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**ALINHAMENTO DA AGENDA POLÍTICA EUROPEIA
COM OS OBJETIVOS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO
SUSTENTÁVEL – ANÁLISE DOS ODS 8 E ODS 12**

**ALIGNMENT OF THE EUROPEAN POLICY
AGENDA WITH THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS – THE CASE OF SDG 8
AND SDG 12**



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WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?
– THE SPECIAL CASE OF SDG8 AND SDG 12**

Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Ciência Política, realizada sob a orientação científica da Doutora Sara Margarida Moreno Pires, Professora Auxiliar, do Departamento de Ciências Sociais, Políticas e do Território, da Universidade de Aveiro; e coorientação da Doutora Marta Alexandra da Costa Ferreira Dias, Professora Auxiliar, do Departamento de Economia, Gestão, Engenharia Industrial e Turismo da Universidade de Aveiro.

*“If Roses grow in Heaven
Lord, please pick a bunch for me.
Place them in my Mother's arms
and tell her they're from me.”*

o júri

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palavras-chave

Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Parlamento Europeu, Membros do Parlamento Europeu, Sessões de Plenário

resumo

O trabalho que se propõe desenvolver pretende estudar os fatores que influenciam o alinhamento da agenda legislativa Europeia com a *Agenda 2030* das Nações Unidas, nomeadamente a nível de traços e características dos Membros do Parlamento Europeu (MEPs). A investigação foca-se em dois dos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS), o ODS 8, preocupado em garantir desenvolvimento económico sustentável e trabalho digno, e o ODS 12 que se foca em padrões de produção e consumo sustentáveis. De forma a atingir os objetivos propostos, conduziu-se uma análise qualitativa de todas as sessões de plenário do Parlamento Europeu (PE) entre 2016 e 2019 que se referem a algum dos tópicos abordados em um ou em ambos os ODS. Esta análise foi feita com recurso ao software *NVivo* e todas as sessões foram codificadas, até se obter uma base de dados, que associa os MEPs aos seus discursos em torno destes dois grandes desígnios, e que é o objeto de suporte de discussão desta dissertação. O objetivo da presente investigação é, assim, compreender a influência de fatores e traços pessoais dos eurodeputados na abordagem aos ODS em análise, e conseqüentemente, na agenda legislativa do Parlamento Europeu. Os resultados mostram que os homens são mais ativos no PE perante assuntos do ODS 8 e 12. Os eurodeputados mais velhos também revelam mais atividade do que os seus colegas mais novos. Em relação ao tempo de experiência nesta Instituição, os dados demonstraram que os eurodeputados com menos experiência se revelam mais interventivos em matérias destes ODS. Por último, os partidos de esquerda são aqueles que registam mais intervenções na arena do PE. Os MEPs também demonstram uma maior tendência a abordarem o ODS 8, em comparação com o ODS 12.

keywords

Sustainable Development Goals, European Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, Plenary Sessions

abstract

The proposed work seeks to study the factors that influence the alignment of the European legislative agenda with the *Agenda 2030*, namely concerning the traits and characteristics of Members of the European Parliament MEPs. The research focuses on two specific Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 8, concerned with ensuring sustainable economic development and decent work, and SDG 12, which focuses on sustainable production and consumption patterns. To achieve the proposed aims, a qualitative analysis was conducted of all plenary sessions of the European Parliament (EP), between 2016 and 2019, that refer to any of the topics addressed in one or both SDGs. This analysis was carried out using NVivo software and all sessions were coded until a database was obtained, which connects the MEPs with their speeches around these two grand topics, that is the object of support for the discussion of this dissertation. The goal of the present research is to grasp the influence of MEPs' personal factors and traits on the approach to the SDGs under review, and thus on the legislative agenda of the European Parliament. The results show that men are more active in the EP towards issues concerning SDGs 8 and 12. Older MEPs also demonstrate more activity than their younger colleagues. With regard to the length of experience in this Institution, the data revealed that MEPs with less experience time are more intervening on the studied issues. Finally, left-wing parties are the ones that register the most interventions in the EP arena. The MEPs also reveal a tendency to approach SDG 8 more frequently than SDG 12.

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List of Abbreviations

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations
EF – Ecological Footprint
EP – European Parliament
EU – European Union
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GPI – Genuine Progress Indicator
HDI – Human Development Index
HPI – Happy Planet Index
ISEW – Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare
MDG – Millennium Development Goals
MEP – Member of the European Parliament
MP – Member of the Parliament
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
OWG – Open Working Group
SD – Sustainable Development
SCP – Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
SDGI – Sustainable Development Goals Index
SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprises
UN – United Nations

1. Introduction

“Sustainability is a political choice, not a technical one. It’s not a question of whether we can be sustainable, but whether we choose to be.”

Gary Lawrence

Since the last few decades, Humanity has been facing unprecedented changes and challenges, which require attitudes and responses that are up to the task. The world leaders are asked to answer the call to revert the catastrophic climate and social scenario and to join efforts, as we are facing these at a global scale. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed on the United Nations *Agenda 2030* in September 2015, emerged from this very need. The aim is that all nations worldwide may respond to the most urgent questions of today’s reality and prepare the arena for future generations, so that *“the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better”* (UN, 2015, p.6). This new global agenda proposes 17 Goals, with 169 targets, ready to tackle the most undermining dimensions of sustainability around the world. All SDGs are interconnected, and one should not be achieved while challenging another. These Goals are conducted and structured under 5 P’s: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership – representing the tight bond and co-dependence among all goals, rather than 17 different Goals fighting against each other (Brown & Rasmussen, 2019).

Among the 193 countries that signed the agreement, the 27+1 European Union (EU) Member States are included. Among the various Institutions that rule the EU, the European Parliament (EP) stands out by its legislative features, alongside one very particular feature – it is the only EU Institution directly elected

by the European citizens (European Parliament, n.d.)¹. The EP is the main stage for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and all the parliamentary activity they engage on, from short presentations, to plenary sessions, and votes. They are the voice of all European citizens, so they are responsible for promoting and supporting their interests. The plenary sessions are drawn from different political agendas and foster debate on a wide range of issues, turning plenary sessions into a valued object for those who wish to engage and study further any of the matters covered. Among these topics, one may also find the discussion of international agendas, such as the UN *Agenda 2030*.

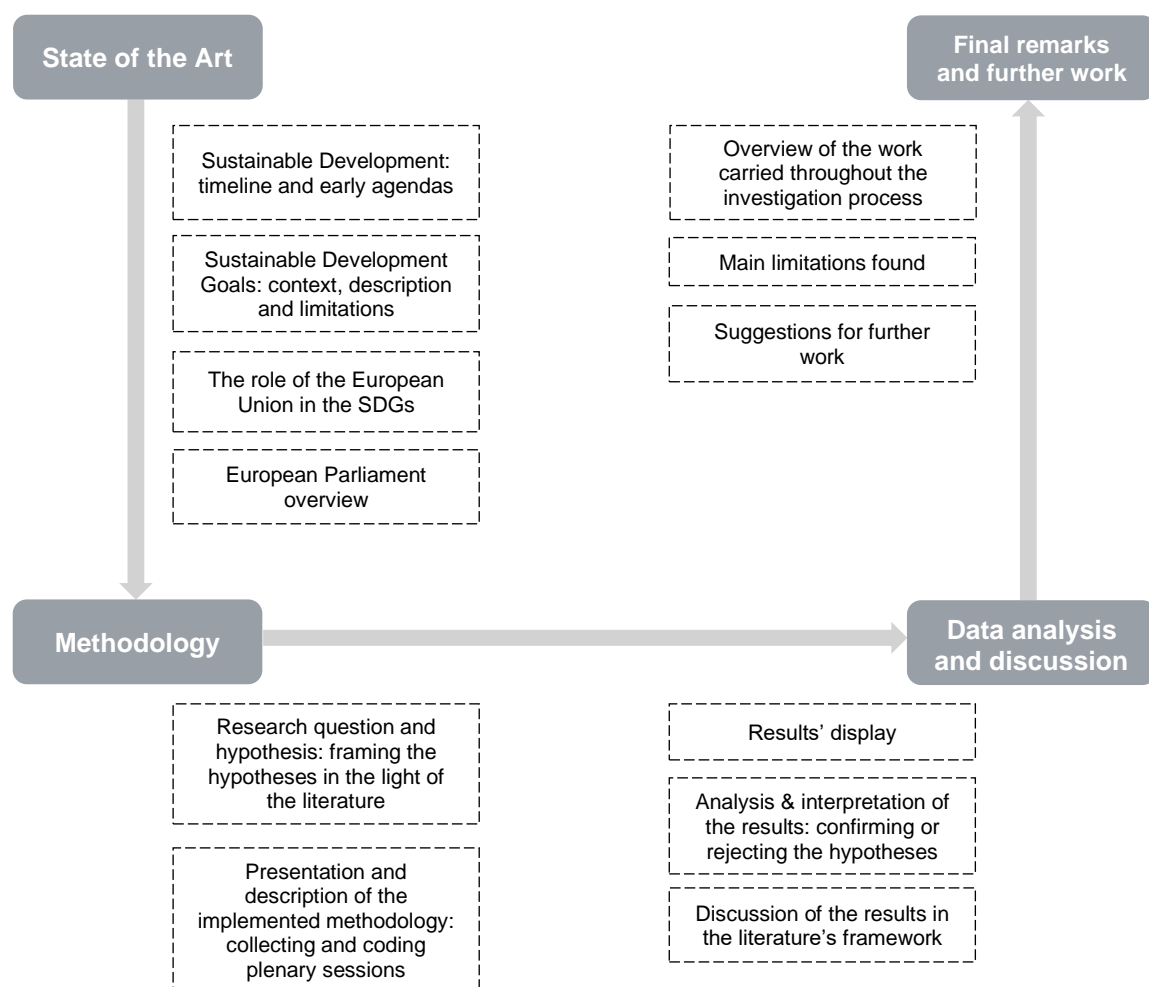
The core of the present research contemplates a reflection of the work of MEPs, as representatives of the citizens and political parties, and the will of the European Union, with regard to *SDG 8 – Decent Work, and Economic Growth* - and *SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production*. The aim is to understand and explain what personal Members of the European Parliament's characteristics influence the alignment of the European plenary agenda with these two SDGs of the *Agenda 2030*. These Goals share a common underlying focus on the economy within their nature (Venkatesan, 2020), with the peculiarity that their targets and main purposes are not in harmonious agreement among each other (Hickel, 2019) - providing the ground for a research that better understands how they may interconnect or conflict. Thus, the study of the two SDGs together brings an insightful overview of the European political behaviour on two seemingly but also potentially conflicting SDGs.

In order to carry out this task, this dissertation is divided in 6 chapters. The current Chapter One frames the Introduction to the topic, the main goals and research question. Chapter Two describes the framework on the Sustainable Development Goals, from the very first definition of Sustainable Development until the agreement of the *Agenda 2030*. It is followed by Chapter Three, that aims to present the European Parliament and the EU's role and actions around SDGs. Chapter Four introduces and describes the methodology employed in the present research, as well as the hypothesis, looking further into the existent

¹ European Parliament. (n.d.) *How plenary works*. European Parliament - About Parliament. Retrieved 2 April 2021, from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/how-plenary-works>

studies that endorse the methodology here applied. The main goals of this research are to assess the influence of MEPs' personal traits when addressing SDG8 and 12. To accomplish them, the personal features considered in the present work as important variables are gender, country of representation, time of experience (seniority) at the service of the EP and party affiliation, both at the Parliament and home country. In addition, the collected sample of MEPs' discourses from 2016 to 2019 is presented and described. In Chapter Five – Discussions and Findings, results of the analysis are presented, and discussed. The last chapter outlines the final considerations and conclusions, main restrictions found throughout the research and suggestions for further research. Figure 1 outlines the research design employed in the present investigation.

Figure 1. Research Design



Source: Author's elaboration

The current research is focused on grasping which are the determinant factors for approaching these Goals inside this Institution - it will not follow up on the quality of governance in the European Parliament towards SGDs. The more feasible it is to understand how political actors perform in the SGDs arena, the greater are the prospects to enhance sustainability governance, and consequently to witness improved outcomes. Thus, the research that will be carried out becomes an added value for those who wish to study the dominance and the drivers for the presence of SDGs in the European Parliament in the future, whether their analysis aims for a wider sphere of domains, for instance the entire *Agenda 2030*, or they decide to assess specific issues, as environmental sustainability, social goals, or others that feature on this Agenda. It aims to widen the scope of European Parliament and plenary's studies, thus contributing to enlarge Political Science's literature (Van Aggelen et al., 2017).

2. UN 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals: when, how and why?

2.1. Early stages of the global political agenda on Sustainable Development

Human history has evolved through many stages. From nomadic lifestyles to kings and queens, through the industrial revolution and world wars, Earth has witnessed all this evolution and endured with the human demands. But when did humans begin to realize that these patterns of behaviour could not last long? The concept of sustainable development emerged on the second half of the 20th century. The *World Conservation Strategy* is where this concept first appears, associated to the sustainable management of forests. But it was in *Our Common Future*, or as it is widely recognised as *The Brundtland Report* - a report coordinated by the first minister of Norway at the time, Gro Harlem Brundtland, in 1987, - that the first official definition for sustainable development has surfaced:

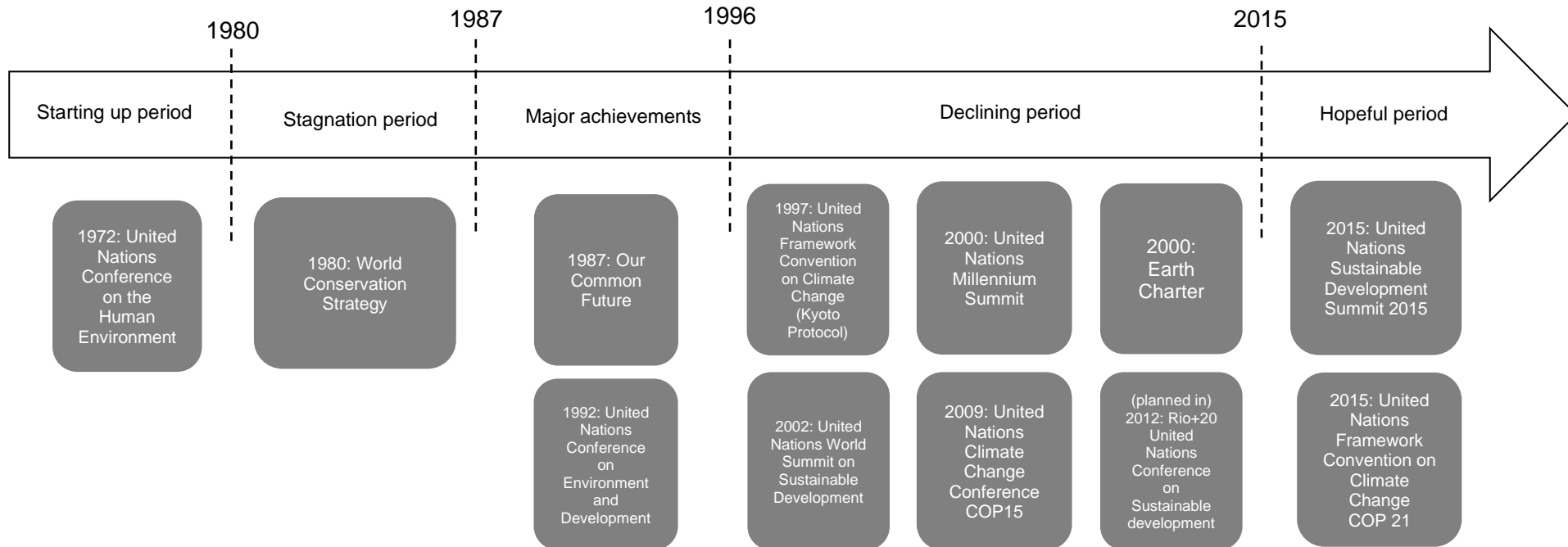
“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- *the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given;*
- *and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.”*

(WCED, 1987, p.41)

The *Brundtland Report* was not the first, nor the last, report on a global level to address the ability of nations' development to be sustainable in the long run. The global political agenda started to feature sustainable development and its increasing relevance and urgency was beginning to be acknowledged. The first *United Nations Conference on Human Environment*, in 1972, marks the beginning of sustainable development concerns in the world's political agendas, which led to the *Stockholm Declaration*: a document that aims to protect and improve human environment (Waas et al., 2011). The 1980 *World Conservation Strategy* sought to shield the ecosystems and all the life-support systems that maintain the Earth diversity (IUCNNR; UNEP; WWF; FAOUN; UNESCO, 1980). Nevertheless, from the 1980s until the end of 1986 some authors call this the stagnation period (Waas et al., 2011), that ended up giving place to a period of major achievements, with the Report *Our Common Future* in 1987, and the 1992 *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*. These milestones launch sustainable development in the world and spread the message on environmental awareness. With the establishment of the *Agenda 21*, in 1992, it was possible to observe actors from all fields – governments, NGOs, labour organizations, private sector and even citizens -, involved in actions towards a more sustainable future (Waas et al., 2011). Although the beginning of the 21st century is packed with summits and conferences, none have proven to be as effective towards SD as *Agenda 21*, resulting in a declining period (Waas et al., 2011). The *Agenda 2030* sets the tone for a renewed hopeful period, after more than two decades, with the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed in 2015 until 2030. Also, on the very same year, the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* produced the *Paris Agreement*, which brought years of climate change negotiations to an end and embraced a new climate agreement. Figure 2 summarizes the Sustainable Development milestones and illustrates the main time periods.

Figure 2. Sustainable Development milestone events



Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from Waas et al. (2011) and Moreno Pires (2021)

2.2. Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, the *United Nations Millennium Summit*, held in New York City, the Millennium Development Goals were presented and ratified by 191 countries. With a horizon of 15 years, the countries agreed to a Declaration – the *Millennium Declaration* – that contained 8 Goals – illustrated in Figure 3, targeting specifically the least developed countries. The aim of this Agenda was to support and foster growth and stability in the African continent, alongside poverty eradication, health and schools' systems improvement, in order to reduce disparities among developed and least developed countries, while improving the quality of life of the targeted populations (United Nations, 2000).

Figure 3. Millennium Development Goals



Source: United Nations website (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) triggered the alarms of the world's population to the most undermining issues, since it presented 8 Goals that intended to be accessible to anyone, creating awareness, enacting political accountability and creating pressure in the civil society and Institutions to mobilize action (Sachs, 2012). Although MDGs have raised concern and interest around issues like poverty, health and global hunger, they were tools filled with expectations that could not be met, lacking a structure system that would guide its implementation, mainly financially wise (Clemens et al., 2007). This international Agenda was largely criticized, mainly due to its top-down drafting procedure and the limited scope of action proposed (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). By the year this Agenda was due, there were still many challenges that remained to be tackled. Although the proportion of population in risk of poverty reduced globally, almost 800 million were still living in extreme poverty, with women facing a more likely chance to fall in this category (Andresen & Masahiko, 2017). The rate of registration in primary education registered growth – with a huge presence of girls in schools, reducing gender inequalities-, but the danger of dropping out was still elevated in the poorer households (Andresen & Masahiko, 2017). The health systems were improved, with a decrease in maternal and child mortality - however there is still a substantial mortality rate that urges to be tackled (Andresen & Masahiko, 2017). Furthermore, 16% of rural population still did not have access to drinking water in 2015, despite the efforts and recorded enhancements in this field (Andresen & Masahiko, 2017). In order to carry out all these enhancement actions, the more developed countries were summoned to assist, with a registered growth of 66% on the international assistance fund (Andresen & Masahiko, 2017). These achievements and all the remaining challenges are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Millennium Development Goals: Achievements and Remaining Challenges

Goals	Achievements	Remaining Challenges in 2015
1. <i>Eradicate poverty and hunger</i>	(i) Proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day dropped to 14% in 2015; (ii) Proportion of undernourished people fell to 12.9% in 2014-2016.	- About 800 million people still live in extreme poverty.
2. <i>Achieve universal primary education</i>	(i) Net rate of primary school enrolments reached 91% in 2015; (ii) Literacy rate of youth increased from 83% in 1990 to 91% in 2015.	- 57 million children are not in school; - Children from the poorest households are four times as likely to be out of school as children from the richest households in developing regions.
3. <i>Gender equality</i>	(i) The developing regions as a whole achieved the target to eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary, and tertiary education.	- Women are more likely to live in poverty than men; - Women earn 24% less than men globally.
4. <i>Reduce child mortality</i>	(i) Reduction rate of child mortality tripled globally since 1990.	- About 16,000 children die each day before the age of 5; - Child mortality rate of the poorest households is almost twice that of the richest households in developing regions.
5. <i>Improve maternal health</i>	(i) Maternal mortality rate has declined by 45% worldwide since 1990.	- Maternal mortality rate in developing regions is 14 times higher than in developed regions.
6. <i>Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other disease</i>	(i) New HIV infections fell from an estimated 3.5 million cases to 2.1 million between 2000 and 2013; (ii) Over 6.2 million malaria deaths have been averted between 2000 and 2015.	- About 36% of the 31.5 million people living with HIV in developing regions received antiretroviral therapy in 2013.
7. <i>Ensure environmental sustainability</i>	(i) 91% of the global population is using an improved drinking water source in 2015.	- About 16% of the rural population does not use improved drinking water sources in developing regions; - Global carbon dioxide emissions have increased by over 50% since 1990.
8. <i>Global partnership for development</i>	(i) Official development assistance from developed countries increased by 66% between 2000 to 2014, reaching \$135.2 billion.	- There are few countries that exceed the official development assistance target of 0.7% of gross national income.

Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from Andresen and Masahiko (2017), pp. 172, 173.

2.3. Sustainable Development Goals

As the century progressed, and the environmental and social crisis grew at disturbing rates, the call emerged for an agenda to be set for the years ahead. Between world summits and conferences, there were several failed attempts at setting and implementing a new Agenda towards the sustainable development of Nations and new political goals and compromises (Moreno Pires, 2021). In June 2012, the *Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development* took place in Brazil, and the outcome document, *The Future We Want*, did not define a new agenda, as it was intended; it only designed the structure to proceed with the negotiations, assigning a task force to work on the Sustainable Development Goals, to be implemented in the period beyond 2015 (United Nations, n.d.)². A total of 30 people was called to join the Open Working Group (OWG) and the target was to produce an Agenda that would reinforce the “*political commitment for sustainable development*” (UN, 2012, p. 21), in alignment with the three dimensions of SD: economic, social and environmental. The OWG delivered on December 2014 the *Open Working Group Proposal for Sustainable Development Goals*, where the first draft of the final SDGs can be found.

Through a very open, deliberative and collaborative process, where almost a million people was able to participate and provide feedback - besides the assigned task of the OWG -, the United Nations streamlined the largest advisory process witnessed, in order to obtain the most comprehensive Agenda feasible (Monkelbaan, 2019). The impetus was set for cooperation and the design of a global agenda that would bring all countries together and address the most pressing issues of modern society.

² United Nations. (n.d.). *Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals* .:. *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. UN Sustainable Development. Retrieved 27 May 2021, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>

Transforming Our World: The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is the Agenda, agreed on by 193 countries, in the *United Nations Sustainable Development Summit*, in September 2015. The *Agenda 2030* features 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with 169 targets, that are aimed to be achieved between 2015 and 2030, with official start date on 1st January 2016. Table 2 presents all the SDGs and correspondent targets.

“Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda” (UN, 2015, p.9)

This new set of Goals comprises a variety of dimensions and aims to reach every human being, and the ecosystems that surround us. SDGs are a key asset in achieving sustainable development. Its establishment provides a foundation for, and is intended to foster (Monkelbaan, 2019):

- (i) The clustering of stakeholders from the widest diversity of fields - political, social, economic, scientific, among others - and form a partnership to pursue their common concerns;
- (ii) Spur of consciousness towards sustainable development and increase the sense of collective responsibility in the face of this challenge;
- (iii) Information and education for the population regarding the problematic issues addressed, in order to promote global learning.

Alongside the Goals and targets, UN also prepared indicators to support SDGs, to enable the monitoring of progress and to provide greater insight of real-time advancements in every nation – with particular consideration given to the least developed countries (United Nations, 2015).

Table 2. Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and targets

SDGS	TARGETS
1. NO POVERTY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Eradicate extreme poverty; 1.2. Reduce poverty by at least 50%; 1.3. Implement social protection systems; 1.4. Equal rights to ownership, basic services, technology and economic resources; 1.5. Build resilience to environmental, economic and social disasters; 1.a. Mobilize resources to implement policies to end poverty; 1.b. Create pro-poor and gender-sensitive policy frameworks.
2. ZERO HUNGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Universal access to safe and nutritious food; 2.2. End all forms of malnutrition; 2.3. Double the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers; 2.4. Sustainable food production and resilient agriculture practices; 2.5. Maintain the genetic diversity in food production; 2.a. Invest in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, technology and gene banks; 2.b. Prevent agricultural trade restrictions, market distortions and export subsidies; 2.c. Ensure stable food commodity markets and timely access to information.
3. GOOD HEALTH AND WELL BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Reduce maternal mortality; 3.2. End all preventable deaths under 5 years of age; 3.3. Fight communicable diseases; 3.4. Reduce mortality from non-communicable diseases and promote mental health; 3.5. Prevent and treat substance abuse; 3.6. Reduce road injuries and deaths; 3.7. Universal access to sexual and reproductive care, family planning and education; 3.8. Achieve universal health coverage; 3.9. Reduce illness and death from hazardous chemicals and pollution: 3.a. Implement the WHO framework convention on tobacco control; 3.b. Support research, development and universal access to affordable vaccines and medicines; 3.c. Increase health financing and support health workforce in developing countries; 3.d. Improve early warning systems for global health risks.
4. QUALITY EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1. Free primary and secondary education: 4.2. Equal access to quality pre-primary education: 4.3. Equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education; 4.4. Increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success; 4.5. Eliminate all discrimination in education; 4.6. Universal literacy and numeracy: 4.7. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship; 4.a. Build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools; 4.b. Expand higher education scholarships for developing countries; 4.c. Increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1. End discrimination against women and girls;

<p>5. GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<p>5.2. End all violence against and exploitation of women and girls; 5.3. Eliminate forced marriages and genital mutilation; 5.4. Value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities; 5.5. Ensure full participation in leadership and decision-making; 5.6. Universal access to reproductive health and rights; 5.a. Equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services; 5.b. Promote empowerment of women through technology; 5.c. Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality.</p>
<p>6. CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p>	<p>6.1. Safe and affordable drinking water; 6.2. End open defecation and provide access to sanitation and hygiene; 6.3. Improve water quality, wastewater, treatment and safe reuse; 6.4. Increase water-use efficiency and ensure freshwater supplies; 6.5. Implement integrated water resources management; 6.6. Protect and restore water-related ecosystems; 6.a. Expand water and sanitation support to developing countries; 6.b. Support local engagement in water and sanitation management.</p>
<p>7. AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</p>	<p>7.1. Universal access to modern energy; 7.2. Increase global percentage of renewable energy; 7.3. Double the improvement in energy efficiency; 7.a. Promote access to research, technology and investments in clean energy; 7.b. Expand and upgrade energy services for developing countries.</p>
<p>8. DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<p>8.1. Sustainable economic growth; 8.2. Diversify, innovate and upgrade for economic productivity; 8.3. Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises; 8.4. Improve resource efficiency in consumption and production; 8.5. Full employment and decent work with equal pay; 8.6. Promote youth employment, education and training; 8.7. End modern slavery, trafficking and child labour; 8.8. Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments; 8.9. Promote beneficial and sustainable tourism; 8.10. Universal access to banking, insurance and financial services; 8.a. Increase Aid for Trade support; 8.b. Development a global Youth Employment strategy.</p>
<p>9. INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	<p>9.1. Develop sustainable, resilient and inclusive infrastructures; 9.2. Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization; 9.3. Increase access to financial services and markets; 9.4. Upgrade all industries and infrastructures for sustainability; 9.5. Enhance research and upgrade industrial technologies; 9.a. Facilitate sustainable infrastructure development for developing countries; 9.b. Support domestic technology development and industrial diversification; 9.c. Universal access to information and communications technology.</p>
	<p>10.1. Reduce income inequalities; 10.2. Promote universal social, economic and political inclusion; 10.3. Ensure equal opportunities and end discrimination; 10.4. Adopt fiscal and social policies that promote equality;</p>

<p>10. REDUCE INEQUALITIES</p>	<p>10.5. Improved regulation of global financial markets and institutions; 10.6. Enhanced representation for developing countries in financial institutions; 10.7. Responsible and well-managed migration policies; 10.a. Special and differential treatment for developing countries; 10.b. Encourage development assistance and investment in least developed countries; 10.c. Reduce transaction costs for migrant remittances.</p>
<p>11. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</p>	<p>11.1. Safe and affordable housing; 11.2. Affordable and sustainable transport systems; 11.3. Inclusive and sustainable urbanization; 11.4. Protect the world’s cultural and natural heritage; 11.5. Reduce the adverse effects of natural disasters; 11.6. Reduce the environmental impact of cities; 11.7. Provide access to safe and inclusive green and public spaces; 11.a. Strong national and regional development planning; 11.b. Implement policies for inclusion, resource efficiency and disaster risk reduction; 11.c. Support least developed countries in sustainable and resilient building.</p>
<p>12. RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>	<p>12.1. Implement the 10-Year Sustainable Consumption and Production Framework; 12.2. Sustainable management and use of natural resources; 12.3. Halve global per capita food waste; 12.4. Responsible management of chemicals and waste; 12.5. Substantially reduce waste generation; 12.6. Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and sustainability reporting; 12.7. Promote sustainable public procurement practices ; 12.8. Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles; 12.a. Support developing countries’ scientific and technological capacity for sustainable consumption and production; 12.b. Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism; 12.c. Remove market distortions that encourage wasteful consumption.</p>
<p>13. CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<p>13.1. Strengthen resilience and adaptative capacity to climate related disasters; 13.2. Integrate climate change measures into policies and planning; 13.3. Build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change; 13.a. Implement the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; 13.b. Promote mechanisms to raise capacity for planning and management.</p>
<p>14. LIFE BELOW WATER</p>	<p>14.1. Reduce marine pollution; 14.2. Protect and restore ecosystems; 14.3. Reduce ocean acidification; 14.4. Sustainable fishing; 14.5. Conserve coastal and marine areas; 14.6. End subsidies contributing to overfishing; 14.7. Increase the economic benefits from sustainable use of marine resources; 14.a. Increase scientific knowledge, research and technology for ocean health; 14.b. Support small scale fisheries; 14.c. Implement and enforce International Sea Law.</p>
	<p>15.1. Conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems; 15.2. End deforestation and restore degraded forests;</p>

<p>15. LIFE ON LAND</p>	<p>15.3. End desertification and restore degraded land; 15.4. Ensure conservation of mountain ecosystems; 15.5. Protect biodiversity and natural habitats; 15.6. Promote access to genetic resources and fair sharing of the benefits; 15.7. Eliminate poaching and trafficking of protected species; 15.8. Prevent invasive alien species on land and in water ecosystems; 15.9. Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity in governmental planning; 15.a. Increase financial resources to conserve and sustainably use ecosystem and biodiversity; 15.b. Finance and incentivize sustainable forest management; 15.c. Combat global poaching and trafficking.</p>
<p>16. PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>	<p>16.1. Reduce violence everywhere; 16.2. Protect children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and violence; 16.3. Promote the Rule of Law and ensure equal access to justice; 16.4. Combat organized crime and illicit financial and arms flows; 16.5. Substantially reduce corruption and bribery; 16.6. Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions; 16.7. Ensure responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making; 16.8. Strengthen the participation in global governance; 16.9. Provide universal legal identity; 16.10. Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms; 16.a. Strengthen national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime; 16.b. Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies.</p>
<p>17. PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS</p>	<p>17.1. Mobilize resources to improve domestic revenue collection; 17.2. Implement all development assistance commitments; 17.3. Mobilize financial resources for developing countries; 17.4. Assist developing countries in attaining debt sustainability; 17.5. Invest in least developed countries; 17.6. Knowledge sharing and cooperation for access to science, technology and innovation; 17.7. Promote sustainable technologies to developing countries; 17.8. Strengthen the science, technology and innovation capacity for least developed countries; 17.9. Enhance SDG capacity in developing countries; 17.10. Promote a universal trading system under the WTO; 17.11. Increase the exports of developing countries; 17.12. Remove trade barriers for least developed countries; 17.13. Enhance global macroeconomic stability; 17.14. Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development; 17.15. Respect national leadership to implement policies for the Sustainable Development Goals; 17.16. Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development; 17.17. Encourage effective partnerships; 17.18. Enhance availability of reliable data; 17.19. Further develop measurements of progress.</p>

Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from UN SDGs website (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>)

As mentioned before, all the Goals were formulated around 5 P's: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership – illustrated in Figure 4, as principles to follow and pillars for sustainable development, and also as guided assistance to broader understanding and assessment of the Goals (UNESCWA, n.d.)³.

Figure 4. The five P's of the *Agenda 2030*



Source: Retrieved from:

<https://www.oneworldcentre.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/5-Ps-sustainability-1.png>

Each “P” relates directly with a group of SDGs, as outlined in Figure 5. SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are related to people, therefore are more focused on improving social wellbeing. SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15 concern Planet, therefore, have a greater environmental dimension. Prosperity “ensures that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature” (UNESCWA, n.d., p. 1)³, and encompasses SDGs 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Peace aims to create a world environment that does not include war or any conflict, relating to SDG 16. SDG 17 calls for Partnership of all members of the UN, to successfully achieve all Goals. This 5 P's classification is one perspective to approach and classify the SDGs, done by the United Nations. Other authors have organized them differently, as will be shown in a moment.

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. n.d. *The 5Ps of the Sustainable Development Goals* [PDF]. Retrieved 21 May 2021, from https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u593/the_5ps_of_the_sustainable_development_goals.pdf.

Figure 5. The five P's and SDGs



Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (n.d.)³ (images retrieved from UN SDGs website: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>)

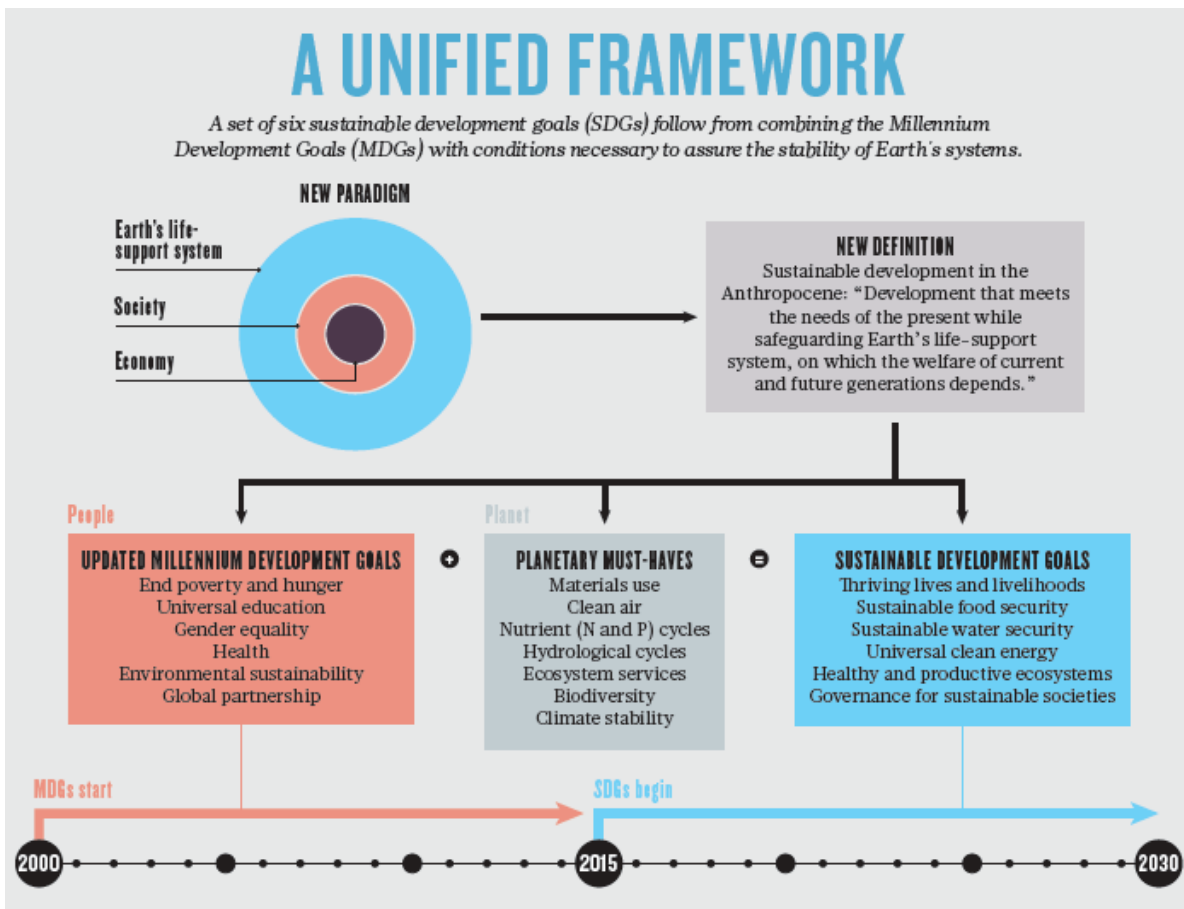
But these Goals were not designed to act separately, nor do one may be achieved endangering another (Coscieme et al., 2020; Fonseca et al., 2020) - the *Agenda 2030* highlights “*they are integrated and indivisible*” (UN, 2015, p. 5). The dichotomy between finite resources and economic growth has been a dilemma for Humankind as the societies have evolved, and SDGs are no exception to this – the prospect to accomplish growth in a sustainable matter is still a great concern (Hickel, 2019). Hence, having a consistent policy of implementation ensures that the achievement of one does not jeopardise the successful accomplishment of another (Coscieme et al., 2020). The synergies between the SDGs play a determinant role for those who are in charge to implement them: decision-making processes have to be pursued in a manner that

will not endanger the achievement of sustainable development (Fonseca et al., 2020).

Goal 17, more specifically Target 17.19, fosters transparency and accountability of stakeholders in SDGs attainment, hence emerged the necessity to develop a global Index (Sachs et al., 2016; Sachs et al., 2018). The Sustainable Development Goals Index was developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Bertelsmann Stiftung, and resorts to data publicly available from the 193 nations (Fonseca et al., 2020). Through reliable metrics and a standard measure, it becomes feasible for SDGs to become functional tools, by: *“(i) mobilizing governments, academia, civil society, and business; (ii) providing a report card to track progress and ensure accountability; and (iii) serving as a management tool for the transformations needed to achieve the SDGs by 2030”* (Sachs et al., 2016, p.11). The first unofficial report was pressed in 2016, and from 2017 on, every year an official report of the SDGI is released. The SDGI is calculated for cities, regions and countries and all the results are available in open source in the official website.

With the emerging of this new Agenda, some new frameworks also appeared, defying the previous three-dimensional approach to SD proposed by the United Nations, as well as the 5 P's classification and placement. Griggs et al. (2013) proposed a new paradigm and a new definition for sustainable development, in order to achieve human development and protect the biosphere. Figure 6 illustrates the proposal for six goals, as well as the new paradigm and definition for SD proposed by these authors.

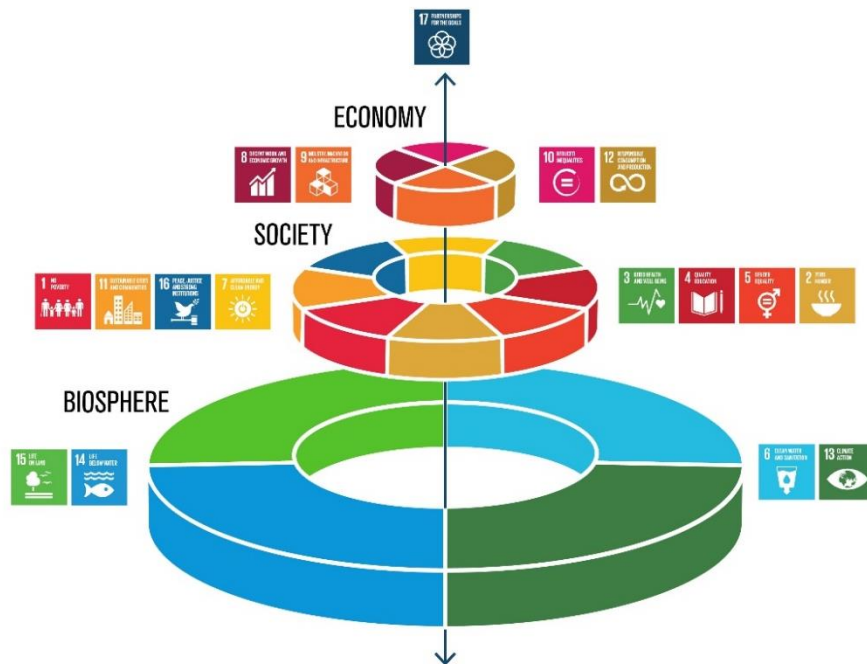
Figure 6. Proposal of six SDGs by Griggs et al. (2013)



Source: Griggs et al. (2013, p.306)

The Stockholm Resilience Centre's contribution report also defends a more comprehensive approach, where all the three dimensions need to be seen as interconnected – the societal and economic dimensions are embedded within the environmental sphere, since the first two are commonly the focus, while the biosphere is disregarded as a first priority (SCR, 2016). The biosphere is on the base of the functioning of the planet, and therefore it is vital for the successful accomplishment of the remaining subjects. Figure 7 demonstrates the interactions among SDGs and the biosphere, society, and economy. This approach is very different from the 5 P's: as for instance, SDG 12 in the 5 P's is considered "Planet", while below is a clear economic Goal.

Figure 7. Review on the three dimensions of SD: a new proposal for the economic, social and environmental approach

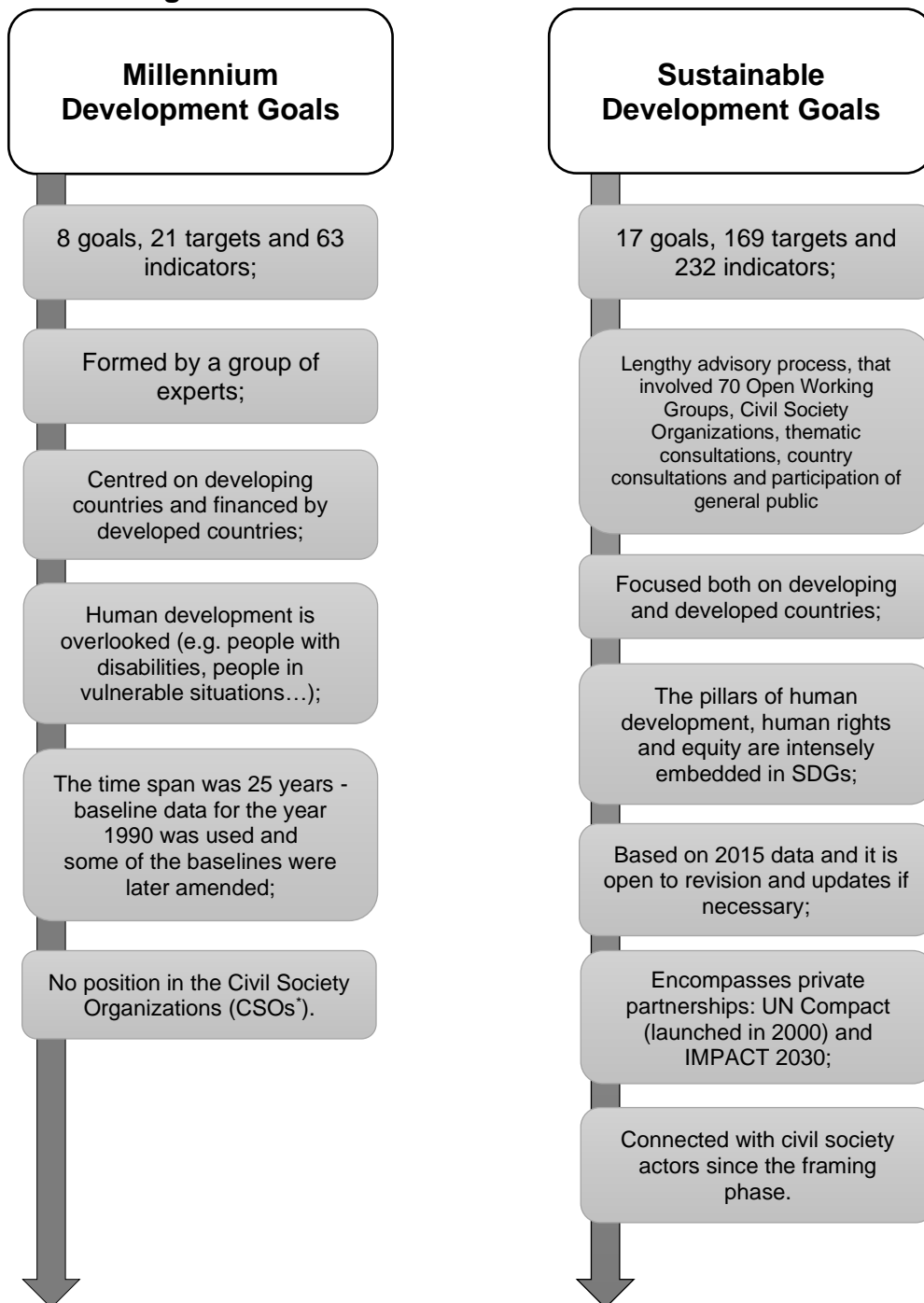


Source: Azote Images for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University (2016)

The Sustainable Development Goals are aimed to tackle the most pressing issues left unaddressed in the MDG agenda (UN, 2015). The SDGs – as the MDGs - are not compulsory for any country; it is a set of compromises and goals that were built upon political and social consensus, and therefore there is no punishment for those who wish not to pursue it, which is a drawback on the enforcement of SD pursue (Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Pogge & Sengupta, 2015). But besides this, and even though they are both SD global Agendas, there are several differences which neatly distinguish their nature, scope of action and purposes (Figure 8). One of the main aspects that they differ regards their territorial focus: while MDGs were only applicable to developing countries, SDGs are universal and are relevant to any nation, underdeveloped or developed. Also, another difference was the process of creating the goals - on one hand the Millennium Development Goals reflect their top-down approach, while on other, the Sustainable Development Goals mirror a more comprehensive method, with a bottom-up approach (Kanie & Biermann, 2017). But the major noticeable difference is the length of the agendas. The SDGs outnumber the MDGs by over double the goals and have eight times more targets. Also, the core of each

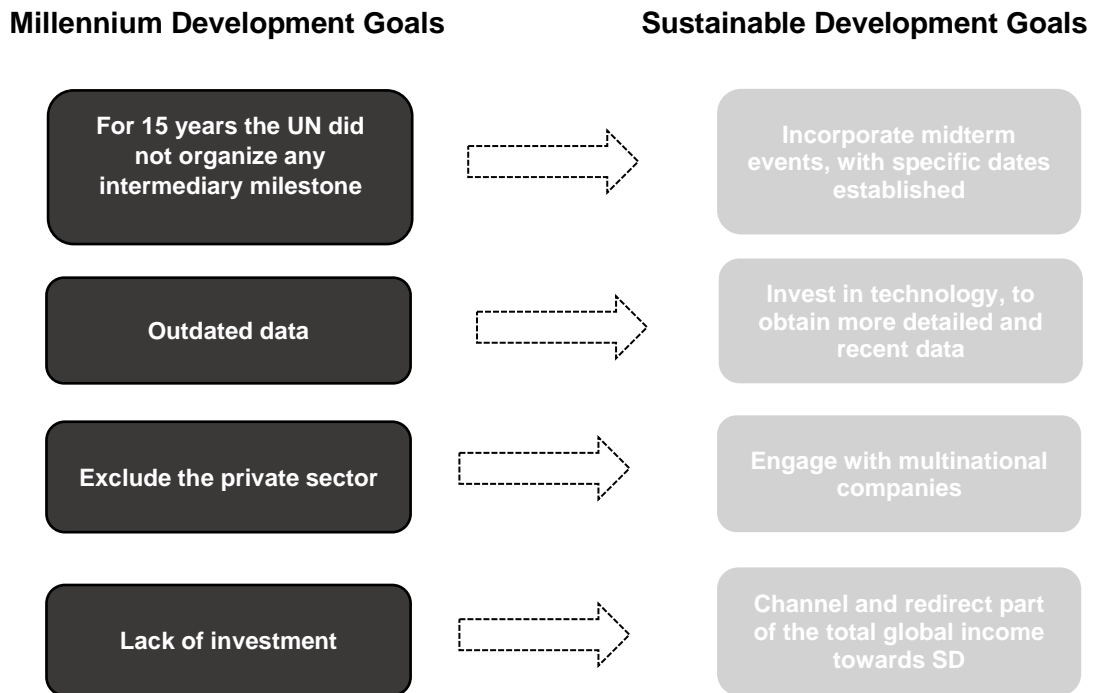
Agenda differs immensely from one another. Millennium Development Goals were engaged in ending poverty and enhance economic development in least developed countries, while SDGs cover an entire spectrum of topics, from environmental concerns, social issues to economic and political matters (Kanie & Biermann, 2017).

