

SDG Barometer 2026

Executive Summary

A more practical question

The SDG Barometer 2026 looks beyond whether organizations know, mention, or formally adopt the SDGs. Instead, it asks a more practical question: what happens when organizations actually try to work with the SDGs over time?

To answer this question, this edition of the SDG Barometer uses a case-based reasoning approach, examining the experiences, struggles, lessons, and emerging practices of Belgian organizations. The sample includes 14 for-profit and six not-for-profit organizations, with organizations from both Flanders and Wallonia, and a range of organizational sizes. As the participating organizations are relatively engaged with sustainability, the findings should be read as practice-based insights rather than as a representative picture of all Belgian organizations.

Less visible can be more meaningful

The findings reveal an important shift. SDG maturity is not primarily about doing more with the SDGs, mentioning more goals, or communicating them more prominently. It is about becoming better at translating broad ambitions into organizational choices, routines, evidence, and sustained action.

Organizations appear to follow different trajectories in their SDG use. At an early stage, the goals often serve as a map: they help organizations identify how existing activities relate to sustainability. With experience, this use can deepen. The SDGs become a roadmap for prioritization, a compass for strategic direction, and ultimately a framework for building evidence and accountability.

This also changes how so-called 'SDG fatigue' should be understood. The data suggest that organizations are not necessarily tiring of sustainable development itself. Rather, they struggle with the unresolved work of turning a universal agenda into concrete decisions about procurement, investment, HR, operations, stakeholder engagement, reporting, and business models.

Likewise, declining visibility of the SDGs does not automatically imply declining relevance. In more mature organizations, the goals may become less prominent as a label while becoming more deeply embedded in materiality assessments, governance, reporting, strategy, and operational routines. The future of the SDGs may therefore lie partly in silent integration: less emphasis on displaying the framework, and more on what it enables organizations to do.

What looks like SDG fatigue may therefore often be translation fatigue.

Where organizations get stuck

Across the cases, six recurring implementation struggles stand out: focus, translation, data, support, credibility, and continuity. These are not isolated barriers; they reinforce one another. Weak prioritization complicates translation. Poor data undermine credible claims. Broad internal support does not necessarily generate ownership or resources. And initiatives that depend on individual champions, temporary funding, or reporting cycles often struggle to endure.

The study also identifies a support trap: sustainability may receive broad endorsement until it starts affecting budgets, responsibilities, procedures, investment choices, or workloads. Genuine support therefore requires more than agreement; it requires organizational capacity and practical enablement.

Evidence presents a similar challenge. Rather than moving directly from activity to 'impact', organizations typically climb an evidence ladder: from examples and initiatives, to outputs, indicators and baselines, recurring measurement routines, and eventually credible outcome and impact claims. This turns measurement from a reporting exercise into a learning process.

The next step: building transition capacity

Taken together, the findings point toward a broader concept: SDG transition capacity.

For organizations, this means moving from SDG alignment to SDG consequences: asking what selected goals require them to change, strengthen, stop, scale, or organize differently. It means prioritizing more deliberately, developing people who can translate sustainability across functions, building evidence before making strong impact claims, turning collections of projects into coherent transition portfolios, communicating progress as evidence-based learning, and institutionalizing continuity. Mature practice may therefore mean fewer SDGs, but stronger logic, clearer choices, and deeper consequences.

For policymakers and intermediary organizations, the implication is equally clear: support should increasingly focus not only on encouraging SDG engagement, but on strengthening organizations' capacity to translate, measure, learn, collaborate, and sustain change. Sector-based learning, shared evidence approaches, case-based learning, support for transition portfolios, and better alignment between the SDGs and regulatory frameworks can help make that shift.

The key question is no longer whether organizations are active on the SDGs, but whether their activities accumulate into coherent, embedded, and sustained organizational change.



The central message of the SDG Barometer 2026 is simple in principle, but complex in practice: the next phase of the SDGs is not about making them more visible, but about making them more consequential. Doing so requires organizations to turn broad ambitions into choices, routines, evidence, learning, and sustained capacity for change.

Authors:
Prof. Lars Moratis,
Prof. Valérie Swaen,
Prof. Luc van Liedekerke



Partners

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