



Halfway to 2030 – Getting back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

What is the UN SDG Summit 2023?

By Leanne Digney | August 2023

In September 2015, the Member States of the United Nations (UN) came together and agreed to adopt a groundbreaking universal action plan to support global cooperation on sustainable development for the period 2015 to 2030, entitled, “*Transforming the World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”¹

This action plan was facilitated by Ireland’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, Ambassador David Donoghue, and his Kenyan counterpart, Ambassador Machiara Kamau. Both were appointed by the President of the UN General Assembly in 2014 to lead negotiations between world governments in agreeing this new set of Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) to follow the Millennium Development Goals, which were due to expire at the end of 2015. The SDGs were created through the largest ever participatory process undertaken through the auspices of the UN, with approximately 10 million people from different parts of the globe involved in the consultation process.²

With the stated aim of ‘leaving no one behind’,³ the 2030 Agenda has defined 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets to address environmental degradation and climate change; to eradicate poverty; and to build a more peaceful, equal, and sustainable world.⁴

Where are we now?

Despite marginal progress toward achieving some goals, such as SDG 3 (ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages),⁵ the latest SDG Progress Chart shows that efforts to achieve most targets have faced substantial setbacks.⁶

In 2023, the world is enduring the greatest number of conflicts since the creation of the UN in 1945. This proliferation of conflict, as well as other crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of climate change, are but some of the factors that have contributed to the derailing of progress on the SDGs. UN data suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic alone erased four years of progress on SDG 1 (to end poverty in all its forms everywhere).⁷

According to the 2023 Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report, a preliminary assessment of the approximately 140 targets with data, shows that only about 12% of those 140 targets are on track; close to half, are moderately or severely off track; and about 30% have either seen no movement or have regressed below the 2015 baseline.⁸

Moreover, with the gap between high and low-income countries’ ability to meet their SDG targets expected to widen, regional disparities are becoming more pronounced. There is a clear need to reinvigorate global consensus in order to get the SDG agenda back on track.

1. [Agenda for Sustainable Development web.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

2. <https://undp.medium.com/5-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-380405b44e3c>

3. <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>

4. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

5. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>

6. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/Progress-Chart-2022.pdf>

7. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

8. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

The Halfway Point

2023 marks the midpoint of the SDG implementation timeline envisioned in 2015. To mark this new phase of the 2030 Agenda, the UN is convening the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the auspices of the General Assembly 2023 - the SDG Summit (“the Summit”), which will take place on 18-19 September 2023 in New York. The Summit seeks to provide a platform for high-level political guidance on transformative and accelerated actions leading up to 2030. The Summit is set to be the highlight of the High-Level Week of the UN General Assembly.

In advance of the Summit, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has urged world leaders to deliver a Rescue Plan for People and Planet⁹ through deliverables in three key areas. First, he has appealed to member states to massively scale up financing and other measures, such as debt relief, as an act of commitment to the SDGs. Second, he called for countries to convey a ‘National Commitment to SDG Transformation’,¹⁰ which could include clear benchmarks to reduce domestic poverty and inequality levels by 2027 and 2030, in tandem with nationally determined climate contributions. Third, all countries have been urged to include civil society and the private sector in their Summit preparations.¹¹ As such, the Summit will be a critical moment for member states to look forward and renew their commitment to the SDGs.

The Political Declaration

The main outcome of the SDG Summit will be the adoption of an action-oriented Political Declaration. Ireland is once again playing a leading role in championing the SDGs, as Ireland’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Fergal Mythen, alongside his Qatari counterpart, Ambassador Alya Ahmed Saif al-Thani, were appointed by the President of the UN General Assembly as co-facilitators of the negotiations on the Political Declaration.¹²

The co-facilitators are responsible for ensuring that all relevant stakeholders participate and engage meaningfully in the negotiation process. The first informal consultations on the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit were convened by the co-facilitators on 3 February 2023. On 8 May 2023, the co-facilitators then circulated a [zero draft](#) of the Political Declaration, based on inputs from delegations during negotiations.¹³

The zero draft contains sections on: Member States’ shared resolve; progress and remaining gaps; and a call to action to get back on track for 2030. The document also outlines transformative actions for the SDGs, particularly relating to gender equality, inclusive and equitable quality education, expanding digitalisation, the transition to sustainable food systems, renewable and clean energy, and reducing disaster risk and building resilience.¹⁴

9. [UN Secretary-General’s Report Outlines Rescue Plan for People and Planet | News | SDG Knowledge Hub | IISD](#)

10. [National Transformation Commitments | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)

11. <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition.pdf>

12. [Letter from the President of the General Assembly – SDG Follow-up and Review – Appointments of Co-facs | General Assembly of the United Nations](#)

13. [Zero-Final-SDG-PD-8-May-2023.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

14. <https://www.un.org/pga/77/wp-content/uploads/sites/105/2023/05/Zero-Final-SDG-PD-8-May-2023.pdf>

The Summit is set to be a critical moment for Member States to renew their commitment to the SDGs, and the envisaged adoption of the Political Declaration in September 2023 should mark the beginning of a new phase of accelerated progress towards achieving them.

What Next?

In the UN Secretary-General’s 2021 roadmap for his second term in office, entitled “*Our Common Agenda*,”¹⁵ António Guterres set out his vision for the future of global cooperation and proposed that a Summit of the Future should take place. The purpose of this Summit will be to forge a new global consensus on how the future should look and set out the steps to secure it. The Summit will take place in September 2024 with consultations and preparation already beginning in 2023.

The 2023 SDG Summit is expected to lay the foundations for the envisaged Summit of the Future and will endeavour to breathe new life into the multilateral system so that it can deliver on the fundamental commitments of the United Nations Charter and the ambitious goals set by the 2030 Agenda.

15. https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf

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