

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 8

**DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC
GROWTH**

Teacher's Manual

**8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH**



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1 Introduction to the SDGs

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to:

- provide the link between the SDGs and the MDGs
- explain the origin and overall aim of the SDGs
- name and briefly discuss the five priority areas of the SDGs
- position SDG 8 within the framework of Agenda 2030

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the central component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed by the United Nations (UN) in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda consists of a set of 17 interlinked goals (United Nations, 2015), with associated targets and indicators, which are to be achieved by 2030.

The 2030 Agenda was developed as an action plan with the purpose of boosting the development of humanity in five priority areas: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships, as well as continuing the progress made with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in force during the years 2000 to 2015. The MDGs consisted of eight international development goals and were supported with 21 individual targets. Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs have a more comprehensive scope, rely more on collective action and are more detailed, with the message very clear that success will depend on the active support and participation of every nation (Feeny, 2020).

The SDGs provide a framework within which global approaches can be planned and implemented to secure a fair, healthy and prosperous future for the current and future generations (Morton et al., 2017). A key element is that all the SDGs are closely interconnected, and that failure to take this into account will lead to a highly ineffective way to address the sustainability dilemma the world is facing (Van Soest et al., 2019). According to Van Soest et al. (2019), key interactions exist across all areas of critical importance for the SDGs but lie especially within the area of “people”, as well as between the areas of “people” and “prosperity”, and between the areas of “people” and “planet”.

Figure 1 presents the set of 17 SDGs proposed by the 2030 Agenda.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Figure 1 – The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Source: United Nations, Communication Material (n.d.)

The aim of this module is to present an introduction to SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth” covering its definition, the impact of global crises on the achievement of its targets, the regional contexts, progress towards SDG 8, case studies with good practices and examples of exercises that can be applied with students.

SDG 8 is included in the “Prosperity” dimension of the 2030 Agenda and concerns the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Global Goals, 2022).

Supplementary resources

- Allen, C., Metternicht, G. & Wiedmann, T. 2018. Initial progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A review of evidence from countries. *Sustainability Science*, 13(5), 1453–1467.
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<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2022/07/sdgs-report/>. Last accessed November 2022.

- Díaz-López, C., Martín-Blanco, C., De la Torre Bayo, J.J., Rubio-Rivera, B. & Zamorano, M. 2021. Analyzing the Scientific Evolution of the Sustainable Development Goals. *Applied Sciences*, 11(18), 8286.

Examples of questions for assessment

1. Introduction to the SDGs

- Name the five areas of critical importance to which the 17 SDGs are linked and explain why they are referred to as the five Ps.
- Explain the link between the MDGs and the SDGs.
- Explain how the SDGs differ from the MDGs.

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Van Soest, H.L., Van Vuuren, D.P., Hilaire, J., Minx, J.C., Harmsen, M.J., Krey, V., Popp, A., Riahi, K. & Luderer, G. 2019. Analysing interactions among sustainable development goals with integrated assessment models. *Global Transitions*, 1, 210–225.

2. Defining SDG 8

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to:

- define SDG 8 and list its targets and indicators
- explain the significance of SDG with reference to its three main thematic areas
- list and explain five advantages of SDG 8
- reflect on the interdependencies between SDG 8 and the other SDGs
- comprehend the implications of the interdependencies between SDG 8 and the other SDGs
- understand the challenges involved to achieve SDG 8 and discuss examples of actions to address these challenges

Sustainable Development Goal 8 calls for action to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.” (United Nations, n.d.). It has ten suggested global outcome targets and two additional targets referred to as means of implementation, each one accompanied by one or more indicators to monitor progress over time, as presented in Table 1. The targets cover topics such as economic productivity, resource efficiency, employment and protection of labour rights.

Table 1 – Targets and indicators for SDG 8

Targets	Indicators
8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7% gross domestic product (GDP) growth per annum in the least-developed countries;	8.1.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita
8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors;	8.2.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person
8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services;	8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex

Targets	Indicators
8.4 Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead;	8.4.1 Material footprint, material footprint per capita and material footprint per GDP 8.4.2 Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP
8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of female and male employees by occupation, age and persons with disabilities 8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training	8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training
8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms	8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age
8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants and those in precarious employment	8.8.1 Fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries per 100 000 workers, by sex and migrant status 8.8.2 Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status
8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products	8.9.1 Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate
8.10 Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all	8.10.1 (a) Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults and (b) number of automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults 8.10.2 Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider
8.a Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries	8.a.1 Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements
8.b By 2020, develop and operationalise a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization	8.b.1 Existence of a developed and operationalised national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy

Source: United Nations (n.d.)

2.1 Significance of SDG 8

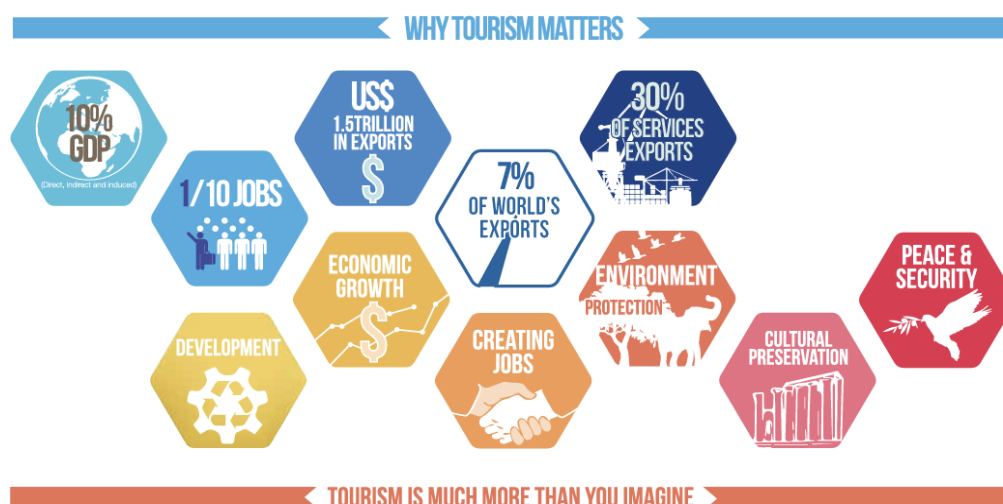
SDG 8 holds significant importance in the global development agenda due to several reasons. SDG 8 promotes economic development, job creation and sustainable practices.

By addressing the challenges and promoting inclusive growth, it contributes to poverty reduction, social inclusion and the overall well-being of individuals and societies.

SDG 8 is based on a green economy. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2023), “a green economy is defined as a system that enhances human well-being and social equity, while simultaneously reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”. Essentially, a green economy is characterised by its low carbon emissions, efficient resource utilisation and inclusive social practices.

SDG 8 has a special focus on promotion of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Tourism is one of the world’s fastest-growing industries and an important source of foreign exchange and employment, while being closely linked to the social, economic and environmental well-being of many countries, especially developing countries. Figure 2 highlights the importance of tourism in the economy.

Figure 2 – Sustainable tourism and its contribution to economic growth



Source: UNWTO (2023)

Besides this, there is an important focus on decent work, which includes opportunities for productive and fair employment, safe working conditions, social protection and equal pay for work of equal value. SDG 8 also addresses the issue of youth unemployment, aiming to promote policies and initiatives that facilitate the transition of young people into the labour market, ensuring that they have access to quality education, skills development

and employment opportunities. Still, this SDG looks for gender equality. According to OECD (2023), despite progress over generations, women still fare worse than men in labour markets. Figure 3 shows the gender wage gap.

Figure 3 – Gender wage gap – difference between the median full-time earnings of men and women, relative to the median full-time earnings of men



Source: OECD data indicator Gender wage gap

Table 2 – Significance of SDG 8

Green economy	Sustainable tourism	Employment, decent work for all and social protection
<p>According to current trends, the global per capita use of natural resources will increase by 70% by 2050.</p> <p>Green economy is based on low-carbon development and low carbon growth, which focuses specifically on investments that reduce carbon emissions. It also includes other aspects such as resource efficiency, waste reduction and the contribution of natural capital (nature and ecosystems) to economic development, well-being and inclusiveness.</p>	<p>Tourism that considers its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.</p> <p>In other words, it is tourism that respects local cultures, protects the environment and distributes its benefits equitably among communities.</p> <p>Sustainable tourism can be seen as a driver of economic growth and job creation, particularly in developing countries.</p> <p>2020 showed the relevance of tourism for sustainable development.</p>	<p>This Goal advocates for decent work, employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue.</p> <p>Globally, labour productivity has increased and unemployment is back to pre-financial crisis levels, 58% of those employed were in informal employment in 2022, amounting to around 2 billion workers in precarious jobs, most lacking any form of social protection. The median gender pay gap across 102 countries is approximately 14%. Globally, nearly one in four (23.5%) young people were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2022. One in ten of all children are in child labour worldwide,</p>

	2021 laid the foundations for the transformation of the sector.	totalling 160 million at the beginning of 2020.
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Prepared by the authors based on UNWTO (2023), UN (2018)

2.2 Interdependencies of SDG 8

This section aims to present the way in which the connection among the 17 SDGs can be perceived and how the 2030 Agenda comprises a set of goals that can be mutually achieved, when the targets in one SDG can contribute to the progress of the entire Agenda, or at least to a significant part of it. Nonetheless, before presenting the interdependencies between the SDGs, it is important to highlight some aspects about their synergies. Breuer et al. (2019) highlight that depending on the conditions of each context, the achievement of the SDGs targets can take more time and the result of the synergies between SDG targets may occur over the medium or long term and not immediately. The example given by the authors considers investments in quality education (SDG 4), which may not bring immediate results for SDG 8, but in the long term, would have a positive impact on job opportunities and economic growth (Breuer et al., 2019).

As presented in the previous sections, SDG 8 has a direct or indirect impact on a series of other goals, in addition to having strong synergies among its own targets. The main connections are presented in the summary below:

Table 3 – Interdependencies between SDG 8 and the other SDGs

	<p>The opportunity for decent and dignified jobs makes a fundamental contribution to reducing poverty through the opportunity to generate income and improve living conditions.</p>
	<p>Agriculture is the primary sector of the economy and good results in this sector have a favourable impact on all other sectors that depend on it. In addition, for many families agriculture is a profession and source of income.</p>



While a healthy population works better and contributes to the economic development of a nation, decent work with good health and safety conditions, better benefits and social protection result in **greater well-being for workers**.



The access to decent and better job opportunities often depends on some level of education. Quality education can guarantee **better job opportunities**.



Ensuring that women and men can work in the same roles and positions is critical to promoting gender equality, and decent employment is a significant factor in **empowering women and girls**.



The improvement of infrastructure in the water and basic sanitation sector involves the **creation of jobs in the area** and, at the same time, better water infrastructure enables **economic growth**.



The creation of green jobs, especially in the renewable and energy-efficient technology sectors is an opportunity for **sustainable economic growth**.



Developing industries and infrastructure requires a **workforce** and thus increases job creation while investments in innovation can also **improve working conditions**.



Reducing inequalities can be leveraged by promoting **economic inclusion**, especially through decent work.



The development of quality urban infrastructure involves public transport, energy and sanitation, among others, which drive the **creation of jobs and leverage the economy sector**.



The promotion of sustainable patterns of production and consumption is also concerned with **decent working conditions**, in addition, it encourages the **circular economy** and guarantees sustainable economic growth.



The creation of green jobs and its positive impact on the economy is one of the most significant factors contributing to driving the **transition to a low-carbon economy**.



Conservation of marine ecosystems includes fostering sustainable activities such as sustainable tourism and sustainable fisheries that can **support sustainable economic growth**.



Sustainable management of natural resources can generate job opportunities such as ecotourism and thus drives **sustainable economic growth**.



Effective and transparent institutions are key to creating an **enabling environment for investment**, job creation and economic development.



Cooperation between different sectors and actors is key to driving **economic and social development in a sustainable way**.

Source: United Nations (n.d.)

2.3 Advantages of SDG 8

We can discuss the advantages of achieving SDG 8 considering the social, environmental and economic impacts.

In terms of social impact, sustained and inclusive economic growth is crucial for poverty reduction, improving living standards and promoting social stability. It creates job opportunities and encourages entrepreneurship and investments in productive sectors.

Achieving the aims of SDG 8 will generate decent and productive employment opportunities for all, including youth, women, persons with disabilities and those in vulnerable employment. By fostering an enabling environment for job creation, such as through supportive policies, access to finance and entrepreneurship development, it helps reduce unemployment and underemployment rates. Also, it contributes to social inclusion and reduces inequalities. Access to decent work can empower individuals and communities, enabling them to participate more fully in society.

SDG 8 highlights the importance of investing in education, vocational training and skills development, as by enhancing human capital and improving the employability of individuals, it equips them with the necessary skills to participate in the labour market and contributes to their long-term economic and social well-being.

Regarding environmental impact, adopting sustainable and responsible business practices, promoting a low-carbon economy and minimising negative environmental impacts can support sustainable development and climate action. Building a more sustainable global economy will help reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change and keep the planet healthy.

All the aspects mentioned above also have an intrinsic connection with economic issues. SDG 8's focus on diversifying economies, promoting entrepreneurship and improving access to finance can contribute to the resilience of economies. By reducing dependency on specific sectors, fostering innovation and encouraging a diverse range of economic activities, countries become better equipped to withstand economic shocks and external disruptions. In this way, countries can create inclusive and resilient economies that contribute to poverty reduction, social inclusion and overall human development.

2.4 Challenges with the implementation of SDG 8

SDG 8 addresses several important aspects of economic development and job creation, and it faces a range of challenges.

One of the significant challenges in achieving SDG 8 is the persistence of economic inequality within and among countries. Many countries struggle with income disparities, lack of access to resources and unequal distribution of wealth (Chancel et al., 2022).

Other issues are the high levels of unemployment and underemployment in many regions and countries, particularly for young people and women (United Nations, 2023). In addition, a large portion of the global workforce is engaged in informal and vulnerable employment, lacking access to social protection, fair wages and adequate working conditions.

Technological advancements and automation can enhance productivity and economic growth, but they also pose challenges to job creation, leading to job displacement and widening skill gaps, particularly in sectors vulnerable to technological disruption and low investments in skills development.

The progress of SDG 8 is hindered by global economic instability, slow economic recovery after COVID-19 and the lack of access to finance and investments by enterprises in low- and lower-middle-income countries (United Nations, 2022).

The last report about the SDG's advances (United Nations, 2023) shows that the progress towards achieving SDG 8 has been challenging and the world is not close to reaching any of the targets. The report highlights various factors that have contributed to this struggle, including the enduring impact of COVID-19, crises related to the cost of living, trade tensions, uncertain monetary policies, mounting debts in developing nations and the ongoing war in Ukraine. Combined, these crises pose a significant threat to global economic growth. Global real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is forecast to slow down in 2023, putting at risk employment and income as well as advances in equitable pay for women and decent work for young people (United Nations, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from governments, businesses, civil society and international organisations. By adopting inclusive policies, promoting entrepreneurship, investing in skills development and ensuring social protection, progress can be made towards achieving SDG 8 and fostering sustainable economic growth and decent work for all.

Table 4 – Examples of specific challenges involved in achieving the targets of SDG 8

Specific challenge	Actions to address the challenges
Economic inequality within and among countries	Requires a wholesale reform of the financial system in order to tackle rising debts, economic uncertainties and trade tensions.

Income disparities, lack of access to resources and unequal distribution of wealth	Requires promoting inclusive policies, with equitable pay and decent work.
High levels of unemployment and underemployment	Requires promoting entrepreneurship and investing in skills development.
Informal and vulnerable employment, lacking access to social protection, fair wages and adequate working conditions	Requires adopting inclusive policies and ensuring social protection.
Technological advancements and automation	Requires investing in skills development and adopting inclusive policies.

Source: United Nations (2022), United Nations (2023) and Chancel et al. (2022)

Supplementary resources

- Leal Filho, W. et al. 2023. When the alarm bells ring: Why the UN sustainable development goals may not be achieved by 2030. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 407, 2023, ISSN 0959-6526, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.137108>.
- Sustainable Development Goal SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. <https://youtu.be/bbPeiTbYrxc>, 12min05s

TED Talks

- 2030- SDG 8- Decent Work and Economic Growth- Ted talks. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaWbx0VvKOY> Duration: 11 min 13 s
- Is China the new idol for emerging economies? https://www.ted.com/talks/dambisa_moyo_is_china_the_new_idol_for_emerging_economies?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare Duration: 16 min 10 s

- Economic growth has stalled. Let's fix it.

https://www.ted.com/talks/dambisa_moyo_economic_growth_has_stalled_let_s_fix_it?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare Duration: 13 min 55 s

Podcast

- SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth. Duration: 34 min 50 s

Examples of questions for assessment

2. Defining SDG 8

- What are the main aspects of SDG 8?
- What is the focus of the first ten targets of SDG 8?
- What is the focus of the last two targets of SDG 8?

2.1 Significance of SDG 8

- What is the status of the progress to achieve SDG 8 by 2030?
- Explain the main characteristics of the key aspects of SDG 8: Green economy, sustainable tourism, employment, decent work for all and social protection.

2.2 Interdependencies of SDG 8

- How is SDG 8 interconnected with the other SDGs? What other SDG do you think would be most affected if SDG 8 is not achieved?
- Select any three SDGs and briefly explain how they interact with SDG 8. Use examples from your region to illustrate your explanation.

2.3 Advantages of SDG 8

- What would the main advantages be for the world if SDG 8 is achieved?
- Select any two of the targets of SDG 8 and explain the specific advantages which would manifest with the attainment of these targets. Link it to advantages for your specific region.

2.4 Challenges in the implementation of SDG 8

- How have different global crises been affecting the implementation of SDG 8?

- What are the difficulties in implementing SDG 8 in your country? Which are the main barriers? And how can they be overcome?

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Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., Zucman, G. et al. World Inequality Report 2022. Available at: https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2021/12/WorldInequalityReport2022_Full_Report.pdf Last accessed 27 November 2023.

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UN. 2018. Measuring the Value of Forests in a Green Economy. June, 2018, ISBN: 978-92-1-117162-4. ECE/TIM/DP/70

UN. 2022. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022.

UN. 2023. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet. Special Report.

3. Overview of various crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 8

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to:

- identify the major crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 8
- explain how the major crises prevent the achievement of SDG 8
- describe how the impact of current crises on the achievement of SDG 8 differs regionally

Historically, crises have formed the basis of the catalyst that initiates significant social, political and economic change in society. A global or regional crisis also demonstrates exactly how interdependent and interlinked all the components of sustainable development are and this extends to the achievement of all the SDGs by 2030. Further, as the impact of most global and regional crises transcends national and international borders, it is important for the international community in collaboration with governments to work together to develop common solutions to mitigate the impact of the crisis. This collaboration could include the facilitation of structural transformation that would enable and encourage success in the pursuit of achieving the SDG targets by 2030 (United Nations, 2022).

