
# 2026 HLPF thematic review concept note
# SDGs 6, 7, 9, 13 and 17

## HLPF 2026 Overview

The theme of the 2026 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is "*Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for a sustainable future for all*". The 2026 HLPF will have an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, 7 - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, 9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation, 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. The HLPF will provide an opportunity to assess progress on these goals and accelerate action. With less than five years until the 2030 deadline, it will identify what can be done, for focused acceleration of the SDGs, connecting with other intergovernmental processes such as the 2026 United Nations Water Conference.

The 2026 HLPF will also be an opportunity to build on the promises of the Pact for the Future agreed in 2024, the 2025 Ocean Conference, the Seville Commitment and Platform for Action from the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4), the Second World Summit for Social Development and COP 30, and find ways to turbocharge delivery on the SDGs. The HLPF can promote science- and evidence-based solutions that cut across the three dimensions of sustainable development creating co-benefits, addressing trade-offs, meeting multiple objectives in a coherent manner, and leaving no one behind.

## SDG thematic review context in 2026[1]

Based on the findings of *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*, global progress toward achieving the SDGs remains inadequate, with only 35% of targets on track or making moderate progress, while 48% are moving too slowly and 18% have regressed below 2015 levels. This paints a stark picture just five years before the 2030 deadline.

[1] The data in this document are from United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 unless otherwise stated.

Some areas have seen notable gains. Access to electricity has reached 92% globally, and Internet connectivity has grown from 40% in 2015 to 68% in 2024. Maternal and child mortality rates have declined, and more girls are completing school. Social protection coverage has expanded, and over half the world's population now receives at least one benefit. However, these improvements are overshadowed by persistent challenges. Extreme poverty still affects 1 in 10 people, and food insecurity impacts 2.3 billion individuals. Climate change is accelerating, with 2024 being the hottest year on record, and $CO_2$ emissions reaching historic highs.

Debt servicing costs for low- and middle-income countries hit a record $1.4 trillion in 2023, severely constraining development financing. Meanwhile, gender inequality, conflict, and data gaps continue to hinder progress. Without decisive investment and political will, the SDGs risk slipping further out of reach.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has become increasingly difficult in the face of escalating global conflicts, climate change, and displacement. Armed conflicts not only destroy infrastructure and disrupt essential services like healthcare and education, they can also divert resources away from development efforts toward military spending and humanitarian relief. In conflict zones, governance structures often collapse, making it nearly impossible to implement long-term development strategies.

Simultaneously, climate change is intensifying natural disasters, threatening food and water security, and displacing millions of people—many of whom are already vulnerable. This environmental stress exacerbates existing inequalities and places additional pressure on host communities and fragile ecosystems. Displacement, whether due to conflict or climate, disrupts livelihoods and access to basic services, making it harder for affected populations to participate in or benefit from sustainable development initiatives. Together, these overlapping crises create a complex web of challenges that demand coordinated, well-funded, and adaptive responses at both national and international levels.

Accelerating progress demands massive financing, inclusive governance, and robust data systems. Sustainable development requires removing structural barriers—particularly those limiting women's participation in economic and public life—and closing digital and social divides. Following from the Pact of the Future, it also requires harnessing technology responsibly, including artificial intelligence, and ensuring that multilateral processes translate into integrated national strategies.

In this context, substantive reviews for the 2026 HLPF are an opportunity to assess progress, identify emerging and persistent challenges to progress on each of the Goals under review in the current context, and consider opportunities for action that have emerged since each in-focus SDG (6, 7, 9, 11, and 17) was last reviewed at the HLPF (see Annex A). Each of these SDGs has already been reviewed two times providing ample opportunity for sharing of experiences and lessons learned. It's now time to identify the science-backed transformations that have to be realized for acceleration on these goals and build the coalitions and take the actions needed to make this happen[2].

