



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2025

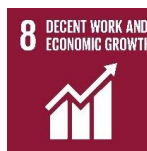


Sustainable Development Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Expert Group Meeting in preparation for HLPF 2025: Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind

ILO Conference Room, New York, 6-7 February 2025

Organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Labour Organization, and UN partners



Concept Note

Introduction

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will be convened in New York from 14 to 23 July 2025. Its overall theme will be *Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind*. The HLPF is mandated as the central forum in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2025, the HLPF 2025 will carry out an in-depth review of SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), in addition to SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) which is considered each year.

The SDGs under review will be examined in terms of progress made and challenges encountered in their implementation, as well as in terms of their relationships with the rest of Agenda 2030. The 10th anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda will be an important moment to identify what can be done to accelerate progress on the SDGs in the remaining five years until 2030 and beyond, taking a future-oriented, anticipatory perspective of recent major developments. Where appropriate, the review will connect with related intergovernmental processes such as the 3rd UN Ocean Conference, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), the 2nd World Summit for Social Development, and the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+30).

In preparation for review of SDG8 and its role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, together with the International Labour Organization, and relevant UN partners is organizing an in-person Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on SDG 8 progress, policies and implementation.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the meeting are:

- a) to take stock of where we are in terms of SDG8 progress, through data-driven assessments;
- b) to identify lessons learned over the past 10 years, in terms of success stories (collaborations, programmes, good practices) as well as particular areas of concern;
- c) to identify innovative solutions for accelerated SDG8 progress, building on synergies with other policy goals and addressing trade-offs;
- d) to consider issues and challenges that have emerged since the last in-depth review of the Goal in 2019;
- e) to reflect on ways to harness the political momentum from the SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future to deliver on SDG 8; and
- f) to chart a future way forward for longer-term progress beyond 2030.

The expert discussions will help informing the HLPF, assist in planning its sessions, and contribute toward identifying collaborations and programmes of work on SDG 8 going forward from 2025.

SD8 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” (General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/1), UN Member States expressed their determination “...to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.” They resolved to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities (para 3). Member States underlined that sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion, all of which are linked to each other and are interdependent (para 13). Furthermore, Member States emphasized that sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is essential for prosperity; that it requires addressing income inequality, eradication of child labour, forced labour, and human trafficking; promoting dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies, youth employment, women’s empowerment, and decent work for all; and that everyone would benefit from a healthy and well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society (para 27).

SDG 8 specifically calls on the international community to “*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*”. It thus captures two main economic themes that are strongly interlinked – economic growth and employment/decent work. More people in decent jobs and healthier workforce can lead to stronger and more inclusive economic growth, and vice versa. It is a strong relationship that deserves more attention in decision-making. With the 2030 Agenda, the world has a once-in-a-generation chance to make a real change in this respect and improve the lives of billions. Putting job creation at the heart of economic policy-making and development plans, will not only generate decent work opportunities but also more robust, inclusive and poverty-reducing growth. It is a virtuous circle that is as good for the economy as it is for people and potentially for the planet as well. Decent work is both a means and an end of the 2030 Agenda.

There are twelve targets underlying SDG8. Targets 8.6 and 8.b were to be achieved by 2020, all the others by 2030 (see table 1). Targets can be broadly grouped into the following areas: (a) Economic growth, technology, and diversification; (b) Global resource efficiency; (c) Full and productive employment and decent work; (d) Labour rights, health and safety at work; (e) Forced labour, child soldiers, and child labour; (f) Financial access; and (g) Aid for trade.

