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**Article**

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# AN ASSESMENT OF THE POLICIES CONCERNING THE EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Arnold Weissenbacher\*

**Abstract:** *Sustainable development has been now for more than 15 years, at the center of the objectives of the EU, being already enshrined in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. The basic concern of this now ubiquitous term is to assure the current generation's demands will be fulfilled without endangering the needs of upcoming generations, sustainability being a key factor that affects both the financial market and the overall economy. The European Union has addressed this issue by developing a long term strategy, taking into account both economical, social, environmental and global governance factors and identifying seven key interrelated issues regarding climate change and clean energy, transport, consumption and production, the management and conservation of natural resources, public health, social inclusion and global poverty. This paper aims to present an overview of the current situation of the key challenges and their intersectoral measures and to determine the progress made in this area as well as to identify the key issues that offer the greatest amount of improvement and to recommend possible solutions to the aforementioned challenges. The methodology will benefit from data obtained and sampled from the Eurostat monitoring report, thus providing an accurate and transparent impartial analysis.*

**Keywords:** sustainable development strategy; social inclusion; public health; climate change and energy.

**JEL Classification:** A14; C40; E24; E31; E62; H31; H50; I12; I31.

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is now at the forefront of European policies with a growing demand for conserving the resources at disposal and improving the quality of life for the current generation, without endangering the needs of future ones. The EU has devised a strategy based on several key trends, among which the seven most important ones will be tackled in a successive manner and the underlying issues as well as some possible lines of recommendation will be highlighted. Headline indicators will provide an overview of the current situation regarding each topic and a brief summary of each trend will be offered in conclusion.

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## 1.SOCIAL INCLUSION

The goal of the European Union is to include every citizen in society, especially those that are disadvantaged. There is a strong link between poverty and social inclusion in the EU, poverty eradication being the greatest global challenge and a crucial requirement for sustainable development, as was pointed out in Chapter II of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. A large part of the EU population risks being at poverty level and social exclusion, but it is interesting to notice that not all are affected in the same way. Although some people may have low income compared to people residing in other countries, this does not imply that their standard of living is low. People affected by material deprivation, which is another form of poverty, cannot deal with unplanned expenses, nor purchase desirable items that would contribute to a decent living. Reducing the gap between the highest and lowest incomes is essential to sustainable development and to social cohesion. In eliminating this gap between incomes, the elimination of the inequality of earnings between men and women must also be taken into account.

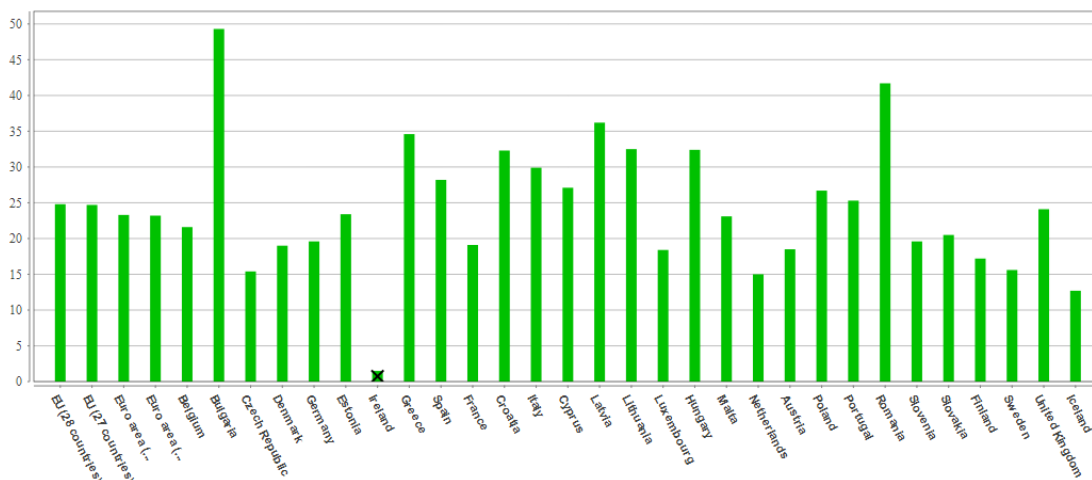
**Figure 1 – People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (1.000 persons)**

Geo/time	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU 27	124.339	123.051	119.360	116.418	114.286	116.780	120.171	122.860

Source: Eurostat.

