

ESDN Newsletter

(December 2024)

News from the ESDN

ESDN Youth Workshop 2024

The Youth Workshop 2024 took place in Berlin, Germany on 04-07 September, in which 33 Youth Network Members from 19 European countries participated. Together, they learned and worked on future scenarios using foresight to address the main question of Europe's sustainability and climate-neutrality in 2050.

Youth Members were challenged to envision a Europe in the year 2050 under different circumstances of achieving climate-neutrality. These exercises were then used to further discussions between the Youth Members on what they found important to address climate-neutrality. They came up with four main themes:

1. Mindset Shift & Cultural Behaviour
2. Power and Trust
3. Strong Institutions
4. Financing a Sustainable Future

These themes will be turned into ESDN Policy Notes and published on the ESDN website in early 2025.

For more information on the Workshop, including keynote presentations, the Workshop agenda, two Workshop Reports, and the Workshop photo album, click here: <https://www.esdn.eu/events/workshops>.

European Sustainable Development Week 2024

The ESDW 2024 took place from 18 September – 08 October. In total, 3.950 events in 25 countries were registered.

The European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW) was an initiative launched by Austria, France and Germany in 2015 and was supported by the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN). The goal of the ESDW is to provide a platform and make exemplary commitment visible throughout all of Europe within a certain period of time (18 September - 08 October), to attract public attention to the topic of sustainable development, the UN 2030 Agenda, and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Everyone can change something for the better! The more people and organizations that participate, the stronger the signal we send out together!

Since 2015, a total of 46,786 events have been registered through the ESDW with tens of millions of participants having attended events!

Since 2016, events registered through the ESDW have been explicitly linked to the SDGs. It is a wonderful way to showcase what individual countries and Europe are doing to reach the Goals.

The ESDW 2025 will be taking place next year from 18 September – 08 October.



9th ESDN Peer Learning Platform – “Sustainable Culture and Circular Economy: Building Resilience for Tomorrow”

The 9th ESDN Peer Learning Platform took place in Bucharest, Romania on 22-23 October! The title of this year's Peer Learning Platform was "Sustainable Culture and Circular Economy: Building Resilience for Tomorrow". It was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Romanian Prime Minister’s Office – Department of Sustainable Development.

Day 1 was devoted to the topic of sustainable culture, and featured a mix of keynote presentations with experts, a panel discussion, and good practice examples from governments using culture for sustainable development. The day ended with a visit to an art gallery, so participants could see culture and sustainability in action.

Day 2 focused on Circular Economy and featured keynote presentations on the topic, from the Hungarian Sustainable Development Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the OECD, as well as featured country good practice cases from Romania, Luxembourg and the EESC.

This event was open to European civil servants and sustainable development experts, who provided many of the keynote presentations over the course of the two-day event. The Platform took place under the Chatham House Rules.

ESDN Policy Note – Peer Learning Platform

This Policy Note draws from the presentations, discussions, and results of the 9th ESDN Peer Learning Platform. The Policy Note offers the following recommendations on culture and sustainability:

- 1) Use culture as an enabler to implement SD
- 2) Develop specific mindsets and values for culture and sustainability
- 3) Integrate culture systematically into SD policymaking
- 4) Make culture an important aspect in the post-2030 Agenda framework
- 5) Include SD holistically into education programs and awareness raising

The Policy Note offers the following recommendations on fostering Circular Economy:

- 1) Develop and continuously update national CE strategies and actions plans
- 2) Include the sub-national level (regions, cities and municipalities) into CE activities
- 3) Establish stakeholder exchange on advancing CE
- 4) Develop an integrated and holistic CE concept
- 5) Involve more scientific knowledge and research into CE policy design and actions

You can find the Policy Note here:

https://www.esdn.eu/fileadmin/Publications/ESDN_Policy_Briefs/2024/ESDN_Policy_Note_November_2024_final.pdf.

