



HLPF 2025

Sustainable Development Goal 14

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

Concept note

1. Introduction

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will be convened in New York from 14 to 23 July 2025. The theme of the 2025 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind”. The 2025 HLPF will have an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals 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, and 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Ten years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the 2025 HLPF will assess progress on these Goals and identify sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions to advance SDG implementation in the remaining five years. The HLPF will identify interlinkages with other intergovernmental processes in 2025, including the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), the Third United Nations Ocean Conference, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), and the Second World Summit on Social Development, creating synergies that underscore the interconnectedness of these processes with the SDGs. The 2025 HLPF will support the implementation of the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit and contribute to the follow-up of the Summit of the Future and its Pact for the Future.

In preparation for the review of SDG 14 – and its role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA/DSDG), together with other partners, are organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on SDG 14 – and its role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda – in support of the HLPF’s in-depth review.

This event will help inform the HLPF, including the planning of its sessions, and contribute to the evidence base for work on life below water going forward from 2025.

In addition, the HLPF Review of SDG 14 and the UN Ocean Conference are mutual complementary processes. The 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference will be co-hosted by the Governments of Costa Rica and France and held in Nice, France a month ahead of the 2025 HLPF, from 9 to 13 June 2025. The overarching theme of the Conference is “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”. The Conference aims to support further and urgent action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and identify further ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14. It will build on existing instruments to form successful partnerships towards the swift conclusion and effective implementation of ongoing processes that contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. The UN Ocean Conference will provide an important basis for the work of the HLPF in reviewing Goal 14, including through providing information on lessons learned, reflections on actions taken, and proposed new directions and innovations for scaling up implementation. The HLPF review of SDG 14 and its targets will serve to guide the efforts of the action oriented Voluntary Commitments stemming from the UN Ocean Conference as these move towards implementation. Results from the 2025 SDG 14 EGM will also feed into the preparation and discussions of the 2025 UN Ocean Conference.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the 2025 SDG 14 EGM will be to:

- a) **Take stock of progress towards achieving SDG 14:** experts will assess what has changed since the SDG was last reviewed in 2022, the progress made regarding SDG 14 targets that have already expired and the status and next step for the target that will expire in 2025.
- b) **Review SDG 14 implementation opportunities and threats:** the meeting will seek to identify lessons learned and best practices on SDG 14 implementation over the past 10 years. Experts will also consider interlinkages with other SDGs and opportunities to leverage synergies and co-benefits and minimize trade-offs, share knowledge about success stories, good practices and challenges, while identifying areas of concern.
- c) **Make recommendations:** the meeting will highlight evidence-based recommendations to catalyze SDG14 implementation, including securing financing for SDG 14, while generating and leveraging synergies across the 2030 Agenda. Experts will also reflect on ways to harness the political momentum from the SDG Summit, the Summit of the Future and the 2025 UN Ocean Conference. Participants will suggest ways forward in terms of policies, partnerships and coordinated actions at all levels from 2025 onwards but also for long-term progress beyond 2030.

3. Framing the issue: SDG 14 and its progress

In the [World Ocean Assessment II](#), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres recalled that ‘*the ocean plays a crucial role in [...] the livelihoods of billions of people*’ and that ‘*we urgently need to change how we interact with it*’. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 provides the transformative framework needed to deliver on such a change. [SDG 14 Life Below Water](#) calls on the international community to ‘*conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*’ and establishes ten action-oriented targets. Four of the targets were to be achieved by 2020 (targets 14.2., 14.4., 14.5., 14.6.). The deadline for target 14.1. on marine pollution is 2025. Other targets need to be implemented by 2030, only five years from now.

Target	Objective	Timeline
14.1. Reduce marine pollution	Prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.	By 2025
14.2. Protect and restore ecosystems	Sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.	By 2020
14.3. Reduce ocean acidification	Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels.	2030
14.4. Sustainable fishing	Effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics.	By 2020
14.5. Conserve coastal and marine areas	Conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.	By 2020
14.6. End subsidies contributing to overfishing	Prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation.	By 2020
14.7. Increase the economic benefits from sustainable use of marine resources	Increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.	By 2030
14.a. Increase scientific knowledge, research and technology for ocean health	Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries.	2030

14.b. Support small scale fishers	Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.	2030
14.c. Implement and enforce international sea law	Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of “The future we want”.	2030

Table 1. SDG 14 and its targets. Source: <https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/14-life-below-water/>

Despite the ambitious action framework set up by SDG 14, the ocean remains in a state of emergency. Issues such as ocean acidification, warming, eutrophication, and deoxygenation are escalating and often interacting, all compounded by climate change. Plastic pollution continues to plague marine and coastal ecosystems, and overfishing remains a significant concern, with over one-third of global fish stocks being exploited at biologically unsustainable levels. These challenges not only threaten the health of the ocean and its ecosystems, but also that of over 3 billion people who depend on it.

The most recent [2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024](#) confirms that action is not advancing at the speed or scale required to meet the SDG 14 targets (Fig.1.).