Table 1. Table. Official targets under SDG8

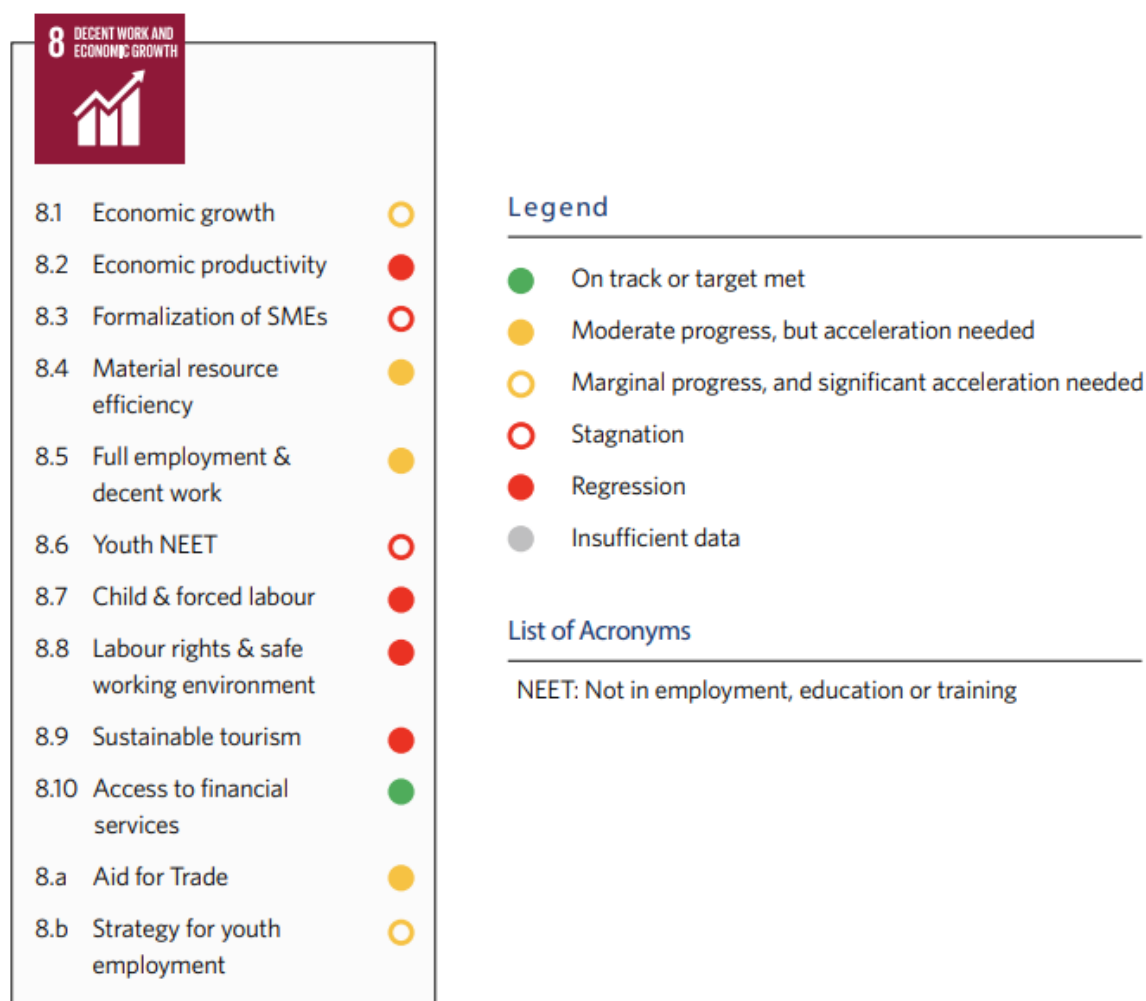
Targets under SDG8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	
Economic growth, technology, and diversification	8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries
	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
Global resource efficiency	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
Full and productive employment and decent work	8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.
	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
	8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training
	8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products
	8.a By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization
Labour rights, health and safety at work	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
Forced labour, child soldiers, and child labour	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/
Financial access	8.10 Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all
Aid for trade	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

Source and data on trends: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

SDG8 progress

How has the world performed in terms of SDG8 progress? The most recent Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 provides a concise overview of global progress: The target on access to financial services is the only one of 12 targets and SDG8 that is on track to be met. Five targets have seen only marginal or moderate progress, including the targets on economic growth, on material resource efficiency, on full employment & decent work, on aid for trade, and on strategies for youth employment. Most concerning is stagnation and even regression in terms of six targets – on economic productivity, formalization of SMEs, on Youth not in employment, education or training, on child & forced labour, on labour rights & safe working environments, and on sustainable tourism. When compared to other SDGs and measured at the level of targets, the balance on progress on SDG8 is among the worst.

