IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

WWF recommendations to the European Parliament resolution

March 2022

WWF welcomes the initiative by the ENVI and DEVE committees to draft an own-initiative report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

WWF believes the report should focus on addressing the EU implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole, reflecting the universality of the Agenda as well as its integrated nature. As such, the report should first focus on the governance aspects of the implementation of the SDGs, rather than specific goals or sectoral policies.

**WWF calls for the report to address as a priority:**

1. **Recall previous European Parliament resolutions as well as Council conclusions, which have not been implemented by the Commission:** the resolution should recall the many previous positions adopted by the EU institutions on the SDGs, and request the Commission to justify why these were not implemented;

2. **Implement the ‘whole of government’ approach promised in the 2020 European Commission Staff Working Document:** the resolution should call for the Commission to further detail how they are implementing the ‘whole of government’ approach to the SDGs, and SDGs should be better integrated into the EU’s annual programming;

3. **Establish meaningful mechanisms for policy coherence for sustainable development:** the resolution should call for sustainable development to be prioritised at every stage of the policy development process, and for all dimensions of sustainable development to be systematically considered in all impact assessments;

4. **Reinstate a body for structured stakeholder engagement on the implementation of the SDGs:** the resolution should call for the urgent reinstatement of a multi-stakeholder body to advise the EU on the implementation of the SDGs, in an inclusive, participatory manner;

5. **Commit to a true paradigm shift towards a ‘Wellbeing economy’:** the resolution is an opportunity to recall the commitment to shift to a ‘Wellbeing Economy’ by putting in place ‘Beyond GDP’ indicators, guided by public interests and not merely GDP growth, and should urge the Commission to come forward with the report and dashboard as soon as possible;

6. **Integrate sustainable development in parliament decision making processes:** The Parliament should recognize that it also has a role to play to ensure sustainable development is mainstreamed within its procedures, that the interlinkages between policy areas are properly addressed, and committees do not work in silos.
1. RECALL PREVIOUS EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTIONS AS WELL AS COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS, WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BY THE COMMISSION

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU have on many repeated occasions called on the European Commission to fully implement the SDGs, by adopting a comprehensive overarching strategy for implementing the SDGs. The European Commission – both under the leadership of President Juncker and current President Von der Leyen – has repeatedly resisted these calls, and to date no comprehensive strategy, addressing the gaps to the EU’s achievement of the SDGs, has been adopted by the EU despite the Parliament and the Council’s calls.

The resolution could therefore recall these previous positions of the EU institutions, and request the European Commission to justify why these were not implemented:

- European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2016 on the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda (2016/2696(RSP))
- A comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis - Council conclusions (22 June 2021)
- Building a sustainable Europe by 2030 – Progress thus far and next steps - Council conclusions (10 December 2019)
- Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030 - Council conclusions (9 April 2019)
- A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Council conclusions (20 June 2017)
- European Council conclusions, 18 October 2018

2. IMPLEMENT THE ‘WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT’ APPROACH PROMISED IN THE 2020 EUROPEAN COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

In 2020, the European Commission published a Staff Working Document (SWD) on ‘Delivering on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals – A comprehensive approach’. This was not a strategy document but rather a summary of existing initiatives the EU had already committed to deliver the SDGs. However, one announcement in the SWD that had promise is that President von der Leyen herself is taking on responsibility for coordinating efforts for SDG implementation, taking a ‘whole of government’ approach, requiring coherent action across the Commission. Before this it was unclear who among the Commissioners was responsible. Regrettably, the SWD didn’t provide any detail on how this ‘whole of government’ approach will be implemented, and the coordination of SDG implementation by President von der Leyen has yet to be seen in practice. The resolution should therefore call for the Commission to further detail how they are implementing the ‘whole of government’ approach to the SDGs.

WWF considers that this could be demonstrated by the active involvement of the President in SDG related events such as the United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF), as well as closer alignment of the EU’s annual programming, which the President is responsible for jointly with Vice-President Šefčovič. At present, the Commission’s Annual Work Programmes...
reflect very little of the SDGs. **A new cycle should be put in place, starting with the Eurostat annual monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs.** The President should take note of the Eurostat monitoring report publicly, and respond in her State of the Union address on how the EU will make sure to advance on those goals where there is no progress or even regression. The annual Commission Work Programme should then indicate how the various initiatives presented are intended to implement the SDGs.

### 3. Establish Meaningful Mechanisms for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

The SWD identifies policy coherence as essential to integrate sustainable development at all stages of domestic and international policy making. This is key to ensuring the success of the SDGs, but to date – despite commitments to policy coherence – very few tools have been put in place in practice at the EU level to ensure this.

The lack of SDG implementation strategy makes it more difficult to achieve policy coherence. Indeed, if there were a **framework for EU SDG implementation containing clear, measurable and time-bound EU-wide targets for all SDGs to report against**, it would be much easier to identify gaps, inconsistencies and laggards. The Parliament report should therefore call for such a framework as the first step to ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development.