The data clearly points out how the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion increased starting with the onset of the economic crisis, in clear contrast to the progress made before. Whereas in 2009 the number of people affected by this indicator was at its lowest of 114.2 million, a 7% increase occurred during the effects of the crisis, the number peaking at 122.8 in 2012. That means that 24.7% of the population of the European Union is in risk of poverty or social exclusion. A closer look at the last two countries that adhered before Croatia, gives an alarming picture: in Romania, 41.7% were affected by this, while in Bulgaria the figure is a staggering 49.3% or close to a half of the population.

**Figure 2 – Percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by country**



Source: Eurostat.

In order to measure the poverty, a multi-perspective view was taken into account, considering monetary poverty, severe material deprivation and very low work intensity. 84.1 million people suffered from monetary poverty, meaning they earned less than 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers), 38.6 million inhabitants experienced very low work intensity, this being the people aged 0-59 living in households where the adults work less than 20% of their total work potential during the past year and 49 million underwent severe material deprivation, whereas they have living conditions severely constrained by a lack of resources. In order to meet the Europe 2020 benchmark of lifting 20 million people out of poverty, the European Union still has some significant work to do, being clearly out of the graph regarding this indicator. Some possible lines of actions that can be taken are a prioritization of the social investment and the focus on providing better and more efficient social protection, improving the opportunities to the labour market of the current population and investing in the youth for a more sustainable workforce. Close attention should be paid to the inclusion of people with disabilities and the improvement of statistical information and empirical research for them (Shima and Rodrigues, 2009). The Member States need to independently simplify and improve their social policies in order to cope with the shrinking working-age population, the increase of the proportion of older people and the unemployment and poverty that have come about with the economic crisis.

## 2. PUBLIC HEALTH

Healthy people are valuable to the social development and economy of a country, as they tend to be more productive. The main public health challenges faced by countries differ depending on the stage of development that they are in. Traditional health issues are commonly associated with a country's lack of development, while more modern ones are correlated with a rather quick development that do not dispose of health and environmental safety guards. Among modern health threats it is worth mentioning air and water pollution, chemical radiation, waste accumulation, chronic diseases, as well as social factors that might lead to health damage such as unemployment or social exclusion.

A strong connection exists between health and other problems concerning sustainable development. Environmental issues such as that caused by climate change and energy (greenhouse gas emissions, for example), sustainable production and consumption and the way in which natural resources are managed all impact the health of the individuals. Improvement in health can be achieved through means of socioeconomic development and reaching for social cohesion, as all these reduce the existent inequalities between people and favour the opportunities for living more decently.

Whereas in 2004 a woman was expected to live on average 81.5 years at birth, in 2012 this number grew by 1.6 to 83.1 years expected to live in good health at birth.

**Figure 3 – Healthy life years and life expectancy at birth**

Geo/time	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU 27	81.5	82.0	82.2	82.4	82.6	82.9	83.2	83.1

Source: Eurostat

The increase was slightly bigger for men, who in 2004 were expected to live 75.2 years on average, in comparison with 77.5 years in 2012, translating into a 2.3 year increase in life expectancy. This means the gap between males and females is going to reduce with time. To be noted that the above numbers represents the expected number of years that a person has to live on average, without disability or disease. When this is factored in, we observe no significant difference between women and men. A woman was estimated in 2012 on average to live 61.9 years in good health at birth, meaning disability or disease-free. For men, the number was only minimally lower, with 61.3 years expected to live in good health in 2012. What this means is that although women live on average longer than men, they don't necessarily live in better health and actually they spend a greater share of their life disease or disability-ridden than men.

It is worrying however, that the number of years in good health is showing a decline. One of the main goals of the EU in what concerns public health is to increase this number, of expected healthy years to live at birth by 2 years by 2020. The importance of the healthy expected years at birth indicator is justifiable when we think of the quality of life concept and its emphasis in the policies of the EU.

A positive picture concerns the suicide rates, which have dropped by about 14% from 2000 until 2010. However, most of the decrease occurred before the start of the economic crisis. After 2007, the rate started to increase again. Also, similar to life expectancy the gap between men and women is reducing.

Pollution is a major health risk as well. No considerable improvements occurred in the exposure to air pollution by particulate matter with only a reduction of 1 microgram per cubic meter in 11 years.

