendations made in last years' ESDR2023/24 to **"Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in a Fragmented and Multipolar World" endorsed by 200+ scientists**, experts and practitioners from all over Europe remain particularly relevant (Lafortune et al., 2024) (see Box 1). The new EU leadership is the last one before reaching the 2030 landmark year. The next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), for 2028–2035, must integrate, maintain, and even increase the total level of financing to sufficiently fund the required transformation deep into the next decade.

This EU leadership will also be in charge of negotiating the next set of goals and global agenda for sustainable development that will continue the SDGs. Similar to the role played by the EU before the adoption of the SDGs, the EU and its member states should work with the rest of the global community to raise the level of ambition and implementation mechanisms, including a reformed GFA, for achieving sustainable development by 2030 and beyond as part of an ambitious post-2030 Agenda. The preparation of an ambitious second EU Voluntary Review presented ahead of the next SDG Summit at Heads of States level in 2027, building on extensive consultation with civil society, would send a strong signal to the international community about the EU's commitment to advance long-term sustainable development at home and globally by 2030 and beyond.

Box 1. Towards a new European Deal for the Future: The ten priority actions endorsed by 200+ scientists and practitioners from all over Europe

The 2023/24 ESDR identified ten priority actions: addressing internal SDG priorities, the EU's international leadership, and how to get the job done:

1. Respond to the Grave Danger of Negative 'Social Tipping Points' – Significantly Reduce the Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion of European Citizens

2. Double down Efforts to Achieve Net-zero Emissions in the EU by 2050, with Major Breakthroughs by 2030

3. Strengthen Regional and Local Authorities in Achieving the SDGs – Regularly Monitor and Report SDG Progress at All Levels.

4. Curb Negative International Spillovers and Support the Transformation Towards a Sustainable Trade System

5. Leverage Team Europe for Global SDG Diplomacy –Strengthen Diverse and Universal Formats Especially the United Nations

6. Step up Europe's Multilateral Role – Lead Global Efforts to Reform the Global Financial Architecture

7. Re-focus the EU's International Partnerships on the SDGs – Move towards Mutually Transformative Cooperation

8. Mobilize the Financial Means for Transformations toward a Sustainable Future

9. Institutionalize the Integration of the SDGs into Strategic Planning, Macroeconomic Coordination, Budget Processes, Research and Innovation Missions, and Other Policy Instruments.

10. Set up New Permanent Mechanisms for Structured and Meaningful Engagement with Civil Society, Including Youth, and within the European Parliament on SDG Pathways and Policies

The full statement and list of signatories are available online.

2. Performance of the EU and European countries on the SDGs in 2025

The 2025 edition of the SDG Index and Dashboards for the EU, European member states and partner countries builds on the global SDG Index methodology. This year's edition covers 41 countries (Table 1). This methodology was peer-reviewed by Nature Geoscience and Cambridge University Press, and the 2019 global edition was statistically audited by the European Commission Joint Research Centre. In 2021, the SDG Index was listed by the European Parliament research service among the ten composite indices useful for policymaking (European Parliament, 2021).

From a global perspective, 19 out of the 20 countries that top the SDG Index are European countries (Sachs et al., 2024). Interestingly, European citizens also report high levels of subjective well-being as emphasized in the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2024).

Yet, these results are uneven across European countries and many dimensions of sustainable development have not shown significant progress since 2015, and even more so since 2020. There are also significant uncertainties about future SDG trends in Europe, considering the demographic, economic, technological and geopolitical challenges that lie ahead, as also described in the Draghi report.

The EU also generates large negative spillovers, notably via unsustainable consumption and exports, which must be addressed through collective global action. On average, the SDG Index score of the EU is equivalent this year to 72.8 percent. On average the pace of SDG progress in the EU over the period 2020–2023 was more than two times lower (+0.8 points) than over the period 2016–2019 (+1.9 points). In fact, in some of the most advanced European regions, including Western Europe and Northern Europe, SDG performance has slightly declined since 2020 driven notably by declining trends in socio-economic goals.

The 2025 SDG Index for Europe is topped by Northern European countries. Finland ranks first for the fifth year in a row, followed by Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Norway. Yet the SDG dashboards show that even these countries face major challenges (red dashboard rating) in achieving at least two goals.

Table 1. Country coverage in the 2025 ESDR

Total	Country groups	Countries
27	EU member states	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden
9	Candidate countries	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine
4	European Free Trade Agreement	Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland
1	Partner country / Former EU member state	United Kingdom

41 individual countries

Building on this year's dashboards and previous editions, we underline five major SDG challenges faced by the EU:

1. Stagnation and even reversal of progress on Leave-No-One-Behind indicators since 2020, measuring within-country inequalities in opportunities, well-being and equity in access to and quality of services.

2. Persisting challenges related to environmental and biodiversity goals, including sustainable food and land systems (SDG 2, SDGs 12–15). Alongside the launch of this year's ESDR2025 a companion study prepared by the SDSN and EESC launched the same day discusses challenges and opportunities for achieving SDG2 (Zero Hunger) and sustainable food and land

systems in the EU (Lafortune et al, 2025). The study builds on other processes and studies, including the outcome of the Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU Agriculture.

3. Negative impacts from unsustainable consumption and supply chains via international spillover effects.

4. Large gaps and a slow pace of convergence in SDG outcomes across European countries, including on SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).

5. Slow progress and even reversal in progress on some indicators under SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Figure 1: The 2025 SDG Index for Europe

SDG Index Rank	Country	SDG Index Score
1	Finland	81.1
2	Denmark	79.7
3	Sweden	79.4
4	Austria	77.3
5	Norway	76.2
6	Germany	75.0
7	France	73.9
8	Slovenia	73.8
9	Czechia	73.7
10	Iceland	73.4
11	Poland	73.3
12	United Kingdom	72.7
13	Switzerland	72.4
14	Croatia	72.4
15	Italy	72.3
16	Belgium	72.2
17	Netherlands	71.9
18	Estonia	71.7
19	Ireland	71.5
20	Spain	71.2
21	Latvia	70.6
22	Portugal	70.6

SDG Index Rank (cont.)	Country	SDG Index Score
23	Slovak Republic	70.6
24	Malta	69.3
25	Hungary	68.8
26	Lithuania	67.8
27	Luxembourg	67.6
28	Greece	66.5
29	Romania	64.2
30	Serbia	63.2
31	Bulgaria	62.9
32	Cyprus	62.7
33	North Macedonia	62.5
34	Türkiye	59.1
	European Union	**72.8**
	Northern Europe	80.4
	Western Europe	74.1
	EFTA Countries	73.9
	Southern Europe	71.2
	Central and Eastern Europe	70.1
	Baltic States	69.6
	Candidate Countries	60.9

NOTE: Due to missing data several Candidate countries could not be included in this year's Europe SDG Index rankings including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, and Ukraine. However, detailed country profiles and dashboards are made available for these countries online.