Presently, the most dominant global crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) by the year 2030, include climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict.

3.1. Climate change

Climate change has a severe impact on different communities throughout the world and when it comes to the achievement of SDG 8 “Decent work and economic growth”, these impacts involve economic losses, loss of jobs, loss of productivity and threats to the health and well-being of workers.

In addition to human losses, climate change is responsible for significant economic losses, for example, the damage caused by extreme weather events to city infrastructure

and the funding needed to repair the damage (OECD, 2022). An extreme climate scenario also imposes severe difficulties for generating income from economic activities that are highly susceptible to climate conditions and that depend on natural resources such as agriculture, fishing and tourism. Climate change threatens the sources of income and jobs of many families in communities that depend on natural resources, especially populations that are already vulnerable (International Labour Organization, 2019). The productivity of sectors that depend on the climate is also affected, as in the case of agriculture, being a primary sector of the economy, the economic growth of the whole society is affected by the loss of agricultural productivity. In addition, when it comes to dignified working conditions, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) highlights that the increase in temperatures is related to workers' heat stress in addition to exposure to vector-borne diseases, aspects that make it difficult to achieve worker well-being conditions.

All these factors highlight how the success in achieving SDG 8 targets also depends on efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

3.1.1 Impact of climate change in Latin America

Climate change impacts on economic development in Latin America are explored in the report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) "The economics of climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean" (ECLAC, 2020). In addition to covering the differences among regions, the report explores how climate change affects agricultural activities, water resources, urban and health challenges, coastlines, biodiversity and extreme weather events. The most common impacts are associated with a decrease in job creation and economic growth, especially in more vulnerable populations. Even though SDG 8 is not the main topic of the publication (ECLAC, 2020), it reports on important implications for achieving the targets of this goal, explored as follows.

One key aspect of the impact of climate change in Latin America is the decrease in agricultural productivity. The region is affected quite unevenly due to the different types of crops. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports indicate that

changes in precipitation, increases in temperature and heat stress are expected to cause declines in crop yields (Castellanos et al., 2022). The following examples of different approaches are presented in the literature:

- Some studies indicate that the impact of climate change on crop yields in Latin America may, in general, be positive. But differences among countries occur: major losses in consumable food calories are observed in countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay and Venezuela, while an increase in food calories was seen in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Cuba (Ray et al., 2019);
- Depending on the models and scenarios used, some crops are expected to suffer more decline in production than others, which is the case for maize, for example (Banerjee et al., 2021), while soybeans tend to respond better.
- Ortiz-Bobea et al. (2021) point to a decrease in agricultural productivity by around 26% in Latin America.

Even with the distinct impact across countries and crops, the effects of climate change in the region undermine SDG 8 by hindering economic growth in the agricultural sector, which employs around 15% of the region's workforce (OECD, 2022; The World Bank, 2021).

Another sector severely hit by climate change in the region is tourism. The Caribbean region alone generates over \$50 billion in tourism revenue per year and the sector employs over 2 million people (Ewing-Chow, 2019). This region stands out as suffering the worst impact within Latin America primarily due to its smaller population and significant economic reliance on tourism (World Meteorological Organization – WMO, 2022). Climate change-related impacts such as sea-level rise, coral bleaching and natural disasters pose a threat to the industry's viability and the livelihoods of those who depend on it. The impact associated with SDG 8 refers mainly to reduced revenue that have an impact on local economies and small companies, and unemployment.

Climate change-induced extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and floods, can cause infrastructure damage, with reports indicating annual adaptation costs in developing countries to be USD 70 billion, but reaching USD 140–300 billion in 2030 and

USD 280–500 billion in 2050 (Neufeldt et al., 2021). The cost of infrastructure repair and replacement diverts resources from economic development projects, hindering SDG 8 by limiting investment in other sectors. The extreme weather events can cause forced displacement and migration. Population displacement leads to economic disruption, strain on social services and unemployment, with an estimated 17 million climate migrants in Latin America by 2050 (World Bank Group, 2021). This impedes SDG 8 by hindering economic growth due to labour market disruptions and decreased productivity.

Climate change can also exacerbate water scarcity issues in some regions, particularly affecting the energy sector, which is heavily reliant on hydroelectric power. Insufficient water availability leads to reduced energy production, increased costs and power shortages, which consequently affect the economy. Similarly, climate change affects industries dependent on natural resources, such as fishing, forestry and mining, which employ millions of people in the region.

On top of all these aspects, climate change contributes to increased vulnerability and economic inequality, as it has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. Economic disparities hinder economic growth by limiting access to resources and opportunities for marginalised groups.

Supplementary resources

- WWFCA. 2022. Climate Change Impacts in Latin America. Available at: https://www.wwfca.org/en/our_work/climate_change_and_energy/climate_change_impacts_la/.
- UNFCCC. 2022. New Report Details Dire Climate Impacts in Latin America and the Caribbean. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/news/new-report-details-dire-climate-impacts-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean>.
- COVID-19 and the World of Work – UN chief Policy Brief (19 June 2020) <https://youtu.be/VjB2fcPhN3Q>, 3 min 12 s

3.1.2 Impact of climate change in Africa

The African Climate Policy Centre projects that the GDP in Africa will likely experience a major decline due to a rise in global temperatures ascribed to climate change. More specific predictions specify that global temperature increases from between 1°C to 4 °C relative to pre-industrial levels, will result in an annual decrease of the African GDP of over 2% (Du, Zhao & Huang, 2017). As of 2019, losses due to climate change resulted in losses of more than USD 3.8 billion per annum, which represents 5.3% of the joint GDP of sub-Saharan African countries and this has significantly slowed the progress towards achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 8.

The impact of climate change on the GDP of the continent in turn has a negative impact on the provision of decent work and economic growth in Africa and this is reflected in a variety of ways that have a direct and indirect impact on the achievement of the various targets of SDG 8. In many African states, the economic sectors are dominated by agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism. The continent's available natural resources are critical to sustain these economic activities and the negative impact of climate change on these resources are reflected in soil erosion, desertification, drought, floods, crop failures, pest infestations and the loss of wildlife, all of which have a negative impact on the dominant economic sectors. With a decline in the quality of the natural resources to sustain economic activities on the continent, the provision of work through the creation of employment opportunities is limited and this will significantly contribute to the predicted annual decline in GDP. Climate change has an impact on the working conditions and health of the workforce. Considering that a high percentage of the African workforce is directly dependent on natural resources, climate change and increasing global temperatures pose significant health risks to workers. These health risks include (but are not limited to) heat stress, malnutrition, waterborne diseases and vector-borne diseases. These climate-related risks to human health have a negative impact on livelihoods, food security, water supply and economic inclusive growth (Abidoye & Odusola, 2015).

Climate change has resulted in an increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters (storms, landslides, wildfires) all causing high human casualties, the displacement of people, and massive damage to infrastructure and assets, which have a collective negative impact on the continent's ability to create employment that will further

result in a growth in the GDP (Abidoye & Odusola, 2015). Natural disasters shift the focus and funding towards recovery rather than the creation of employment.

Climate change in Africa has undermined the social and economic development of many countries with resulting political instability that increases food insecurity, increased migration and competition for resources, which severely hampers the ability to create employment. Climate change can affect the demand and supply of labour, skills and jobs, which can create both challenges and opportunities for decent work and economic growth in Africa. For example, climate change can reduce the demand for jobs in sectors that are negatively affected by climate change, such as agriculture and tourism. But it can also increase the demand for jobs in sectors that are positively affected by climate change or that contribute to climate action, such as renewable energy and green technology.

Supplementary resources

- Abidoye, B.O. & Odusola, A.F. 2015. Climate change and economic growth in Africa: An econometric analysis. *Journal of African Economies*, 25(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/eju033>.
- Du, D., Zhao, X. & Huang, R. 2017. The impact of climate change on developed economies. *Economic Letters*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1574-0862.2009.00379>.

3.1.3 Impact of climate change in Europe

Climate change and its consequences are one of the major issues that could hinder the targets related to SDG 8 in Europe. Therefore, being aware of ways to combat it could reduce extreme weather events and promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (Bosello et al., 2012).

This perspective is no different for European countries, where climate change is considered one of the biggest challenges. The year 2022 was identified as the hottest

summer (Ballester et al., 2023); these results are likely to be a consequence of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions since Europe is the 4th major greenhouse emitter after China, India and the USA (De Sloover et al., 2023). This scenario reveals a need for action, which is already recognised by the European Union, reflected in programmes and initiatives aimed at combatting global warming. Examples of initiatives are the a) European Green Deal, b) Renewable Energy Directive (RED II), c) Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR), d) EU Emissions Trading System, e) Circular Economy Action Plan and f) European climate law. The table below provides a summary of these initiatives and programmes:

Table 5 – European programmes and initiatives to combat climate change

Programmes and initiatives	Description	Website
European Green Deal	Comprehensive policy framework introduced by the EU to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It encompasses a wide range of measures across various sectors, including energy, transport, agriculture and more.	https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en
Renewable Energy Directive (RED II)	This directive sets binding targets for EU member states to increase the share of renewable energy sources in their energy mix, contributing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.	https://energy.ec.europa.eu/index_en
Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR)	This regulation sets binding national greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for sectors not covered by the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), such as transportation, agriculture and buildings.	https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/effort-sharing-member-states-emission-targets_en
EU Emissions Trading System	This is a cap-and-trade system where companies must hold allowances for their emissions. The total number of allowances is capped, and companies can trade allowances, encouraging emission reductions.	https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en

Circular Economy Action Plan	This initiative aims to reduce resource consumption and waste generation by promoting circularity in product design, production and consumption.	https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/circular-economy-action-plan_en
European climate law	The EU introduced a climate law that legally binds the bloc to reach climate neutrality by 2050 and sets an intermediate target to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.	https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/european-green-deal/european-climate-law_en

Sources: Ammann and Boussat (2023), Dechezleprêtre et al. (2023), Dekanozishvili (2023), Günar (2023), Pinyol Alberich et al. (2023), Romppanen (2023)

Being aware of climate change and its consequences, such as extreme weather events, to SDG 8 draws a clear scenario of the importance of promoting initiatives.

Extreme weather events are a reality in Europe and could not only compromise economic growth and inhibit the creation of work opportunities for all but also increase inequalities and have an impact on vulnerable communities. These extreme weather events could take several forms, such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, cold snaps and harsh winter storms (Mateos et al., 2023).

Floods are likely to occur in some European countries such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Floods usually happen as a consequence of weather events and are likely to happen in specific geographical areas such as low-lying coastal regions, river floodplains and urban areas due to impermeable surfaces. The higher incidence of floods can compromise the disruption of economic activities in several ways, such as infrastructure damage and economic disruption.

Heatwaves and droughts, in turn, are likely to happen in Southern Europe, where countries such as Spain, Greece, France and Italy usually experience hot and dry summers with a high possibility of wildfire occurrence. Heatwaves can also have an intense impact on agricultural activity and affect workers' health conditions.

On the other hand, cold snaps and harsh winter storms are likely to happen in Northern Europe, Eastern Europe and the Alpine region. Due to these kinds of events, government bodies in charge of infrastructure maintenance are gaining importance since they have to

mitigate the impact of the weather conditions on communities and infrastructure, also imposing a challenge to achieve decent work opportunities for all.

These aforementioned events can contribute to infrastructure damage and economic disruption by causing damage to roads, bridges, factories and utilities (Kliesen & Mill, 1994; Larsen, 2015), leading to job losses, reduced productivity and generating negative externalities on business in general, especially for medium and small enterprises (SMEs) (Bradford & Fraser, 2008; Margosi, 2022). In addition, these events can produce other negative consequences, such as supply chain disruptions or even reduce the confidence of investors in specific regions.

Finally, it is worth considering that some European industries, such as agriculture and tourism, are also prone to be affected by climate change and its extreme weather events (see Arabadzhyan et al., 2021; Malhi et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2020; Schuldt et al., 2020). For example, floods can destroy crops, damage farmland and harm livestock, which have an impact on lower rural activities and income, especially for small farmers. Another example could be related to the tourism and hospitality sectors, where extreme weather events can cause cancellations or delays in flights and trains, damage the tourism infrastructure (e.g., closure and repairs of some attractions and accommodation options), cause decreased attractiveness due to safety concerns implying reputational damage of some regions from the perspective of tourists.

Supplementary resources

- Sikora, A. 2021, January. European Green Deal – legal and financial challenges of the climate change. In *Era Forum*, 21(4), 681–697. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Malhi, G.S., Kaur, M. & Kaushik, P. 2021. Impact of climate change on agriculture and its mitigation strategies: A review. *Sustainability*, 13(3), 1318.
- Schuldt, B., Buras, A., Arend, M., Vitasse, Y., Beierkuhnlein, C., Damm, A., ... & Kahmen, A. 2020. A first assessment of the impact of the extreme 2018 summer drought on Central European forests. *Basic and Applied Ecology*, 45, 86–103.
- Santos, J.A., Fraga, H., Malheiro, A.C., Moutinho-Pereira, J., Dinis, L.T., Correia, C., ... & Schultz, H.R. 2020. A review of the potential climate change impacts and adaptation options for European viticulture. *Applied Sciences*, 10(9), 3092.

- Arabadzhyan, A., Figini, P., García, C., González, M.M., Lam-González, Y.E, & León, C.J. 2021. Climate change, coastal tourism, and impact chains—a literature review. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(16), 2233–2268.

3.2. COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced numerous aspects beyond the health emergency with a negative impact on all 17 SDGs (United Nations, 2020). In terms of SDG 8, there was an increase in unemployment rates and economic recession since the economic sector was severely affected by the COVID pandemic. Once lockdown took place, a huge part of the economy came to a complete standstill which resulted in declining investment and stagnation, in some cases even reversing economic growth. As a consequence of the reduction of economic activities, countless jobs were lost, threatening the financial security of many families and increasing social inequalities. Inequality between countries was also evident, as developed nations were able to offer social protection systems and unemployment insurance for their population. The pandemic also highlighted disparities in access to decent work; it had a severe impact on informal workers, who move a significant part of the economy, due to the lack of social protection in terms of decent work and well-being.

In order to achieve the decent work and economic growth proposed by SDG 8, it is necessary to build back better, focus on economic stimuli for sustainable growth, support the generation of new jobs and strengthen social protection systems and labour policies.

3.2.1 Impact of COVID-19 in Latin America

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the economic development of Latin America, with many countries in the region experiencing sharp declines in economic growth, employment and income. The region experienced an estimated 7.7% contraction in GDP in 2020 (ECLAC, 2020) (impact on target 8.1), driven by declines in key sectors such as tourism, manufacturing and services.

The pandemic has also disrupted supply chains and reduced demand for goods and services, which has affected productivity levels in the region (impact on target 8.2). Many businesses have been forced to close or reduce operations, particularly in the informal sector where workers have little access to social protection or financial assistance. Additionally, the pandemic has led to significant job losses and reduced opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation. Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been particularly affected, with limited access to financial assistance and a lack of government support (impact on target 8.3). Likewise, women, young people and informal workers have been particularly affected by job losses and reduced opportunities for decent work (impact on target 8.5). Many workers have been forced to accept lower wages or precarious working conditions, exacerbating existing inequalities.

Many countries in the region have struggled to balance economic recovery with environmental and social considerations, leading to increased pressure on natural resources and ecosystems (impact on target 8.4). In addition to the environmental impact, the pandemic has led to significant disruptions in education and training programmes as well, particularly for vulnerable populations. This has affected the ability of young people to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the workforce and pursue productive careers (impact on target 8.6).

As happened in other regions, foreign aid and international support to finance SDG 8-related investments and improvements were reduced due to the pandemic and realignment of priorities.

3.2.2 Impact of COVID-19 in Africa

COVID-19 caused the deepest global recession in decades, reducing global GDP by 3.1% in 2020. Studies by Maliszewska et al. (2020) report that global GDP fell by 2%, with lows of 2.5% for less-developed nations due to the COVID-19 crisis. Africa has been hard hit by the pandemic, with the African Development Bank (2021a) estimating that economic growth on the continent shrank by 2.1% in 2020.

In Africa, governments, private sector institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) introduced various measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, and these included lockdowns, quarantines, social distancing, travel bans both internationally and nationally, and shutdowns of non-essential activities. These measures resulted in a severe slowdown in economic growth, socio-economic disruptions in African economies, and poor working conditions, all presenting a huge challenge for African countries to achieve the various targets of SDG 8 by 2030. According to the regional overview of COVID-19, effects vary significantly between nations, the informal and formal sectors, industries trade and economic growth. The pandemic has had an impact on the subregion of Africa in terms of economic growth; in 2020, growth in Southern Africa was estimated to have decreased by 7.0%, in West Africa by 1.5%, North Africa by 1.1% and Central Africa by 2.7% (African Development Bank, 2021b).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions to people's lives and livelihoods in Africa. The pandemic has slowed down economic growth, increased poverty and hunger, worsened health outcomes, and disrupted education and social services (Ramelli & Wagner, 2020). SDG 8 aims to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. Before the pandemic, Africa had made some progress in this area, such as reducing the unemployment rate from 8.1% in 2010 to 6.3% in 2019, increasing the share of informal employment from 66% to 68% over the same period, and improving labour productivity by 12% between 2010 and 2019.

However, the pandemic has reversed some of these gains and posed new challenges for achieving SDG 8 in Africa. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), the COVID-19 crisis resulted in an estimated loss of 81 million jobs in Africa in 2020, a decline of 8.6% in working hours equivalent to 19 million full-time jobs, and a drop of 12% in labour income. The pandemic also increased the vulnerability of workers in the informal sector, which accounts for more than two-thirds of employment opportunities in Africa, with limited access to social protection, health care and decent working conditions.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on SDG 8 in Africa, various policy responses have been implemented or proposed by governments, regional organisations, development

partners and civil society. These include providing fiscal and monetary stimulus, expanding social protection coverage, supporting small and medium enterprises, promoting digital transformation, enhancing regional integration and strengthening health systems. However, these measures face many constraints, such as limited fiscal space, weak institutional capacity, inadequate data availability and unequal access to vaccines.

To achieve SDG 8 in Africa post COVID-19 will requires an increase in coordinated efforts from all stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels. Some of the key actions that could help accelerate progress include mobilising more domestic and external resources for recovery and resilience; enhancing social dialogue and tripartism among governments, employers and workers; fostering innovation and diversification of economic activities; ensuring decent work standards and rights for all workers; and building effective partnerships for sustainable development.