2nd ESDN Topic Exchange – Assessment and monitoring of SDG implementation & Just Transition initiatives

The ESDN organized its 2nd Topic Exchange on 18 November. The title of this 2-hour long exchange was "Assessment and monitoring of SDG implementation & Just Transition initiatives".

The ESDN Advisory Board Members heard from colleagues from the Finnish Prime Minister's Office on sustainability assessment in Finland, from our new Advisory Board Member and Dutch SDG Coordinator Anna Pot on the 8th National SDG Report in the Netherlands. Both of these speakers covered the assessment and monitoring topic.

The Just Transition initiatives topic will be covered by a colleague from Belgium's FISD (Federal Institute for Sustainable Development), who presented on the Just Transition approach in Belgium. We also heard from a colleague from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action who shared the Just Transition activities being undertaken by Austria.

The ESDN Topic Exchanges are a brand-new event the ESDN decided to organize as an exclusive added value for its Regular Members (those countries and ministries supporting the ESDN).

We look forward to organizing more of these events in 2025!

Youth Network Webinar on Biodiversity

The webinar took place on 05 December, where the ESDN Youth Network Members were joined by an expert on biodiversity, Kristiina Niikonen. She has been a part of the global negotiations for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the 2030 targets for halting biodiversity loss. She now works for the Finnish Prime Minister's Office on the Biodiversity Life project, aiming to reinforce biodiversity policy coherence according to the 2030 biodiversity targets. She will present on the main question: What are the three levels of biodiversity policy and how can we empower citizens for biodiversity action?

Kristiina was joined by Antti Ala-Heikkiä and Anna-Sofia Krjukov, who are members of The Young People's Climate and Nature Group (NUOLI) operating under the Finnish Prime Minister's Office. In October 2024, NUOLI organized the Finnish Local Conference of Youth (LCOY), bringing together over 300 participants from across the country. The conference acted as a learning experience for the recently founded NUOLI group and an empowering space for community-building and knowledge-sharing, resulting in the Finnish National Youth and Child Environment Statement. Antti and Anna-Sofia will reflect on the key messages voiced in the statement, the current landscape of youth environmental advocacy in Finland, and the lessons gained from organizing LCOY. They will focus on the question: What defines the spirit of Finnish youth as political action on the environmental crisis continues to waver, years after the start of global youth climate strikes?

News From European Countries

Austria – 1st Regional SDG Dialogue Forum

On 13 November, the province of Carinthia and the civil society organisation "ÖKOBÜRO" hosted the first "Regional SDG Dialogue Forum" in Austria. Stakeholders from politics, administration, science, business and civil society met in the picturesque setting of the "Hohe Tauern" national park to discuss the local implementation of sustainable development. After Austria presented its second VNR at this year's HLPF, the focus on localising the SDGs seems to be "the logical next step", as the representative of the Republic put it in his opening speech. Carinthia was the perfect host, as it is the first province in Austria to include the SDGs in its government programme.

The programme of the one-day event included several workshops on topics ranging from ending child poverty to greening supply chains, as well as a focus on young people who assured us that they are motivated to play an active role in achieving the SDGs despite the current crises. The Governor of Carinthia, Peter Kaiser, who is also active in the Council of Regions, took part in a panel discussion that emphasised the importance of education, information and participation of the general public for the implementation of the SDGs on the ground.

The Austrian public administration encouraged SDG localisation at its session as well. In a panel discussion, representatives of the inter-ministerial working group on the 2030 Agenda, the Carinthian provincial administration, the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns and of the youth identified the continuous information and involvement of the entire administration and local population, the support of committed stakeholders and the involvement of youth as factors for successful implementation. As the title of the session "From VNRs to VLRs" suggests, Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) were presented as a helpful tool for localising the SDGs. The

coordinator of Bad Köstritz's VLR travelled all the way from Thuringia to tell us personally about how this small town in Germany drew up their report and how that not only created a positive momentum in the town but also led to widespread recognition. The VLR was not only presented in Germany but also at this year's HLPF in New York.



