



ESDN REPORT

SDGS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

WORKSHOP REPORT 2022

ESDN Office

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Introduction

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 Workshop 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.

There was a great mix of participants and speakers from outside of Europe (Thailand, for example), as well as a lot of engagement with the participants in the chat function, which allowed for deeper discussions. The Workshop had 82 registered participants from 20 countries

This Workshop Report seeks to capture the main ideas of presentations and discussions from the workshop day. Many keynote presenters made use of PowerPoint presentations, which have been converted to PDFs and uploaded on the ESDN website and can be found [here](#) under keynote presentations. Keynoters who did not make use of PowerPoints in their presentations are summarized more in depth in this Report. Those with PowerPoint presentations are marked.

The Report is structured into several sections that reflect the opening and welcomes, the sessions and the closings of the Workshop.

The key messages – Executive summary

The Workshop was dedicated to human rights and the SDGs, focusing on the rights of women and girls, human rights defenders and financing for human rights. The main messages discussed during the workshop include:

- To better link the work on human rights and the SDGs, it is practical to use specific tools, such as the one developed and presented at the Workshop 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.
- 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. The Workshop took special

- attention on the fact that 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.
- 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.

- The Aarhus Convention's rapid response mechanism was introduced during the Workshop. This mechanism was developed 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.
- 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](#)).
- 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.

WELCOME AND OPENING

ESDN Workshop 2022 Opening by ESDN President

Daniel Dubas, ESDN President & Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda, Federal Office for Spatial Development, Switzerland, opened the Workshop, presenting the Agenda and the format of the discussions.

Marc Bichler, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg at the UN, Switzerland, underlined the importance of the topics of SDGs and human rights and noted which specific angles of this topic will be taken during the Workshop.

André Weidenhaupt, Director General, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, Luxembourg presented the integration of human rights into the work of the Ministry. He recalled the Resolution of October 8, 2021 by Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly. He specified several aspects which are priority now and that is why the workshop is dedicated to following aspects: gender, HR defenders and finance. He also underlined the fundamental rights to life, development, water, cultural rights, environmental rights.

PANEL 1

SDG 5'S IMPACT ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

SDGs and Human Rights Tool

Micah Grzywnowicz, Senior Adviser, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, Danish Institute for Human Rights, Denmark shared the tools to show connections between SDGs and Human Rights, which is a "[Human Rights guide to the SDGs](#)". This tool uses information from 67 human rights monitoring mechanisms. The user can filter information on different criteria, different types of rights or different SDGs. It can also be filtered by country. This tool shows all the recommendations which were given to the country previously. "Human rights guide to the SDGs" tool is regularly updated automatically with a use of new data. Based on this tool the Danish Institute for Human Rights also developed the [Human Rights Data Explorer](#).

Gender, Women and Girls

Anne Goedert, Ambassador at large for Human Rights, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Luxembourg, reminded of the slogan in „leave no one behind“. She said that in developing countries the situation with women rights is very difficult. For example, there are a lot of women rights violations in Bangladesh, specifically for rural women without access to finance, where early marriages are still very common.

Anne stated that 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:

- o 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.

o 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 to shelter them in decent conditions. Special funding should be established for these purposes.

Workshop participants added in the discussion with the panelists:

o One of the workshop's participants noted that LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) women are not well represented in SDG 5. Their interests should be addressed more clearly.

o Another participant also highlighted that 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.

PANEL 2

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Empowering human rights

Debbie Stothard, Founder, Alternative ASEAN Network in Burma, Thailand, underlined the names of HR defenders being imprisoned recently. Debbie also enlightened the situation with human rights defenders in Thailand. She talked about the enormous fake news market in Thailand, while there is mass surveillance. She said about the abuse of labour rights and HR defenders who now work in Birma. There were around 16 000 attacks on civilians last year. These numbers are higher than in Syria, only in Ukraine is more. HR defenders are routinely tortured.

Human Rights and the Environment

Sor.Rattanamanee Polkla, Executive Coordinator, Community Resource Centre Foundation, Thailand, underlined the risks taken by those who try to protect the environment. She told that whenever a community tries to protect their land, they face enormous risk. For example, in order to silence and intimidate human rights defenders it is very common to use the judicial system.

Judicial harassment can include criminal charges, civil lawsuits or administrative proceedings.

Judicial harassment is a problem even for states. Most international investment treaties and free-trade deals grant foreign investors the right to demand damages (often huge), known as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), if they want to challenge government decisions affecting their investments. This is an obstacle to support SDGs and HR. It is a challenge to tackle this problem and regain full state sovereignty.

The Aarhus Convention's rapid response mechanism

Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention, France, emphasized a growing role of environmental defenders. 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.

PANEL 3

FINANCING AND GOVERNANCE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE SDGS

Climate Financing and Governance for Human Rights

Isabelle Delas, CEO of LuxFlag, Luxembourg, explained climate financing for human rights. She presented LuxFLAG Climate Finance Label. Launched in September 2016, the LuxFLAG Climate Finance Label helps unlock capital from institutional and private investors to support the financing of climate change actions. She explained how this Label encourages a human rights-based approach.

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.

Governance for Human Rights and the SDGs

Cherryl Dentzer, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, Luxembourg, gave the insights into the governance set up in relation to the SDGs in Luxembourg and shared her expertise on Luxembourg's International Climate Finance Strategy. She underlined how the strategy seeks to strengthen a human rights-based approach and gender responsiveness in climate finance.

Closing of the ESDN Workshop 2022

Marguy Kohlen, ESDN Vice President, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, Luxembourg, made a wrap-up of the Workshop and listed some lessons learned.

Daniel Dubas, ESDN President and Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda, Federal Office for Spatial Development, Switzerland, closed the Workshop and announced ESDN news and plans for 2023.



ESDN

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.