

Brief analysis of Finland's performance according to the SDG Index and Dashboard 2016–2019

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Background

This document assesses Finland's performance in relation to Sustainable Development Goals as defined under the Agenda 2030 framework of the United Nations (UN). The analysis supports Finnish Voluntary National Review (VNR) prepared for the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2020.

Here the performance of Finland is assessed based on information available from the SDG Index and Dashboard reporting between 2016 and 2019. The assessment aims to draw an overall picture of the development in Finland during the four-year period. It also aims to identify potential data gaps and uncertainties and to verify whether the data collected for international comparisons is suitable for making national-level interpretations over time. Domestic statistics and other data sources are used to verify the results.

Key observations

Finland has been one of the top performers of sustainability according to the SDG Index and Dashboard presented in the Sustainable Development Reports published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (<https://www.sdqindex.org/>). The reports have provided extensive indicator-based country comparisons on an annual basis. Finland was placed fourth in the 2016 report and the country climbed to number three in 2017–2019 reports. Currently, the comparison includes all the UN member countries.

Despite the good overall performance, the SDG Index and Dashboard suggest that further action is needed related to several SDGs. According to the 2019 report, SDG2, SDG12, SDG14 and SDG17 are the ones where greatest improvement is needed in Finland. On the other hand, Finland is leading the implementation of SDG5 even though the goal is still to be reached. Maintaining good performance and addressing vulnerable groups remain permanent challenges also in cases where global goals are already reached. There appear to be opportunities for Finland to learn from the experiences of several other countries, as shown by the variety of countries leading the implementation of individual SDGs (Figure 1.).

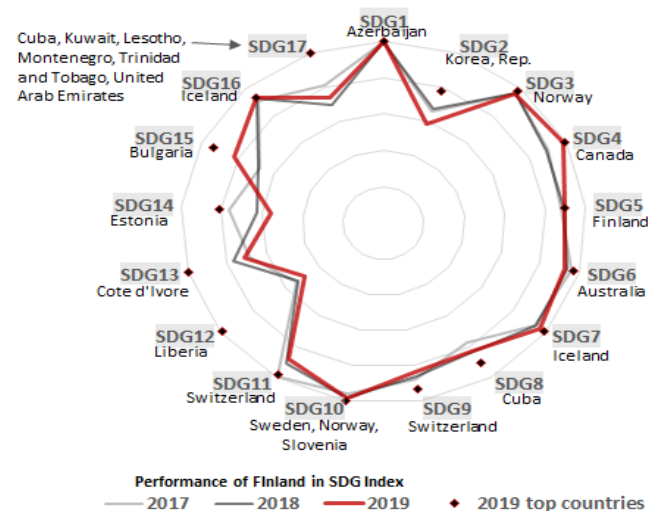


Figure 1: The overall performance of Finland between 2017 and 2019 and comparison with leading performers in each SDG according 2019 reporting. The figure shows the regional average score scaled between 0 and 100. Outer ring of the figure indicates that the SDG is reached.

Key message: positive overall progress, challenges related to environmental effects of high overall consumption and production levels

In this analysis, the 2016 report was taken as a starting point and trends were evaluated focusing on information presented in subsequent reports. Between 2016 and 2019 reporting, 50 indicators provide a solid basis for comparison.¹ Of these indicators 54% show an improving trend, 12% are on the target without a noticeable change, while 34% show a decreasing trend. Overall, most of the indicators show a good performance related to social and economic challenges while greatest long-term challenges arise from high levels of consumption of materials and energy.

The most distinctive positive changes during the four years period include the following:

- Self-reported subjective well-being (SDG3) of Finns has remained at a very high level as is shown also by the top position in the World Happiness Report.
- Finns can enjoy excellent outdoor air quality as measured by particle concentration (PM_{2,5}). More widely, this indicates high standards of infrastructures (SDG9) and good management and overall quality of urban environments (SDG11).