Furthermore, the rules that the Commission must follow when starting a proposal or an evaluation, otherwise known as the Better Regulation rules – must be aligned with the imperative to meet the SDGs, and be guided by a ‘think sustainability first’ approach, rather than by a strict simplification and ‘burden reduction’ approach. At present, the Better Regulation rules state that they aim to mainstream the SDGs into policy making, so that every legislative proposal contributes to the achievement of the SDGs. Relevant SDGs are to be identified for all proposals, and referred to throughout different sections of the impact assessment. While this is a good step towards ensuring the SDGs are systematically considered by all Directorates-General of the Commission when putting forward proposals, by referring only to ‘relevant SDGs’, the integrated and holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development risks being overlooked. The goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda are interlinked and therefore focusing only on certain goals and targets could lead to overlooking the impact on other goals and targets which interact. The Parliament resolution should therefore call for sustainable development to be prioritised at every stage of the policy development process, and all dimensions of sustainable development should be systematically considered in all impact assessments.

The JURI committee is developing an own-initiative report on Better Regulation where these messages should also be reflected.

### 4. Reinstate a Body for Structured Stakeholder Engagement on the Implementation of the SDGs

**WWF regrets that a renewal of the Commission’s multi-stakeholder platform is not envisaged at the moment.** The European Commission established the Multi-stakeholder platform on the SDGs, bringing together stakeholders from across sectors to support and advise the European Commission on the implementation of the SDGs at EU level. During its two-year mandate, the platform contributed significantly to the EU institutions’ thinking on how to take
forward the SDGs, including on how to better mainstream sustainability throughout the EU’s policies and budget. At the end of 2019, members of the platform were informed it was to be discontinued, despite months of inactivity by the Commission, when stakeholders asked for more engagement. The importance of structured stakeholder engagement and multi-stakeholder partnerships is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, notably in Goal 17 on ‘Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development’.

The 2020 SWD mentions that efforts to engage with civil society will continue, but without structured dialogue it is difficult for civil society to keep track and have a transparent dialogue with the Commission. The SWD does call for further means of exchange to emerge, but how is unclear, and since the adoption of the SWD engagement with civil society has continued to be ad-hoc. A new platform should therefore be created, which could link civil society and local authorities more closely to the monitoring of the goals, building on the Eurostat annual SDG monitoring report to discuss how to correct course when the EU is not delivering, and reflect this back into the President’s annual programming. Furthermore, with the EU planning to report in 2023 at the UN HLPF, the platform could help prepare the EU’s voluntary review, ensuring the process for its preparation is participatory.

The membership should have a balanced and diversified representation. The full diversity of stakeholders should include, in particular, a range of civil society organisations, community-based organisations, the private sector (including SMEs and producer-led organisations), trade unions, co-operatives, academia and research institutions, regional and local governments and groups at risk of being, or already left behind. All stakeholder constituencies represented on the platform should be “self-organising” and held accountable by their respective constituencies.

5. COMMIT TO A TRUE PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS A ‘WELLBEING ECONOMY’

The Commission’s Strategic Foresight Report, published in September 2020, recognised that the health crisis had ‘reignited the debate on what kind of economic growth is desirable, what actually matters for human wellbeing in a world of finite resources and on the need for new metrics to measure progress beyond GDP growth’.

This Parliament resolution is an opportunity to recall the need to shift to a ‘Wellbeing Economy’ by putting in place ‘Beyond GDP’ indicators, guided by public interests and not merely GDP growth. This was recently committed to in the 8th environment Action Programme (8th EAP) text agreed in trilogue in December 2021. The 8th EAP calls for a shift towards a wellbeing economy within planetary boundaries and sets out the need for systemic change, “requiring major shifts and reorientation in systems goals, incentives, technologies, social practices and norms, as well as in knowledge systems, and governance approaches’. Most importantly, it requires the Commission to identify how existing and often fragmented monitoring frameworks at EU level measuring social, economic and environmental progress can be streamlined into a single ‘Beyond GDP’ dashboard and indicator set, ultimately serving as a political summary to guide policy-making and provide for a clear and coherent overarching narrative.

The Parliament report could recall this obligation and urge the Commission to come forward with the report and dashboard as soon as possible.
6. INTEGRATE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PARLIAMENT DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

The European Parliament also has a role to play to ensure sustainable development is mainstreamed within its procedures, which should be evaluated in a transparent manner to better ensure that the interlinkages between policy areas are properly addressed and committees do not work in silos. The reintroduction of the annual SDG implementation report is a good first step. On the basis of the report, both Presidents of the European Commission and Council should be invited to the Plenary for a debate.

Further steps to ensure the SDGs are mainstreamed across parliamentary work could include:

- The Budgetary Committee should assess the contribution of the annual budgets to the Sustainable Development Goals, and guarantee that appropriate minimum spending targets for social and environmental objectives are met;
- Formal opportunity should be provided to stakeholders and civil society to provide input to Parliament decision-making through a central online platform where anyone interested can provide direct input to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs);
- MEPs should indicate which stakeholders they have consulted as part of the drafting process and make public the document that stakeholders have handed to them by introducing a legislative footprint.

For more information

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