

**High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development**

**14 July 2020**

**Statement by**

**Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Vice-Minister for the Environment, Nature  
Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, and**

**Maria Flachsbarth, Vice-Minister for Economic Cooperation and  
Development, Germany**

As we are starting into the Decade of Action and Delivery for accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda, we all need to scale up our efforts to achieve the SDGs until 2030!

Because of COVID-19, already more than 500.000 people have lost their lives. The pandemic brought large sectors of industry to a standstill. It affects particularly vulnerable groups around the world.

Combating the pandemic, saving lives, and protecting health are top priority. But our response cannot stop there. Increased efforts towards sustainable development will make our societies more resilient to COVID-19 and future crises. Therefore, we unremittingly need to address growing inequalities, the destruction of nature and the climate crisis.

In 2015, we achieved consensus on

- the need for a transformation of our societies to sustainable development and
- the decarbonization of our economies.

During the last years, the sense of urgency to act on climate change and for a more sustainable world has been building up. Healthy and resilient societies depend on social cohesion, inclusive economies and giving nature the space it needs.

We know: The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement serve as our compass out of the crisis.

As the G20 Finance Ministers recently stated: "We commit to support an environmentally sustainable and inclusive recovery. We will be guided by a sense of shared, long-term responsibility for our planet and citizens consistent with the 2030 Agenda, our national and local development strategies, and relevant international commitments".

Especially against the background of the pandemic, the focus of this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on accelerated action and transformative pathways is very important.

In the next months it will be essential to ensure at the international level that our programmes and policies in response to the crisis are socially, economically and

ecologically sustainable. They should be designed to make our societies “future-proof” and our economies climate-neutral and resilient, sustainable, inclusive and competitive.

Instead of falling behind in the implementation of the SDGs, we must think about how we restart our economies in a way that will accelerate implementation.

Germany is committed to a green and better recovery after COVID-19, oriented towards sustainable development, including climate and biodiversity protection at national, European and international level. Recovery policies also need to take the specific impact of the COVID-19 crisis on different groups of society, such as older persons, children, families and not least women and girls into account. Germany is committed to policies that work for all to be free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and to equally participate in and lead our societies, including the EU’s Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

Germany is currently undergoing a comprehensive revision of its National Sustainable Development Strategy. The Strategy is based on the 2030 Agenda and the guiding principles of inter-generational equity, quality of life, social cohesion and global responsibility. The new strategy will determine our course for the upcoming years. We are convinced that it will be a key instrument for crisis resilience.

Within the EU, Germany supports recovery measures in accordance with the European Green Deal, contributing to a green recovery. Germany welcomes the European Commission’s proposal to raise the 2030 emission reduction target to between 50 and 55 percent, with the objective of a climate-neutral EU by 2050.

Germany is committed to actively engage in the shared response to the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The German Federal Government has therefore set up an Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme to help developing countries and emerging economies to stabilize. It focuses on health and pandemic response, food security, stabilization in refugee and crisis regions, and safeguarding jobs.

To this end, we are reallocating more than EUR 1 billion in the current 2020 budget. An additional EUR 3,1 billion was earmarked for 2020 and 2021. This will complement Germany’s ongoing support for its bilateral and multilateral partners.

At this occasion, we would also like to reiterate that the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs must be implemented not only *for*, but also *by* the whole of society. In order for that to happen, we need the voices of civil society to be heard, especially in extraordinary circumstances. This year's virtual HLPF will provide new forms of digital participation. We need to ensure that this allows for meaningful stakeholder engagement in the HLPF deliberations.

Only together can we move forward and ensure that no one is left behind.

Thank you.

*Please note: The German government invited German stakeholder groups to submit brief position papers on their priorities for the Decade of Action and Delivery. For information purposes, we are attaching these papers to this statement.*



## Decade of Action: Obstacles, Requirements and Chances for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we agreed on a master plan to sustainably transform our world until 2030. To achieve the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs in the remaining 10 years, we need a Decade of Action in which the many decisions and negotiations are finally followed by concrete actions.

### What can we learn from the coronavirus pandemic?

The corona pandemic shows how strong we depend on global supply chains, how the weakest in society are most affected by the situation, and how inequalities are increasing. Our current economic structures incorporate high vulnerability for crises, governmental interventions for the recovery must finally establish the 2030 Agenda as a political guideline and create a basis to make sustainable action easier accessible for individuals.