The reviews will need to identify evidence backed solutions for the in-focus SDGs that leverage interlinkages with other Goals and Targets. This will include considering opportunities to build from discussions leading up to the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) and the Second World Summit for Social Development, and to leverage momentum from the launch of the UN

[2] https://sdgs.un.org/gsdr/gsdr2023

Decade of Sustainable Transport. The findings from these reviews will also be instrumental to plan for the future including by informing Member State discussions at the 2027 SDG Summit on how to "advance sustainable development by 2030 and beyond" as called for in the Pact of the Future.

**SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation**

While global access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services has improved since 2015, billions remain underserved. In 2024, 2.2 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water, 3.4 billion lacked safely managed sanitation, and 1.7 billion lacked basic hygiene services at home. Schools also face major gaps, with 646 million children lacking basic hygiene services. Water stress remains a critical issue, especially in Northern Africa, Western Asia, and Central and Southern Asia, where levels of water stress exceed 75%. Agriculture, which accounts for 72% of freshwater withdrawals, is both a driver and victim of water stress, highlighting the need for smarter water management and improved efficiency.

Monitoring and treatment of water resources show uneven progress. In 2024, only 56% of domestic wastewater was safely treated, and industrial wastewater data remain scarce. Water-quality monitoring has expanded, but significant gaps persist, especially in the poorest regions. Freshwater ecosystems continue to degrade, with 50% of countries reporting damage. Transboundary water cooperation is limited, with only 43 countries having operational arrangements covering over 90% of shared basins. Integrated water resources management (IWRM) implementation rose to 57% globally, but financing and coordination challenges hinder progress, especially at subnational levels.

Water-use efficiency improved globally by 23% between 2015 and 2022, but regional disparities remain. Agriculture showed the greatest relative gains, though it still lags in absolute efficiency. Gender mainstreaming in water management is progressing slowly, and only half of countries report formal cross-sector coordination. Investments in digital monitoring, capacity-building, and inclusive governance are needed to protect freshwater ecosystems and ensure sustainable water management. In addition, the exponential growth of generative AI and development of data housing centers is generating new demands for freshwater that must be managed together with other needs. Without accelerated action, the world will not achieve SDG 6 until at least 2049.

Progress on Goal 6 is closely linked with other Goals, and strategies that leverage the synergies can reinforce progress in other areas. For example, reliable infrastructure and sustainable industries (SDG 9) depend on efficient water use and advanced treatment technologies. Resilient water and sanitation systems are the lifeblood of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), ensuring public health, protecting against water-related disasters, and enabling safe and inclusive urban living for all. In addition, bridging the gap between water management and urban planning can ensure that cities are also resilient to the impacts of climate change (drought, flooding, etc.).[3]

**SDG 7 – Affordable and clean energy**

The latest data shows notable progress in expanding access to electricity and clean cooking solutions. By 2023, global electricity access reached 92%, with 45 countries having achieved universal access since 2010. However, sub-Saharan Africa continues to lag, accounting for 85% of the global electricity deficit. Access to clean cooking fuels rose from 64% in 2015 to 74% in 2023, yet 2.1 billion people still rely on

[3] https://www.iea.org/commentaries/energy-is-vital-to-a-well-functioning-water-sector

polluting fuels. Without accelerated action, 645 million people will remain without electricity and 1.8 billion without clean cooking by 2030. Off-grid solar solutions are highlighted as a cost-effective pathway to close these gaps, especially in rural areas.

Renewable energy is the fastest-growing energy source, with its share in total final energy consumption rising from 15.6% in 2015 to 17.9% in 2022. Electricity generation from renewables reached 30% in 2022, led by hydropower, wind, and solar. However, renewable energy use in heating and transport remains low, and disparities persist between developed and developing countries. Installed renewable energy capacity per capita reached 478 watts globally in 2023, but developed countries average three times more than developing ones. Energy efficiency also saw gains, with global energy intensity improving by 2.1% in 2022, partly due to reduced energy use during the energy crisis and high prices in 2022. Financial flows to clean energy in developing countries rose to $21.6 billion in 2023 yet remain below the 2016 peak and are unevenly distributed.