Figure 8. Main differences between MDGs and SDGs



* The CSOs perform an important part in holding governments accountable at the local level.
 Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from Kumar et al., (2016) p.3

Figure 9. How to improve SGDs by MDGs?



Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from Sachs, J. D., (2012) pp. 2210, 2211

Even though there are some limitations with the Millennium Development Goals, they paved the path for SDGs and helped to point out some flaws that have the opportunity to be corrected in this new global Agenda (Sachs, 2012). Figure 9 shows how the SDGs may benefit from their predecessors. The Sustainable Development Goals “seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve” (UN, 2015, p.5).

2.4. Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 12

After the framework of the *Agenda 2030* has been thoroughly assessed, to examine in depth each SDG becomes a smoother task. The aim of this sub-chapter is to look further in the comprehension of the two Goals under review in the present investigation: Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 12. In addition to their description and presentation, their limitations and how these have been addressed in the literature are also introduced and explored.

2.4.1. Sustainable Development Goal 8

Sustainable Development Goal 8 aims to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. In parallel with the three pillars of SD, it fits within the economy classification and with regard to the 5 P's is inserted in "Prosperity". This Goal is endorsed by 12 targets and 17 indicators, described in Table 3, which encompasses economic dimensions, like economic growth, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and innovations, and actions towards decent work and employment issues, that are aligned with the international legal framework and greatly support the accountability and measuring progress (Frey, 2017).

Table 3. Sustainable Development Goal 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

<i>Targets</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
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	· 8.1.1. Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita
8.2. Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sector	· 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 formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services	· 8.3.1. Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex.
8.4. Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavor 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 employee, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities; · 8.5.2. Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.

<p>8.6. By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.6.1. Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training.
<p>8.7. Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.7.1. Proportion and number of children age 5-17 years engaged in child labor, by sex and age.
<p>8.8. Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.8.1. Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupations injuries, by sex and migrant status; · 8.2.2. Increase in national compliance of labor rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labor Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status.
<p>8.9. By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.9.1. Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate; · 8.9.2. Number of jobs in tourism industries as a proportion of total jobs and growth rate of jobs, by sex.
<p>8.10. Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.10.1 Number of commercial banks branches and 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.
<p>8.a. Increase Aid for Trade support for developed countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.a.1. Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements.
<p>8.b. By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact for the International Labor Organization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · 8.b.1. Total government spending in social protection and employment programs as a proportion of the national budgets and GDP.

Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from United Nations (2015) and UN SDGs website (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>)

One of the biggest concerns among those who devote to study this field is reconciling economic growth with social sustainability without harming the human-rights standpoint (Frey, 2017). Likewise, in line with the debate between economic growth vs. economic development, the first target of Sustainable

Development Goal 8 (8.1. *Sustainable economic growth*) also raises questions about the preference to use GDP⁴ as the key indicator for economic and sustainable development, despite the several criticisms devoted to this indicator (Coscieme et al., 2020; Hickel, 2019; Pulselli et al., 2016). Simon Kuznets was the first economist to present the GDP methodology on a Congress Report, in 1934, at the light of the Great Depression in the United States of America (Pulselli et al., 2016). He highlighted the indicator's limitations when presenting it to the Congress, acknowledging that "*the welfare of a nation can, therefore, scarcely be inferred from a measure of national income*" (USASC, 1934, p. 7). In 2007, the European Commission promoted the conference *Beyond GDP*, a political debate that aimed to promote boundaries on the measurements of well-being and growth of the Member States, dismissing GDP as the primary welfare and development indicator – its use alone does not mirror the progress of a nation (European Commission, 2007). *The Stiglitz Report: reforming the international monetary and financial systems in the wake of the global crisis*, a book on the reform of the economic system and financial institutions, states:

"As statisticians and economists know very well, GDP mainly measures market production – expressed in money units – and as such it is useful. However, it has often been treated as if it were a measure of economic well-being. Conflating the two can lead to misleading indications about how well-off people are and entail the wrong policy decisions." (Stiglitz et al., 2010, p. 12,13)

One proposal to address this shortfall is to replace GDP, or complement it with other macroeconomic indicators, such as GPI – Genuine Progress Indicator-, ISEW – Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare -, GNH - Gross National Happiness -, or even HPI - Happy Planet Index (Coscieme et al., 2020; Schepelmann et al., 2010; Venkatesan, 2020). These aim to measure progress on other aspects, such as wellbeing, rather than production (Pulselli et al., 2016).

⁴ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is defined as the economic output of goods and services generated within each country's national territory – regardless of being generated by national or foreign citizens.

2.4.2. Sustainable Development Goal 12

Sustainable Development Goal 12 main purpose is to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. In the light of the layering of the three sustainable development pillars, equally to SDG 8, is framed in the stratum of Economy, although the UN have organized it in the “Planet” category, under the 5 P’s classification. Nonetheless, other have also considerer SDG 12 to have an economic dimension (Venkatesa, 2020), despite some of its environmental targets. SDG 12 comprises 11 targets, backboneed by 13 indicators, listed on Table 4. The key targets revolve around safeguarding practices of sustainable consumption and production, with regard to the scarcity of resources, waste management, secures the dissemination of information to the civil society actors and assures corporate accountability and transparency conducts.

Table 4. Sustainable Development Goal 12 – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

<i>Targets</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
<i>12.1. Implement the 10-Year-Framework of Programs on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.1.1. Number of countries with sustainable consumption and production (SCP) national action plans or SCP mainstreamed as a priority or target into national policies.
<i>12.2. By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.2.1. Material footprint, material footprint per capita and material footprint per GDP; • 12.2.2. Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita and domestic material consumption per GDP.
<i>12.3. By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest loss</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.3.1. Global food loss index.
<i>12.4. By 2020, achieve the environmental sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse on human health and environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.4.1. Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement; • 12.4.2. Hazardous waste generated per capita and proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment.
<i>12.5. By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.5.1. Nacional recycling rate, tons of material recycled.

<p>12.6. Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.6.1. Number of companies publishing sustainability reports.
<p>12.7. Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.7.1. Number of countries implementing sustainable public procurement policies and action plans
<p>12.8. By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.8.1. Extent to which (i) global citizen education and (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment.
<p>12.a. Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.a.1. Amount of support to developing countries on research and development for sustainable consumption and production and environmentally sound technologies.
<p>12.b. Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.b.1. Number of sustainable tourism strategies or policies and implemented action plans with agreed monitoring and evaluation tools.
<p>12.c. Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.c.1. Amount of fossil-fuel subsidies per unit of GDP (production and consumption) and as a proportion of total national expenditure on fossil fuels.

Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from United Nations (2015) and UN SDGs website (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal12>)

Sustainable Development Goal 12 formulation and targets also raise some apprehensions. As an interconnected globe, it is not possible to divide the impact of production and consumption patterns of each country, without having implications in another nation. This transnational effects are not compulsory to report, thus endangering the accounting and measurement of proper transparent procedures and implementation of this Goal (Amos & Lydgate, 2019).

One specific methodology, Ecological Footprint (EF), helps to understand the limitation of resources and how we, human beings, use the means at our disposal in an exhaustive manner, measuring both the natural supply and human demand on ecosystems (Borucke et al., 2013).

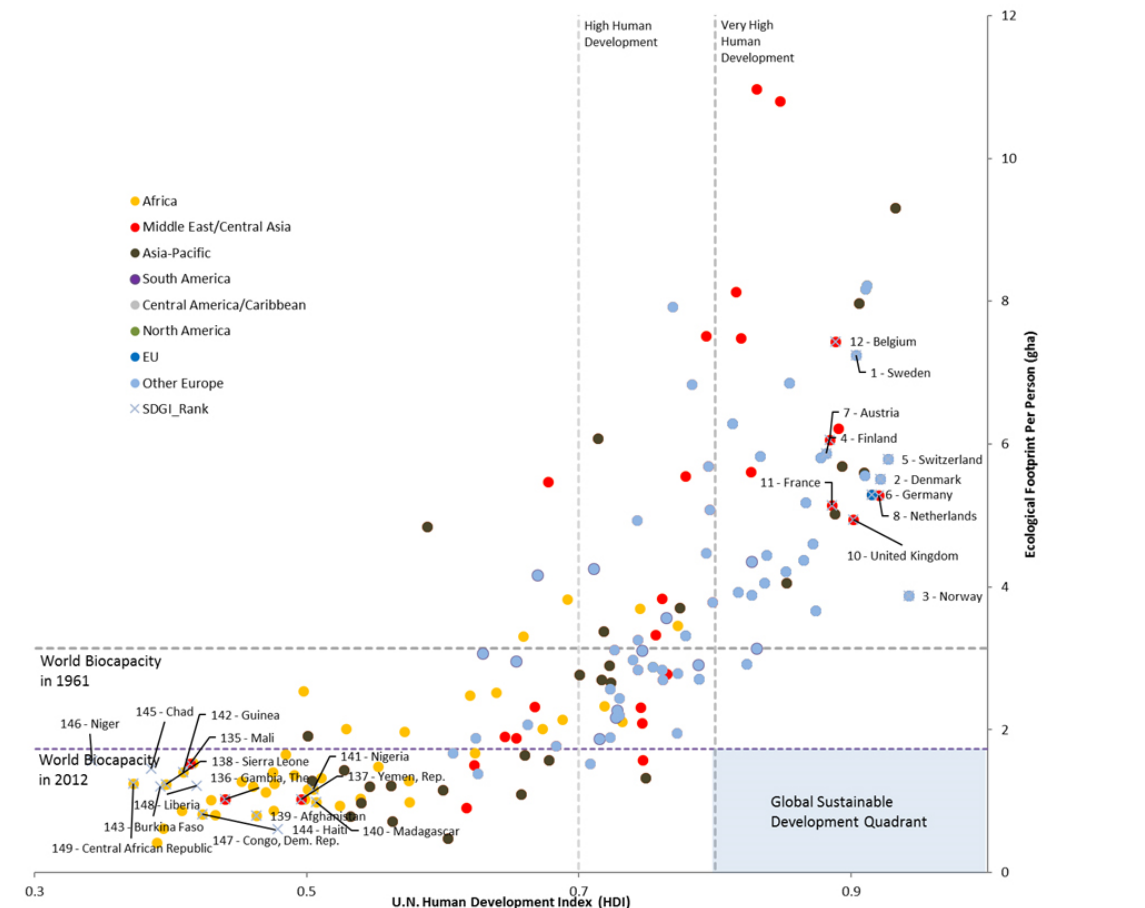
- *“On the demand side, the Ecological Footprint measures the biologically productive land and sea area – the ecological assets – that a population requires to produce the renewable resources and ecological services it uses;*
- *On the supply side, biocapacity tracks the ecological assets available in countries, regions or at the global level and their capacity to produce renewable resources and ecological services”* (Galli et al., 2013).

Ecological Footprint results are presented in Global Hectares and reflect the Humanity’s demand on the Earth’s natural resources (Rees & Wackernagel, 1996). The Ecological Footprint has a broad range of coverage: it can be calculated for individuals, communities, such as cities or regions, countries or even the entire human population (Kitzes et al., 2008). Every year, the Global Footprint Network, a Non-Governmental Organization that is specialized in this methodology, calculates and publishes the National Footprint Accounts, that indicate the amount of use of natural resources by certain country or region, aiming to provide calculations and data to decision-making stakeholders (Borucke et al., 2013). The Global Footprint Network also involves governments in the calculation process – they are engaged in order to verify the assessments and to be able to receive further suggestions (Galli et al., 2013). Thus, this indicator provides comparison among countries and/or regions on environmental assessment.

The National Footprint Accounts help to understand and assess countries on matters of natural resources use. But when combined with other indicators, these enable the evaluation of countries and/or regions in terms of sustainable and human development (Moran et al., 2007; Wackernagel et al., 2017). Figure 10 illustrates the junction of the EF and the Human Development Index (HDI), alongside the SDGI Ranking. The countries that register higher HDI, are also the same countries that have high EF and higher scores on the SDGI Ranking – higher scores on the SDGI do not mean higher ecological performance of the

countries (to note the strong presence of the EU's Member States on this quadrant). The least developed countries, according to the HDI, have a low EF and lower scores on the SDGI.

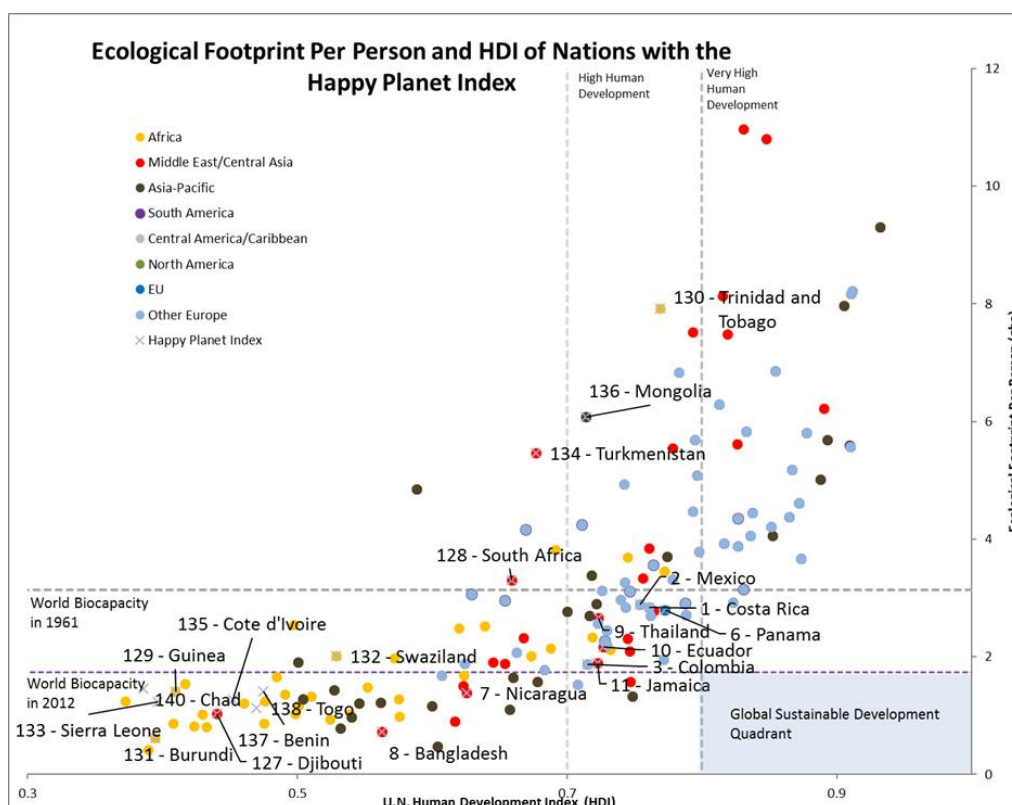
Figure 10. EF per person and nations' HDI (with SDGI Ranking)



Source: Wackernagel, Hanscom, and Lin (2017). P. 4

When observing other indexes, for instance the Happy Planet Index (suggested by Schepelmann et al. (2010) as an alternative for GDP: see subchapter 2.2.1), the configuration is substantially different (Figure 11). Costa Rica is the country with the best Happy Planet Index – and the remaining countries with the best results do not have an elevated HDI, nor Ecological Footprint. The countries that before emerged with higher SDGI and HDI scores, do not make an appearance on the HPI.

Figure 11. EF per person and nations' HDI (with the Happy Planet Index)



Source: Global Footprint Network (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.footprintnetwork.org/content/images/efhdihipi.jpg?_ga=2.48836206.974434108.1624208743-1859160321.1623930031.

2.4.3. Sustainable Development Goal 8 vs Sustainable Development Goal 12, or can we achieve sustainable economic growth?

Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 12 are both classified as economic goals (see Figure 7) and are intertwined through one specific target – 8.4. *Decouple economic growth from environmental degradation* (Coscieme et al., 2019). But besides this major economic dimension, the conflicting differences among the two Goals may endanger their coexistence and fruitful implementation (Coscieme et al., 2020; Hickel, 2019; Venkatesan, 2020). One of the biggest issues that Humankind face is the natural resources' scarcity, which has been accentuated by the draining practices of modern societies; therefore, SDGs should be devoted to minimize the impacts of this issue (Wackernagel et al., 2017). This is also the main issue that puts these two Goals in two possible opposite directions: how can sustainable consumption and production be

achieved, while the aim is to promote strong economic growth based on GDP? (Venkatesan, 2020).

One of the possible solutions to surmount this massive challenge is to pursue economic growth without surpassing the ecosystems limits, living within the limits of one planet, and this is only possible if countries are able to “*achieve absolute decoupling*” (Hickel, 2019, p. 876; Wackernagel et al. 2017). Also Circular Economy has been gaining ground - since its first roots in 1989 up to the present day (Ghisellini et al., 2016). It sets aside consumption and wasteful behaviours, such as the “end-of-life”⁵ concept, supporting not only the reuse and recycling of materials, but also the reduction in the overall consumption (Kirchherr et al., 2017). It can be defined as the:

“Regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy leakage are minimised by slowing, closing, and narrowing material and energy loops. This can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling.” (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017, p. 759)

The *Dasgupta Review* proposes an approach that shifts the way our society is organized, in order to be feasible to attain sustainable development and to ensure conditions for future generations (Dasgupta, 2021). Partha Dasgupta is an economist and the author of the *Dasgupta Review* – he alerts to the urgency of changing the economic growth perspective: in the last decades, Humanity has increased its consumption patterns of consumption and production, while the Earth’s natural resources’ stock registered a decrease of 40% (Dasgupta, 2021). He advises not only a shift in the economic perspective, but also at institutional and cultural level.

Others propose degrowth, or *Décroissance* as it was firstly appointed – which means “decrease growth” (Latouche, 2010, p. 519) -, as the path to pursue a society based on wellbeing and life patterns that are compatible with the capacity of planet Earth (Csutora et al., 2016). In addition to these, many streams have risen to propose alternatives for the philosophy of unbridled economic growth, as outlines Table 5. The Steady State Economics approach supports a steadiness in the economic panorama – apart from expansion or recession -, that

⁵ End-of-life: in the stages of product’s life cycle, it corresponds to the final ones; the product does not have any utility as it is.

should be endorsed by governments as key stakeholders to the success of this movement (Daly, 1997; Moreno Pires, 2017). The Prosperity without Growth stream initiated through a publishing by Tim Jackson – initially as a report to the Sustainable Development Commission, and after its great success and interest, as a book -, and outlines the necessity and possibility to achieve social prosperity and wellbeing, without registering growth in the economy (Jackson, 2009; Moreno Pires, 2017). The Voluntary Simplicity movement bases its principles on a very simplistic and spirituous lifestyle, leaving aside the consumerist mindset very embedded in today's society, and proposes a consumption positioning⁶ (Etzioni, 2004; Kocsis, 2002; Moreno Pires, 2017). Sustainable Happiness stands as a mid-ground for sustainability and happiness, providing enhancement in wellbeing both on the individual and community level – it is based on and measured through positive experiences and individual features, as well as institutions with a positive role (Moreno Pires, 2017; O'Brien, 2005). One stream that includes growth and adapts it to the SD sphere is Green Growth, where economic and environmental aspects are in communion, as means of tackling the existing shortfalls of the economic model in use (Moreno Pires, 2017).

All these alternative streams agree that it is possible to achieve wellbeing without compromising the ecosystems limits or even without growth and that such economic model is feasible to achieve, but not within the mouldings that we know today (there would need to be an increase in economic efficiency and a decrease in overall consumption) (Moreno Pires, 2017). On the other hand, there is lack of agreement on how to implement these new approaches – some call for individual actions (e.g. voluntary simplicity), while other emphasize the role of institutions, such as governments (e.g. steady state economics) (Moreno Pires, 2017).

