



The Sustainable Progress Index 2026

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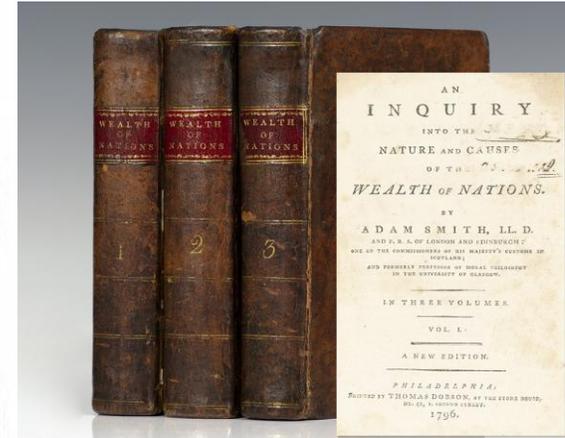
Overview

- Introduction
- GDP, Wellbeing and Progress
- The Sustainable Progress Index 2026
- Conclusions and Policy Implications

GDP, Wellbeing and Progress

What is Progress and Why Measure it?

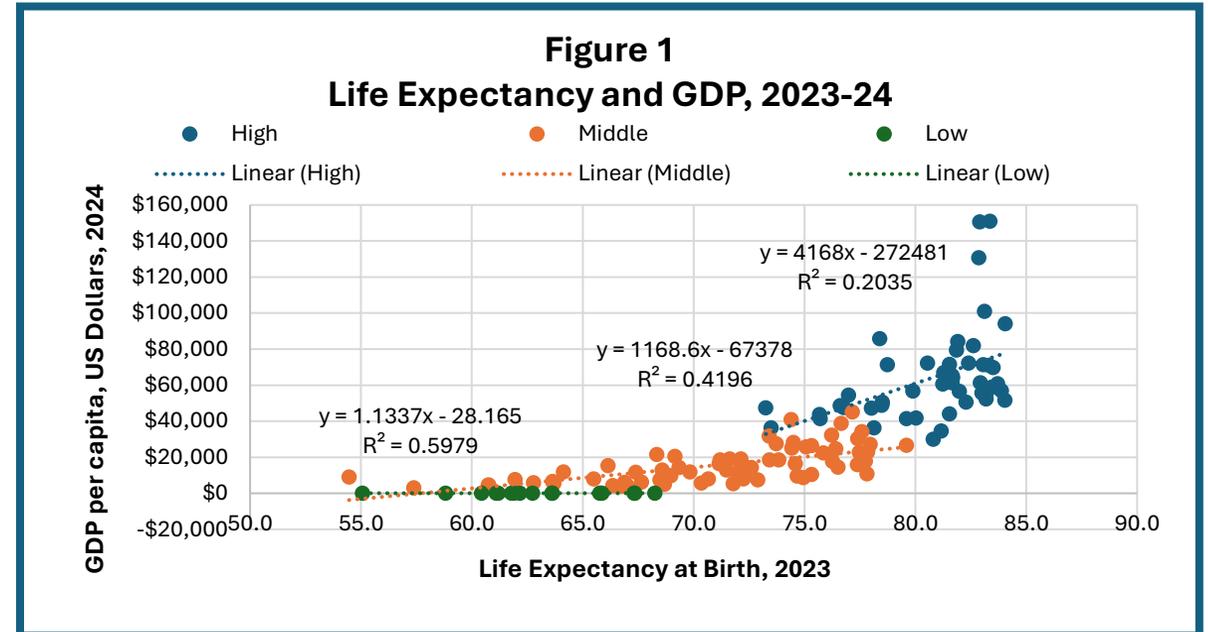
- Progress for whom?
- Sovereigns and Elites
 - Capturing Wealth
- Adam Smith and Universal Progress
- Government Planning
 - Improvement or decline
 - Bench marking/ Best Practices



“No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is ... equity ... that they who feed, cloth and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged”
Adam Smith, 1776

Gross Domestic Product and Progress

- GDP started as a way to measure output and potential output
- United Nations develops Systems of National Accounts
- Used to measure economic growth and standard of living
- Economic growth comes from increased inputs or productivity gains



Benefits of Economic Growth are rising standards of living, more resources for other goals, avoiding zero-sum conflicts

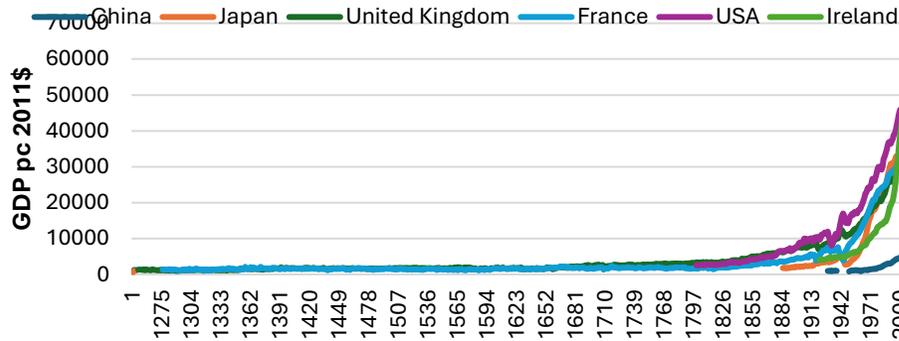
The Limits to GDP

- GDP measures spending and not all spending adds to welfare;
- Much economic activity takes place out of market relations, and thus is not included in GDP (household production);
- Many non-economic events (like natural disasters) have a negative impact on welfare but often can have a positive effect on GDP;
- Many consumption or production expenditures have a positive effect on the welfare of the individuals undertaking them, but a negative effect on non-market participants (economists call these externalities);
- An individual's wellbeing is greatly affected by many non-economic factors, such as their health, family relations, friendships, factors that GDP does not measure (SNA 1992)