Increased production and use of renewable energy is a powerful catalyst for sustainable development across other goals. It directly enables sustainable cities (SDG 11) by powering zero- and low-carbon public transport, efficient buildings, and smart urban infrastructure. For water security, renewable energy drives low-cost desalination and modern water purification systems, making clean water more accessible. Furthermore, small scale off-grid systems can be used to provide lighting and energy for pumping to gain access to water and to purify and re-use water especially in rural areas (SDG 6). Affordable and reliable energy is the backbone of sustainable industry and innovation, powering manufacturing processes, digitalization, and resilient infrastructure (SDG 9) without reliance on fossil fuels. Despite growth in renewable capacity and financial flows, significant disparities and underinvestment in vulnerable regions threaten progress on SDG 7. Tailored policy interventions, increased investment, and equitable distribution of resources can help to ensure a just energy transition and meet climate goals.

**SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**

Since 2015, SDG 9 has seen notable progress in infrastructure expansion, industrial growth, and innovation. Global manufacturing value added (MVA) per capita rose by 17.3%, and maritime freight volumes reached 11.6 billion metric tons in 2023, with developing countries now handling the majority of global trade. Mobile broadband access has expanded significantly, with 5G now covering 51% of the global population. However, disparities persist: low-income countries still face systemic barriers to industrialization and digital connectivity, and manufacturing employment has slightly declined, reflecting weakened industrial resilience.

Despite growth in clean energy technologies, global carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustion and industrial processes hit a record high of 37.6 gigatons in 2024—an 8.3% increase since 2015. While advanced economies have reduced emissions, emerging markets have seen increases due to population and economic growth. Clean technologies like solar, wind, and electric vehicles have helped curb further emissions, preventing an additional 2.6 gigatons annually. Nonetheless, rising energy demand and climate-related factors continue to drive emissions upward, underscoring the need for sustainable industrial practices and stronger energy efficiency policies.

Innovation and research capacity have grown globally, with researchers per million people increasing from 1,137 in 2015 to 1,420 in 2022, and R&D investment rising from 1.72% to 1.95% of global GDP. However, some regions including sub-Saharan Africa lag significantly behind. Financial inclusion remains

a challenge for small enterprises, with only 31% having access to loans or credit—just 18% in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 46% in Latin America. To advance SDG 9, countries must prioritize inclusive financing, bridge the digital divide, and strengthen support for innovation and industrial development in underserved regions.

Technological trends embedded within industrial growth under SDG 9, such as the growth of energy intensive data centers for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language models, can present tradeoffs with other Goals including responsible production and consumption under Goal 12. AI data centres consume significant amounts of water primarily for cooling purposes. These facilities house thousands of servers that generate intense heat, and water-based cooling systems are often used to maintain optimal temperatures. In regions with limited water resources, this demand can strain local supplies, impacting water access for households. The issue is becoming more pressing as AI workloads grow and data centres expand globally[4].

There are also synergies with other goals. In synergies with SDG 17, partnerships with public and private entities can boost advancements in innovation and infrastructure by pooling of resources and finance to fund these projects.

**SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities**

Rapid urbanization has intensified housing affordability challenges, with up to 3 billion people struggling to secure adequate housing and 1.12 billion living in slums or informal settlements. The global average housing cost burden stands at 31%, with sub-Saharan Africa facing the highest burden at 43.5%. Climate threats are compounding urban vulnerabilities, as cities face rising temperatures and flood risks. Urban green spaces have declined significantly, and cities require trillions in annual investment for climate-resilient infrastructure, yet only a fraction of this funding is currently available. Inclusive governance is also lacking, with only 19% of cities demonstrating strong civil society participation in urban planning.

Local disaster risk reduction strategies are gaining traction, with 110 countries reporting alignment between local and national plans and 73% of municipalities implementing them. However, infrastructure remains vulnerable, with over 92,000 units damaged annually and 1.6 million service disruptions, particularly in education and healthcare. Waste management coverage varies widely, with Europe and Northern America achieving near-universal coverage, while sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia lag significantly. National urban policies are increasingly addressing population dynamics and territorial development, but fiscal decentralization and local financing remain weak points.