The indicators with the most notable negative trend include:

- Obesity of adult population (SDG2) is a serious and increasing problem related both to nutrition and insufficient physical activity.
- Ocean Health Index and fish caught by trawling indicate the multiple challenges facing life below water (SDG14).
- Low level of international concessional public finance, including official development assistance, shows the difficulties to secure adequate long-term investments for effective implementation of international partnerships (SDG17).

Data coverage remains a key challenge

The results highlight that changes in social, ecological and economic trends are typically slow ones. Caution is needed when changes over time are looked through the lenses of indicators since in many cases what seems as a radical or rapid change is caused by alterations in indicator composition or data coverage rather than actual changes in the country's performance.






The main aim of the SDG Index and Dashboard is to provide a wide-based international country comparison at a given time. The ability of the data to describe temporal development is somewhat limited. There are considerable time lags, some data gaps and several inconsistencies between the data available for international comparisons and the best nationally based data. Furthermore, each SDG needs to be scrutinized in a more detailed manner in order to guide policy actions at the national or local level since aggregation of information to SDG level may mask trends going to different or even opposite directions.

¹ In addition, ten indicators allow comparison either between 2016 and 2018 or between 2017 and 2019. 14 indicators have insufficient data for meaningful interpretation over time.

Summary of the analysis

The following table summarises the results of assessment of the Finnish performance based on the data from SDG index and dashboard, 2016–2019. The 😊 symbol indicates positive and 😞 negative development during the four years period. The green colour of the symbol indicates that the SDG was reached in 2019, yellow colour indicates that the SDG was partly reached, and red colour indicates that the SDG was not yet reached. See Appendix 1 for more detailed results.

SDGs	Change over 2016-2019	Key challenge
DG1 No Poverty	😊	Relative poverty of certain vulnerable groups
SDG2 Zero Hunger	😞	Obesity caused by unhealthy diets and lack of physical activity
SDG3 Good Health and Well-being	😊	Improving the well-being of the most vulnerable groups
SDG4 Quality Education	😞	Maintaining the good status of primary and secondary education
SDG5 Gender Equality	😊	Pay gap mainly caused by differentiation of labour markets by gender
SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation	😞	Ageing of water infrastructures, management of diffuse pollution sources
SDG7 Affordable and Clean Energy	😊	High energy consumption, use of fossil fuels and peat
SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	😊	Long-term unemployment and youth not in employment, education or training
SDG9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	😞	Expenditure on research and development is relatively low
SDG10 Reduced Inequalities	😞	Gradual increase of inequalities potentially eroding social trust
SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	😊	Maintaining and developing the good quality of urban environments
SDG12 Responsible Consumption and Production	😞	High level of material consumption

SDG13 Climate Action		High emission levels
SDG14 Life below Water		Halting the biodiversity loss
SDG15 Life on Land		Halting the biodiversity loss
SDG16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions		Maintaining the low level of corruption
SDG17 Partnership for the Goals		Securing adequate resources for partnerships with the Global South

Appendix I. SDG-specific analysis of the SDG Index and Dashboard data, 2016–2019

The assessment of the trend between 2016 and 2019 is based on the indicators providing full temporal coverage from the whole period. The assessment of the current situation takes into account all the indicators used in the 2019 report. Smiley symbols indicate temporal development while colour indicates distance from target.



Positive trend, SDG reached



Positive trend, SDG partly reached



Positive trend, SDG not reached



Negative trend, SDG reached



Negative trend, SDG partly reached



Negative trend SDG not reached

SDG1 No Poverty



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: Finland has achieved the target levels. However, the indicator *Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$ 1.90* is largely irrelevant in the Finnish context of an economically affluent country. *The Poverty Rate after Taxes and Transfers* shows a positive trend. The key issues include relative poverty of vulnerable groups such as unemployed people, single-parent families and elderly people with low pension.

Data quality: No major concerns observed.

SDG2 Zero Hunger



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: Finland has achieved the target level of *Cereal Yield* but it shows a decreasing trend. *Prevalence of obesity* remains as a serious and increasing challenge.

Data quality: Data for *Undernourishment* in 2019 has been reported as an WHO average value for high-income countries, and therefore its trend was not evaluated in this analysis.

