

THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN FUNDS ON THE ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This research analyses the impact of European funds on the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova, exploring the country's transition from a remittance-dependent growth model to one based on strategic investments and alignment with European Union standards. In the context of obtaining candidate country status in 2022 and the launch of the Growth Plan for Moldova (2025-2027), the article assesses the quality of the convergence process through the lens of 25 fundamental bibliographic sources and recent strategic documents.

The methodology used is based on the SDG Mapping technique, which allows the correlation of European funding pillars with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 8 (economic growth), SDG 9 (industry and innovation) and SDG 13 (climate action). The analysis of the specialized literature highlights the fact that the efficiency of EU funds is not an automatic process, but is strictly conditioned by institutional quality and administrative absorption capacity.

The results indicate that while EU financial assistance has strengthened Moldova's macroeconomic resilience to geopolitical shocks, long-term sustainability depends on modernizing business ecosystems and reducing regional disparities. The paper contributes to the literature by providing a framework for monitoring real convergence, demonstrating that European integration functions as a catalyst for the structural transformation of the Moldovan economy.

Keywords: economic growth, employment, european funds, investment strategies, sustainable development.

JEL CLASSIFICATION: E22, F02, G2, O11, Q01

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the European integration process has become the main vector of structural transformation for the states of Central and Eastern Europe, with the Republic of Moldova today finding itself at a historical turning point. Obtaining the status of candidate country to the European Union in 2022 has reconfigured not only the diplomatic priorities, but also the financial and economic architecture of the country. In this context, European funds are no longer just an instrument of technical assistance, but are becoming the central pillar of the strategy for ensuring economic sustainability.

Context and relevance of the topic. The economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova is frequently tested by external shocks, the volatility of energy markets and the need for a rapid transition to a green and digitalized economy. The specialized literature emphasizes that the efficiency of non-reimbursable funds depends fundamentally on the absorption capacity and the strategic targeting of investments towards sectors with high added value. However, in the case of transition economies, a gap is often observed between the volume of allocated financing and the real impact on long-term sustainable development indicators.

Research issues and the SDG Mapping Approach. A major challenge in evaluating external assistance is translating macroeconomic figures into tangible progress on multidimensional sustainability. The critical research question is: To what extent are EU-funded investment strategies aligned with national sustainable development priorities?

To answer this question, this study introduces a methodological approach based on SDG Mapping. This technique allows for the visualization and quantification of how European financial

flows (such as the Eastern Partnership Economic and Investment Plan) catalyse the achievement of the 2030 Agenda targets. The analysis focuses mainly on the resilience pillars: SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), providing a clear picture of the convergence between EU cohesion policies and the sustainability objectives of the Republic of Moldova.

Objectives and scientific contribution

This paper aims to empirically analyse the correlation between European fund flows and sustainability dynamics through the following objectives:

1. Evaluation of the investment structure: Identifying the priority areas that benefited from European support in the pre-accession period.
2. Strategic mapping (SDG Mapping): Determining the degree of coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals through EU-funded projects.
3. Impact analysis: Using proxy indicators to measure the efficiency of these investments in strengthening a resilient economy.

By using the SDG Mapping technique, this study makes an original contribution to the literature, providing an assessment framework that goes beyond linear GDP analysis. The results are essential for policymakers to recalibrate investment strategies to ensure a sustainable transition and accelerated European integration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextualizing the analysis: From financial assistance to structural resilience

Understanding the impact of European funds on the Republic of Moldova requires an analysis that goes beyond simple budget execution, focusing on the quality of reforms and their alignment with international sustainability standards. The current moment is defined by a dual paradigm: on the one hand, the need to manage external shocks caused by regional instability, and on the other hand, the imperative to accelerate convergence with the European Single Market.

In this sense, the present research investigates eight documentary and strategic pillars that underpin the country's current economic trajectory. These works, ranging from monitoring reports of international financial institutions (World Bank, OECD) to government action plans and industrial impact studies, provide the empirical basis for the SDG Mapping process. The following analysis is not limited to a simple description of the financing programs, but seeks to identify to what extent these resources are directed towards the sectors with the highest sustainability potential and how they contribute to reducing the historical vulnerabilities of the Moldovan economic model.

Critical analysis of the strategic pillars of sustainability

The analysis of the corpus of documents reveals a paradigm shift in the management of European funds, moving from emergency budget support to strategic investments conditional on reforms. The European Parliament Study (2025) and the Reform Agenda (2025-2027) emphasize that the new "Growth Plan for Moldova" is not just a financial package, but a tool for alignment with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through integration into European value chains. This direction is supported by data from the FDI Study (2024), which demonstrates that although the number of companies with foreign capital has fluctuated due to geopolitical risks, their productivity remains 3.5 times higher than that of local firms, validating the role of European capital as a vector of efficiency.