**Figure 4 – Urban population exposure to air pollution by particulate matter (mg/m3)**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	28	26	27	30	27	28	30	28	26	26	26	27

Source: Eurostat.

On the other side of the spectrum, some worrying increments were observed in what concerns the exposure to air pollution by ozone with 769 micrograms per cubic meter per day from 2000 to 2001, accompanied by noteworthy fluctuations due to heat waves in between.

**Figure 5 – Urban population exposure to air pollution by ozone (mg/m3/day)**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	2937	3512	3511	5528	3491	3677	4478	3611	3580	3648	3368	3706

Source: Eurostat.

Since a healthy pool of population leads to economic growth and prosperity, the European Union needs to invest in people's health through health-promotion programs and health coverage for reducing the disparities between income-classes and promoting social inclusion. The EU plans to invest in that regard into sustainability of health systems, in helping Member States design reforms and improving the efficiency of health systems, improving cost-efficiency through sound innovation, developing tools to better assess the efficiency of health systems, contributing to the employment factor and providing people a chance to be active for a longer time, promoting good health and employment in the health sector as well as reducing inequalities in health through financial instruments for investing in health.

Directive 2008/50/EC is also an important piece of legislation that strives to merge most of the existing directives into a single one for a better air quality for Europe. A 120 micrograms of ozone per cubic meter benchmark was imposed for the long-term as well.

### 3. SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

The basic needs of humanity such as food or shelter are covered through the means of production and consumption of goods, as well as of services. Sustainable consumption and production is achieved through taking care of the basic needs of society while minimizing the use of natural resources, which implies that waste is reduced, pollutants are eliminated and consumption and the demand of products is reduced if all these aspects are managed properly and if the quality of products and of services are improved. In addition, more agricultural practices that are eco-friendly should be put into usage, as these help preserving the landscape and improving the quality of the soil and water.

There is a link between all these aspects concerning sustainable consumption and production: air pollutants used in fields such as industry, agriculture or transportation are leading not only to health damage, but also to acidification or eutrophication. There is also a link between waste levels and waste treatment, recycling and composting playing a crucial role in reducing the need for raw materials and the extraction of resources.

An 18.74% increase in resource productivity, which is the ratio between gross domestic product (GDP) divided by domestic material consumption (DMC) occurred from 2000, the reference year, to 2011. Whereas GDP grew by 16.5% in the same period, this means an absolute decoupling or separation of the environmental pressures from economic growth. However, the biggest influence on the DMC is the construction sector and the decrease in consumption of non-metallic materials by this sector.

**Figure 6 – Resource productivity**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	100	101.8	104.1	106.4	103.9	104.1	105.9	106.9	107.8	116.2	121.4	118.7

Source: Eurostat.

A decrease of around 144 million tonnes of domestic material consumption, which is the total amount of materials directly used in economy, occurred between 2000 and 2011. However, the progress was not linear, with the peak occurring just before the economic and then a sharp decrease

was noticeable, followed by another increase from 2010 to 2011 due to increased material extraction.

**Figure 7 – Components of domestic material consumption (1.000 tonnes)**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	7.571.127	7.581.051	7.509.537	7.458.702	7.835.691	7.985.058	8.116.448	8.298.301	8.262.579	7.318.863	7.148.461	7.427.197

Source: Eurostat.

A very positive outlook is encountered when it comes to waste generation and treatment. In 2012, out of 492 kg of waste generated per capita, 481 kg of that was disposed of by one form of deposit onto or into land, total incineration, material recycling or composting and digestion. The quantity of waste disposed onto or into land, which is the most environmentally threatening, reduced significantly from 278 kg in 2001 to 162 kg in 2012, a decrease of more than 40%.

**Figure 8 – Municipal waste generation and treatment (kg per capita)**

Geo/time	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU 27	278	269	255	239	221	220	213	199	192	186	171	162

Source: Eurostat.

That share was overcompensated by more green-oriented technologies of waste disposal, like incineration, recycling and composting, with material recycling showing the greatest increase, of around 33% from 2001 to 2012.

**Figure 9 – Material recycling (kg/capita)**

Geo/time	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU 27	88	95	97	99	105	109	119	120	122	125	129	132

Source: Eurostat.

