



Next steps for a sustainable European future

REFORMING EUROPE – IMPLEMENTING SDGS

7 July 2016 | 9 a.m – 6 p.m.

EESC – 99 rue Belliard – 1040 Brussels | JDE 62 + JDE 63

SUPPORTING PARTNERS



Workshop conclusions

Workshop Planet: sustainable production and consumption

Chair: Hajo Wilms, Vice-President of the section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, EESC

Speakers:

Patrick ten Brink, Head of Brussels office, Institute for European Environmental Policy

Cosima Hufler, Policy Officer, DG ENV, European Commission

Pieter De Pous, European Policy Director, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Cillian Lohan, EESC Member, rapporteur on the circular economy

Rapporteur: Jarmila Dubravská, EESC Member

The UN 2030 Agenda is an opportunity for Europe. The introduction of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda was seen as a strategic move that could address some of the challenges the EU currently faces, in particular the disenchantment of populations with the EU, providing a positive narrative that addresses many of the worries EU citizens have (e.g. environmental, social, and economic). One SDG-related concept that exemplifies the opportunities to address these challenges is the circular economy, which is reflected in SDG No12 on responsible consumption and production. The circular economy will create new, unprecedented opportunities, in particular through new products, (eco-)design and the departure from a culture of use to waste to one of ownership and responsibility for products and their components.

Fully implementing SDGs implies addressing urgently and drastically the overall environmental footprint of our economies and societies; establishing a genuine green economy entails moving towards **absolute decoupling** of natural resources consumption and economic output and human well-being. Examples of our mainstream economic models' negative externalities were addressed during the workshop, such as pollution brought by microbeads in cosmetics or tax reductions of Diesel fuel in Germany. Options to shift to environmental sustainability include applying innovative economic models minimising environmental negative externalities, boosting demand for sustainable goods and services, such as collaborative consumption, and using economic tools to set the right incentives.

When it comes to the **challenge of SDGs' implementation**, experts and members of the audience discerned:

- **Communication challenges:** SDGs should not be seen as more (over-)regulation, nor should the circular economy be interpreted as a European concept used for green protectionism. Sustainable development entails a widespread dynamic, starting from community levels. Speakers and the audience discussed the ideas of better communication with and greater participation of civil society through dialogue and even further coordinated legislative initiatives;
- **Coordination challenges:** All 17 SDGs have to be mutually reinforcing. This must be reflected, for instance, in a commitment to the SDGs across the European Commission's various departments. The same goes with a lot of similar private and public organisations which need to approach the SDGs with a cross-sectoral mind-set;
- **Winners & losers:** SDGs' implementation has to take into consideration potential winners and losers, especially those related to environment. Access to eco-friendly products, for instance, must not be reserved for the upper and middle classes.

Workshop People: Social Justice and Decent Work

Chair: Isabel Caño Aguilar, Vice-President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory

Speakers:

Manuela Geleng, Head of Unit , DG EMPL, European Commission

Claire Courteille, Director, Office of the International Labour Organisation to the EU

Allan Päll, Secretary-General, European Youth Forum, Board Member Social Platform

Rapporteur: Sian Jones, Policy Coordinator, European Anti-Poverty Network

Rapporteur's conclusions:

1. Change of paradigm – another growth model is needed!
Achieving the SDGs in the social area – poverty, inequality decent work – are central but won't be achieved without a shift towards a more inclusive model of development. Who benefits from growth? We need to promote inclusive (and sustainable) growth, which creates jobs, reduces inequalities, supports inclusion and doesn't prejudice the environment.
2. Decent work depends on job-rich growth, enforcing employment standards and positive active inclusion.
There are opportunities and threats of new employment, e.g. circular economy and low carbon economy, but EU concern should be most on how to ensure decent work. This partly depends on 1) what type of economic growth: inclusive job-rich growth and fair distribution, i.e. closing the gaps on income level; but also 2) employment standards: minimum wage and collective bargaining and 3) positive support into jobs through effective skills support and positive active inclusion. High wage economies also support environmental standards.
3. New employment trends mean adequate Social Protection is even more necessary combined with social investment. Social protection is being drastically cut through austerity policy response to the crisis, but the reality of new precarious work implies the need to increase the quality and effectiveness of welfare systems across the life course. Primary concern should be social standards: adequate minimum income, for those without other support, as part of a comprehensive universal social protection floor. This will need major social investment –public investment in income support but also to ensure access to essential services – education, housing, social services etc.
4. How to ensure Policy Coherence?
How will the SDG goals in the social field link to existing strategies? SDGs must build on the Europe 2020 targets on poverty reduction and employment and other social targets and the new Social Pillar of Rights. More importantly how to guarantee that macroeconomic goals deliver on social (and environmental!) goals? E. g. the dominance of stability, fiscal consolidation and restructuring goals that are generating more poverty, including in-work poverty has to be

addressed. It is particularly important to rebalance the European Semester, to ensure delivery on the targets and prevent negative impacts.