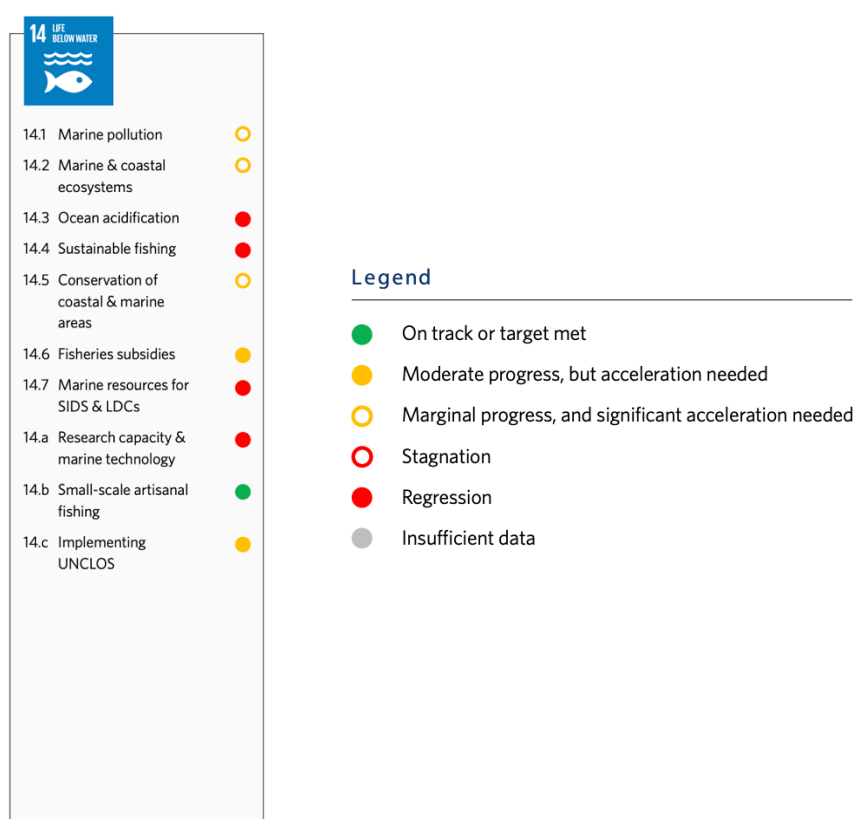


Figure.1. SDG progress by target – SDG 14.

Source : <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

According to the report, only about 10% of the SDG 14 targets are on track or met (Fig.2.). A concerning trend, the report highlights that about 40% of SDG 14 targets are regressing below the 2015 baseline levels (Fig.2.). In addition, as stated in [the Secretary-General's Background Note for the Preparatory process for UNOC3](#), Goal 14 remains the most underfunded of all Goals. The note reminds that while nearly \$175 billion per year is needed to achieve Goal 14 by 2030, less than \$10 billion was allocated to this goal between 2015 and 2019.

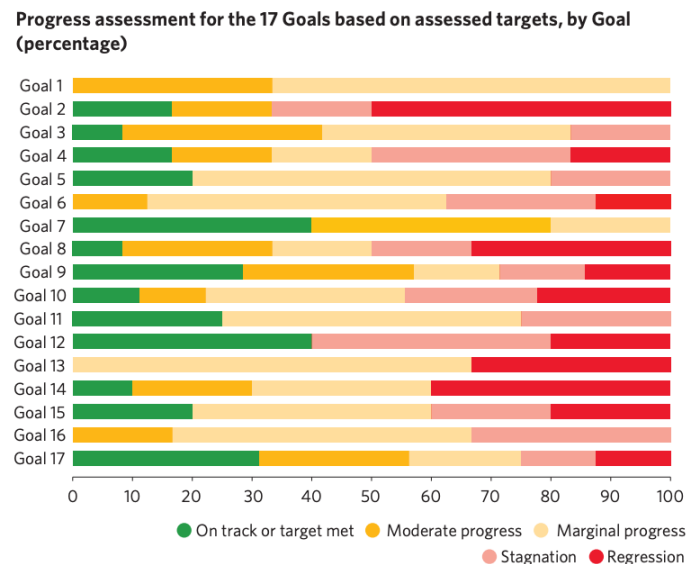


Figure 2. Progress assessment for the 17 Goals based on assessed targets, by Goal (percentage).

Source: United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024,

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

On the other hand, since the 2022 HLPF SDG 14 Review and the 2022 UN Ocean Conference, several critical milestones have also been achieved in global efforts to conserve and sustainably use ocean resources. In March 2022 a historic resolution titled “End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument” was adopted at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. Negotiations for this plastic treaty are ongoing, with the goal of completion in 2025. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted in June 2022, aims to halt harmful fisheries subsidies, and efforts to negotiate the overfishing articles are well underway. Further, the Food and Agriculture Organization unveiled the details of a major update to its methodology for the State of Stocks Index (SOSI) that increases from 500 to 2600 the number of the world’s stocks in the Index. It provides a more precise and region-specific picture of the world’s maritime fisheries resources. Full results will be presented during the 2024 Oceans Conference.