### HLPF Problems

For us, it is clear that the 2030 Agenda can only succeed through international cooperation and collaboration between various actors. Therefore, the HLPF must take its role of providing political leadership for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda seriously and promote the exchange between states. In order to achieve an objective exchange, "cherry-picking" at VNR-presentations must stop. Measures such as an independent evaluation of the reports can ensure that VNRs become more realistic and objective. This includes also the more formal recognition of shadow reports provided by civil society. The HLPF can only fulfill its intended political leading role if its relevance gets increased and if real decisions will be taken there.

### Civil Society Participation

Not only at the HLPF it mainly depends on civil society to draw attention to the main problems. It is therefore crucial to involve civil society organizations in the political processes and to give them the access they need to do so. However, we are experiencing in many processes that spaces for civil society participation are increasingly shrinking. The corona pandemic must not be used as an excuse to accelerate this trend of preventing civil society participation. Instead, civil society organizations need more spaces to get involved.

Critical voices also run the risk of suffering governmental reprisals, particularly when commenting on VNRs. This must stop immediately. The UN- Secretariat needs to provide more clear and designated spaces for civil society/MGoS and strongly communicate to governments that reprisals are not tolerated. In the spirit of collaboration and as outlined in the 2030 Agenda, civil society is an indispensable partner to achieve the SDGs.

What applies to the involvement of civil society, in general, applies particularly to the involvement of young people. Young people under 30 years make up the majority of the world's population. However, young people are not adequately represented in political processes - at both international and national levels. Even though they are the ones who have to live with the current failings in sustainability policies and all their consequences in the future. Official UN youth delegates to the HLPF are almost solely sent by Northern and Western European countries. It is so important that young people from other parts of the world, particularly from countries that are most affected by unsustainable policies, are also represented. We ask both the Secretariat and the Member States to give young people the opportunity for meaningful participation at international conferences.

# German Trade Union Statement to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2020

The logo of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) is a red parallelogram with the letters 'DGB' in white, bold, sans-serif font.

Sustainable development in Germany, but also in Europe, and around the world is a high priority for the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and its affiliates. They support the holistic approach of the Agenda 2030 to bring together ecological viability with economic reason and social improvement.

Not only is the transformation, driven by digitalization, globalization and climate change, challenging our societies and economies. Also the current coronavirus pandemic and its effects on the individual, on companies and regions, underline the necessity for an active state and joint actions. Thus, from the trade union perspective, participation, social cohesion and international solidarity are now more important than ever.

As trade unions, we are working globally to bring together equally distributed prosperity with decent work while respecting the planetary boundaries. Four elements are of special importance when it comes to the guiding theme of “leaving no one behind”.

## **Reduction of Inequality**

There is still only little progress with regard to fighting poverty and reducing inequality. Despite considerable improvements over the last years, the working poor still make up eight percent of the world’s population. Germany presents a similar picture. Continuous job growth over the last ten years has been seen alongside a growing at-risk-of-poverty rates. That means: even coming from unemployment into a job, for many households does not go along with an economic uplift – many wages are too low to prevent workers from poverty. People working in precarious or low qualified jobs do have a high poverty risk. Often, these people are excluded from social life, resulting in an economic and social imbalance.

## **Strengthen Decent Work and Workers’ Participation**

Decent work is the most effective instrument to fight poverty (SDG1) as well as to reduce inequality (SDG10). Decent working conditions, fair wages and complying with workers’ rights are the basis for a prospering economy, rise the living standards globally, and thus can prevent poverty. Collective bargaining agreements promote decent work and strengthening them has to be a political priority. Furthermore, in order to guarantee fair conditions, it needs precise and firmly embedded instruments of workers’ participation. Hence, the DGB is working on the national level to include the quality of employment in Germany’s National Sustainable Development Strategy as the employment rate is the only indicator considered here to measure SDG8 (Decent Work) until now. This needs to be improved quickly when reviewing the Strategy. For example, the ratio of employees covered by collective agreements would be easy to collect.

Internationally, the DGB together with the international trade union confederation (ITUC) is campaigning with “Time for 8” for workers’ rights worldwide. It needs strong workers’ representation to negotiate with governments and employers at eye level in the social dialogue and to implement social and environmental standards. It is thus essential to build and support democratic trade unions around the world.