⁶ *Consumption vs Consumerism: Consumption is based on consuming what is necessary to suppress our needs of the present. Consumerism, on the other hand, stands as the unbridled consumption of good and services – one believes it can only achieve maximum wellbeing when over-consuming.*

Table 5. Alternative streams for economic growth

"BEYOND ECONOMIC GROWTH" STREAMS	KEY ISSUES	AUTHORS
DEGROWTH (DÉCROISSANCE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The origins of the principle: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1971 and 1994: Linkage between entropy, ecology and economy; 2. 1972: <i>The limits to Growth</i>: Report of the Club of Rome; 3. 1970s to 2000s: even though the term was mainstreamed since the 70s, only in the 2000s it was used a normative/activist slogan. • Key principles: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Economy shall not go beyond the carrying capacity of the Earth; (ii) Economic activity should focus on increasing human wellbeing and happiness and not on the increase of wealth for its own sake; (iii) Voluntary and bottom-up transition together with (some) policy support. • Reduced working hours, in order to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) reduce consumption both at the supply (production capacity) and the demand (purchasing power) side; (ii) Welfare and wellbeing benefits (more leisure time, less stress, and so on). • Eight "R's": Revalue; Reconceptualize; Restructure; Relocate; Redistribute; Reduce; Reuse; Recycle. 	1. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen 2. Meadows et al. (1972) 3. Whitehead (2013) Latouche (2009) and Latouche (2010)
STEADY STATE ECONOMICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant stock of capital and a constant population of people = constant stock of labour • Ethic and social limits to growth: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the costs imposed on future generations; (ii) the costs imposed on sub-human species; (iii) self-cancelling effects on welfare (Easterlin paradox⁷); (iv) corrosive impacts on moral standards including glorification of self-interests. 	Daly (1997)
PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancement of wellbeing and social aspects, arising from a no growth economy and prosperity; • Beyond a certain point, growth does not translate in an increase in human wellbeing; • The authors highlight the need for a 10-fold faster improvement in eco-efficiency (carbon efficiency) than today's (2009) (and 8-fold faster efficiency improvement even in a zero-growth economy). • Combination of degrowth and efficiency improvements. • Prosperity in three dimensions: (i) ecological sustainability; (ii) social inclusion, and (iii) the quality of life; • Outcomes: a relative high level of prosperity can be achieved with a relatively low level of income. 	Jackson (2009) Kallis et al. (2012) Fritz & Koch (2014)
VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalized form of resistance to consumer society: a way of life which is outwardly simple and inwardly rich. • Inspired on the lifestyles of Puritans, naturalistic and spiritual visions, and simplistic social philosophies preached by leaders, such as Gandhi and Jesus Christ. • Consumerism – not consumption -, is the target to fight against for voluntary simplicity. 	Elgin (1993) Elgin & Mitchell (1977) Gregg (1936) Kocsis (2002) Etzioni (2004)
SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition: Pursuit of happiness without exploiting other people, the environment, or future generations. • Happiness measured around factors, such as frugality; equity; altruism and pro-ecological behaviour; genetics; circumstances of the person; intentional activity; and cultural factors 	O'Brien (2005)
GREEN GROWTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The triple crisis – financial, climate and depletion of global oil reserves – asks for a revision on the growth concept, based on innovative, eco-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies; • It is possible break the link between economic growth and the negative environmental impacts. 	Hayden (2015)

Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from Moreno Pires, S. (2017) and Csutora et al. (2016)

⁷ The Easterlin Paradox: "a point in time happiness varies directly with income both among and within nations, but over time happiness does not trend upward as income continues to grow.". Retrieved from: ESRC - UKRI. (n.d.). The Easterlin Paradox - Economic and Social Research Council. [esrc.ukri.org](https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/50-years-of-esrc/50-achievements/the-easterlin-paradox/). Retrieved 18 June 2021, from <https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/50-years-of-esrc/50-achievements/the-easterlin-paradox/>.

3. Sustainable Development Goals and the European Parliament as a political stakeholder

3.1. The European Parliament: the citizens' voice in EU

The European Parliament is one of seven European Institutions, defined by Article 13 of the Treaty on European Union – the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the Court of Auditors. Among all EU's Institutions, the European Parliament is the only one that is directly elected by the European citizens (European Parliament, n.d.)⁸, which confers it the particular trait of the embodying the people's voices in all the discussed matters. This institution operates under the Rules of Procedure, defined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (article 232). In this very same Treaty are determined the powers assigned to this institution (article 223, article 234, article 314). Among them is the legislative power, one of the most prominent and recently allocated, as it previously had a purely advisory role (European Parliament, n.d.)⁸.

(The European Parliament) "(...) acts to control the various executive bodies of the European Union, without claiming to want to take their place, and its legislative role, though substantially enhanced over the last 30 years, continues to be shared with the Council of the EU and is heavily conditioned by bargaining between the main political groups, with no single group enjoying a dominant role." (Shackleton, 2017, p. 191).

In fulfilling its legislative role, one of the tools that the EP has recourse to are the plenary sessions, divided in debates and votes. The debates encompass both legislative and non-legislative agendas, that lead to committee reports and will later be submitted and presented in plenary sessions or originate oral

⁸ European Parliament. (n.d.) *How plenary works*. European Parliament - About Parliament. Retrieved 2 April 2021, from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/how-plenary-works>

questioning procedures (Sorace, 2018). These plenary sessions share a pattern of organization, regardless of the topic under discussion:

“The plenary meetings of the European Parliament are organised in four-day sessions in Strasbourg, taking place almost every month, and in two-day sessions, which are held in Brussels roughly every other month. On a typical session day, a number of matters are debated, interspersed with votes, questions and administrative duties, as well as occasional statements. Each separate activity taking place in the plenary session is referred to as an agenda item. An agenda item typically consists of a sequence of a few dozen speeches, with the President giving the introductory and the closing speech, where the floor is given to Members of Parliament, EU officials, and invited speakers.”

(Van Aggelen et al., 2017, p. 2)

Also, each specific debate follows a consistent time schedule (Garssen, 2016):

- (i) The responsible rapporteur does an opening statement;
- (ii) A Member of the Commission does an opening statement on the subject;
- (iii) The assigned Main Group spokespersons (MEPs) for the issue intervene;
- (iv) MEPs take individual turns;
- (v) The Member of the Commission does a closing statement;
- (vi) The responsible rapporteur does the closing statement.

When the debate is in progress there are some procedures that MEPs can resort to:

- (i) Catch the eye procedure: short-lengthen speeches, in addition to those already planned, in order to provide more spontaneity to the debate;
- (ii) Blue card procedure: MEPs are given the option to query the speaker by raising a blue card (one might decline to answer) (adapted from European Parliament, 2019, pp.12,13).

The aim of these procedures is, not to add an entire speech to the debate, but to create flow in the discussion with very rapid interventions, thus enhancing the involvement of MEPs and promoting a more fruitful debate. Beyond the debates, the Members of the European Parliament get the opportunity to vote on the discussed matters – normally around mid-day, and every so often they are likely to vote on hundreds of amendments at once (European Parliament, n.d.)⁸. All the minutes of the plenary and votes are available on the European Parliament

website, which is the main source of data collection for the present research, as it will be presented further on the study.

The European Parliament is also an object of interest for many scholars. From the Brexit, to Euroscepticism, to a political institution recognized worldwide, many have tried to understand all the phenomena that take place inside the EP's buildings: *"the evolution of the only directly elected supranational assembly in the world, the European Parliament, from a toothless consultation chamber to a powerful legislative institution is a remarkable development"* (Hix & Høyland, 2013, p.185). Greene and Cross (2017) developed a modelling method that enables the user to identify the topic in each MEP speech and reveal the organization of the EP's political agenda evolution. Some have chosen to dedicate their work towards grasping the constituency of the European Parliament, namely the uneven distribution of ages in the MEPs. Stockemer and Sundström (2019) conclude that the younger generation is not represented fairly in the EP, when compared to the other age brackets. Sorace (2018) also dwells on understanding legislative patterns on participation, but instead of votes and speeches, the author focus on the "supplementary" activities that take place in the EP, such as written questions. Other authors address the role of parties' positioning and influence, such as McElroy and Benoit (2007), and Proksch and Slapin (2009) that focus on the influence of party groups division in policy positions, both on the European Parliament and the national party branch, respectively. Also Hix (2002) studies this influential factor, but instead of focusing on speeches delivered, he analysis MEPs voting behaviour. The distribution of reports through party groups, study carried by (Hausemer, 2006), demonstrates how the EP is organized and identifies some disparities in party forces and its participation in the institution.

3.2. The European Union and Sustainable Development Goals: when sustainable development enters the European political arena

An institution like the European Parliament commands a great deal of attention, in particular when it comes to a global Agenda such as the Sustainable Development Goals. EU's responsiveness and positioning are under the eyes of

great world leaders, global organizations, and scholars from all fields. In matters such as the Sustainable Development Goals the spotlight goes directly to the European Parliament and to the Members representing all Member States, as “*good, effective and equitable governance*” is a key element to SDGs implementation (Monkelbaan, 2019, p. v). The European Commission, on a press release concerning the EU’s priorities, states that “*the EU has a strong starting position and track record, with a high level of economic development, social cohesion, democratic societies and a commitment to sustainable development which is firmly anchored in the European Treaties*”, clarifying the stand of the Institution in the light of the goals presented by the United Nations (European Commission, 2016, p.1).

The 2014-2019 parliamentary term is the first to have the SDGs in place, that officially started to be implemented in January 2016. In the very begin of this legislature, the European Commission President in office, Jean-Claude Juncker, established 10 priorities to pursue in the term (European Parliament, 2014):

- 1) Improvement on jobs, growth and investment;
- 2) Connected digital single market;
- 3) Ground-breaking climate change policy;
- 4) Deeper and fairer internal market, with special attention to reinforce the industrial tissue;
- 5) Deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union;
- 6) Balanced and proportioned free trade agreement;
- 7) An area of Justice and Fundamental right, based on transparency and shared trust;
- 8) Improved migration policy;
- 9) Europe as a strong global actor;
- 10) A Union of democratic change.

This list was set before the SDGs were in action. Almost at the end of the term, the European Parliament pressed a study on *Europe’s approach to implement the Sustainable Development Goals: good practices and the way forward*, presenting an overall assessment of SDGs implementation and suggestions for further improvement (Niestroy et al., 2019). The report focuses on the European Union level, Member States level and also on the National Parliaments’ level. The results show a more active role played by the Member

States and the individual Parliaments and the need to improve the EU's level action and involvement towards SDGs. Table 6 summarizes the main report results at all three levels.

Table 6. 2019 Report on EU's approach to SDGs: main results

Level of analysis	Report results
EU level	Absence of an implementation strategy
	Disseminate SDGs in all policies – to highlight the predominance of economic policies over environmental and social policies
	The Commission's Multi-stakeholder platform on SDGs produced a joint statement in 2018 – showing support from the various civil society, business and think tank groups
	Improve horizontal coordination – to positively highlight the Working Party for Agenda 2030
	The necessity of include and improve multi-level governance with collaborative mechanisms
Member States level	Most EU members are on the process of updating their SD strategic plan, or have already included SDGs in their national plans
	The connection between domestic and external dimension is considered to remain weak, in the same way as the vertical coordination of Member States
	Massive efforts to engage stakeholders in SDGs. Only few countries remain with very low stakeholders' participation rate
	Many countries have worked on SDGs reports, even though it is possible to enhance these
	Absence of sustainability impact assessments and budget checks; this is already being tackled in most countries
	The number of committees or arrangements dedicated to SDGs is on the rise
Parliaments level	Increasing number of activities planned in the national parliaments
	Nine national parliaments set up specific institutional arrangements in light on the Agenda 2030; one other is in the process of planning.
	The European Parliament stands as one of the first drivers in the EU for SDGs implementation; event though it is pointed the lack of initiative and some inertia towards the challenges presented.
	Positively emphasize the already active practices in national parliaments and the efforts in the European Parliament, leading to the potential for enhancing the interparliamentary cooperation, and with this, the role of parliaments in the SDG implementation

Source: Author's elaboration, adapted from Niestroy et al. (2019.): a study for the European Parliament, pp. 6,7

The following, and current, Parliamentary term in office, from 2019-2024, also drew some goals to achieve through the term. The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, highlighted the six ambitions for the following 5 years, that are aligned with the *Agenda 2030* and the Sustainable Development Goals (Figure 12) (European Commission, 2019, p.4):

- 1) A European Green Deal;
- 2) An economy that works for people;
- 3) A Europe fit for the digital age;
- 4) Protecting our European way of life;
- 5) A stronger Europe in the world;
- 6) A new push for European democracy.

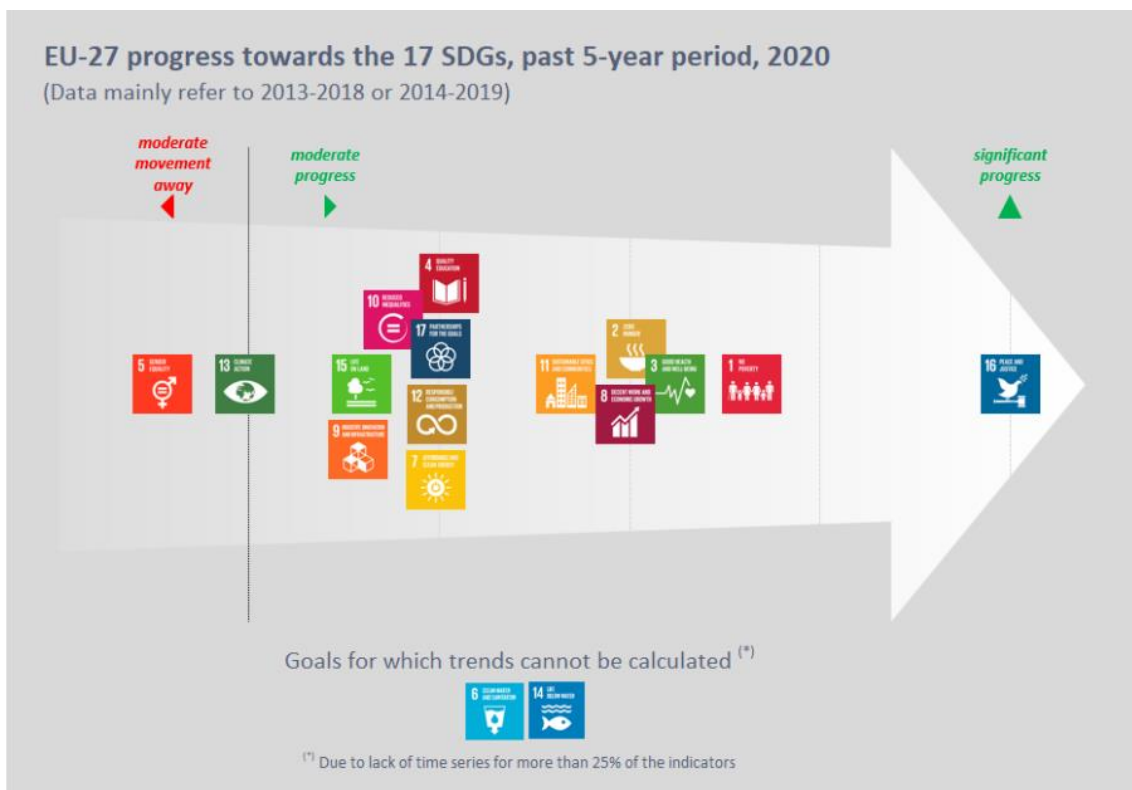
Figure 12. 2019-2024 European Commission Priorities aligned with the SDGs



Source: European Commission (2020), p.3

Recently, the European Commission, in partnership with EUROSTAT, has launched a new platform dedicated to SDGs, named *KnowSDGs* – a place of summarised information, interactive and accessible to all. It explains how EU policies interlink with the SDGs, what are the connections among SDGs and how these can be identified, and also provides access to modelling tools, that help to look at the SDGs through a quantitative lens (European Commission, n.d.)⁹. In the stated platform, it is possible to access the EU latest progress towards *Agenda 2030* Sustainable Development Goals. In the 2020 report, the Goal that reveals the biggest improvement is SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, while SDG 5 – Gender Equality, and SDG 13 – Climate Action, show some setbacks (Figure 13).

Figure 13. EU progress towards SDGs, 2014-2019

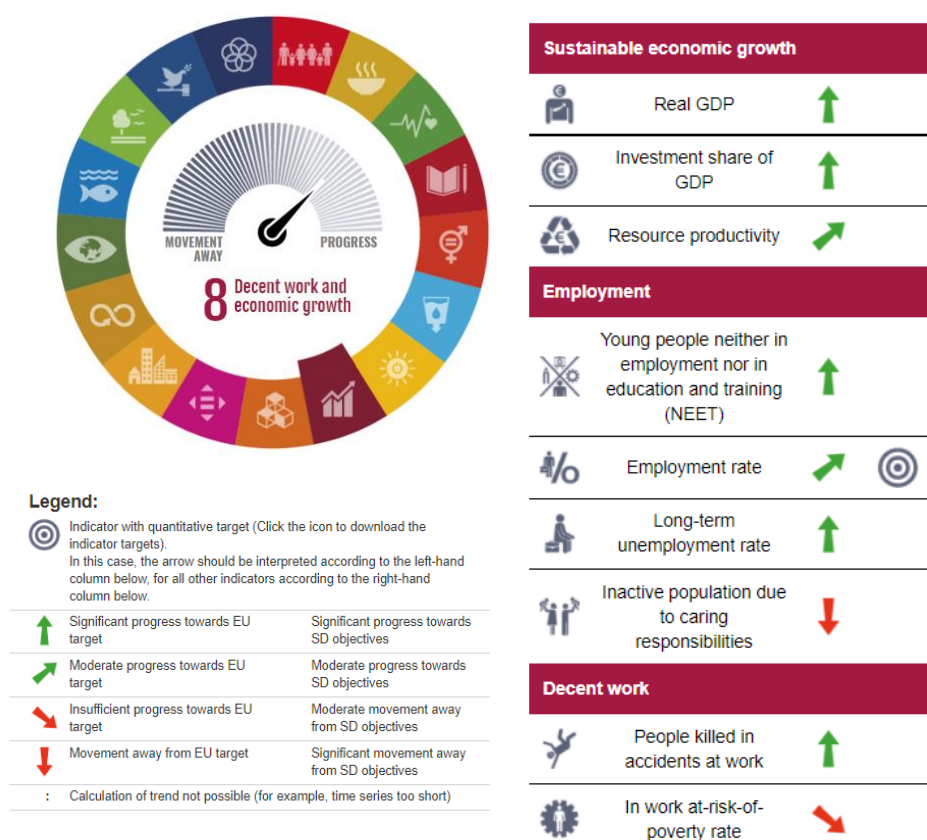


Source: EUROSTAT report for the European Commission. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/41urostat/web/sdi/key-findings>.

⁹ European Commission (n.d.) KnowSDGs. Retrieved 29 May 2021, from <https://knowsdgs.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>.

In reliance on the same repertoire, it is also possible to analyse deeper the progress towards each specific Goal. With respect to SDG 8 there has been positive advancements in the overall assessment of the Goal. Only *Inactive Population due to caring responsibilities* and *In-work-at-risk-of poverty* sub indicators reveal a movement away from EU target (Figure 14).

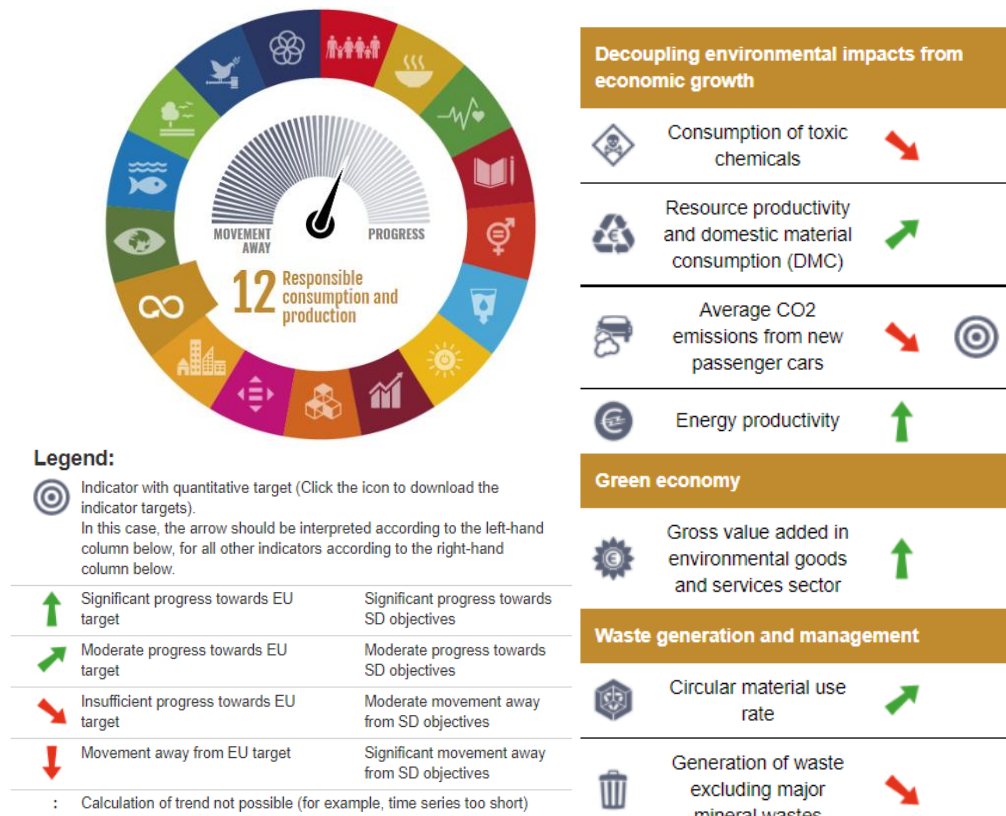
Figure 14. EU overall progress towards SDG 8



Source: EUROSTAT report for the European Commission. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/key-findings>

SDG 12 also has positive progress, but three sub indicators fall into the low improvement category: *consumption of toxic chemicals*, *average CO2 emissions from new passenger cars* and *generation of waste excluding major mineral wastes* (Figure 15).

Figure 15. EU overall progress towards SDG 12



Source: EUROSTAT report for the European Commission. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi/key-findings>.

The European Union and its Institutions, namely the European Parliament, have promoted several initiatives towards Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that SD is a present and active theme in the current parliamentary term (European Commission, 2019). Through the next chapters, this commitment will be under review, trying to understand how the Members of the European Parliament behave on matters of the *Agenda 2030* and the SDGs, as well as the main influential factors and traits.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research question, hypothesis, and main investigation purposes

The UN *Agenda 2030* places SD in political agendas worldwide towards a more harmonized and balanced set of policies, that embrace not only environmental issues, but also economic and social matters (Griggs et al., 2014). Thus, it is given that SDGs feature inside parliaments and main conference rooms all over the globe – European Parliament included. The present investigation will focus on the SDGs and its dominance within the European Parliament plenary sessions. How predominant are SDGs 8 and 12 in the European arena? What motivates each MEP to approach to SDG 8? And to SDG 12? Are there differences in this approach regarding the personal and professional traits of MEPs? These questions will guide the investigation, alongside the hypothesis that will provide the required ground to answer them:

H₁: Men tend to present more speeches regarding SDGs 8 and 12 in the Parliament.

Gender has been studied as a prominent determinant factor in parliamentary participation (e.g. Akirav, 2020; Bäck et al., 2014; Hargrave & Langengen, 2020; Sundström & McCright, 2014). Hence, the relevance of adding this variable in the present study arises, in order to grasp if the tendency in the European Parliament, and regarding SDG 8 and 12, agrees with the general tendency in the other parliaments. Although women are more involved in environmental affairs, men usually record a higher rate of participation in the debates than their female counterparts. (Bäck et al., 2014; Sundström & McCright, 2014).

H₂: Most experienced MEPs tend to be more active in the European Parliament, thus presenting more interventions related to the SDGs 8 and 12.

H₃: Older MEPs are prone to be more engaged in the plenary sessions regarding SDGs 8 and 12.

Age and time of experience at the service of the EP also seem to be related and impact one's performance in the Parliament. The older and more experienced a MEP is, the greater the prospect for him/her to be actively enrolled in the plenary sessions (Giannetti & Pedrazzani, 2016; Hájek, 2019). The goal is to test if these hypotheses are still valid within the European Parliament and when it comes to parliamentary debates that involve SDG 8 and 12.

H₄: MEPs who belong to right party's affiliation tend to approach frequently SDGs 8 and 12 in their parliamentary speeches.

