



SBO programme
Manual on Sustainable Development criterion U3
(version 2022)

**Preparation and submission of a project application: see
SBO-website**

[\(https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/\)](https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/)

1. Positioning of this manual

This manual is intended for applicants who wish to address the added value of their SBO project proposal in terms of sustainable development.

SBO projects with an elaborated focus on particular sustainable development goals may be granted a score of 9 or 10 score on the sustainable development criterion U3 of the SBO score grids ([SBO-E](#) and [SBO-M](#)). The purpose is to **clarify the eligibility criteria** for sustainable development goals indicators and the **evaluation principles** by which the SBO project proposals are assessed for their anticipated contribution to the sustainable development goals (SDGs). SBO project applications where ‘sustainable development’ does not play a (key) role and no negative impact on SDGs is anticipated, receive a neutral score for the criterion U3.

Apart from the current manual, there is also general SBO manuals for applicants available, as well as manuals that is intended for non-academic SBO stakeholders (societal ([M](#)) - economic ([E](#)) organisations) in an SBO proposal. All information on the SBO funding channel is compiled on the website: <https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/>.

2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015 by the United Nations as the new [global sustainable development agenda](#) for 2030. A set of 17 goals (see figure below) and 169 associated targets were defined by the ‘Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators’ ([IAEG-SDGs](#)). In addition to an ecological dimension, these 17 SDGs represent a very broad range of economic and societal challenges.



Figure 1: Sustainable development goals

Distance to the SDG Targets

In addition to the overall SDG performance of the 193 UN member states, [Sachs and co-workers \(2021\)](#) give an overview of the performance of each country for a specific selection of these IAEG-SDGs indicators. In close consultation with the members of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, **thresholds and trends**

are calculated for these indicators (for methodology, see: Lafortune et al., 2018) which indicate, respectively, the country’s position with regard to the SDG targets and the linear annual growth rates needed to meet the specific SDG target by 2030. The purpose of the [global SDG dashboards](#) of Sachs et al. is to **emphasise specific operational SDGs indicators for any given country that should be prioritised for timely action**. The Sachs report shows, e.g., that many high-income countries perform well for economic SDGs, but face considerable challenges in climate change mitigation, income inequality, gender equality and education.

3. Distance to IAEG-SDG targets as eligibility criterion for research topics within SBO’s SDG criterion U3

Where adequate solutions for achieving the targets do not yet exist, strategic basic research and applied research is an essential link in the societal value chain that could make the SDGs feasible. This is particularly true for IAEG-SDGs that lag well behind their 2030 targets. Therefore, the ‘distance to the SDG targets’ in Belgium, as defined by the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDG Indicators (<https://dashboards.sdgindex.org>), is used as the criterion to delineate which research topics are potentially eligible for a score of 9 or 10 within the sustainability criterion U3.

The “traffic light” colour scheme (green, yellow, orange and red) illustrates how far a country is from achieving a particular goal indicator. The trend indicates whether a country is on track to achieve a particular goal by 2030 based on recent past performance of a given indicator (Lafortune et al. 2018).

