

Human rights are essential to achieving sustainable development that leaves no one behind. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “seek to realize the human rights of all”, and more than 90% of the targets directly reflect elements of international human rights and labour standards. The pledge to “leave no one behind” mirrors the fundamental human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality (The Danish Institute for Human Rights 2017).

The European Sustainable Development Network’s (ESDN) Workshop was entitled “SDGs and Human Rights”. It took place online on 23 November 2022. This ESDN event was organised by the ESDN in cooperation with the Luxembourgish Ministries of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development and for Foreign and European Affairs. The Workshop was a 1-day event that brought together policymakers and experts from different stakeholder groups from all over Europe to learn, exchange, and share their experiences.

The Workshop focused on specific topics relating to the SDGs and Human Rights. The topics and discussions included three panels: one on SDG 5’s Impact on Human Rights of Women and Girls, one on Human Rights Defenders, and one on Financing and Governance for Human Rights and the SDGs. In addition to the keynote speakers’ presentations, there was time for questions, productive discussions and sharing experiences.

The Conference saw keynote presentations from the European level and national level, as well as inputs from Youth Representatives, who presented what they had previously discussed at the ESDN Youth Workshop in September 2022 in Berlin.

This policy brief contains the main messages and recommendation, which came out of the Workshop work.

Recommendations on SDGs and Human Rights

- 1) Link the SDGs and Human Rights better
- 2) Change power imbalances – Gender, Women and Girls
- 3) Empower Human Rights Defenders
- 4) Protect Environmental Defenders better
- 5) Human Rights and Forced Migration due to Climate Change – to add
- 6) Promote a human rights-based approach to climate finance

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is a non-profit, pan-European peer-learning, networking, knowledge, and advocacy platform for sustainability professionals in the public sector working in collaboration with other organisations and institutions dealing with sustainable development issues. It is based on the transparent and trustful cooperation of these actors. It collects, compiles and shares information on sustainability policies, strategies and practises, and provides expertise to political decision-makers at European, national and sub-national levels. The ESDN also fosters sustainable development through active communication and continued cooperation with other stakeholders and civil society.

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1) Link the SDGs and Human Rights better

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) "seek to realize the human rights of all", and more than 90% of the targets directly reflect elements of international human rights and labour standards. To better link the work on human rights and the SDGs, it is practical to use specific tools, such as the one developed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights. This [tool](#) helps incorporate the SDGs in their human rights reporting, choose the right indicators for the SDG targets, and influence national-level implementation strategies and follow-up and review processes.

2) Change power imbalances - Gender, Women and Girls

Gender equality is a fundamental human right. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is crucial to achieve the SDGs. There has been progress over the last decades, but still, there are targets to reach:

- Women must be considered essential actors of change, and future-oriented solutions should be designed with a strong representation of women. Their representation is crucial on economic, social, and political levels, and this is a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.
- Women's rights in Europe: domestic violence is still present, and Europe must combat violence against women. Women facing home violence need structures that can host them and their children in difficult situations. Unfortunately, there is a lack of those, even in the EU, because

there is generally a lack of funds and structures to welcome vulnerable people and shelter them in decent conditions. Special funding should be established for these purposes.

- LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) women are not well presented in SDG 5. Their interests should be addressed more clearly.
- At this moment, it is also crucial to support women in Ukraine. Violence and related human rights abuses against women in Ukraine are prominent and European support is needed.

3) Empower Human Rights Defenders

Being a human rights defender is dangerous in many parts of the world. Most human rights defenders are not empowered enough to do their work. They are not protected. This creates the risk that they - when they receive threats - cannot continue their work out of fear of being arrested if they continue. There are a few actions, which can be done by Europe to help human rights defenders in other countries. It is essential to keep the visibility of human rights defenders by ensuring access to media and expressing public support for human rights defenders. Also, Europe can influence these countries by introducing sanctions both on political and economic levels.

4) Protect Environmental Defenders better

More and more ordinary people are finding themselves on the frontline protecting their local communities' land. They have to defend their environmental rights from violations by corporate or state actors and unsustainable exploitation. In

July 2017, statistics released by Global Witness revealed that, on average, three environmental defenders are being killed per week. Environmental defenders play a crucial role, and this role is becoming more important as climate crises is intensifying. Those who fight need to be protected.

The Aarhus Convention's rapid response mechanism was introduced for the Better Protection of Environmental Defenders. This is the first such mechanism specifically safeguarding environmental defenders to be established within a legally binding framework. It is a powerful tool through which any member of public or private structures can submit complaint. The rapid response mechanism allows to issue immediate protection measures to prevent the harassment and persecution of environmental defenders.

5) Address the challenges of Human Rights and Forced Migration due to Climate Change

The states should take responsibilities on human mobility challenges created by climate change. The legislation, policies and negotiations should take into account the human rights law obligations. To meet their obligations, states should facilitate migration with dignity and address the specific human rights protection needs of migrants. This includes the provision of food and clean water; access to adequate housing, health care and social security, education, and decent work opportunities ([UNHCR](#) 2022).

6) Promote a human rights-based approach to climate finance

A human rights-based approach to climate finance will help countries to avoid or minimize the human rights impacts of mitigation and adaptation measures, and promote sustainable and equitable low-carbon development. It is essential that climate finance mechanisms establish institutional systems that effectively prevent social and environmental harm, promote sustainable development, and maximise participation, transparency, accountability, equity, and rights protections. In support of this process, the [LuxFLAG Climate Finance Label](#) was launched in September 2016. It helps to unlock capital from institutional and private investors in order to support the financing of climate change actions.

More information on the Workshop and additional materials are available [here](#).

Ivanova, Svetlana; Kopp, Ursula (2022). "SDGs and Human rights", ESDN Policy Brief, Dec 2022, ESDN Office, WU Vienna