BKMC / Wolfgang Jannach

Belgium

Flanders

The SDGs as a policy framework

Committing to the SDGs is committing to the 17 goals in itself, but it is also about using the SDGs as a framework or compass for your policies as a whole. In this compilation video, we show how **Deinze, Halle and Harelbeke** already systematically include the 2030 Agenda in their policy planning, citizen participation and monitoring systems.

Watch the (Dutch spoken) video with subtitles in [Dutch](#), [French](#) or [English](#).

SDG awareness raising

To make real work of the SDGs in your city or municipality, it is important that employees as well as citizens know about the 17 goals and how they themselves can contribute to them. In this compilation video, we show how **Bruges, Sint-Niklaas, Eeklo and Deinze** carry out creative actions to make the SDGs better known among local officials, politicians, young people, schools and the general public.

Watch the (Dutch spoken) video with subtitles in [Dutch](#), [French](#) or [English](#).

Malta – VNR 2025 and ESDW 2024 Success

Malta will be presenting its second Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during next year's UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. In drafting the second VNR, Malta is committed to deploy a whole-of-

government and society approach, while ensuring a broad, transparent, and participatory stakeholder process. A Sustainable Development Multi-Stakeholder Forum was held at the end of November to foster discussions on success stories and good practices, challenges and ways forward in various thematic areas. Groups such as youths and children will be engaged through drawing and digital art competitions and educational events.

Furthermore, as part of the European Sustainable Development Week 2024, the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Regeneration of the Grand Harbour launched Malta's Sustainable Development Action Days, which is a yearly initiative aimed at promoting and fostering awareness on sustainable development and the related United Nations SDGs. Its main objective is to inspire more individuals, entities, businesses, and organisations to take action and showcase their commitment towards sustainability. This year, over 30 initiatives took place all over Malta and Gozo and were promoted on various social media channels and websites, as well as through a highlight feature.

These initiatives, which were organised by government entities, NGOs, local councils and businesses, ranged from awareness raising and educational campaigns on climate action, food waste, reduced inequalities, poverty, human rights, good health and wellbeing, sustainable urban development, and cultural heritage; workshops and conferences; clean-ups; digital events; exhibitions; eco markets; as well as the promotion of sustainable development through physical activities, art and crafts, among others.

More information about each initiative can be found here:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.gov.mt/events/>

Link to the Highlight Feature can be found here: <https://fb.watch/w7QjCmjgdU/>.

Netherlands – Advisory letter: 'Inextricably linked: the SDGs in the Netherlands and the rest of the world'

The Dutch independent advisory council published some advice to the Dutch government about the role of the government in implementing the SDG's and made a few recommendations.

This advisory letter addresses the question of how the government can strengthen the involvement of the Dutch public and business community in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this advice, the AIV states that it is difficult to join forces in a coherent manner and to achieve the international goals. The Netherlands is lagging behind the frontrunners. The advice addresses the interaction between government policy and the involvement of citizens and companies, and the importance of policy coherence to accelerate the SDG agenda.

The letter can be downloaded from this page:

<https://www.advisorycouncilinternationalaffairs.nl/documents/publications/2024/09/17/advisory-letter-inextricably-linked-the-sdgs-in-the-netherlands-and-the-rest-of-the-world>.

Romania – Mobilizing the Next Generation of Leaders” – Training of trainers for experts in sustainable development

Organized in partnership by the World Bank and the Department for Sustainable Development, this event brought together trainers from Romania's accredited universities with postgraduate

programs for sustainable development experts. Held in Bucharest, the initiative aimed to develop and align methodologies and competencies for future leaders in sustainability. Notable international guests included Louis Meuleman, Vice-Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, and Peter McAteer, a global expert in sustainability education.

In his opening address, Yasser El-Gammal, Country Manager of the World Bank for Romania and Hungary, highlighted Romania's progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). László Borbély, State Counselor and ESDN President, emphasized key initiatives such as the Network of Sustainable Development Hubs, in every central institution, and the recently legislated Center of Excellency for Sustainable Development, which will grow the expertise needed for the implementation of the SDGs.