Supplementary resources

- Ramelli S. & Wagner A.F. 2020. Feverish stock price reactions to COVID-19. *Rev. Corp. Financ. Stud.* 9, 622–655. doi: 10.1093/rcfs/cfaa012
- Maliszewska, M., Mattoo, A. & van der Mensbrugghe, D. 2020. The Potential Impact of COVID-19 on GDP and Trade: A Preliminary Assessment (No. 9211) Washington D.C.

3.2.3 Impact of COVID-19 in Europe

The year 2020 brought unprecedented challenges to the world as the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly, affecting every dimension of sustainable development. Among the global goals set by the United Nations, the SDGs represent a blueprint for addressing pressing global issues. However, as Europe battled the pandemic, it encountered unforeseen obstacles in pursuing these goals. This section explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the attainment of SDG 8 targets in Europe.

SDG 8 comprises 12 distinct targets, each tackling various dimensions of economic growth, employment and decent work. These targets encompass endeavours such as

enhancing labour productivity, ensuring equitable remuneration, curbing youth unemployment and safeguarding safe working conditions. In the face of the pandemic, these objectives have faced setbacks due to disruptions that have rippled through economies and societies across Europe (Makarenko et al., 2021; Shulla et al., 2021)

Target 8.1's aspiration of attaining annual economic growth has encountered considerable challenges. The pandemic catalysed economic contractions through lockdowns, supply chain interruptions and decreased consumer expenditure. A host of European countries recorded negative growth rates with a notable impact on tourism, hospitality and retail industries.

As economies contracted, the pandemic left a trail of unemployment. Target 8.2's objective of augmenting economic productivity through innovation and diversification has also faced setbacks due to reduced job creation and labour participation. The pandemic's workforce disruption posed a huge challenge to the realisation of this target (EUROSTAT, 2023b, 2023a).

Gender equality, a cornerstone of target 8.5, has suffered under the pandemic's weight. Women have borne the brunt of pandemic-induced job losses and increased caregiving responsibilities, aggravating pre-existing gender disparities. The unequal impact on women's employment, particularly in sectors like hospitality and retail, has hindered progress towards closing the gender pay gap (EUROSTAT, 2023b, 2023a).

There was a profound impact on target 8.6's focus to curb youth unemployment as the pandemic upended educational systems and shuttered businesses that typically employ young individuals. The resultant surge in youth unemployment jeopardised the realisation of this target in several European nations (EUROSTAT, 2023b, 2023a).

The pandemic underscored the importance of safe workplaces, a fundamental aspect of target 8.8. Essential workers, including health-care personnel, faced heightened risks due to inadequate protective measures. The pandemic spotlighted disparities in occupational safety standards, which are integral to this target's achievement.

Regarding European countries, Italy, an exemplar of a nation reliant on tourism, saw its economy suffer significantly from the pandemic. The closure of borders and imposition of

lockdowns led to widespread job losses in the hospitality sector, impairing progress toward targets 8.2 and 8.9 (EUROSTAT, 2023b, 2023a).

With a history of high youth unemployment, Spain experienced exacerbated challenges as tourism dwindled. The closure of key sectors led to a stark rise in youth unemployment, hampering progress toward target 8.6.

As Europe's economic powerhouse, Germany experienced supply chain disruptions and reduced global demand with an impact on targets 8.2 and 8.9. The nation's economic growth slowed, reflecting the pandemic's influence on industrial and export sectors. Renowned for robust social safety nets, Nordic countries like Sweden and Denmark mitigated some pandemic-related job losses through government support. Nevertheless, women remained disproportionately affected, highlighting existing gender inequalities in part-time and service-sector employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shadowed Europe's path toward SDG 8. The resulting economic contractions, job losses and exacerbated gender inequalities challenge the achievement of diverse SDG 8 targets. To reinvigorate progress, European nations will likely prioritise investment in innovative sectors, boost social safety nets and implement policies empowering marginalised groups. Efforts to enhance labour productivity, ensure safe working environments and rejuvenate the tourism sector are pivotal for a resilient and inclusive economic recovery across the region. Despite the hurdles posed by the pandemic, the aspiration of attaining SDG 8's objectives remains an essential endeavour for Europe's sustainable future.

Supplementary resources

- Chen, S., Igan, D.O., Pierri, N. & Presbitero, A.F. 2020. Tracking the economic Impact of COVID-19 and mitigation policies in Europe and the United States. *IMF Working Papers*, 2020(125).
- Almeida, V., Barrios, S., Christl, M., De Poli, S., Tumino, A. & van der Wielen, W. 2021. The Impact of COVID-19 on households income in the EU. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, 19(3), 413–431.
- Grasso, M., Klicperová-Baker, M., Koos, S., Kosyakova, Y., Petrillo, A. & Vlase, I. 2021. The impact of the coronavirus crisis on European societies. What have we learnt and

where do we go from here?—Introduction to the COVID volume. *European Societies*, 23(sup1), S2–S32.

- Juergensen, J., Guimón, J. & Narula, R. 2020. European SMEs amidst the COVID-19 crisis: assessing impact and policy responses. *Journal of Industrial and Business Economics*, 47, 499–510.
- Barua, S. 2020. Understanding Coronanomics: The economic implications of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. *Available at SSRN 3566477*.

3.3 Conflict

The existence of conflicts in a country or region generates severe crises and compromises the economy due to the instability generated. From the perspective of decent work and economic growth, conflicts cause interruptions in economic activities and therefore comprise the growth of a nation or region. In this context, it has a huge impact on aspects such as infrastructure, industries, and services. Both internal and external conflicts increase uncertainties leading to a reduction in investments. The loss of jobs in this context occurs both due to the reduction of investments in the country as well as the political instability that creates conflict zones, since a country in conflict does not offer dignified working conditions and security for workers. All these aspects also threaten the economic survival of many families, which can lead to displacement and forced migration to other countries in search of better conditions, which does not always occur due to the lack of migration policies, placing these individuals once again in a vulnerable situation.

3.3.1 Impact of conflict in Latin America

The ECLAC's report "Repercussions in Latin America and the Caribbean of the war in Ukraine: how should the region face this new crisis?" is dedicated to covering the main areas of impact of the conflict in Ukraine and how it affects Latin America (ECLAC, 2022).

The first aspect is the impact on the world's production structure and its growth. Following other international crises (such as the global economic crisis of 2008–2009 and the pandemic, more recently), the region has been suffering from feedback loops of changes

that weakened globalisation. These events have weakened the region's economic structure, particularly in areas related to investment, labour productivity and development of human and technological capabilities.

The war in Ukraine has added a new source of uncertainty to the global economy. The GDP trends of the region's key trading partners (the USA, China and the European Union) have worsened, leading to declines in external demand and consequent impact on the region's economic development. Additionally, climbing prices of energy products (and of commodities in general), have increased international transport costs, worsened supply problems and pushed up global inflation.

The economic damage in Latin America and the Caribbean is unevenly distributed: while the impact is severe in some countries and sectors, others have practically not been affected. The level of dependence of each country on oil, gas and other primary products have determined the impact of supply disruptions. On the other hand, some shared impacts include the increase in uncertainty and its effects on investment, per capita GDP and social inequalities.

Looking to regional crises, in Latin America and the Caribbean, some countries are facing difficult situations. Social conflicts can be seen in Colombia and Chile; in Haiti, the growth of gang violence has been a major concern in recent years, with a great crisis of insecurity, weakening the state power and asserting authority in an increasingly destructive manner.

In Venezuela, the political crisis, violence, insecurity, threats and lack of food, medicine and essential services, have made over 6 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, the vast majority in countries within Latin America and the Caribbean. This has become the second-largest external displacement crisis in the world. Recipient countries in the region offered the advantage of common language and culture, but difficulties in terms of legal and non-legal barriers, leading to an absorption of workers in the informal sector (Alvarez et al., 2022). Despite the challenges in their country of origin, the migration flows within Latin America and the Caribbean seem to be leading to a GDP growth in the recipient economies.

In this context of external uncertainties and internal restrictions, studies pointed to a growth of only 3.7% in 2022 – approximately half the previous year's rate. The slowdown is expected to continue in 2023, with an expected economic growth of 1.3% (ECLAC, 2023).

Supplementary resources

- Acosta-Ormaechea, et al. 2022. Latin America faces unusually high risks <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/04/26/blog-latin-america-faces-unusually-high-risks>
- How Does War Affect the Global Economy? | Analyze This! <https://youtu.be/srgC6N5KZm0>, 1 min 52 s

3.3.2 Impact of conflict in Africa

Conflict is one of the major challenges facing Africa's development and stability and the achievement of SDG 8. The most important consequence of conflict is that it has a direct and indirect impact on millions of people over space and time, through the displacement of people, violations of human rights, increases in food insecurity, increased health risks and extensive environmental degradation. The direct and indirect impact of conflict thus hampers economic growth, reduces public investment, disrupts trade and markets, destroys infrastructure and assets, and erodes human capital, and this provides the most serious challenges in achieving the targets set for SDG 8.

Studies conducted by Novta and Pugacheva (2021) report that in recent decades the number of conflict-related deaths (both military and civilian) has fluctuated over time, but generally speaking, it has increased since the early 2000s. In sub-Saharan Africa, conflict has a negative impact on economic growth by destroying cities and infrastructure, halting economic activity, discouraging investment and increasing government spending, all of which impede economic growth (Ray & Esteban, 2017). Since 2017, the progress towards the achievement of SDG 8 has regressed in many countries in Africa that have

experienced ongoing violent conflicts (e.g., South Sudan, Sudan, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique). Conflict has a long-term negative impact on economic growth, hence achievement of SDG 8 by 2030 is a huge challenge.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the displacement of the population due to armed conflict has a major impact. This has enormous negative economic growth, monetary and social effects on the conflict-affected regions as well as on the neighbouring countries that host the refugees. Africa is blessed with natural resources, and in theory these assets should provide a solid basis of development including economic growth and the provision of employment for its population. However, the abundant resources in Africa have generated a cycle of conflict and underdevelopment (Sachs & Warner 2001).

Conflict is one of the reasons that Africa will not be able to achieve SDG 8 by 2030, unless global, national and local stakeholders make more concerted and coordinated efforts to solve the underlying cause of conflict in various geographical areas. A more constructive dialogue should take place that will aid in implementing negotiated peace settlements. In the meantime, time is running out fast for the continent to achieve the various SDG 8 targets, and countries in Africa need to be mobilising more domestic and external resources for recovery from extended conflict.

Supplementary readings

- Adhvaryu, A., Fenske, J., Khanna, G. & Nyshadham, A. 2018. *Resources, Conflict, and Economic Development in Africa*, NBER Working Paper No. 24309.
- Agence Française de Développement (AFD). 2018. *Crisis and Development: The Lake Chad Region and Boko Haram*. August 15, Paris. https://issuu.com/objectif-developpement/docs/web-lac_tchad_va20180809_465c23d2fc5934.
- Ray, D. & Esteban, J. 2017. Conflict and Development. *Annual Review of Economy*, 9, 263–293.

3.3.3 Impact of conflict in Europe

Amid the intricate web of global aspirations, 2015 marked a pivotal juncture as the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 8 a set of targets aiming to cultivate enduring, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, alongside the pursuit of comprehensive and fruitful employment, and dignified labour for all. Yet, the ongoing war in Ukraine has introduced unforeseen intricacies, straining these visions and casting doubts upon the achievement of the targets of SDG 8, such as economic growth (Pereira et al., 2022).

A foundational stone of SDG 8 resides in target 8.1 – a call for a robust and resilient global economy primed to withstand adversity and propel all-inclusive growth. However, the conflict disrupting trade, draining resources, dismantling infrastructure and generating economic instability in Ukraine, also reverberates in other countries. Target 8.2, in turn, envisions harnessing innovation, diversification and technological elevation to propel economic productivity. The conflict's corrosive influence, however, has obstructed the path of innovation and stifled diversification, leading to a stagnation in economic progress. The displacement of communities and destruction of infrastructure have converged to erode the foundations of productive employment, imperilling the materialisation of this target's potential (Sasse, 2020).

Gender equality is central to target 8.5, championing equal pay for work of comparable value and striving to bridge wage gaps. Yet, within the conflict's tumultuous embrace, women were disproportionately affected. Displacement shattered employment opportunities, caregiving responsibilities became more demanding and preexisting gender inequalities deepened, underscoring the conflict's inadvertent role as an antagonist in the struggle for gender equality.

The youth found their aspirations compromised by target 8.6, which endeavours to reduce the proportion of young individuals not engaged in employment, education or training. In landscapes scarred by conflict, educational systems falter, training opportunities dissolve and uncertainty shrouds the passage from adolescence to adulthood. Youth unemployment, a harbinger of instability, burgeons, impeding the fulfilment of this target's promise (Anastasia et al., 2022).

Target 8.8 lies in cultivating secure and sound working environments for all, transcending boundaries to encompass even migrant workers. Yet, the conflict disrupts ambition, exposing workers to hazards amidst infrastructure ruin. The promise of safety – a fundamental right – shrinks in the conflict's looming presence.

Examples of the conflict's impact manifest vividly within the heart of Ukraine itself, as the nation is fighting against economic instability (Leal Filho et al., 2022), population displacement and an uncertain future. In addition, neighbouring countries like Poland and Hungary may find their resources stretched thin by the influx of refugees, diverting attention and resources from SDG 8's aspirations.

For the European Union, the conflict's resonance extends across multiple fronts. Stability wavers, economies stumble and the promise of decent work and social harmony embedded in SDG 8, faces a stern examination. The displacement of communities, trade disruption and corrosion of economic stability converge to challenge the core essence of SDG 8's ideals.

Supplementary resources

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Examples of questions for assessment

3. Overview of global crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 8

- Name at least three global crises that affect the achievement of the targets of SDG 8.

3.1 Climate change

- What negative impact does climate change have on the progress around economic growth and employment?
- How are these impacts perceived in your region?

3.2 COVID-19

- What are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the targets of SDG 8?
- How are these effects perceived in your region?

3.3 Conflict

- Explain how conflicts have a negative impact on the efforts to achieve SDG 8.
- How are these impacts perceived in your region?

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4. Regional contexts/progress towards the achievement of SDG 8

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to:

- develop an understanding of regional differences in achieving SDG 8
- understand the various factors that have a negative impact on the achievement of the various targets for SDG 8

The beginning of the Decade of Action – which was supposed to be dedicated to accelerating solutions for meeting the 2030 Agenda and achieving a more sustainable world from 2020 to 2030 – ended up starting with a global pandemic. Even before the devastating impacts of the spread of the coronavirus across the world, the United Nations warned that global efforts were not sufficient to deliver the change needed. Nevertheless, previous reports pointed out progress and positive trends in important areas.

Within the first five years of implementation of the SDGs, some aspects had improved considerably.

4.1 Regional progress in Latin America

Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced economic growth in recent decades. Factors that boosted this growth are the improvement in the price of exported commodities, for example.

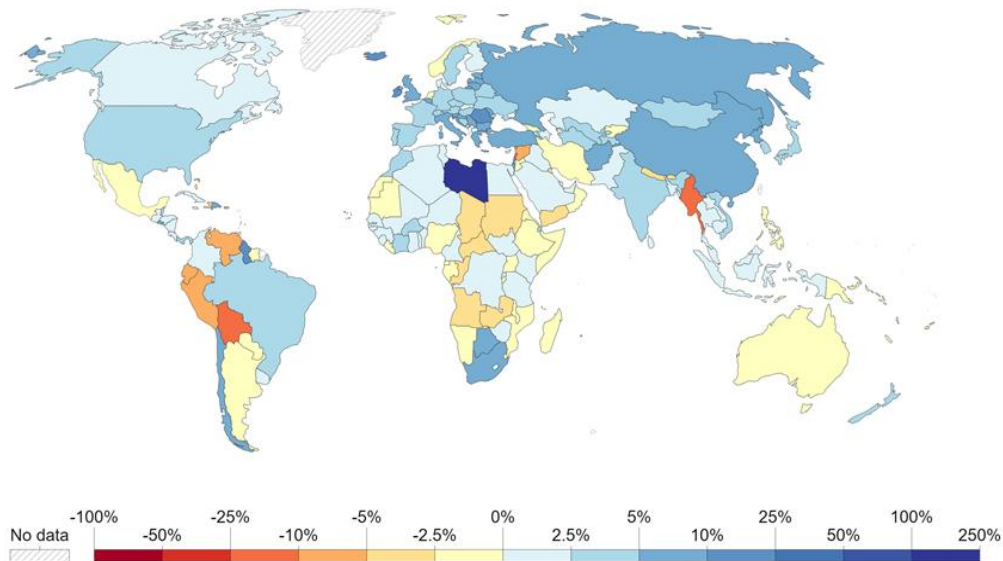
Considering the last three years, the GDP per capita of nations was severely affected by the COVID pandemic and in 2020 most countries recorded negative GDP growth or much lower growth than expected. For 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean, GDP growth was -7.57% while the world average was -4.29% , showing that the impact on region was higher than the world average.

Despite this impact on the economy of Latin America and the Caribbean, some countries in this region presented high values in GDP per capita when measured by GDP per employed person. Figure 4 highlights Guyana (18.2%) and Chile (9%) and small Central American countries such as the Dominican Republic (7.5%), El Salvador (5.4%) and Belize (4%).

Figure 4 – Growth rate of real GDP per employed person

Growth rate of real GDP per employed person, 2021

Annual change in real gross domestic product (GDP) per employed person. Real GDP is adjusted for price changes and inflation.