Figure 2: The 2025 SDG Dashboards for Europe

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	NO POVERTY	ZERO HUNGER	GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	QUALITY EDUCATION	GENDER EQUALITY	CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	INDUSTRY, INNOVATION & INFRASTRUCTURE	REDUCED INEQUALITIES	SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION	CLIMATE ACTION	LIFE BELOW WATER	LIFE ON LAND	PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Countries listed (top to bottom): Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom

European Union

Baltic States, **Candidate Countries**, **Central and Eastern Europe**, **EFTA Countries**, **Northern Europe**, **Southern Europe**, **Western Europe**

Legend:
- 🟢 SDG achieved
- 🟡 Challenges remain
- 🟠 Significant challenges remain
- 🔴 Major challenges remain
- ⚪ Data not available
- ↑ On track
- ↗ Moderately Increasing
- → Stagnating
- ↓ Decreasing

SOURCE: Authors' calculations

Figure 3: Top and bottom indicators by progress since 2015

Indicators showing the most progress since 2015

1   Individuals that use the internet to make appointments with a practitioner (%)
2   Households with broadband access (%)
3   Positions held by women in senior management positions (%)
4   Gross disposable income (€/capita)
5   Unemployment Rate (% labour force)

Indicators showing the worst regression since 2015

1   Variation in mathematics performance explained by students' socio-economic status (%)
2   Underachievers in mathematics (% of population aged 15)
3   PISA score (worst 0–600 best)
4   Press Freedom Index (worst 0-100 best)
5   Gap in self-reported health, by income (p.p.)

NOTE: These focus on structural trends since 2015 and may not reflect short-term year-on-year trends.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations

2.1 The Leave-No-One-Behind Index

The SDGs call for addressing inequalities *within* and *across* countries. The "leave no one behind" principle, which is incorporated into the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, is commonly invoked in reference to inequalities *within* each country. SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) also call for reducing inequalities *across* countries, and for increased partnerships. In Europe and by EU leadership, this is generally referred to as "convergence". The European Commission has announced its intention to come up in 2025 with a new action plan on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.

To measure inequalities within countries, including their evolution over time, SDSN has developed a "leave-no-one-behind"—or LNOB—index for European countries (Box 2). From a global perspective, the EU is among the most equal regions in the world, offering the most advanced social protection systems and universal access to basic services (Sachs, Lafortune and Fuller, 2024). The LNOB Index for Europe aims to capture persisting gaps and differences across European countries and to identify areas where policymakers must remain vigilant. This year's edition of the LNOB Index for Europe includes a new indicator on the disability employment gap.

The full list of LNOB indicators is available online. The SDSN, working closely with many partners, has also documented throughout the years territorial gaps in SDG implementation and challenges faced by regional and local leaders to finance and implement the SDGs (Box 3).

Northern European countries obtain the highest scores on the 2025 LNOB Index (Figure 4). Norway, Finland, Iceland, Denmark and Sweden are at the top of the index, mainly driven by low levels of income inequality and material deprivation in these countries. On the other hand, there are persisting within-country inequalities are seen in the Baltic States and Central and Eastern European countries, which appear at the bottom of the 2025 LNOB Index. EU candidate countries face many difficulties in catching up with EU member states on measures of LNOB, primarily due to their much higher rates of material deprivation and poverty.

Box 2. The Leave-No-One-Behind Index (LNOB)

The LNOB Index measures inequalities within countries. It is composed of a subset of 34 indicators (also used in the overall SDG Index and Dashboards) and reflects the progress of European countries on four main dimensions of inequality:

- Poverty and material deprivation (e.g. poverty after social transfers, people unable to afford to keep their home adequately warm);

- Income inequality and respect for fundamental labour rights (e.g. GINI coefficient, Palma Ratio);

- Gender inequality (e.g. gender pay and employment gaps, under-representation of women in leadership roles in the public and private sectors); and

- Access to and quality of services (e.g. disparities across population groups in relation to key services including education and health).

The LNOB Index is scored on a scale of 0 to 100, where higher scores represent better performance and therefore less inequality. More information on indicator sources and aggregation is accessible online.

Figure 4: Leave-no-one-behind Index for Europe

LNOB Index Rank	Country	LNOB Index Score
1	Norway	86.4
2	Finland	84.9
3	Iceland	84.7
4	Denmark	84.4
5	Sweden	82.4
6	Netherlands	81.8
7	Ireland	81.2
8	Belgium	80.9
9	Slovenia	79.4
10	Austria	79.3
11	Germany	77.4
12	Spain	76.9
13	France	76.5
14	Switzerland	76.2
15	Malta	76.1
16	Czechia	76.0
17	Luxembourg	75.4
18	Poland	75.3
19	Croatia	75.1
20	Slovak Republic	72.9
21	Estonia	72.5
22	Portugal	71.7

LNOB Index Rank (cont.)	Country	LNOB Index Score
23	Italy	71.6
24	Latvia	71.5
25	United Kingdom	70.3
26	Lithuania	69.4
27	Cyprus	69.3
28	Hungary	66.0
29	Serbia	65.0
30	Greece	62.5
31	Romania	62.4
32	North Macedonia	60.9
33	Bulgaria	60.0
34	Türkiye	45.8
European Union		**75.2**
Northern Europe		84.1
EFTA Countries		82.6
Western Europe		78.0
Southern Europe		72.8
Central and Eastern Europe		70.9
Baltic States		70.7
Candidate Countries		52.3

Figure 4: Leave-no-one-behind Index for Europe (cont.)