Similarly, evidence on the impact of small-scale fisheries on food and nutrition security and livelihoods continues to grow. The Illuminating Hidden Harvest report, launched in 2023, demonstrated the need to double efforts to deliver SDG target 14.7.

In December 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the [fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties \(COP 15\)](#) following a four year [consultation and negotiation process](#). This historic Framework, which includes goals and targets relevant to the ocean, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world

living in harmony with nature by 2050. In March 2023, UNEA adopted resolution 6/15 on strengthening ocean efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss and pollution.

In June 2023, after nearly 20 years of discussions, the historic Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction was adopted. The UN Ocean Decade Conference was held in April 2024, Barcelona, highlighting the important role of the science-policy interface and science-based innovation in ocean action.

The SIDS4 conference in May 2024 saw unanimous appeals for the protection and sustainable use of ocean resources for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Ocean-based solutions have been incorporated into mainstream discussions under the frameworks of UNFCCC COPs and CBD COPs, addressing the crucial interlinkages of ocean-climate change-biodiversity.

A living repository of concrete actions supporting the implementation of SDG 14, the registry Voluntary Commitments (VCs) managed by UN DESA currently hosts over 2,100 commitments from governments, UN entities, philanthropic organizations, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

Lastly, leveraging interlinkages between SDG 14 and other SDGs is of paramount importance to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This has been acknowledged by the [2022 UN Ocean Conference outcome document](#), within which Parties ‘*underline the interlinkages and potential synergies between Goal 14 and the other Sustainable Development Goals and recognize that the implementation of Goal 14 can contribute significantly to the realization of the 2030 Agenda, which is integrated and indivisible in its nature*’. Detailed analyses of these interlinkages has already been produced by UN DESA, including in the [Concept paper](#) for the ‘*Interactive dialogue 8: Leveraging interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal 14 and other Goals towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*’ for UNOC 2, as well in as the 2017 ‘[DESA Working Paper No. 149 Mapping the linkages between oceans and other Sustainable Development Goals: A preliminary exploration](#)’.

4. Key questions

a) Status and trend

- *What is the status of SDG 14 and its targets, in terms of actual measured progress and trends?*
- *Which areas have seen the most progress and which ones are lagging behind the most?*
- *How does progress vary regionally?*

b) Situation analysis

- *Over the past 10 years, what have been the biggest impediments to implementing SDG 14 in different regions?*
- *What is the best course of action for expired SDG 14 Targets?*
- *How might recent crises, new commitments including in the Pact for the Future, COPs discussions on climate and biodiversity, and emerging technologies affect longer term trends and change the landscape for achieving SDG 14?*
- *How synergies and interlinkages among SDGs can be leveraged to advance SDG14?*
- *What can be learnt from the regional patterns?*

- *What groups are most at risk of being left behind in relation to SDG 14 and what types of special attention may they require?*
- *Where are the greatest data gaps in tracking progress towards SDG 14 and how can they be tackled?*
- *How could data and measurement limitations be addressed?*
- *How to best harness the new opportunities created by science and technology?*
- *Which innovative solutions or partnerships should be scaled up?*
- *What innovative funding mechanisms can already be applied or need to be built (including those called for in the Pact and FfD4 process)?*

c) Looking ahead

- *What new/promising openings are there for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?*
- *Looking at the next 5 years and well beyond, what are some emerging opportunities for accelerated SDG 14 progress?*
- *Are there any emerging opportunities to accelerate/achieve SDG 14 by 2030?*
- *What opportunities exist for building on synergies with other policy goals and for managing trade-offs?*
- *What are most promising strategies to mobilize stakeholders?*

d) Policy recommendations

- *What key policy recommendations and solutions that should be brought to the HLPF session from the meeting?*
- *What recommendations would the 2025 SDG 14 EGM like to share for UNOC3?*
- *How can the review of progress on SDG 14 at the HLPF best boost implementation efforts at all levels going forward?*

5. Contribution to HLPF 2025

The meeting is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of SDG 14 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 14 at the HLPF in 2025.

The knowledge and insights of experts from different stakeholders, including government, civil society, youth, academia and the private sector, and from all regions and sectors, will be crucial for addressing the identified questions. The EGM will serve to bring together a cross-section of expertise on SDG 14 to help:

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

6. Participation and organization

The EGM is part of a broader review of SDG 14, including reviews of specialized reports from United Nations systems partners and research institutions. Some of these inputs will also provide background material for discussions at the EGM.

Participation at the EGM will be by invitation only. A limited number of experts from think tanks, academia, NGOs, the private sector and Governments will be invited. Experts from the UN system and other international organizations will also be invited to participate. Experts will participate in their personal capacity and not as representatives.

UN-DESA/DSDG, UNEP, FAO will prepare the event in consultation with other UN agencies. DESA/DSDG will also coordinate across other DESA divisions.

The EGD will be conducted online. Individual sessions at the EGM will address specific themes. The mode will be interactive, with all participants encouraged to speak openly and informally. The possibility of a limited number of breakout sessions on key areas will be explored. 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. Presentations/papers/remarks will be made available online.