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO)

OurWorldInData.org/economic-growth • CC BY

Source: Our World in Data (2022)

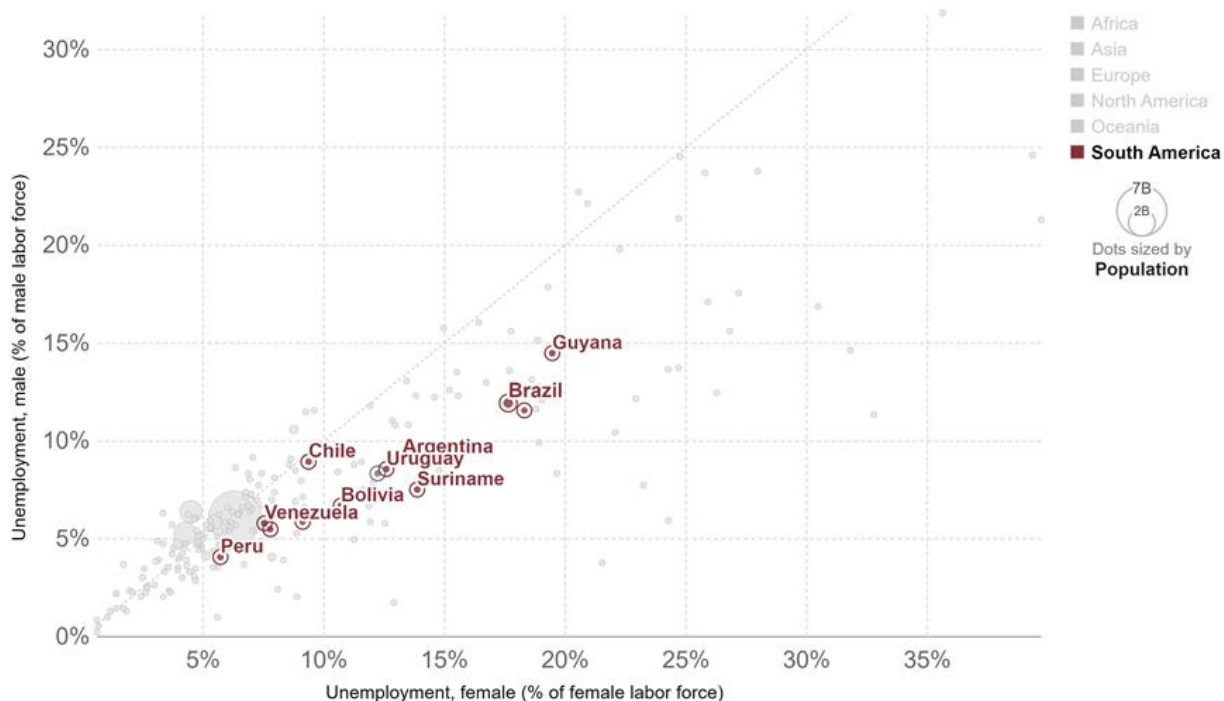
An improvement in the economy also generates greater opportunities for jobs and the data confirm the reduction of unemployment in this region, although many jobs are still informal. In 2020, the unemployment rate in Latin America was the highest recorded since 1991, reaching 10.6% while the world average was 6.57%. For the year 2021 there was a reduction in unemployment to 9.96% while the world average was 6.18%.

Progress has also been made in promoting gender equality in the workplace. Women's labour force participation has increased, and more women are occupying leadership positions. Still, the 2021 data show that the unemployment rate is higher among women than among men in Latin America and the Caribbean. Figure 5 indicates that unemployment for the female population (horizontal axis) has higher percentages than for the male population (vertical axis).

Figure 5 – Unemployment rates per gender

Unemployment rate of males vs. females, 2021

Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment.



Source: International Labour Organization (via World Bank)

OurWorldInData.org/global-education • CC BY

Source: Our World in Data (2022)

Considering progress towards SDG 8, major or significant challenges remain in the Latin American and Caribbean region. According to data from the latest Sustainable Development Report 2023, the countries with the highest scores in achieving the SDGs are Uruguay, Cuba, Brazil, Argentina and the Dominican Republic. Of these countries, only Cuba has the status of SDG achieved, while Uruguay and Argentina face significant challenges with projection of improvement, Brazil faces significant challenges with projection of stagnation and the Dominican Republic still finds difficulties in complying with SDG 8, with significant challenges remaining and a projected worsening scenario.

Supplementary readings

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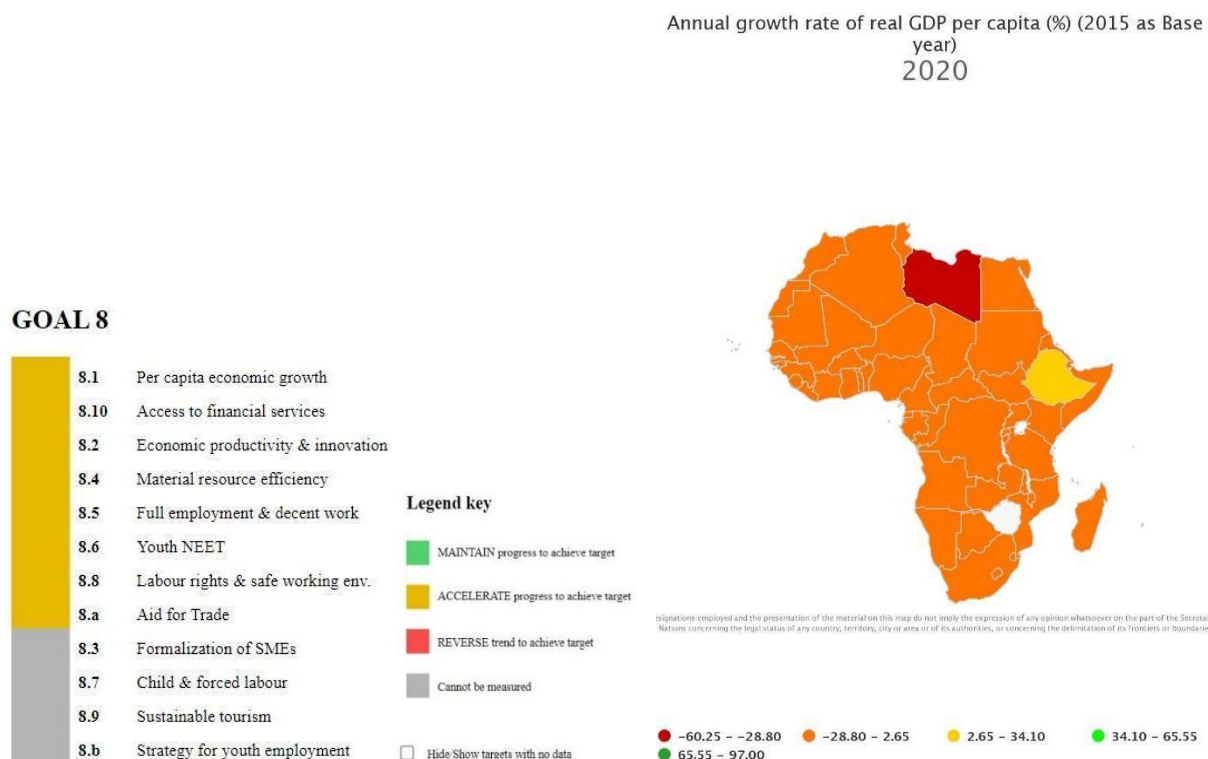
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4.2 Regional progress in Africa

Although SDG 8 is unlikely to be achieved at the global level at the current pace, Africa lags behind all other regions and is not on track to achieve any of the 12 SDG 8 targets (see Figure 6). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, economic growth on the African continent had not been inclusive and fast enough to absorb the growing labour force in the formal economy (United Nations, 2021). Cerf (2018) asserts that if SDG 8 targets are to be achieved in Africa, African countries’ economies need to transition from economic activities that provide diminishing returns over time, such as agriculture, mining, logging and fishing toward activities that provide increasing returns over time such as manufacturing and services to reach their full potential, which could also accelerate material resource efficiency (SDG target 8.4), which is currently concerning. According to Baninla et al. (2020), there has been little or no improvement in resource efficiency in African regions, suggesting there is still a long way to go on the continent.

Figure 6 – Progress towards achieving the SDG 8 targets by 2030 and annual growth in Africa



Source: <https://ecastats.uneca.org/unsdgsafrica/sdgs> (Last accessed 20 July 2023)

Targets that can only be achieved if the present trends are urgently reversed

Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all as per SDG 8 remains one of the most daunting challenges facing the African continent. However, the current situation reveals that Africa must accelerate its progress if SDG 8 targets are to be a reality on the continent.

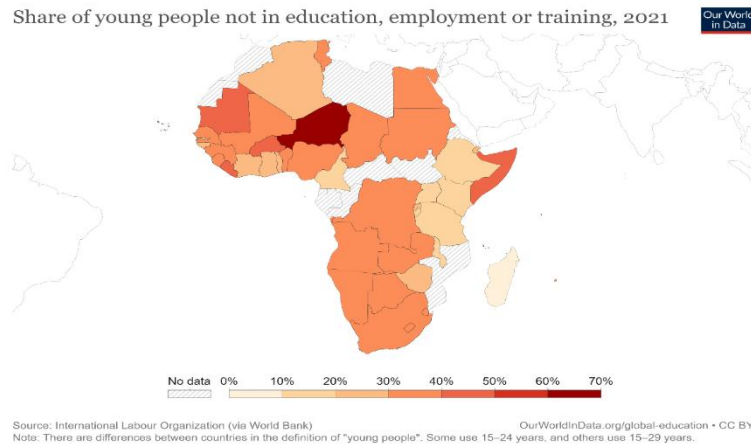
Targets that can be achieved if progress is accelerated

Sustaining per capita economic growth (target 8.1) is in jeopardy as low and falling growth in income per capita is estimated to fall to 1.4% in 2023 after averaging 1.6% in 2021 and 2022 and will keep poverty entrenched in Africa and prevent countries from accelerating progress towards the SDGs (DESA, 2023). In 2020, most African countries had a

negative annual growth rate of real GDP per capita ranging from –28.80 to –2.65%. Economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) slowed to 3.6% in 2022, from 4.1% in 2021; and economic activity in the region is projected to further slow down to 3.1% in 2023, which will impede the achievement of higher levels of economic productivity and innovation (target 8.2). COVID-19, climate change, persistent conflicts, sluggishness of the global economy, declining yet high inflation rates, and challenging global and domestic financial conditions amid high levels of debt explain the downgrade (World Bank, 2023).

Continental effort and accelerated actions are necessary if Africa is to achieve targets 8.5 (decent work and full employment), 8.6 (youth not in education, employment or training – NEET) and 8.8 (labour rights and safe working environment) considering that decent jobs, which are important routes out of poverty, are hard to find given that Africa’s growth has not created sufficient jobs to match demand. Approximately 60% of jobs in Africa are considered vulnerable, less than 1% of the unemployed receive unemployment benefits and only 19% of the African population (excluding North Africa) is covered by social insurance. In addition, African women and youth (15–24) continue to face persistent challenges to getting decent jobs as most heavily rely on informal employment and are exposed to unsafe working conditions. The highest gender unemployment gap is found in Northern Africa with the female youth unemployment rate almost double that of young men, reaching as high as 44.3%. Women in employment spend 9 hours and 20 minutes in paid and unpaid work, whereas men spend 8 hours and 7 minutes in such work. Moreover, women spend 4 hours and 30 minutes per day on unpaid care work, compared to 1 hour 20 minutes for men (ILO, 2016a).

Figure 7 – Youth NEET



Source: <https://ecastats.uneca.org/unsdgsafrica/sdgs> (Last accessed 20 July 2023)

Based on Figure 7 above, most African countries in 2021 had the majority of youth NEET ranging between 30 and 70%. Access to financial services (target 8.10) in Africa also needs to be accelerated because, in 2019, Africa was ranked as the world's least-banked region, with an estimated 80% of its one billion people lacking access to formal banking services. Only 24.8% of adults in sub-Saharan Africa have a bank account, and only 14.8% of adults possess a debit card (Makina, 2019).

Targets that cannot be measured

The remaining four targets; formalisation of SMEs (target 8.3), child and forced labour (target 8.7), sustainable tourism (target 8.9) and strategy for youth employment (target 8b), cannot be effectively measured due to challenges related to reporting. However, data for target 8.7 indicate that Africa has the largest number of child labourers; 72.1 million African children are estimated to be in child labour and 31.5 million in hazardous labour. One-fifth of all African children are involved in child labour, a proportion more than twice as high as in any other region (ILO, 2016b).

Supplementary readings

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4.3 Regional progress in Europe

As the world embarked on the journey to address global challenges through the SDGs, Europe found itself at a unique juncture in the pursuit of Goal 8. This goal, aimed at fostering sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth while ensuring full and productive employment and decent work for all, has carved a dynamic pathway of progress within the European region. While advances have been notable, challenges persist, necessitating concerted efforts to navigate towards the fulfilment of SDG 8.

Europe's diverse tapestry of economies and societies has yielded a mixed landscape of SDG 8 advancements. Countries with robust industrial bases and diversified economies, such as Germany and the Nordic nations, have propelled sustainable economic growth, leveraging technological innovation and efficient labour practices. For instance, Germany's "dual system" apprenticeship programme stands as a model for skill development and youth employment, underscoring the effectiveness of such initiatives.

However, the remnants of economic downturns, most notably in Southern European countries like Greece and Spain, underscore the fragility of economic progress and the need for resilient growth strategies. These countries continue to grapple with high levels

of youth unemployment, highlighting the imperative for tailored policies that address specific challenges within their labour markets.

Employment patterns within Europe exhibit multifaceted dynamics. Several nations, like Sweden and Norway, boast low unemployment rates, reflecting proactive labour market policies and social safety nets. Scandinavian countries' commitment to work-life balance and gender parity serves as an exemplar for creating conducive working environments. Conversely, countries like Greece and Italy struggle with youth unemployment, necessitating innovative skills development and vocational training approaches (EUROSTAT, 2023a, 2023b).

Gender equality in the realm of employment has experienced both strides and setbacks. While European nations have made remarkable progress in addressing gender wage gaps and promoting women's participation in the workforce, the pandemic has unveiled underlying inequalities. Disproportionate impacts on sectors with higher female representation, such as retail and hospitality, have emphasised the need for sustained efforts to ensure equal pay for equal work and dismantle gender-based disparities. Iceland's groundbreaking legislation requiring equal pay certification for companies is a testament to Europe's commitment to rectifying gender pay gaps (EUROSTAT, 2023a, 2023b).

The advancement of technology and its integration into workplaces have emerged as pivotal elements of SDG 8's realisation. Countries like Estonia have harnessed digitalisation to foster innovation and empower their labour force. Yet, digital divides persist, with rural areas and marginalised communities often left behind. Bridging these divides while harnessing technology for equitable growth and employment remains a fundamental challenge for Europe. Estonia's success in leveraging e-governance and digital education initiatives to create a tech-savvy workforce showcases the transformative potential of technological integration.

The European Union's commitment to social cohesion and labour rights has underpinned significant strides in promoting safe and secure working environments. Occupational health and safety regulations have been instrumental in safeguarding workers across

industries. However, the rise of gig economy jobs and evolving work arrangements necessitate adaptive policy frameworks that cater to emerging labour dynamics. The Netherlands' "flexicurity" model, combining flexible work arrangements with robust social protections, stands as an archetype of balancing labour market flexibility with worker security.

The regional progress of SDG 8 is a reflection of the intricate interplay between economic, social and political dimensions within Europe. The challenges are manifold, ranging from economic inequalities and youth unemployment to gender disparities and evolving labour paradigms. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative approach involving governments, businesses, civil society and international organisations. The European experience of SDG 8 underscores the importance of tailored strategies that resonate with the unique contexts of nations while also embracing shared principles of sustainable growth, inclusive employment and dignified work.

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5. Case studies

Readers (teachers) will be empowered to:

- identify good practices in various regional case studies in achieving SDG 8
- develop and apply a local project aimed at achieving SDG 8
- use the knowledge presented in regional case studies to adapt to a more sustainable way of living

This section is dedicated to present examples of good practices applied in different countries around the world to support the implementation of SDG 8. These practices take different approaches, as shown in Table 6. Additional examples can be found in the [United Nations' SDGs Knowledge Platform](#).

Table 6 – Examples of best practices related to SDG 8

Name and geographical coverage	Objective	Related SDGs	Source
Green Cities, Saudi Arabia	Global hub of expertise with a network of professionals across disciplines including energy, water, waste, infrastructure and human experience that aim to support associates to achieve a collective voice around the position of civil society for the SDGs. Local economy and municipal finance are among the topics covered.	6-9, 11-13, 16-17	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/green-cities-creating-localized-sustainable-development-global-network-generation
School Education Quality Assessment Project, West Asia and Europe	School Education Quality Assessment Project (SEQAP) aims to help developing countries that have insufficient capacity of experts to master use of the assessment technologies through development and adaptation of tools.	4, 8, 17	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/school-education-quality-assessment-project-segap
FORSOFT Academy, Latin America and the Caribbean	The FORSOFT Academy project aims to prepare and insert young people between 18 and 36 years of age, who are in a situation of social vulnerability and have no prospect of improving their lives, into the technology job market, offering complete training and opportunities to experience the day-to-day life of a software factory.	1, 4, 8, 10	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/forsoft-academy
Dali Azores, Europe	The project aims to develop the production of sustainable shoes made with handmade textile and technological material. It also intends to present a new, more-sustainable approach to the industry, with less production, more care and greater added value.	8, 12	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/dali-azores
Mariana Fashion Production, Africa	Mariama Fashion Production organises workshops to train local artisans to learn how to use natural dyes in order to replace synthetic dyes. Women receive training on how to understand colours and use local plants to produce their textiles. The initiative also participated in the production of reusable bags that consumers in Abidjan can use instead of single-use bags.	8	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/mariama-fashion-production-mfp
LEAP Project, Africa	The LEAP Project is an incubator programme created for emerging fashion entrepreneurs in Africa. It is an intensive in-class training programme, combined with mentorship and funding, where selected participants are tutored and mentored by seasoned business experts and professionals. The project includes the opportunity to pitch business ideas and get internship placements and mini-grants.	4, 8, 9	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/leap-project
Citizen of the World Program, Latin America and the Caribbean	High-school graduates from the public school system are offered the opportunity of joining international exchange programmes by democratising its access. The initiative also promotes bilingual training for young college students. Global citizenship is promoted, as well as increased employability for decent and productive jobs within national and international labour markets.	4, 5, 8, 10	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/citizen-world-program-programa-cidadao-do-mundo-connected-sdgs-4-5-8-and-10
Youth Employment, Africa	The initiative aims to develop the capacity of local experts to produce a reliable evidence base on youth employment issues, while engaging with policy to ensure uptake in decision and advisory processes.	4, 8	https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/youth-employment-supporting-evidence-based-policy-making-through-local-capacity

5.1 Latin America

According to the report *Labor productivity in Latin America* (ECLAC & ILO, 2022), in the first half of 2022, Latin America showed progress in terms of employability data, registering an increase in job creation, in particular, in the services and manufacturing

sector. When it comes to the achievement of SDG 8 the estimates are promising for a good post-pandemic recovery.

Brazil, Colombia and Peru were selected as case studies. The case studies presented in this section aim to highlight good practices adopted in this region by presenting programmes, their results and impacts, and the lessons learnt. Furthermore, each case study seeks to contemplate one of the three major areas in which SDG 8 is connected: 1) Green economy; 2) Sustainable tourism; and 3) Employment, decent work for all and social protection.