Figure 5: Growth rate in percentage points of LNOB by sub-dimension, EU Average, 2016-2019 versus 2020-2023
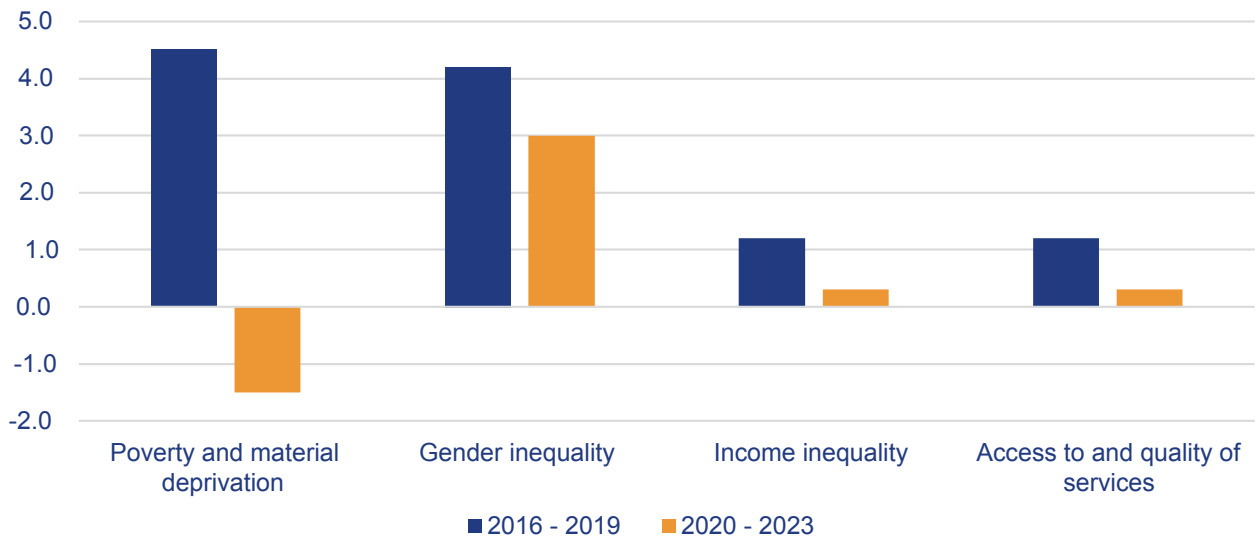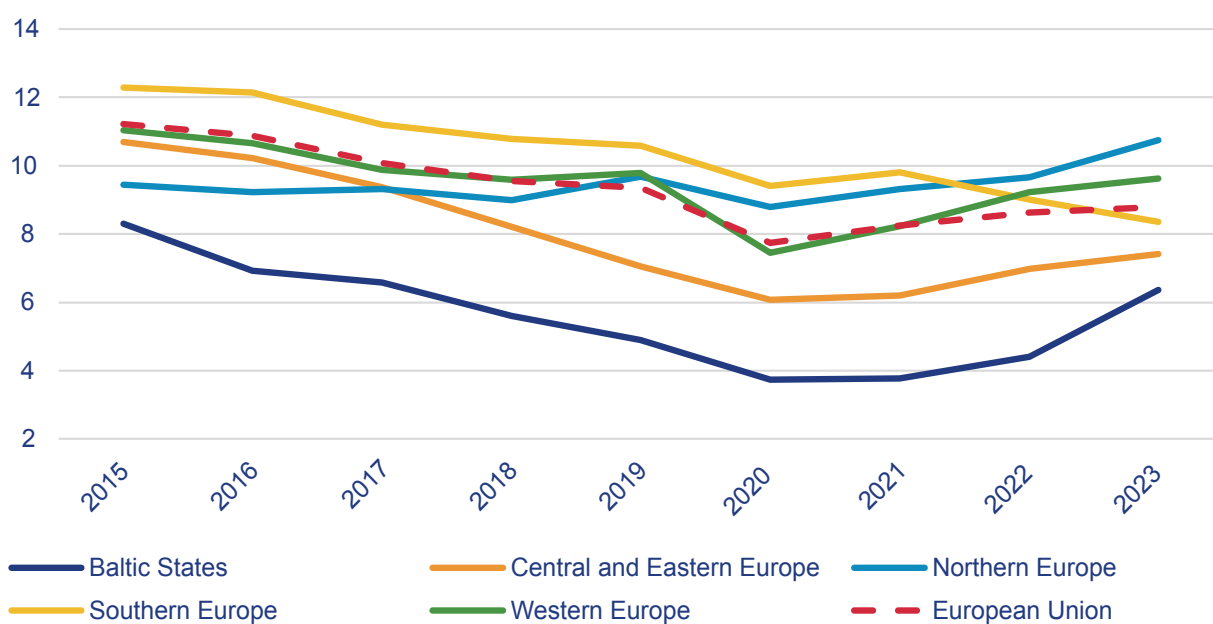

SOURCE: Authors

The trend on the LNOB Index and indicators is concerning. Figure 5 shows that on average, since 2020, the EU made progress in one sub-dimension (gender equality), stagnated in two sub-dimensions (income inequality and access to services) and declined in one sub-dimensions (poverty and material deprivation). In fact, the aggregate total LNOB score of Western Europe and Northern Europe has declined on average since 2020, driven by declining trends in the poverty, income inequality and access to services sub-pillars of the LNOB Index. The trend for individual indicators, such as the housing cost overburden rate, suggest that households in Europe tend to face growing challenges related to affordable housing and energy as underlined also in other studies (EPC, 2024) (Figure 6).
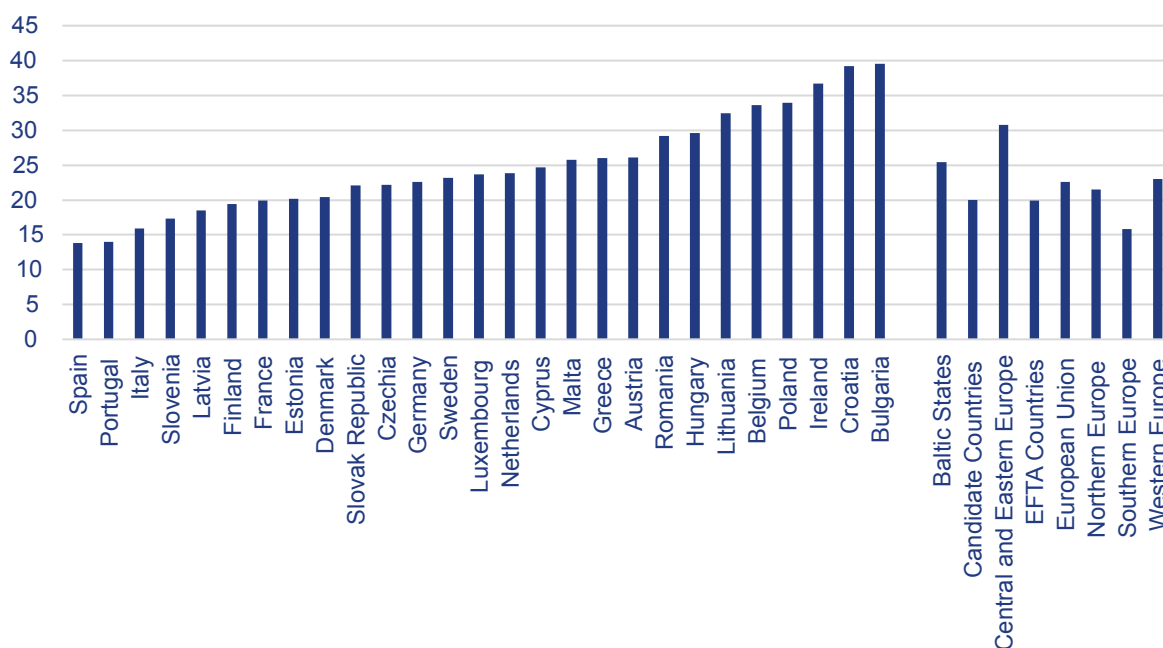
Our results suggest limited convergence by EU candidate countries regarding the achievement of LNOB principles and outcomes. Yet, the positive trend on gender equality must be emphasized, although these efforts must be continued by the new leadership of the EU since no European country has fully achieved yet SDG5 (Gender Equality). The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs make several references to the need to address inequalities faced by people with disabilities. Using the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) compiled by Eurostat, this year's edition underlines persisting gaps across European countries in terms of disability-related labour market inequalities (Figure 7).