Efforts to preserve cultural and natural heritage are growing, with the number of countries tracking public spending on heritage tripling in five years. Despite this, investment disparities persist: developed countries spend a median of $83.30 per person, compared to just $3.86 in developing countries. To achieve SDG 11, coordinated investments are needed in affordable housing, climate-resilient infrastructure, inclusive governance, and green-space restoration. Strengthening land access, transportation, and local financing, alongside robust data systems and participatory planning, is essential to building inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities that leave no one behind.

[4] https://www.eesi.org/articles/view/water-use-in-data-centers; https://spectrum.ieee.org/ai-data-centers-water

The success of these urban systems is inextricably linked to progress in other goals: sustainable cities depend on resilient water and sanitation systems (SDG 6) to combat scarcity and pollution, universal clean energy (SDG 7) to power electrified transport and buildings, and innovative infrastructure (SDG 9) to create smart grids, circular waste systems, and low-carbon construction materials.

**SDG 17 – Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development** - SDG 17 is central to implementation across the entire 2030 Agenda and to action and partnerships on all SDGs based on how STI, financing, data, capacity building, partnerships and other mechanisms support acceleration. This Goal will be considered closely within the reviews of all other Goals also drawing from events that focus on the means of implementing the SDGs such as the Partnership Forum of the Economic and Social Council, the Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum), and the Financing for Development Forum.

Continued strengthening of the multilateral system is essential to tackle emerging challenges and address gaps and weaknesses in the international architecture that have constrained progress on the SDGs. The Pact of the Future resolved to make the multilateral system more effective, fit for the future, just and representative, inclusive and networked, and financially stable. Equitable access for developing countries to the fruits of science, technology, and innovation, are among the key priorities. The Sevilla Commitment stresses the need for reforming the international financial architecture, addressing high borrowing costs, and increasing investment for sustainable development.

## SDG thematic review format

Thematic reviews of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 and their interlinkages across the SDGs will be informed by the latest research and evidence, as well as case studies, from the UN System, government, the private sector, academia, and civil society working through existing mechanisms such as ECESA Plus, the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, the UN interagency task team on STI for the SDGs (IATT), the UN Economist Network, UN SDG7 Technical Advisory Group, the Independent Group of Scientists and the 10-Member Group of High-level Representatives. Reviews will be based on reports and policy-briefs from these sources as well as the outcomes of regional SDG Forums. The reviews will also be informed by a series of Expert Group Meetings (EGMs). **The outcome of the thematic reviews for each in-focus Goal will be an approximately 10-page background note to inform the HLPF.**

The series of EGMs (one for each Goal under review with SDG 17 covered in each EGM) will be organized in early 2026 by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), together with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) on SDG 9, and United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT) on SDG 11, in collaboration with other UN system partners. The meetings will bring together diverse experts from government, the private sector, academia, and civil society and the UN system to identify progress and challenges, share lessons learned and identify promising partnerships and opportunities for rapidly scaling up action toward achieving each of the goals while also generating synergies and addressing trade-offs with other goals. The focus of these EGMs could build on the extensive background materials prepared for each of these SDGs when they were last reviewed (see Annex A), while also assessing new challenges linked to the current context as well as looking toward the future and incorporating foresight on sustainable development beyond 2030.

These EGMs could be structured in larger plenary sessions to identify overarching trends, opportunities and challenges, and smaller break-out groups to generate rich dialogue, including to identify synergies

and manage trade-offs with other Goals. The EGMs, together with other analytical resources, will help to inform the HLPF structure and substantive content. The EGMs will also provide a space to identify potential resource persons for the HLPF. **The outcome of each EGM will be a concise and action-oriented summary note.** These EGM summaries will, together with other previously mentioned resources, inform the 2025 HLPF thematic sessions. A briefing to Member States on the main messages coming from the EGMs will be arranged to help in preparations for the HLPF.

