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**AN OVERVIEW ABOUT THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

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An overview about the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals²

Kulcsszavak: Fenntartható Fejlődési Célok, nemzetközi környezetjog, soft law, nemzetközi jog

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In 2015 a new, innovative agenda³ was introduced by the United Nations to maintain sustainable development with special emphasis on human rights issues and urgent global challenges, such as the serious threat of climate change or the loss of biodiversity. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) involve the different aspects of sustainable development and the 17 goals create an integrated network with the necessary holistic approach. The agenda is one of the specific forms of international law's instruments, as it is a so-called soft law document. In this article, we will not explain the widespread dispute about the legal nature of the soft law documents but we will examine the working process of this significant soft law document through the latest comprehensive report⁴ (hereinafter the Report) which aims to underline the importance of these kinds of instruments. I consider the definition of Andrew T. Guzman and Timothy L. Meyer as an accurate starting point. They claim the soft law as a continuum between fully binding treaties and fully political positions⁵. Their approach is really practical as they do not focus on the doctrinal dispute of the binding nature but the extent of the obligations and define soft law as nonbinding rules that interpret the understanding of the legally binding rules.⁶ Examining the report, we will experience the fine line between these two kinds of instruments. After the release of the report, in this decisive period of the

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„AZ INNOVÁCIÓS ÉS TECHNOLÓGIAI MINISZTERIUM ÚNKP-19-3-I-PPKE- 80 KÓDSZÁMÚ ÚJ NEMZETI KIVÁLÓSÁG PROGRAMJÁNAK SZAKMAI TÁMOGATÁSÁVAL KÉSZÜLT.” 

³ A/RES/70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 [without reference to a Main Committee (A/70/L.1)] 21. 10. 2015. [hereinafter A/RES/70/1.].

⁴ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf> (07.10.2019).

⁵ GUZMAN, Andrew T. – MEYER, Timothy L.: International soft law. *Journal of Legal Analysis*. Vol 2., no. 1., 2010. 173. doi: 10.1093/jla/2.1.171

⁶ Ibid. 174.

implementation, we will examine the following questions raised by the SDGs. On the one hand, an overview of the current status of the implementation with the help of this data-oriented and comprehensive report. On the other hand, to understand the importance of the agenda, we will consider the agenda's role in the international legal environment and how connected it is.

1. The current state of the realisation of the Goals and its international legal connections

*Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere*⁷

If we examine the Goals, we will notice that they not only focus on the future generation but the inequalities between the generation living today. This extended time dimension suits well to the principles of the inter- and intragenerational equity described by Edith Brown Weiss. According to her the intragenerational equity – the equity among and within the countries and the people living today – complete the equity between the present and future generations.⁸ Goal 1 is an excellent example of this approach besides other goals such as Goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 5 (gender equality). Of course, all these goals have further aspects which can affect future generations, for examples, it would be difficult to envisage the possibility of environmentally friendly, long-term solutions where the people live in extreme poverty.

According to the report, there is progress in the implementation of this goal but it is too slow. The share of the world population living in extreme poverty was 36% in 1990, 10% in 2015 - we need to mention that this year was the end of the previous agenda, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)⁹, which also has set a target of fighting against extreme poverty – and it was 8,6 % in 2018, while the goal is 6 % by 2030.¹⁰ The goal is significant as it can be considered as a first step of the realisation of the other goals and it has a strong bond with resilience, which is essential in today's fast-changing environment.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The second goal is in correlation with the first goal, in fact, they were marked together as the MDGs' first goal.¹¹ This goal also raises the aspect of intragenerational equity, in particular, that the goal aims to end hunger and provide access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for

⁷ A/RES/70/1. 15.

⁸ BROWN WEISS, Edith: Climate Change, Intergenerational Equity, and International Law. *Vermont Journal of Environmental Law*. vol. 9, no. 3. 2008, 616. doi: 10.2307/vermjenvilaw.9.3.375.

⁹ United Nations Millennium Declaration UN G.A. Resolution A/RES/55/2. 18 September 2000. [hereinafter: A/RES/55/2].

¹⁰ The report. 6.

¹¹ A/RES/55/2 4 – 5. 7. – 8.

all by 2030.¹² This goal mostly focuses on the issue of the right to food which appeared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) related to the right to a standard of living.¹³ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) considers the negative and positive aspects of the right as it distinct the fundamental right to be free from hunger¹⁴ and the right to food.¹⁵ An Optional Protocol expanded the procedural aspect of the Convention which entered into force in 2013 during the implementation time of the MDGs.¹⁶

According to Sándor Szemesi, there is a difference between the quantitative and the qualitative hunger and the latter belongs to the aspects of the right to health. The right to food means in this light the right to food which covers the daily needs of the human body and which absence could cause a risk to life or death.¹⁷ The SDG itself considers both aspects as it declares the universal access not only to sufficient but nutritious food, which is a qualitative feature.