Progress and Progress Traps: Increased Output usually means Increased Pollution

Figure 2

Various Countries GDP per capita Growth, 1-2022



Source: Maddison Project 2023

Figure 3

Global Temperature, 1850-2024

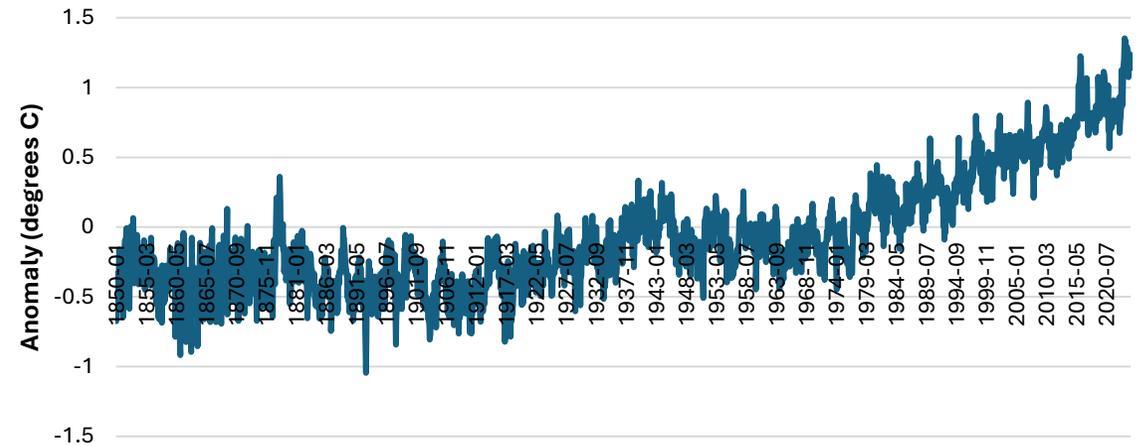
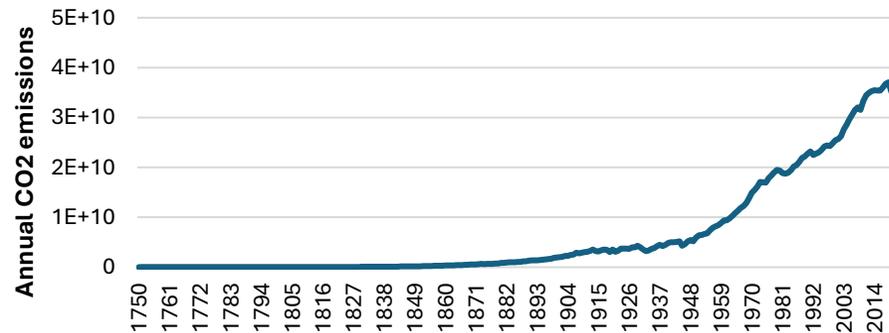


Figure 4

World CO2 Emissions, 1750-2024



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SNA 2025: Answering 'Beyond GDP' Challenge

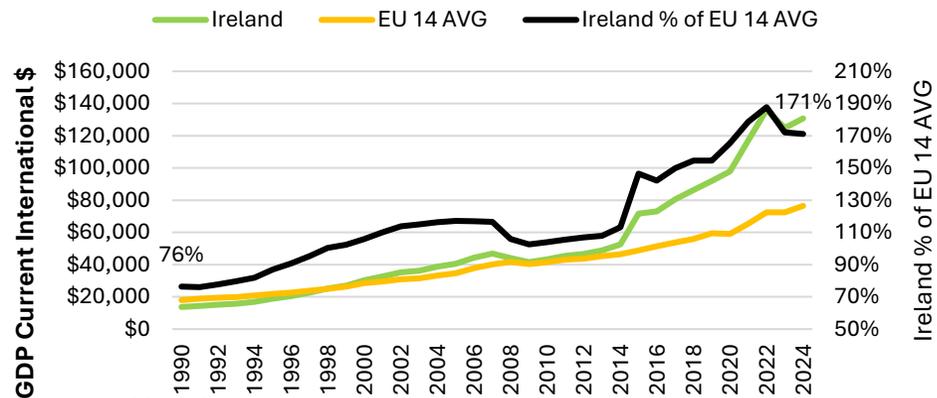
Table 4
Conceptualisation of Wellbeing in United Nations System of National Accounts, 2025

Aspects of Wellbeing		Other aspects of Wellbeing
Aspects of Material Wellbeing		
Within National Accounts	Outside National Accounts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Income (household) * Final Consumption * Labour * Household distributions of income, consumption and wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Unpaid household service work * Ecosystem services * Health care activity * Education and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Subjective wellbeing * Governance * Social cohesion * Health outcomes * Crime and justice outcomes * Leisure * Capabilities and freedoms

Source: SNA 2025

Ireland's GDP has been fastest growing country in Europe, but is this a reflection of quality of life?

