

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH: CASE OF EU

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Abstract. This article assesses the eighth goal of sustainable development – Decent work and economic growth (SDG8). The theoretical part of the article analyses the concept of SDG8 and its importance for the European Union's economy. The research methodology covers multiple criteria decision-making (MCDM) approaches. In order to assign the weight to criteria, the CRITIC method was employed. After that, the priority line was developed by applying the COPRAS approach. CRITIC method results showed that assessing the targets and their constituting indicators of the SDG8, the most vital indicator is the annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person. COPRAS method results showed that the most advanced countries to implement SDG8 are Germany with 100 points and France with 91 points. The results also revealed that the less advanced in implementing SDG 8 countries are Latvia with 59 points and Finland with 56 points.

Keywords: SDG8 sustainable development, EU countries, decent work, economic growth, CRITIC, COPRAS.

JEL Classification: B41, C22, E00, Q01.

Introduction

Today's world is increasingly aware of the importance of social, ethnic and ecological goals, as the development of new technologies is still having a devastating effect on the environment and natural resources, leading to a scarcity of these resources. In order to create a unique, sustainable, resource-efficient and environmentally friendly economy that would reduce unemployment and social inequalities, in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly presented the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets (United Nations, 2015).

The key principles of this agenda are economic development, tackling social problems and their compatibility with environmental issues. All these principles must be integrated into national policies. Different institutions and strategic planning systems based on the principles of sustainable development are being developed (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019) in order to reach the stated goals by 2030. An ambitious plan for 17 Sustainable Development Goals has been developed. Implementation of the plan should eradicate poverty, inequality and overexploitation of natural resources (Griggs et al., 2014). All these aspects are closely related to economic development, so sustainable development is a topic for analysis in the

context of economics. Hence, this article chooses to analyse precisely the 8 Sustainable Development Goal – Decent Work and Growth in the European Union. This goal recognises the importance of sustainable economic growth and a high level of economic productivity in creating well-paid jobs and ensuring resource efficiency. This goal aims at allowing all to have a decent job, eliminate forced and child labour and trafficking in human beings, and ensuring a safe working environment. The SDG8 in this article is chosen because it is specifically related to economic growth, and the scientific literature justifies it with much research.

As sustainable development is a global initiative covering all areas of life, it is essential to explore it and its implications. Scientists from different fields analyse different aspects of sustainable development, comparing how different countries are succeeding in implementing the sustainable development agenda (Claro & Esteves, 2020; Issever Grochová & Litzman, 2021) other authors have researched how the pursuit of different goals of sustainable development affects the economies of countries (Jianu et al., 2021), or how the progress of sustainable development affects other sectors in the European Union (Cernev & Fenner, 2020). Since the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997, sustainable development has become one of the European Union's priority objectives;

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therefore, analysing the current economic situation of the countries in the context of sustainable development is relevant for further successful sustainable development.

This article will assess the 8 goal of sustainable development – Decent work and economic growth (SDG8). This objective is crucial for the analysis of the economic situation in the European Union because it promotes full employment in the labour market, including equal working conditions for all workers, regardless of gender or age, and economic growth based on the principles of sustainability (Frey, 2017). This goal is aimed at the economic efficiency of countries and their regions, which focuses on job creation and economic prosperity, promoting social progress and environmental sustainability. Therefore, SDG8 is an essential and achievable goal in the European Union.

The theoretical part of the article analyses the concept of SDG8 and its importance for the European Union economy. The research assesses only those objectives and indicators of SDG8, the statistics of which are provided in databases. The study uses the CRITIC method for determining the weights of factors and the method of complex proportional assessment – COPRAS for countries' priority line creation.

For methodological purposes, the article is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to the critical literature review on theoretical aspects of SDG8. The second part of the article explains the methodology of CRITIC and COPRAS analysis. The third part presents results and discussion based on the weighting procedure to find out the most significant indicator of SDG8 and rank the most advanced countries in implementing SDG8.