On the dimension of ecological sustainability (SDGs 7 and 13), the OECD (2022) and USAID (2023) documents highlight an imminent pressure: the need to adapt to the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Critical analysis of these sources indicates that European funds are directed primarily towards decarbonisation and energy efficiency in order to maintain the competitiveness of Moldovan exports. In parallel, the Economic Reform Program of the Ministry of Finance and the World Bank Update (2025) warn of limited "absorption capacity", identifying it as the main risk to transforming assistance into real sustainability.

Finally, the Investor Guide (2025) and the NRC report (2023) complete the picture by highlighting the resilience of the digital sector and the need to protect human capital from external

shocks. In conclusion, the eight sources converge on the idea that EU funds function as a catalyst for SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), but their long-term success depends on the perfect synchronization between capital infusions and the institutional capacity to implement the assumed structural reforms.

The analysis of the impact of EU funds on economic sustainability represents a central pillar in the specialized literature dedicated to the convergence processes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Current research goes beyond the simple paradigm of financial absorption, investigating the quality of institutional reforms, innovation capacity and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2.1. Institutional conditionality and the quality of governance

A major consensus in recent literature is that the efficiency of European funds is directly proportional to the level of institutional maturity of the recipient state. Augusztin et al. (2023) demonstrate that the impact of structural and pre-accession funds on economic growth is conditioned by the "quality of governance". Using a 30-year time series, the authors emphasize that in the absence of a solid rule of law and an efficient bureaucracy, capital infusions can generate marginal effects or even economic distortions.

This view is nuanced by Surubaru (2021), who analyzes whether European funds in Romania and Bulgaria have functioned as "engines of change" or just as simple budgetary transfers. His conclusion points to an asymmetric Europeanization, where success is limited by the politicization of local administration. In this context, Zajackowski and Smolaga (2023) observe an interesting evolution: as CEE states integrate, they adopt OECD standards and become donors of development assistance (ODA), which validates the transfer of good institutional practices as a form of political sustainability.

2.2. Convergence models and the impact on competitiveness

The macroeconomic dimension of EU funds is explored through the lens of the β and σ convergence theories. Romanowski et al. (2023) demonstrate that funds directed towards innovation accelerate local convergence, provided that functional regional ecosystems exist. This approach is empirically supported by Török László (2025), who confirms that although integration into the Single Market has reduced the gaps in GDP per capita between East and West, the sustainability of this process is threatened by the "middle income trap".

Furthermore, Blazhko et al. (2025) use correlation analyses to prove the positive impact of structural funds on exports and external competitiveness, but warn that inflation volatility can erode these gains. Correspondingly, Stoilova (2025) shows in her study on Bulgaria that, although EU funds contribute to GDP and employment growth, they tend to favour already developed regions, exacerbating internal disparities – a major risk for social cohesion included in SDG 10.

2.3. Digitalization, innovation and the business environment

An emerging research direction focuses on the role of EU funds in microeconomic modernization. Panait et al. (2025) use topic modelling techniques to highlight how the absorption of EU funds has become synonymous with the development of business ecosystems and digitalization. This trend is supported by Abalăşei, Maha and Viorică (2022), who demonstrate the success of operational programs in increasing the competitiveness of urban SMEs in Romania.

However, the literature also introduces elements of caution. Rácz et al. (2025) discuss "dependent capitalism" in the CEE region, arguing that reliance on foreign direct investment (FDI) and EU funds, in the absence of indigenous innovation capacity, creates structural vulnerability. Brodny and Tutak (2024) complete this picture with a multi-criterion assessment (TOPSIS), demonstrating that innovation potential is unevenly distributed and heavily depends on intellectual capital and R&D investment (SDG 9).

2.4. Green transition and environmental sustainability as a new conditionality

With the launch of the European Green Deal, sustainability is no longer just an economic objective, but an ecological imperative. The UNCCD report (2021) highlights the need to restore ecosystems in CEE as part of the "green recovery", while O'Sullivan and Fazio (2023) provide strict recommendations for the allocation of funds based on the "Do No Significant Harm" (DNSH) principle.

Research by Shkolnykova and Wedemeier (2025) indicates that for transition economies, such as the Republic of Moldova, alignment with these environmental standards is not optional, but represents the access ticket to European capital markets. Furthermore, Davidescu et al. (2023) argue that European policies must address the social inequities generated by the costs of the green transition, ensuring a just transformation (SDG 13).

