

STRIKING OUT INTO THE 2020s: achieving the SDGs together

Guidelines for the work of SDSN Germany¹

1 Who we are

Since 2014, leading German **knowledge centres and partners from civil society and the private sector** have been working together in the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Germany (SDSN Germany) to promote sustainable development in the country and encourage Germany's commitment to sustainable development in the European Union (EU) and around the world. SDSN Germany and its members are part of the global SDSN, which was founded in 2012 under the auspices **of the Secretary-General of the United Nations** to mobilise academic, scientific and technological expertise to foster sustainable development, specifically to achieve the goals of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** (Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs) and the **Paris Climate Agreement**. The members of SDSN Germany serve this mission through their own activities as well as their cooperation with one another and with the network's partners. Going beyond traditional settings, SDSN Germany creates new forums for dialogue and cooperation between the political sphere, the academic and scientific community, the private sector and civil society, thus bringing various actors involved in sustainable development together in a constructive spirit. SDSN Germany, its members and its partners are actively involved in the institutional architecture for further developing and implementing Germany's National Sustainable Development Strategy, thus combining academic and scientific debates with day-to-day governance and implementation.

2 What matters now

The **2030 Agenda**, which was adopted by all the world's heads of state and government at a United Nations (UN) summit, and the **Paris Climate Agreement**, which was signed in the same year, have succeeded in generating some **quite remarkable momentum** both in Germany and across the world in the first four years of their implementation. This is reflected, for instance, in the large number of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) brought to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the many countries that were quick to ratify the climate agreement and the almost complete set of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that have now been submitted. In Germany, the federal government has seized on this momentum and has completely overhauled its **National Sustainable Development Strategy**, aligning it uniformly with the SDGs. With regard to **climate action**, additional measures have been agreed such as a Climate Change Act and the **phase-out of fossil fuels** by 2038 at the latest. More and more **companies** as well as **actors in the financial sector** see the responsibility and opportunity that come from sustainable development. **Social movements** such as Fridays for Future are reflecting an increased awareness of the situation and people's calls for a radical transformation. At the same time, one is forced to draw the **sobering**

¹The guidelines were adopted by the Leadership Council on 10 October 2019 and build on SDSN Germany's "[founding charter](#)" of 2014.

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conclusion that well thought-out, far-reaching strategies for sustainable development have only just begun to emerge even in free, democratic and caring societies. The world is **a long way from being on track with the SDGs and the climate**, and that includes Germany and Europe. Progress towards achieving the self-set goals is even going backwards in key fields. The sustainability movement has not done enough to propel itself beyond its own structures and processes to penetrate core areas of policy-making and economic governance effectively. The internal reciprocal relationship between individual SDGs, including the climate targets embedded in them, is not being considered or communicated sufficiently frequently. At the same time, the widespread rise of populism and nationalism, geopolitical tensions and a crisis in multilateralism are generating socio-political and international headwinds. Against this backdrop, although the unwavering determination of the heads of state and government to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and embark on a **decade of action and delivery** was reaffirmed in **September 2019** at the first **UN SDG Summit** to check on progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, the summit itself was unable to demonstrate the necessary extra momentum. In their **“Call for Accelerated Action”**, the heads of state and government highlight ten areas where more needs to be done more quickly. This includes proactively integrating the 2030 Agenda into national planning instruments, policies, strategies and financial frameworks and making use of science, technology and innovation for sustainable development with a stronger focus on digital transformation. Governments, the public sector and civil society now need to address this issue with a sense of urgency and in new ways.

Germany and the EU are also now required to respond to this clarion call both energetically and judiciously and to make **achieving the SDGs and the climate targets** much more of a **central reference point** of their policies at home, in Europe and worldwide. **Germany’s National Sustainable Development Strategy**, which is to be revised to cover 2020 to 2024, has to become a relevant **driver of transformation** in all policy areas that delivers effective results. And the same goes for the Climate Change Act and the phase-out of fossil fuels. The European Commission needs to refresh the commitment of each of its members and itself as a body to achieving the SDGs by adopting a **comprehensive European strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda**. It must also align its legislative work with the SDGs and harness the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework as an instrument for the 2030 Agenda in the EU. Otherwise, neither Germany nor the EU will manage to work through a backlog, which in some areas is now precariously extensive, and achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Multilateralism and international cooperation need to be strengthened once again across the world, something for which the summit celebrating the UN’s 75th anniversary offers a further opportunity. With its **EU Presidency in the second half of 2020**, its next **VNR for the HLPF 2021** and its **G7 Presidency in 2022**, **Germany** also has the major responsibility and opportunity to exert significant influence on implementing sustainable development, particularly within the EU and G7 countries themselves but also in their relations with one another and with the rest of the world. All in all, **the not quite four years before the next UN**

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summit to evaluate progress with the 2030 Agenda (in 2023) must be **put determinedly to use** so that an optimistic mid-term review can be produced at that point.