1. Theoretical aspects of SDG8

SDG8 incorporates two phenomena, i.e. decent work and economic growth. According to Blustein et al. (2016),

decent work is considered as fair, dignified, stable, and secure. At the same time, economic growth is traditionally connected with the GDP per capita of the country. In other words, both decent work and economic growth are vital for a country's overall well-being. Hence, SDG8 has gained great attention from scholars from different fields of science, including economists, managers, engineers and others. The most recent pieces of research in the area of SDG8 are presented in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, the performed researches are very diverse: the development of the tourism sector is analysed, labour market inequality issues, the development of blue economy, increasing productivity, COVID-19 pandemic and other topics. This abundance of analysed topics in the context of SDG8 demonstrates the relevance and importance of this goal. However, the pursuit of this goal also receives negative feedback from the authors. Haberl et al. (2020) argue that long-term economic growth runs counter to ecological sustainability and that achieving this goal is therefore contrary to sustainable development. Kreinin and Aigner (2021) also question the accuracy of the current name of SDG8, as the authors say decent work and economic growth do not meet robust sustainability criteria and propose the new name – “Sustainable Work and Growth”. Other authors enquire whether decent work does not encourage forced labour, which would allow for the further development of modern slavery (Frey, 2017; Rai et al., 2019). Although one of the targets of this goal is precise to end modern slavery and human trafficking, the authors still see some risks. The different views of the authors are essential for the scientific debate, as it leads to new research and shows that global topics such as sustainable development, which seeks universal well-being, can also have a negative side. SDG8 is also analysed in the context of culture; UNESCO 2017 has announced its intention to

Table 1. SDG8 Decent work and economic growth: the latest scientific research (source: authors)

Authors & year	Research
Scheyvens et al. (2021).	The tourism industry is analysed, addressing the issues of economic growth, employment, sustainable consumption and production. The authors examine opportunities for the development of a more sustainable tourism sector.
Jianu et al. (2021).	The authors were researching labour market inequalities in EU regions in the medium and long term.
Scheyvens et al. (2021), Rai et al. (2019).	The authors analysed whether the pursuit of SDG8 does not violate human rights and does not encourage forced labour, which would allow the development of modern slavery.
Herreros (2021).	Measures to increase productivity for implementation are analysed in the current study.
Kreinin and Aigner (2021).	In the study, the authors propose a new SDG8 system in line with the strong ideas of sustainability “Sustainable Work and Growth”.
Chaleta et al. (2021).	The authors analyse how much higher education institutions pay attention in their study programs for SDG8.
Lucas and Landman (2021).	The authors investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic affected SDG8.
Adeniji et al. (2020).	The authors of the study analyse the role of selected company managers, how it influences employee behaviour and their involvement in work processes, and how this affects productivity.
Grant et al., (2021).	Promote gender equality in cultural enterprises, increase equal access to cultural and educational services, and develop the integration of innovation in the cultural sector.

include culture in the implementation of SDGs by 2030 (UNESCO, 2017). Culture is proposed to be seen as an engine for sustainable development by integrating it into all SDGs including and SDG 8 (Wiktor-Mach, 2020). A specific action plan is proposed: to promote gender equality in cultural enterprises, to increase equal access to cultural and educational services, and to develop the integration of innovation in the cultural sector. All this

makes culture a tool that can contribute to economic development (Grant et al., 2021). There is also a strong focus on the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage, which places a particular burden on developing economies. Additional UNESCO funding and experts are provided to help such countries.