Figure 5
Ireland and EU 14 AVG GDP, 1990-2024



Source: World Bank

Table 5

EU14 GDP per capita and Disposable Income of Households per capita, 2024

Country	GDP	Country	Adjusted Gross Disposable Income of Households per capita in PPS
Luxembourg	€127,030	Luxembourg	€41,552
Ireland	€104,510	Germany	€37,098
Denmark	€65,650	Austria	€34,443
Netherlands	€62,380	Netherlands	€34,406
EU14 AVG	€55,809	Belgium	€33,078
Austria	€53,830	France	€32,371
Sweden	€52,550	EU14 AVG	€30,873
Belgium	€52,370	Finland	€29,876
Germany	€51,830	Sweden	€29,539
Finland	€49,100	Denmark	€29,268
France	€42,590	Ireland	€28,933
Italy	€37,310	Italy	€28,646
Spain	€32,630	Spain	€26,999
Portugal	€27,060	Portugal	€25,378
Greece	€22,480	Greece	€20,639
Ireland as %	187.3%	Ireland as %	93.7%
EU14 AVG		EU14 AVG	

Source: Eurostat

Evaluating Ireland's ability to address its problems

- Globalization and financialization are main reasons Ireland's GDP is not helpful.
- But Ireland has challenges that require knowing its potential output and a comparative analysis of how it collects and spends money.
- Example: A recent Comparative Analysis looked at how European countries are addressing the challenge of aging population (pension and healthcare costs); cost of climate transition; increased defense spending; and higher government borrowing costs.



Table 7

Indicators Based on GDP

Public Debt as a % of GDP

Fiscal Balance as % of GDP

Spending Pressure as % of GDP

Health Care Expenditures as % of GDP

Defense Spending as % of GDP

Climate Spending Pressures as a % of GDP

Total Gov Revenue as % of GDP

Annual Spending Pressure as % of GDP

Total Energy Subsidies as % of GDP

Tax Gap as % of GDP

Source: Long-Term Spending in Europe, IMF

Some Examples.....

Table 6

Two Ways to Compare EU14 Health Care Spending, 2023

Healthcare Spending per cap		Healthcare Spending as % of GDP	
Country	Spending	Country	% of GDP
Luxembourg	€6,888	Germany	11.7
Ireland	€6,313	France	11.5
Denmark	€6,021	Austria	11.2
Germany	€5,902	Sweden	11.2
Netherlands	€5,871	Belgium	10.8
Austria	€5,780	Finland	10.5
Sweden	€5,728	Portugal	10
Belgium	€5,468	Netherlands	9.8
Finland	€5,117	EU14 AVG	9.6
EU14 AVG	€4,864	Denmark	9.5
France	€4,755	Spain	9.2
Italy	€3,037	Greece	8.4
Spain	€2,857	Italy	8.4
Portugal	€2,540	Ireland	6.6
Greece	€1,816	Luxembourg	5.7

Source: Eurostat

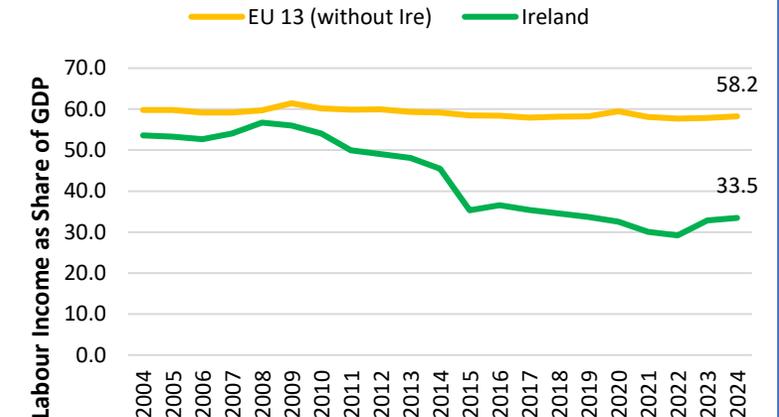
Table 8

EU14 Revenue as a % of GDP, 2024

Country	Rev % GDP
Denmark	45.8
France	45.3
Belgium	45.1
Austria	43.8
Luxembourg	42.7
Italy	42.6
Sweden	42.4
Finland	42.3
Greece	41.7
Germany	40.9
EU14 AVG	40.6
Netherlands	39.4
Spain	37.3
Portugal	37.1
Ireland	22.4

