

## Processed contributions

This summary text incorporates contributions from:

- [Boerenbond](#) vzw
- [Union wallonne des Entreprises](#) (UWE)
- [Federation of Belgian Enterprises](#) (VBO-FEB)
- [VOKA](#), Flemish network of enterprises.

## Which SDGs are the partners themselves working on?

- The answers show that the organisations support or promote actions around all SDGs, with some accents.
  - The [Boerenbond](#) refers to many different [concrete initiatives](#) or actions aimed at strengthening the agricultural sector in view of the major challenges of today and tomorrow, including through various forms of innovation. The challenges are environmental, social and ecological. How farmers and the sector as a whole can respond well to climate, energy and nature issues, among others, while ensuring a livable income is the central question. The Farmers' Union also refers to the pioneering role our country is playing in the development of the international chain of [sustainable soy](#).
  - [UWE](#) has largely focused on raising awareness and educating its member companies about the SDGs as a whole. Specifically, the focus is on three elements. (1) There is a strong focus on informing and sensitising UWE members. To this end, a [special website](#) has been developed, in collaboration with the Walloon government. From the set of 169 targets to the 17 SDGs, 63 have been selected around which Walloon companies are active. The website also contains a lot of useful information. (2) Companies that want to commit to certain SDGs are guided in doing so. This is done via a number of thematic cells. Support can be substantive, e.g. for the environment or mobility. There are also initiatives aimed at promoting internships by young people and meetings with students. (3) There is active participation in the public debate. In this, proposals are launched in the field of sustainability and the contribution to the SDGs.
  - [VBO-FEB](#) refers to its renewed mission "Creating Value for Society" for its own contribution. The organisation wants to be the guide to guide companies through the major societal and socio-economic challenges of the future. This is done in several ways. (1) The mission is fleshed out substantively through information and advocacy for companies and that linked to the various policy initiatives that have an impact on companies. The organisation's various competence centres have embedded sustainability in their operations. (2) Long-term visions are being worked on in various cross-cutting areas in the field of mobility (mobility, circular economy, taxation, energy, labour market, digitalisation, etc.). This is done through studies, reports and participation in public debates. Together with all sector federations, the general future vision for our country has also been developed, entitled [Horizon 2030](#). This explicitly

refers to the SDGs as a framework and to the intention to make our country 'SDG-Proof'. The plan consists of a series of 40 fiches. The organisation refers to a number of fiches related to the following SDGs: 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 17. (3) The organisation also chooses to raise awareness about new trends and highlights good practices. This is done through its own publications and events (such as the [Belgian Business Awards for the Environment](#)), among others. (4) Its member sectors have also produced sustainability reports and roadmaps. Some examples: [Essenscia](#), [Comeos](#), [Fevia](#), [Agoria](#), [Synergid](#).

- [VOKA](#). Voka tries to embed the SDGs in its own operations in several ways. (1) The common thread throughout its operations is the [Plan Growing Together](#). In it, there is a big focus on health, innovation and sustainability. (2) Via the [Voka Charter Sustainable Business](#), more than 300 companies are actively supported in their plans to implement the 17 SDGs. Companies can receive certificates for their efforts and Voka works together with Cifal Flanders and UNITAR to this end. (3) In addition, the organisation is committed to several specific SDGs. These include learning networks on energy and sustainable entrepreneurship, digitalisation projects, a platform on healthcare, etc.
- Some general elements (from the discussion during the SDG Forum):
  - A lot of companies, including small businesses, contribute to the realisation of the SDGs in practice, but do not always communicate or certify this.
  - Partnerships with NGOs can increase companies' commitment.