We could see the importance of this Goal and the related human rights, but according to the report, meeting these requirements is shockingly far as the undernourished people's number was 784 million in 2015 while it was 821 million in 2017, mostly in Africa. Thus, hunger not only has not decreased but is increasing.¹⁸

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 3 has a strong bond with the right to health, from which the health's definition is the following, according to the World Health Organisation's Constitution: *'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'*.¹⁹ According to Ágnes Dósa, this definition was disputed and she suggests the definition of General Comment No. 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states that every human being has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and this is fundamental to exercise other human rights.²⁰ She added that this could mean that the implementation depends on the economic circumstances.²¹

Goal 3 aims concrete targets, such as reduce the global maternal mortality ratio – which was a significant goal of the MDG too – or end preventable deaths of newborns and children under

¹² A/RES/70/1. 15.

¹³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 25.

¹⁴ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27. Article 11. para 2.

¹⁵ Ibid Article 11. para 1.

¹⁶ Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. A/RES/63/117, adopted on 10 December 2008.

¹⁷ SZEMESI, Sándor: Élelemhez való jog [Right to food]. In: Lamm, Vanda (ed.) *Emberi Jogi Enciklopédia [Human Right Encyclopedia]*. Budapest, HVG ORAC, 2018. 266 – 267.

¹⁸ The report. 7.

¹⁹ Constitution of the World Health Organisation adopted by the International Health Conference held in New York from 19 June to 22 July 1946, signed on 22 July 1946.

²⁰ CESCR General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12) Adopted at the Twenty-second Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, on 11 August 2000 (Contained in Document E/C.12/2000/4). para 1.

²¹ DÓSA, Ágnes: Egészséghez való jog. [Right to health] In: Lamm, Vanda (ed.) *Emberi Jogi Enciklopédia [Human Right Encyclopedia]*. Budapest, HVG ORAC, 201889.

5 years of age or fight against communicable diseases such as AIDS, Hepatitis and non-communicable diseases. It is worth to mention that the non-communicable diseases, like some kind of cancer or non-communicable lung condition, can be caused by air pollution.²² This means that this Goal also considers an aspect of the right to a healthy environment and has a correlation with other goals, such as goal 11: sustainable cities and communities.

While the realisation of goal 2 is still inappropriate the implementation of goal 3 can be characterised as positive. There is major progress in improving health, fighting against communicable diseases, reducing maternal and child mortality and increasing life expectancy, but improvement is still needed in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis and access to essential health services. The achievement against HIV can underline the statements above as the infection per 1000 uninfected people in sub-Saharan Africa (between the age of 15 and 49) was 3,39 in 2010 and 2,14 in 2017.²³

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Quality education is also a key to meet the requirements set in the agenda and to promote sustainable development. The importance of education also appears in other goals, for example in goal 3. related to the universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care²⁴ or in goal 13, which focuses on the fight against climate change, where the improving of the education on climate change mitigation, adaption, impact reduction, and early warning is a significant aspiration.²⁵

This goal also has a precursor in the agenda of the MDGs and the right to education can be found in several binding and non-binding international documents. The UDHR declares the universal right of the education which shall be free, at least at the elementary level (it shall be compulsory at this level too). In the higher and technical level, the main criteria are the general availability and equal accessibility.²⁶ The CESCR also addresses this as a universal human right and confirms the free and compulsory characteristic of the elementary education, while it states, that the secondary education shall be made generally available and accessible to all in particular by the progressive introduction of free education. Related to higher education, it also emphasises the importance of equitable access, moreover, it proposes the progressive introduction of free education too, just like at the secondary level.²⁷ The related specific international documents, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

²² EEA Report No 5/2015. 44. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2015#tabdata-references> (11.10.2019).

²³ The report 7 – 11.

²⁴ Goal 3. 3.7. A/RES/70/1. 16.

²⁵ Goal 13. 13.3. A/RES/70/1. 23.

²⁶ UDHR Article 26.

²⁷ CESCR Article 13.

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)²⁸ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRD)²⁹ also, consider the issue. According to the CEDAW, the States shall take the appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in this field and describes its various aspects.³⁰ The CRD contains similar provisions like the CESCR about the different levels of education.³¹ Goal 4 goes even further by expanding the aspiration to maintain free, equitable and quality education even at the secondary level. It also sets minimum standards like achieving at least literacy and numeracy.³²

The report shows that the States must make more efforts to meet the requirements because 262 million children and youth, between the age of 6 -17 were out of school in 2017 and more than half of the children and adolescents struggle with the minimum standard of reading and math. Moreover, in the developing countries, in particular, in Sub-Saharan Africa the basic infrastructure and facilities are missing in educational institutions. Particular attention should be paid to the Southern Asian region because globally 750 million adults – mostly women – remained illiterate in 2016 and half of them (49%) live there.³³

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

There was a goal dedicated to this issue in the agenda of the MDGs and women's emancipation is a part of the UN's human right system. The Member States affirm their belief of women and men's equality in the UDHR's Preamble and it declares the equal right to marriage and family (the only restriction is the full age) and it emphasises that women and men both have the same rights in this field too.³⁴ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) declares the equal right of all men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights.³⁵ The above-mentioned CEDAW defines the term '*discrimination against women*' means and the obligations of the States Parties. It covers various aspects, such as the enjoyment of educational, political, cultural, social, economic rights. The CEDAW has its control-mechanism through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which has an important role in the implementation of the SDGs. According to the substantive statement of 2018, the Commission is a major provider of the implementation of the principle 'no-one should be left behind', which is a significant principle. The Commission's general recommendations can promote the vision of substantive equity. Moreover, the Commission can set the critical normative standards, related to food, education, health, housing, non-discrimination, political participation, freedoms of expression and

²⁸ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979 entry into force 3 September 1981.