Source: Eurostat

Figure 6
Labour Share of GDP, 2004-2024

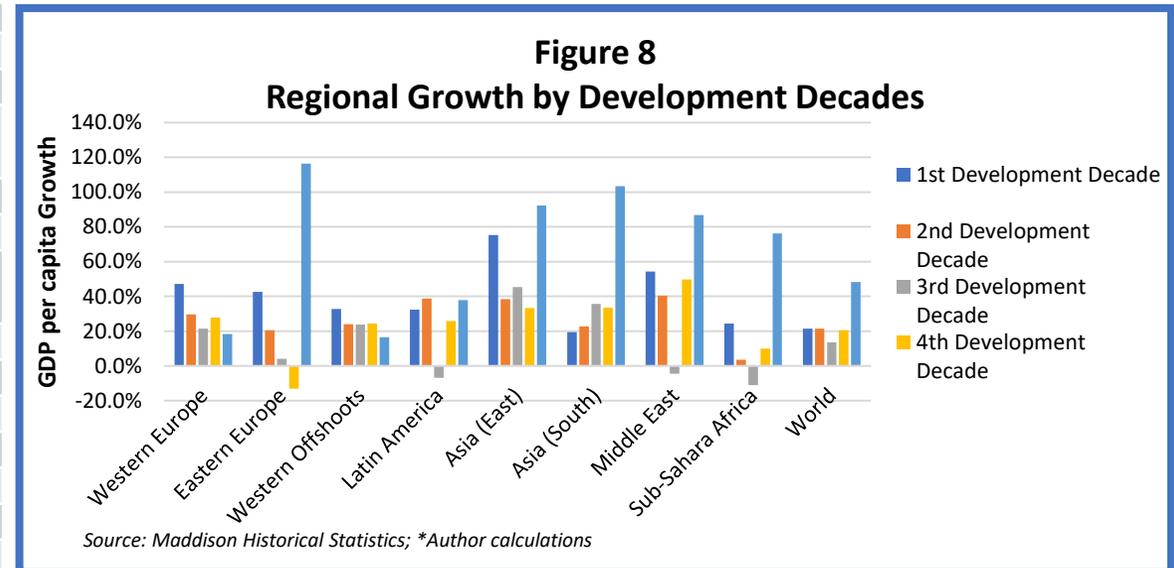


Going Beyond GDP to MDGs and SDGs

Table 11

Goals of Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals

MDG 2000	SDG 2015
1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	1. No Poverty
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education	2. Zero Hunger
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	3. Good Health and Wellbeing
4. Reduce Child Mortality	4. Quality Education
5. Improve Maternal Health	5. Gender Equality
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases	6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability	7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Global Partnership for Development	8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
	9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
	10. Reduced Inequalities
	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
	12. Responsible Consumption and Production
	13. Climate Action
	14. Life Below Water
	15. Life on Land
	16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
	17. Partnerships for the Goals



Review of Various Measures of Progress

Table 13
Alternative Measures of Progress for EU14, 2024-2025

Gross Domestic Product per capita		Social Progress Index		World Happiness Index		Sustainable Development Goals Index	
Country	GDP	Country	2025	Country	2024	SDGI	2024
Luxembourg	€127,030	Denmark	91.65	Finland	7.736	Finland	87.02
Ireland	€104,510	Finland	91.28	Denmark	7.521	Sweden	85.74
Denmark	€65,650	Sweden	90.75	Sweden	7.345	Denmark	85.26
Netherlands	€62,380	Luxembourg	88.86	Netherlands	7.306	Germany	83.67
EU14 AVG	€55,806	Netherlands	88.82	Luxembourg	7.122	France	83.14
Austria	€53,830	Ireland	88.76	Belgium	6.910	Austria	83.01
Sweden	€52,550	Germany	88.24	Ireland	6.889	EU14 AVG	81.78
Belgium	€52,340	Austria	87.8	EU14 AVG	6.833	Spain	81.04
Germany	€51,830	Belgium	87.51	Austria	6.810	Belgium	80.67
Finland	€49,100	EC14 AVG	87.35	Germany	6.753	Portugal	80.64
France	€42,590	Spain	85.58	France	6.593	Italy	80.26
Italy	€37,310	France	84.81	Spain	6.466	Netherlands	79.98
Spain	€32,630	Portugal	84.63	Italy	6.415	Greece	79.12
Portugal	€27,060	Italy	84.08	Portugal	6.013	Ireland	78.59
Greece	€22,480	Greece	80.13	Greece	5.776	Luxembourg	76.73
Ireland as % EU14 AVG	187.3%	Ireland as % EU14 AVG	100.5%	Ireland as % EU14 AVG	100.0%	Ireland as % EU14 AVG	96.1%

Sources: Eurostat, Social Progress Report 2025; World Happiness Report 2025; Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2025.

