



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Topic 1: The intersection of economic, social, and environmental sustainability towards the 2030 agenda

Research report by: Mariasole Grondona, David Manzoni, Kairav Roberson and Arianna Zucchini

Contents

1. Definition of key terms	1
2. Introduction	2
3. Background information	2
4. Timeline of events	3
5. UN involvement	4
6. Major countries involved	4
7. Useful links	5

1. Definition of key terms

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The 17 global goals established by the United Nations to guide sustainable development efforts through 2030.

Triple Bottom Line: A framework that evaluates performance based on economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

Economic Sustainability: Strategies to promote long-term economic growth while ensuring efficient resource use and financial stability.

Social Sustainability: Policies and practices that emphasize equity, inclusion, human rights, and social well-being.

Environmental Sustainability: Efforts to protect ecosystems, conserve resources, and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Climate Action: Initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change.

Equity and Inclusion: Ensuring fair access to opportunities, resources, and rights for all, particularly marginalized groups.

Resilience: The ability of systems and communities to withstand and adapt to challenges such as economic shocks, social inequalities, and environmental crises.

Circular Economy: An economic model that emphasizes reuse, recycling, and reducing waste to create sustainable resource loops.

Decent Work and Economic Growth: SDG 8, which focuses on creating jobs, fostering entrepreneurship, and achieving equitable economic development.

Climate Justice: Addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities and ensuring fair adaptation and mitigation measures.

Natural Capital: The world's stock of natural resources, including air, water, and biodiversity, which underpin economic and social systems.

Global Partnerships: Collaborative efforts among governments, businesses, and civil society to achieve the SDGs.

Integrated Approaches: Policies and strategies that consider the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Just Transition: Ensuring fairness and inclusion for workers and communities as societies shift to more sustainable practices and economies.

2. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations, shapes a global vision for a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize the critical need to combine economic, social, and environmental sustainability. These three dimensions are strongly interconnected and essential to creating a world that meets the needs of the present. Economic sustainability aims to foster resilient economies that generate prosperity while managing resources wisely. Social sustainability focuses on equity, inclusion, and the well-being of all individuals, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups. Environmental sustainability seeks to protect ecosystems, address climate change, and preserve the planet's limited resources. Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires ensuring that progress in one dimension does not undermine the others. This intersection is both a challenge and an opportunity, demanding innovative policies, cross-sectoral collaboration, and systemic thinking. By embracing these interconnected dimensions, the global community can make meaningful strides toward a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future.

3. Background information

The **United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** includes three pillars: economic, social, and environmental sustainability, which were established in 2015. These pillars are associated with the 17 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, created to transform the world for better economic and environmental sustainability. Economic stability seeks to promote development and innovation that includes everyone; however, different challenges exist. For example, since the onset of the pandemic, developing countries have seen an increase in funding gaps for the SDGs from over \$2.5 trillion to more than \$4 trillion after COVID-19. Such amounts indicate that an increase in investments is required. **Social sustainability** emphasizes fairness and inclusion. The 2030 Agenda ensures that the SDGs will be implemented without leaving anyone behind, especially the poor and vulnerable, who are often the most affected.

Environmental sustainability remains a major concern, as many ongoing goals related to climate change and biodiversity protection have yet to be met. Economic development is often harmful to environmental aspects, as seen when resources are overexploited. Social sustainability depends on the availability of economic opportunities and environmental health, as both impact the well-being of communities. UNESCO implements sustainability initiatives through its

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programs. These initiatives aim to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to address complex sustainability challenges. A balance between economic, social, and environmental factors is essential for achieving the SDGs. Despite the challenges, global cooperation and various projects led by UNESCO can help progress toward a sustainable future.

4. Timeline of events

2015 → September 25: The United Nations General Assembly adopts the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, establishing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all.

2019 → December 11: The European Commission presents the **European Green Deal**, a comprehensive plan to make the EU's economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities.

2020

- **January 14:** The **European Green Deal Investment Plan** and the **Just Transition Mechanism** are introduced to mobilize public investment and assist regions most affected by the transition to a green economy.

- **May 20:** The **Farm to Fork Strategy** is presented to promote a fairer, healthier, and more environmentally friendly food system, alongside the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, focusing on protecting natural resources.

2021 → July 14: The European Commission introduces the **"Fit for 55" package**, a set of proposals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, aligning with the European Green Deal's objectives.