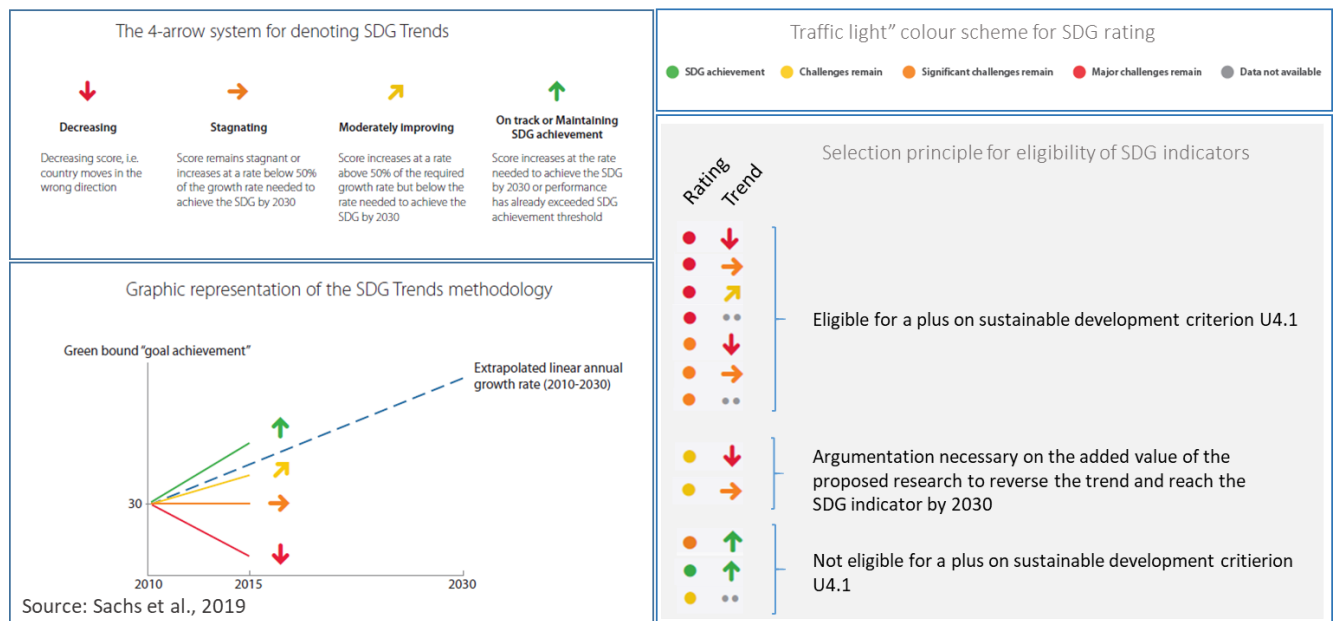


Figure 2: Visual representation of the SDG indicator’s ratings and trends and the principle used for choosing SDG indicators eligible for assessing SBO applications on criterion U3

Selection of eligible SDG indicators

Different situations can be distinguished with respect to the IAEG-SDGs indicators in Sachs et al., 2019:

- Topics for which the indicators in the dashboard SDG index combine a long ‘distance’ (poor starting position) to the final target (orange & red ratings) with a growth rate of less than 50% of what is needed to achieve the SDG by 2030 (orange & red trend indicators), are very likely those where strategic basic research can make a difference in achieving the SDG targets. Research on these topics, if properly substantiated in the application, is eligible for a selection advantage for sustainable development.
- For topics with a good (green and yellow) rating and for which the trend indicates to be on schedule when implementation continues unchanged (green and yellow trend indicators), strategic basic research is more than likely no longer the missing link in achieving the intended SDG target. A sustained roll-out of the

initiatives already taken is required here. These topics are not eligible for a selection advantage for sustainable development criterion U3.

- For (borderline) cases, e.g., a good starting position combined with too low a trend, the project applicant will have to argue why their research will reverse this trend in order to be eligible for a selection advantage for criterion U3.
- IAEG-SDGs indicators for which no trend is known due to lack of historical data (grey dots), a long final target distance (orange or red rating) may be sufficient as an acceptance criterion for a sustainable development advantage, if duly substantiated in the application.

The list of eligible SDG topics (see annex 1) is updated with each SBO call on the basis of the latest available IAEG-SDG dashboard publications (<https://www.sdgindex.org/> and <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org/downloads>). When the UN and EU dashboard publications diverge, the UN publication takes precedence.

In view of the importance and the often **cross-border impact of some SDG aspects**, indicators that do not give rise to concern in Flanders/Belgium, are not a priori excluded from being eligible for a score of 9 or 10 for U3. To this end, the SDG indicators concerned should meet the same 'rating and trend criteria' as discussed above, in a non-Belgian country that is specified in the application file. In addition, and in line with the utilisation objective of SBO, the high level of involvement, participation and co-creation between societal stakeholders in the relevant country and the project applicants must be unequivocally demonstrated in this case. This applies not only during the delineation of the research objectives (pre-project phase) but also during the project execution and the anticipated implementation. Notably, criterion U3, which evaluates the added value for - and associated value chain in Flanders -, remains in full force and effect.

4. Evaluation of the SBO SDG criterion U3

To the extent that the project's research topic meets the aforementioned eligibility requirements, a maximum score of 9 or 10 on SDG criterion U3 is not a priori acquired.