5. No one left behind: this means making sure the policies reach all the groups (e.g. women in prisons, most excluded), but also participation – who is at the table? How to involve civil society organizations in design, monitoring and delivery but also the people themselves. This is part of a broader question - how to regain trust of EU citizens? This is partly about more democratic and participative process, but also about goals – will the SDGs benefit people (and planet) or markets?

Workshop Global Partnership and Peace

Chair: Luca Jahier, President of Group III – Various Interests, EESC

Speakers:

Nicoletta Merlo, Deputy Head of Unit, DG DEVCO, European Commission

Tanya Cox, Senior Policy and Advocacy Manager, Plan International

Louise van Schaik, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Ioannis Vardakastanis, EESC Member, rapporteur on the 2030 Agenda

Rapporteur: Stephanie Beecroft, Policy Officer, European Youth Forum

Rapporteur's conclusions:

The workshop dealt with two aspects of the 2030 Agenda: global partnership and peace. It was looking into some recent or upcoming policy decisions relevant for this area: the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy and the European Consensus on Development. There is a need for these to respond to the 2030 Agenda, integrate its principles and, in particular, to tackle the challenges of inequalities and poverty eradication.

The heart of the question of partnership is the credibility. To be a good partner the EU has to look at itself.

In order to be a credible partner the EU would need to respond to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda more promptly. It would need an over-arching strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda covering both, internal and external policies.

We need more SDG practice instead of "SDG- tokenism". We need to break silos and create bridges between the different policy areas. The EU needs to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development and think of the economy as serving people and planet and not the other way around. The EU has to act jointly with its Member States towards third countries and form partnerships with civil society.

In order to set the right priorities a mapping of existing EU policies is not sufficient. We need an assessment of where the real gaps are in the achievement of SDGs in the EU.

The existing instrument of policy coherence for development has to be shifted toward policy coherence for sustainable development.

The EU 2030 Agenda is an opportunity to do the things very differently. But we still need to see if the EU is going to put in place a strategy, an action plan and concrete actions. Citizens' activities are already happening. But we need to have a stronger political will in order to have massive responses to these questions. In order to regain citizens' trust we need to see more credibility of the EU in the new global partnership.

Workshop Prosperity: Sustainable Business and Investment

Chair: Lutz Ribbe, Vice-President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory

Speakers:

Edward Bannermann, Adviser to Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, European Commission

Beatriz Alonso, Manager for the Services, CSR Europe

Jan Tytgat, Director Government Affairs EU-Benelux, UMICORE

Hugues Chenet, Scientific Director, 2^o Investing Initiative

Tellervo Kylä-Harakka-Ruonala, EESC Member, rapporteur on the Road from Paris

Rapporteur: Cillian Lohan, EESC Member

The workshop addressed extensively the many innovation challenges the economy faces to shift towards a genuinely sustainable model. Companies, and in particular SMEs, may look at the SDGs from the perspective of Corporate Social Responsibility and/or from the perspective of business opportunities. It is important that SDGs become an integral part of the business and not an optional add-on, because there is a business case for sustainability: it is not only good for people and the planet, it also provides with new economic opportunities.

In order to engage businesses, it is essential to start with practical support, looking at the challenges and starting addressing those at a practical level. Upscaling and replicating successful sustainable business experiences is paramount, as well as building partnerships to guide companies and SMEs through their transition. One of the speakers explained that the sustainability shift at SME level in Finland is driven primarily by customer demand. Some leading businesses' proactiveness can help shift practices, such as the example of the Belgian company Umicore – specialised in valuable minerals and recycling – which demonstrates that a real sustainability strategy at company level through innovation, change and adaptation to new trends is a successful way of doing business.

In the banking and financial sector, there is today a higher level of reporting occurring on financial institutions practices and a new approach to risks. A lot still needs to be done but things are moving at a very fast pace and there is an increasing level of awareness among financiers that business as usual is truly not an option anymore: risks are now increasingly seen in a forward-looking prospective, as challenges ahead rather than what has gone before. Similarly, the financial sector is now increasingly factoring in the impact of investment in a broad perspective. Taking all these different factors into account, true accountability becomes possible. At the EU level, the Juncker Plan is doing a lot to ensure investment goes to projects contributing to the transition to sustainability and to incentivise private institutions to invest in the latter: over half of the projects approved so far focus on low-carbon, resource-efficiency and research activities.