Sustainable Nitrogen Management has included crop yield since 2017, and therefore the value of 2016 is different compared to 2017–2019. Furthermore, interpretation of the trend of

cereal yield is complicated because of annual variability caused by natural conditions and because increase in cereal yield may indicate increased environmental effects.

SDG3 Good Health and Well-being



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 6

Key observations: Finland has achieved most of the targets and is doing well especially in *Subjective Well-being*. *Infant Mortality Rate* remains one of the lowest in the world. *Maternal Mortality Rate* is on the target level but has not improved during the study period.

Data quality: The age definition of WHO leads to the relatively low estimation *Vaccination* level (WHO considers infants to be younger than 12 months, whereas measles vaccination has been given to children aged 12–18 months in Finland since 2014). The indicator of *Healthy Life Expectancy* has been changed to life expectancy. *Neonatal Mortality Rate* and *Mortality Rate, Under 5* do not correspond with the data of the World Bank or with the domestic data that show constantly improving trends for both indicators.

SDG4 Quality Education



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 3

Key observations: Finland has achieved all the targets, but there is quite a lot of variation between the years. *PISA* scores are on the target level but are decreasing. The target of *Population Age 25–34 with Tertiary Education* has barely been reached.

Data quality: The *Number of School Years* was no longer included in the SDG Index in 2019.

SDG5 Gender Equality



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 4

Key observations: Finland shows to be quite equal in terms of *Seats Held by Women in the Parliament* and *Female Participation in Labour Force*. Finnish women are slightly more educated than men in terms of *Years of Schooling*. However, there is a distinguishable *Gender Wage Gap* in the favour of men. It should be noted that the indicator is based on data describing full-time jobs and that differences in working patterns complicate international comparisons.²

Data quality: *Estimated Demand for Contraception that is Unmet* was no longer included in the SDG Index in 2019.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en

SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation


Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: Finland has achieved almost all the targets related to clean water and sanitation. However, *Freshwater Withdrawal* and *Wastewater Treatment* are showing negative developments as the withdrawal percentage has almost doubled between 2016 and 2019 and treatment has decreased by 8 percentage points. However, because of hydrological conditions, water scarcity is not a key problem for Finland. Ageing of the water and sanitation infrastructure is an increasing problem.

Data quality: Data for OECD/high-income countries represented in the SDG index does not correspond with the data of the JMP that the SDG Index uses as a reference. The index states that access to improved sanitary would be 91,6% and 96,9% to improved water in Finland. However, the JMP data shows the percentages to be correspondingly 99,2 and 99,6.

SDG7 Affordable and Clean Energy

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 3

Key observations: On track/maintaining. It should be noticed that the positive trend in the *Share of Renewable Energy* does not necessarily mean an increase of carbon neutral energy. High energy consumption and use of fossil fuels and peat remain as key challenges.

Data quality: No major concerns observed.

SDG8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 5

Key observations: Overall, while Finland has challenges in meeting the economic growth target, the development is positive. The only comparable indicator that was achieved was *Employment-to-Population ratio*. The most challenging targets are *Unemployment* and *Youth not in Employment, Education or Training*.

Data quality: The Finnish *Unemployment Rate* is missing from both the indicator profile and country profile even though there is data available in the Excel sheet of the SDG index.

SDG9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 4

Key observations: Finland has achieved all the targets for indicators with data from 2016–2019. However, *R&D Researchers* and *R&D Expenditure* are both decreasing alarmingly.

Data quality: The percentage of *Internet Users* in 2016 and 2017 does not comply with the data of ITU that was used as a reference. Therefore, the change seems negative, although the values have been steadily between 86 and 89 percent since 2010, according to ITU.³ The indicator of *Patents* has changed in 2017 when the scale was changed to be per 100,000 instead of a million population. Still, the data used in the SDG index does not match with the OECD data.

SDG10 Reduced Inequalities

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: Both PALMA ratio and GINI coefficient showcase that Finland is fairly equal. However, the PALMA ratio has not decreased during the period, meanwhile GINI has increased showing a negative trend.