Figure 6: The Housing Cost Overburden rate (%) by EU sub-regions, 2015 - 2023

SOURCE: Authors' calculations based on EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)

Figure 7. Disability employment gap (p.p.), 27 EU member states and averages by sub-European regions, 2023

Box 3. SDG progress and challenges in European cities and regions

SDSN and its partners have documented territorial inequalities in SDG performance over the past decade. The SDG Index and Dashboard reports for individual countries and regions underline differences in SDG achievements within countries and territories (SDSN, 2024). SDSN Networks have published assessments for Greek, Italian and Spanish cities, and also globally for cities and regions in Benin, Brazil, Malaysia and the United States, among others. These tools provide a more comprehensive overview of SDG gaps and challenges at the territorial level.

A recent report prepared by the SDSN, OECD and Committee of the Regions, building on a survey of 240+ local and regional leaders, primarily in Europe and OECD countries, emphasized that while the SDGs are increasingly used and understood by subnational leaders as an important instrument for integrated policy frameworks, the limited financial resources available at subnational level remains an important challenge (OECD & SDSN, 2024). The SDSN Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance, co-Chaired by Mayor Hidalgo (Paris), Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs and Mayor Paes (Rio de Janeiro) aims precisely to come up with solutions to address the specific challenges faced by subnational entities which depend on multilevel government transfers and do not have the same access to private and public finance compared to national governments (SDSN Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance, & University of Pennsylvania Institute for Urban Research, 2024).

To access the full OECD & SDSN study: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/localising-the-sdgs-in-a-changing-landscape_a76810d7-en.html

Finally, some convergence in SDG performance can be observed over the period 2015-2023, yet our results suggest that the pace of convergence remains rather slow. Countries that started in 2015 with lower baseline SDG Index scores did on average progress faster than countries that started at higher baselines (Figure 8). At the same time, a simple linear extrapolation suggests that it will take Southern Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Baltic States and Candidate countries respectively 19, 23, 27 and 66 years to catch-up with the average performance of Northern Europe on sustainable development (Figure 9).

As an example, SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) is the goal for which the greatest number of countries score 'green' on the dashboards (very high performance) and the one with the greatest number of 'red' scores (very poor performance).

As emphasized in the Draghi report, strengthening the EU's competitiveness in the short and long-run will depend on its ability to harness digital technologies and on its role in developing the technologies of the future, including low-carbon solutions, generative AI and other technologies to advance the green and digital transition. As such, strengthening the performance of all European countries on SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and accelerating the convergence in R&D capacities and investments will be key to improving productivity and living standards across the continent. The poor and declining results of some European countries in international education assessments, including PISA (OECD, 2024) and TIMSS (IEA, 2023), also call for strengthening the European Education Area in addition to further investments and reforms at member states' level to improve learning outcomes, including in STEM subjects.

Figure 8. SDG Index baseline (2015) versus growth rate in p.p. (2015-2023)
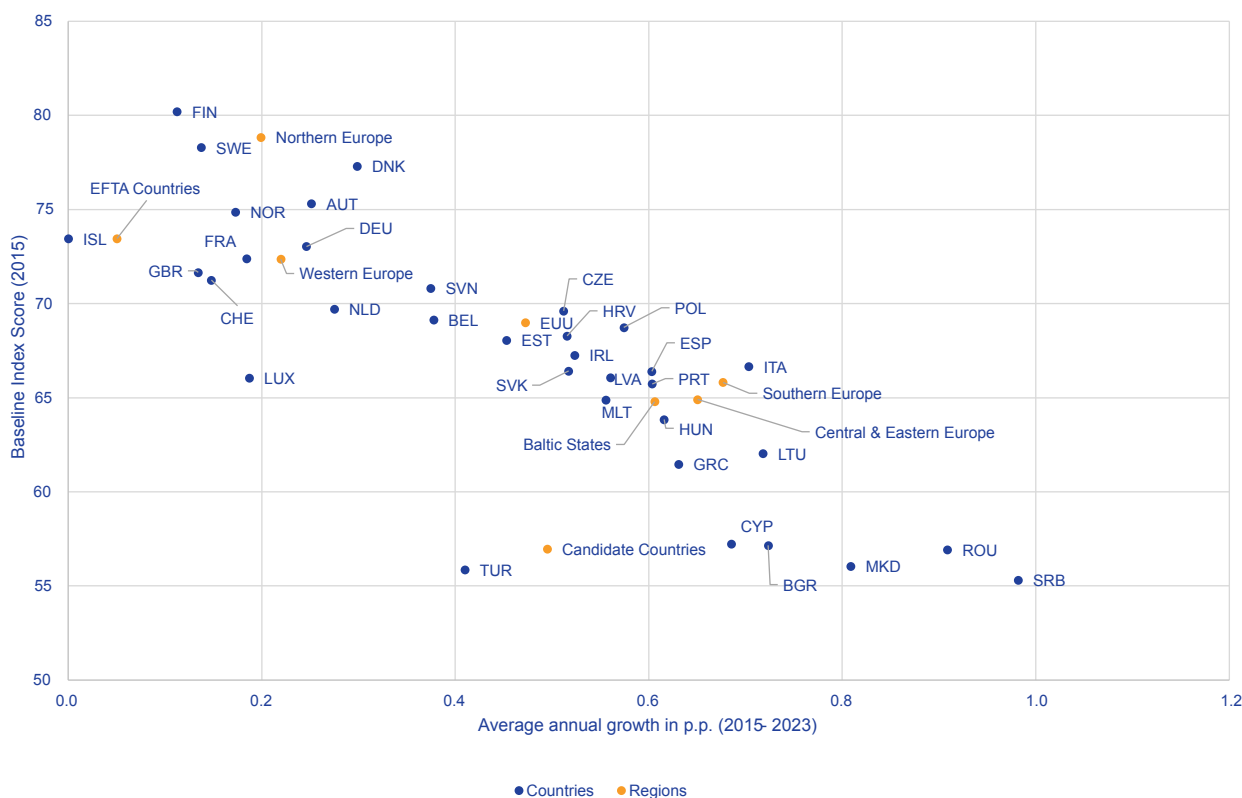
SOURCE: Authors