2.5. Republic of Moldova: From resilience to shocks to structural convergence

The analysis of strategic documents and reports of international financial institutions for the period 2022-2025 reveals a paradigm shift in the economic trajectory of the Republic of Moldova. According to the European Parliament Study (Hagemejer and Dąbrowski, 2025), the Moldovan economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of overlapping crises (pandemic, energy crisis and war in Ukraine), achieving a massive trade reorientation towards the European Union, which currently absorbs over 65% of exports. However, this success is overshadowed by a growth model that remains vulnerable due to dependence on remittances and reduced investment in fixed capital.

The World Bank (2025) emphasizes in its economic update report that obtaining the status of candidate country represents a historic window of opportunity for the modernization of infrastructure and the professionalization of the public service. However, the authors warn that the success of the Growth Plan for Moldova (2025-2027) is directly conditioned by increasing the absorption capacity and reducing the labour market constraints generated by massive emigration. In this regard, the Economic Reform Program (Ministry of Finance, 2025) proposes an ambitious agenda of fiscal consolidation and digitalization, aimed at attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in high value-added sectors, such as IT and renewable energy.

The environmental sustainability dimension has become a central element in financing conditionalities. The USAID (2023) study on carbon pricing mechanisms indicates that the Republic of Moldova needs to rapidly align its environmental policies with the EU Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in order to remain competitive. This process of "greening" is supported by initiatives such as EU4Environment (OECD, 2022), which promotes the circular economy and efficient management of natural resources as pillars of sustainable development.

Finally, research by Invest Moldova (2024) shows that although FDI flows have increased by 28% in absolute terms over the past decade, their impact on local productivity is still fragmented. The recommendations in the Norwegian Policy Brief (2023) make a clear point: The Republic of Moldova needs to transition from crisis assistance to long-term resilience investments, integrating the principle of "doing no significant harm to the environment" into all national infrastructure projects to ensure real and sustainable convergence with the EU bloc.

2.6. Summary of Research Gaps

Despite the wealth of studies on the member states (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria), the academic literature presents a significant gap regarding the Republic of Moldova. Most of the works analysed treat Moldova either tangentially, in the context of the Eastern Partnership, or through technical reports of international organizations (USAID, 2023; World Bank, 2025).

There is a lack of academic studies integrating SDG Mapping as a tool for assessing the quality of investments from European funds in the post-2022 pre-accession period. The present research aims to fill this gap, using the theoretical foundations of institutional quality (Augusztin, 2023) and innovation (Brodny, 2024) to assess how the "Growth Plan for Moldova" (Agenda 2025-2027) transforms financial assistance into multidimensional sustainability.

Thus, the paper contributes to the specialized literature by proposing a convergence monitoring framework based on SDG indicators, offering a new empirical perspective on the transition from an economy dependent on remittances to one based on strategic and sustainable investments.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis of the impact of European funds on the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova was carried out through a qualitative-quantitative documentary approach, complemented by a

thematic mapping analysis (SDG Mapping). The methodology aims to identify the degree of alignment of interventions financed from European funds with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their specific targets, in order to assess the structural contribution to economic sustainability.

The research is based on a corpus consisting of 25 relevant documents on European funds intended for the Republic of Moldova. The corpus included strategic documents, official reports, funding programs, partnership agreements, programming documents, research papers, as well as implementation reports. The selection of documents was carried out based on the criteria of thematic relevance (direct correlation with European funds), topicality and official character, so as to reflect recent interventions and strategic priorities of cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union.

The analysis of the alignment with the SDGs was carried out by applying the SDG Mapper tool, a thematic mapping system based on automatic natural language processing (NLP), which identifies correspondences between the analysed textual content and the standardized formulations of the Sustainable Development Goals and their associated targets. The tool operates by identifying the frequency and semantic relevance of key terms and conceptual expressions associated with each goal and target, generating a percentage distribution of thematic correlations.

The methodological process involved several stages. In the first stage, the selected documents were collected and organized into a unitary corpus, being subjected to a preliminary check to eliminate duplications and irrelevant content. In the second stage, the corpus was introduced into the SDG Mapper tool, where each document was processed individually, and subsequently the results were aggregated to obtain a cumulative distribution at the level of the 17 SDGs and their associated targets. In the third stage, the results were exported and graphically represented in the form of percentage distributions and bubble charts, which allow highlighting the relative weight of each objective and target.

