**Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment**

**Reply by Portugal to the questionnaire on “Human Rights, Transformative Actions and UN Sustainable Development Goals”**

1. **What transformative actions would be required, given the national context of your State, to achieve SDGs directly linked to environmental sustainability (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)? Transformative actions can be understood as “bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path”[[1]](#footnote-1).**

Transformative actions as the promotion of sustainable production systems and increasing investment in rural infrastructure as well as in research and agricultural development are required to meet SDG 2. Progress towards SDG 6 requires ensuring universal access to safe and affordable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, improving water quality and water-use efficiency (including the water reuse for agriculture and urban green spaces irrigation) and encouraging sustainable abstractions and supply of freshwater. Regarding SDG 7, the availability of a higher budget for supporting the investment in renewable energy deployment across several technologies and TRLs (technology readiness level), namely the more advanced, is needed as well as the development of a fully integrated energy market. Further incentives, governmental support and implementation of standards would contribute to transform an economy model based on a linear approach to a circular one, also addressing SDG 12.

In the same sense, stronger investments in green economy activities, infrastructure and skills are needed to tackle climate action (SDG 13), while fostering biodiversity preservation and restoration. Concerted efforts to reduce marine pollution, ocean acidification and to protect and restore marine and coastal ecosystems is required to make progress towards SDG 14. Furthermore, a group of key actions should be set in order to preserve life on land (SDG 15) such as: conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems; end deforestation; expand marine and terrestrial protected areas globally (new 30 x 30 CBD Goal); and combat soil degradation and prevent desertification and integrate these concerns in governmental policies design while providing the adequate financial resources.

1. **What steps has your State taken to accelerate progress towards fulfilling the eight SDGs that have the most direct environmental linkages (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)?**

In the context of SDG 2, Portugal has launched the [Agenda for Research, Innovation and Sustainability in Agriculture](https://recuperarportugal.gov.pt/2021/10/01/agenda-para-investigacao-inovacao-e-sustentabilidade-da-agricultura/), aimed to boost research and innovation towards sustainable agriculture, and the [Azorean Agriculture](https://portal.azores.gov.pt/web/drpfe/c5.-relan%C3%A7amento-econ%C3%B3mico-da-agricultura-a%C3%A7oriana) an investment fund for supporting recovery and resilience, innovation and green and digital transition. In order to address to the drought problem in the southern region, addressing SDG 6, the [Regional Water Efficiency Plans for Algarve and Alentejo](https://apambiente.pt/agua/planos-regionais-de-eficiencia-hidrica) regions was created in 2020. Also, [Efficiency and Water reinforcement of Supply and Irrigation Systems Plan](https://recuperarportugal.gov.pt/2021/06/13/investimento-re-c09-i03/) in the Autonomous Region of Madeira and the [Crato’s Multi-Purpose Hydraulic Use Project](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/comunicado?i=empreendimento-de-aproveitamento-hidraulico-de-fins-multiplos-do-crato-ate-2025) by 2025 will accelerate progress on SDG 6.

Portugal has been moving towards achieving increasingly higher levels of incorporation of renewable sources in the various sectors, having reached a total incorporation quota well above the European average and in a growing trend in recent years. During the first quarter of 2022, Portugal was the fourth European State with the highest level of incorporation of renewable energies in the electricity sector, 58.7%. As a result, Portugal has managed to reduce its energy dependence from abroad (dependency of 65,8% in 2020), increasing domestic energy production and reducing primary energy consumption, thus also ensuring a higher level of supply security. Moreover, Portugal has submitted an [Energy Compact](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021_energy_compact_v_27_aug_portugal_final.pdf) (2021) to contribute to the efforts towards the achievement of SDG 7 and related SDG’s. Portugal was the first country in the world to assume the goal of being carbon neutral in 2050. The [Roadmap for Carbon Neutrality for 2050](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3D%3DBAAAAB%2BLCAAAAAAABACzMDexBAC4h9DRBAAAAA%3D%3D) aims at reducing emissions between 85% and 90% by 2050, compared with 2005. Aligned with this vision, Portugal was one of the first European countries to adopt a [National Hydrogen Strategy](https://kig.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EN_H2_ENG.pdf), having developed a [national roadmap](https://www.ap2h2.pt/download.php?id=178) and some specific funding programs on hydrogen production.