The following sections will present the case studies for the efforts for employment opportunities for young people in Brazil, the sustainable tourism plans in Colombia and the green economy monitoring in Peru.

5.1.1 FORSOFT Academy in Brazil: preparing young people for the technology job market

Brazil is the largest country in terms of area in Latin America and the Caribbean, and also the country with the largest population in the region with 214.3 million inhabitants. It is an upper-middle income country and a developing country considered one of the largest economies in the world. Its outstanding activities are due to the abundance of natural resources such as biodiversity, water resources, agricultural production of various commodities and oil.

Nonetheless, Brazil is a country with great social and income inequality, with significant differences between rich and poor in terms of access to quality services when it comes to education, health, housing, security and infrastructure, among others. The majority of the population in Brazil is urban, with 84% of Brazilians living in cities. The COVID pandemic further aggravated the historically existing social inequalities in Brazil and increased poverty in the country. According to data from 2021, about 30% of the Brazilian population experienced some form of poverty and 8.4% of the population lives in extreme poverty.

In this scenario, one of the strategies to combat poverty is the promotion of opportunities for access to education and employment, especially among young people, one of society's vulnerable groups and an important group for long-term social development.

The strategy of the programme

Considering the shortage of qualified professionals in the area of technology and the potential that young people can develop in this sector, the FORSOFT Academy project was developed in Brazil. The FORSOFT Academy project aims to train young people aged between 18 and 36 in socially vulnerable situations for the technology job market and information technology (IT) area. All regions of Brazil are covered and special attention is given to young people from regions far from large centres and peripheral areas. The interested students enrol in the course and after the selection process (always prioritising young people from vulnerable communities), the students begin the course for online or in-person training, and as FORSOFT Academy is a social programme, the training is completely free.

Through the course, the project trains students in soft skills (teamwork, communication, work ethics, among others), in hard skills (algorithms, programming logic, software engineering, among others) and also for opening a real company, training students for entrepreneurship. In this programme, after being introduced to basic knowledge in soft skills, hard skills and entrepreneurship, the students can choose between three specific subject areas for training in the IT sector: data analyst, full-stack developer or DevOps engineer.

The training duration is six months and, to complete the course, the class must develop and apply a real global-level software project in practice. The evaluation of the students is not only done by teachers but also by classmates. This is a methodology that reinforces the importance of teamwork where students learn in the simulated environment of a company.

Results and impact of the programme

FORSOFT Academy creates a positive social impact through education, training and promoting job market inclusion opportunities for young people. By making it possible for socially vulnerable young people to enter the workforce, the project contributes to increasing employability in vulnerable communities, increasing the income of the family and the entire community.

According to the programme (United Nations, 2023; FORSOFT Academy, 2023), within six months after the training, 95% of students were employed in the IT area. Furthermore, an 18% increase in the income of young people was registered after technical education.

Link(s) with targets and indicators of SDG 8

This project contributes to SDG 8 through its connection with decent work opportunities for the young population, specifically targets 8.6 and 8.c:

Target 8.2: Diversify, innovate and upgrade for economic productivity

As stated in target 8.2, higher levels of economic productivity can be achieved by inserting newly qualified workers. This aspect is even more relevant when it comes to the field of technology and innovation, as favoured by the FORSOFT project.

Target 8.5: Full employment and decent work with equal pay

By promoting decent work opportunities, especially for young women and men in situations of social vulnerability, the project contributes specifically to target 8.5. In addition, the project makes it possible for these young people to enter the labour market with decent working conditions and decent wages.

Target 8.6: Promote youth employment, education and training

The FORSOFT project makes a special contribution to target 8.6 by offering educational opportunities, training for the job market and, later on, decent employment for young people throughout Brazil. All of these activities are in line with target 8.6.

8.c: Develop a global youth employment strategy

FORSOFT Academy is a social programme that uses a strategy to train and qualify young women and men in situations of social vulnerability for the job market in the field of technologies and IT. For this reason, it is aligned with target 8.c.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

In addition to the contribution to SDG 8 as a whole, with the promotion of training opportunities for work and the insertion of young women and men in the technology job market, this project contributes to the achievement of SDG 1 (No poverty) by improving the life conditions of the students' entire family; SDG 4 (Quality education) by promoting learning opportunities for young women and men; and SDG 10 (Reduce inequalities) for allowing these young people, with better wages, better living conditions and access to educational opportunities, to integrate into society on equal terms.

5.1.2 Ecotourism Project “Vínculos territoriales en el municipio de Lejanías: El ecoturismo en la región del Ariari”, Colombia

In recent years, Colombia has prospered in the sustainability arena, as Colombian cities such as Medellin and Bogota have become examples of good practices in building so-called “sustainable cities” (Mejía-Escalante, 2012). On the other hand, the country still faces challenges such as economic inequality and drug trafficking, which have negatively affected the country's stability in some regions and still pose some challenges to achieving SDG 8, “Decent work and economic growth”. With 50 million inhabitants, Colombia is a country with a growing economy, with the sectors that most contribute to the economy being the oil, mining, agriculture and tourism sectors.

One activity that is growing significantly in many countries is so-called ecotourism. Ecotourism is known as a modality of tourism focused on enhancing sustainability in its activities, with the aim to promote not only tourism experiences for the tourists in the midst of natural resources, but also appreciation of the local cultures and the local communities while being committed to reducing or minimising environmental impacts in the region visited (Haya, 2001). Among the benefits of this sustainable practice for the conservation of the local region and the environmental preservation of the territory, are economic opportunities for employment and income generation for local communities. Since interest in this type of tourism is increasing, the demand for the provision of services of this nature is growing and thus, more income opportunities are arising for local communities.

The strategy of the programme

In this scenario, the project “Vínculos territoriales en el municipio de Lejanías: El ecoturismo en la región del Ariari” (Territorial connections in the municipality of Lejanías: Ecotourism in the region of Ariari) (Fernández Delgado et al., 2022) recognises the importance of the relationships between the rural and the urban areas for the promotion of the sustainable development in the entire region. Among the dimensions that can be included are the management of natural resources, economic activities, and social and cultural relations. According to the project, it is essential to strengthen these ties to promote the sustainable development of the entire territory.

The Ariari region, where the municipality of Lejanías is located, is part of the central area of Meta, formed by 16 municipalities in a region where 17% of the Colombian population is concentrated. Considering the large number of tourists moving to this region, the 2020–2023 Departmental Development Plan for the region paid special attention to the tourism sector to ensure the protection of tourist attractions, as well as to promote employment and income opportunities for the population.

With the support of city hall and other local and regional actors, a strategy was developed to leverage ecotourism in the region with the aim of establishing sustainable conditions for the management of natural resources in the region, also seeking economic, social and cultural benefits and strengthening rural-urban relations in the territory.

Results and impact of the programme

With the support of city hall and other actors involved in the strategy, it was possible to carry out studies to investigate the tourist-carrying capacity of the region, develop a tourist profile from the visitors, strengthen the sector’s information system and seek more opportunities for income generation, by characterising farms with potential for ecotourism in the region.

The project’s key strategy is the promotion of ecotourism to intensify rural-urban relations. The benefits of this project include: generating jobs and income; improving living

conditions in communities; strengthening social relationships; and creating a culture of conservation that contributes to the preservation and sustainable use of natural resources and landscapes.

Link(s) with targets and indicators of SDG 8

The Ecotourism Project in Colombia contributes to SDG 8 “Decent work and economic growth” especially for its relationship with one of the three pillars of this SDG, namely “sustainable tourism”. But when it comes to the SDG 8 targets, the project connects with two specific aspects:

Target 8.4 Sustainable economic growth

The project contributes to economic growth in line with sustainable development and highlights sustainable activities, respects the planetary boundaries and focuses on reducing environmental impacts.

Target 8.9 Promote beneficial and sustainable tourism

The Ecotourism Project in Colombia contributes to this target by developing a sustainable tourism programme that is able to create jobs for the local community while committing to the conservation of the territory and local culture.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

In addition to the direct contributions to SDG 8 when it comes to sustainable tourism, the Ecotourism Project in Colombia also contributes directly or indirectly to other SDGs, including SDG 1 (No poverty) by improving the life conditions of families living in the region by having tourism as a source of income; SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) by creating opportunities to make territories and communities more aligned with the principles of sustainable development; SDG 12 (Responsible production and consumption) by promoting a change in the behaviour and sense of responsibility of tourists to recognise their role in the impact on local territories; SDG 14 (Life below water) by promoting sustainable ecotourism reducing environmental impacts in territories, including generation of waste that may later end up in the oceans and seas, reducing plastics in the oceans, one of the main goals of SDG 14; and, finally, SDG 15 (Life on

land) sustainable tourism is aligned with sustainable land use, which is widely advocated by SDG 15. Analysing the relationship with the other SDGs, it becomes clear how impactful sustainable tourism is beyond SDG 8.

5.1.3 Pilot study “Monitoring green growth in the LAC region” in Peru

According to the World Bank (2023), Peru is seeing rapid post-COVID recovery and currently enjoys a stable economy. With more than 33 million inhabitants, Peru’s economy is diversified and relies on mining, agriculture, fishing and industries, in addition to a strong tourism sector due to the archaeological sites present in the country, such as Machu Picchu. However, like most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Peru also faces challenges when it comes to economic inequality, poverty and access to basic services.

The strategy of the programme

The initiative “Monitoring Green Growth in the LAC Region” was a collaborative effort involving multiple organisations: UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization), OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), CAF (Latin American Development Bank), SELA (Latin American Economic System) and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). The primary objective of this project was to implement a pilot study to assess and validate the applicability of OECD green growth indicators within the context of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The intention behind this initiative was to measure how well these indicators could capture the sustainable and environmental aspects of the economic growth in the region. Participating countries in the project included Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru. These countries were invited to utilise a specific set of green growth indicators and customise them to align with their respective national circumstances. The purpose was to adapt these indicators to the unique economic, social and environmental contexts of each country. Moreover, the project sought to encourage these participant countries to incorporate the results of their adapted green growth indicators into their national reports.

The indicators were organised into several categories, each focusing on specific aspects of the country's development: socio economic context; environmental and resource productivity; natural asset base; environmental quality of life; economic opportunities and policy responses.

The indicators selected and applied in the country covered four areas:

- economic opportunities and policy responses
- environmental and resource productivity (divided into carbon productivity; energy productivity; resource productivity)
- environmental dimension of life quality (divided into air quality; water; environmentally related health)
- natural asset base (divided into water; forest resources; fish resources; mineral resources)

Results and impact of the programme

In the context of Peru, several significant challenges have been identified. These obstacles are primarily related to integration of indicators for sustainable growth into policies, the creation of a comprehensive institutional framework for reporting these indicators, and the establishment of an operational working group tasked with evaluating and improving the quality of information related to sustainable growth for reporting purposes. Overcoming these obstacles is essential for Peru to effectively promote green growth and contribute to global sustainability efforts. By successfully incorporating indicators for sustainable growth into policies, establishing a robust institutional network, and implementing a rigorous review mechanism, Peru can enhance its capacity to measure progress and make informed decisions that balance economic development with environmental preservation.

The project's results are expected to enhance the region's understanding of sustainable development and promote the integration of environmental considerations into the countries' economic planning and policy-making processes. The collaboration among international organisations and the engagement of multiple countries in the project underscore a collective dedication to advancing sustainable economic growth and

responsible environmental practices throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Links with targets and indicators of SDG 8

The pilot study “Monitoring green growth in the LAC region” in Peru plays a role in advancing SDG 8, which focuses on promoting decent work and economic growth. This contribution is linked to one of the three main components of SDG 8, namely the concept of the “green economy”. When it comes to the SDG 8 targets, the project connects with target 8.4.

Target 8.4 Sustainable economic growth

The connection occurs since this target seeks to gradually improve the efficient use of global resources in consumption and production by 2030, while also working to separate the link between economic growth and environmental decline. By measuring green growth in Peru and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, this initiative contributes to paving the way towards sustainable economic growth by mapping the current scenario, which can help improve country metrics and performance, as well as commit to leveraging policies that favour the green economy.

When it comes to the entire set of the 2030 Agenda, this initiative is also interconnected and can indirectly contribute to the enhancement of SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) by promoting advancements in global indicators. It promotes economic growth practices that prioritise environmental sustainability. Additionally, it aligns with SDG 12 (Sustainable production and consumption) by striving for economic growth that respects the responsible use of natural resources and minimises environmental impacts.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

The categorisation of indicators and their application in these specific areas allowed for a comprehensive assessment of Peru’s green growth progress. By addressing economic opportunities, policy responses, resource productivity, environmental quality and the state of natural assets, the project aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the country’s

path toward sustainable development while highlighting areas that required attention and intervention.

Even in cases where indicators may not immediately demonstrate positive outcomes, the process of monitoring plays a crucial role in driving future improvements and informing targeted interventions for decision making by providing an understanding of the current scenario and identifying challenges.

5.2. Africa

5.2.1 Case study of Mozambique: Joint programme for “more and better jobs in Cabo Delgado and Nampula province – harnessing the job opportunities in the new economy in Mozambique”

The Republic of Mozambique is in the south-eastern part of Africa and shares its borders with Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Eswatini and the Indian Ocean (Figure 8). Since its independence in 1975, the country witnessed a civil war between Frelimo and Renamo until a peace deal was signed in 1992. The country has plentiful natural resources, arable land, forests, mineral resources and newly discovered natural gas offshore in the Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces. Despite having a significant natural resource base, the country is among the world’s poorest (World Bank, 2023). The population of Mozambique was 33 817 425 as of Wednesday, 7 June 2023 (Worldometer, 2023). The same source estimates that the population density in 2023 was 40 people per square km, with a median age of 17.6 years. An estimated 62% of the population lives in rural areas (Worldometer, 2023). Despite a few years of relative peace in the country, the rich gas province of Cabo Delgado is still faced with military insurgence; this has caused an estimated 4 000 deaths and internal displacement of approximately 1 000 000 people (SDG-Fund, 2016), and in this way, the progress to achieving the targets for SDG 8 are seriously hampered.



Figure 8 – Provincial demarcation of Mozambique and surrounding countries

Source: IFAD-WFP (2018)

Although Mozambique's economy has recorded a strong and outstanding growth rate in recent years, this has not resulted in the creation of new jobs, socio-economic inclusion or a decline in the levels of inequality, and thus the achievement of SDG 8 and SDG 10 by 2030 is placed in jeopardy. On the other hand, inequitable economic growth without equitable distribution has increased the number of unemployed people in the last few years and this trend increasingly traps the potentially economically active population in a cycle of poverty. All fundamental indicators of SDG 10 (inequality) have increased, as has the rate of unemployment (SDG 8). Even though Mozambique's oil and gas sector is developing and positively contributing to the economy, the country needs to generate its investments into creating employment opportunities for the fast-expanding youth population (UNCT, 2013; Word Bank, 2023). The extractive industry has not had a beneficial, transformative impact on governance and development in the country. As a result, the SDG-Fund (SDGF, n.d.) partnered with UN agencies (UNDP, UN Women, UNIDO and ILO) and national partners (government ministries, multinational companies, provincial government, civil society organisations [CSOs] and NGOs) to fund a

joint programme to support and encourage gender-sensitive employment practices and workforce skills and strengthen small companies' production ties to certain multinational corporations. The joint programme's theme is "*More and better jobs in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces – harnessing the job opportunities in the new economy in Mozambique*" (World Bank, 2017). The programme was created to engage with the population of the provinces of Cabo Delgado and Nampula with a focus on young people and women, who are either seeking employment for better livelihoods or establishing small businesses. The duration of the programme was from 1 May 2015 to 30 April 2017.

Country setting and major issues linked to SDG 8

To support sustainable economic growth and create decent new job possibilities for local populations in the provinces of Cabo Delgado and Nampula, the joint programme was aimed at increasing the ability of local institutions to offer vocational training and encouraging multinational corporations in the oil and gas industries to use local content, while also assisting in the development of employment policies that take gender equality into account and enhancing the capabilities of micro-businesses and their connections to value chains.

The strategies of the programme

The joint programme was implemented in the two provinces to reduce poverty and create job opportunities by fostering economic opportunities for women and young people (target 8.5, target 8.6 and target 8b). The objectives of the joint programme were (SDGF, n.d.):

- assisting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as the creation of new decent jobs, reduce gender equality, and long-term jobs for the youth and women
- enabling multinational corporations and the extractive sector the opportunity to absorb local labour and integrate small-scale enterprises into their value chains for the benefit of local economies
- assuring the implementation of local content policies, including multinational enterprises' (MNEs') local purchases of goods and services and environmentally

friendly business practices in the case of the extractive sectors and women's empowerment

- targeting the creation of at least 1 500 direct jobs and 1 500 indirect positions, of which at least 50% are for women and at least 25% for the youth

The programme aimed for inclusive growth and put a premium on youth and women's skill development while concentrating on creating an environment of decent employment.

Results and impact of the programme

The case study in Mozambique was used to establish the following results and progress to achieving SDG 8 (SDGF, n.d.):

- A Training for Rural Economic Empowerment Strategy was engaged with 380 local youth who received training and start-up kits, which equipped them with the skills they needed to launch their local companies as a source of support for their livelihoods (target 8.6 and target 8.b).
- To enhance the supply-value chain, a community business service centre focusing on institutional capacity building helped local agribusiness with management and connections to larger customers, like catering companies and supermarkets. At the final stage of evaluation, there were 472 firms in the subcontracting and partnership exchange platform, with 129 matches between buyers and suppliers.
- In addition, 14 businesses profited from assessments, and 80 national consultants received training on environmental performance and the promotion of resource-efficient and cleaner production. They were able to comprehend and enhance their performance by comparing their performance to that of an additional 69 organisations.
- Overall, the programme benefited 3 241 individuals, including 722 women, who were able to receive assistance from the joint programme.

Challenges experienced

Mozambique was regarded as one of the sub-Saharan African countries with the fastest economic growth from 2000 to 2015 (World Bank, 2023), and this could be interpreted as

a country in the early stages of development due to the provision of employment opportunities, poverty reduction and human capital accumulation. This resulted in several challenges that had a negative impact on the programme, these included:

- the oil and gas industry's global slump
- the prevailing disempowerment and lack of skills among women and youth
- the trend of inequality of women in the labour market
- increasing attacks of extremist groups on host communities in the province of Cabo Delgado limiting access to the oil and gas production sites and the planned activities of the programme

Although prevailing national and international challenges had a negative impact on the overall effectiveness of the programme, and the originally planned number of jobs and small and medium-sized businesses were not achieved, the achievements as listed above resulted in a positive contribution towards setting the foundation of achieving the various targets for SDG 8.