## **Fairness along Global Supply Chains**

Human rights violations and environmental degradation in many sectors are part of the established economic model. However, unfair competition at the cost of the environment and fundamental workers’ rights is unacceptable. Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are not only human rights and democratic principles, but in fact a precondition for humane work and social progress. Thus, it needs clear and binding guidelines and responsibilities along international supply chains. Respecting and implementing the ILO core conventions as well as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights have to be basic requirement. This is why the DGB is supporting the initiative for an effective law on supply chains.

## **Suitable Framework for the Transformation**

The transformation we are facing will change our way of living, consuming and working decisively around the globe. In order to cope with this change successfully, climate protection has to be brought together with equally distributed prosperity and decent work. Essentially, reliable perspectives for affected regions and workers have to be created. The trade union demands for a Just Transition should be the guideline. Workers are at the core – they are both driver of sustainable development and directly affected by transformation processes. It is important to take them on board, to safeguard them and to include them when shaping the transition. The social dialogue between companies and state actors has to be used to negotiate reliable concepts. This leads to acceptance of the measures, higher participation, and social and economic progress.

**Position**

**German Industry advances  
SDGs worldwide**

**Federation of German Industries e.V.**

## **German industry advances SDGs worldwide**

With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations sets common goals for sustainable development. The focus is on sustainability issues such as effective climate protection, more efficient use of scarce resources, closing material cycles, respect for human rights and fair working conditions. At the same time, the negative effects of industrial production and products are to be reduced.

In view of the "Decade of Action and Delivery" proclaimed in September 2019, the industry is committed to the guidelines of sustainable development. This includes the pillars of economy, ecology and social responsibility. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030 of the United Nations (UN) will decisively advance the German, but above all the global modernization agenda in the future. Industry in Germany has long been driving forward the implementation of SDGs worldwide, in particular by developing innovative technologies and products. Digital technologies, for example, already enable concrete applications in all sectors that can have a major impact on SDGs, such as saving scarce resources.

However, numerous German companies also implement other sustainability goals of the United Nations in their everyday business - from start-ups to large corporations. These include the commitment of companies to observe SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth" by implementing the UN's guiding principles for business and human rights.

In the future, industry will need even more political support in order to fulfil its role as guarantor and enabler of sustainable development worldwide. This includes protection against global competitive distortions caused by differing sustainability standards in the major industrialized countries. The SDGs should be used more intensively to achieve a common understanding of sustainability standards worldwide.



## **About BDI**

The Federation of German Industries (BDI) communicates German industries' interests to the political authorities concerned. She offers strong support for companies in global competition. The BDI has access to a wide-spread network both within Germany and Europe, to all the important markets and to international organizations. The BDI accompanies the capturing of international markets politically. Also, she offers information and politico-economic guidance on all issues relevant to industries. The BDI is the leading organization of German industries and related service providers. She represents 40 inter-trade organizations and more than 100.000 companies with their approximately 8 million employees. Membership is optional. 15 federal representations are advocating industries' interests on a regional level.

## **Imprint**

Federation of German Industries e.V. (BDI)  
Breite Straße 29, 10178 Berlin Germany  
[www.bdi.eu](http://www.bdi.eu)  
T: +49 30 2028-0

## **Contact**

Franz-Josef von Kempis  
Department of Environment, Technology and Sustainability  
Telefon: +49 30 2028-1509  
[v.Kempis@bdi.eu](mailto:v.Kempis@bdi.eu)

BDI document number: D 1147

# WE NEED LEGALLY BINDING AND IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION!

## HLPF 2020 and SDG Decade of Action

The COVID-19 pandemic is challenging our way of life to an unprecedented degree and has uncovered the weaknesses of our globalised economic system. It has exposed the failures of neoliberal policies and more than three decades of public sector privatisation and underfunding. We see serious implications of a commercialised, profit-oriented health system, the structures of dependence in global value chains, the hardship of people working in precarious jobs, of women taking on unpaid, invisible care work, and the missing financial safety net for a generation of freelancers. Our current system destroys the environment by polluting air, water, and soil, and exploiting resources and material, leaving more than 10 percent of the global population in extreme poverty. These global multiple crises will only grow in number and intensity.

**Protest movements all over the world with millions of people have shown us that a majority of people want progressive policies for the common good and global justice. This is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda! Governments of the world cannot let this ambitious agenda fail. More than ever, we need a system change. Rebuilding the old economies is nothing but a recipe for further crises.**



### Stop Negotiating, Start Implementing

While there is a high level of awareness in terms of the dramatic situation of global biodiversity, pollution of ecosystems and the climate crisis, with many internationally agreed environmental conventions, the global community, including Germany, fails to reach almost all of the goals and targets. We will no longer accept this absurd circle of negotiations of new goals never to be reached due to lack of political will.