These measures also contribute to SDG 13. In this field, Portugal has been reducing CO2 emissions to 32% less in 2020, when compared to 2005; and adopted the [Climate Law](https://files.dre.pt/1s/2021/12/25300/0000500032.pdf), aiming at enforcing environmental rights by promoting sustainable development.

Portugal’s efforts to meet SDG 14 are embodied the [National Ocean Strategy 2021-2030](https://www.dgpm.mm.gov.pt/enm-21-30) and in the 31 voluntary commitments, covering a wide range of areas, such as: the reduction of marine litter, through technological solutions to promote the recycling of waste produced on board ships and vessels; the conservation of at least 14% of coastal and marine areas; the increase in funding in marine biodiversity conservation, research and innovation projects. Moreover, the project [“*Fishing for a garbage-free sea*”](http://www.marsemlixo.com/) addresses target 14.1; and the [Programme Blue School](https://escolaazul.pt/) promotes Ocean Literacy, complying with target 14.2. Portugal is also coordinating the project [“All Atlantic Blue Schools”](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CLuis.Galante%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CWS4UG9NH%5CAll%20Atlantic%20Blue%20Schools), aiming at creating a network of pilot blue schools around the Atlantic basin, joining 14 countries.

On SDG 15, Portugal adopted a [National Strategy for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity 2030](https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/resolucao-conselho-ministros/55-2018-115226936), a [National Plan for Integrated Wildland Fire Management](https://www.agif.pt/app/uploads/2019/05/PNGIFR_ENGLISHVERSION_menor.pdf) and the [Red Book of Vascular Plants of Portugal](https://listavermelha-flora.pt/), which was completed in 2019. Regarding SDG 12, Portugal adopted an [Action Plan for Circular Economy](https://eco.nomia.pt/contents/ficheiros/paec-en-version-4.pdf) and the [National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Food Waste](https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2018-03/fw_eu-platform_20180319_sub-ai_pres-05.pdf).

1. **What specific actions is your State taking to fulfil the commitments to “leave no one behind” and to prioritize actions “to reach the furthest behind first” in terms of achieving SDGs 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15?**

[Portugal’s Recovery and Resilience Plan](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/portugals-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en) responds to the urgent need of fostering a strong recovery. The reforms and investments in this plan will help Portugal become more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda, the plan will contribute to achieve progress on the SDGs, aiming at leaving no one behind.

Moreover, in the context of COVID-19, Portugal has continued to advocate for a Human Rights-based and whole-of-society approach to [migration](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/portuguese-government-gives-temporary-residence-immigrants-pending-applications_en). In 2020, Portugal granted temporary residence status to more than 350,000 migrants, providing them full access to health care and social support. Migrants were included into the national vaccination plan, regardless of their status, thus contributing to reduce inequalities.

Furthermore, Portugal adopted [The National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People 2017-2023](https://urbanlex.unhabitat.org/law/5204). Within the [National Ocean Strategy 2021-2030](https://www.dgpm.mm.gov.pt/enm-21-30) and its Action Plan includes initiatives aiming at eliminating pockets of poverty in the coastal communities and at fostering gender equality in marine activities. And the [National System of Classified Areas](https://rea.apambiente.pt/content/sistema-nacional-de-%C3%A1reas-classificadas), fundamental for territorial cohesion, involves local communities and actors and aims to promote local development.