²⁹ Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990.

³⁰ CEDAW Article 10.

³¹ CRD Article 28.

³² A/RES/70/1. 17.

³³ The report 11.

³⁴ UDHR Preamble and Article 16.

³⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976.

assembly. This could lead to the adoption of a development framework based on the proposals of the Committee.³⁶ Goal 5, besides the prohibition of discrimination between men and women, aspires to combat violence against women, early or forced marriage, female genital mutilation, promotes shared responsibility in households, women's representation in politics and decision-making, universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.³⁷

While there is progress in the implementation of this Goal – for example, the occurrence of the female genital mutilation and the early marriage has declined (but circa 200 million girls are subjected to this), the legal discrimination and the unfair social norms are still existing. The sexual violence is worrying, according to the data from 106 countries, between 2005 and 2017, the proportion of ever-partnered women and girls between the age of 15 and 49 who were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, the world average is 18%, while it is 23% in the Central and Southern Africa, 23% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12% in Latin-America and 6% in Europe. The women's political participation seems to be quiet low, women are underrepresented in at all levels of political leadership.³⁸

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The right to water and basic sanitation is a relatively new member of the universal human rights family. The UDHR and the CESCRC do not mention exactly this right, but according to General Comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11 about the right to an adequate standard of living, implicates this right too. To provide this right the State Parties must maintain the availability, the physical, economic, equal and informational accessibility. It also sets qualitative standards, the water must be safe, free from contamination and micro-organism or chemical substances, radiological hazards, it must have acceptable colour, odour and taste.³⁹ Goal 6 also promotes the equitable and universal access to water and sanitation, while it encourages the improvement of water quality, the implementation of integrated water resources management and the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems.⁴⁰ This issue also affects Europe, this is evidenced by the first successful European citizens' initiative, the so-called 'Right2Water' initiative.⁴¹ The initiative, just like Goal 6, gives particular attention to the vulnerable and marginalised groups, and it raises the non-liberalisation in the related public services. The ECI's main success is that it started the legislative process of the European Union, after the close of the collection of signatures, the Commission published a Proposal⁴², however according to the relevant regulation, it is not

³⁶ Contribution to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in response to a call for inputs by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 27 April 2018.

³⁷ A/RES/70/1. 18.

³⁸ The report 13.

³⁹ General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the Covenant) Adopted at the Twenty-ninth Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, on 20 January 2003 (Contained in Document E/C.12/2002/11).

⁴⁰ A/RES/70/1. 18.

⁴¹ 'Water and sanitation are a human right! Water is a public good, not a commodity!'

⁴² Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the quality of water intended for human consumption (recast) Brussels, 1.2.2018 COM(2017) 753 final 2017/0332 (COD).

mandatory.⁴³ May this could be assumed as a special form of the soft law's transformation into hard law, or at least its impact.

The report confirms that there are serious problems, with the implementation of this goal, billions of people still lack safe water and sanitation and to meet the requirements by 2030, the current rate of progress must be doubled. Even though the fact, that globally the share of the population using safely managed drinking water services increased from 61% to 71% between 2000 and 2015, which remains 71% in 2017, 785 million people still lacked even a basic drinking water service. The share of the population using safely managed sanitation services is lower compared to the drinking water services, but it increased, as it was 28% in 2000, 43% in 2015 and 54% in 2017. 40% of the World's population still have no basic handwashing facility with soap and water at home. The report adds that significant effort is needed in cooperation, regarding the transboundary context of the issue.⁴⁴

Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy

I assume that there is no doubt that the World's energy demand has steadily increased since the last decade. This may have resulted the formation of the energy law, a new international branch of law, which is still taking shape. According to Orsolya Bányai⁴⁵ several international legal documents contain environmental concerns but the scope of that documents which aspire to the reduction of energy consumption or which promote the use of renewable energy resources, is much narrower. It includes for example the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) and the Energy Charter Protocol on Energy Efficiency and Related Environmental Aspects (PEEREA).⁴⁶ According to the ECT's Consolidated version of 2016, the enhanced energy trade is a catalyst for the sustainable use of energy⁴⁷ and investing in energy efficiency can ensure sustainable economic growth.⁴⁸ Moreover, market-oriented energy prices that reflect environmental costs, efficient and coordinated policy measures, use of renewable energy sources and clean technologies can lead to a sustainable energy mix, implied by energy efficiency and environmental protection.⁴⁹ Goal 7 declares the universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services and aspires to increase the share of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, promote investments in this infrastructure and expand it, in particular in the developing regions.⁵⁰

The report shows that there are mixed results in implementing this Goal, the access to electricity in developing countries, energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy are improving, nevertheless, 800 million people are remaining without electricity. The global

⁴³ Regulation (EU) No 211/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on the citizens' initiative. L 65/1, 11.3.2011. Article 10 – 11.

⁴⁴ The report 14.

⁴⁵ BÁNYAI, Orsolya: *Energiajog az ökológiai fenntarthatóság szolgálatában* [Energy law for ecological sustainability]. Debrecen, DELA Könyvkiadó- és Kereskedelmi Kft., 2014. 73 – 77.