3 How we work

Together with its members and partners, SDSN Germany will be **generating momentum, especially in selected strategic areas** requiring much closer alignment with the SDGs and climate targets. These include financial and economic policy (e.g. budgetary policy, sustainable finance, industrial policy), research and technology policy (e.g. digitalisation, biotechnology) and foreign and security policy, but also efforts to embed the 2030 Agenda in the work of political parties as well as societal and business associations. With their diverse profiles and priority areas, the **member and partner organisations** of SDSN Germany make invaluable contributions of their own towards this objective and feed them into **SDSN Germany's cooperation and dialogue forums**. Focused research and advisory processes instigated by SDSN members and partners ensure that the issue of sustainable development plays a more prominent role in German politics, the private sector and civil society. As a network, SDSN Germany focuses particularly on promoting **knowledge-based cooperation between members and partners** and provides dialogue forums at the **science-policy interface**, which brings **"sustainability pioneers"** together with other actors from politics, the private sector and civil society, and reinforces the **links between international, European and German debates**. In order to drive forward **organisational and institutional implementation itself**, however, SDSN Germany also intends to fully embrace the principles of sustainable development in its own network activities.

As a member of the Federal Chancellery's **Sustainability Forum** and the **Dialogue Group of the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development** and as one of the three organising institutions for the **Science Platform Sustainability 2030**, SDSN Germany forms an integral part of the structures and processes of German sustainability politics and will be stepping up its efforts to integrate results from its cooperation and dialogue forums into these formats.

The inter- and transdisciplinary **SDSN cooperation projects**, each of which is being implemented by one or more member or partner organisations within SDSN's German or international framework, are to be expanded further over the next few years and given a more prominent role in the German and European debate on sustainability. Examples to date include projects such as the "Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project" (DDPP), "The World in 2050" (TWI2050), "The Food, Agriculture, Biodiversity, Land-Use, and Energy (FABLE) Consortium", and the "Sustainable Development Reports" with SDG index and dashboards. In Bonn, the Innovation Campus Bonn (ICB) is being established by the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research, a partnership between German SDSN members based there. This new global research centre aims to pool the top-level expertise in sustainability research available at the German UN- and sustainability-hub. SDSN Germany is also committed to expanding cooperation between existing academic, scientific, knowledge-based and university-level sustainability networks, thus making it more effective. To this end too, SDSN Germany

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regularly serves as a **partner and co-organiser** of conferences, workshops and expert panels, both within and outside the network, thus increasing the visibility and impact of the network, its members and its partners.

The **network's dialogue forums** are one of the features that characterise SDSN Germany. With their cross-cutting settings, it is hoped that they will make an even greater contribution in the future to bringing leading figures from different fields of academia, science, the private sector, civil society and politics together for dialogue and to developing new initiatives and solutions for the SDGs and climate action beyond traditional "silos", including in the context of contemporary issues such as digitalisation and populism. SDSN Germany is helping to expand the use of scientific policy advice for sustainable development matters through the **Advisory Councils' Dialogue**, which it set up in 2018 together with the **Science Platform Sustainability 2030**. The Advisory Board Dialogue brings together representatives of leading scientific advisory boards of the federal government from various policy areas to provide coordinated advice on challenges facing political decision-makers and place them in the context of Germany's National Sustainable Development Strategy and the global 2030 Agenda. **SDSN Germany's Extended Steering Committee**, which meets twice a year and which also counts federal ministries and government advisory boards amongst its members, has evolved into an attractive dialogue forum for consulting on current and upcoming challenges across policy fields and with a strategic perspective. The annual German SDSN Assembly gives all the network's members and partners an opportunity to exchange ideas and develop new partnerships. However, it also serves as a space for public debate.

During the 2017 German general elections to the Bundestag and the 2019 European elections, SDSN Germany engaged **political parties, political foundations** and **special-interest groups** in dialogue to push for the 2030 Agenda and climate action to play a more central role in their programmes and manifestos. This work will continue, both between and before future elections.