Figure 1. Broad overview of progress on SDG8 targets, as of 2024



Source: SDG Progress Chart 2024 Technical Note, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/>

Framing the issues

Progress towards Goal 8 faces headwinds from the COVID-19 aftermath, trade tensions, rising debt in developing countries, conflicts and geopolitical strains, climate change, and demographic shifts – collectively threatening global economic growth. Global real GDP per capita inched up 1.8 per cent annually from 2015 to 2019 but fell by 3.9 per cent in 2020 before recovering with a 5.3 per cent increase in 2021. Growth slowed to 2.2 per cent in 2022 and is estimated to further drop to 1.0 per cent in 2023. The projected growth rate will be 1.8 per cent in 2024 and 1.5 per cent in 2025. Global growth remains subdued by recent historical standards, falling short of the average pre-pandemic rates. Prevailing high interest rates, limited fiscal space and ongoing geopolitical uncertainties continue to cloud economic prospects¹.

Global unemployment hit a historic low of 5 per cent in 2023 and is projected to further drop to 4.9 per cent in 2024 and to stay the same level in 2025. Yet gaps remain for many groups. Women and youth face higher unemployment rates. In 2023, gender unemployment gaps were similar to those in 2015, with the largest disparities in Northern Africa and Western Asia. Central and Southern Asia has made strides in narrowing the gap due to improved labour market access for women, particularly in Southern Asia. Youth unemployment was over three times higher than adult rates globally, at 13.0 per

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-september-2024-update/>

cent compared to 3.7 per cent, respectively. While headline unemployment figures improved, persistent challenges such as working poverty and informal employment highlight ongoing struggles in realizing decent work. *[This paragraph needs to be updated with WESO trends in Jan. 2025]*

Informal employment poses a significant global challenge, with over 2 billion workers in informal jobs lacking social protection in 2023. In the least developed countries (LDCs), and in sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, nearly 9 in 10 workers are informally employed. The labour market in developing countries continued to face the persistent challenges of informal employment, gender disparities, and high youth unemployment. Labour market conditions in many developing countries will likely deteriorate in 2024 amid weaker prospects, with the lagged effect of monetary tightening taking a toll on employment².

The in-depth review of SDG 8 in 2019 recommended a reinvigorated social contract and national action plans for achieving SDG 8. It recommended that Member States should review their compliance with international norms and standards relevant to the achievement of SDG 8 and develop mechanisms to address potential gaps, in consultation with civil society and the private sector. It was suggested that a renewed social contract could aim for a universal labour guarantee, a universal social protection floor for all workers, and respect for their rights, including collective bargaining³. In 2021, the review emphasized building back better from COVID-19 acting on evidence on interlinkages among goals⁴.

The review of SDG 8 at HLPF 2025 will be an opportunity to examine how system wide transformational changes towards a greener economic system create opportunities for inclusive growth and jobs. The review will examine how to make the best of these synergies between the sustainability and employment agendas and make sure that these opportunities are realized. The discussion can also address the trade-offs that have to be managed, as the transition away from destructive activities and industries also involve the loss of jobs. The discussion will address how transformation can incorporate the Just Transition and Leave No One Behind principles and may also build on the discussions at the 2025 United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSocD).