Data quality: No major concerns observed.

SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities


Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: Finland has achieved the highest level of *Improved Water Source, Piped*. The *Mean Concentration of Particulate Matter of Less Than 2.5 PM* is on the target level and has improved.

Data quality: No major concerns observed.

SDG12 Responsible Consumption and Production

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 1

Key observations: Finland's indicators of sustainable consumption and production are pointing out a very challenging situation. The only comparable indicator is *Non-Recycled Municipal Solid Waste* that shows a positive trend.

Data quality: Notably, the SDG Index indicator profiles do not entail any trend assessments and no raw data for SDG12 indicators was included in the Excel sheet "2019GlobalIndexResults".

The *Municipal Solid Waste* indicator used in the SDG Index is World Bank data from 2012 stating a 2.13 kg/day/capita. According to Statistics Finland, the amount was 1.5 kg/day/capita in 2018, which is smaller than the amount reported in the SDG Index but still far from the target level (0.9). At the same time, achieving the target is challenging as the amount of MSW is increasing.⁴

³ <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

⁴ http://www.stat.fi/til/jate/2018/jate_2018_2020-01-15_tie_001_fi.html

SDG13 Climate Action



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: Finnish *Energy-Related CO₂ emissions* are significantly higher than the target level but no direct climate-related challenges occur based on the indicators. CO₂ Emissions are decreasing but are still far from the target.

Data quality: Data for energy-related CO₂ emissions is rather old and presents the results of 2014.

SDG14 Life below Water



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 3

Key observations: The most challenging indicator is *Fish Caught by Trawling* that is already on a red level and is increasing. In addition, the *Clean Waters* indicator shows that the marine waters under Finnish jurisdiction are somewhat contaminated and the trend is worrisome. Based on the raw data of the 2019 index, the percentage of *Marine Protected Area* has remained the same between years 2016 and 2019. At the same time, the percentage of *Fish Stocks Overexploited* is on target level but has increased alarmingly during the period.

Data quality: *Marine Protected Area* was defined as completely protected in the data of 2016, whereas since 2017, partial coverage was considered enough, causing changes in the dataset. The Ocean Health Index includes both the clean waters and biodiversity values. Biodiversity was not included in the SDG index in 2019 but it did show a significant drop of 10 percentage points in 2016–2018.

SDG15 Life on Land



Change 2016–2019

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 1

Key observations: Finland is on target in relation to the only comparable indicator, the *Red List Index of species survival* but it has decreased during the study period.

Data quality: The numbers presented for the *Red List Index of Species Survival* are higher than numbers presented in the latest national assessment (2010: 0.873, 2019: 0.868) that shows a continuing decline of biodiversity.⁵ The *forest change* indicator was included in the Index from 2016 to 2018 and was on a red level and showing an increase in tree cover loss. However, Finland has reached the target level of *Permanent Deforestation* that replaced the forest change indicator in 2019. The new indicator considers permanent tree cover removal, e.g. due to commodity production but not temporary forest loss due to forestry. The value of Finland was 0. *Terrestrial Protected Area* was considered to be completely protected in the data of 2016, whereas since 2017, partial coverage was considered enough, causing changes in the dataset. In 2017–2019, the area had slightly decreased.

⁵ <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/299501>

SDG16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 6

Key observations: Finland has reached all the targets analysed in this comparison and trends are mostly positive. At the same time, *the Corruption Perception Index* has decreased 5 percentage points and the number of *Homicides* has barely reached the target level.

Data quality: The target of *Government Efficiency* has been left out of the SDG index in 2019 due to lack of up-to-date data. However, the target was achieved, and the trend was positive between 2016 and 2018. In addition, *Transfer of Major Conventional Weapons* that was included in the SDG Index in 2019, is on a yellow level.

SDG17 Partnership for the Goals

Change 2016–2019 

Number of indicators assessed in trend analysis: 2

Key observations: *Government Spending on Health and Education* has reached the target but has decreased within it by 7 percentage points. The amount of *Official Development Assistance* is below the target level and has decreased during the period.

Data quality: No major concerns observed.