### **What are priority themes or SDGs for Belgium in implementing the 2030 Agenda?**

- Organisations' responses place different emphases.
  - It is important for Belgium to focus on a number of goals and targets for which scores are not yet always good, as shown by the indicators of the SDG Index. These include: SDG 7 (especially: share of renewable energy in total energy supply), SDG 9 (especially: female share of graduates in STEM fields at tertiary level), SDG 11 (especially: satisfaction with public transport), SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 17 (especially: development cooperation). (UWE)
  - Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to the effects linked to imports and exports. Belgium is an open economy, where the ecological footprint is linked to international trade. It is important to pay attention to the ecological and social impact beyond our borders (e.g. electronic waste, pollution, risk of human rights violations). It is necessary to have a good understanding of the entire supply chain and customers. For this, good data is needed. (UWE)
  - Companies want to make strong commitments in three areas: more people at work, investing in the future, transforming to a sustainable economy. In the transition to a sustainable economy, the focus is on: CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, green innovation, green mobility and promoting ESG principles. It is important to look at EU reference countries for these themes. The aim should be to do at least as well as those reference countries for those themes. Making that possible should be a priority of the Belgian government. (VOKA)
  - Our country faces four major challenges: the tendency to slow down our economic growth and productivity growth, the ageing of our population, (global) climate change, the international trend towards deglobalisation. To respond to these, a major turnaround is needed in four major areas: digitalisation, greening, labour market, governments. (VBO-FEB)

- A special focus is needed on the agricultural sector. To integrate sustainability expectations, a correct income for farmers is a necessary condition. That guarantee is not there now. It is necessary for sustainability policies to take into account the different forms of business in the sector and their interactions. Agriculture is the first link in the agri-food chain. It is important to address the challenges together and chain-wide. It is further important that healthy and sustainably produced food is consumed in a healthy diet and lifestyle. (Boerenbond)
- Some general elements (from the discussion during the SDG Forum):
  - There is a need for initiatives to further inform and sensitise small businesses about the SDGs as well. Despite the current difficult circumstances, companies are convinced of the importance of the SDGs.
  - A major challenge lies in the area of the circular economy, including a focus on eco-design and life-cycle analysis. All this is not only about production, but also about consumption patterns.
  - Different legislations at different policy levels are a challenge for companies.
  - The energy crisis has a heavy impact on companies. At the same time, there may also be opportunities to accelerate the energy transition, including by consuming less energy.

#### **What issues require changes at European or international level to implement the 2030 Agenda?**

- The organisations point to a number of issues:
  - There is a need for proper follow-up within the EU, so that all countries are assessed at the same level and the bar is set equally high. (VOKA)
  - Internationally, all countries need to be on board. That way we can ensure the continent's competitiveness and prevent carbon leakage. (VOKA)
  - There is a need for a different food policy. That means a policy that guarantees a fair price for the food producer while keeping food affordable for vulnerable consumers. Price agreements within the chain are needed. This requires an adjustment of competition legislation. There is a need for a true level playing field between food imported into the EU and food produced here under strict sustainability requirements. In that context, a form of border levy (analogous to CBAM) that is WTO-compliant could be considered. (Boerenbond)
  - There is a need for measures that can normalise the current energy price situation. Climate investments must be able to take place in a favourable investment climate. Rising energy costs present entrepreneurs with difficult dilemmas. (VOKA)
  - There is a need for a different form of governance. The 2030 Agenda represents a new policy vision around which EU countries can unite and for which citizens can be mobilised. (UWE)

#### **What key messages would you like to see in the VNR?**

- The organisations have some suggestions:
  - The business community is already strongly committed to achieving the SDGs and will continue to do so. The VOKA Charter Sustainable Business programme is innovative and unique. With this programme, our country is a frontrunner. Because of other countries, there is interest in this. There are great opportunities in this. But companies cannot do

this alone. All stakeholders must cooperate: government, citizens, knowledge institutions, ... The importance of this kind of programme should be clearly stated in the VNR. (VOKA)

- It is very important to guard against policy coherence of public policies, and that at national and European level. This is important for accelerating the ecological transition and ensuring greater social justice. (UWE)
- It is globally very important to be more vigilant about policy coherence of public policies at national, inter-federal and European levels. The structure of our Belgian economy is very open and does not allow us to engage in 'gold plating'. (VBO-FEB)
- The VNR should express appreciation for sustainable food production in Belgium and recognise that the sustainability of food production is ongoing. There is a need for a system adjustment in terms of a fair price for the producer as a condition for further sustainability. (Boerenbond)

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