The review of SDG 8 offers a key opportunity to align with UNFCCC COP29 outcomes and climate action. Despite attempts to strengthen the Just Transition Work Programme, COP29 concluded without a structured work plan, underscoring challenges in linking global ambitions with actionable pathways for developing countries. Integrating just transition principles into SDG 8 and aligning with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) could connect decent work and economic growth with mitigation, adaptation, and energy transition priorities. Climate-resilient economic strategies, including adaptation indicators under the UAE Framework, position SDG 8 as a lever for advancing the Paris Agreement's goals while promoting equity and sustainability.

Building on the Pact for the Future's emphasis on science, technology, and innovation, including digitalization and AI, the SDG 8 review should explore how these transformative tools can enhance productivity and create opportunities for decent work. Integrating advancements in AI and digitalization into strategies for inclusive economic growth can address gaps in labor markets, upskill workers, and support just transitions to sustainable economies, aligning with broader global objectives.

Overall approach and substantive preparations

In view of the wide scope of SDG 8 including the macroeconomy, resource efficiency and labour markets, the Expert Group Meeting will examine progress towards SDG8 at the level of individual SDG8 targets. It is important to note that SDG 8 contains targets of varying scope – some narrowly defined, others broader, serving to as expressions underlying principles such as peaceful and inclusive

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-2024/>

³ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25385Meeting_report_SDG8_final.pdf

⁴ https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/migrated/documents/27874BN_HLPF_2021_SDG_1_2_8_17.pdf

societies. The Meeting will also assess synergies and trade-offs among SDG 8 targets, as well as SDG 8 and other SDGs. It will look at the latest trends and consider likely future developments, including in terms of rapid technological change. The discussions will directly build on the outcomes⁵ of the expert group meeting⁶ and review in 2019, and also consider UN deliberations on SDG8 in a virtual EGM⁷ and the HLPF⁸ in 2021.

Discussions will be data-driven and also assess challenges, enablers and interlinkages across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. While the discussions will be informed by progress along the official indicators, it will go beyond their frame and draw on scientific, civil society and business data where appropriate, in line with the much wider scope of the goal and the targets themselves.

The Expert Group Meeting will be organized into thematic sessions. Well before the meeting, participants and other experts will be requested to provide further written responses to key questions for each of the sessions. The Secretariat will compile and synthesize the responses. ILO and DESA may also produce a more in-depth background document, in order to focus the deliberations, provide easy access to most relevant work, and make most use of the limited time at the EGM. The meeting agenda will capture all issues outlined in the SDG8 targets, as well as address big picture trends and issues, interlinkages with other SDGs, means of implementation, future challenges and policy recommendations for the HLPF.

Outcome - contribution to HLFF 2015

The meeting is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of SDG8 progress together with concrete policy recommendations. A short meeting summary and outcome document with key messages and recommendations emerging from the EGM will contribute to the thematic review of SDG 8 at the HLPF in 2025.

The knowledge and insights of experts—both practitioners and academics—from across the world will be crucial to addressing these questions. The EGM will serve to bring together a cross-section of such expertise from a diversity of countries and regions to help:

- Provide substantive inputs into the thematic reviews at the HLPF and help inform its outcomes;
- Identify cases from regions and countries (incl. those that are conducting or have conducted Voluntary National Reviews) that illustrate challenges or highlight innovative practices;
- Suggest effective presenters for the specific sessions at the HLPF, as well as contributors to blog posts, e-discussions and other activities leading up to the HLPF, and
- Build on and influence collaborations and programmes of work going forward from 2025.

The EGM findings will flow into a substantive, technical paper of about 10-20 pages to “review” SDG 8. The paper and two-page summary will be prepared by the Secretariat with inputs from UN partners and meeting participants and serve as inputs to the deliberations in the HLPF 2025.