⁴⁶ Energy Charter Treaty and the Energy Charter Protocol on Energy Efficiency and Related Environmental Aspects signed in Lisbon on 17 December 1994.

⁴⁷ The International Energy Charter, Consolidated Energy Charter Treaty with Related Documents. 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 12.

⁴⁹ Ibid Title I.. para 3. 15.

⁵⁰ A/RES/70/1. 19.

electrification rate was 83% in 2010, 87% in 2015 and 89% in 2017. The share of the people who use clean cooking fuels and technologies is growing, it was 57% in 2010 and 61% in 2017, but close to 3 billion people are still using polluting and inefficient technologies. There is a progress in the usage of renewable energy, which is quite slow, the share was 16,6% in 2010 and it was just 17,5% in 2016. The reports marks that a much faster development is needed.⁵¹

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

The right to work can be identified as a classical social right, a second-generational right in the human right classification system, created by Karel Vasak.⁵² This kind of human rights has a double nature, on the one hand, they expect the negative behaviour from the state, on the other hand, the state is required to take positive actions. This is set out in Article 23 of the UDHR, in complementary with the prohibition of discrimination.⁵³ The CESCR adds that the State Parties are required to take steps which include technical and vocational guidance and training programs, policies and techniques.⁵⁴ Goal 8 concerns this right but it also takes account of the aspects of sustainable economic growth depending on national circumstances. It also designates a leading role to the developed countries in improving economic growth in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, which complies with the principle of intragenerational equity. We need to mention the International Labour Organisation, which is engaged in the implementation of the SDGs. The Director-General launched the topic Future of Work and its scope is so boarded that it includes all the Goals but have special linkage among others with goal 8.⁵⁵

According to the report, the labour productivity has increased and the unemployment decreased to the pre-financial crisis level, but more progress is required in increasing employment opportunities, especially creating opportunities dedicated to youths, reduce the informal employment and the gender pay gap, which is related to goal 5 too.⁵⁶

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 9 declares the universal, equitable access to quality, reliable, sustainable, resilient infrastructure, promotes the inclusive and sustainable industrialization and the clean, environmentally-friendly technologies, support the small-scale industrial enterprises, especially

⁵¹ The report 15 – 16.

⁵² Karel VASAK: A 30-year struggle- The sustained efforts to give the force of law to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. *The Unesco Courier: A window open on the world.* 11/1977. 28-29, 32.

⁵³ UDHR Article 23.

⁵⁴ CESCR Article 6.

⁵⁵ International Labour Organisation: The future of work

<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/fow/lang--en/index.htm> (10.11.2019.).

⁵⁶ The report 17.

in developing countries and enhance scientific research.⁵⁷ This goal is essential in order to properly meet the other target's requirements because many of them expect the sustainable and resilient infrastructure, it is vital for examples in achieving good health and well-being (goal 3), quality education (goal 4), access to clean water and sanitation for all (goal 6) or to affordable and clean energy (goal 7), and the sustainability of cities (goal 11) etc. Grete Faremo points out that climate change created new challenges as it increases the frequency of natural disasters. Thus, the sustainable infrastructure has two aspects, on the one hand, it is related to the support of the sustainable development, on the other hand, it needs to focus on the post-disaster situations which indicate the need for a risk-based approach.⁵⁸ However, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030⁵⁹ is named in goal 11, it is relevant in this field too, especially, that this goal could serve as a precondition of the sustainable urbanization. The Sendai Framework's second priority is strengthening the disaster risk governance at the global, national and regional levels. The latter two require national and local frameworks which address among others the importance of disaster risk in publicly owned, managed or regulated services and infrastructures.⁶⁰

It is positive that the financing for economic infrastructure has increased in developing countries and there is great progress in mobile connecting. Despite this, there are still problems with the developing countries' manufacturing industry's share of GDP which should be double by 2030 and investment in scientific research and innovation must be more encouraged.⁶¹

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

As explained above, the sustainable development shows a strong bond with inter- and intragenerational equity. This goal, which has two directions, meets the latter equity's requirements. On the one hand, it has provisions, like the social, economic and political inclusion for all without any discrimination, the requirement of eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, adoption of fiscal, wage and social politics in order to progressively achieve greater equality, which could serve as guideline in reducing inequalities within the countries. On the other hand, there are specific requirements, which target equality among countries, such as ensuring greater representation and voice for developing countries in the decision-making of the global international economic and financial institutions.⁶²

From a different perspective, we can notice that besides the general principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination, this goal has an economic nature and places a strong emphasis on the issue of economic inequalities which means a significant concern according to the report. The goal aspires to achieve income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average, but according to data from 92 countries, in more than half

⁵⁷ A/RES/70/1. 20 – 21.

⁵⁸ Grete FAREMO: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. *UN Chronicle*. LI. No. 4, 2014. 21 – 22.

⁵⁹ The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 was adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* para 26 – 27.

⁶¹ The report 18.