Figure 9. Number of years required for sub-regions to catch-up with top performing European sub-region (Northern Europe), in years
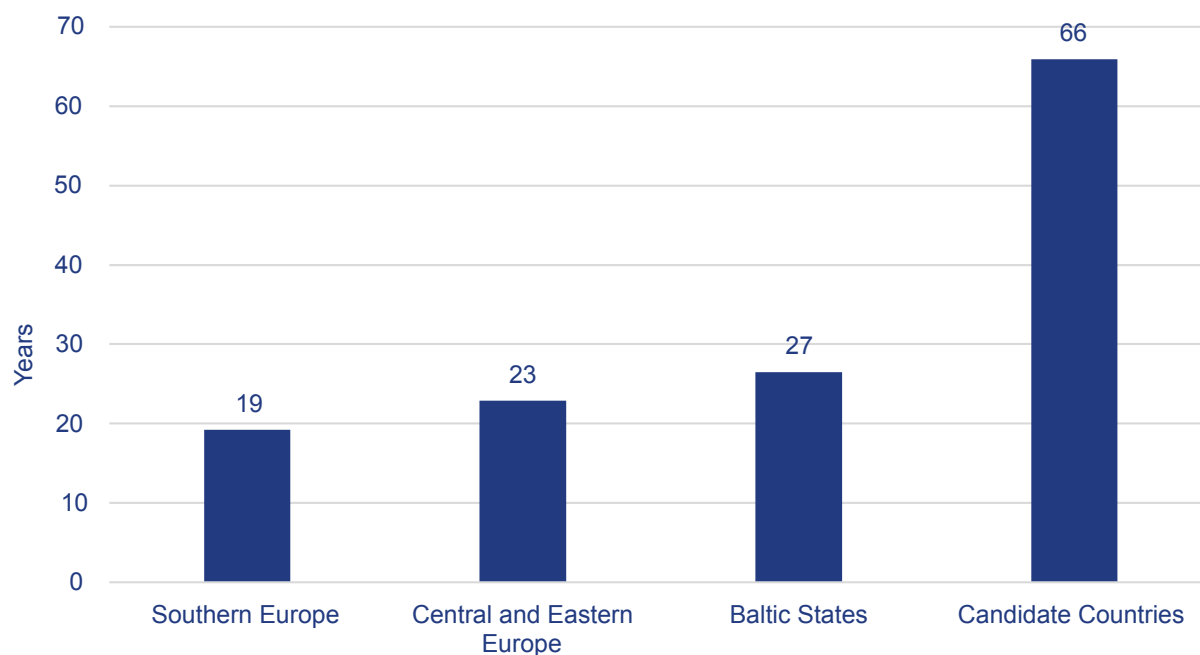
NOTE: Based on a linear extrapolation of annual growth rates over the period 2015-2023.
SOURCE: Authors

2.2. Partnerships for the Goals

Most fundamentally, peace, good governance and international cooperation underpin the achievement of the SDGs in Europe and globally. These are captured under SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals). War and conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and other parts of the world, are humanitarian disasters, major distractions for the sustainable development agenda but also lead or may lead to negative budget trade-offs which affect the ability of developed and developing countries to achieve the SDGs.

As such the European Council meeting of 19 December 2024 focused exclusively on international affairs: Ukraine and the EU in the World. Fifty years after the first ever European Council meeting, the conclusions and follow-up remarks by President António Costa emphasized notably the long tradition of the EU in promoting "unity in diversity" and a "culture of compromise and solidarity" (European Council, 2024).

In 2024, the global community adopted by consensus the "Pact for the Future" which calls for deeper global cooperation:

*"We believe that there is a path to a brighter future for all of humanity, including those living in poverty and vulnerable situations[...]. This will require a recommitment to international cooperation based on respect for international law, without which we can neither manage the risks nor seize the opportunities that we face. This is not an option but a necessity. Our challenges are deeply interconnected and far exceed the capacity of any single State alone. [...]. We recognize that the multilateral system and its institutions, with the **United Nations and its Charter at the centre**, must be strengthened to keep pace with a changing world. They must be fit for the present and the future – effective and capable, prepared for the future, just, democratic, equitable and representative of today's world, inclusive, interconnected and financially stable.[...]. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to act in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and its purposes and principles."*

Global challenges require global solutions. As emphasized in the *Sustainable Development Report 2024,* no nation can solve the global climate crisis on its own. No nation can make a low-cost energy transition on its own. No nation can ensure peace and security on its own. No nation by itself can protect the vital ecosystems or avoid the potential dangers and pitfalls of runaway technologies, be they advanced biotechnologies that can create new pathogens, or artificial intelligence systems that can create fake news or provocations to war.

Nation-states, which remain at the heart of the multilateral system, must be held accountable for upholding the values and principles of the UN Charter. Published in SDSN's SDR 2024, the Index of Countries' Support for UN-Based Multilateralism (UN-Mi) precisely aims to fill this knowledge gap by providing the first measure of countries' commitments to UN-based multilateralism and the UN Charter focusing on six headline indicators (ratification of major UN treaties, UNGA votes aligned with the majority vote at UNGA, membership in UN organizations, use of unilateral coercive measures, peace and demilitarization and financing the UN system and solidarity). The indicators, methodology and results are described at length in a dedicated academic paper (Lafortune & Sachs, 2024).

Specifically, global cooperation to reform the GFA is particularly critical so that more countries can have the fiscal space to invest in the infrastructure and human capital needed to achieve the SDGs. A European country—Spain—will host the 4th FFD Conference in June 2025. Alongside increased geopolitical tensions, the lack of fiscal space is the major barrier to SDG progress at the global level (Sachs et al, 2023). Promoting an ambitious reform of the GFA is critical, to make sure that a growing share of the approximately $30 trillion USD of global savings supports investments in sustainable development in developed and developing countries alike.

As part of this reform, increasing the levels and effectiveness of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is also critical, at least as a temporary instrument, to safeguard livelihoods and allow poor, fragile and vulnerable countries to escape the poverty trap. Yet, pressures to increase defence expenditure and, in some European countries, to significantly accelerate fiscal consolidation efforts in the next 2–3 years may lead to budget trade-offs and potentially to significant cuts in ODA spending in the coming years, with negative impacts on vulnerable populations and more broadly on efforts to achieve the SDGs globally.

Finally, partnerships are also needed within countries with civil society information and as such freedom of speech and expression is a paramount objective of the SDGs covered under SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). The war in Ukraine and other geopolitical tensions were associated with a decline in Europe and in other parts of the world of the Press Freedom Index as measured by Reporters Sans Frontières (Figure 10). Strengthening freedom of speech and the rule of law more generally is, rightfully so, a central priority of the new leadership of the EU.