When it comes to Portugal’s development cooperation policy, our country has been paying particular attention to its main partner countries’ needs, which include the most vulnerable (LDCs and SIDS). In this regard, Portugal has been strengthening the support for these countries to achieve SDGs 6, 7, 13 targets, notwithstanding SDGs 12, 14 and 15, at a lower intensity. The support regarding SDGs 6, 12, 13 and 15 will indirectly contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger and to increase food security.

1. **Are there any good practices that you would like to highlight?**

The [Crato’s Multi-Purpose Hydraulic Use Project](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/comunicado?i=empreendimento-de-aproveitamento-hidraulico-de-fins-multiplos-do-crato-ate-2025) is one of the biggest investments ever made in the Alto Alentejo region for fostering development and cohesion, contributing to SDG 6, as well as energy transition and carbon neutrality. In the field of SDG 7, [Portugal adopted renewable energy auctions](https://prod.iea.org/policies/6574-portugal-renewable-energy-auctions) (2019) as a procurement tool for a new utility-scale renewable projects.

Furthermore, [LocalSDG](https://odslocal.pt/?lang=EN) is a municipal platform of SDGs targeted on the mobilization of municipal decision-makers and technicians, local agents and citizens. Also at the local level, the [Municipal Plans for the Integration of Migrants](https://www.acm.gov.pt/196) provide an important tool towards a more adequate, inclusive and fairer management of migratory flows and for enhancing migrants contribution to local development.

Several initiatives have emerged at regional and local levels to foster green mobility, as the “[Cicloficinas”](https://cicloficina.pt/), an informal initiative that gives technical support to people who ride bicycles.

The Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics, in partnership with private banks, launched the SDGs Observatory, aiming at monitoring the 50 largest Portuguese companies, with emphasis on listed and a sample of SMEs.

In order to raise awareness on the importance of increasing gender equality and to share experiences on the role of women in the maritime sector, Portugal held the conference ["A Sea of Equality"](https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/events/conference-a-sea-of-equality/) during the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Good practices worthy of highlighting include the public consultations developed before deciding on strategic public policies, as the one before the approval of the National Ocean Strategy 2021-2030. Also, institutional and civic participation were encouraged and a participatory dialogue took place when elaborating the National Energy and Climate Plan 2030.

1. **How much budget has your State invested, since 2015, on actions to fulfil the eight SDGs that have the most direct environmental linkages (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)?**

The national budget is not yet elaborated based on SDGs criteria. Thereby, it is not possible to provide full data for this purpose. Nevertheless, according to the National Institute for Statistics, the public expenditure in environment from 2015 to 2020 was more than 7 million euros, which corresponds to an increase of 50%. Biodiversity and landscape protection represented 32% of the expense in 2015 and 25% in 2020, the same year as when waste management expenditures represented 31% and other activities related to environment protection 41%.

1. **What are the main barriers to progress towards achieving the relevant SDGs?**

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 and the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine put additional pressure on the financial and economic systems. Thus, the level of inflation, the harder access to resources and the uncertainty may deviate crucial efforts away from a sustainable development focus, challenging particularly SDG 1, 2 and 7. Moreover, in terms of energy, the grid infrastructure is a limiting factor since there is not enough injection capacity available – in terms of capacity and number of injection points. In addition to that, grid infrastructure for international electricity and gas transmission is also a limiting factor towards an integrated market.

Furthermore, the current situation of [drought in Portugal mainland](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/en/gc22/communication/news-item?i=portuguese-minister-of-agriculture-requests-from-the-european-commission-measures-to-minimize-the-ef) impacts negatively agricultural activity and challenges access to water (SDGs 2 and 6).

Regarding SDG 14, there are challenges in both traditional sectors (modernization of fisheries, increasing the average income of fishermen, fostering development initiatives in coastal and fishing communities and mitigation of ecological impacts of their activities) and emergent sectors (access to funds for innovative projects in biotechnology, ocean renewable energy or marine robotics and competitive capacity in the global market).