⁶² A/RES/70/11. 21.

of the countries, the bottom 40% of the population received less than 25% of the overall income or consumption.⁶³

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

As at least 55% of the World's population lives in cities, which share could reach 68% by 2050⁶⁴, the importance of this Goal is indisputable. Its scope is relatively wide, because it provides the ensuring of the access to adequate, safe and affordable housing, basic services for all, aspires to upgrade slums and provide an affordable, safe, accessible and sustainable transport system for all – with a special emphasises to the vulnerable groups of the society. Furthermore, it addresses the importance of integrated and sustainable management and the preservation of the world's cultural and natural heritage. This goal also gives high priority to the protection against disasters and it is dedicated to the improvement of air quality and waste management. it also promotes universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible and green public places.⁶⁵ The goal mentions the Sendai Framework, which third priority is investing in disaster risk reduction.⁶⁶

The report points out that greater efforts need to be made. However, there is progress in reducing the global urban population's proportion who lives in slums but more than 1 billion people still live there and that notwithstanding that according to Article 25 of the UDHR the right to an adequate standard of living includes housing⁶⁷, just like the CESCR, which adds the continuous improvement of living conditions.⁶⁸ The CESCR Committee highlights in General comment no. 4. that the States Parties must treat the disadvantaged groups of the society and policies, measures shall not be designed to benefit those who already belong to advantages social groups at the expense of those who are living in unfavorable conditions.⁶⁹

Moreover, the vast majority of urban residents breath poor-quality air, in 2016 9 in 10 people breathed air that did not meet the WHO's guidelines and more than half of the population is affected by the increase of the particular matter 2,5. This can be related to limited access to transport. Based on data from 227 cities from 78 countries just 53% of urban residents have convenient access⁷⁰ to public transport. it is a great concern that the cities occupy more and more area, which grow 1,28 times faster than the cities' population between 2000 and 2014.⁷¹

⁶³ The report 20.

⁶⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: 68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN.
<https://bit.ly/2sR9H9l> (10.11.2019.).

⁶⁵ A/RES/70/1. 21 – 22.

⁶⁶ Sendai Framework Article 30. para h.

⁶⁷ UDHR Article 25.

⁶⁸ CESCR Article 11.

⁶⁹ CESCR General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant) Adopted at the Sixth Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, on 13 December 1991 (Contained in Document E/1992/23). Para 11.

⁷⁰ Convenient access means that there is a bus stop within 500 metres or a railway station/ferry within 1000 metres.

⁷¹ The report 21 – 23.

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

The Goal builds on the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP)⁷², which implementation is one of its targets. The 10 YFP is a global framework strongly based on the principle of international cooperation. Its main objectives are the following: supporting regional and national policies to achieve sustainable consumption and production, creating new jobs, combat poverty, incorporate the sustainable consumption and production patterns in the policies concerning the sustainable development – what was done in this SDG -, support developing countries with financial and technical assistance, stimulate the information flow between the stakeholders.⁷³ The States shall take into account the responsibility of the developed countries. The Goal envisages the achievement of sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, the reduction of global food waste, and other waste, it encourages prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse. It also realises the key role of large companies and the importance of awareness-raising.⁷⁴

The report's results are worrying, our material consumption is expanding rapidly and urgent action must be taken to avoid the over-extraction of resources or degradation of environmental resources. There is a pressing need to adopt policies that could improve resource efficiency and reduce waste. The fact that worldwide material consumption reached 92,1 billion tons in 2017, raises concerns.⁷⁵

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

The goal can be described as complementary to the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)⁷⁶, which is the primary international and intergovernmental forum for negotiation in this field.⁷⁷ Based on the UNFCCC, other significant international documents were adopted, such as the Paris Climate Change Agreement (Paris Agreement)⁷⁸ and the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, which is a voluntary collaboration. Under the umbrella of the UNFCCC, among others, guidelines for policymakers are creating. According to the Summary for policymakers 2018⁷⁹ the States must synchronise the technical innovations with innovative business models and financing mechanisms. They should also realise the circular economy with all-level integration, which means the involvement of the consumers too. Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of the information flow.⁸⁰

⁷² 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. A/CONF.216/5*.

⁷³ Global Action for Sustainable Consumption and Production: The 10 Year Framework on Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production.
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/944brochure10yfp.pdf> (10.11.2019.).

⁷⁴ A/RES/70/1.

⁷⁵ The report 22.

⁷⁶ United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted on 9 May 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

⁷⁷ A/RES/70/1. 23.

⁷⁸ Paris Climate Change Agreement adopted on 12 December 2015 in Paris.

⁷⁹ Climate Action Now – Summary for policymakers. United Nations Climate Change Secretariat.
http://unfccc.int/resource/climateaction2020/media/1308/unfccc_spm_2018.pdf (10.11.2019.).

⁸⁰ Ibid 8.

The Goal suits well in this system and it aims to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity, which could help to fight the climate-related hazards' and natural disasters' consequences. It also brings integration into prominence, just like education, awareness-raising, impact reduction, and early warning. Regarding the developing countries it foresees \$100 billion annually by 2020 through the Green Climate Fund, coming from the developed countries which are parties of the UNFCCC.⁸¹

It is noteworthy that the goal does not set 2030 as the implementation deadline, it only mentions 2020, in relation to the financial mobilization mentioned above, this can be linked to the urgency of the climate change which is emphasized in the report too. The rising greenhouse gas emissions – that reached new highs in 2017 - are catalysing the climate change and it is much faster than anticipated, while its effects can be felt worldwide. This process has been leading to climate-related disasters that resulted in almost \$3 trillion direct economic losses between 1998 and 2017 and claimed 1,3 million lives. By April 2019 185 states had ratified the Paris Agreement and by 20 May 2019 28 countries had accessed Green Climate Fund may which cause that the global climate finance flows increased by 17% between 2015 and 2016. The fact that 75 countries asked for support for their national adaptation planning process, witnesses the importance of the Fund.⁸²