Thus, summarising the opinions of the authors, it can be stated that the scientific literature for SDG 8 pays a

Table 2. SDG8 Decent work and economic growth factors and indicators assessed in the research (compiled by the authors based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development)

Targets	Indicators	Measurement
8.1. Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries	8.1.1. Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita	Real GDP per capita
8.2. Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors	8.2.1. Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person	Real GDP per employed person
8.3. Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services	8.3.1. Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex	Active population aged 15 to 74 who has been unemployed for 12 months or more.
8.4. Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead	8.4.2. Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP	Domestic material consumption per GDP
8.5. By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	8.5.2. Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Unemployment rate
8.6. By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training	8.6.1. Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training	Aged (15–24 years) not in education, employment or training
8.8. Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment	8.8.1. Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status	Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries
8.9. By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products	8.9.1. Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate	Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate
	8.9.2. Number of jobs in tourism industries as a proportion of total jobs and growth rate of jobs, by sex	Number of jobs in tourism industries (%)
8.10. Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all	8.10.1. Number of commercial bank branches and automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults	Number of commercial bank branches
8.a. Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular, least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries	8.a.1. Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements mil.	Aid for Trade commitments
8.b. By 2020, develop and operationalise a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization	8.b.1. Total government spending in social protection and employment programmes as a proportion of the national budgets and GDP	Proportion of the national budgets and GDP

lot of attention, and this goal is explored from various aspects. And from the point of view of economics, this goal describes a development that creates the conditions for long-term stable economic growth in a sustainable manner.

Further analysis of SDG 8 is presented in Table 2, in which the objectives and indicators of this goal¹ are provided. SDG 8 consists of 12 targets and indicators. All the targets except 8.7 are included in the study. 8.7 target is not analysed due to missing data for Europe. However, it could be assumed that forced labour, modern slavery, forced recruitment of children to work and trafficking in human beings are irrelevant for the European Union. Moreover, in Table 2, the measurement of the indicators are proposed. The data provided in Table 2 is used for further research.

2. Methodology

The methodology is divided into two steps. The first step covers the assignment of weight to selected indicators. And the second step is devoted to the prioritisation of the EU countries in terms of SDG 8. The data used in this study are from 2019 (the latest available information). The data was collected from Eurostat, United Nations, International Labour Organisation databases.

2.1. CRITIC method

The CRITIC method was selected for weights assignment as it is considered an objective methodology for that issue. The CRITIC method approach is described in the following steps (Krishnan et al., 2021; Paradowski et al., 2021):

Step 1. The decision matrix X showing the performance of different alternatives with respect to selected criteria is constructed:

$$X = [x_{ij}]_{m \times n} = \begin{bmatrix} x_{11} & x_{12} & \dots & x_{1n} \\ x_{21} & x_{22} & \dots & x_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ x_{m1} & x_{m2} & \dots & x_{mn} \end{bmatrix} \quad (1)$$

$i \in \{1, 2, \dots, m\}, j \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}.$

Step 2. The normalisation of the decision matrix:

$$r_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij} - x_j^{\min}}{x_j^{\max} - x_j^{\min}}, \quad i \in \{1, 2, \dots, m\}, j \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}, \quad (2)$$

where: m – the number of alternatives; n – number of criteria.

Step 3. Calculation of the standard deviation σ_j of each r_j .

Step 4. Calculation of correlation of every pair of normalised criteria and construction of the symmetric matrix with elements R_{ij} .

Step 5. Determination of conflict measure between criteria:

C_j released by the j -th criterion:

$$C_j = \sigma_j \sum_{j=1}^n (1 - R_{ij}). \quad (4)$$

Step 7. Determination of the weights of criteria:

$$w_j = \frac{C_j}{\sum_{j=1}^n C_j}. \quad (5)$$

2.2. COPRAS method

Multi-criteria decision-making methods are widely used in many areas, and sustainable development is not an exception (Narang et al., 2021). The COPRAS method is used by many researchers investigating topics related to sustainable development. For instance, Balali et al. (2020) use it for analysing sustainable development and the use of sustainable materials in the construction industry. Mousavi-Nasab and Sotoudeh-Anvari (2018) apply the method for examining sustainable architecture. Due to wide usage, COPRAS was selected for the present study. Below are the steps of the method.