Figure 10: Press Freedom Index (worst 0-100 best), 2015 – 2024, in EU, US, BRICS average
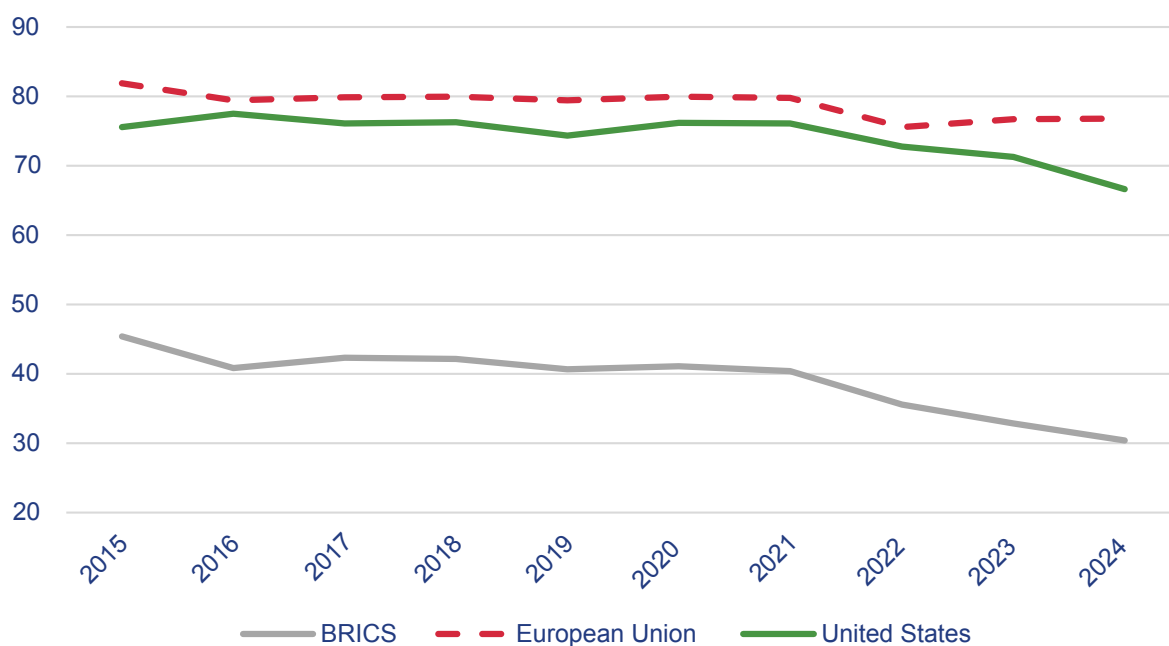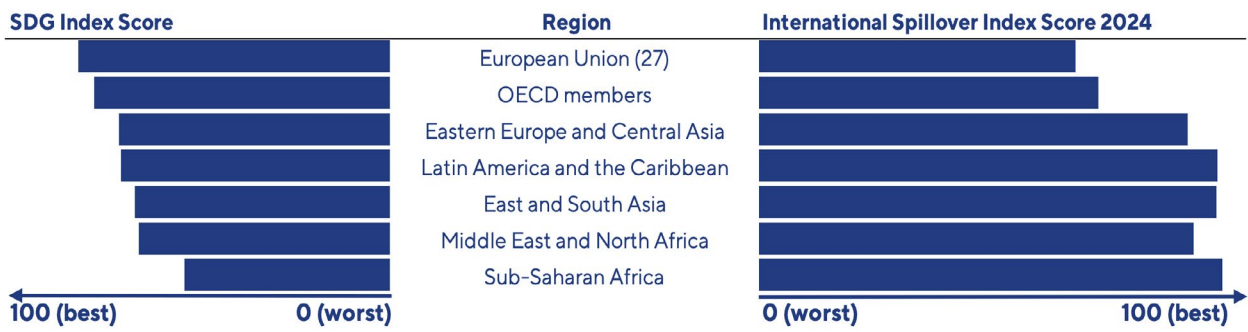
2.3. The International Spillover Index

The climate and biodiversity crises are driven by domestic action, but they are also impacted by activities that extend beyond national borders: through trade and other cross-border activities. In addition to environmental spillovers, which are driven by international trade and domestic policies, countries also generate economic, financial, social, and security spillovers.

Over the past decade, the SDSN has pioneered numerous initiatives to measure and to curb negative international spillovers, notably those embodied into unsustainable supply chains. Our analyses also build on the excellent work done by other organizations and thought leaders to track the negative impacts generated by the export of toxic pesticides, conventional weapons, unfair tax competition and tax havens among others (Gaberell et al., 2020; SIPRI, 2024; Tax Justice Network, 2024; Tørsløv et al., 2022). The SDSN has advised European governments and institutions (including France, Germany and Eurostat), developed the first dedicated instrument to track a diverse set of negative imported impacts on the global commons (Lafortune et al, 2021; Ishii et al., 2023) and contributed to numerous sectoral studies to strengthen the governance of specific supply chains including textiles (Malik et al., 2021), minerals (Malik et al., 2024) and food (Malik et al., 2023), and policy studies including for instance a recent study on spillovers issued in the context of the Brazil T20 process (Berger et al., 2024).

Compared with other world regions, the EU—and OECD countries in general – tends to generate relatively large negative spillover effects (Figure 11). These are driven primarily by unsustainable supply chains, which lead to deforestation and other negative environmental and social impacts, serving the consumption needs of EU and OECD countries. Box 4 provides further details about the Spillover Index. Figures 12 & 13 from the Global Commons Stewardship Index (GCSi) suggests that these negative impacts can represent 20-30% of the total footprint and sometimes even more.

Figure 11: SDG Index score vs International Spillover Index score by region

SDG Index Score	Region	International Spillover Index Score 2024
	European Union (27)	
	OECD members	
	Eastern Europe and Central Asia	
	Latin America and the Caribbean	
	East and South Asia	
	Middle East and North Africa	
	Sub-Saharan Africa	
100 (best) ← → 0 (worst)		0 (worst) ← → 100 (best)

SOURCE: Authors' calculations

Figure 12: GHG emissions, domestic vs spillover impacts, G20 countries (tonnes CO$_2$ equivalent per capita)

GHG emissions
(tCO$_2$e/capita)

- Spillover GHG emissions
- Domestic GHG emissions

Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, United States, South Korea, Russia, Germany, Rest of the EU, Japan, China, France, United Kingdom, Argentina, Italy, South Africa, Brazil, Türkiye, Mexico, Indonesia, India
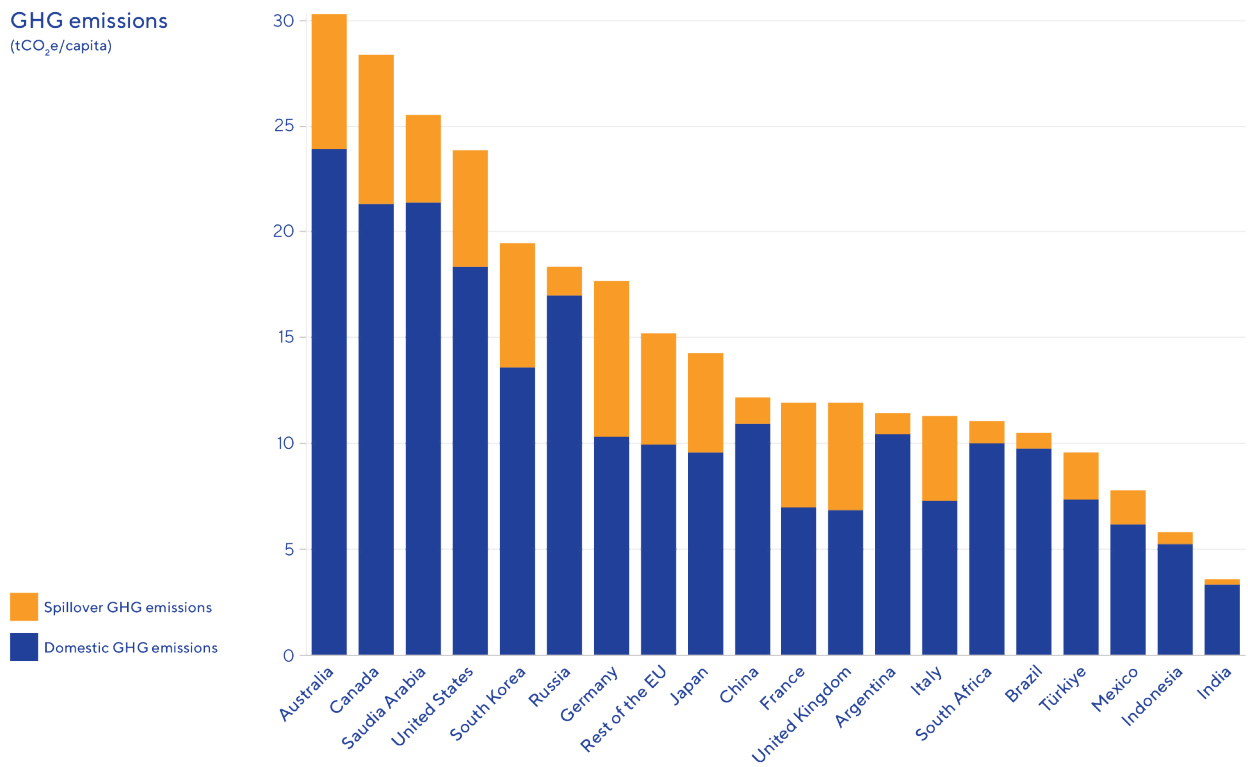
SOURCE: Ishii et al., 2024. Global Commons Stewardship Index 2024.

