

Sustainable development in the EU

Is the European Union moving towards sustainable development?

A statistical assessment of progress

Sustainable development policy aims to achieve a continuous improvement in citizens' quality of life and well-being. This involves the pursuit of economic progress, while safeguarding the natural environment and promoting social justice. The economic, environmental and social dimensions are all part of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) adopted in 2001 and renewed in 2006. The EU SDS also includes an institutional and a global dimension, with the adoption of good governance practices in the EU as well as a global partnership for worldwide sustainable development. Along these five dimensions, the EU SDS defines objectives and targets intended to place the EU on a path to sustainable development. The Eurostat monitoring report, published every two years, provides a quantitative assessment of whether the EU is moving in the right direction.

Today, **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, publishes its sixth monitoring report of the **EU Sustainable Development Strategy**. This monitoring report evaluates progress towards the EU SDS objectives using a set of more than 100 sustainable development indicators, grouped into ten thematic areas. The evaluation considers two periods: the long term, accounting for progress since the year 2000, and the short term, looking at the trends over the last five years. Progress is visually represented through weather symbols, which reflect how favourable or unfavourable the developments have been over those two periods. Thematic chapters provide a detailed assessment of each of the ten themes.

Evaluation of changes in the sustainable development headline indicators in the EU

Theme	Headline indicator	Long-term evaluation (since 2000)	Short-term evaluation (last 5 years)
Socioeconomic development	Real GDP per capita		
Sustainable consumption and production	Resource productivity		
Social inclusion	People at risk of poverty or social exclusion		
Demographic changes	Employment rate of older workers		
Public health	Life expectancy and healthy life years		
Climate change and energy	Greenhouse gas emissions		
	Primary energy consumption		
Sustainable transport	Energy consumption of transport relative to GDP		
Natural resources	Common bird index		
Global partnership	Official development assistance		
Good governance	No headline indicator	:	:

Clearly favourable developments for three headline indicators, some improvements in two others

Resource productivity, the headline indicator of the ‘sustainable consumption and production’ theme, has improved substantially since 2002 thanks to an overall reduction in domestic material consumption and an increase in GDP. The **employment rate of older workers**, the headline indicator of the ‘demographic changes’ theme, has increased continuously since 2002 and in 2013 the EU finally met its 50% employment target for older workers, which was originally set for 2010. A clearly favourable development has also been observed for **greenhouse gas emissions** (GHG emissions), one of the headline indicators of the ‘climate change and energy’ theme. GHG emissions have steadily decreased in the long run. If this trend continues the EU is likely to surpass its 2020 target to reduce emissions by 20 % compared with 1990 levels.

Within the economic dimension of sustainable development, the headline indicator **real GDP per capita** depicts an overall favourable picture for the EU. The indicator increased by more than 13% between 2000 and 2014. **Life expectancy** has increased moderately in the long run, reflecting some positive developments in the ‘public health’ area.

Moderately unfavourable developments for five out of the ten headline indicators

The headline indicator of the ‘social inclusion’ theme has developed in a moderately unfavourable way over the long-term period with almost one in four people in the EU still **at risk of poverty or social exclusion** in 2013. **Primary energy consumption**, the second headline indicator of the ‘climate change and energy’ theme, developed unfavourably until 2006. Since then, however, the trend has reversed and a continuous reduction can be observed. This reversal of the trend is reflected in the divergent short and long-term evaluations. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the trends of **energy consumption of transport relative to GDP**, the headline indicator of the ‘sustainable transport’ theme. It shows a moderately unfavourable long-term trend but a clearly favourable short-term trend. The population status of **common birds**, the headline indicator of the ‘natural resources’ theme, has deteriorated in the long term. Short-term developments were even more aggravated as a result of the substantial decline in the abundance of farmland birds. Finally, regarding commitments in the area of ‘global partnership’, the increase of the share of gross national income (GNI) spent by the EU on **official development assistance** (ODA) has been too slow to place the EU on track to meet its long-standing target of dedicating 0.7% of GNI to ODA in 2015. Nonetheless, the EU remains the world’s largest donor and its share of ODA to low-income countries has increased more markedly over the long term. It should also be noted that most indicators of the ‘global partnership’ theme display favourable trends.

Geographical information

The **European Union (EU28)** includes Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

In some cases where EU28 data are not available, EU27 (without Croatia) data are used instead.

Methods and definitions

Explanations of the symbols:

-  Changes are **clearly favourable** in relation to sustainable development objectives
-  No or **moderately favourable** changes in relation to sustainable development objectives
-  Changes are **moderately unfavourable** in relation to sustainable development objectives
-  Changes are **clearly unfavourable** in relation to sustainable development objectives

For more information

“Sustainable Development in the European Union” from Eurostat. The [PDF-version](#) available on the Eurostat website.

The complete set of sustainable development indicators is available in the [dedicated section](#) of the Eurostat website.

More information on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy is available [here](#).

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