We call on the German government to finally

- » realize a decentralized energy transition and immediate coal phase-out
- » implement a citizen-led mobility transition; and
- » a socially and ecologically sound agriculture transition
- » support an ambitious plan for all 2020 SDG targets



### Restructure Public Budgets, Regulate Private Investments

In order to close investment gaps, there is an increasing trend to privatize public services and infrastructure and submit them to the logic of private capitalist structures. While taking most of the risk, public money has to work like private money: generate a return for investors. This logic cannot any longer be applied to the SDGs by the UN and governments.

We call on Germany to finally

- » finance the SDG implementation through a sustainable restructuring of public budgets
- » demand of companies to abide by human rights, labour and environmental standards and laws
- » ensure SDG implementation beyond profit interests in Germany and world wide



### Fight Inequalities Everywhere

Economic and social inequalities are growing globally as well as in Germany, with the COVID-pandemic putting additional stress on vulnerable people. Once again, this is well-known and well-documented and has already led to massive social and political tensions and upheaval. Overcoming inequalities has to finally become a priority.

We call on the German government to finally

- » structurally and financially improve our social system
- » link economic recovery to socially and ecologically transformative policies
- » stop the MERCOSUR freetrade agreement
- » lead the way to become an industrial nation based on an ecologically and socially just use of resources



### No more Voluntary Actions!

As long as the 2030 Agenda is not a political priority but little more than a nice to have sustainability project, we will never achieve a transformation of our world. There is a real danger of the 2030 Agenda becoming yet another failed UN project. In light of the urgent need for real political change and the enormous footprint of our European way of life, the current state of implementation in Germany is especially disappointing.

We call on Germany to finally

- » end the era of voluntary action but implement legally-binding sustainability policies and regulation
- » substantially revise the German Sustainability Strategy or develop a real SDG Strategy instead
- » introduce a participatory process leading up to its VNR at the 2021 HLPF

# The Agenda's implementation is urgent

## Proposals for the United Nations Decade of Action

The United Nations (UN) have called for a decade of action in order to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We emphatically welcome this initiative. So far, the international community has invested too little in implementing the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda must now be vigorously implemented – under difficult conditions compounded by the corona pandemic. We want to highlight the following core concerns with respect to the orientation of the decade of action:

**No one must be left behind:** The fight against poverty, hunger and inequality must be intensified. Poor countries, people in crisis regions, refugees and migrants as well as vulnerable segments of the population such as children, people with disabilities and the elderly must receive more support. A primary focus should be on fighting the structural causes. The goal must be to link the urgent issues in the Global North and in the Global South in the framework of a coherent policy.

**We must not lose sight of the climate goals:** Protecting the climate remains an existential and urgent challenge. The decade of action should therefore be used for vigorously pursuing the implementation of the Paris climate agreement. The economic assistance and stimulus packages in the context of the corona crisis play an important role in this regard. They must not result in the consolidation of business models and economic sectors that were not sustainable even before the crisis. All measures must be oriented towards climate goals.

**Gender-sensitive approaches are required:** There can be no sustainable development without gender equality. Gender-sensitive approaches must therefore be demanded more forcefully during the decade of action.

**Multilateral structures must be strengthened:** Multilateralism has been severely weakened in recent years, despite the fact that even now no single state can deal with the devastating consequences of crises that know no boundaries. The SDG decade should be used for highlighting the importance of cooperating in solidarity, for strengthening international cooperation in the framework of the United Nations System and beyond it, and for expanding global partnerships.

**Civil society organizations must be able to act:** Civil society organizations are partners in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and also important actors in the democratic and critical oversight of government policies. But their scope of action is being continuously restricted. The role of civil society must be further strengthened in the course of the decade of action. The goal should be to enable comprehensive and transparent participation of civil society at all political levels.

**Fair and sustainable digitalization:** Digitalization offers a vast potential for the Sustainable Development Goals. New forms of knowledge society and new kinds of cooperation are becoming possible. The corona crisis is resulting in an increased use of virtual means of communication worldwide. However, many countries lack the prerequisites to keep up with the changes. Thus both the digital divide and the dependence on a handful of digital technology corporations are growing. The protection of personal data, cybersecurity and use of resources are also critical. Counteracting the risks of digitalization and putting it to use for sustainable development requires a stronger political framework.