Figure 13: Water stress consumption, domestic vs spillover impacts in G20 countries (cubic meters of H$_2$O equivalent per capita)

Water Stress Consumption
(m³ H$_2$O-eq./capita)

Spillover water stress
Domestic water stress

Building on SDSN's work, but also the pioneering work done by Yale University, the Remaking Trade Project—including the Villars Framework for a Sustainable Global Trade System – and the global leadership of the Center for the Global Commons at the University of Tokyo, the GCSi 2024 was published in March 2024 in Switzerland argued the following:

"The world currently does not have a global governance mechanism to coherently address spillover impacts associated with unsustainable global supply chains. Given the scale of the negative impacts and resource consumption identified in this report, it is now urgent to come up with effective governance mechanisms and policy measures to safeguard the global commons – underpinned by sound data, the latest insights from science, and rigorous analysis. The international spillovers are driven by two main causes: (1) inadequate pricing of environmental externalities and (2) national policy frameworks that were designed primarily to meet domestic objectives without paying sufficient attention to transboundary spillovers" (Ishii et al, 2023).

The 2024 GCSi report identifies five major priorities for action. One of them focuses on the importance of strengthening the international trade system—covering the World Trade Organization (WTO), UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the International Trade Center (ITC) – so that it "fulfills the *sustainable development* mandate in the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement".

The EU's *unilateral measures* that aim to address carbon leakage and other imported negative impacts, more specifically the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), are conceptually correct and pricing carbon is an *important* policy lever for climate mitigation (Baranzini et al, 2017; Boyce, 2018). Such policies may help create a level-playing field and encourage other countries to adopt more ambitious climate regulations. Yet, the CBAM largely reflects the EU's approach to monitoring and curbing carbon emissions. In a context of rising trade tensions, driven to some extent by the United States' stated intention to increase unilaterally and significantly tariffs, the EU should pursue its efforts to make its trade policies compatible with global frameworks and forge new strategic global alliances.

In this context, the CBAM might benefit from further discussions at the international level and with major partner countries including for instance on standards applied to measure and monitor carbon emissions, on how subnational carbon pricing schemes might be considered but also how the revenues of the CBAM could potentially be leveraged to address concerns in developing countries related to the fairness, equity and distributional impacts of the CBAM.

In general, the EU and the international community at large should pursue their efforts to also advance *global mechanisms*, including carbon pricing and pricing natural capital. The reform of the global trade system must go and-in-hand with accelerated efforts to expand access to low-carbon and digital technologies and unlock private and public capital in developing countries to invest in more sustainable production systems.

Box 4. The International Spillover Index

The 2025 Spillover Index for Europe comprises 15 indicators that are also included in the overall SDG Index. It measures Europe's progress in reducing environmental and social spillovers embodied in trade, spillovers related to economic and financial flows across countries, and peacekeeping and security spillovers. Conceptually, international spillovers in the context of the SDGs can be grouped into four categories:

Environmental and social spillovers embodied in trade. These cover international impacts related to pollution and the use of natural resources, as well as social impacts generated by the consumption of goods and services. Multi-regional input–output (MRIO) models, combined with satellite datasets, provide powerful tools to track impacts generated worldwide by consuming countries. This category of spillovers also includes exports of toxic pesticides and the illegal wildlife trade. They are particularly connected to SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), SDGs 12 through 15 (related to responsible consumption, climate and biodiversity), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals). They also indirectly affect all other SDGs.

Spillovers related to economic and financial flows. These include unfair tax competition, corruption, banking secrecy, profit shifting, tax havens and stolen assets, which all undermine the capacity of other countries to leverage resources to achieve the SDGs. They also include positive spillovers (or handprints) such as international development finance (for example, ODA).

These types of spillovers are closely related to SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals)—and indirectly to all other SDGs, notably through ODA.

Peacekeeping and security spillovers. These include negative externalities such as organized international crime or exports of major conventional weapons or small arms, which can have a destabilizing impact on poor countries, but also positive spillovers like countries support for UN-based multilateralism as measured by the UN-Mi. Among the positive spillovers in this category are investments in conflict prevention and peacekeeping. These spillovers are particularly related to SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals), but also indirectly connected with most of the SDGs, including poverty, hunger and health as well as other socio-economic goals.

Direct cross-border flows in air and water. These cover effects generated through physical flows—for instance of air and water—from one country to another. Cross-border air and water pollution are difficult to attribute to a country of origin, and this remains an important data gap. Unfortunately, the International Spillover Index does not currently include any indicators to track these types of spillovers. They are particularly related to SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) and SDGs 12–15 on climate and biodiversity, but they also concern many other goals, including SDG 3 (Good health and well-being).

Further details on indicator sources and aggregation for the International Spillover Index are provided online.

3. Outlook

We reiterate our call for a "European Deal for the Future" which should be green, social and international. The implementation of the SDGs in the EU over the period 2024-2029 must include four overarching priorities: (1) collectively, scale up investments in clean energy and digital technologies in the EU now and lay the foundations for an ambitious investment strategy well into the next decade via an ambitious Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2035; (2) strengthen pro-social measures to address the EU's stagnation on the "Leave no one behind" principle of the SDGs, the social consequences of inflation, rising budget pressures and rising geopolitical tensions; (3) address the negative health and environmental impacts from unsustainable consumption, by prioritising notably the just transition toward healthier and more sustainable diets, and finally (4) harness SDG/Green Deal Diplomacy with all regions, uphold the principles established in the UN Charter and support an ambitious reform of the GFA, including at the forthcoming FFD4 Conference in Sevilla, Spain in June 2025.

These objectives are to some extent reflected in the strategic documents presented by the new leadership of the EU, including the Commissioners' mission letters and Council of the EU Strategic priorities. The stated intention to prepare and to adopt rapidly in 2025 an ambitious *Clean Industrial Deal* might also go in the right direction. In general, the EU should pursue its efforts to align its main process for macroeconomic coordination—the European Semester—with the SDGs, mobilize its flagship research programs like Horizon Europe and continue to report regularly its progress toward achieving the goals via Eurostat as important levers to ensure *integrated* action on environmental sustainability, technological innovation and social cohesion.