The Sustainable Progress Index 2026

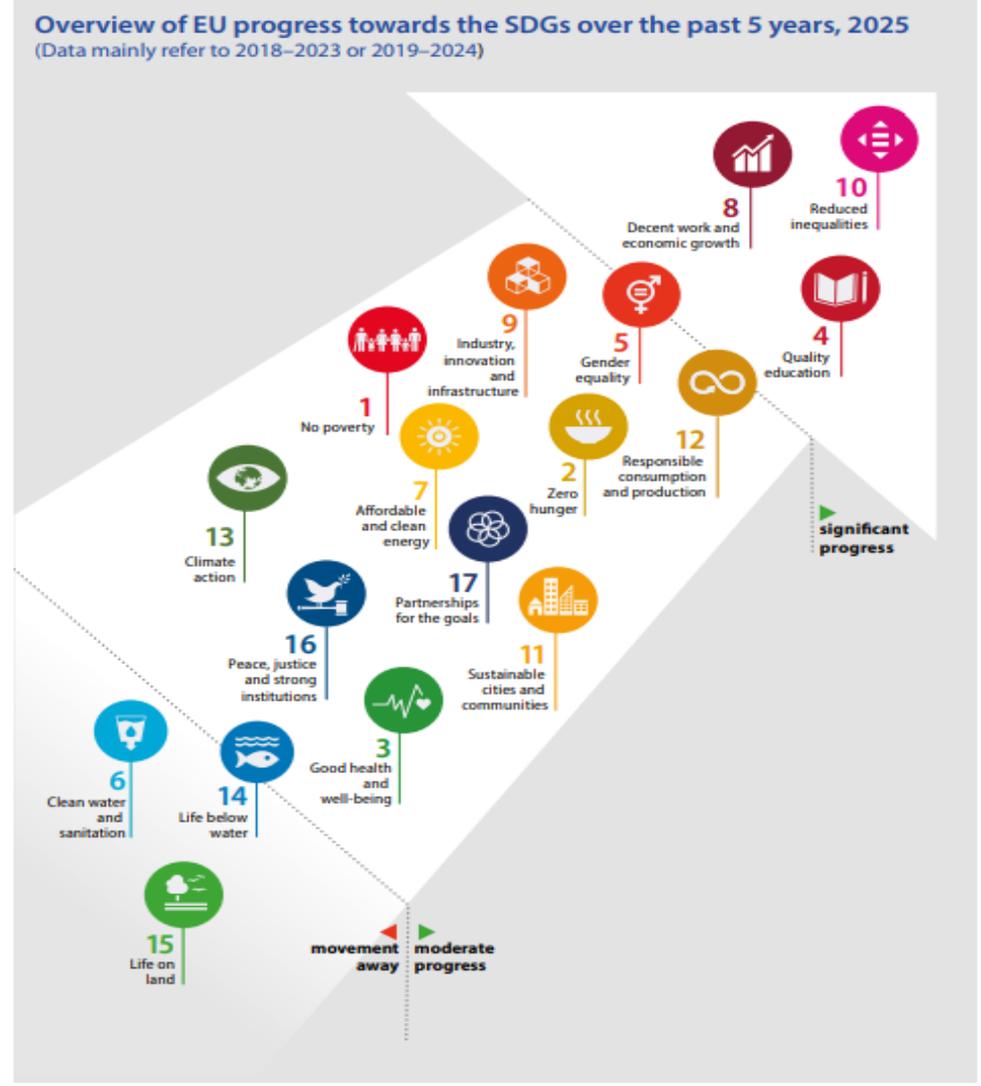
The 17 Sustainable Development Goals



Eurostat 2025, EU Progress towards the Goals

Key Results

- Strong Progress: SDG 4, SDG8, SDG10 Moderate Progress: SDG2, SDG9, SDG12, SDG14,**
- Movement AWAY: SDG6 SDG14, SDG15**



Jeffrey Sachs et al, SDSN



Data Collection

UN Global Indicator Framework for the SDGs (2017; 2024)

EU SDG Indicator Set (2025)

Our Focus?

the **EU14 countries** aim to compare Ireland relative to its peers

Our Criteria for Data Selection?

Relevance and applicability

Quality

Coverage:

Most recent available

Our Final Dataset?

82 indicators across the 17 goals

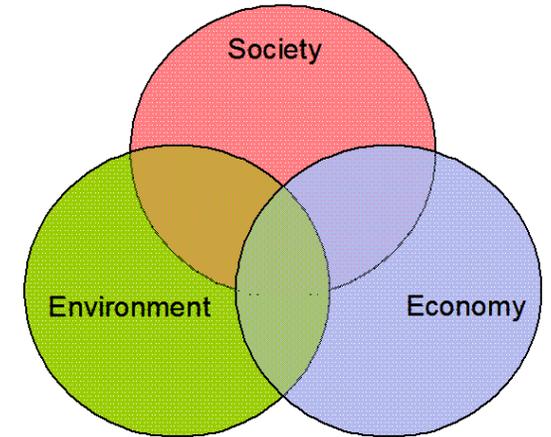
Minimum of 4 or more indicators per SDG

Exception is SDG 13 (2 indicators) and SDG 11 (3 indicators)



Our Method

- **Follows Sachs et al (2016)**
- **Assign percentile rank to each indicator**
 - Normalise the data – 100 is best, 0 is worst
 - Better performance always means higher scores
- **First, examine SDGs by three 3 dimensions – 3 Indexes**
 - Economy, Society, Environment
- **Aggregate across all 17 SDGs to arrive at Sustainable Progress Index**
 - all data from latest year available
- **Each indicator weighted equally in the SDG (UN, 2015)**



“These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development”. (UN, 2015, paragraph 5)



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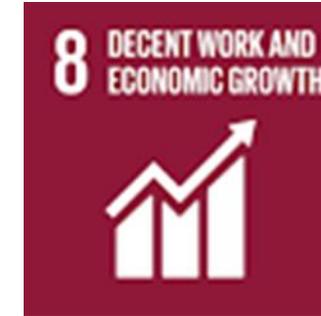


The Economy Index – Country Ranking

Table 14

The Economy SDG Index – Ranking by Country

Country	Index Score	Country Rank
Netherlands	0.8357	1
Denmark	0.8128	2
Sweden	0.8014	3
Germany	0.6320	4
Finland	0.6012	5
Ireland	0.5487	6
Austria	0.5293	7
Belgium	0.4998	8
Luxembourg	0.4627	9
Portugal	0.3445	10
France	0.3022	11
Spain	0.2855	12
Greece	0.1639	13
Italy	0.1458	14



The Society Index – Country Ranking

Table 15

The Society SDG Index – Ranking by Country

Country	Index Score	Country Rank
Sweden	0.6629	1
Finland	0.5935	2
Denmark	0.5906	3
Netherlands	0.5736	4
Ireland	0.5546	5
Austria	0.5348	6
Luxembourg	0.4979	7
Belgium	0.4694	8
Germany	0.4629	9
Portugal	0.4517	10
France	0.4477	11
Spain	0.4276	12
Italy	0.4198	13
Greece	0.3163	14