The analysis of the results was carried out at two complementary levels. At the macro level, the distribution of weights between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals was assessed, in order to identify the dominant strategic directions of European funding. At the micro level, the distribution by specific targets was analysed, in order to highlight the concrete mechanisms through which the funds contribute to economic sustainability, such as stimulating economic growth, institutional consolidation, infrastructure modernization or integrating climate measures into public policies. The approach used has several methodological advantages. First, it allows for a systematic and replicable assessment of the strategic alignment with the SDGs, reducing the subjectivity inherent in purely qualitative analysis. Second, it facilitates comparability with other studies using SDG Mapping, ensuring the integration of the research into an international framework of analysis. Third, the analysis at the target level offers a greater degree of granularity, allowing the identification of priority areas of intervention.

At the same time, certain methodological limitations should be mentioned. The results depend on the textual content of the analysed documents and the formulations used, which means that some indirect contributions to sustainability may be underestimated if they are not explicitly formulated. Also, the analysis reflects thematic correlations and does not measure the actual quantifiable impact of the funds on economic or social indicators. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as an assessment of strategic and conceptual alignment, not as a direct measurement of economic performance. Overall, the adopted methodology ensures a rigorous, transparent and replicable approach to assessing the impact of European funds on the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova, integrating documentary analysis with modern thematic mapping tools and providing a solid basis for interpreting the results presented in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to highlight the degree of strategic alignment of European funds with the Sustainable Development Goals, an aggregate analysis of the corpus of 25 documents was carried out using the SDG Mapper tool. The results obtained allow the identification of priority areas of intervention and dominant directions of contribution to the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova. The distribution of weights on the 17 SDGs is presented in Figure 1.

The figure obtained by applying the SDG Mapping tool provides a synthetic, but extremely relevant, picture of how interventions financed from European funds align with the Sustainable Development Goals and, implicitly, on the directions through which they contribute to the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova. The distribution of weights highlights both the structural priorities of European funding and the multidimensional nature of their impact.

First, the results show a significant focus on SDG 8 - "Decent work and economic growth", which has a share of 24.1%, representing the highest value of all the objectives analysed. This dominance confirms that European funds are mainly oriented towards stimulating sustainable economic growth, developing the entrepreneurial environment, supporting SMEs, creating jobs and increasing productivity. In the context of the Republic of Moldova, characterized by structural vulnerabilities, labour migration and dependence on remittances, investments aimed at strengthening the domestic economic base have an essential role. The high share of SDG 8 suggests that European funds are not only instruments of financial assistance, but mechanisms of structural transformation, contributing to strengthening the economy's capacity to generate added value and support long-term growth.

Secondly, the results indicate a considerable relevance of the institutional dimension, reflected by SDG 16 - "Peace, justice and effective institutions" (11.0%) and SDG 17 - "Partnerships for the goals" (8.3%). These weights underline the fact that economic sustainability is not approached exclusively through the lens of productive investments, but also by strengthening the institutional framework and governance mechanisms. European funds contribute to reforming public administration, strengthening the rule of law, increasing transparency and increasing the administrative capacity to absorb and manage external resources. In the absence of efficient institutions and a predictable environment, the impact of economic investments would be limited. Therefore, the strong correlation with SDG 16 and SDG 17 highlights the systemic nature of European interventions, which aim to strengthen the institutional infrastructure necessary for sustainable economic development and progressive integration into the European space.