In a multipolar and increasingly divided world, we also reiterate our call to the new European Parliament, European Commission, and European Council to adopt in 2025 a Joint Political Statement reaffirming the EU's Commitment for the *universal* SDGs and preparing for the next decades of global sustainable development. Ahead of the next 2027 SDG Summit at Heads-of-States level, the European Commission could coordinate the preparation of a second EU Voluntary Review and actively contribute to the adoption of an ambitious post-2030 global Agenda for sustainable development.

We also encourage the new leadership of the EU to set up a specific mechanism for structured engagement with civil society on the SDGs. This mechanism could perhaps be hosted and coordinated by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which successfully led civil society consultations in 2023 in the context of the first EU Voluntary Review. This mechanism could focus on SDG priorities in the EU but also make space for a dialogue with the Global South and major international partners. The SDSN, SDSN Europe and its 19 regional and national chapters—including its newest members in Bulgaria and Romania – remain very much committed to support the new leadership of the EU by providing solutions, data and a platform for exchange among scientists, experts and practitioners to accelerate SDG implementation by 2030 and beyond.

4. Methods Summary

The *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* provides a quantitative assessment of SDG priorities for the EU, EFTA countries, the UK and candidate countries. The report builds on the methodology of the Sustainable Development Report, developed by the SDSN and Bertelsmann Stiftung to track countries' performance on the 17 SDGs. The methodology has been peer-reviewed (Schmidt-Traub et al., 2017) and statistically audited—via the 2019 global edition—by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (Papadimitriou et al., 2019b). The SDG Index has been listed among the ten composite indices useful for policymaking by the European Parliamentary Research Service (European Parliament, 2021).

The data of this edition were extracted between October and November 2024. The 2025 SDG Index for Europe includes 111 indicators, including 103 that permit an evaluation of progress over time. The same indicator set is used for all countries to generate comparable scores and rankings. Approximately 70% of the indicators come from official statistics (primarily services of the European Commission) and 30% from non-official data sources (NGOs, academia). The full list of sources by indicator is available online. The selection of indicators and performance thresholds benefited from inputs submitted in various rounds of stakeholder consultations, including an online public consultation on preliminary data and results in December 2024.

Changes to the 2025 edition

The *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* covers 41 European countries, including 3 additional countries not previously covered: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, reflecting the latest enlargement of the candidate countries. Due to time lags and data gaps, the data for Ukraine do not fully reflect the severe consequences of the war since February 2022. This year, the report includes three new indicators, including the Disability employment gap, Victims of human trafficking, and the Index of countries' support to UN-based multilateralism. For the full list of new indicators and modifications as well as the full indicator metadata, please consult the Codebook which is available for download online.

Method for defining performance thresholds (decision tree)

Performance thresholds ('upper bound') for each indicator were determined using the following decision tree:

1. Use absolute quantitative thresholds in SDGs and targets: e.g. zero poverty, universal school completion, universal access to water and sanitation, full gender equality.

2. Apply the principle of 'leave no one behind' when no explicit SDG target is available.

3. When available, use science-based or technical targets that must be achieved by 2030 or later (e.g. net-zero greenhouse gas emissions from energy by 2050, 80% yield gap closure).

4. For all other indicators, use the average of the top performers.

The lower bound (0%) was defined at the lowest 2.5[th] percentile either from the global Sustainable Development Report or from the European countries included in the Europe-specific datasets.

Normalization

To make the data comparable across indicators, each variable was rescaled from 0 to 100 with 0 denoting worst performance and 100 describing the optimum. After establishing the upper and lower bounds, variables were transformed linearly to a scale between 0 and 100 using the following rescaling formula for the range [0; 100]:

$$x' = (x - min(x)) * 100 / (max(x) - min(x))$$

where *x* is raw data value; *max/min* denote the bounds for best and worst performance, respectively; and *x'* is the normalized value after rescaling. Each indicator distribution was censored, so that all values exceeding the upper bound scored 100, and values below the lower bound scored 0.

The rescaling equation ensured that higher values indicated better performance. In this way, the rescaled data became easy to interpret: a country with a score of 75 has covered three quarters of the distance from worst to best.

Weighting and aggregation

To compute the SDG Index, we first calculate scores for each goal using the arithmetic mean of the scores of the indicators for that goal. These goal scores are then averaged across all 17 SDGs to obtain the SDG Index score. Equal weights were used for aggregating indicator scores into the goal scores, and for aggregating goal scores into the overall index score.

Averaging across all indicators for an SDG might hide areas of policy concern if a country performs well on most indicators but faces serious shortfalls on one or two metrics within the same SDG (often called the 'substitutability' or 'compensation' issue). As a result, the SDG Dashboards are based only on the two variables on which a country performed worst—except for Goal 3, where the three worst indicators are used. The dashboards use a 'traffic light' colour scheme (green, yellow, orange and red) to illustrate how far a country is from achieving a particular goal. A red rating was applied only if both the worst-performing indicators score red. Similarly, in order to score green, all indicators under the goal must be green.

Trends

Using panel data, we estimate how fast a country has been progressing towards an SDG and determine whether—if continued into the future—this pace will suffice to achieve the SDG by 2030. To estimate SDG trends, we calculated the linear annual growth rates needed to achieve the goal (green threshold) by 2030 (2015–2030), which we compared to the average annual growth rate over the most recent period starting from the year of the adoption of the SDGs (e.g. 2015–2023). A green arrow denotes 'on track or maintaining performance above goal achievement', the intermediate yellow and orange arrows denote insufficient progress, and a red arrow indicates movement away from the target. Countries that have already achieved an SDG target, but whose performance has worsened since 2015 are assigned an orange arrow 'stagnation.'

Country groupings and averages

To simplify the analysis, we provide population-weighted averages using the following country groupings described in the table below. The online database provides detailed results by individual country and country groupings for all the indicators and goals.

Table 2. Country groupings used in the ESDR25

| | European Union | | | | Partner Countries | |
Baltic States	Central and Eastern Europe	Northern Europe	Southern Europe	Western Europe	Candidate Countries	EFTA
Estonia	Bulgaria	Denmark	Cyprus	Austria	Albania	Iceland
Latvia	Croatia	Finland	Greece	Belgium	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Liechtenstein
Lithuania	Czechia	Sweden	Italy	France	Georgia	Norway
	Hungary		Malta	Germany	Moldova	Switzerland
	Poland		Portugal	Ireland	Montenegro	
	Romania		Spain	Luxembourg	North Macedonia	
	Slovak Republic			Netherlands	Serbia	
	Slovenia				Türkiye	
					Ukraine	

SOURCE: Authors

Country Profiles and Data visualization

The *Europe Sustainable Development Report* is accompanied by an online data visualization tool that can be accessed at *sdgtransformationcenter.org*. Dedicated country profiles, the full excel database, and indicator metadata are all available online.

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SDG Priorities for the New EU Leadership

*Includes the SDG Index for the European Union,
its member states, and partner countries*

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