The main challenge on SDG 15 is to ensure regular reporting of indicators. The comparability and adequacy between global metadata and the methodologies used at national level makes it difficult to define proxies and properly evaluate progress.

1. **How can steps taken by your State to implement the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (recognized in A/HRC/RES/48/13) serve as a catalyst for making more rapid progress towards SDGs 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15?**

As the first country in the world to enshrine the right to a healthy environment in its Constitution, in 1976, Portugal fully supported the recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment at the Human Rights Council last year. It was an historic moment and a much needed and timely decision, with enriched the body of universal human rights.

We hope this recognition serves as a catalyst to the improvement of laws and policies on the protection of the environment worldwide, with that also strengthening the protection of the wide range of human rights inevitably affected by environmental degradation.

We fully support the work of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, and we look forward to welcoming Mr. Boyd in Portugal for your mission in 2022.

As mentioned above, the [National Plan for Energy and Climate](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/pt_final_necp_main_en.pdf), the [Climate Law](https://files.dre.pt/1s/2021/12/25300/0000500032.pdf), the [Environmental Fund](https://www.fundoambiental.pt/), the [National Ocean Strategy 2021-2030](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CLuis.Galante%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CWS4UG9NH%5CNational%20Ocean%20Strategy%202021-2030), its Plan of Action and specific funds (e.g. Blue Fund and Blue Portugal) contribute to promote the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, while accelerating progress towards SDGs.

Moreover, a great effort has been made in the articulation between the three Rio Conventions. A holistic approach of their main goals and targets allows an improved monitoring process. These intricate subjects, such as climate, biodiversity and desertification are key aspects to achieve a clean, healthy sustainable environment for all.

1. **How could increasing gender equality contribute to more rapid progress towards SDGs 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15?**

Portugal underlines that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is key to achieve all SDGs. Public policies and measures across all areas of government take into account that women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources, political participation and opportunities.

Though playing an important role in the rural life, women still face gender discrimination in agriculture. Its elimination would play an important contribution to progress on SDG 2. Since huge gender inequalities still exist in access to water, sanitation and hygiene, women’s rights to these issues play an important role in achieving SDG 6.

Access to energy (SDG7) can contribute to expand opportunities for women, for example by enabling them to work from home, thus generating more income. Access to energy enhances women’s access to education and the labour market.

When empowered, women can be powerful agents of change, for instance, playing a leading role in protecting marine ecosystems and the sustainable use of marine resources (SDG 14) by improving waste management, especially in coastal areas; also, in biodiversity protection, conservation and sustainable farming. Thus, gender equality is fundamental also to build more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable communities and cities (SDG 11) and to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12).

1. **How can businesses contribute to transformative actions and accelerating progress to achieve SDGs 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15?**

Achieving SDGs requires strengthened cooperation between the public and private spheres. Businesses play a central role in promoting sustainable development, through changes in production patterns, prevention, management of industrial accidents, and on investment in innovation, including technology development and transfer.

More particularly, businesses activity in the agricultural sector, the creation of better conditions for increasing the income of producers, making the agricultural activity more attractive and competitive is important for accomplishing SDG 2.

The private sector also plays an important role on the energy sector, particularly in renewable energy production, encompassing electricity, gas and liquid fuels and increasing energy efficiency (SDG 7).

Private sector is key to accelerate the transition to sustainable business models, as companies can adopt environmentally friendly practices, thus contributing to SDG 12 and SDG 7, 13, 14, 15. Particularly, companies can contribute to sustainable fishery, by taking into consideration the vulnerability level of the fish species, preventing stock overexploitation or fostering the use of reusable bags, avoiding plastic bags, which could end up as plastic/marine pollution (SDG 14). Businesses also can measure, manage and mitigate their impact and dependence on land and ecosystems. Investing in innovation and responsible policies promotes the sustainable use of land and forests, while retaining consumer confidence in eco-friendly products.

1. A/RES/70/1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)