Step 1. Construction of the decision matrix:

$$D = \begin{bmatrix} A_1 [x_{11} & x_{12} & \dots & x_{1n}] \\ A_2 [x_{21} & x_{22} & \dots & x_{2n}] \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ A_m [x_{m1} & x_{m2} & \dots & x_{mn}] \end{bmatrix}, \quad (6)$$

where: D – decision matrix; A_m – selected European country; x_{mn} – research data for every country; m – number of alternatives; n – number of criteria.

Step 2. Normalisation of the decision matrix:

$$\bar{x}_{ij} = \frac{x_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^m x_{ij}}. \quad (7)$$

Step 3. Construction of weighted decision matrix:

$$\tilde{x}_{ij} = \bar{x}_{ij} \cdot w_j. \quad (8)$$

Step 4. Calculation of maximising and minimising index for each alternative:

$$S_{+i} = \sum_{j=1}^n \tilde{x}_{+ij}; \quad (9)$$

$$S_{-i} = \sum_{j=1}^n \tilde{x}_{-ij}. \quad (10)$$

Step 5. Calculation of the relative weight of each alternative:

$$Q_i = S_{+i} + \frac{S_{-\min} \sum_{i=1}^m S_{-i}}{S_{-i} \sum_{i=1}^m \frac{S_{-\min}}{S_i}}. \quad (11)$$

¹ Only information with available data is provided.

Step 6. Computation of utility degree for all the alternatives (countries):

$$U_i = \frac{Q_i}{Q_{\max}} \cdot 100\%. \quad (12)$$

3. Results and discussion

The first part of the research focuses on determining the weights of the 12 targets that constitute SDG 8 using the CRITIC method obtained results are shown in Table 3. As can be seen from Table 3, the most significant indicator is the annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person. This is a probable result, as this indicator describes the level of economic growth of the country and has a close interface with unemployment. As GDP slows growth, unemployment begins to rise due to the decline of labour demand. Thus, the dynamics of GDP and its fluctuations directly affect the labour market.

Table 3. Obtained weights (source: authors' calculations)

Indicators	Weights of indicators	Indicators	Weights of indicators
8.1.1. Indicator	0.08727	8.6.1. Indicator	0.03936
8.2.1. Indicator	0.08778	8.8.1. Indicator	0.04655
8.3.1. Indicator	0.04593	8.9.1. Indicator	0.03528
8.4.2. Indicator	0.05716	8.9.2. Indicator	0.03828
8.5.2. Indicator by age 15	0.04593	8.10.1. Indicator	0.04048
8.5.2. Indicator by age 15–	0.04449	8.a.1. Indicator	0.05354
8.5.2. Indicator by age 25+	0.04567	8.b.1. Indicator	0.06436

The second part of the research used the COPRAS method to estimate the priority ranking of European Union countries in terms of SDG 8. The obtained results are shown in Table 4.

The results show that the most advanced countries in terms of SDG8 are Germany with 100 points and France with 91 points. The obtained results are logically substantiated, as according to SDG Index statistics, both countries are among the top ten countries in the world. Another critical index we can compare both countries' results with is the Global Competitiveness Index. According to the data from 2019, Germany ranks 7th position among the world countries, and France – 15th. It is worth noting that SDG8 has a significant impact on the country's overall competitiveness, as the Member States are committed to achieving SDGs by 2030; therefore, this indicator is crucial for the competitiveness of countries, which could correlate with the efficiency of the economy. One of the critical principles of competitiveness is the country's ability to respond quickly to changing markets (Aiginger, 2021), i.e. the higher level of SDG8, the more flexible the country is and could rapidly respond to any changes. Moreover, the countries that are able to combine economic growth with the principles of sustainability and innovation (which SDG8 is about) are more attractive to investors. The full picture of the countries' ranking is provided in Figure 1.

As it could be seen from Figure 1, the top countries are Germany, France and Greece, while Slovakia, Latvia and Finland showed the lowest results.