Lessons learnt in terms of the achievement of SDG 8

Despite the various challenges faced by the implementation of the joint programme in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces, there was a strong need for specific strategies to address the various challenges encountered, which was the key to achieving reducing levels of inequality between gender-sensitive skills and specific training for women in extractive industries (oil and gas) host communities in the region. Although the programme used a participatory plan of action, more must be done to advance mainstreaming gender equality and economic independence for women to fully participate and benefit from these opportunities created in the sector (SDGF, n.d.).

Sustainability and possibility for replication

The joint programme, directly and indirectly, supported the economic inclusive growth of women and youth to reduce poverty levels (SDG 1), and gender equality (SDG 5) as well as a partnership for the goals (SDG 17). To achieve SDG 8, the initiative “*More and better jobs in Cabo Delgado and Nampula province – harnessing the job opportunities in the*

new economy in Mozambique”, which was adopted by national stakeholders and UN agencies, could be incorporated into policies for generating more and better jobs in other provinces. Hence, the joint programme has a strong likelihood of being replicated in other countries with economies reliant upon natural resources such as oil and gas.

5.2.2 Case study of South Africa: Creating Opportunity for South Africa’s Youth (COSY)

South Africa’s unemployment rate eased to 32.7% in the fourth quarter of 2022, from 32.9% in the prior period, however, with the expanded definition of unemployment, which includes those discouraged from seeking work, it was 42.6% in the fourth quarter. Meanwhile, the youth unemployment rate, measuring jobseekers between 15 and 24 years old, rose to 61% in the fourth quarter of 2022, up from an over two-year low of 59.6% in the previous period (Statistics South Africa, 2022a). In 2022, 47% of South African women were recorded as economically inactive meaning that almost half of the working-age women in the country are out of the labour force compared to 35,6% of their male counterparts (Statistics South Africa, 2022b). South Africa’s economic growth is 1.6% annually, which is insufficient to curb rising unemployment, given the country’s population growth rate (Parker, 2022). It is projected that South Africa would have to achieve a stable 5% a year economic growth rate for the next 50 years, which would bring the unemployment rate to under 10% (Statistics South Africa, 2022a). These disquieting figures show that South Africa still faces a tall task to achieve SDG 8, which strives for decent work and sustainable economic growth through improved employment opportunities for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities.

In response to this dire economic situation in the country, the Creating Opportunity for South Africa’s Youth (COSY) project was launched in February 2017 and concluded in January 2020. The project was funded by the European Union and coordinated by the British Council, in partnership with Business and Arts South Africa, LifeCo UnLtd South Africa and Livity Africa to foster inclusive growth. The British Council’s COSY project also partnered with Digify Africa to impart digital skills to young people, particularly young

women, in rural and peri-urban areas in South Africa, as part of its broader entrepreneurship programme. The aim was to support the sustainable futures of young people in some of South Africa's most excluded communities.

The COSY project wanted to achieve the following objectives.

- enabling young people, particularly young women, in rural and semi-rural areas to be more active agents in achieving sustainable growth
- building the capacity of rural people to become entrepreneurs by increasing their employability
- building the capacity of the local civil society organisations (CSOs) and supporting youth-led and youth-centred economic empowerment programmes
- identifying needs and income-generating opportunities
- supporting the strengthening of networks and partnerships so that young people can access these

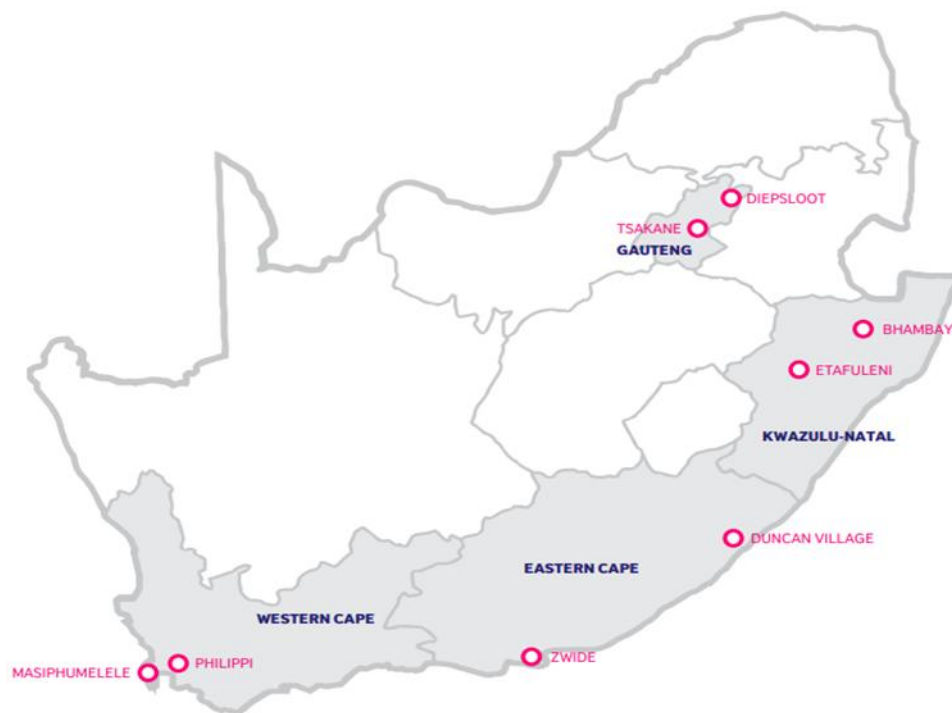
This entrepreneurship training programme partnership with different companies of a high level of expertise ensured the multifaceted approach which focused on creative, social and digital enterprise. For instance, LifeCo and Business Arts South Africa partnered with COSY to deliver core skills to enhance young people's entrepreneurial knowledge and boost their employability. This was a meaningful initiative because according to SDG target 8.2 higher levels of economic productivity can only be achieved through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation. Concerningly, 80% of the South African population is not digitally literate, meaning they do not know how to use digital resources as a tool to unlock economic potential for themselves, therefore, this project addressed that dearth (British Council, n.d.).

Results and impact of the programme/project

This project managed to reach eight communities in four provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Western Cape, [please see Figure 9]), targeting youth especially women between the ages of 15 and 25, including community leaders and civil society organisations (CSOs). The project's achievements include funding 20 CSOs, training 970 young people in entrepreneurial skills, reaching 11 000 South African youth

and awarding R200 000 in start-up capital to initiate new businesses (British Council, n.d.).

Figure 9 – COSY Project in different communities of South Africa



Source: British Council (n.d.)

The COSY project has been successful in upskilling and giving a voice to marginalised youth, often excluded from skills and entrepreneurship training initiatives concentrated in urban centres such as Johannesburg. The project introduced digital literacy, challenged participants to think beyond traditional forms of employment and encouraged them to explore entrepreneurship as a means of livelihood and job creation. At least 13 COSY participants established themselves as entrepreneurs and have created employment opportunities for others. One participant started a book publishing business and employs editors and translators since books are written in the isiZulu and English languages. Another participant manufactures homemade hand-poured candles and employs five employees and one more as a shareholder. Another one started an Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre to help broaden children's mental, educational, social, emotional and physical skills (British Council, n.d.).

With South Africa's current high unemployment rate, especially among the youth, the need to explore alternatives for job creation has never been greater. Programmes such as COSY are relevant and valuable because they demonstrate an understanding of the plight of South African youth. It also exposes young people to the enlightening and hopeful fact that there can indeed be a solution to the problem, in a real and relevant way, and in a global and connected world. The beneficiaries of the project were from some of South Africa's most impoverished communities as 7% still used buckets or pit latrines, 69% indicated that at least one person in their house was receiving a government grant, and 50% reported that they sometimes went to bed hungry. Therefore, this project ensured that more than 970 families have sustainable sources of income through entrepreneurship skills, thus improving the quality of life (British Council, n.d.).

Challenges experienced

Even though the training programme was offered free of charge, participants still had to provide their own transport to training venues, which was a challenge as some participants would miss training or training would be delayed. Another challenge was related to funding; it was not enough to fund all the business ideas and newly established businesses that participants had, as the number of applicants far exceeded the number that could be admitted.

Lessons learnt in terms of the achievement of specific SDG 8

Since this project targeted young people, mostly women between the ages of 15 to 25 years, it directly responded to SDG targets 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.5 and 8.6 which seek to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for men and women while reducing youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), which would sustain per capita economic growth. To achieve decent work and economic growth as stated by SDG 8, this case study was able to establish the following.

- creating employment opportunities for the youth by improving entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation, while encouraging the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises as 13 businesses were established and

registered such as sewing, car-washing, book-publishing, candle-manufacturing businesses and many more.

- inculcating a renewed thinking that women are also capable of starting and growing their businesses while ensuring that they also participate actively in the South African economy instead of occupying traditional female occupations within the domestic and farming sectors, where they often have low-paying positions (OECD, n.d.).
- cultivating creativity as a renewable resource. Designing thinking methodologies into the programme was of great importance to help participants re-imagine the role or potential of their businesses in relation to their environment and immediate surroundings, as well as to encourage a culture of experimentation, collaboration, and resourcefulness.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

The project provided a different and comprehensive approach by focusing on improving entrepreneurship skills for the South African youth to enable them to think beyond finding jobs and instead be creators of employment opportunities. This entrepreneurship training can be replicated in other provinces within the country as well as on the African continent.

5.2.3 Community-based asset programme for empowerment to drive grassroots sustainable development in the villages of Koffiekraal/Brakkuil in the North West province of South Africa

Contextual setting

Significant progress has been made in South Africa to address poverty, unemployment and inequality since the dawn of the new democracy in 1994. In this regard, South Africa's National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) plays an important role and aims to significantly reduce unemployment in South Africa by 2030. The NDP aligns with the SDGs with similarities in matters related to people, prosperity, peace, planet and partnerships (the five Ps). Despite some progress in achieving the goals by 2030, many vulnerable groups

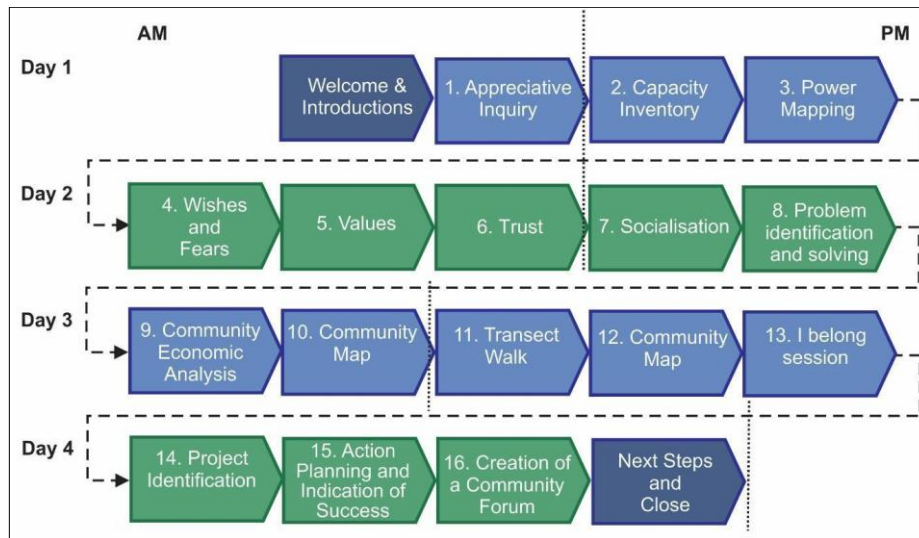
(women and children) in South Africa continue to experience acute poverty, while inequality persists alongside high unemployment rates and low rates of participation in the labour force.

The NDP advocates for developing the capabilities of communities to empower them to improve their lives through education, skills development and self-employment (National Planning Commission, 2011), and these align closely with SDG 8 targets 8.1, 8.5, 8.6 and 8.b. This case study documents the collaboration of stakeholders from the University of South Africa and a non-profit organisation (NPO) with the Koffiekraal/Brakkuil communities in the North West province of South Africa from 2012 to 2016 (Nicolau et al., 2018). The purpose of the collaboration was to empower the community to drive their own sustainable development. This case study shares the framework for this engagement, using the community-based tourism and handicraft components of the project as illustrative examples.

Project strategy

The university and NPO partnership led to the development of the Community Asset Mapping Programme (CAMP) – an empowerment tool to facilitate community-driven sustainable development in rural communities. CAMP consists of several processes designed to assist communities to make a mind shift from a traditionally disenfranchised community into a community of empowerment and control (Figure 10) that is facilitated during a series of workshops.

Figure 10 – Community Asset Mapping Programme



Source: Nicolau (2013)

The application of CAMP in Koffiekraal/Brakkuil in August 2012 took the form of a four-day workshop (Figure 10) and was attended by 76 community members (Nicolau et al., 2018). During this workshop, and with due consideration of their inherent social, human, economic and environmental assets, the participants from Koffiekraal/Brakkuil identified several entrepreneurial opportunities to address the high unemployment rate and lay the foundation to facilitate community-driven sustainable change in their communities. Several entrepreneurial initiatives were identified by participants to work towards community empowerment and to drive their sustainable development. Two of these initiatives, namely community-based tourism (SDG target 8.9), and handicraft (SDG target 8.2), will be reflected on as examples in this case study (Pretorius & Nicolau, 2020).

The community-based tourism component of the project

The university developed a learning strategy first aimed at the transfer of knowledge within a classroom situation to increase awareness among participants of the resource potential of their local living environment for community-based tourism (Nicolau et al., 2018). At the end of the classroom phase, two groups emerged that showed interest in developing community-based tourism opportunities in the villages of Koffiekraal/Brakkuil. During 2014/5 these groups had the opportunity to develop and have trial runs of the village tour they designed from their knowledge and insight gained in the classroom. In

2015 the two groups merged and formed the Big 5 Community Tourism Forum. The trial runs of the tours offered by this forum were community driven, with the university and NPO staff participating in advisory capacity. In 2016 it became clear that enough experience had been gained to take the village tour concept into the public domain. To ensure sustainability further training followed, targeting aspects such as communication, project management, budgeting and bookkeeping, before the launch of the Koffiekraal/Brakkuil village tours in November 2016 (SDG target 8.10).

The handicraft component of the project

During the CAMP workshop in 2012, an inventory of the skills of community participants showing interest in handicraft was compiled. These skills are related to textiles, clothing, fashion and crafts. Some of these participants expressed the wish and subsequently engaged in a workshop on the possibility of creating employment opportunities for similarly skilled community members. To support participants in developing their handicraft skills into a business, university and NPO staff provided training aimed at developing the participants' handicraft skills. This training took place monthly over a period of 18 months, after which 15 participants received attendance certificates. After the training, six participants expressed the wish to form a collective and the NPO assisted them to develop a business plan (SDG target 8.10). To ensure financial sustainability of the collective, the NPO provided training on budgeting and bookkeeping. This resulted in the development of a collective, that during 2014, had several opportunities to sell their handicrafts, including monthly craft markets and contracts from multinationals (Pretorius & Nicolau, 2020).

Results and impact of the project

The training phases of the community-based tourism and handicraft components of the project were experienced positively by participants (Pretorius & Nicolau, 2020). Apart from empowering them in terms of tourism and handicraft, it provided them with skills that they would be able to use in various contexts.

Despite the initial enthusiasm and positive feedback obtained from guests who participated in the trial runs of the village tour, the initiative came to an end after the launch

in November 2016. Moving forward, the role of the university and NPO staff was only to provide advice, while the Big 5 Community Tourism Forum had to take active ownership in the endeavour. Unfortunately, the Forum failed in offering further village tours in a sustainable way on their own once the university and the NPO exited the community.

The handicraft component of the project progressed further than the tourism component with the formal establishment of a collective, together with initial perusal of business opportunities leading to income generation. However, the collective did not exist for very long and was disbanded in 2014. Thereafter individual members continued to produce handicrafts and sold their goods within and outside their villages. In this way, the individuals continued to boost their households by income from handicrafts (target 8.2).

Both the community-based tourism and handicraft components of the project therefore did not develop into sustainable opportunities for income generation as initially foreseen. However, the reasons for this differ and provide lessons for implementation of similar projects.

Challenges experienced

The challenges with the implementation of the community-based tourism component of the project were on two levels (Pretorius & Nicolau, 2020). Firstly, several logistical challenges occurred, some of which could be addressed by planning and coordination. An example is the reliability of locals providing entertainment and transport. The lack of reliable 3G and internet coverage caused communication challenging and sometimes resulted in delays. This also constrained operational aspects, while poor transportation infrastructure made it difficult and costly for forum members to access products for catering. The second, more challenging concern involved the apparent lack of confidence of forum members while guiding visitors during village tours. Despite training and trail runs, this did not improve and manifested until the launch. This can probably be ascribed to the difficulty forum members experienced to communicate in English with visitors, combined with their limited knowledge/insight into the history of the villages. The challenges experienced by the handicraft component of the project were of a different

nature and involved issues relating to trust which had a negative impact on the relationship between group members. Initially these issues were about financial matters and although it only involved two members, it eventually had a negative impact on the group as a whole and their ability to collaborate to honour their contracts to provide handicrafts. Despite attempts from the NPO and the university staff to mediate, the relationships between the members of the group had reached a point where it could no longer function as a collective and they disbanded by the end of 2014.

Lessons learnt

The community-based tourism and handicraft components of the project demonstrated similarities and differences in terms of their development, implementation, challenges and successes from which important lessons can be learnt for similar initiatives in other areas (Pretorius & Nicolau, 2020).

- The handicraft group had members of the same gender, while the tourism group was mixed. The age differentiation between the groups varied, with the handicraft group having the biggest difference. In both groups the age differentiation presented problems. This may reflect the village culture, with youngsters expected to show respect for their elders, but which sometimes impeded the success of the projects.
- During training more success was achieved with the handicraft group. This could be related to the product of the training. The training of this group led to an immediate tangible outcome. Members could therefore attach a value to the skills learnt by selling their products. The training for the tourism group was less tangible and since none of the members were tourists themselves before, they found it challenging to grasp what tourism is about.
- The training for the handicraft group was more regular, while the training of the community-based tourism group was more ad hoc due to the availability of the academics.
- The initial successes of the handicraft group allowed members to start selling their products and to immediately generate an income. They were therefore more

motivated to pursue the project. On the other hand, the community-based tourism group could not immediately generate an income and had to wait until implementation before financial benefits would materialise (SDGs Targets 8.10 and 8.9).

