Book Review

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Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025: SDG Priorities for the New EU Leadership
by Guillaume Lafortune and Grayson Fuller
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The Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025 presents an updated narrative and database on the implementation of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda across Europe. In fact, the new EU leadership for the 2024–2029 term emphasised the necessity for all EU member states to implement the SDGs. In this respect, the report aims to highlight achievements in this regard as well as areas that still require improvement.

The report includes an SDG Index database for 41 European nations, including 27 EU member states, 9 candidate countries, 4 EFTA countries, and the UK, allowing comparisons between European sub-regions. The data and findings build on multiple consultations and insights collected since 2019 with scientists, experts, and practitioners, along with the cooperation between the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

Overall, the document emphasises the importance of peaceful and global cooperation to achieve sustainable development in Europe but also globally. To reach this goal, the SDG/Green Deal Diplomacy, the UN Charter (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) are mentioned as fundamental instruments to promote the dialogue between states. Moreover, according to the authors the EU should strengthen its efforts to implement its instruments, including the reform of the Global Financial Architecture, to achieve the set goals. Considering the 2030 deadline approaching, the report serves as a crucial tool for policymakers, researchers, and civil society for the preparation of the next SDG Summit at Heads of States level in 2027, which aims to reinforce commitments to sustainable development.

The report begins with an overview of the ten priority actions set by the EU leadership, which include: reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion; reach net-zero emissions; strengthen regional and local authorities; support the transition towards a sustainable trade system; strengthen the EU's role in multilateral organisations; reinforce European multilateral role in global economic reform processes; ensure the necessary financial means for sustainability transformations; strengthen the role of SDGs in strategic planning, budgeting, research and innovation; and finally, ensure civil society engagement with the European institutions.

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Later, the collected data shows that, even though European citizens report high levels of subjective well-being, there has been no significant progress in many dimensions after 2015, especially after 2020. Countries in the Northern Europe, particularly Denmark, Norway, Finland, Austria and Sweden, have demonstrated the effectiveness of their environmental and social policies. On the other hand, the study also identifies areas where progress has been impeded due to some major challenges, such as increasing inequalities in opportunities, well-being and access to quality services since 2020; environmental and biodiversity challenges; unsustainable consumption and supply chains contributing to environmental and social harm; significant disparities across European countries, particularly in sectors like industry, innovation, and infrastructure; and slow or reversed progress on governance and partnerships.

This analysis is followed by graphics and an in-depth examination of each country's progress regarding its SDG index score, as well as its performance with respect to the ten EU priorities. In fact, although from a global perspective Europe is one of the most equal regions, the leave-no-one-behind index shows that since 2020, the EU has made progress in gender equality. However, it has stagnated in income inequality and access to services, while declined in poverty and material deprivation. Moreover, even if there is a positive trend, no European country has fully achieved the gender equality or addressed inequalities faced by people with disabilities.

One thing that is repeated several times in the research is that global challenges require global solutions, and that no nation can solve important issues on its own. Global cooperation to reform the GFA is fundamental to achieving the SDGs. In fact, it is essential to increase collaboration between countries to help others escape the poverty trap and increase the freedom of speech and expression, as well as, more generally the rule of law. Moreover, according to the authors, it is important to invest in infrastructure and human capital to create sustainable progress.

The report also shows that although EU tends to generate large negative spillover effects, especially due to unsustainable supply chains, deforestation and other negative environmental and social impacts, the 2025 Spillover Index indicates some progress in reducing these negative spillovers. Noteworthy progress has been made in environmental and social spillovers, which are related to economic, financial relation with other countries, as well as peacekeeping and security spillovers. Nevertheless, according to the authors, some obstacles persist. To fully implement the SDGs, several actions must be implemented, such as: investments in clean energy and digital technologies; strengthening pro-social measures to address the EU's stagnation on the 'Leave no one behind' principle of the SDGs; resolving the negative health and environmental impacts from unsustainable consumption; utilising SDG/Green Deal Diplomacy with all regions; respecting the principles established in the UN Charter and support a reform of the GFA.

The EU leadership's intention to pursue a greener and sustainable future is also reiterated by a new deal which is the Clean Industrial Deal, which aims to ensure integrated action on environmental sustainability, technological innovation and social cohesion. In this regard, the authors encourage the EU towards a cooperative approach with other countries and civil society while prioritising on SDG.

In conclusion, the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025 employs a methodological approach constructed using a set of indicators, many of which derive from official statistics of the European Commission or from NGOs. Moreover, the data have been peer-reviewed and audited by the European Commission Joint Research

Centre. The authors admitted the lack of data from Ukraine due to the war since February 2022 but highlighted that the 2025 report includes some new indicators in comparison with the past ones: Disability employment gap, Victims of human trafficking, and the Index of countries' support to UN-based multilateralism.

The report effectively analyses the complex nature of sustainable development, addressing the economic, social and environmental aspects of the SDGs while highlighting both achievements and challenges faced by European countries. The authors maintain an unbiased position in their account of the facts, presenting information objectively and based on evidence. In fact, the document presents both achievements and areas for improvement in the European region regarding the SDGs, avoiding excessively optimistic or pessimistic narratives.

Additionally, the document constitutes an excellent instrument for monitoring sustainability progress and a reliable reference for decision-makers and academics in shaping future public policies. In fact, it is essential to have an instrument that permits EU institutions and leaders to measure the effectiveness of their policies. By identifying areas that require greater attention, policymakers can refine their strategies and intervene more effectively thanks to the data presented in the report. Furthermore, the report can play an important role in raising awareness among the public. In fact, by making information more accessible and comprehensible, it can motivate citizens and businesses to actively participate in achieving the SDGs.

Finally, the report and its findings can represent a great instrument in shaping the EU agenda beyond 2030. As Europe faces economic, social, and geopolitical challenges, Member States and their leaders need to be well-informed, partly thanks to reports like this, on areas that require intervention.