The event featured interactive sessions, case studies, and panels, addressing:

- **Decomposing Complexity**

Collaborative leadership for sustainable impact presented by Louis Meuleman, who shared insights from his book *Metagovernance for Sustainability – A Framework for Implementing SDGs*.

- **Strategies for Adult Education: The Sustainable Development Expert as a Leader**

Practical approaches for adult education in sustainability were discussed by Peter McAteer, author of *Sustainability is the New Advantage and Paths to Action*.

- **Innovative Approaches in Education for Sustainable Development**

Tools for adult learning and innovation, led by Vincent Ribiere, General Director of the Institute for Knowledge and Innovation in Southeast Asia (IKI-SEA).

World Bank experts facilitated interactive workshops encouraging participants to approach the expert training program from a highly practical perspective, ensuring its maximum relevance and utility for future students.

This program focused on aligning the methodology and fostering practical competencies for the over 2000 sustainable development experts, that will be trained by 2026, preparing them for dealing with sustainability challenges in public administration. Activities included discussions on using feedback and self-assessment for effective training, as well as reflections on next steps for strengthening international partnerships and applying sustainable solutions at the community level.

Spain

Catalonia

The data sets of the Catalan Open Data portal now integrate SDGs

The Catalan Government, with the support of the [Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia \(CADS\)](#), has published a new [web viewer](#) that classifies the 1,066 available data sets on the Open Data portal according to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This classification of data sets by SDGs represents a digital transformation tool that makes information more accessible, relevant and useful to address important global challenges. By promoting transparency and data reuse, the new web viewer contributes to strengthening the commitment to open government, and to facilitate collaborative work towards achieving the SDGs. The [web viewer](#) shows data sets according to the 17 SDGs and enables a combination of searches by thematic area, data set, Government Department or publisher organisation.



Cultural rights and sustainability in Catalonia

The [Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia \(CADS\)](#), in recognition of the important role that culture can play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, co-organised an event with the cultural association 'Ateneu Barcelonès', on '**Cultural rights and sustainability, a call for action**'. The event took place on 21 May 2024, coinciding with the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. Additional information on the event, including a link to the recorded session (only in Catalan), can be found [here](#).

The success of that initial event has sparked the creation of a working group, within the [Catalonia 2030 Alliance](#)* framework, to continue developing activities that contribute to the recognition of the transformative role that culture has to play in the achievement of the SDGs.

*The [Catalonia 2030 Alliance](#), coordinated by the [Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia \(CADS\)](#) is a coalition constituted by 85 organisations representing different sectors of the Catalan society with the aim to share information, resources, and best practices, in order to drive shared initiatives to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Interesting Projects and Research from around Europe

Nordregio

Nordic Toolbox for a Just Green Transition

The green transition involves different economic, social and territorial impacts that have been explored in the four-year research project “Not Just a Green Transition – Examining the path towards a socially just green transition in the Nordic Region” (short name: NJUST). The result is the Nordic Toolbox for a Just Green Transition, which contributes to a transition towards a climate neutral Nordic Region that is socially just.

The comprehensive and interactive toolbox offers guidance for Nordic policymakers to navigate challenges, listen to those affected, and get inspired. The toolbox highlights six priority areas for enabling a just green transition and offers policy memos from four socially at-risk groups: older adults, youth, people with disabilities and those at risk of unemployment. Through practical tools and examples, a structured checklist, policymakers can gain insights into how to take action for a transition that is not only green – but equitable too.

Access the toolbox: <https://pub.nordregio.org/r-2024-21-nordic-toolbox-for-%20a-just-green-transition/>.

Event - Tackling rural labour shortages: challenges, strategies and solutions

Rural areas across the Nordic Region are facing increasing labour shortages, impacting industries, public services and local communities. We invite you to join us to explore the findings of Nordregio’s new report, [‘Strategies to address Nordic rural labour](#)

shortage and discover practical solutions for overcoming skills and labour supply challenges in rural areas.