- Finally, both groups developed trust issues, with the handicraft group which was eventually disbanded due to lack of trusting each other, while the tourism group inherently struggled with aspects related to confidence and trust in themselves to act as tour operators and to market the village tours.

Sustainability and possibility for replication

While the community-based tourism and the handicraft components of the project in Koffiekraal/Brakkuil experienced successes and challenges in their implementation, community engagement initiatives facilitated by academics in rural areas through the implementation of CAMP can play a major role in achieving the SDGs (generally targets 8.10, 8.2, 8.5, 8.3, 8.9 and 8.b). This case study highlighted how empowerment of local communities can contribute specifically to the realisation of SDG target 8.5, namely to provide productive employment and decent work for all by 2030. In this case study, these endeavours were specifically linked to SDG target 8.9, referring to the promotion of sustainable tourism. The implementation lessons shared in this case study will be of value to rural communities of South Africa who aim to drive their own sustainable development as well as stakeholders involved in the process. To this end processes such as CAMP can play an important role, especially in a country where social change has for many years been seen as the responsibility of the government and not driven by the community.

5.3 Europe

5.3.1 Ireland: Economic Recovery Plan and improving equal access to decent work and fair remuneration (SDG 8-related targets: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.5 and 8.8)

Irish socio-economic overview

In recent years, Ireland has consistently ranked first in economic growth within the European Union, including the period between 2020 and 2022. Over the past decade, the

GDP of the Emerald Isle has grown by more than 110%, while the EU average stood at 11.6%. As a result, Ireland is rapidly ascending among the wealthiest economies in Europe.

Major multinational companies such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Amazon, as well as Intel, Dell, AOL, PayPal, eBay, Oracle, Cisco and Twitter, have chosen Ireland as their primary European headquarters. This decision is driven by Ireland's favourable policies, allowing these companies to earn revenue from intellectual property outside the country and benefit from low taxation on such activities. However, this situation may change with the potential introduction of a digital tax within the European Union. Some experts argue that Ireland's economic growth has been largely artificial, mainly stemming from attracting international corporations through low taxes, which may not entirely reflect genuine prosperity. Nevertheless, Ireland undeniably belongs to the group of developed countries with a relatively high standard of living (OECD Economic Surveys, 2022).

Towards implementing SDG 8 – Economic Recovery Plan

One of the interesting projects aligning with the implementation of SDG 8 is the Economic Recovery Plan (ERP), which serves as one of the responses to the crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The national response to the pandemic has transitioned from an emergency approach to a more comprehensive and targeted strategy aimed at mitigating the severe impacts of COVID-19 on the population. As part of the recovery process, government departments are actively learning from the experiences during the pandemic and embracing opportunities that emerged. This includes integrating innovative practices like digital delivery and fostering collaboration in policy development, as well as adopting new delivery models utilised during the pandemic. Additionally, efforts are being made to address backlogs, pent-up demand and unmet needs that have arisen due to the pandemic and associated public health responses (Economic Recovery Plan, 2021).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ireland has established a comprehensive set of national framework policies to foster a favourable public policy environment for recovery. These policies not only aim to guide the country's recovery from the pandemic but also

address pre-existing challenges and requirements. Moreover, they seek to prepare the economy and labour market to effectively tackle future challenges and embrace potential opportunities that lie ahead.

The Economic Recovery Plan introduced in June 2021 is aimed at achieving a sustainable rebound in economic activity and employment by embracing the transition towards a decarbonised and digital economy. It revolves around main pillars: assisting individuals in returning to work (SDG 8); rebuilding resilient businesses (SDG 8, SDG 9); fostering a balanced and inclusive recovery, acknowledging crisis-induced challenges and opportunities for positive transformation (SDG 10, SDG 11); and securing sustainable public finances and macroeconomic stability as the bedrock for lasting recovery (SDG 8) (Ireland's 2023 Voluntary National Review).

The following are the four pillars of the ERP (Economic Recovery Plan, 2021):

- Ensuring that public finances are sustainable for a lasting recovery
- Helping people back into work by extending labour market supports and through intense activation and reskilling and upskilling opportunities, driven by Pathways to Work 2021–2025
- Rebuilding sustainable enterprises through targeted supports and policies to make enterprises more resilient and productive
- A balanced and inclusive recovery through strategic investment in infrastructure and reforms that enhance the long-term capacity for growth, balanced regional development and by improving living standards

Decent work and fair remuneration in the context of ERP and overall SDG 8 implementation in Ireland

Ensuring improved equality in access to decent work and fair compensation is crucial for advancing economic equality, as evidenced by various targets under SDG 8. Ireland's emphasis on the labour market and job creation should prioritise safeguarding the six key dimensions of decent work: work accessibility, adequate earnings, employee representation, work security and stability, equal opportunities and treatment in employment, and health and safety. However, in 2023, the European Committee of Social

Rights found Ireland in violation of nine labour rights articles under the Revised European Social Charter, including just conditions of work, fair remuneration, the right to organise, and collective bargaining. Moreover, Ireland struggled with recognising and respecting pay transparency in practice. Despite some progress, gender pay and pension gaps persist at approximately 12.6% and 35%, respectively. Research also highlights the need to proactively design policy measures that protect women's access to decent work, particularly during crises and pandemics, as evidenced during COVID-19 when women faced reduced working hours and additional caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, women were disproportionately affected by unemployment in sectors where COVID-19 had a heavy impact, such as hospitality, retail and care. The research further indicates that equality and social inclusion strategies in Ireland tend to prioritise activation over ensuring decent work opportunities for structurally vulnerable groups (Ireland's 2023 Voluntary National Review).

Results and impact of the project

The Progress Report published in June 2022 showcased strong employment growth since the inception of the ERP, marking significant achievements through the implementation of crucial initiatives and policies geared towards sustainable economic recovery and revitalisation. The Economic Recovery Plan was designed in accordance with Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), a part of the European Union's NextGenerationEU, a comprehensive €750 billion recovery package for the entire European Union. This joint recovery and resilience initiative aimed to tackle the pandemic's economic and social impact while fostering greater sustainability, resilience and readiness for the green and digital transformations that lie ahead in European economies and societies (Economic Recovery Plan, 2021).

Ireland's NRRP has a central goal of contributing to a sustainable, fair, green and digital recovery, complementing and bolstering the government's broader efforts as outlined in the Economic Recovery Plan. This comprehensive plan comprises 16 investment projects and nine reform measures, all of which focus on three main priority areas (Ireland's 2023 Voluntary National Review):

- advancing the green transition – a first step to significantly reform and direct relevant funding towards decarbonising projects and to strengthen the overall governance framework by enshrining key environmental policies in national legislation to ensure that our environmental policy efforts are on a sustainable footing and that momentum is maintained into the medium and long term
- accelerating and expanding digital reforms and transformation – to support Irish business and citizens to adapt to, and reap the benefits from digitalisation
- social and economic recovery and job creation – to support the return to work and prepare people for the challenges of the future as well as contribute to strengthening the overall social and economic policy framework in Ireland

Key points of the Economic Recovery Plan include the following (Economic Recovery Plan, 2021):

- substantially extending the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), and the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS), while significantly enhancing both EWSS and CRSS
- complementing these efforts with other initiatives, including extending the Commercial Rates Waiver, introducing the new Business Resumption Support Scheme and extending the Tax Debt Warehousing Scheme
- providing ongoing support for the worst-affected sectors like aviation, tourism and events during their reopening phase, which includes extending the 9% VAT rate for the tourism and hospitality sector, supporting the live entertainment and events sector, and developing a roadmap for the aviation industry
- undertaking strategic investments aimed at driving the digital and green transition, supporting social and economic recovery, and fostering job creation
- setting an overarching ambition to exceed pre-crisis employment levels and aiming to have 2.5 million people in work by 2024
- assisting individuals in returning to work and accessing sustainable job opportunities through increased activation measures, as well as reskilling and upskilling opportunities

- paving the way towards a robust and resilient economy, aligning with the government's green and digital ambitions
- learning from the lessons of the pandemic to build a balanced and inclusive recovery, utilising new ways of working, and enhancing labour market supports and living standards
- ensuring sustainable public finances to achieve lasting recovery

The importance of implementing SDG 8 is particularly significant for Ireland, especially when considering both local and global trends. In recent times, Ireland's labour market has faced notable disruptions but has demonstrated impressive resilience in its recovery efforts. Nonetheless, the pandemic has shed light on longer-term structural changes affecting the workforce, including digitalisation and shifts in industry sectors. Over the past two decades, there has been a noticeable shift in the composition of employment in the Irish economy, with a growing emphasis on the service sectors, particularly those that require specialised knowledge. This trajectory is expected to persist, possibly even accelerated by the impact of COVID-19.

Additionally, Ireland's evolving demographics, characterised by a rising proportion of older individuals in the population, will also have repercussions for employment growth. This demographic shift is likely to create increased opportunities in sectors like health care and caregiving, among others.

Lessons learnt in terms of the achievement of SDG 8

In general, countries can learn the following potential lessons from the Irish Economic Recovery Plan to achieve SDG 8:

- The Irish plan has emphasised building economic resilience and diversification, which can help countries respond better to future crises and challenges.
- The plan has included initiatives to support job creation, particularly in sectors with high growth potential, which other countries can adopt to promote decent work opportunities.
- The plan has included measures to address social and economic inequalities, which is crucial for sustainable economic growth and achieving SDG 8 targets.

- The plan focused on promoting innovation and digital transformation, and other countries can learn from these strategies to enhance their own economic growth and productivity.
- Efforts to invest in education and skill development can help countries equip their workforce for the demands of the future labour market.
- The plan has utilised public-private partnerships effectively, showcasing how collaboration between the government and private sector can drive economic growth and job creation.
- The Irish plan has incorporated sustainability principles, and other countries can learn from integrating environmental and social considerations into their economic recovery strategies.
- It is essential for countries to establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of their economic recovery plans in achieving SDG 8 goals.

Possibility for replication

In conclusion, while the Irish Economic Recovery Plan could serve as a valuable reference for other countries, successful replication would depend on the specific circumstances, adaptability and commitment of each nation to tailor and implement the plan according to its unique needs and challenges. Collaboration, international partnerships and shared learning can also enhance the effectiveness of efforts to replicate successful economic recovery strategies. Moreover, it should be noted that the discussed plan has a broader spectrum of impact, influencing not only the implementation of SDG 8.

Replicating any economic recovery plan is rather difficult, but stakeholders' engagement is essential. Involving key stakeholders, including government agencies, businesses, community organisations and experts, in the planning and implementation process is needed. Their input and support are critical for success. Moreover, evaluating existing policies and regulations that may hinder or facilitate the implementation of the recovery plan and making necessary adjustments to create a favourable environment for economic growth are necessary.

5.3.2 Poland: The lowest unemployment rate in the EU in light of the strategy to support the labour market and vocational activation (SDG 8-related targets: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5 and 8.8)

Economic and political circumstances of Poland

Poland is one of the largest countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the 5th largest in the European Union. Its economy has been growing at a stable pace for over 30 years and is the 6th largest in the EU. The GDP per capita is close to 80% of the EU average (based on purchasing power parity in 2022). These exceptionally healthy developmental foundations are evident as Poland was the only country in Europe not affected by recession from 2008 to 2010. Currently, the main drivers of economic growth are exports and domestic consumption.

The healthy state of public finances and the ability to plan long-term investments demonstrate economic stability and predictability. Public finances remain in much better shape than the EU average public debt as a percentage of GDP.

The modernisation process initiated in 1989 is being continued. The Polish economy is becoming increasingly integrated with the global economy. Polish businesses are strongly integrated into European production chains, and the government's priority is to provide solid foundations for business development and entrepreneurship. This complex goal is achieved by ensuring transparent and stable conditions for conducting economic activities.

The GDP in Poland is expected to grow by 1% in 2023 and, in the following years, the growth rate will gradually accelerate to 2.2% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025. Despite the current economic slowdown, the country's unemployment rate is still at a record low and the lowest in the European Union (2.7% as of April 2023).

Currently, the issue of concern is inflation, which peaked in Poland in February at 18.4%. Since March, inflation has been decreasing, and this trend is expected to continue in the coming months. In July 2023, inflation stood at 10.8% (socio-economic situation of the

country in 2022, Statistics Poland; Doing Business in Poland, 2022; HSBC International Business Guides Central and Eastern Europe, 2022; McKinsey & Company in cooperation with Forbes, 2019; Ernst & Young, 2022).

Main projects supporting implementation of SDG 8

“The Business Constitution” (in force since 30 April 2018), a package of five laws constituting the “systemic core” of conducting business activities in Poland, is the most significant reform in this area in over 20 years. “The Business Constitution” introduced, among others, the presumption of honesty for entrepreneurs, the obligation to resolve factual and legal doubts in favour of the entrepreneur, as well as the possibility of suspending business activities indefinitely, conducting small-scale business without the need for registration and voluntary exemption for new entrepreneurs from social insurance for the first six months. Approximately three out of four people starting a business benefit from this latter solution. “The Business Constitution” also provides for adequate institutional protection for entrepreneurs through the Ombudsman for Small and Medium-sized Entrepreneurs.

The Package of 100 Changes for Companies covers various issues and areas, including financial, accounting, administrative and employment matters. It addresses regulations related to simplified joint stock companies and company succession, among others.

The Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) Package introduces many simplifications in taxes, administrative obligations and the rules governing the organisation of commercial companies. Thanks to these measures, entrepreneurs will have nearly 4 billion Polish zloty (PLN) in their pockets over the next ten years.

The “Business-Friendly Law” Package introduces changes in over 60 laws, aiming to eliminate inconsistencies and excessive restrictions in Polish law. It applies to various industries, including postal, telecommunications, aviation, energy, hospitality and payment services. The changes complement other initiatives such as the Package of 100 Changes for Companies, “The Business Constitution” and the SMEs Package. Together, these measures seek to create a more business-friendly environment in Poland.

The Anti-Crisis Shield is a package of several laws and regulations introducing numerous support instruments. These include facilitation of payments for tax and contribution obligations, subsidies for loan interest, and guarantees from the Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK). It also includes credit holidays, the introduction of remote work possibilities and the extension or suspension of certain deadlines prescribed by the law. The Anti-Crisis Shield aims to provide support and relief to businesses and individuals during times of crisis.

The state procurement policy outlines Poland's priority actions in the area of public procurement and the desired direction for contracting authorities regarding the awarded contracts. It indicates the following priorities: the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and sustainable and innovative procurement. The aim is to increase SME activity in the public procurement market. Under the priority of sustainable and innovative procurement, contracting authorities are obligated to apply environmental, health and social aspects more extensively in public procurement and increase the number of innovative contracts. Initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable public procurement among contracting authorities and providing them with substantive support, such as training programmes, are also planned.

The Public Employment Services (PES) Reform aims to modernise and improve the functioning of the employment offices through the implementation of several measures. The key objective is to modernise the IT system, introduce new procedural standards and provide training for PES employees on the new operating principles. These changes will enable more efficient mediation between employers and job seekers, shorten the job search time and ultimately contribute to an increase in employment rates.

A responsible migration policy has been developed through the amendment of regulations concerning foreigners' access to the Polish labour market. A new type of permit, the seasonal work permit, has been introduced. The rules for short-term employment have been tightened to reduce abuses and protect foreign workers. Additionally, provisions have been adopted to limit circular migration in favour of medium- and long-term migration. Information systems facilitating the legalisation process for employing

foreigners have been expanded, as well as cooperation between various institutions involved in migration issues.

Poland is currently undergoing a transformation from a country that receives migrants for short-term work to a country where migration is more permanent and includes not only workers but also their families. This means that more efforts are now focused on the integration of foreigners rather than just the efficiency of work legalisation procedures. The migration policy has been influenced significantly by crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The demand for foreign workers is sustained and mainly stems from demographic changes in Poland and the need for qualifications that are scarce domestically.

The professional activation of young people, women, individuals aged 50+, long-term unemployed individuals and people with disabilities through actions in the “Work” area defined in the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 aims to result in increased professional activity for people with disabilities and greater employment opportunities in an open, inclusive and accessible work environment. The main goal of the proposed solutions in this area is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to exercise their right to work on an equal basis with others (Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Poland, 2023).

Results and selected impacts of discussed projects

It should be emphasised that ensuring sustainable and balanced economic growth and supporting an inclusive labour market is crucial for building the long-term competitiveness of the Polish economy.

Despite significant disruptions and crisis phenomena in the external environment, the previous economic convergence was achieved due to favourable macroeconomic conditions, structural reforms and support from domestic and European funds. The government is implementing various actions aimed at improving the competitiveness and regulatory environment for Polish companies. Efforts are being made to provide conditions for fair competition, eliminate market imperfections, reduce developmental barriers for entrepreneurship and introduce modern business development instruments.

A significant challenge for Poland, similar to many Central and Eastern European countries, remains high inflation (16.6% at the end of December 2022), largely influenced by external factors (mainly energy prices due to the war in Ukraine). The government is taking actions to mitigate its negative impact on the economy and society (e.g., within the framework of the anti-inflation shield).

From 2018 to 2022, the labour market situation in Poland significantly improved. The unemployment rate according to the Labor Force Survey (BAEL) is the lowest in 30 years (2.3% in the age group 25–74 in Q3 2022). Considerable improvement is also observed in employment indicators. According to GUS/BAEL data, in 2021, the employment rate for individuals aged 20 to 64 was 75.4%. As part of Poland's commitments under the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), the goal by 2030 is to achieve a rate of at least 78.5%.

There is also an increasing activity of people with disabilities in the labour market. From 2018 to 2021, the employment rate for working-age people with disabilities increased by 4.6% (from 28.3% to 32.9%), the employment rate rose by 4.5% (from 26.2% to 30.7%), and the unemployment rate decreased by 0.3% (from 7.2% to 6.9%). However, the level of occupational activity for people with disabilities remains significantly lower compared to fully able individuals.

The average wages are rising both in the economy (an average of 4.1% annually in the period 2018–2021) and in the business sector (an average of 3.6% annually in the period 2018–2021). The percentage of employees with employment contracts compared to the total number of people employed in the national economy is also increasing (a 6.5% increase from 2018 to 2021 to a level of 80.4%).

The share of the entire small and medium and micro-enterprise (SMME) sector in generating value-added is still lower than the EU average (50.0% compared to 51.8% in 2021), although this sector shows a higher share in the total number of people employed in Poland compared to the EU overall result (66.7% compared to 64.4% in 2021). This means that the entire SMME sector in Poland has relatively lower productivity compared to the EU, influenced by various factors, such as technical work equipment, extent of

innovative solutions used throughout the business scope, digitisation of processes and quality of management (Poland: Land of rising opportunities, 2019).