Participation and organization

The EGM is being organized by the UN Division for Sustainable Development Goals in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Labour Organization and will be held in partnership with relevant UN partners. It will be held as an in-person meeting. The possibility of online

⁵ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25385Meeting_report_SDG8_final.pdf

⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=13&nr=3054&menu=1634>

⁷ https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/2021_HLPF-EGM-Report-SDG2-focused_Breakout_session_%281%29.pdf

⁸ https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/migrated/documents/27874BN_HLPF_2021_SDG_1_2_8_17.pdf

interventions in specific sessions by a limited number of key speakers will be considered on an exceptional basis.

Participation is by invitation only. There will be a total of about 30 to 50 participants comprising experts from academia, think tanks, private sector, NGOs, UN system and other international organizations, and relevant governmental institutions. Experts will participate in their personal capacity and not as representatives. Unsolicited requests for attendance will be considered on their merits on a case-by case basis, space permitting.

The Meeting will be organized to facilitate frank discussion and interactive engagement to define actions and policies to achieve SDG 8. Power point presentations and written statements are discouraged. Solution-oriented inputs in the form of short background notes or hand-outs of presentations are welcomed and will be published on the meeting's webpage, when available. To the extent possible, all available materials will be shared with participants in advance of the meeting.

Each session will be guided by a moderator and a limited number of kick-off interventions focused on a set of guiding questions. All participants are encouraged to actively engage in the discussions.

Individual EGM sessions will run sequentially and will address specific themes. The possibility of a limited number of breakout sessions on key areas will be explored. The sessions will be highly interactive and focused on the session questions. It will be a working-level meeting, with all participants encouraged to speak. Breakout sessions will be explored on key issues. Participants will be encouraged to submit answers to the session questions and relevant background documents well before the meeting, which will be compiled by the Secretariat. In addition, inputs from wider scientific and technical communities will be explored.

The EGM will be conducted in English. Unless otherwise requested, all presentations/papers/remarks will be made available online. Prior to the HLPF, arrangements will be explored to brief UN Member States on the findings of the meeting.

Programme schedule

The meeting will be held at ILO offices in New York, USA. It will begin at 10:00 am on 6 February 2025 and run until 18:00 on 7 February. Details regarding logistics and further background information will be sent separately to confirmed participants.

The Secretariat will develop a detailed programme focused guiding questions which might include some of the following elements, among others:

1. Opening and big picture
 - Introduction to the meeting and setting the stage
 - Big picture trends and issues
2. Where do we stand - stocktaking and trends, analysis, and interpretation of findings
 - Sustained economic growth, productivity and jobs creation
 - Full and productive employment and decent work
 - Environment, resource efficiency, and sustainable tourism
 - Labour rights, health and safety at work
 - Forced labour, child soldiers, and child labour
 - Financial access, aid for trade, science and technology
 - Inter-linkages between SDG 8 and other goals

What is the current status of SDG8 and its targets, in terms of actual measured progress and trends? What new/promising openings are there for tracking progress, including from additional data sources? Over the past 10 years, what have been the biggest

impediments to implementing SDG8 in different regions? What groups are most at risk of being left behind in relation to SDG8 and what types of special attention may they require? What opportunities exist for building on synergies with other policy goals and for managing trade-offs?

3. Where do we go from here – priority actions, policy recommendations, and future prospects
- Priority actions (data, partnerships, capacity, financing, technology, trade)
 - Future challenges and prospects
 - Policy recommendations

Looking at the next 5 years and well beyond, what are some emerging opportunities for accelerated SDG8 progress? What would be useful, longer-term pathways and objectives? How could data and measurement limitations be addressed? How might recent crises, new commitments including in the Pact for the Future, COP discussions on climate and biodiversity, and emerging technologies affect longer term trends and change the landscape for achieving SDG8? Which innovative solutions or partnerships should be scaled up? How to best harness the new opportunities created by science and technology? What innovative funding mechanisms can already be applied or need to be built (including those called for in the Pact and FfD4 process)? What are most promising strategies to mobilize stakeholders?

4. Conclusion and closing