GOAL RANK

SDG1 – 4 (joint)

SDG2 – 12

SDG3 – 6

SDG4 – 2

SDG5 - 8

SDG10 - 5 (joint)

SDG16- 2

SDG17 - 8

The Environment Index - Country Ranking

Table 16

The Environment SDG Index – Ranking by Country

Country	Index Score	Country Rank
Germany	0.5826	1
Austria	0.5759	2
Sweden	0.5715	3
Netherlands	0.5715	4
Denmark	0.5648	5
Greece	0.5106	6
Luxembourg	0.4990	7
Finland	0.4943	8
France	0.4900	9
Spain	0.4748	10
Belgium	0.4475	11
Italy	0.4211	12
Ireland	0.4140	13
Portugal	0.4083	14

GOAL RANK

SDG6 – 13

SDG7 – 11

SDG11 – 7

SDG12 - 12

SDG13 - 11

SDG14 - 5

SDG15 - 13

Ireland's Ranking by SDG and Dimension

Table 17
Ireland's Rank by Dimension and by SDG

Economy		Rank
SDG 8:	Good Jobs and Economic Growth	4 (joint)
SDG 9	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	10
Society		
SDG 1	No Poverty	4 (joint)
SDG 2	Zero Hunger	12
SDG 3	Good Health and Wellbeing	6
SDG 4	Quality Education	2
SDG 5	Gender Equality	8
SDG 10	Reduced Inequality	5 (joint)
SDG 16	Peace and Justice	2
SDG 17	Partnerships for the Goals	8
Environment		
SDG 6	Clean Water and Sanitation	13
SDG 7	Affordable and Clean Energy	11
SDG 11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	7
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption and Production	12
SDG 13	Climate Action	11
SDG 14	Life Below Water	5
SDG 15	Life on Land	13

The Sustainable Progress Index 2026

Table 18

The Sustainable Progress Index 2026

Ranking by Country

Country	Index Score	Country Rank
Sweden	0.6416	1
Denmark	0.6061	2
Netherlands	0.6036	3
Finland	0.5535	4
Austria	0.5495	5
Germany	0.5321	6
Ireland	0.4960	7
Luxembourg	0.4939	8
Belgium	0.4640	9
France	0.4480	10
Spain	0.4303	11
Portugal	0.4212	12
Italy	0.3881	13
Greece	0.3784	14

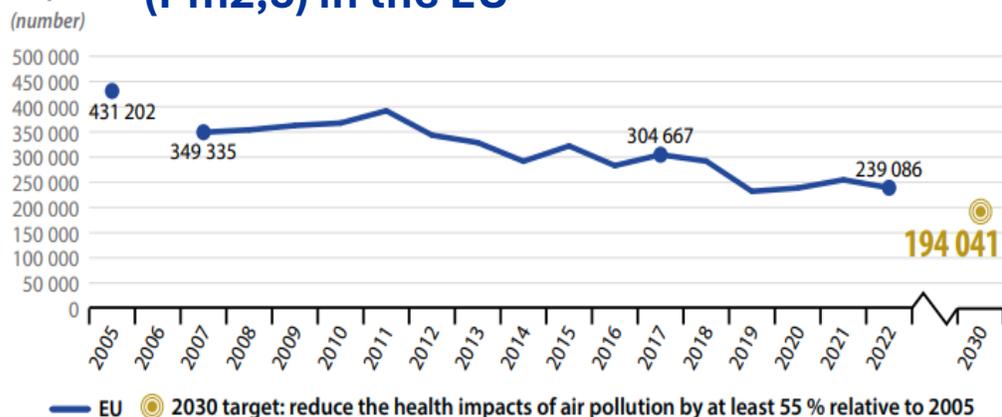
SO: where do we stand?