Materials to be developed for each EGM would include:

- Concept note and guiding questions for EGM participants
- Participant and speaker lists, bios
- EGM summary note and key messages

General guiding questions may include:

- What is the current status of the Goal or target, in terms of actual measured progress and trends? What new/promising openings are there for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?
- Since 2015, what have been the biggest impediments to implementing this Goal including in different regions? Looking at the next 5 years and beyond, what are some emerging opportunities or spaces for overcoming these?
- How might recent crises, new commitments including in the Pact of the Future and emerging technologies affect longer term trends and change the landscape for achieving this Goal?
    - Are there additional obstacles or opportunities for implementation including ways to build synergies and/or overcome trade-offs with other Goals?
    - In the current context, what groups are most at risk of being left behind in relation to this Goal and what types of special attention may they require?
    - Are there new and innovative solutions, technologies or partnerships that could drive progress? What steps can be taken to scale these up and make them appropriate in different contexts?
    - What solutions might be emerging from STI and how can these be better shared and acted on for Goal achievement?
    - What innovative funding mechanisms, including those called for in the Pact and FfD4 process, can be applied with immediate urgency to deliver on the Goal by 2030?
- What are the most promising strategies to mobilize stakeholders including national and local governments, the private sector, civil society, and academia to advance implementation of this Goal and support key transformations?

**Annex A – PAST REVIEWS of in-focus SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17***

| SDG | Last year reviewed | Partner agency for thematic review EGM | Link to EGM summary or concept note | Link to HLPF thematic review background paper | Indicator custodian agencies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6 – Clean Water and Sanitation** | 2023 | DESA, UN Water | | https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/BN%20HLPF%202023%20SDG%206_1.pdf | 6.1-WHO/UNICEF JMP<br>6.2.1-WHO/UNICEF JMP<br>6.3.1-WHO/UNEP<br>6.3.2-UNEP<br>6.4.1-FAO<br>6.4.2-FAO<br>6.5.1-UNEP<br>6.5.2-UNECE, UNESCO<br>6.6.1-UNEP<br>6.a.1-OECD<br>6.b.1-WHO, UNICEF JMP |
| **7 – Affordable and Clean Energy** | 2023 | DESA, UN Energy | https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Expert%20Group%20Meeting%20SDG7%20Summary_0.pdf | https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/BN%20HLPF%202023%20SDG%207.pdf | 7.1-World Bank, WHO<br>7.2-IEA, IRENA, UNSD<br>7.3-IEA, UNSD<br>7.a.1-OECD, IRENA<br>7.b.1-IRENA |
| **9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure** | 2023 | DESA, UNIDO | https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023%20HLFP%20Thematic%20review%20of%20SDG%209%20Summary%20Report_30%20June%202023.pdf | https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/BN%20HLPF%202023%20SDG%209.pdf | 9.1-World Bank<br>9.2-ICAO, IMO, ITF, UNECE<br>9.2.1-UNIDO<br>9.2.2-UNIDO<br>9.3.1-UNIDO<br>9.3.2-World Bank and UNIDO<br>9.4.1-IEA and UNIDO<br>9.5.1-UIS<br>9.5.2-UIS<br>9.a.1-OECD<br>9.b.1-UNIDO<br>9.c.1-ITU |
| **11 – Sustainable cities and communities** | 2023 | DESA, UN HABITAT, UNDP | https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/HLPF%20EGM%20Summary_FocusSDGs%202023_SDG11_FINAL.pdf | https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/BN%20HLPF%202023%20SDG%2011.pdf | 11.1-UN Habitat<br>11.2.1-UN Habitat<br>11.3.1-UN Habitat<br>11.3.2-UN Habitat<br>11.4.1-UIS<br>11.5.1-UNDRR<br>11.5.2-UNDRR<br>11.6.1-UNEP<br>11.6.2-WHO<br>11.7.1-UN Habitat<br>11.7.2-UNODC |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 11.a.1-UN Habitat<br>11.b.1-UNDRR<br>11.b.2-UNDRR, ITU<br>11.c.1-UN-Habitat |

*SDG 17 has been reviewed through each of these reviews based on interlinkages as an enabling mechanism with each of the other Goals. Reviews of SDG 17 also benefit from the Annual Partnership Forum.