Party affiliation, both on the EP and on the country of representation, is organized through the following political spectrum: (i) far-right; (ii) right/centre-right; (iii) centre; (iv) centre-left/left; (v) far-left and (vi) others. The right/centre-right and left/centre-left positioning were grouped due to the large number of parties that fall under both categories, thus making their compilation and analysis simpler. The category, (vi) Others, emerges as a result of two main reasons. First, some MEPs are Non-Inscrits (in the case of the EP, meaning that they do not belong to any of the recognized parties) or Independents (in the case of country of representation, indicating that they do not belong to any party). The other reason lies with the fact that some national parties identify themselves as Big Tent – where the members may not share a common ideology (from left to right) -, or a combination of the left-right spectrum philosophy - Syncretic, rather than defined as left or right parties (Gatti, 2016; Merriam-Webster, n.d.)¹⁰. Not only parties influence voting behaviour (Hix, 2002), but also parliamentary activity in

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster. Definition of BIG TENT. Retrieved 3 June 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/big%20tent>.

general, such as plenaries – in the European Parliament this dimension directly influences the speeches given by the MEPs (McElroy & Benoit, 2007; Slapin & Proksch, 2010). Prior to belonging to any European party, MEPs are affiliated to some national party, which reveals to play a determining role in their plenary interventions (Proksch & Slapin, 2009). Despite the fact that parties are formed by individuals with their own will and ideas (Hausemer, 2006), party forces end up exerting an important influence on parliamentarians' decision-making and interventions (Ono, 2015).

Left-wing parties are prone to legislate and participate more often in topics that concern sustainability and the environment (Læssøe, 2007; Neumayer, 2004). As discussed above, SDG 8 and 12 are predominantly economic in character, even though SDG12 also entails the environmental aspect, - which situates them beyond the environmental scope, and thus forecloses the predominant participation of left-wing parties. Additionally, at the top of my knowledge, the studies that focus on Sustainable Development and partisan ideologies are virtually non-existent, with one exception. Lee (2019) has carried a text analysis to test if party affiliation influences the achievement of SDGs. The author evaluates four specific goals, among them SGD 8, and concludes that this Goal is more frequently approach by Non-Left stakeholders (Lee, 2019). Hypothesis 4 then emerges, as right-wing parties are more likely to intervene in parliamentary debates regarding SDG 8 and 12.

4.2. Research tools and techniques

4.2.1. Research tools: plenary sessions

The parliamentary arena is an extremely comprehensive tool, since its events are rich in content and provide a plethora of insights on several topics (Proksch & Slapin, 2009). Across countries, scholars have been addressing MP's behaviour and parliamentary activity (e.g. Baumann et al., 2015; Hix, 2002; Napetvaridze et al., 2020). The European Parliament is no exception, and it has also been an object of study for many (e.g. Greene & Cross, 2015; Guijarro & Poyatos, 2018; Hix et al., 2009). This field of study can be centred on (i) parliamentary debates/plenary sessions, or (ii) Members of the Parliament votes.

The present research focuses on plenary sessions held on the European Parliament floor. The preference for plenary debates over votes relies on the fact the first ones provide a greater insight of the positioning of the deputies and legislative behaviour, while voting patterns only influence the policies results and do not offer a comprehensive explanation for MP's performance (Bäck & Debus, 2016; A. S. Proksch & Slapin, 2012; S. O. Proksch & Slapin, 2010b; Sieberer, 2016). One may argue that debates' analysis may be an extensive and challenging task, in comparison to the forthright voting study, but the benefits outweigh the disadvantages – while plenary sessions, and hence speeches, deliver a detailed assessment for the researcher, votes can be dulled study instrument (Bäck & Debus, 2016).

"The plenary sessions of the European Parliament are one of the most important arenas in which European representatives can air questions, express criticisms and take policy positions to influence European Union politics. The plenary thus represents the most visible venue where the content and evolution of the policy agenda of the EP can be examined."

(Greene & Cross, 2017, p. 77)

4.2.2. Research focus: Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 12

The present dissertation conducts a qualitative study on two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 8 and SDG 12. These two Goals are some of the few that share a common underlying focus on economics within their targets (Venkatesan, 2020). Nevertheless, these are the only couple of SDGs in the *Agenda 2030* where the economic connection conceals also a conflictive relationship – “SDG 8 violates SDG 12” (Hickel, 2019, p. 879). Thus, it becomes relevant to perceive how MEPs behave and approach these two distinct Goals, and if this dissonant relationship may be mirrored in the plenary sessions. This clashing nature is studied and assessed at the light of the European Parliament and fosters the comprehension and assessment of the driving factors.

4.2.3. Research methodology

The main object of the present research are the plenary sessions held at the European Parliament from 2016 to 2019. The first step was to collect all those plenary sessions that approached SDG 8 and/or SDG 12. The official EP website provides a complete database with all the plenary sessions and allows to narrow the search by keywords and plenary terms. The time frame under review begins with the start date of the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda, on January 1st 2016, and finishes by the end of 2019. This date is the end point of United Kingdom participation in the European Parliament, due to the Brexit – even though it was only official on February 1st 2020, the choice to opt for December 31st as the end date, is based on the fact that this way it is possible to obtain 3 full civil years. From then on, the distribution of seats and the composition of European Parliament body of deputies have changed, making the comparison analysis more difficult. Therefore, in this case, from January 1st 2016 to July 1st 2019 the 8th term was in office, and from July 2nd 2019 to December 31st 2019 begun the 9th term of the EP.

Because each SDG covers such a massive amount of topics, the keywords to build the database of MEPs' discourses in plenary debates were selected by Goal, taking into consideration each specific target and respective indicators, as presented in Table 7. The keywords that are repeated (e.g. *sustainable tourism*) were, however, only searched once, in order to avoid duplication of documents.

Table 7. Keywords used on the plenary sessions' research

Target	Keywords
8.1. Sustainable economic growth	(i) Economic growth (ii) GDP
8.2. Diversify, innovate and upgrade for economic productivity	(i) Productivity (ii) Diversification and innovation (iii) Technological upgrade (iv) Labour-intensive sectors
8.3. Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises	(i) Development policy (ii) Job creation (iii) Micro, small and medium enterprises (iv) Financial services
8.4. Improve resource efficiency in consumption and production	(i) Global resource efficiency (ii) Environmental degradation (iii) Sustainable Consumption (iv) Sustainable Production
8.5. Full employment and decent work with equal pay	(i) Employment (ii) Decent work (iii) Equality

8.6. Promote youth employment, education and training	(i) Youth employment (ii) Education rate
8.7. End modern slavery, trafficking and child labour	(i) Forced labour (ii) Modern slavery (iii) Human trafficking (iv) Child labour (v) Child exploitation
8.8. Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments	(i) Labour rights (ii) Migrant workers (iii) Precarious employment
8.9. Promote beneficial and sustainable tourism	(i) Sustainable tourism
8.10. Universal access to banking, insurance and financial services	(i) Financial institutions
8.a. Increase Aid for Trade support	(i) Aid for Trade
8.b. Development a global Youth Employment strategy	(i) Youth Employment (ii) Global Jobs Pact
12.1. Implement the 10-Year Sustainable Consumption and Production Framework	(i) Sustainable consumption (ii) Sustainable production (iii) Developing countries (iv) Developed countries
12.2. Sustainable management and use of natural resources	(i) Sustainable management (ii) Efficiency (iii) Natural resources
12.3. Halve global per capita food waste	(i) Food waste (ii) Production chain (iii) Supply chain
12.4. Responsible management of chemicals and waste	(i) Chemicals management (ii) Waste management
12.5. Substantially reduce waste generation	(i) Waste generation (ii) Prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse
12.6. Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and sustainability reporting	(i) Large and transnational companies (ii) Sustainable practices (iii) Sustainable information (iv) Sustainability reports
12.7. Promote sustainable public procurement practices	(i) Public procurement (ii) Sustainable policies
12.8. . Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles	(i) Sustainable information (ii) Public awareness
12.a. Support developing countries' scientific and technological capacity for sustainable consumption and production	(i) Technological advances (ii) Scientific advances (iii) Sustainable patterns (iv) Support developing countries
12.b. Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism	(i) Sustainable tourism
12.c. Remove market distortions that encourage wasteful consumption	(i) Fossil-fuel (ii) Market distortions (iii) Negative externalities (iv) Communities' protection

Source: Author's elaboration

Following this focused search by keywords and parliamentary terms, all the plenary sessions – a total of 150 - were collected, via the extension *NCapture for NVivo*, and afterwards imported to the *NVivo* software. This software allows the

user to conduct a qualitative analysis and group data, and, thus, serves the purpose of this investigation.

The methodology of assessment of these plenary sessions is based on the total number of interventions, instead of on the content of each speech – since the aim is to understand what influences the presence of SDGs in the interventions of each MEP, rather than how they position themselves towards these issues (positive or negative behaviour), based on the methodology present on Bäck and Debus (2016) and Debus and Tosun (2021). In these mentioned studies, the authors collect a plethora of parliamentary debates and focus on the amount of speeches given by the Members of the Parliament – with the purpose of trying to grasp the “*agenda-setting behaviour*” of the MPs towards the green agenda (Debus & Tosun, 2021). The present work differs from the studies previously mentioned as it proposes to code the plenary sessions to its full extent, and not only to code the title and the corresponding theme.

After the plenary sessions were inserted in the *NVivo* software, two main codes were created, in order to code all the documents: code SDG 8 and code SDG 12. The process of coding in *NVivo* allows the researcher to understand patterns and explore disparities among individuals, organizations or categories. To get a more in-depth overview, other codes were also added – corresponding to the targets of each SDG (e.g., SDG 8.1; SDG 12.1). The coding process was carried out by reading each and all plenary sessions and examining all the speeches given by each MEP. As it was read, all the fragments of speech that fell under SDG 8 and/or SDG 12 were allocated to its specific code (interventions coded). Take for instance the example of the following speech randomly drawn from the *NVivo* database:

*“Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE / NGL). - Mr President, justice and the creation of a common space between European workers do not need a semblance of revision of the "posted workers" directive. The one you are proposing, Commissioner, maintains competition for employees within the European Union. **We therefore ask you to draw up a new directive based on consultation with trade unions, with the objective of ensuring posted workers real equality of treatment in terms of pay, social protection and working conditions. It should be complemented by the creation of a European body of labor inspectors responsible for enforcing a high level of labor law. The European***

institutions should become the source of new economic, social and democratic rights for all workers, otherwise it will be increasingly rejected, as it is now.”

The highlighted sentences were coded to SDG 8 targets 8.5. *Full employment and decent work with equal pay* and 8.8. *Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments*, becoming part of the database as interventions.

Also, all the MEPs that would intervene in the coded speeches were also being coded in the *NVivo Case* category. The cases were created under the deputy's name, and they were assigned *Case Properties*. The *NVivo* software enables the user to classify their cases into *Person*. That was the case in this research – after creating the *Case*, this would be assigned to the *Case Classification: Person* and afterwards the *Case Properties* were filled, with information gathered from the official European Parliament website, which encompasses all the details about MEPs used in this research. For further understanding, take for instance the prior intervention: it would be coded to the MEP Patrick Le Hyaric, right after his profile details (name, gender, age, country of representation, party affiliation in country of representation and party affiliation in the EP) were searched and inserted in *NVivo*.

The analysis starting point is a detailed categorisation of the intervening stakeholders, enabling a finer level of interpretation of both behaviours and influencing factors, as personal traits and the surrounding environment have proven to be essential in political matters (Bäck & Debus, 2016; Baumann et al., 2015). These attributes were chosen due to their relevance to the present investigation and enact as foundations to the hypothesis that this dissertation intends to prove. The selected *Case Classifications* are as follows:

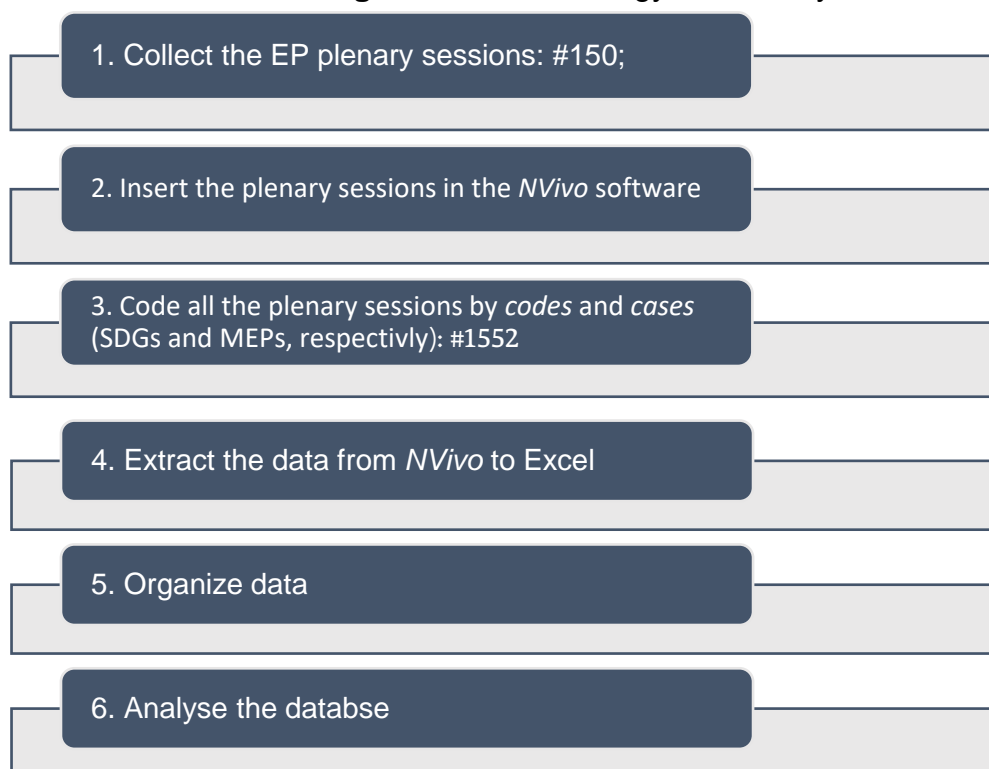
1. Gender;
2. Age group;
3. Country of representation;
4. Experience time in the EP;
5. Party affiliation in the EP;
6. Party affiliation in the country of representation.

The coding was done as outlined – as the document was being read, if a fraction mentioned any of the SDGs (8 or 12), it would be coded to the corresponding target (*Code*), and subsequently the same fraction of text would

be coded to its author (*Case*). The MEPs' *Cases* were created as their name would appear on the plenary sessions, and if they already existed in the database then there was no need to recreate the *Case* and the analysis could be proceeded. Once all plenary sessions have been read and coded, a *Matrix Coding Query Analysis* was conducted in *NVivo*, where the rows corresponded to the *Cases* (e.g., SDG 8.5; SDG 12.a), and the columns were the *Cases Properties* defined in the *Case Classifications* (note: *Case Properties* concern the individual information of each MEP; *Case Classification* relate to the six main categories). This method was replicated to all six *Case Classifications*, resulting in six tables, then exported to Excel.

After exiting the *NVivo* software and obtaining the Excel files, all the information collected needs to be organized. The database extracted from *NVivo* consists of cells that show (i) total number of interventions coded per *Code x Case Classification* (e.g. in the group of people with 44 years old, there were 6 interventions coded); and (ii) on the first row of the table features the total number of MEPs that share a *Case Classification* (e.g. there are 15 deputies with 44 years old). Hence, it is possible to observe how many MEPs belong to each *Case Classification* and how many parts of speeches (interventions) were coded. All the Excel files were organized, since these showed raw information, that required to be categorized – for instance, the total interventions done by all the individuals that belong to the 44 years old age group had to be summed, as did all the other age groups, resulting in tables that enable the analysis further presented – organization through age group required to sum up all the individuals between 40 to 49 years old, for instance. Figure 16 provides an overview of the methodology process applied in the present research.

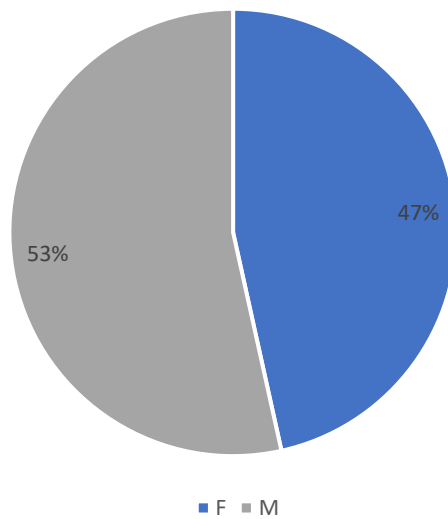
Figure 16. Methodology's summary



4.3. Sample description

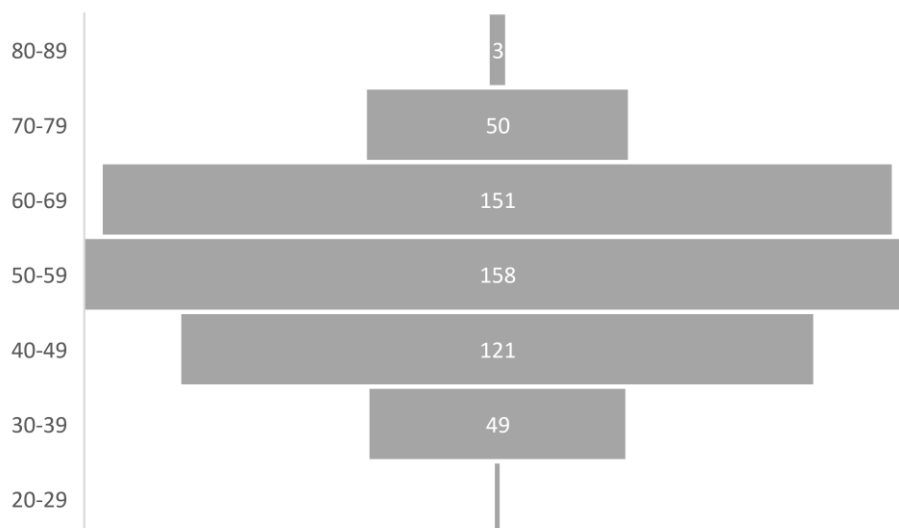
Once the collection and coding procedure is finalized, a database emerges. In total, 150 plenary sessions were analysed, which led to the codification of 533 Members of the European Parliament. Within these plenary sessions, 1552 fractions of speeches were coded, and these are the primary elements of analysis for the present research. From the 533 MEPs coded, 248 are female, which corresponds to 47% of the total sample, and the remaining 285 are male (53%), as represented in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Gender distribution



Regarding the age distribution of the MEPs, the groups of age and respective distribution are seen in Figure 18. Whilst in the data collection process, ages were recorded individually, the choice of arranging by age groups is driven by the immensity of the sample and mirrors the distribution used by Hájek (2019). By clustering in this manner, it is simpler and more concise to understand the distribution of ages. The dominant age group is located between 50-59 years old, and the least present age group is between 20-29 years old, with only one MEP with 22 years of age.

Figure 18. MEPs' age distribution



When observing the country of representation of each MEP (Figure 19), it is possible to see the presence of MEPs from all Members States in the database. The country that records the highest number of deputies coded is Germany, with a total of 57 MEPs, followed by Italy, with 51 MEPs. On the other hand, Luxembourg, Latvia and Cyprus register the lowest number, with 2, 3 and 5 MEPs respectively. This is mainly due to the distribution of seats within the European Parliament – the countries with the largest number of seats assigned also register a superior total of MEP coded, in absolute values.

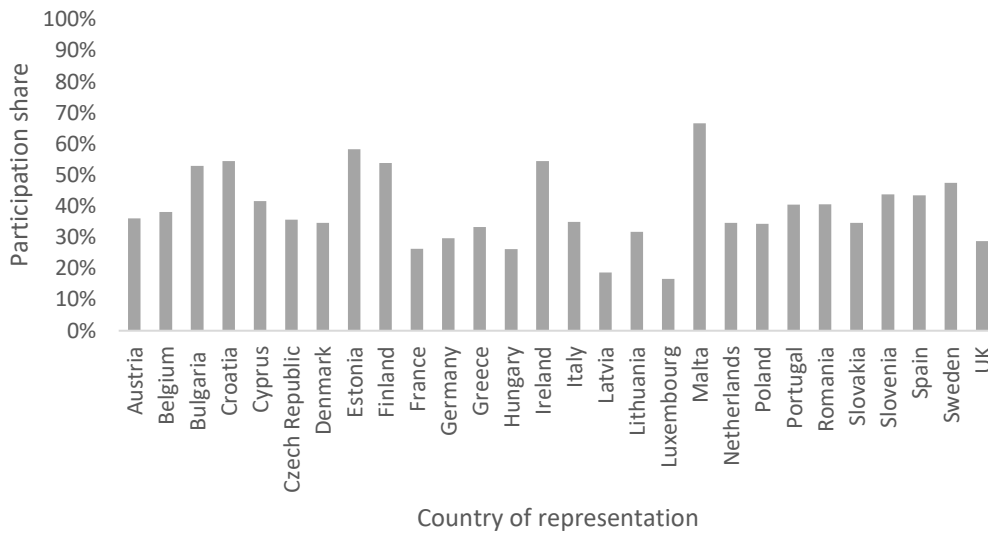
Figure 19. MEPs' Country of representation



Nonetheless, Figure 20 demonstrates the percentage of participation in the interventions coded, based on the total number of seats allocated, in order to avoid misleading reads with the absolute values in Figure 19. The total number of seats is calculated based on the number of EP terms present in this investigation: as previously mentioned, on July 2nd 2019, the 9th EP term begun, and therefore the total number of seats correspond to the double (e.g. Austria has 18 seats assigned per term; in order to obtain this figure, the total was calculated by doubling this number: $18 \times 2 = 36$). When observing the proportion of participation by seats, Germany and France are no longer the higher participative countries. Rather Malta – with almost 67% of their total MEPs intervening in plenary sessions regarding SDG 8 and 12 -, and Estonia – with over half MEPs

being active towards SDG8 and 12 in plenary sessions -, emerge as the most prominent countries.

Figure 20. Share of MEP participation by country of representation and seats allocated in the EP



The majority of the Members of the European Parliament, coded in this sample, have less than 5 years of experience in this Institution. Only 5 out of 533 deputies hold over 30 years of experience at the service of the EP, corresponding to 1% of the total. The total distribution is featured in Figure 21. Those with 0 years correspond to the MEPs that only entered the EP in the 9th, thus having less than 6 months of experience.

Figure 21. Time experience in the EP

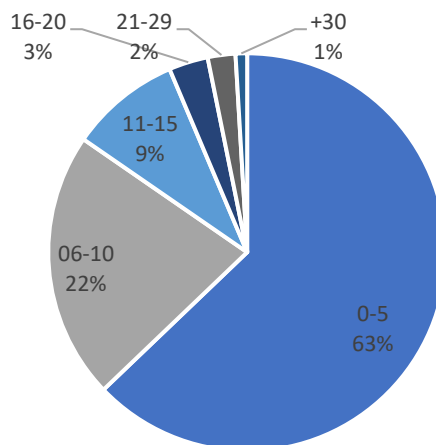
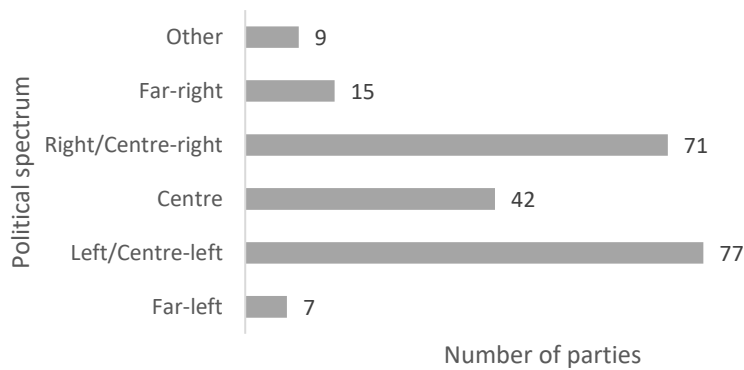


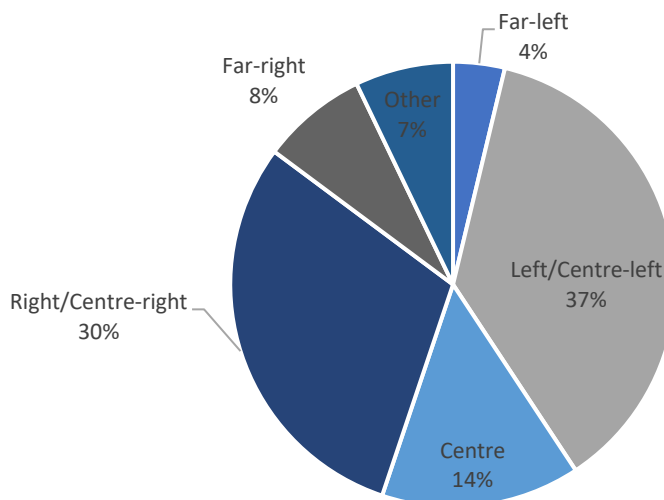
Figure 22 illustrates the distribution of parties by affiliation, with regard to the national parties of each country of representation. 77 parties belong to the left/centre-left ideology, and 71 to the right/centre-right ideology. The edges of the political spectrum – far-left and far-right -, count with 7 and 15 parties in total, respectively.