Ireland is ranked 7th overall

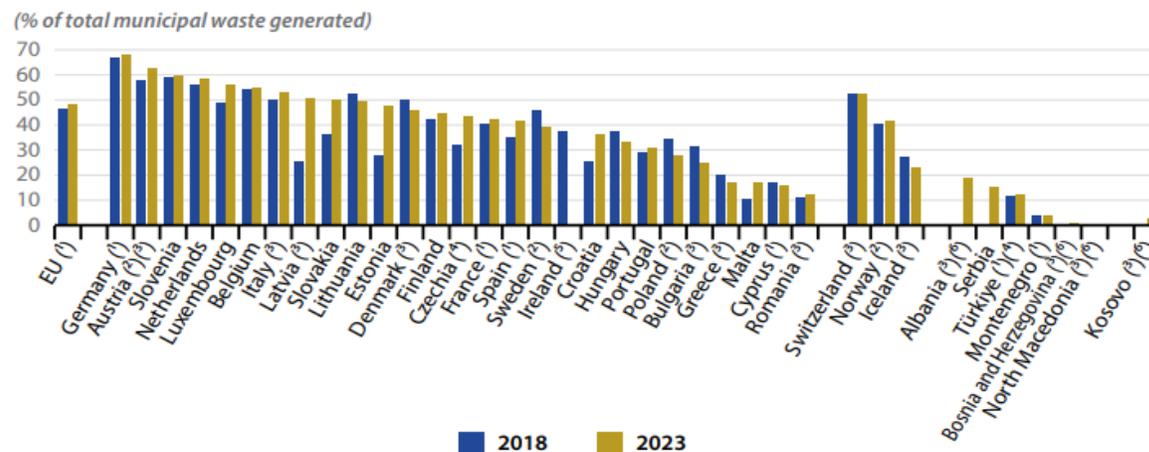


A Closer Look at SDG11

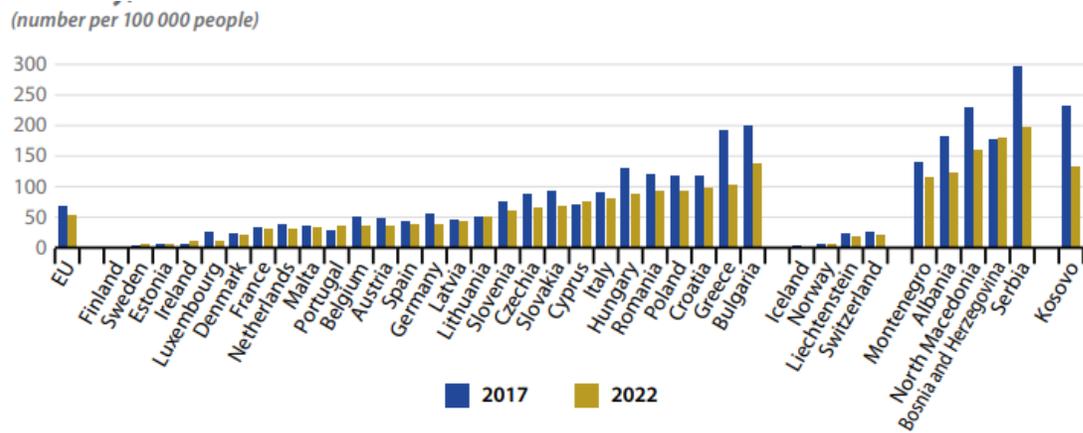
Premature Deaths from Pollution (Pm2,5) in the EU