Not only did waste treatment improve significantly across Europe but the atmospheric emissions of the major pollutants like NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub>, NMVOC and NH<sub>3</sub>, commonly known as ammonia, experienced considerable reductions and results are showing the ceiling for 2020 will be reached. NO<sub>x</sub> or nitrogen oxides are mostly released through fuel combustion and therefore are prevalent in the transport and energy production sector. Its effects include acidification which in turn provides damage to the soil and water quality. The 326.000 tonnes reduction from 2000 to 2011 was however mostly due to the transport sector, where ceiling ranges were imposed and they provided to be very effective. Sulphur oxides or SO<sub>x</sub> emission experienced overall the greatest



reduction. They recorded an almost 50% reduction from 2000 to 2011, from 1.14 million tonnes to 6 million tones. As for the nitrogen oxides, they are released through fuel combustion and impact the soil and water quality as well as the air quality.

**Figure 10 – Emissions of sulphur oxides SOx (tonnes)**

Geo/ time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU	11.34	10.94	10.41	10.22	9.780	9.374	9.208	8.886	7.242	6.349	5.974	5.977
27	9.194	3.100	1.218	5.496	.526	.929	.283	.359	.969	.026	.396	.237

Source: Eurostat.

Non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC) are another class of very damaging pollutants to human health. They are released in the environment through combustion, the use of solvents or through different kind of production processes. Being one of the main contributors to ground-level ozone it is encouraging to witness a 34% reduction of levels between 2000 and 2011 in the EU-28 countries. Ammonia underwent the least reduction out of the four main pollutants, experiencing a less than 10% decrease in the EU-28 from 2000 to 2011. The main contributor to the reduction is the modernization of the agricultural sector where ammonia found one of its highest usages.

The EU has already adopted an action plan to combat these issues by trying to decouple economic growth from the environmental component. This would be achieved by setting high standards for products, more precise and convincing information to customers through use of a better labeling framework and providing incentives for improved products. According to researchers in the RESPONSES project (2013) more emphasis needs to be put on implementation and adaptation rather than assessment in terms of climate change, as does closer attention to qualitative insight because of uncertainty in the quantitative analysis methods.

#### **4. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT**

The transport system of the EU is not yet sustainable, as the ever-growing number of transport activities requires large quantities of natural resources, thus affecting the environment in a negative way. Greenhouse gases emission and air and noise pollution are just a few examples of how our natural world and the health of people are impacted negatively by transport. Another effect of transport that is worth mentioning is the fragmentation that transport infrastructure induces on the landscape.

In what concerns energy consumption of transport relative to GDP, we can notice a 12.2% decrease between 2000 and 2012.

**Figure 11 – Energy consumption of transport relative to GDP**

Geo/time	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU 27	99.0	98.6	98.6	98.7	97.5	96.2	94.7	93.2	94.2	91.9	90.0	87.8

Source: Eurostat.

In order to analyze the most popular means of transport among people from the EU, we will divide passenger transport into the following three categories: passenger cars, trains, and the third one motor coaches, buses and trolley buses. As far as passenger cars are concerned, a slight increase of 1.32%, from 83% in 2000 to 84.1% in 2011, was observed, representing the percentage share of this mode of transport.

The average percentage share of trains as modes of transport has remained relatively constant in the years from 2000 to 2011, with a value of 7.1%. As for motor coaches, buses and trolley buses, we can observe a 11.1% decrease in their usage as forms of transport, from 9.9% in 2000 to 8.8% in 2011. Although the transportation of people occupies a large segment from the total of transport activities, freight transport is also a very important component in analyzing and developing the keys through which the EU could make transport sustainable. Freight transport on roads has become over the last few decades indispensable for the well-functioning of several economic industries, and we can notice an increase from 73.7% in 2000 to 75.5% in 2011 in the percentage share of this mode of transport, making this mean of transporting freight the most popular one, three quarters of the total freight transport. As for freight transport done on railways, we can notice a 6.59% decrease in the percentage share of this transport mode, from 19.7% in 2000 to 18.4% eleven years later. The least percentage share of freight transport belongs to the freight carried on inland waterways. In the time span from 2000 to 2011, it decreased slightly from 6.5% to 6.2%, respectively.

Such intense transport activities have serious repercussions for the environment, most noticeable through the rising greenhouse gas emissions, but also for society, in a more direct way, if we take into account the number of road accidents that occur.