Conclusions

SDG 8 is a widely discussed topic in the scientific literature. The analysis of recent research in the context of

Table 4. SDG8: Decent work and economic growth ranking of European Union country (source: authors' calculations)

Country	Relative weight	Determination of the degree of efficiency	Rank	Country	Relative weight	Determination of the degree of efficiency	Rank
Germany	1.508	100	1	Slovenia	0.991	65.677	15
France	1.370	90.824	2	Lithuania	0.977	64.762	16
Greece	1.292	85.686	3	Italy	0.975	64.629	17
Malta	1.264	83.816	4	Bulgaria	0.971	64.411	18
Spain	1.116	74.000	5	Romania	0.970	64.310	19
Poland	1.094	72.538	6	Luxembourg	0.931	61.721	20
Croatia	1.074	71.213	7	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	0.9170	60.776	21
Netherlands	1.067	70.714	8	Austria	0.914	60.616	22
Ireland	1.033	68.471	9	Sweden	0.907	60.120	23
Hungary	1.021	67.709	10	Denmark	0.901	59.727	24
Cyprus	1.008	66.842	11	Belgium	0.896	59.411	25
Portugal	0.995	65.988	12	Slovakia	0.894	59.261	26
Czechia	0.994	65.884	13	Latvia	0.888	58.858	27
Estonia	0.991	65.687	14	Finland	0.838	55.589	28

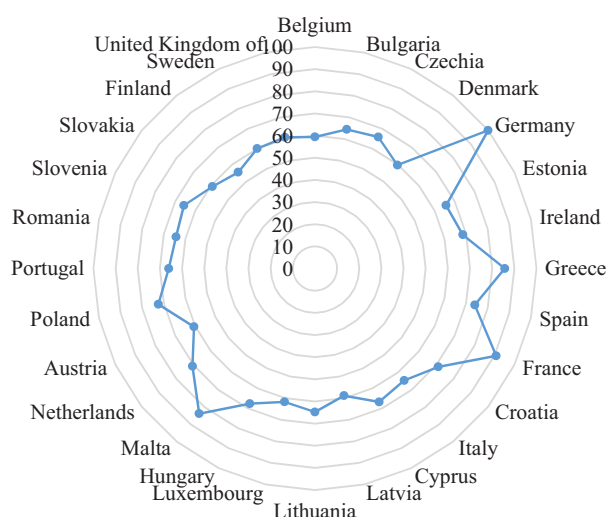


Figure 1. EU countries priority line according to SDG8 (source: authors' calculations)

SDG 8 highlights the following main areas of investigation: tourism sector development, labour market inequality issues, productivity growth, the development of a blue economy, promote gender equality in cultural enterprises, increasing equal access to cultural and educational services, and developing the integration of innovation in the cultural sector, COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of the scientific literature also showed a negative attitude of some authors towards the implementation of SDG 8. The authors question whether long-term economic growth is compatible with ecological sustainability and whether decent work does not encourage forced labour. Such a wide-ranging discussion demonstrates the relevance and importance of this goal.

In this research, the countries of the European Union were ranked according to their progress in implementing SDG 8. MCDM methods were used in the study (CRITIC to determine the objective weight and COPRAS in order to create a priority line of the European Union countries based on the 2019 SDG 8 statistics).

Based on the weighting procedure, the most significant indicator of SDG 8 is the Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person. And this is a likely result, as this indicator describes the level of development of the country's economy and has close links with unemployment. The results of the COPRAS method show that the most advanced countries in implementing SDG 8 are Germany with 100 points and France with 91 points. The results also revealed that the less advanced in implementing SDG 8 countries are Latvia with 59 points and Finland with 56 points.

The results obtained are logically based on comparing them with the SDG Index and the Global Competitiveness Index. In both cases, these top countries are among the 15 countries globally, which also justifies their level of progress. The results of the study may be useful in implementing the European Union's commitments to SDG by 2030.

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