This **webinar on 15 January 2025 (13.00-14.30 CET / Stockholm)** will highlight:

- Key trends and drivers of rural labour shortages, from demographic shifts to the green transition.
- Regional and sectoral variations in workforce challenges across the Nordic countries and territories.
- Six adaptable strategies to address labour shortages in rural areas.
- Lessons learned, practical experiences and actionable pathways for local strategies and measures.

This 90-minute webinar will feature expert presentations and Q&A session, offering participants the opportunity to engage with Nordic researchers and policymakers working on rural labour market issues. Take part and join the discussion to gain insights and contribute to the conversation on developing strategies to foster vibrant rural labour markets in the Nordic Region.

For more information and registration, please visit:

<https://www.nordregio.org/events/tackling-rural-labour-shortages-challenges-strategies-and-solutions/>.

Event - Future-proofing the Nordics – what is resilient leadership?

Pandemics, climate disasters, political polarisation, rising inequality, aging populations, disinformation and fake news – these are but a few of many trials facing leaders of the information age. Bouncing back from a crisis isn't easy – and yet the Nordic countries seem to be extraordinarily good at it. With high levels of social trust across the populations, governments are seemingly able to adapt to challenges with flexibility and agility.

Can we trace the stable economic growth to a specific Nordic brand of resilience? And which industries are able to thrive despite a new reality of concentric crises?

“Don't put all your eggs in one basket” – In this conference we explore how the Nordics strategically spread out their efforts, to not lean too heavily on just one industry or sector. And how no single type of leader can handle the growing complexity of future challenges.

Instead, the Nordic countries can lead the way by showcasing the strength of regional cooperation.

We have the research to back up the theoretical understanding of how that leadership works and at this conference, we will bring together the people that show the pivotal results of collaborative leadership.

For more information and registration, please visit:

<https://www.nordregio.org/events/future-proofing-the-nordics-what-is-resilient-leadership/>.

Highlights from Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

The following links, provide more insights into SDSN events that have taken place in different European countries.

- [Pathways to Progress: Insights from SDSN's Pre-Summit of the Future](#)
- [SDSN Bulgaria Hosts First Annual Conference](#)
- [SDSN Italia Hosts "A New Vision for the Future: Moving Beyond the 2030 Agenda"](#)

Culture4Climate as a Beacon Example at the RNE Annual Conference 2024

The 23rd Annual Conference of the German Sustainable Development Council (RNE) took place on 08 October in Berlin, themed "Sustainability Under Stress." The discussions, led by the Chancellor and an expert panel, focused on what holds society together during turbulent times and how climate protection can be pursued in a socially just manner. Among the highlights were selected examples from the "Gemeinschaftswerk" on Sustainability, including the Culture4Climate initiative coordinated by 2N2K Germany, the Sustainability in arts and culture network, which showcased successful bridge-building efforts.

Each year, the Annual Conference brings together prominent representatives from politics, business, academia, culture, and civil society in and outside of Germany to discuss the current state and future of sustainability policy. After a welcome address by RNE Chairman Reiner Hoffmann and Deputy Chairwoman Gunda Röstel, a panel of experts explored contemporary approaches and challenges in sustainability policy and the transition to a climate-neutral economy and society. Ralph Brinkhaus, a CDU member of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Sustainable Development, emphasized the importance of pursuing ambitious goals. In contrast, Paulina Fröhlich, Deputy Managing Director of the Progressive Centre, highlighted the need for "radical politeness" in today's tense social climate. Writer Ilya Troyanov noted that culture has the power to touch people's hearts, while Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned that "a country that does not hold together internally will not achieve sustainable development," addressing around 500 attendees.