## 5. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

Sustainable development is seriously threatened by climate change, with high temperatures, rising sea levels and a higher frequency of weather hazards being more and more obvious in recent

years. Studies have shown that greenhouse gas emissions caused by people is the main reason why the average temperatures have increased so much all over the world in the last two centuries. These emissions come, from the most part, from the burning of fossil fuels not only in power plants, but also in households or auto vehicles. Energy consumption has the largest contribution to the formation of these emissions in the EU, although other sources of the greenhouse gases include excessive farming, waste and deforestation.

The EU aims to limit climate change and to minimize its negative effects upon the environment and society. The major headline indicator through which climate change can be analyzed is the greenhouse gas emissions (1000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent) by sector. Total emissions have decreased with 18.3% from 5.092.754 tonnes in 2000 to 4.578.469 in 2011, though the declining trend is not continuous from year to year. The greenhouse gas emissions that have come from energy industries dropped 15.7%, those produced as a result of manufacturing industries and construction have decreased with 34%, the emissions resulted from industrial processes decreased with 27.4%, those that appeared as a consequence of agriculture fell down by 23.1%, while emissions resulted from waste decreased with 34.1%, all recorded in the 1990-2011 time interval and at the level of the EU countries. In contrast with the overall decrease of greenhouse gas emissions is the sector of transport, within which the emissions have increased in the same time interval and at the level of the EU with 19%.

**Figure 12 – Energy consumption of transport relative to GDP**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU	5.066	5.115	5.070	5.157	5.161	5.129	5.116	5.059	4.952	4.593	4.705	4.550
27	.484	.451	.198	.890	.640	.156	.865	.034	.412	.422	.200	.212

Source: Eurostat.

In the context of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions it is also worth mentioning the trend of these emissions' intensity of energy consumption, which is the ratio between energy-related GHG emissions (carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) and the gross energy consumption produced on the territory of the EU. The intensity of energy consumption has decreased with 19.8% from 1990 to 2011.

Other headline indicators in what concerns climate change are, on the one hand, the share of renewables in gross final energy consumption, which has increased in the EU with almost 70%, from 8.3% in 2004 to 14.1% in 2012, and on the other hand, primary energy consumption, by which is meant the gross consumption occurred inland, the values from 1990 and 2011 being quite similar,

with only a 0.87% difference between them, though the fluctuations of the primary energy consumption over the years in between was much more evident.

To keep under control the climate change, the EU aims to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy resources, which will benefit the EU by reducing the dependence on the imports of energy, as these imports are subjected to unpredictable market prices for fossil fuels. Creating an eco-friendly economy holds many opportunities, as the increasing need for green technologies is capable of innovating and putting on the market new jobs. Investing into electric vehicles or energy storage can prove to be very benefic for the EU as it will export more and more on the global market.

## 6. NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resources is one of the themes most closely associated with sustainable development in the heads of EU citizens since it is one whose needs of fulfillment when related to the requests of current and future generations provide a simple, direct and visible picture in terms of what sustainable development means.

It is crucial for the EU to reform the agriculture industry, the fish and water policies and to make transport, consumption and production sustainable to control and ensure that our natural resources will be sufficient for generations to come.

We can analyze the quality of water in the EU by observing the biochemical oxygen demand in rivers – the lower its value, the higher the water quality. From 1992 until 2008, the mean annual BOD5 in rivers has decreased from 6.27 (mg O2/L) to 1.88 (mg O2/L). Moreover, water abstraction from ground, as well as surface water has proved to be sustainable in the majority of the EU country members. As far as land use is concerned, forest fellings have increased with 22.2% from 400.239 (1000 m3 over bark) to 489.265.34 (1000 m3 over bark) in the 1990-2010 time interval. Another negative aspect related to land use is the fact that more and more artificial areas emerge to the detriment of natural areas. As of 2012, 4.6% of the land area in the EU was covered by artificial areas.

**Figure 13 – Forest annual fellings (1000 m3 over bark)**

Geo/time	1990	2000	2005	2010
EU 27	395.793,96	463.371,02	507.933,67	484.079,33

Source: Eurostat.

While the percentage of all common bird species slightly increased between 2000 and 2011 by 1.1%, the percentage of common farmland birds drastically plunged in the same period, reaching a low of 89.2% in 2011. According to a 2012 report of the European Commission, the main culprit was the simplification of landscapes created by intensive agriculture. Birdlife international (2012) suggests the lack of proper distribution of subsidies from the Common Agriculture Policy in order for maintaining High Nature Farmland is one of the key problems when addressing intensive agriculture.