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

The importance of the natural resources' – air, water, land, flora and fauna, representative samples of natural ecosystems - protection occurred in the Stockholm Declaration of 1972. This significant soft law document emphasized the prevention for the benefit of present and future generations and named its instruments, careful planning, and management.⁸³ The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was also founded in the Conference and it has been served as an effective negotiation platform during the years, its result is for example the Paris Convention for the prevention of marine pollution from landbased sources (1974)⁸⁴ or the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (1976)⁸⁵. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), that has a crucial role in the prevention of the marine resources, was adopted in 1982.⁸⁶ The UNCLOS addresses the issue of pollution and considers the various possible sources of it, such as land-based sources, seabed activities or dumping, etc.⁸⁷ It also mentions the global and regional cooperation⁸⁸ and

⁸¹ A/RES/70/1. 23.

⁸² The report 23 – 24.

⁸³ Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment adopted June 16, 1972, by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. [Stockholm Declaration] In. Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1. Principle 2.

⁸⁴ Convention for the prevention of marine pollution from landbased sources. Concluded at Paris on 4 June 1974. No. 26842.

⁸⁵ Convention for Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution adopted on 16 February 1976, in Barcelona.

⁸⁶ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea adopted on 10 December 1982, in Montego Bay.

⁸⁷ UNCLOS Section 5. Art. 207 – 212.

⁸⁸ UNCLOS Art. 199.

monitoring.⁸⁹ The UNCLOS created its judicial forum and contains the Statute of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), based in Hamburg, Germany.⁹⁰

Goal 14 also aims the prevention and significant reduction of the pollutions, emphasizes the importance of sustainable management and resilience and sets exact goals such as minimalizing the impact of ocean acidification or addressing the problem of overfishing and the conservation of coastal and marine areas.⁹¹

The report highlights that the expansion of the protected areas, the existing policies, and the adopted treaties are still insufficient for the protection of marine biodiversity. It also indicates its reasons, such as overfishing, growing ocean acidification, which is related to climate change as it is caused by the uptake of atmospheric CO₂, and coastal eutrophication.⁹²

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

This complex goal focuses on various challenges, that endanger the sustainable life on land. It priorities the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems, in particular, the forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands. The goal promotes the sustainable management of all types of forests and aims to fight against deforestation. It also aspires to combat desertification, loss of biological diversity, poaching, trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna. The reducing of the impact of invasive alien species is one of the goals target too, just like promoting fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.⁹³

The root of this goal's main targets can be found in the Agenda 21⁹⁴ which named challenges like managing land sustainability, combating deforestation, desertification, and drought, improving the sustainable mountain development and the conservation of biological diversity.⁹⁵ The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)⁹⁶ was opened for signature in the Rio Conference too. The CBD sets general measures to prevent the biological diversity, like developing national strategies, plans, programmes, integrating the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies.⁹⁷ The CBD also emphasizes the identification of the biological diversity's components, regarding the categories like ecosystems and habitats, species and communities, genomes and genes of social, scientific or economic importance.⁹⁸ The Contracting Parties need to identify

⁸⁹ UNCLOS Art. 204.

⁹⁰ UNCLOS ANNEX VI. Statute of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

⁹¹ A/RES/70/1. 23 – 24.

⁹² The report. 24.

⁹³ A/RES/70/1. 24 – 25.

⁹⁴ Agenda 21 – The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio.In.: Report on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. 12 Aug 1992. A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. II).

⁹⁵ Ibid. Section two: conservation and management of resources. 4- 6.

⁹⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity, Rio de Janeiro, 5 June 1992.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Art. 6.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Art 7. and Annex I.

the activities which have or likely to have a significant adverse impact.⁹⁹ The CBD was completed by the Cartagena Protocol¹⁰⁰ on safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) and the Nagoya Protocol¹⁰¹ related to the liability in the field of living modified organisms.

The other significant international legal instrument related to this goal is the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).¹⁰² The UNCCD has two main objectives, one is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in the affected countries, in particular in Africa and the other objective is the improving long-term integrated strategies to improve land productivity, rehabilitation, conservation, and sustainable land management.¹⁰³ It is remarkable that the UCCD divides the obligations and distinguishes general obligations, such as adopting an integrated approach, giving due attention within the relevant international and regional bodies, integrate strategies for poverty eradication, promoting cooperation and the use of the existing bilateral financial mechanism, etc.¹⁰⁴, obligations of affected Country Parties¹⁰⁵ and obligations of developed country Parties.¹⁰⁶

The results are mixed in the implementation of this goal according to the Report. More key biodiversity areas are protected, the global mean percentage of terrestrial biodiversity area covered by protected areas was 31,1% in 2000 and 46,1% in 2018, the percent of protected freshwater areas was 2,5% in 2000 and 43,2% in 2018 and the protected mountain area's percent was 32,9% in 200 and 44,7% in 2018. Nevertheless, the goals' implementation is unlikely by 2020 because land degradation is continuing, just like the growing of the invasive species and illegal poaching and trafficking of wildlife. It is particularly worrying that from 2000 to 2015 more than one-fifth of the Earth's total land area was derogated, mostly due to desertification, cropland expansion, and urbanization, so by human-induced activities.¹⁰⁷

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

This goal focuses on several and various aspects of social issues related to sustainable development, such as the fight against violence and related death, abuse, exploitation, human trafficking and all form of violence against children. It also promotes rule of law and aims to reduce illicit financial flow and corruption, try to ensure representative, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels and public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Art 7.