2022 → July 8: The **EU strategies for energy system integration and hydrogen** are adopted, laying the foundations for a fully decarbonized, more efficient, and interconnected energy sector.

2023

- **July 10-19:** The **High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** gathers under the theme "Accelerating the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels."
- **December 21:** The **European Union Green Bonds Regulation** comes into force, facilitating the issuance of **"European Green Bonds"** to finance sustainable investments.

2024

- **January 30:** The **ECOSOC (UN Economic and Social Council) Partnership Forum** is held, focusing on strengthening partnerships for sustainable development.
- **May 9:** The **9th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals** is held, emphasizing the role of innovation in achieving the SDGs.
- **July 8-17:** The **High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** unites under the theme "Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions."

- **December:** The **29th Conference of the Parties (COP29)** is held in Baku, Azerbaijan, focusing on establishing a new global climate finance target and addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing nations.

5. UN involvement

The United Nations (UN) has played a crucial role in fostering discussions and projects at the intersection of economic, social, and environmental sustainability as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Recognizing the interdependence of these dimensions, the UN has worked through numerous organizations and programs to address the challenges and opportunities involved. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been instrumental in implementing integrated strategies that promote economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has emphasized the importance of sustainable consumption and production patterns, advocating for policies that balance economic development with ecological preservation. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has held high-level political forums to review progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing the need for coordinated international action to ensure sustainability across all sectors. In particular, ECOSOC has addressed issues such as green job creation, equitable resource distribution, and resilience-building in vulnerable communities. Additionally, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has played a pivotal role in linking environmental sustainability with economic and social goals, particularly through agreements like the Paris Agreement, which seeks to limit global temperature rise while ensuring just transitions for workers and industries. The UN has also organized landmark events, including the Sustainable Development Summits, which bring together stakeholders from governments, civil society, and the private sector to strategize on advancing the integrated sustainability agenda. These efforts highlight the UN's commitment to ensuring that economic growth, social inclusivity, and environmental protection remain interconnected, reinforcing the pillars of the 2030 Agenda.

6. Major countries involved

- **Nordic Countries (Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway):** These countries are exemplary for their strong cultural commitment to environmental protection and social inclusion. One of the pillars of their leadership is the extensive use of renewable energy sources such as wind, hydropower, and biomass. Sweden, in particular, has set an ambitious goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045, while Denmark leads in the offshore wind energy sector. Innovation is a central element, with significant investments in research for sustainable solutions. Finland, for example, is renowned for its advanced research in bioeconomy and sustainable digitalization, while Denmark is experimenting with smart cities to reduce energy consumption and improve the quality of life.
- **Germany:** Germany stands out in promoting sustainability, thanks to its strong economy and strategic vision focused on environmental protection and social inclusion. The **Energiewende** policy, or energy transition, is one of the most ambitious initiatives worldwide for reducing CO₂ emissions and encouraging the adoption of renewable energy. Through this policy, which gradually phases out fossil fuels and nuclear energy, over 46% of electricity now comes from green sources. Education is a key element in fostering lasting cultural change, so it's important to involve schools from primary to university level.

Initiatives include school projects on recycling, university programs dedicated to sustainability, and public awareness campaigns.

- **Japan:** Japan stands out for its technological approach to sustainability, heavily investing in green technologies and smart cities to optimize energy efficiency and reduce emissions. Japanese smart cities integrate innovative solutions such as efficient public transportation, environmentally friendly buildings, and intelligent resource management. Following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japan developed advanced strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation, enhancing its environmental resilience. Additionally, Japan actively promotes the transfer of sustainable technologies to developing countries, strengthening its role as an international leader in environmental issues. These efforts are driven by the country's awareness of its vulnerability to extreme climate events and its desire to maintain a technologically advanced economy.
- **Italy:** Italy is making significant strides toward sustainability, though not yet on par with countries like the Nordic states or Germany. The Italian National Commission for UNESCO has launched projects to raise awareness of sustainability in schools and universities. The country values its natural heritage, promoting integrated management that balances conservation, tourism, and economic development. On the international stage, Italy hosted events like the 2021 G20, where sustainability was a key theme, and actively collaborates with the European Union on the Green Deal. This commitment stems from the need to protect its rich natural and cultural heritage, alongside a growing awareness of the SDGs.

7. Useful links

- <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>
- <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/annual-sdg-financing-gaps-measured-in-trillions-fsdr-2024/>