



SDG Watch Europe Steering Group Statement on Covid-19 April 7, 2020

SDG Watch Europe is an EU-level, cross-sectoral CSO alliance of NGOs from development, environment, social, human rights and other sectors. The mission of SDG Watch Europe is to work to ensure that the EU and its member states fully implement the SDGs by 2030.

Pandemics do not respect national boundaries. As COVID-19 continues to create unprecedented impact across the globe, emergency measures are being introduced - the consequences of which will have a long-term impact upon our societies. As policymakers introduce measures to ensure emergency relief and long-term resilience, SDG Watch Europe calls for all EU institutions to manage the crisis with unity and solidarity, putting people and planet at the centre of all policies:



1. Sustainable Pathways: Transitioning to a Sustainable, Green Economy

SDG Watch Europe calls upon the Commission and all EU institutions to ensure:

- All European countries begin a re-communalisation of the health and care sector, the increase of financial means for social security systems as well as the establishment of effective safety nets for the most marginalised people in our societies (e.g. homeless people, refugees, victims of domestic violence, minorities), in light of the likely restructuring of many economic sectors as a result of the pandemic.
- Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is the framework whereby all EU internal and external policies are aligned with the SDGs across all sectoral policies and programmes, also using the mechanism of the European Semester for this purpose.
- Ambitious reforms of the Multiannual Financial Framework and the European Semester to mainstream the SDGs throughout the EU budget in order to put the public interest at the heart of EU policymaking.
- The “Do No Harm” principle is applied: refrain from retracting or rolling back on environmental and social regulations.
- A proactive stance is implemented to transform energy, transport and food systems and reduce ecological footprint and carbon emission levels.
- The EU Green Deal proceeds as the basis of a stimulus package to relaunch the EU economy in line with sustainable development and in order to support human wellbeing, guarantee a prosperous green jobs sector and ensure a sustainable economic system.
- All economic stimulus programmes are aligned with the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the 1.5 degrees target, as well as global and European objectives to tackle the biodiversity and pollution crises.
- To engage fully with civil society in a radical rethink of our entire system to deliver on the SDGs.

2. Global and European Solidarity and Economic Measures

The COVID-19 crisis is a critical test of solidarity at global and EU levels. We are all in this together.

SDG Watch Europe urges the Commission and all EU institutions to ensure:

- Member States stand in solidarity with each other and help the countries hardest hit, such as Italy and Spain, and ensure that the most vulnerable groups in our societies receive adequate support and equal access to health care.
- The SDGs are implemented through the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU.
- Support for low and middle income countries to get resources for the health measurements and social protection of vulnerable groups in cooperation with its members states, G20, OECD and other global processes in the framework of the UN - for example, for debt cancellation and tax justice.
- Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development for partner countries for all measurements in trade, ODA, sustainable agriculture and sustainable food systems.
- Empowered civil society organizations by increasing financial support for human rights work, ensuring no one is left behind and civic space freedoms are honored, protected and unimpeded.



- Economic measures are introduced to tackle the emergency focusing on the relaxation of multi-annual macroeconomic austerity measures.



- Eurobonds are issued and used the European Stability Mechanism in order to finance the additional public expenditures caused by the pandemic to avoid overloading national deficits and increasing risk premiums.



- All economic and financial measures first and foremost support countries and people with the most urgent needs.



- Marginalized communities and those hardest to reach (such as asylum seekers, migrants, refugees and the Roma communities), become the top priority rather than discriminated against with harsher measures than those imposed on the general population.



- The immediate evacuation of the Greek refugee camps and the relocation of refugees to safe places throughout Europe in accordance with international human and asylum rights law, at this time when conservative and nationalist forces are using the crisis to block humanitarian interventions for those refugees currently stranded at the EU borders and on the Greek islands.



- Revision of the current EU budget to facilitate adequate resourcing for COVID-19-related actions.
- Ensure that the Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU (MFF) funds only policies, measures and actions that support sustainable development, given that Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is a fundamental requirement to achieve the ambition of the 2030 Agenda and to implement the SDGs.



- Ensure the “Benchmarking” or earmarking within funds to achieve specific sustainability objectives by setting binding expenditure targets for climate, biodiversity or social inclusion and ensuring that the money is administered by the relevant authorities.



- All company bailouts must be linked to clear conditionalities and comply with strict conditions: no money for polluting industries without binding commitments (i.e. for the aviation sector).

3. Rights and Democracy

SDG Watch Europe calls for:

- Assurance that the necessary restrictions imposed by governments are time-bound and will be fully lifted to maintain the fair and democratic functioning of our societies.
- Fully-inclusive and transparent European citizen stakeholder participation in social, economic and ecological efforts to promote recovery from the effects of the pandemic.
- New measures on data retention and tracking to be reviewed by governments following the emergency phase of the pandemic to prevent the enforcement of even greater control over citizens, eroding civil liberties and the ongoing justification for the shrinking of civil society space.
- Democracy to be upheld as enshrined in the EU Treaties, the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), whereby all emergency measures taken by governments must be proportionate and respect democratic procedures, transparency and the rule of law.

A significant threat to the successful implementation of the SDGs is a pronounced lack of **Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD)**. Now is the time to be decisive and take bold steps in navigating the Agenda 2030 SDGs roadmap towards a healthy and equitable future for all through a just recovery.

The SDGs are a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". Established in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and intended to be achieved by the year 2030, they are part of UN Resolution 70/1, the 2030 Agenda. ([Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)). The overarching principles are “Building an Economy Within the Planetary Boundaries” and “Leave No One Behind”.

The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** represent a pathway to long-term sustainability in the face of Covid-19. In light of the devastating impacts of the pandemic across Europe and the rest of the world, SDG Watch Europe calls on the EU & its MS to individually and collectively, strengthen all efforts to mobilise the necessary resources to fully implement the SDGs by 2030.

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