¹⁰⁰ Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity, adopted on 29 January 2000.

¹⁰¹ Nagoya – Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on liability and readdress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, adopted on 15 October 2010.

¹⁰² United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa adopted in 17 June 1994.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Art. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* Art. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Art. 5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Art. 6.

¹⁰⁷ The report 25 – 26.

¹⁰⁸ A/RES/70/1. 25 – 26.

We can see that this goal has a strong connection with several international documents, such as UDHR or CRD, but I would like to highlight the Aarhus Convention¹⁰⁹ which three pillars are the following: access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters. The Convention's roots can be detected in another soft law document, in the Rio Declaration, which 10th principle considers the importance of the aspects of public awareness.¹¹⁰

The implementation of this goal can be described as not sufficient, as the international homicides per 100.000 people increased from 6,0 (2015) to 6,1 (2017), mostly in Latin-America, in the Caribbean and in the Sub-Saharan Africa. In 83 countries – mostly from developing regions – nearly 8 in 10 children between the age of 1 to age 14 experienced psychological aggression and/or physical punishment at home. Trafficking in persons – mostly women and girls – increased, just like the murder of journalists and human rights defenders. The realisation of the right to access to jurisdiction is still problematic, among 123 countries 40 do not include the right to appeal to an independent body.¹¹¹

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The last goal is divided into five main categories. Finance focuses on the developed countries' task to provide financial help for the least-developed countries, such as mobilizing additional financial resources, adopting and implementing investments. Technology is also a significant instrument for promoting development, the goal aims for examples of the technology transfer to the developing countries on favourable terms. The third category is enhancing international support for the effective and targeted capacity-building. Moreover, trade plays also an important role, the idea of universal, rules-based, open, non-dissimilatory and equitable multilateral trade system arises here. Finally, the goal considers systematic issues like policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships and the role of data, monitoring and accountability.¹¹²

The 1992 Rio Conference's other soft law product was the Agenda 21¹¹³ also considers the issues mentioned above, such as capacity-building. The agenda declares that the fundamental goal of capacity-building is enhancing the ability to evaluate and addressing the crucial questions in coherence with policy concerns and modes of implementation. It also highlights the fact that these should be based on the environmental potential and limits' understanding.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, done at Aarhus, Denmark, on 25 June 1998.

¹¹⁰ Rio Declaration, Principle 10.

¹¹¹ The report 27 – 28.

¹¹² A/RES/70/1. 26 – 27.

¹¹³ Agenda 21 – The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Chapter 37.

The Doha Declaration¹¹⁵ is also connected to this goal. It has three key messages: the developed countries should have a strong commitment to maintaining the ODA¹¹⁶ targets, the UN's vital role in addressing the new challenges and emerging problems in financing for developed countries and it proposes to hold a conference at the highest level¹¹⁷, which was realized between 24 and 26 June 2009.¹¹⁸

The Report states that net ODA flows totaled \$149 billion in 2018 and in 2019 the annual remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries could reach the \$550 billion. It also mentions that at the end of 2018, 3,9 billion people had access to the Internet, which means more than half of the World's population. It should be added that 81% of the population using the Internet was from developed countries. The total ODA for capacity-building and national planning was \$33,5 billion in 2017 and in the field of the trade, the tariffs applied worldwide are decreasing and it could lead to a more open trading system where it is easier to access goods. Nevertheless, in the category of systematic issues, it is worrying that the bilateral development partners' respect for country policies declined from 64% to 57% from 2016 to 2018.¹¹⁹

2. The way forward

The report recognizes the efforts made by the States and their almost universal commitment, which is evidenced by the fact that 141 countries have presented voluntary national review by July 2019. Nevertheless, it envisages that according to the collected data, the World is still not on the right path to achieve the goals by 2030 and it emphasizes that paradigm shift is required to this.¹²⁰

The report determines the eight main areas, in which fundamental changes are needed.

Leaving no-one behind

The conception of leaving no-one behind, between and within countries, cuts across the goals, in particular in goal 1, goal 2, goal 4, goal 5, goal 6, goal 17. The conception includes addressing human rights for all. The report suggests that there is a need for the transformation of deeply rooted systems, economic, social, political, governance and business. This aspiration underlines the agenda's complex and integrated nature, which is related to the character of the concept of sustainable development too. The report notes that the above-mentioned structures are often based on the unequal distribution of wealth and decision-making power. Due to this, the national policy choices should be carefully identified and they must be evidence-based. The conception of leaving no-one behind requires the progressing of the second generational rights¹²¹ the economic, social and cultural rights, with a special emphasize to the access to

¹¹⁵ Doha Declaration on Financing for Development (A/CONF/.212/L.1/Rev.1*).

¹¹⁶ ODA (official development assistance) means resource flows to developing countries, provided by official agencies, administered with the promotion of economic development. See more: <https://www.un.org/ldcportal/what-are-oda-related-support-measures/> (10.11.2019.).

