

ECONOMIC GROWTH VS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

What does the
growth target in SDG8
mean for developed countries?

In the review year for SDG8, we need to ask whether or not the target of sustained economic growth, measured with GDP, should apply to developed countries. Scientists, NGOs and youth are saying that we need to measure what matters: well-being for all but within planetary boundaries.

Speakers

Isabel Garro

Special Adviser to the High Commissioner for Agenda 2030, Spain.

Prof. Brent Bleys

Professor at the Economics Department of Ghent University, specialised in macroeconomics and alternative indicators for economic welfare.

Bernhard Zlanabitnig

Vice-President of the European Environmental Bureau and director of the Austrian NGO EU-Umweltbüro.

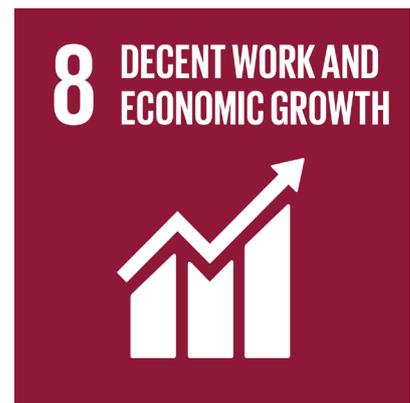
Rosalyn Old

Board member of the European Youth Forum (TBC).

Moderator

Nick Meynen

Policy Officer for Environmental and Economic Justice
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Friday 22 March

13:15 – 14:30

International Conference
Centre (CICG)

Geneva

Rooms: 7 and 8

Lunch provided at 13:00



BACKGROUND

Many scientists say that further economic growth in developed countries is incompatible with environmental sustainability.

[All the data show](#) that an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) leads to an increase in material and energy use, no matter what some say about the decoupling of the two. This moved 238 academics to [publish a letter](#) calling on Europe to move beyond growth-policies. [90,000 Europeans](#) added their support to this academic letter.

How can we make sure the Sustainable Development Goals do not [promote a failing economic model](#) and stop us from implementing deep structural change?

Systemic thinkers from civil society, academia, business and cities recently discussed key leverage points for a positive post-growth economy at the 'Growth in Transition' Vienna conference in the wake of a major postgrowth conference held in the European Parliament, by members of the European Parliament from five different political groups.

They have developed a set of ["Vienna Vehicles"](#) that advise policy-makers at European, national, regional and municipal levels on ways to confront the still worsening crisis of climate change, mass extinction and inequality.

They argue that neither the Paris Agreement nor the SDGs fully deal with the challenges we face and they propose bolder reforms, in line with both scientific research and citizens' demands. We like to know whether the panellists agree with these bolder demands and if so, whether they think a kind of "interpretative text" on SDG 8 target 8.1 is needed.

In a year during which SDG 8 is under review, a critical reflection on the inconsistencies within Agenda 2030 seems appropriate, in particular in relation to the stated goals of sustained GDP growth. It is worth noting that the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs did not mention "planetary boundaries" or "planetary limits" once, while it mentions sustained or sustainable economic growth 23 times.

Could it be that political leaders just find it easier to embrace the SDG agenda because it allows them to continue to talk about infinite growth rather than addressing the bigger challenge of realising a just transition to sustainable well-being for all within planetary boundaries?

- 1 SDG target 8.1
- 2 SDG target 8.4