Each project proposal must, besides mentioning for which IAEG-SDGs indicator it seeks to offer a solution (fit within SDGs), specify how it intends to achieve this solution. In addition, the project proposal must include a quantitative, or, if not possible, at least a very thorough qualitative assessment of the expected direct effects, the significance and the sustainability of these effect, indicators for monitoring the change, as well as possible alternative approaches. Obviously, research aiming at solving socio-economic challenges could only meet its promises, provided it is done in consultation with the other stakeholders of the societal pentagon (i.e. companies, government, financial institutions and citizens/associations). Therefore, the proposed approach must also include a well-thought-out utilisation plan that provides with collaboration between different academic and socio-economic partners such as industry, non-governmental and intermediary organisations and the government.

A substantive assessment of the argumentation of the applicants with regard to the fit of the research project and the assignment of the corresponding score is the sequential responsibility of the external peer reviewers, expert panel(s) and the accountable steering committee.

Projects where sustainable development is not a central issue, where there is no fit with the eligible SDGs and where also no negative impact on SDGs is anticipated, will continue to receive a neutral score.

• REFERENCES:

- Lafortune G, Fuller G., Moreno J., Schmidt-Traub G., Kroll C. (2018) SDG Index and Dashboards: Detailed Methodological paper
- Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., & Fuller, G. (2019). *SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2019*. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2021 Includes the SDG Index and Dashboards The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

• APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Overview of the IAEG-SDGs indicators eligible for a score of 9 or 10 on criterion U3 during call 2022-2023.

Eligible for a score of 9 or 10 on SDG criterion U3 provided argumentation on the impact of the proposed research on reaching the SDG			Eligible for a score of 9 or 10 on SDG criterion U3 provided additional substantiation on the necessity of strategic basic research for reaching the SDG		
IAEG-SDGs indicator	Threshold	Trend	IAEG-SDGs indicator	Threshold	Trend
SDG1 (No Poverty)					
SDG2 (Zero Hunger)					
Prevalence of obesity (BMI larger than 30)	orange	↓			
Sustainable Nitrogen Management Index	red	→			
Human Trophic Level	orange	↗			
Gross nitrogen balance on agricultural land	red	?			
Ammonia emissions from agriculture	red	→			
Exports of pesticides banned in the EU	red	?			
SDG3 (Good Health and Well-Being)					
			Gap in self-reported health, by income	yellow	↓
SDG4 (Quality Education)					
Variation in science performance explained by student's socio-economic status	orange	↓	Underachievers in science	yellow	↓
			Adult participation in learning	yellow	→
SDG5 (Gender Equality)					
Proportion of ICT specialists that are women	orange	→			
SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)					
Scarce water consumption embodied in imports	orange	↗			
SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)					
Share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption	red	→			
SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)					

SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)					
			Female share of graduates from STEM fields at the tertiary level	yellow	↓
SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities)					
SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)					
			Satisfaction with public transport	yellow	↓
SDG12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)					
Electronic waste generated	red	?	Production-based emissions of SO ₂	yellow	→
Imported emissions of SO ₂	red	↓			
Imported emissions of reactive Nitrogen	red	?			
Production-based emissions of reactive Nitrogen	red	?			
Gross value added in environmental goods and services sector	red	→			
SDG13 (Climate action)					
CO ₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production	red	→			
CO ₂ emissions embodied in imports	red	→			
Carbon Pricing Score at EUR60/tCO ₂	orange	↗			
SDG14 (Life below Water)					
Ocean Health Index Goal - Clean Waters score	red	↓			
Fish caught that are then discarded	red	↓			
SDG15 (Life on Land)					
Terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity threats embodied in imports	red	?	Nitrate in groundwater (mg NO ₃ /litre)	yellow	↓
Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity	orange	→	Red List Index of species survival	yellow	→
SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)					
Percentage of population who feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live	orange	↓	Unsentenced detainees	yellow	↓
SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals)					

High-income and all OECD DAC countries: International concessional public finance, including official development assistance	orange	↓			
Corporate tax haven score	red	?			
Shifted profits of multinationals	red	↓			