Building on its early **prioritising of European policy**, SDSN Germany and its SDSN partners across Europe will keep on campaigning for an effective European strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda that reflects Europe's unique access to the SDGs, visibly strengthens the European contribution and encourages greater ambition in Germany. This objective is also to be served by the **cooperation** between the **European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP)** and **SDSN**, which now needs to be filled with life also at the member states level, Germany included. SDSN Germany will give its cooperation and dialogue forums in Germany an increasingly European focus and will call for Germany's European policy to not restrict its vehement campaigning for achieving the SDGs just to Germany's EU Presidency in the second half of 2020.

SDSN Germany contributes German perspectives to the **international debate** by having members sitting on the Leadership Council of the global SDSN, being involved in international SDSN cooperation projects and participating in the International Conference on Sustainable Development co-organised by SDSN. The contribution of SDSN Germany and its members to

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the UN's Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and the G20's Think20 (T20) process is to be made more visible in the HLPF, but also tied in with German and European debates. In the context of Germany's G7 Presidency in 2022 and beyond, SDSN Germany is advocating that the Think Tank 7 (T7) process addresses the 2030 Agenda as a transformation mission, including with regard to the relations between the individual G7 countries.

4 What guides us

SDSN Germany bases its work on a **comprehensive understanding of sustainable development** that takes equal account of the economic, social, environmental, political, technological, cultural and gender aspects of social transformation processes. Rather than being primarily technical in nature, therefore, **sustainable development** is a **profoundly socio-political project**. The inadequate progress that has been made towards achieving the SDGs is not, or not primarily, due to a lack of knowledge or technical solutions as a rule. Instead, shortcomings in social and political consensus-building and implementation are to blame. **Science in the service of the 2030 Agenda** therefore needs to redouble its efforts to tackle these shortcomings and communicate directly with civil society, including outside the corridors of state and at the local level. This will allow science and education for sustainable development to address social questions, problems and experiences and devise implementation strategies together with diverse representatives of society. That requires a lot: empathy, the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes (one of the Kantian maxims of *Gemeinsinn*) and a language that is as widely accessible as possible. But interests, power relationships and resistances must also be recognised. SDSN Germany intends to be open in dealing with these complexities and offer a space for dialogue between politics, the private sector and civil society that is as "neutral" as it is dynamic.



Members

- [Adelphi Research](#)
- [Bertelsmann Stiftung](#)
- [Bonn International Center for Conversion \(bicc\)](#)
- [Deutsche KlimaStiftung](#)
- [German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik \(DIE\)](#)
- [German Institute for Economic Research \(DIW Berlin\)](#)
- [Deutsches Netzwerk Wirtschaftsethik \(DNWE\)](#)
- [Germanwatch](#)
- [Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences – International Centre for Sustainable Development \(IZNE\)](#)
- [HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform](#)
- [Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies \(IASS\)](#)
- [Kiel Cluster of Excellence “The Future Ocean”](#)
- [Center for a Sustainable University \(KNU\) at Universität Hamburg](#)
- [Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change \(MCC\)](#)
- [Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research \(PIK\)](#)
- [Reiner Lemoine Institute](#)
- [German Institute for International and Security Affairs \(SWP\)](#)
- [University of Göttingen – Department of Development Economics](#)
- [Universität Hamburg, Center for a Sustainable University](#)
- [University of Stuttgart – Institute of Urban Planning and Design](#)
- [Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy](#)
- [Center for Development Research, University of Bonn \(ZEF\)](#)

Partners

- [United Nations Association of Germany \(DGVN\)](#)
- [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\)](#)
- [German Commission for UNESCO \(DUK\)](#)
- [German League for Nature and Environment \(DNR\)](#)
- [German Committee Future Earth \(DKN-Future Earth\)](#)
- [econsense – Forum for Sustainable Development of German Business](#)
- [Engagement Global](#)
- [Heinrich Böll Foundation](#)
- [ICC Germany – International Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Sustainability at Higher Education Institutions: develop – network – report \(HOCH-N\)](#)
- [Foundation 2° – German Businesses for Climate Protection](#)
- [German Environment Agency](#)
- [Verband für Entwicklungspolitik und Humanitäre Hilfe \(VENRO\)](#)
- [Federation of German Consumer Organisations \(vzbv\)](#)
- [Verbraucherzentrale NRW](#)

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