Figure 22. Total number of parties by party affiliation, in country of representation



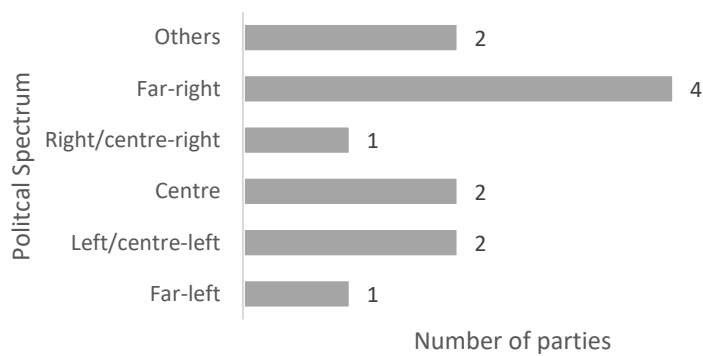
Concerning the affiliation of deputies to each party ideology, Figure 23 demonstrates the overall distribution. 197 MEPs, which corresponds to 37% of the total sample, belong to centre-left/left parties, 160 (30%) belong to centre-right/right parties.

Figure 23. MEPs distribution by party affiliation in their country of representation



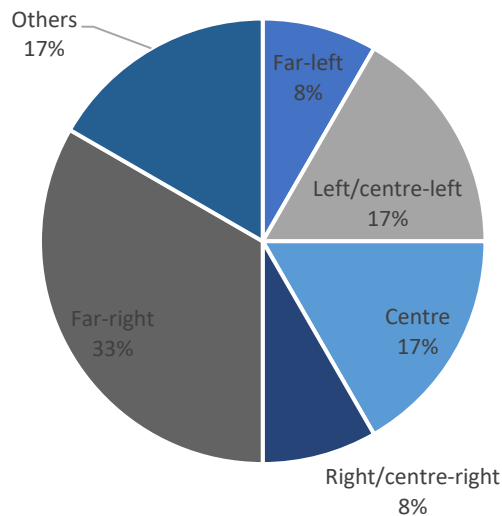
On the European Parliament it is possible to observe the presence of parties with far-right ideology, with a total of 4 parties – this is the party affiliation with the higher number of parties, and also higher percentage of MEPs (37%). With a total of 12 parties coded within the EP, the right/centre-right positioning has one party, equally to the far-left ideology (Figure 24).

Figure 24. Total number of parties by party affiliation, in the EP



The centre, left/centre-left and others share 17% each, the remaining deputies divide into far-left and right/centre-right parties (Figure 25).

Figure 25. MEPs distribution by party affiliation in the EP



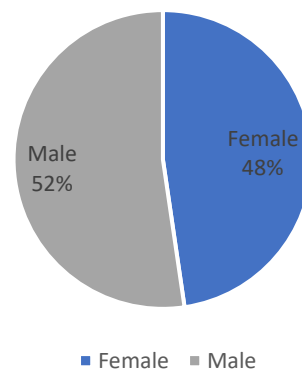
5. Main results: database assessment

Having grasped the methodology employed and gained an understanding of the composition of the sample, the purpose of the present chapter is to introduce, assess and discuss the results obtained. It also comprises a debate comparing the empirical results with the literature.

A. Gender

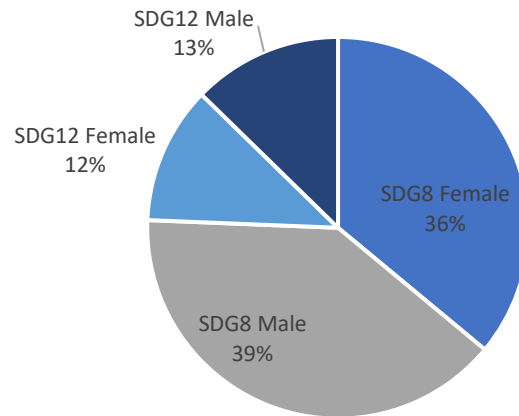
From the 1552 interventions coded regarding SDG 8 and SDG 12, 812 were made by male MEPs – 52% of the total number, and the remaining 740 by female MEPs – 48% (Figure 26). The total quota of interventions by gender is even with the overall number of male and female MEPs in the sample – being that men represent 53% of total MEPs, and women 47%.

Figure 26. Total % of plenary interventions regarding SDG8 and SDG12, by gender



When overviewing the details of female and male MEPs interventions, it is possible to observe how they intervene in matters regarding SDG 8 and 12. 52% of the total interventions are brought out by male MEPs – 39% concern SDG 8, while 13% focus on SDG 12. On the other hand, female MEPs are responsible for 48% of the global interventions - 36% relate to SDG 8 and the remaining 12% are interventions coded to SDG 12 (Figure 27). In SDG 12, the interventions are more balanced than with regard to SDG 8 – men and women have almost the same share of interventions (13% and 12%).

Figure 27. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 in interventions, by gender



To look further into how female and male MEPs arise in the EP arena, Figure 28 present a profile of each gender’s interventions. This profile demonstrates how each gender organizes its own speech time – how do they divide their own interventions? The profile is obtained by making the proportion of each SDG in the total number of interventions given by that same gender (e.g. total number of interventions on SDG 8 given by female MEPs / total number of interventions coded by female MEPs). Both genders have the same distribution: 76% of the total interventions given by female MEPs are around SDG 8, and almost a quarter of the very same interventions grasp SDG 12. The same scenario occurs in the other gender: male MEPs take 76% of their interventions approaching SDG8, leaving 24% to SDG12.

Figure 28. Interventions’ profiling, by gender

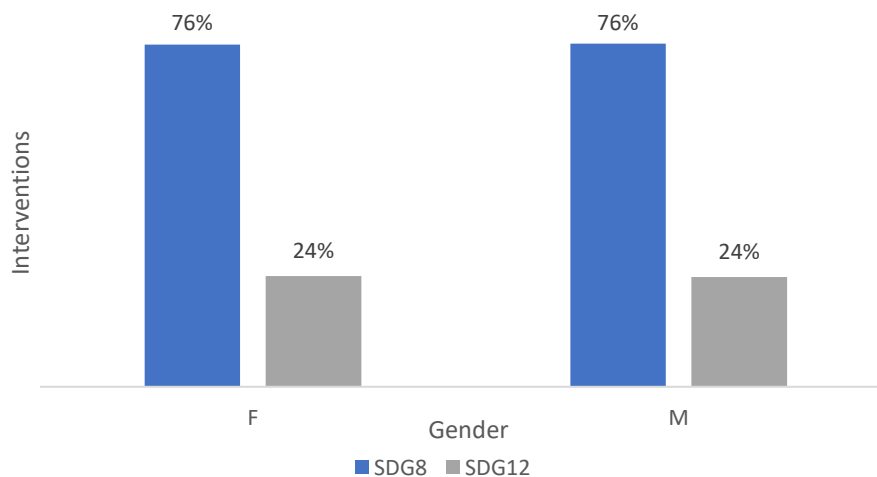
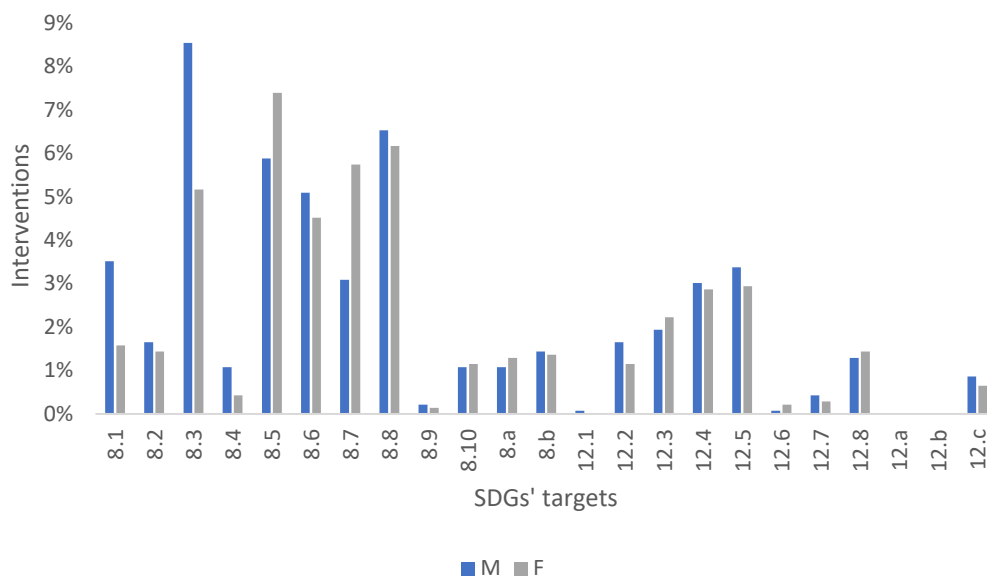


Figure 29. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 in interventions by target, by gender



Male deputies have demonstrated to be more active in the parliamentary economic agenda (Bäck et al., 2014). They have also proven to be more participative towards SDG 8 and 12 than female MEP in the overall plenary sessions – with 52% of total interventions being allocated to the male MEPs, thus confirming Hypothesis 1: *Men tend to present more speeches regarding SDGs 8 and 12 in the Parliament*. Similarly, from the total distribution of interventions coded, also here it may be noted the higher presence of male MEPs in the present database – 53% of the total deputies are men -, therefore explaining in part their higher share of participation in the plenary sessions. Female MEPs may deliver fewer interventions than their male counterparts due to a number of grounds, other than simply their own gender and having “gendered politics”, such as the misrepresentation of women in political grounds (albeit rising, does not match men's); and the occupation of top positions, that are dominated by the male gender (Akirav, 2020; Hargrave & Langengen, 2020). Within their own allocated intervention time – Figure 28 -, both male and female MEPs dedicate the same share to SDG 8 and 12. Moreover, both genders focus equally on terms of *Decent Work and Economic Growth* and *Responsible Consumption and Production*. Figure 29 indicates how the SDGs’ targets are approach by the MEPs, sorted by gender. Male deputies tend to approach more target 8.3. *Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*, while female MEPs focuses more on 8.5. *Full employment and decent work with equal pay*. This female tendency

to centre on this target may be since it covers wage and employment equality, a topic that affects directly this gender. On the SDG 12 topic, the targets that are most addressed are *12.4. Responsible management of chemicals and waste* and *12.5. Substantially reduce waste generation*. The only target where female MEPs show higher share of participation is on the SDG 12 arena, and it is *12.8. Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles*. To point out that there are some targets that are not covered at all, such as 12.a. and 12.b., which concern scientific and technological capacity for sustainable consumption and production and sustainable tourism, respectively. Sustainable tourism is also a topic present in SDG8, on target 8.9, and it is the least discussed target of this SDG, alongside *8.4 Improve resource efficiency in consumption and production*. This last target is aligned with SDG 12, therefore since this Goal, overall, does not come up so often in parliamentary debates, it is expectable that a target recalling for this topic is also more absent from the interventions.

B. Age group

MEPs from 22 years old to over 80 years old are engaged in plenary sessions regarding SDG 8 and/or 12. Figure 30 illustrates how each group age interacts within the 1552 interventions coded– both with regard to SDG 8 and 12. MEPs that have between 60 to 69 years of age are more active, with 23% concerning SDG8 and 8,1% for SDG 12 of total interventions being allocated to this group. Youngest MEPs, on the other hand, are those who register a lower rate of participation, with 0,1% with respect to SDG 8 and no interventions related to SDG 12. Comparably, the other side of the spectrum – the senior MEPs – do not approach SDG 12 and have a participation rate in the overall interventions of 0,3% on SDG 8 topics.

Figure 30. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 in interventions, by age group

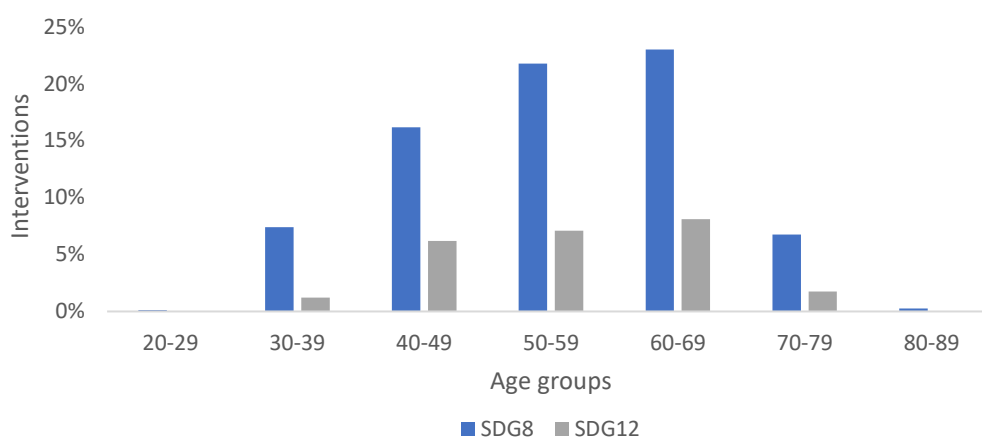
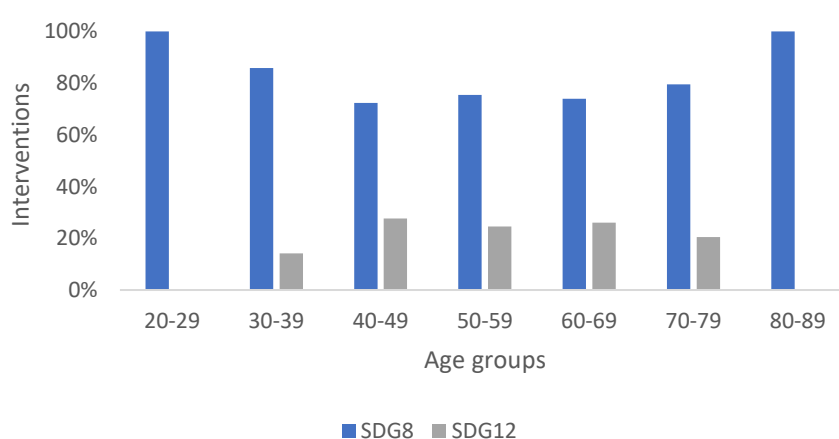


Figure 31 aims to present the profile of interventions given, sorted by age group. This is calculated through the total number of interventions given by age group on each SDG divided by the total number of interventions coded on that same group. This represents the weight of each SDG on their own allocated interventions. Deputies aged from 40 to 49 prove to have the smallest discrepancy of the group, with 28% of their own speech coded being allocated to SDG 12, and 72% to SDG 8 – even though these distribution shares are still very contrasting. In contrast, MEPs with ages ranging from 30 to 39 years dedicate 86% of their coded interventions to SDG 8, and only 14% to SDG 12.

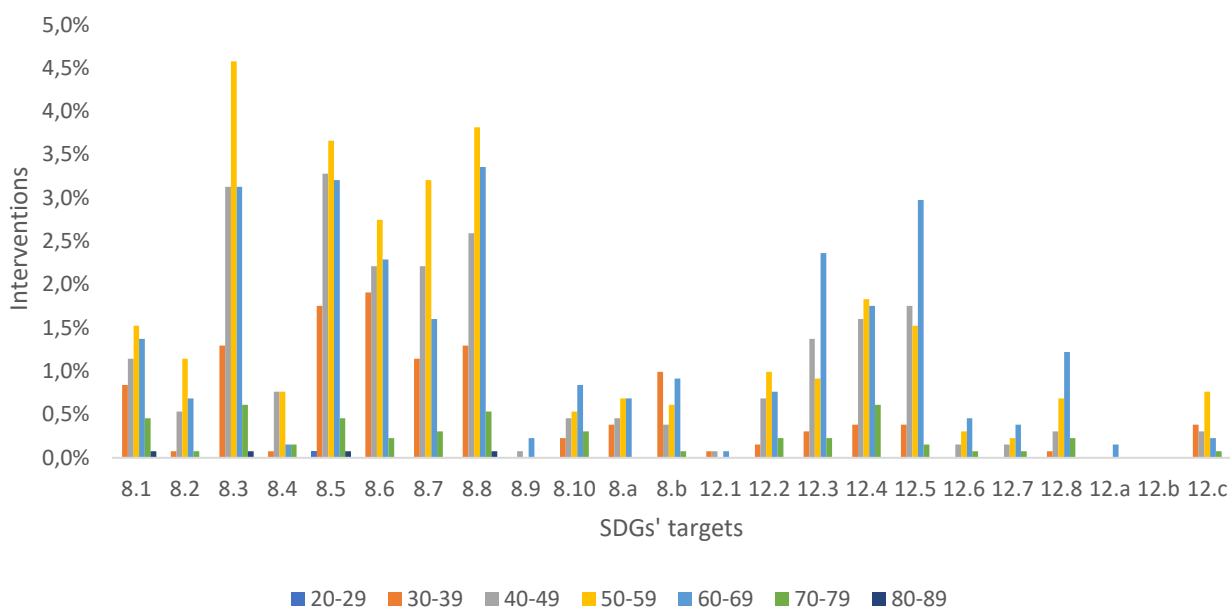
Figure 31. Interventions' profiling, by age group



On Figure 32 it is possible to observe how each age group covers the SDGs' targets. The targets that are covered more frequently are 8.3. *Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*, 8.5. *Full employment and decent work with equal pay*, and 8.8. *Protect labour rights and promote safe*

working environments. Also, on the SDG 12 side, targets 12.3. *Halve global per capita food waste*, 12.4. *Responsible management of chemicals and waste*, and 12.5. *Substantially reduce waste generation*, are the most approached. The age group from 60 to 69 years is the one that covers almost all targets, with the exception of target 12.b. *Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism*. It is feasible to affirm that the younger the MEPs, the lower the chance to approach targets related to sustainable consumption and production. Similarly to what was verified in the gender variable, also here sustainable tourism is not often discussed.

Figure 32. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 in interventions by target, by age group



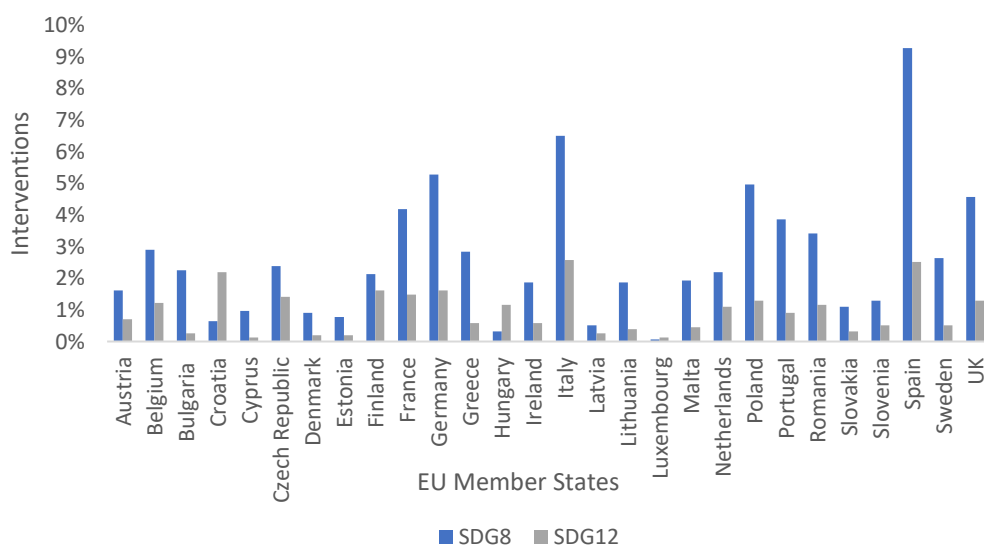
Hájek (2019) highlights the role of age as a determinant factor of engagement in parliamentary activity – the older the deputy, the more likely he/she is to participate in debates. This can be verified resorting to Figure 29 – the majority of interventions coded belong to MEPs aged over 50 years. Hypothesis 3: *Older MEPs are prone to be more engaged in the plenary sessions regarding SDGs 8 and 12*, is then validated. It is pertinent to return to the composition of the sample and to note that this age bracket is also the most prevalent in the total number of MEPs coded. This occurs in the European

Parliament composition as well – the average MEP takes office, on average, at around 50 years of age (Stockemer & Sundström, 2019) -, what typifies the ageing of the EP’s legislative body, and supports the strong presence in interventions on the subject of SDGs 8 and 12.

C. Country of representation

The 28 Members States of the EU, in the year 2019, are all featured in the sample collected through the plenary sessions’ analysis. When addressing Sustainable Development Goal 8, the largest contribution comes from the Spanish MEPs, taking 9,28% of the total number of interventions, followed by Italy with 6,51%. The least participative nation on themes around SDG 8 is Luxembourg, with one intervention – corresponding to 0,06% of the total (Figure 31). Regarding SDG 12, also Italy and Spain are the countries that register a higher percentage of participation, with 2,58% and 2,51%, respectively. Croatia emerges right after, with 2,19%, followed by Finland and Germany, both with 1,61%. The less intervening country if Cyprus, with 0,13%, which translates in 2 interventions out of 1552 in total. The total share of SDGs 8 and 12 is shown on Figure 33.

Figure 33. Share of SDG8 and 12 in interventions, by country representation



So as to identify what the focus of the countries is, a profiling of each countries' interventions was developed and is demonstrated in Figure 34. This profile is obtained through the number of interventions coded for each SDG over the total amount of interventions given by MEPs from that country. From the 28 Member States, only 3 deliver more interventions concerning SDG 12 than they do regarding SDG 8 – these are Croatia, Hungary and Luxembourg. All the remaining countries have a wider focus on SDG 8 within their interventions in the plenary sessions. The wide disparity in the approach to both SDGs is striking in few countries – for instance, Bulgaria, which is the country with the biggest gap between the two Goals, dedicated almost 90% of their interventions to SDG 8.