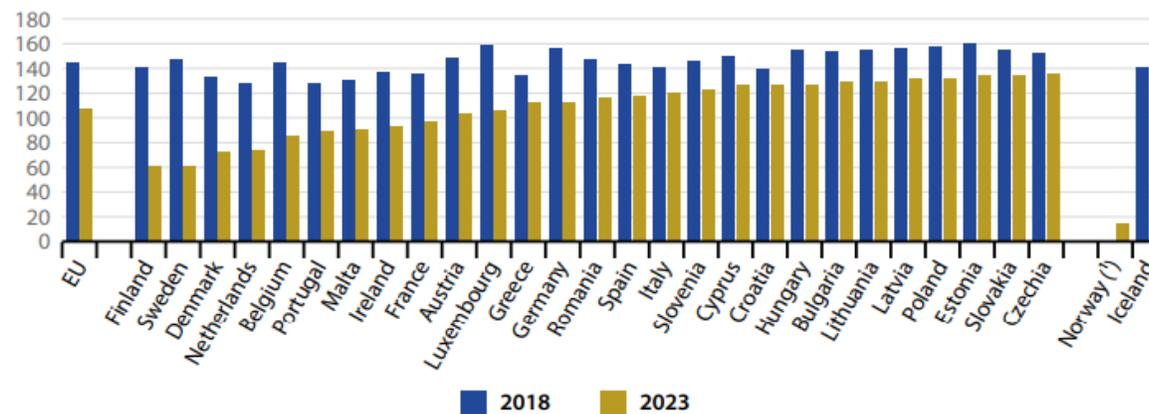
Recycling of Waste



Premature Deaths from Pollution (Pm2,5) by Country

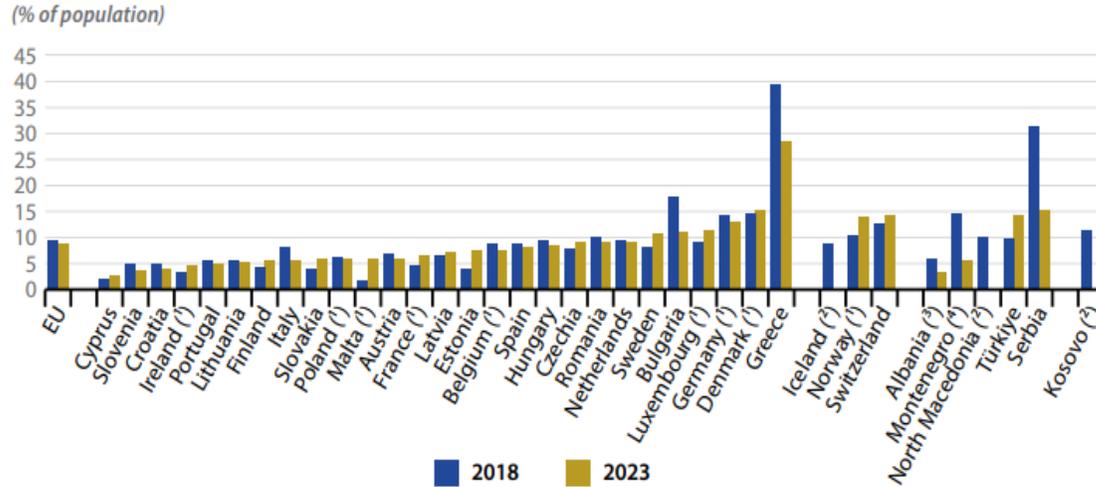


Co2 Emissions from New Cars

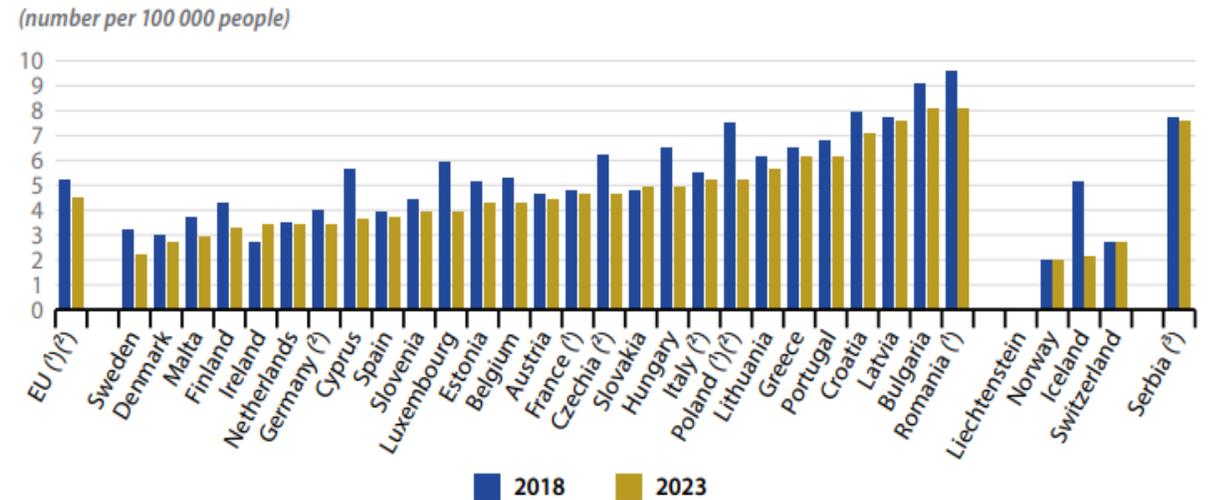


A Closer Look at SDG11

Housing Overburden Rate



Road Traffic Deaths



Conclusions and Policy Implications

Government Action on the SDGs

The 2030 deadline is fast approaching

2025 Programme for Government, *Securing Ireland's Future*, commits to:

‘Implement a Whole-of-Government Strategy to fully integrate the SDGs into national policies and initiatives, ensuring that each goal is actively pursued across all levels of government’

(Government of Ireland, 2025, p. 51)

The Wellbeing Framework & the SDGs

The SDGs refocus policy on: Environmental, Social and Economic wellbeing

The SDGs are complementary to Ireland's Well-being Framework

Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025

Wellbeing Framework: 11 Dimensions

- Subjective wellbeing
- Mental and physical health
- Income and wealth
- knowledge, skills and innovation
- housing and the built environment
- Environment, climate and biodiversity
- Safety and security
- Work and job quality
- Time use
- Connections, community and participation
- Civic engagement, trust, and cultural expression

Wellbeing Framework – Equality and Sustainability

Indicators track progress:

Over time – performance over a five-year period

By international comparison – measured against the EU average.

2023, step forward:

Two further features added: Equality and Sustainability.

2024, step backward:

Equality and Sustainability dropped from methodology.

Renewed Social Contract

Social Justice Ireland's Five Policy Outcomes

A Vibrant Economy

Decent Services and Infrastructure

Just Taxation

Good Governance

Sustainability

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities & Communities

Decent Services and Infrastructure	
Mental & Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase funding to encourage sports participation and active lifestyle programmes.
Housing & Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set a target of 20 per cent of all housing stock to be social housing by 2040 and achieve this through directly building more social housing and decentralizing responsibility for social housing to Local Authorities.• Ensure that no state land suitable for housing is sold by a Local Authority or State Agency.• Address affordability issues by concentrating on supply-side cost reductions rather than demand-side income subsidies; invest in new methodologies and reconsider higher density developments.• Ensure people with disabilities can live independently where possible through increased resourcing, including suitable housing and housing related supports.

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities & Communities

Decent Services and Infrastructure

Housing & Built Environment

- Resource the enforcement of legislation targeting short-term lettings.
- Encourage the right type of supply and reduce reliance on the Build to Rent sector.
- Allow local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies pool resources to sustainably finance increased supply.
- Review planning legislation to ensure that its terms are consistent with the objectives of the SDGs and democratic engagement.

Connections, Community & Participation

- Invest in the provision and maintenance of community spaces, playgrounds and youth centres.
- Increase funding for community development, and for community development workers, to build the capacity of local communities to identify and respond to their own needs and engage in the policy making process

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities & Communities

Just Taxation	
Income & Wealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Government should set a new tax-take target set on a per-capita basis to ensure adequate resources available for investment, especially as windfall revenue withdraws. Ireland's overall level of taxation should reach a level equivalent to €15,000 per capita in 2017 terms. This target should increase each year in line with growth in nominal GNI*.
Good Governance	
Safety & Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review building regulations to ensure good ventilation, heating and fire safety standards across all building.
Civic Engagement, Trust & Cultural Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review planning legislation to ensure that its terms are consistent with the objectives of the SDGs and democratic engagement.
Sustainability	
Environment, Climate & Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Invest in a deep retrofitting programme for community spaces.