¹¹⁷ The road to Doha. A newsletter for civil society in the lead up to the 2008 FID conference.

https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/2008_TheRoadtoDoha_Issue19.pdf (10.11.2019.).

¹¹⁸ UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on development 2009.

¹¹⁹ The report 29 – 30.

¹²⁰ The report 32.

¹²¹ VASAK: i.m. 28-29, 32.

related public services to the vulnerable social groups, for example, social protection, health care, water and sanitation. Furthermore, governments should design their policies to support the most vulnerable groups, treat the problem of discrimination and focusing on the link between economic and social exclusion.¹²²

Mobilizing adequate and well-directed financing

This aspiration is linked to goal 17 and it encourages the strengthening of the investments. It indicates that capacity development is needed and governments should strengthen the enabling environment for investments, for example with creating predictable and consistent policies. There are special areas that must be financially supported more, like gender equality and women's empowerment.¹²³

Strengthening effective and inclusive institutions for implementing integrated solutions

According to the report, transparency and public participation should be strengthened by the governments and it envisages an important role to the local level in accessing information which could lead to the improvement if the quality of public services too.¹²⁴

Accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals locally

The local level's importance appears in the context of the realisation of the full agenda as it declares that the local governments are often the most suitable to lead the realisation, for example with delivering basic services, protecting local ecosystems. This requires cooperation between the national governments and the local level and the improvement of the elected officials' and civil servant's knowledge and capacity.¹²⁵

Building resilience

The resilience means the ability of a system itself and its elements to adapt to new challenges and react to danger.¹²⁶ It appears in several goals, such as goal 9 or goal 11 and the report also highlights this ability. It is in relation to the rapid and sudden changes, which is worsened by the fact that these shocks could easily spill over from one area to the other, for example climate change, economic loss or weather-related hazards. Building resilience could also help to combat poverty, social exclusion and it includes the improvement of education and requires a

¹²² The report. 35.

¹²³ The report 35.

¹²⁴ The report 36.

¹²⁵ The report 37.

¹²⁶ BÁNDI, Gyula: Fenntarthatóság, reziliencia, önkormányzatok [Sustainability, resilience, local governments]. In: Fodor, László – BÁNYAI, Orsolya (ed.): A települési önkormányzatok szerepe a környezeti politika és jog alakításában. [The role of local governments in shaping environmental law and polic] Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó Debrecen University Press, 2017. 9.

systematic approach, taking into account the causal link between the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels. Building resilience indicates the proper information of the risks, the human-centered approach, improvement of various areas, such as food system, energy consumption, sustainable agriculture or changing consumption and production patterns. It also means the consideration of the problem's transboundary nature, which can be observed in climate change, pollution and resource use.¹²⁷

Investing in data

The governments, to fulfil their obligations, should invest in high-quality, timely, disaggregated and open data and statistics too.¹²⁸ The pursuing resolution has also emphasized its role in the implementation of the goals and realizing the concept of no-one should be left behind. It has particular importance in developing countries.¹²⁹

Realizing the benefits of science, technology, and innovation for all

It is recognized in several goals, like goal 1, goal 2, goal 4, goal 5, goal 7, goal 9, goal 14, that technology could help to meet the requirements of the agenda and this appears in the report too. It could contribute to implementing the goals more broadly, such as in the issues related to water and energy, consumption and production, transport, urbanization.¹³⁰

Solving challenges through international cooperation

The idea of international cooperation has already incurred in the Stockholm Declaration's 24th principle and it has been confirmed in the Rio Declaration's 9th principle. The report underlines that the countries must renew their commitment to multilateralism, find new ways of working together to deal with the rapid changes and the challenges generated by this. The UN needs to strengthen its commitment to solving the problem of the '*fragmented nature of today's multilateralism*' which should evolve into a networked multilateralism with the lead of the UN. These new concepts must be human-centred and supported by the collaboration with civil society, businesses, academic and philanthropic communities.¹³¹

In conclusion, with the examination of the report, we received a data-based and timely answer to the question of what is the status of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We could see that there is an international commitment, and there are several improvements, for example in the fight against communicable diseases or reducing maternal and child mortality, or providing access to electricity or Internet. On the other hand, the World is still not on the trajectory to meet the requirement by 2030, we need only consider climate change, the loss of biological diversity, deforestation or desertification. We need to

¹²⁷ The report 37.

¹²⁸ The report 38.

¹²⁹ A/RES/70/1. 12.

¹³⁰ The report 38.

¹³¹ The report 39.

mention that the report has the merit that it reveals the problems that could prevent the realisation of the goals and that it also sets the main paths to solve these problems.

Besides, we could see that the agenda is a part of a complex and broad international network of various documents. While it is a soft law document, with no legal binding force, as a general rule, it is based on other soft law documents, such as the Stockholm Declaration or the Rio Declaration, and on hard law documents, like the Aarhus Convention or the Kyoto Protocol. On the one hand, it could help to redefine the earlier documents, regarding the sudden changes and the new challenges and on the other hand, as it was declared in the report, it could be the fundamental cornerstone of a new, human-centred multilateralism and its implementation could lead to new, including hard law, legal instruments in global, national, regional and local level too.