Figure 34. Interventions' profiling, by country of representation

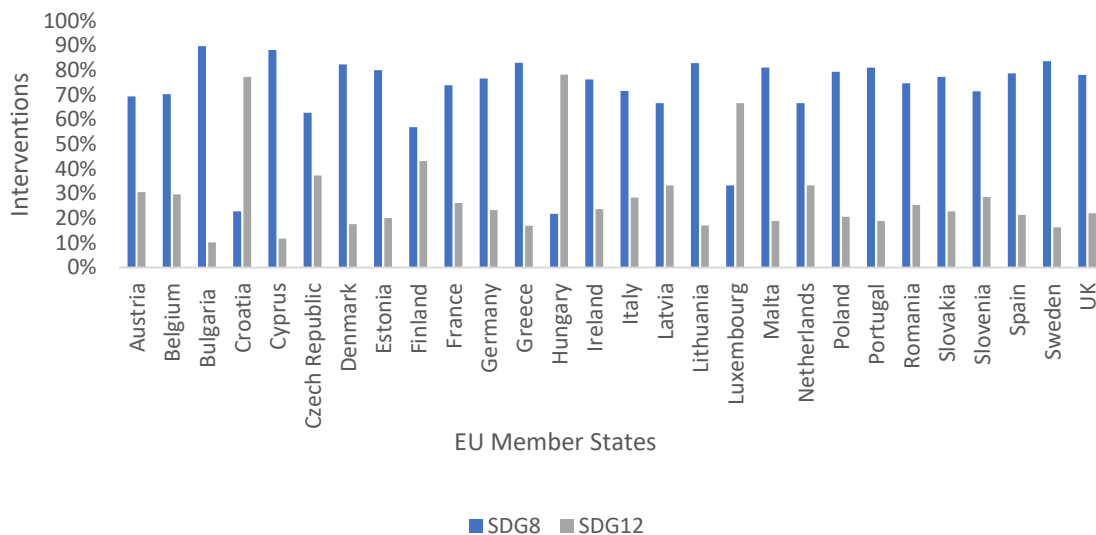
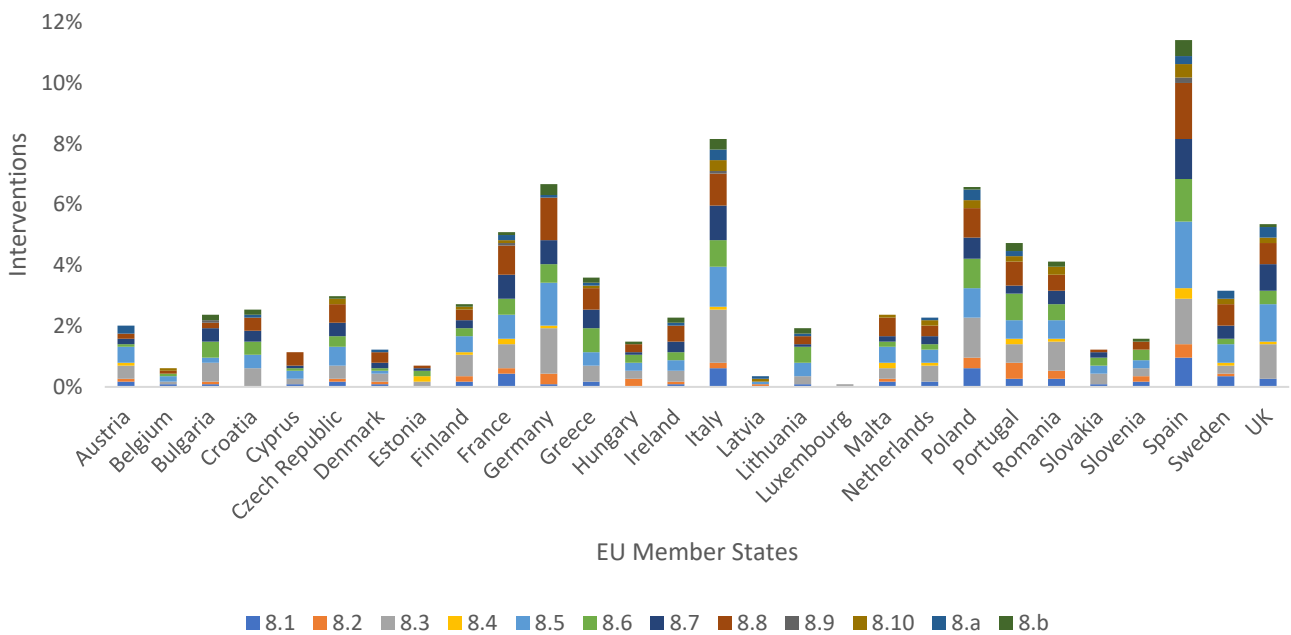


Figure 35 provides an insight on how deputies from each Member State approach SDG's 8 targets. Once again, targets number 3. *Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*, 5. *Full employment and decent work with equal pay*, and 8. *Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments*, are the most dominant, with Italy and Spain being the most intervening countries on these matters. *Target 8.6. Promote youth employment, education and training* is also a topic of interest for many, with Portugal, Italy and Greece being the most active towards this topic. Throughout the coding, it was possible to observe that MEPs from these Member States are very concerned about their situation towards these issues, as for instance, Greece and Italy, are

some of the countries that register the highest rate of NEETs¹¹, according to the lasted EURSTAT report. To highlight that Estonia, Slovakia, Luxembourg and Latvia are the countries that cover SDG's 8 targets the less, ruling out 5 or more targets. As an example, Luxembourg's MEPs only address target 8.3. The least tackled target is, once again, 8.9., on sustainable tourism, only mentioned by MEPs from Spain, Italy and France.

Figure 35. Share of SDG 8 in interventions by target, by country of representation



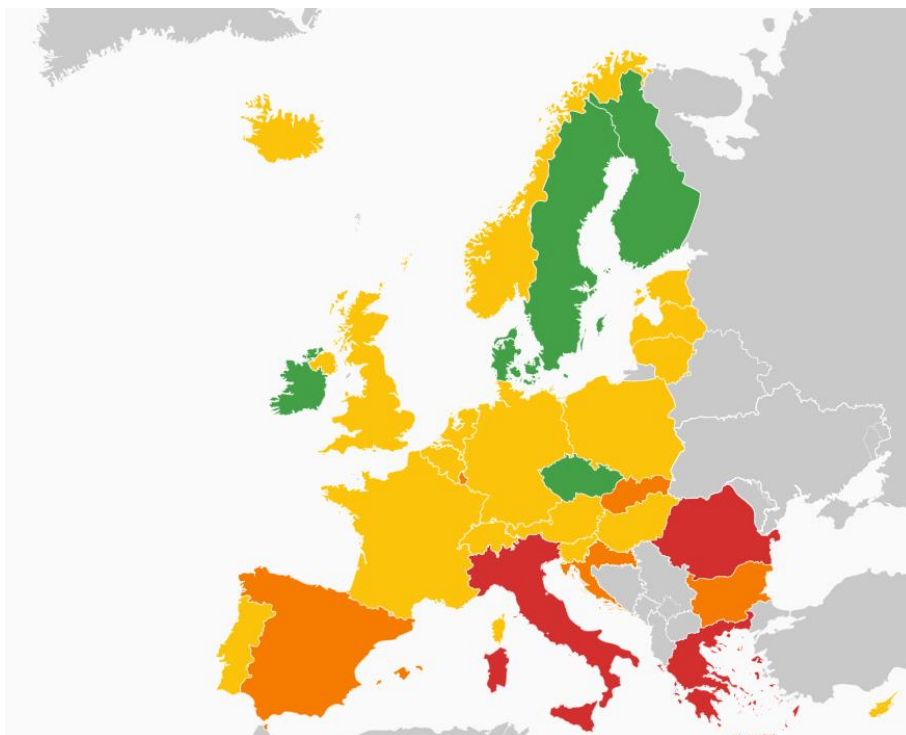
The performance of all EU Member States on matters of SDG 8 can be seen in Figure 36. The first noticeable aspect is that the countries that intervene the most in the European Parliament on this topic are the countries that have lower performances, such as Italy and Spain. Finland, Sweden and Ireland, on the other hand, are the best well score nations and while they are less active towards SDG 8, they still show better performances on the topic. This may be based on the fact that they develop more national policies focused on SD, as for instance Finland – this country published a report, named *The Finland We Want by 2050*, establishing objectives to be attained, in alignment with the SDGs. Sweden also published a report: *“Towards sustainable welfare – the 2030 Agenda”*, with the same aim. The Irish Government launched a website, where

¹¹ NEETs: Young people not in employment, training nor education

they explain all 17 SDGs and present the country's actions towards SDGs. These national efforts and initiatives may lead to the successful implementation of SDGs, and also lead to less interventions in the EU, since they have achieved a higher performance than the remaining countries, and therefore do not need to address the issue as much. The Czech Republic is the other case where SDG 8 is considered “*achieved*”, while MEPs representing this nation are not as intervening as others. Nonetheless, this nation does not present any measure similar to the previous ones mentioned. Further work may try to interlink and explain EP interventions on parliamentary debates and Member States SDG performance.

The majority of the European Union Member States still have challenges remaining in order to achieve SDG 8. The southern Europe seems to have weakest performances than the remaining countries, which may be rooted in historical economic issues, as the 2008 crisis, that severely affected the economies of these nations and the subjacent sectors, such as employment – a key area in SDG 8. This also may explain why they intervene more on this topic, as they are trying to recover and improve in the issues related to Goal 8.

Figure 36. SDG 8 performance on EU Member States



Source: SDSN and IEEP. Retrieved from: <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/map/goals/SDG8>

The following Figure 37 displays how MEPs from different Member States focus on each target of SDG 12. Italy is the country that participates the most, namely with regard to target 12.4. *Responsible management of chemicals and waste* and 12.5. *Substantially reduce waste generation*. On SDG 12, the most approached targets are 12.2. *Sustainable management and use of natural resources*, 12.3. *Halve global per capita food waste*, and 12.4. *Responsible management of chemicals and waste*. Besides the Italian MEPs, their Spanish EP colleagues are the most active covering these issues. Target 12.a. *Support developing countries' scientific and technological capacity for sustainable consumption and production* and 12.b. *Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism* do not register any intervention. Luxembourg is again the Member State that covers the lowest number of targets - these MEPs focus only on two, 12.4 and 12.5.

Figure 37. Share of SDG 12 in interventions by target, by country of representation

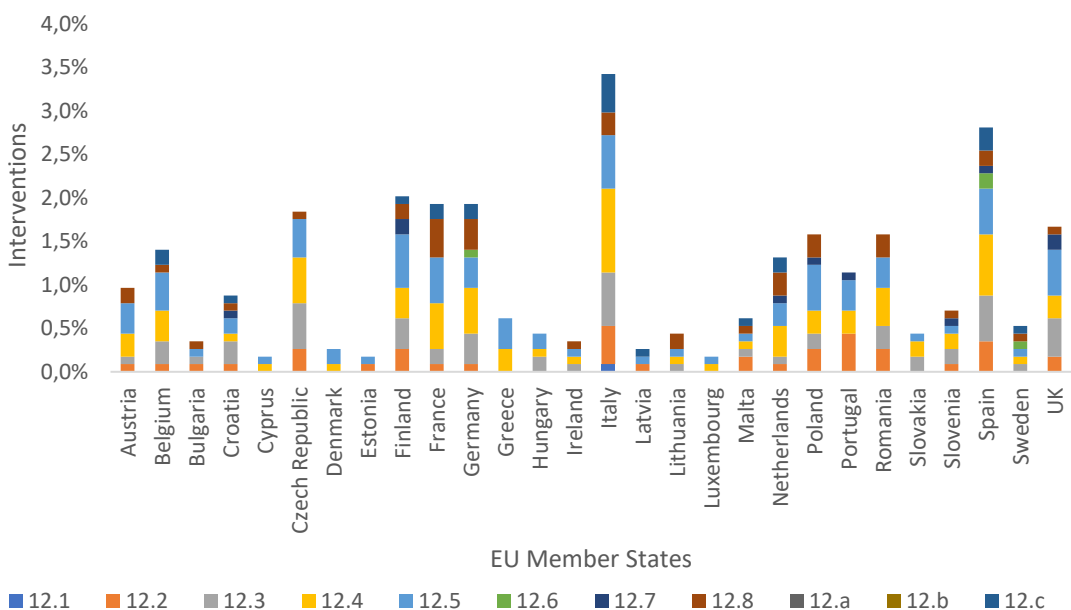
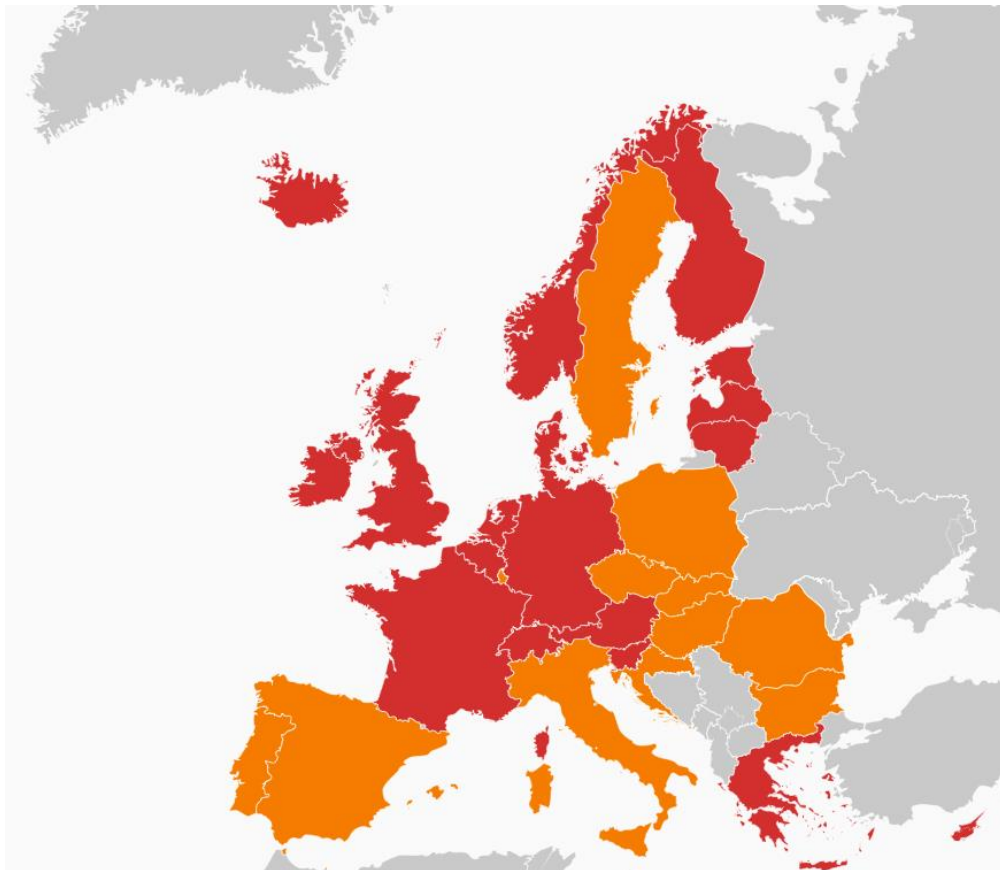


Figure 38 reveals the Members State performance on SDG 12 issues. There is a notorious difference between the performance in this SDG and the previous one: there is no country that is green, which means no nation have achieved SDG 12 yet. In every country there is still “major” or “significant”

challenges to be met, in order to reach this Goal. This could perhaps mirror the discrepancies noted in the analysis above: SDG 8 is far more approached than SDG 12 in every Member State, which may lead to more policies towards its achievement. Centre and northern Europe also reveal lowest performance on SDG 12, which was not the case with the former one, as they are not the countries that intervene the most on the plenary sessions regarding this topic. Even the countries that showed great execution with SDG 8 and their initiatives centred on SDGs, with SDG 12 these do not seem to be yielding the same successful results.

Figure 38. SDG 12 performance on EU Member States



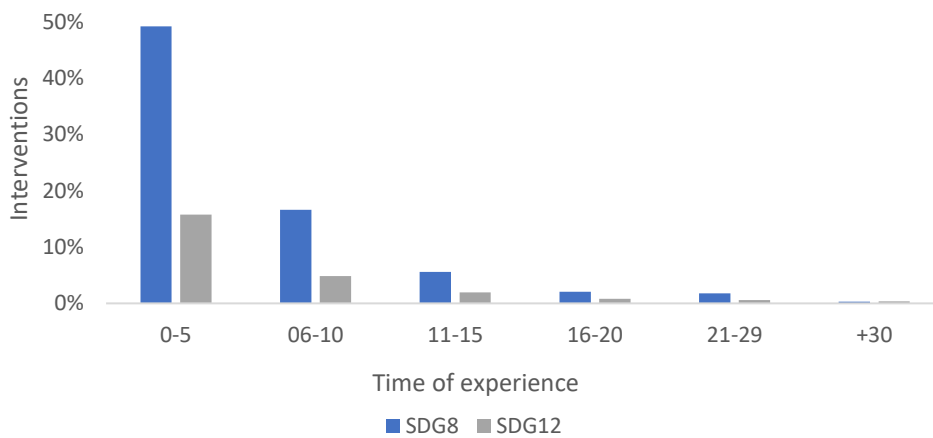
Source: SDSN and IEEP. Retrieved from: <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/map/goals/SDG12>.

D. Time experience (Seniority) in the European Parliament

The time experience in the sample collected varies from 0 years of experience (<6 months) to over 30 years at the service of the European Parliament. The MEPs that have between 0 to 5 years of experience are the most

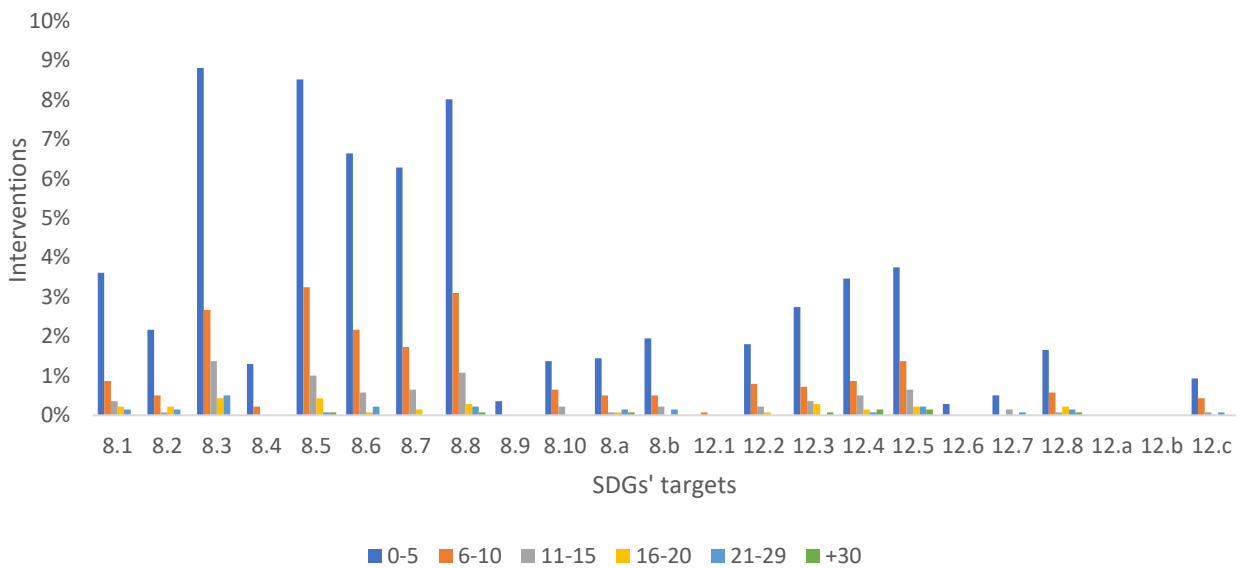
intervening in the plenary sessions, with almost half the total interventions being delivered by this group and regarding SDG8 – 49,23%. The least active class is +30 years of experience, holding less than 1% of interventions by SDG. The share of interventions, sorted by seniority, are represent in Figure 39. To note that, as seen in Figure 18, the MEPs that have between 0 and 5 years of experience are the biggest share, with 63%, and those with over 30 years are the group with the least expressive presence – 1%.

Figure 39. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 in interventions, by seniority



Illustrated on Figure 40 are the shares of SDGs 8 and 12 by each SDG target. This figure allows to understand what the main subjects of interest of the MEPs are. The tendency to approach more *8.3. Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*, *8.5. Full employment and decent work with equal pay*, and *8.8. Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments*, also verifies in this case, overruled by MEPs with 0 to 5 years of experience. Target *8.4. Improve resource efficiency in consumption and production* it is only addressed by MEPs with less than 10 years of experience in the EP. Deputies with over 20 years of experience tend to intervene less than their colleagues on SDG 12, and when they do, they focus more on *12.5. Substantially reduce waste generation* and *12.8. Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles*.

Figure 40. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 in interventions by target, by seniority



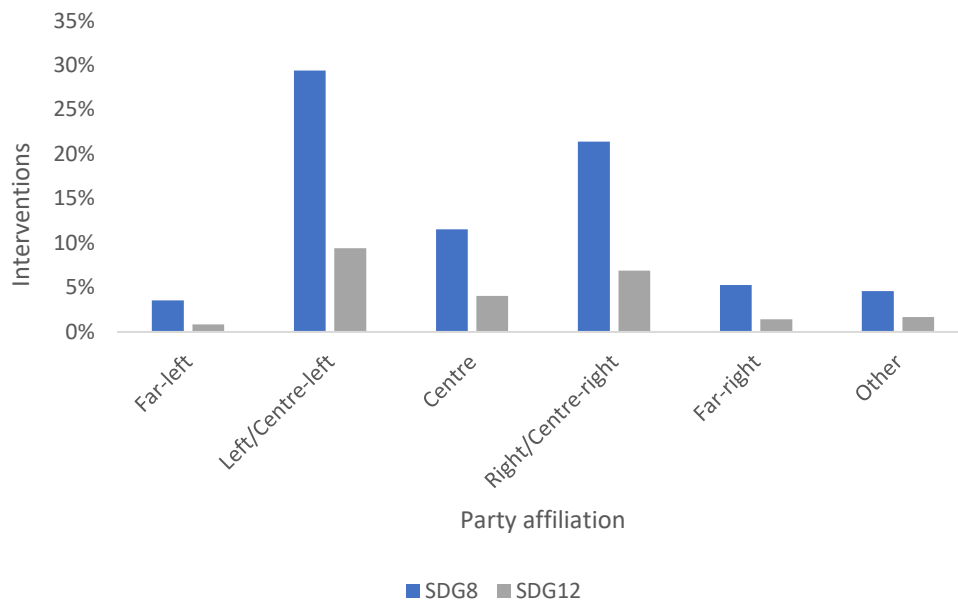
At the light of past studies, such as Bäck and Debus (2016), Hájek (2019) and Giannetti and Pedrazzani (2016), deputies with longer tenure in parliaments are prone to be more engaged in the arena of plenary sessions and debates. The data presented in Figure 39 show the opposite: the longer the time experience, the less interventions found and coded. Hence, Hypothesis 2: “*Most experienced MEPs tend to be more active in the European Parliament, thus presenting more interventions related to the SDGs 8 and 12*” is not demonstrated. One plausible explanation might be the fact that very few MEPs have over twenty years of experience at the service of the EP, being that the biggest share of deputies has less or equal to 5 years tenure, thus having a more prominent presence in the overall participation.