Lessons learnt in terms of the achievement of SDG 8

Based on the implemented projects aligned with SDG 8, several challenges and conclusions for the future can be identified:

- improving the conditions for doing business: Despite numerous changes in the business environment, there is still a need to strengthen solutions favourable for entrepreneurs, particularly considering the dynamically changing external environment.
- effectively stimulating the growth of companies, especially innovative ones, which is essential for positive structural transformations in the economy and increasing its productivity
- promoting corporate social responsibility through actions within the framework of the EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and the EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Reporting, as well as other regulations related to responsible business, such as the prohibition of forced labour
- supporting the occupational activation of people with varying degrees of disabilities through the implementation of the “Strategy for Persons with Disabilities”
- further actions to promote the employment of people aged 50+, facilitate job retention and intermediation, combat age discrimination in the labour market, and develop coordination of the social security system
- The complementarity of foreign workers with the native workforce in managing labour migration remains an ongoing issue and constitutes one of the pillars of the employment policy for hiring foreign workers, alongside ensuring their labour rights and flexible response to emerging crises. Future priorities include digitisation, simplifying procedures and enhancing cooperation with national and international institutions. Areas requiring support include the integration of foreigners into society and the labour market, as well as improving institutional services for third-country nationals.

Challenges and insights for the future in the context of promoting decent work conditions:

- Improving the business environment
- Effectively stimulating the development of companies, particularly in terms of innovation
- Promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) through actions in line with the various EU Directives
- Supporting the occupational activation of individuals with varying degrees of disabilities
- Promoting the employment of individuals aged 50 and above
- Aligning the skill sets of foreign workers with native labour resources in managing labour migration.

Possibility for replication

The economic model followed by Poland can be studied to understand its suitability for replication in other countries. It involves examining policies related to trade, investment, taxation and regulation. The structure of the Polish economy, including its dominant industries and export sectors, plays a crucial role. Replicating this would depend on the presence of similar industries in other countries and their potential for growth.

Labor market policies, including wages, labour laws and workforce skills, influence economic performance. Other countries would need to assess their own labour market conditions to see if they align with Poland's. The level of infrastructure and technological advancement in Poland contributes to its economic success. Other countries would need to analyse their own infrastructure and technological readiness.

The stability of the political environment and the effectiveness of government policies are essential. Replicating the Polish economic success would require understanding the political context and the ability to implement coherent and consistent policies.

Global economic conditions, including trade relationships and geopolitical dynamics, can have an impact on the Polish economy. Other countries should consider their own international relations and economic exposure.

Poland's integration with the European Union has been a significant driver of its economic growth. Other countries would need to consider their regional and global integration

options. Population size, age distribution and labour force dynamics influence economic potential.

5.3.3 Italy: Digitalisation, community, creativity – innovative environment (SDG 8-related targets: 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6 and 8.8)

Italian socio-economic overview

Italy's GDP growth is expected to slow down, declining from 3.8% in 2022 to 1.2% in 2023 and 1% in 2024. The economy faces challenges, including high inflation, which is affecting real incomes due to limited wage growth, and tightening financial conditions. Moreover, fiscal support related to the energy crisis is being gradually withdrawn, which is having an impact on private consumption and investment. Domestic risks are relatively balanced. Although household savings remain substantial, they could potentially support a faster rebound in domestic demand. However, delays in implementing the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) could adversely affect GDP growth.

Monetary policy tightening is starting to have an impact, and as energy-related fiscal support is scaled back, the overall macroeconomic policy stance is becoming restrictive. The current mildly restrictive fiscal stance appears appropriate, and continued consolidation will be necessary in the future to ensure a more sustainable debt trajectory. The prompt execution of structural reforms and public investment plans outlined in the NRRP will be critical to sustaining economic activity in the short term and fostering sustainable growth in the medium term. Despite subdued industrial production and retail sales, there has been an improvement in business and consumer confidence in recent months. The unemployment rate remains historically low, and employment continues to grow, although the working-age population is shrinking. These factors, coupled with recent declines in energy prices, stabilised real household incomes and supported a modest recovery in private consumption during the first half of 2023. The tightening of euro area monetary policy has led to higher borrowing costs for households and businesses, with bank lending rates increasing significantly over the past year.

Additionally, it has raised the government's cost of refinancing the large public debt, with debt servicing costs expected to reach around 4% of GDP in 2024.

Italy has an aging population, which poses challenges for the social welfare system and health-care services. An aging population can also have an impact on the labour market and pension system. Italy has a well-established education system, but there are concerns about the quality and relevance of education, particularly in certain regions. Education plays a crucial role in social mobility and equal opportunities. The health-care system has been highly regarded for its universal coverage and quality of care. However, like in many countries, there are challenges, such as funding and access to services, especially in rural areas. Italy has social welfare programmes in place to support vulnerable populations, including the unemployed, disabled and elderly. However, the effectiveness and coverage of these programmes can vary across regions. Italy has experienced significant immigration in recent years, which has both positive and negative social implications. Integration and social cohesion have been topics of discussion. The cost of housing, particularly in major cities, has been a concern for many Italians, especially for young people and low-income families. Italy has made progress in promoting gender equality, but there are still challenges, including gender disparities in the workforce and representation in leadership positions. Social cohesion, the sense of community and trust among citizens, is a vital aspect of a society. In some regions, there have been concerns about rising social divisions and disparities (OECD Data, 2023; Deloitte, 2021; Boosting evidence-based policy making for economic development policies in Italy, 2023).

Community, digitalisation, innovation and creativity for SDG 8 implementation

Crescere in Digitale is a collaborative project spearheaded by Unioncamere in partnership with Google and supported by the ANPAL (National Agency for Active Labor Policies under the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies) through the resources of the National Operational Programme "Youth Employment Initiative". The primary goal of this initiative is to enhance the employability of young people who are not currently engaged in formal education by equipping them with essential digital skills. Through the programme, these young individuals have the opportunity to sharpen their expertise and support businesses

in navigating the digital realm. Crescere in Digitale offers a comprehensive approach that combines digital education with practical hands-on experience. Participants first undergo a 50-hour online training course, covering various topics such as website building, social media engagement and online advertising. Armed with these newly acquired skills, they are then matched with enterprises keen on enhancing their online presence. This matching process opens the doors for young talent to work alongside businesses and SMEs, fostering a collaborative environment where they can apply their digital knowledge and contribute to digital innovation. Notably, participants get a chance to embark on a six-month paid internship within the partnering companies, allowing them to gain invaluable real-world experience. Overall, Crescere in Digitale serves as a transformative bridge, empowering young jobseekers with digital prowess and fostering digital growth and innovation within businesses, making it a win-win initiative for both the youth and the corporate world (Crescere in Digitale [Growing in Digital], 2023).

The “Welcome – Working for refugee integration” initiative is a reward assigned to the companies that hire refugees and support their inclusion in society. Companies that put in place one of the following actions can use the logo “Welcome – Working for refugee integration” for communication purposes (Welcome – Working for refugee integration, 2023):

- distinguishing themselves for the new hiring of beneficiaries of international protection or for supporting them in actual labour integration, and through effective training programmes or innovative and high-quality language learning programmes
- fostering the social inclusion process of the employees, who are beneficiaries of international protection, within their own local environment through actions aimed at facilitating intercultural dialogue or concrete actions of support
- supporting the creation of self-employment businesses by beneficiaries of international protection through actions of free-of-charge support addressed to start-up ventures

CivicNeet, founded in 2016 by Territorio e Cultura Onlus in Novara, with the support of Fondazione Cariplo, represents an innovative approach to integrating labour and social

inclusion policies. This project focuses on creating a unique training pathway for young people aged 15 to 30, who are not enrolled in any training programme and are unemployed, commonly known as NEETs (not in education, employment or training). This group is particularly vulnerable to social challenges, poverty and exclusion. The primary objective of CivicNeet is to provide these young individuals, who all possess a high school diploma, with the opportunity to be part of a company training programme in the manufacturing sector. The project establishes a strong community connection with each participant, tailoring the training to their individual needs and aspirations. The apprenticeships offered through CivicNeet vary across different sectors, ranging from social promotion associations to theatre companies affiliated with churches, entertainment centres and social cooperatives. This diversity allows for the implementation of innovative strategies that cater specifically to the unique challenges faced by NEETs. One fundamental principle of CivicNeet is its commitment to a place-based approach, wherein various stakeholders collaborate and pool their resources to transform challenges into opportunities for the local community as a whole. By fostering such community-driven initiatives, CivicNeet not only empowers these young people but also contributes to the development and progress of the entire local area (CivicNeet, 2023).

Results and lessons learnt in terms of the achievement of SDG 8

In Italy, a remarkable initiative called “Growing In Digital” is making a significant impact on hundreds of young people and businesses. The project, a partnership between the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce and Google, focuses on equipping young unemployed individuals with the latest digital skills that are highly sought-after in today’s job market. Known as “Crescere in Digitale”, this project has already trained thousands of young people and assisted hundreds of businesses in reaping the benefits of these new skills. The project offers local training workshops where interested businesses can meet and interview potential trainees. The ultimate goal is to provide these young individuals with a six-month paid internship within the companies. This arrangement allows the participants to gain valuable work experience while the businesses benefit from having employees equipped with cutting-edge digital business skills.

Martina Perrucci, who started as an intern at a nautical design company called Flexitab four years ago, is one success story. Thanks to the “Growing In Digital” project, she now holds the position of digital marketing manager and manages her own team. Martina shares that before the project, she lacked clarity about her professional future, but now she is focused on her goals and knows what she wants to achieve.

Another noteworthy effort in Italy is the “Welcome – Working for refugee integration” programme. In 2022, 167 Italian companies were recognised with the “Welcome” logo by the UN refugee agency UNHCR for their commitment to promoting the professional integration of refugees in the workplace. The programme, funded by the Intesa Sanpaolo charity fund and realised in cooperation with the Adecco Foundation, the Italian Ministry of Employment, Confindustria and the Global Compact Network Italia, has made a significant impact by activating professional training for over 22 000 refugees in more than 520 firms across Italy.

These initiatives, along with programmes like CivicNeet, play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by young NEETs in Italy. By offering employment opportunities, vocational training and promoting civic engagement, these projects contribute to social inclusion and support the future prospects of the country’s youth.

These projects may help with decent work scheme implementation because Italy has experienced fluctuations in its unemployment rates in recent years. Achieving full and productive employment is a key component of SDG 8. The Italian government has been working on policies and initiatives to reduce unemployment and create more job opportunities. Moreover, the broadly understood concept of “decent work” includes fair wages, job security, safe working conditions and respect for labour rights. Italy has been working on improving labour conditions and ensuring that workers have access to decent work opportunities.

Possibility for replication

While taking inspiration from successful programmes like “Growing In Digital”, it is essential to recognise that different countries may have diverse educational systems, digital infrastructure and cultural norms. A programme needs to be adaptable and flexible

to suit the local context. Creating public awareness about the importance of digital skills and encouraging participation from various stakeholders is essential to drive support and engagement.

Understanding the specific objectives and goals of the “Welcome – Working for refugee integration” programme is crucial. Considering the refugee context in the target country is essential. The number of refugees, their demographic profile, and the legal and policy framework for refugee integration will influence the design and implementation of the programme. Recognising and respecting cultural differences are crucial when designing programmes for refugee integration. The programme should be culturally sensitive and consider the unique needs of different refugee populations.

Before replicating any programme, it is crucial to understand the specific social, economic and cultural context of the target country. What works well in Italy may not be directly applicable in another nation with different demographics, labour market conditions and social welfare systems. Rather than directly copying a programme, it is often more effective to adapt and tailor the policies and initiatives to suit the local needs and circumstances. Flexibility is essential, as solutions may require modifications to be successful elsewhere.

Engaging stakeholders from different sectors, including government agencies, NPOs, educational institutions and employers, is vital to develop a comprehensive approach to support NEET individuals. Gathering data and conducting thorough evaluations of existing programmes in Italy will provide valuable insights into their effectiveness. Understanding what aspects have worked can help in designing successful interventions in other countries. Successful implementation of NEET support programmes often requires training and building the capacity of local organisations and agencies responsible for executing these initiatives. Adequate funding and resources are critical to sustaining and scaling up successful interventions. Identifying potential funding sources, both domestically and internationally, is essential.

Examples of questions for assessment

5. Case studies and best practises

- List some good practices that target the implementation of SDG 8.
- What could be your own contribution to SDG 8?
- Select a case study in your country that reflects a best practice in terms of achieving the SDG 8 targets. Briefly explain this case study and explore how best practice can contribute towards achieving SDG 8.

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6. Examples of exercises and assessments

Based on the SDG 8 targets and concepts, this section of the manual firstly provides a set of exercises that users (professors, lecturers and teachers) can use with their students to foster ideas, solutions and new initiatives for sustainable development. The level of detail and complexity of these exercises can be regulated according to the educational level of the students. Secondly, a set of shorter assessment questions is also included.

These questions cover all the sections in this manual, and require shorter, more-to-the-point answers. For both the exercises and the assessments, users can decide if they want to use them as provided, adapt them according to their on local contexts and needs or to use them as examples and rather develop their own exercises and assessments accordingly.

6.1 Exercises

The Human Face Of Food: This exercise is aimed at stimulating students to think about the agricultural, rural and fishing industries that produce food across the world.

Careers: What is My Place in the World?: This exercise help students explore career options, the impacts on their lives and on the world around them, and careers in a global context. Suggestion: use the link <https://www.16personalities.com/br> to understand your professional profile.

Case study analysis: Lecturers can either provide students with real-world case studies (some examples are available in the [Urban Sustainability Exchange website](#), and additional resources can be accessed in the [Springer Nature website](#)) related to SDG 8, or ask students to look for cases and bring them to class. Students can analyse these cases, identify the challenges and opportunities related to SDG 8, and propose sustainable solutions.

Group discussions and debates: Lecturers can organise group discussions and debates on various aspects of SDG 8, such as the role of entrepreneurship in job creation, the impact of automation and technology on employment, and working conditions. The discussions could include the interconnection of SDG 8 with the other goals, and promote the analysis of different perspectives.

Guest lectures: Students can be challenged to bring guest lecturers to class, for example, guest speakers from relevant industries, labour organisations or government agencies to share their experiences and insights on practical knowledge related to SDG 8.

Business plan for sustainable start-ups: Students can develop business plans for start-ups that focus on sustainable products or services. They would need to consider

factors such as environmental impact, social responsibility and long-term viability to promote sustainable economic growth. Suggestion: the business model canvas (BMC) may be useful here.

Sustainable tourism: Students can select tourism destinations and assess their sustainability practices, such as waste management, resource conservation and community involvement.

Sustainable job fair: Lecturers and students can organise a sustainable job fair where students can interact with employers, especially in areas such as renewable energy, green technology or social enterprises.

Good practices: Choose one practice on the platform good practices (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/goodpractices>), present and discuss with the colleagues: what are the lessons learnt and how it can be replicated in other contexts? Compare and discuss the data of economic growth from Latin America, Africa and Europe along the years.

6.2 Assessment

1. Introduction to the SDGs

- Name the five areas of critical importance to which the 17 SDGs are linked and explain why they are referred to as the five Ps.
- Explain the link between the MDGs and the SDGs.
- Explain how the SDGs differ from the MDGs.

2. Defining SDG 8

- What are the main aspects of SDG 8?
- What is the focus of the first ten targets of SDG 8?
- What is the focus of the last two targets of SDG 8?

2.1 Significance of SDG 8

- What is the status of the progress to achieve SDG 8 by 2030?

- Explain the main characteristics of the key aspects of SDG 8: Green economy; Sustainable tourism; and Employment, decent work for all and social protection.

2.2 Interdependencies of SDG 8

- How is SDG 8 interconnected with the other SDGs? What other SDGs do you think would be most affected if SDG 8 is not achieved?
- Select any three SDGs and briefly explain how they interact with SDG 8. Use examples from your region to illustrate your explanation.

2.3 Advantages of SDG 8

- What would the main advantages be for the world if the goal of economic growth is achieved?
- Select any two of the targets of SDG 8 and explain the specific advantages which would manifest with the attainment of these targets. Link it to advantages for your specific region.

2.4 Challenges in the implementation of SDG 8

- How have different global crises been affecting the implementation of SDG 8?
- What are the difficulties in implementing SDG 8 in your country? Which are the main barriers? And how can they be overcome?

3. Overview of global crises that have a negative impact on the achievement of SDG 8

- Name at least three global crises that affect the achievement of the targets of SDG 8.

3.1 Climate change

- What negative impact does climate change have on the progress around economic growth and employment?
- How are these impacts perceived in your region?

3.2 COVID-19

- What are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the targets of SDG 8?
- How are these effects perceived in your region?

3.3 Conflict

- Explain how conflicts have a negative impact on efforts to achieve SDG 8.
- How are these impacts perceived in your region?

4. Progress towards the achievement of ending poverty by 2030

- How does your current life pattern affect the achievement of the SDG 8 targets?

4.1 Regional progress in Latin America

- In your opinion, will the countries in Latin America be able to achieve the SDG 8 targets by 2030?
- What are the main obstacles in achieving SDG 8 in your region/country?

4.2 Regional progress in Africa

- In your opinion, will the countries in Africa be able to achieve the SDG 8 targets by 2030?
- What are the main obstacles in achieving SDG 8 in your region/country?

4.3 Regional progress in Europe

- In your opinion, will the countries in Europe be able to achieve the SDG 8 targets by 2030?
- What are the main obstacles in achieving SDG 8 in your region/country?

5. Case studies and best practices

- List some good practices that target the implementation of SDG 8.
- What could be your own contribution to SDG 8?
- Select a case study in your country that reflects a best practice in terms of achieving the SDG 8 targets. Briefly explain this case study and explore how the best practice can contribute towards achieving SDG 8.

7. Concluding remarks

This manual was aimed at providing an introduction to the main aspects of SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth, while also covering the impacts of various crises on the achievement of this goal and the regional contexts and progress of Latin America, Africa and Europe. Case studies and good practices were included to support teaching with examples on different strategies being used worldwide and in the studied regions to support economic development, green economy, sustainable tourism and employment opportunities. Finally, exercises and assessment questions were suggested.

The module can be used as a whole or adapted according to the needs of the teaching staff interested in applying it in their course/class. The variety of targets, challenges and resources related to economic growth, decent work and SDG 8, as well as their connection with other goals, reinforce the importance of this module for all study areas. We recommend that teaching staff encourage students to reflect on their own perceptions and experiences on the topic of economic development, discuss the conflicting aspect of economic growth and sustainable development, and explore the role of different sectors and actors in contributing to SDG 8 and to the overall aims of the 2030 Agenda.

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