In the afternoon, representatives from private, public, and social enterprises discussed the requirements and opportunities presented by the German Sustainability Code (DNK) and its alignment with the European CSRD Directive. Before this discussion, four selected examples from the Gemeinschaftswerk on Sustainability were presented. Selina Kahle and Margarethe Kreuser shared insights from Culture4Climate, an initiative coordinated by the Sustainability in Art and Culture Network (2N2K Germany). Kahle highlighted that Culture4Climate has played a pioneering role since its launch in 2021, collaborating with the Federal Government and the National Climate Initiative to promote innovative climate protection strategies in the cultural sector. Especially the Sustainability Declaration for the cultural sector, which was launched in 2022 and also presented at the UN at last year's HPLF (see Declaration above). Kreuser elaborated on the SDG Tandem Programme, which pairs cultural institutions with sustainable

businesses to form one-year climate partnerships as a model for bridging different sectors. To conclude the conference, Minister of State Sarah Ryglewski provided an overview of developments in the German Sustainability Strategy, which will soon include a cultural indicator.

For further information:

- Program of the RNE Annual Conference 2024: [PDF](#)
- [Culture4Climate initiative](#)
- [2N2K Germany](#)



Margarethe Kreuser, Dr. Werner Schnappauf (RNE) and Selina Kahle with the Sustainability Declaration for the Cultural Sector. Photo: photothek © RNE

Advancing Sustainability Reporting in SMEs: The German Sustainability Code's New Support Services

The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) presents significant challenges for many companies, particularly SMEs. The aim of the [German Sustainability Code \(DNK\)](#) is to reduce the time and effort required to meet the European reporting requirements by providing comprehensive support services. Since February 2024, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) has funded the further development of the DNK to streamline CSRD-compliant reporting.

What makes the DNK's reporting tool special?

- Starting in 2025, the DNK's support services will be available at no cost for companies reporting on a mandatory and voluntary basis.
- The sustainability reporting requirements are structured in modules for different groups of companies and translated into plain language.
- Free information and training services are being developed in the context of CSRD reporting.
- A new, interactive online platform will guide companies through the process of digital CSRD-compliant reporting and offer additional supporting services.

Established in 2011, the DNK brings years of experience in sustainability reporting, continuously enhancing its offerings to provide effective support to companies. The Sustainability Code aims to drive deeper transformation. By analyzing value chains and operations in the context of sustainability matters, the DNK helps companies to gain key insights, promoting more sustainable, efficient, and competitive business models.

Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS)

Report

The road to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is certainly not without obstacles, as illustrated during the UN Summit of the Future, and ASviS took stock of the delays and progress of the 2030 Agenda in Italy and Europe with the [presentation of its ninth Report](#), on 17 October in Rome and in live-streaming. Among other analyses, the Report also illustrated scenarios for the SDGs in 2030, calculated based on current trends. ASviS noted that between 2010 and 2023 the situation worsened for six SDGs in Italy (Goals 1, 6, 10, 15, 16 and 17), while there were small improvements for seven Goals (2, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13 and 14), more significant progress was registered for three SDGs (3, 4, 5) and only for Goal 12 was the improvement significant.

OECD Forum

To improve the understanding of the interconnections surrounding the SDGs, ASviS took part in the [7th OECD World Forum on Well-being](#) in Rome from November 4th to the 6th. The Forum was an essential event for advancing knowledge, building connections, and spurring action for inclusive, sustainable well-being, strengthening approaches for centering multidimensional well-being in policy, measurement, and societal action. ASviS was the only Italian civil society organization present with its own stand and shared the insights it gained over the years of monitoring SDG progress in the country.

Articles on Culture and Sustainable Development – Dorine van Norren

As the topic of culture and sustainable development has been a recurring theme in the ESDN since 2023, where the ESDN organized a Workshop in Vienna on it, as well as this year's Peer Learning Platform, more information is always helpful. Dorine van Norren, from the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and speaker at the ESDN Workshop in 2023, provided links to some of her articles on the subject. They can be found below.

- African Ubuntu and Sustainable Development Goals: seeking human mutual relations and service in development: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2022.2109458>
- The Sustainable Development Goals viewed through Gross National Happiness, Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10784-020-09487-3>

- Sustainability leadership, UNESCO competencies for SDGs, and diverse leadership models:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351495844_Sustainability_leadership_UNESCO_competencies_for_SDGs_and_diverse_leadership_models