E. Party affiliation in the country of representation

Party affiliation is one of the most distinctive features in the political world. In the present investigation this variable is adapted to the country of representation of each MEP and to the EP arena. Figure 41 shows how each political force approaches SDG 8 and 12 in the general interventions. The centre/left-centre force represents the most interactive ideology towards Goal 8, being responsible for 29,38% of the total interventions, immediately followed by the right/centre-right parties, with 21,39% of participation. Far-left parties

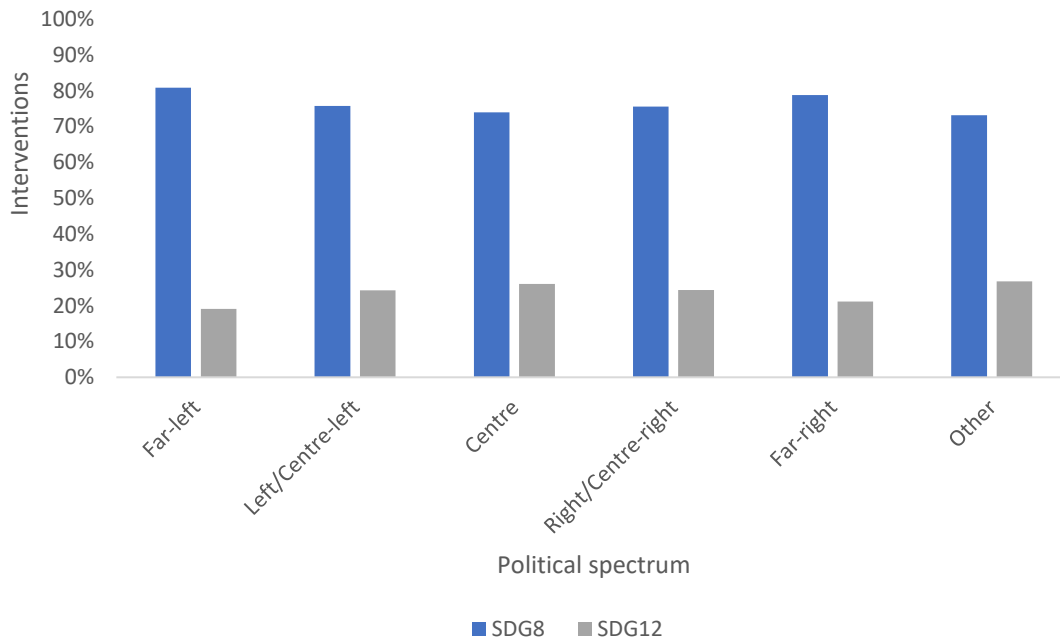
intervene the less, with 3,54% of the total interventions coded being held by deputies from this party ideology. Again, with concern to SDG 12, left/centre-left parties show a higher rate of participation – 9,41%, and the left extreme of the political spectrum holding 0,84% of the total interventions.

Figure 41. Share of SDG 8 and 12 interventions, by party affiliation in the country of representation



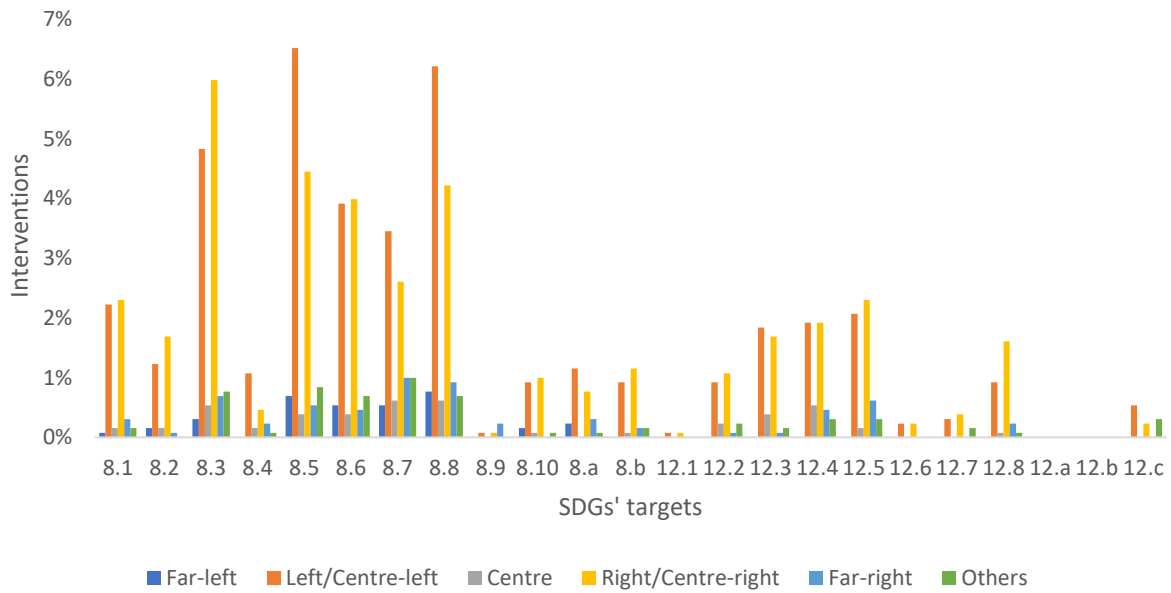
In their own interventions, all the party forces devote special attention to SDG 8, and mention less SDG 12 – around 70% to 80% of their speech time coded related directly to Goal 8. Figure 42 shows how the deputies from each party affiliation organize their own interventions, illustrating the weight of SDGs 8 and 12 in their allocated speech time.

Figure 42. Interventions' profiling, by party affiliation in the country representation



The below Figure 43 exemplifies how the MEPs from each national party force address the SDGs' 8 and 12 targets. Right/centre-right parties focus more than any other party force on targets 8.2. *Diversify, innovate and upgrade for economic productivity*, 8.3. *Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*; 8.6. *Promote youth employment, education and training*; 8,10. *Universal access to banking, insurance and financial services*; 8.b. *Development a global Youth Employment strategy*; 12.5. *Substantially reduce waste generation*; and 12.8. *Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles*. The interventions on the remaining targets are led by the parties of left side affiliation. The far-right deputies are the ones that approach sustainable tourism on 8.9. *Promote beneficial and sustainable tourism* the most, while on the SDG 12 target, 12.b. *Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism*, no party force intervened.

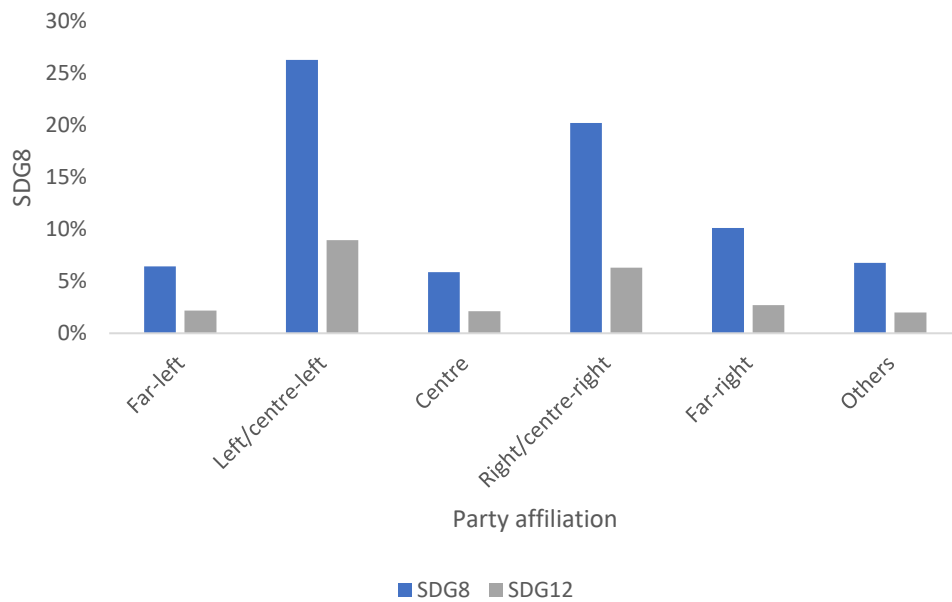
Figure 43. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 interventions by target, by party affiliation in the country of representation



F. Party affiliation in the European Parliament

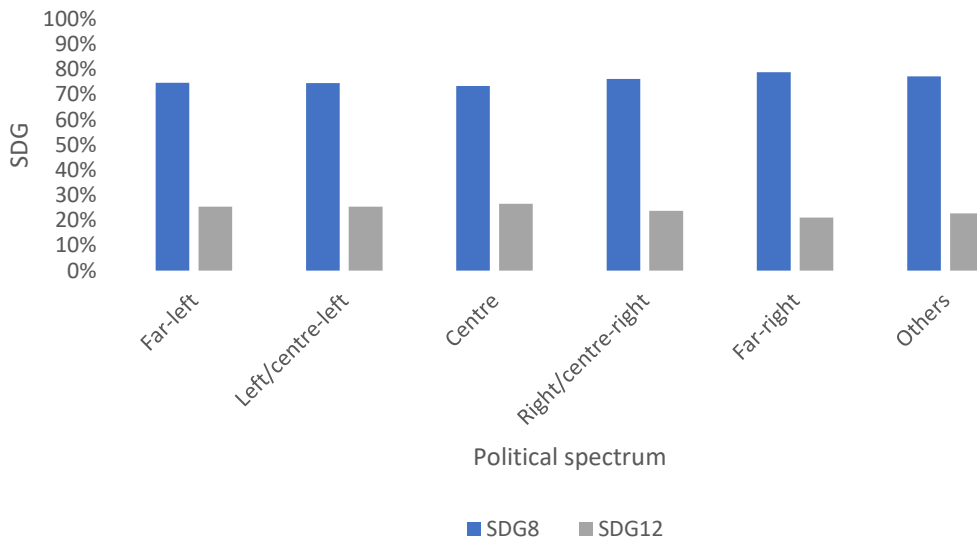
A similar analysis was carried to the EP's party affiliation. Left/centre-left parties deliver 26,29% of the total interventions coded in themes concerning SDG8, while the centre is responsible solely for 5,86% on the topic (Figure 44). The left/centre-left and right/centre-right forces of the EP are the two that most intervene on subjects regarding SDG 12, with 8,96% and 6,31%, respectively (Figure 44). To note that the far-right ideology is the most dominant in the total number of parties and share of MEPs (Figure 24 and 25), and when it comes to total of interventions, these parties do not reach the range of the left/centre-left or right/centre-right parties.

Figure 44. Share of SDG 8 and 12 in interventions, by party affiliation in the EP



As was the case in the party affiliation in the country of representation, also in the EP every party force dedicates 70% to 80% of their interventions coded to SDG 8, as demonstrated in Figure 45.

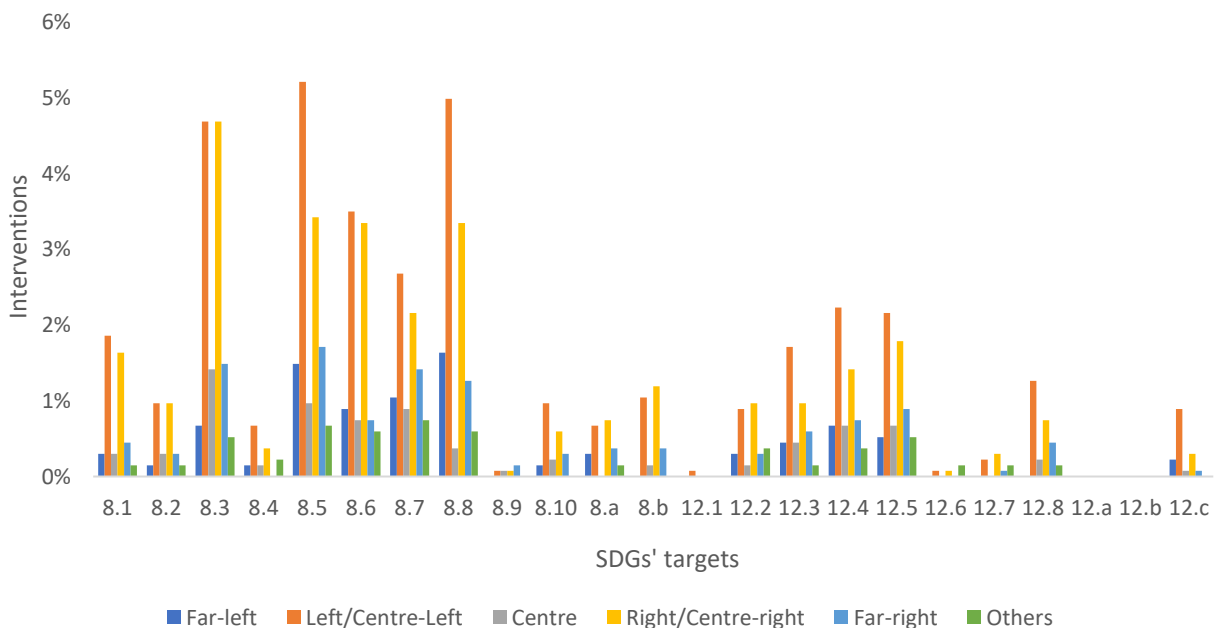
Figure 45. Interventions’ profiling by party affiliation in the EP



The share of SDGs 8 and 12 interventions, sorted by party affiliation in the European Parliament, are represented in Figure 46. SDG 8 targets number 3. *Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*, 5. *Full employment and decent work with equal pay*, 6. *Promote youth employment*,

education and training, and 8. *Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments* are the most tackled, specially by parties from the left and right wing. Unlike what was observed with the country of representation party affiliation, here the left-wing parties hold the majority of interventions in all targets. The far-left party forces focus more on themes around employment issues, represented by target 8.5 and 8.8, while the other extreme of the party spectrum, far-right, devote their interventions mainly on 8.7. *End modern slavery, trafficking and child labour* and also 8.5. The most economic targets, such as 8.1. *Sustainable economic growth* and 8.2. *Diversify, innovate and upgrade for economic productivity* are largely covered by right/centre-right parties and left/centre-left parties. On the SDG 12 side, these are also the party forces that debate more. Targets 12.3. *Halve global per capita food waste*, 12.4. *Responsible management of chemicals and waste*, and 12.5. *Substantially reduce waste generation* are the main discussion topics. To note that left-wing parties also intervene more actively than the remaining parties on 12.3, 12.4, 12.8. *Promote universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles*, and 12.c. *Remove market distortions that encourage wasteful consumption*. Targets 12.a. *Support developing countries' scientific and technological capacity for sustainable consumption and production* and 12.b. *Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism*, are again absent from the statistics.

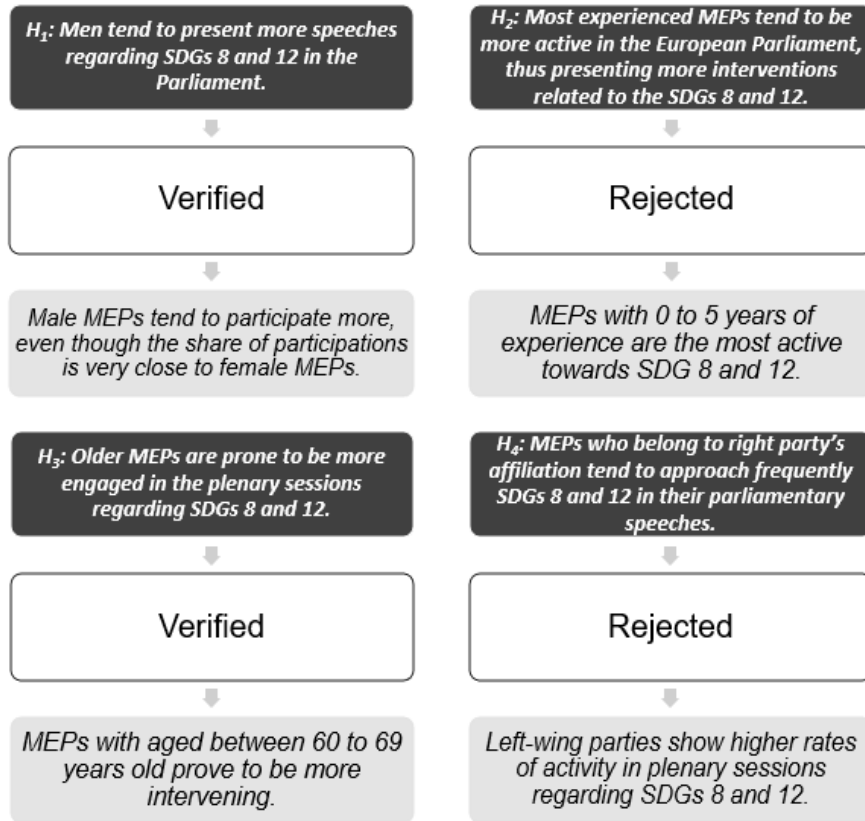
Figure 46. Share of SDGs 8 and 12 by target, by party affiliation in the EP



Party affiliation is a heavy influential factor in the involvement of each deputy, both on the national party side and on the EP sphere (McElroy & Benoit, 2007; Ono, 2015). Left/centre-left parties demonstrate to be more interventionist in issues that relate to SDGs 8 and 12 than the remaining party forces, hence refuting H4: *MEPs who belong to right party's affiliation tend to approach frequently SDGs 8 and 12 in their parliamentary speeches*. This may reveal an opposite tendency to the one registered by Lee (2019) in Mexico. Also, since it has been verified that left wing parties tend to intervene more often in environmental issues (Læssøe, 2007; Neumayer, 2004), this might be the reason that grounds their frequent interventions towards SDG12, since this Goal has too an environmental-economy concern. Further work may compare the how these parties approach ecological SDGs with economic SDGs. When analysing the targets, it is feasible to observe the presence of left-wing parties in environmental targets, like target 12.3, 12.4 and 12.5, as these refer to food waste, chemical and waste management. Whilst among the recorded national parties the left-wing parties have a higher absolute number than the other party forces - thus justifying the predominance in interventions -, within the European parliament the dominant ideology is far-right, that do not intervene as often as left/centre-left parties, or even right/centre-right parties. The reason for this may lie in the fact that parties that belong to the extreme-right wing redirect their speech time towards several other issues that do not relate to the economic field, such as cultural subjects, leaving out of their scope of attention every topic that concerns discussing economic implications or measures (Rovny, 2013). While left/centre-left party forces take over 20% of total interventions coded, the far-left ideology is responsible for the smallest share of involvement on subjects around SDG12, and second to last on SDG8, on the EP, and also reveal to be the least participative force within the national parties' categorization. and therefore dedicate less time to SDG 8 and 12. Also, this is noticeable in the targets they cover more on their interventions, as is the case of 8.5, 8.7 and 8.8 – all related to labour issues (decent work, slavery/exploitation and labour rights).

Figure 47 summons the analysing and testing of the research hypothesis. Grounding on the data collected throughout the analysis, two of them, H1 and H3 were verified; while the other two, H2 and H4 were rejected.

Figure 47. Results summary



Source: Author's elaboration

6. Final considerations and further research

Sustainable Development Goals set up a blueprint for the world's sustainable development until 2030, bringing 193 world leaders together in an unprecedented agreement. Five years into the agreement of the *UN Agenda 2030*, the time emerges to learn how they are covered in the European Parliament and what affects its approach, providing a retrospective on the EU's path so far.

The aim of the present investigation was to cover a broad group of MEPs' personal traits and characteristics that impact the approach of SDGs 8 and 12. From the day that SDGs were implemented, January 1st 2016, until the December 31st 2019, an analysis to the plenary sessions was carried, in order to achieve this research purposes. After reading, analysing and coding 150 plenary sessions, 1552 interventions arose, given by 533 Members of the European Parliament. The personal features studied were: (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) country of representation, (iv) time of experience in the EP, (v) party affiliation in the country of representation, and (vi) party affiliation in the EP. The results have proven two out of four hypotheses initially proposed. The findings demonstrated that men are more active in the EP in subjects regarding SDGs 8 and 12, even though it is noted that this gender is also the dominant one in the sample collected. Moreover, older MEPs have higher participation rates than their younger colleagues – these age groups are also in higher number within the EP. On the other hand, deputies with fewer years of experience are responsible for over half the interventions coded – opposing to the existent literature and other studies. The party affiliations that intervene more towards SDGs 8 and 12 matters are left/centre-left, thus refuting the last hypothesis proposed.

One of the most distinctive results is the predominance of SDG 8 over SDG 12 in the plenary sessions – with very few exceptions, almost all variables reveal a stronger presence of the first Goal towards the second. When analysing the interventions' profile, it is feasible to observe the dominance of themes on the SDG 8 arena, when compared to SDG 12 – proving the content of the plenary sessions and interventions coded are overruled by Goal 8 – especially with regard to the target 8.3. *Promote policies to support job creation and growing enterprises*, 8.5. *Full employment and decent work with equal pay*, and 8.8.

Protect labour rights and promote safe working environments. This may be due to the fact that Sustainable Development Goal 12, besides its economic dimension, also encompasses environmental concerns. The least debated topics relate to sustainable tourism, present on targets *8.9. Promote beneficial and sustainable tourism* and *12.b. Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable tourism*, alongside *8.a. Increase Aid for Trade support*, *12.6. Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices and sustainability reporting*, and *12.a. Support developing countries' scientific and technological capacity for sustainable consumption and production*. These results mirror an exacerbated concern over economic indicators and targets, overlooking sustainable patterns of consumption and production. There is still a long path to tread when it comes to reconcile economy development with environmental sustainability. One feasible path is to pursue goes along other types of growth, that are based on sustainable economic development and wellbeing of the populations, for instance Degrowth, the Steady State Economics, Voluntary Simplicity, or Green Growth (presented in Table 5). The European legislative agenda could benefit from a paradigm change and a growth "beyond GDP", in order to achieve sustainable development, aligned with the limits of ecosystems and the planet, and perhaps, to achieve an Ecological Footprint that does not exceed the planet's limits. This requires a new focus on politics and policies. It is crucial that the issues discussed in SDG 12 are brought to the European Parliament, in order to be discussed and subsequently, legislated and drawn to the attention of European citizens. More initiatives and incentives need to be developed to address the issues surrounding environmental sustainability, together with the relationship between the economy-environment, so that the European Union can develop more sustainable and prosperous territories in the long term. These results may mirror the first years of implementation of the *Agenda 2030*, but the European Parliament focus must shift and balance both SDGs, in order to successfully achieve the goals proposed on the mentioned Agenda.

The plenary sessions that concern Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 12, from 2016 to 2019, provide insightful conclusions on the MEPs' personal characteristics related to their concerns on discussing these topics. Nonetheless, the research presents some limitations. The scope of the research centres on two of the seventeen SDGs – Goals 8 and 12. The option to focus on reducing the

scope of investigation to two SDGs is mainly based on the feasibility of the project – study all 17 Sustainable Development Goals would be a daunting and lengthy task. The methodology chosen has also imposed some restrictions, namely time wise. Whilst NVivo software enables a more advanced qualitative analysis, the coding process was carried by the author and solely the author, which required to read every plenary session – from the opening to closing statements. Some authors have resorted to no non-human coding techniques to conduct similar analysis, as it is the case of Quinn et al. (2010). In the current research, recurring to non-human coding would not be feasible, since this required access to a panoply of resources that are not available. Also, one of questions imposed through the process of reviewing the database was regarding the inclusion of 2 parliamentary terms, which could lead to some downfalls in the results and findings – mainly in the Member States’ seats allocation and the analysis done around this variable.

Further work on this topic may be carried in some other perspectives. It is possible for other researchers to reproduce the method here employed to cover all seventeen SDGs or other groups of SDGs; even perhaps decide to concentrate on other political institutions or other topics. In addition, further investigations might encompass comparisons between the approach on SDGs and other sustainable development agendas (e.g., MDGs), and cover longer time spans. One follow-up study may assess how the MEPs have evolved in approaching SDGs 8 and 12, revisiting the results presented in this research in the future. (e.g. the end of the *2030 Agenda*).

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