**Figure 14.1 – Common bird index (2000=100)**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	100.0	102.8	102.5	103.1	106.5	101.8	101.1	103.3	103.4	99.4	100.7	101.1

Source: Eurostat.

**Figure 14.2 – Common farmland species (2000=100)**

Geo/time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU 27	100.0	99.9	94.4	96.3	99.8	94.9	92.8	93.0	93.0	90.3	88.6	89.2

Source: Eurostat.

Pro Europe has identified two main strategic objectives that the EU needs to follow in order to improve the efficiency of natural resources usage. First would be making sure that the consumption of resources and the impact that this has, doesn't exceed the carrying capacity of the environment and secondly, an important reduction in the amount of waste that are disposed as well as in the amount of hazardous waste needs to be achieved.

## 7. FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

The EU has committed itself to helping least-developed countries by striving to donate 0.7% of its gross national income by 2015, however this has been offset now due to the financial crisis and it looks barely in reach.

**Figure 15 – Official development assistance as share of gross national income**

Geo/time	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU(27 countries)	0.34	0.42	0.41	0.37	0.4	0.42	0.44	0.42	0.39

Source: Eurostat.

The official development assistance (ODA) which is measured as the percent of GNI that is donated annually has fallen down in the period 2010-2012 in line with the economic downturn of most of Europe. Least-developed countries rely heavily on ODA. During the years 2004-2006, in the lower middle income countries the share of ODA directed to them increased, while the share meant for least-developed countries decreased. However, since 2009, countries that were less developed received a greater percentage share of ODA than lower middle income countries and by 2011 both least-developed countries and other low income countries were granted 52.2% of the total share of the ODA to be allocated to the countries in need. It should also be noted that in recent years many countries advanced and became lower or upper middle income countries. In the 10 years span between 2000 and 2010, 26 countries that were least-developed or other low-income countries upgraded their status to that of lower or upper middle income countries, depending on the case. As a consequence of this fact, many people argue that a higher percentage of poor people nowadays live in lower or upper middle income countries, not in least-developed ones.

Also, imports from developing countries have increased while those from least-developing countries didn't have the same amount of share. At the level of the EU, imports from China, Hong Kong included, have increased with a staggering 368%, from values of 64.2 billion euros in 1999 to 300.5 billion euros in 2012. EU imports from least developed countries increased with 236%, from 9.6 billion to 32.3 billion, as did imports from lower middle economies with 165% from 62.2 to 165.0 and those from upper middle income countries increased from 122.7 to 356.1.

**Figure 16 – EU imports from developing countries by income group (billion EUR)**

Geo/time	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU 27	93.5	101.1	116.9	139.4	172.0	209.4	244.9	260.3	227.6	296.9	304.8	300.5

Source: Eurostat (online code tsdgp210)

In terms of handling of the global resources, the gap in CO2 emissions per capita has reduced between the EU and developing countries but this is partly due to the increased level of emissions from the developing countries.

According to a Concord report (2013), in order to improve the fight against global poverty EU Member States should maintain for the budget period 2014-2020 their 0.7% ODA/GNI commitment. A more supportive position needs to be taken by the President of the Commission and the Commissioner for Development, who have the duty to defend development assistance and civil society organizations should play a more active role by keeping the pressure on the governments

and raising awareness of citizens in order for them to understand and support the need for assistance.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, sustainable development will be affected in part by the macroeconomic policies that will be undertaken in order to promote growth as well as by policies concerning industrial activities and redistributive measures, that combined should offer decent employment opportunities.

A better social protection framework needs to be put into place with the scope of getting rid of poverty and social exclusion, with nearly a quarter of the EU population being in this kind of danger in 2012. No major advances were observed in terms of public health either, with stagnating progress and a lot to be addressed when it comes to access to health care. The best improvements could be seen in the climate change and energy sector, with a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the last two decade. Positive signs are also emerging in terms of the sustainability of transport with a relative decoupling of energy consumption from economic growth and even absolute decoupling being registered in 2010 and 2011. The EU still needs to strongly tackle the direction in which its natural capital is being spent. Close attentions should also be given to the way the CAP is distributing its resources. When concerning the fight against global poverty, the EU still has a lot of work to do in order to dedicate 0.7% of its GNI to ODA. The amount distributed from the EU budget should be closely monitored and active citizen support is needed. However, with reasonable and well devised policies, the EU can reach its set of 2020 indicators.

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