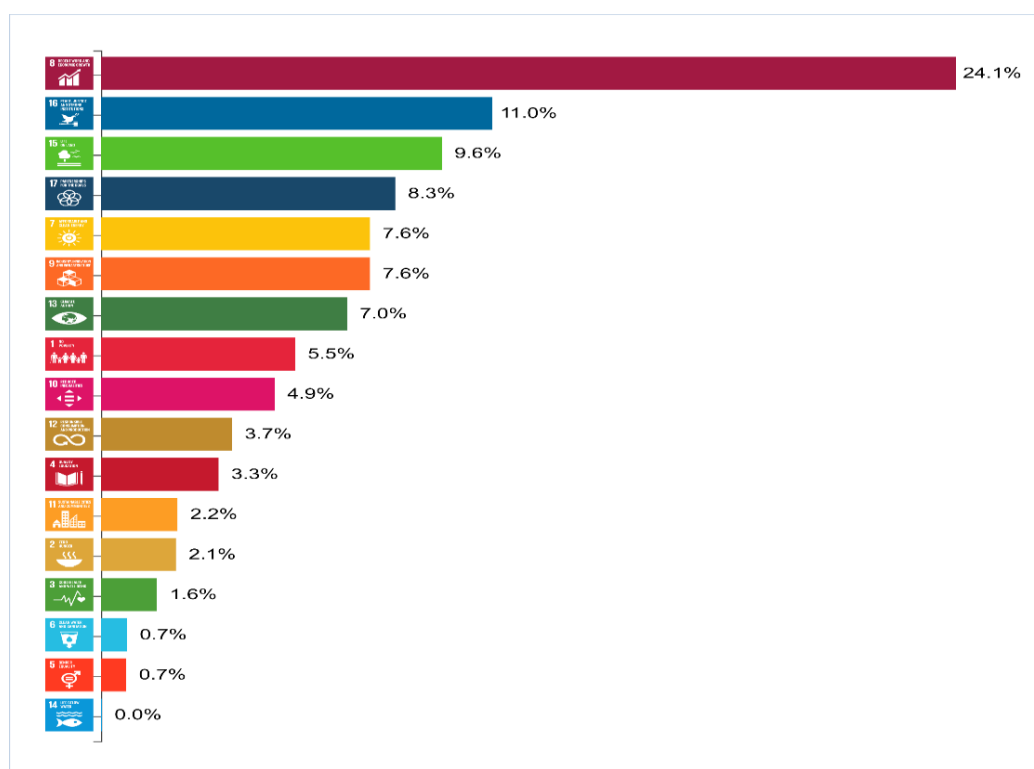


Figure 1. Alignment of European funds with the Sustainable Development Goals, SDG Mapping analysis

Source: own elaboration based on the results obtained by applying the SDG Mapper tool to the corpus of 25 analyzed documents.

The environmental and green transition dimension is also well represented. SDG 15 - "Life on Land" records 9.6%, SDG 7 - "Affordable and Clean Energy" 7.6%, and SDG 13 - "Climate Action" 7.0%. These values indicate that European funds support the transition towards an economic development model less dependent on traditional resources and more adapted to the requirements of the European Green Deal. Investments in energy efficiency, renewable sources, environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources contribute to reducing the energy and climate vulnerabilities of the Republic of Moldova. From the perspective of economic sustainability, these interventions have a double effect: on the one hand, they reduce the costs and risks associated with energy dependence, and on the other hand, they stimulate the development of new economic sectors and investment opportunities.

Another important pillar highlighted by the analysis is SDG 9 - "Industry, innovation and infrastructure", with a weight of 7.6%. This reflects the support given to the modernization of economic infrastructure, digitalization, technological development and increased competitiveness. For an economy in the process of convergence, physical and digital infrastructure are essential factors of productivity and integration into European value chains. European funds thus contribute to creating a favourable environment for investments, reducing regional disparities and stimulating innovation, all of which are fundamental components of long-term economic sustainability.

The social dimension, although present, has more moderate weights. SDG 1 - "No poverty" records 5.5%, SDG 10 - "Reduced inequalities" 4.9%, SDG 4 - "Quality education" 3.3%, and SDG 3 - "Health and well-being" 1.6%. This distribution suggests that the social impact of European funds is, for the most part, indirect, achieved through economic and institutional mechanisms. Job creation, income growth and improvement of public infrastructure implicitly contribute to the reduction of poverty and inequalities. However, the relatively low weight of social objectives indicates that the main orientation of the analysed funding is structural-economic, and the social components are integrated transversally rather than as autonomous priority areas.

Some objectives have very low or non-existent weights. SDG 6 - "Clean water and sanitation" and SDG 5 - "Gender equality" have 0.7% each, and SDG 14 - "Life below water" does not register any correlations (0.0%). The absence of SDG 14 is explainable by the geographical specificity of the Republic of Moldova, a landlocked state. In the case of SDG 5, the low weight may indicate that gender equality is approached as a cross-cutting principle rather than as a distinct direction of intervention.

Overall, the figure reveals that the impact of European funds on the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova is complex and multidimensional, but with a clear economic-institutional dominance. The emphasis on economic growth, institutional consolidation, infrastructure and green transition suggests that the development model promoted by these funds is oriented towards structural modernization and European convergence. The social and environmental dimensions are integrated into this framework, but do not represent the centre of the interventions analysed.

Therefore, the SDG Mapping results confirm that European funds contribute not only to the financing of specific projects, but to the gradual reconfiguration of the foundations of the Republic of Moldova's economy, strengthening the premises of sustainable, resilient and compatible development with the standards and objectives of the European Union.

In order to deepen the analysis and identify the concrete mechanisms through which European funds contribute to economic sustainability, the evaluation was extended to the level of specific targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. This approach allows highlighting detailed thematic directions and the intensity of correlations at the micro-structural level. The distribution of results at the target level is illustrated in Figure 2.

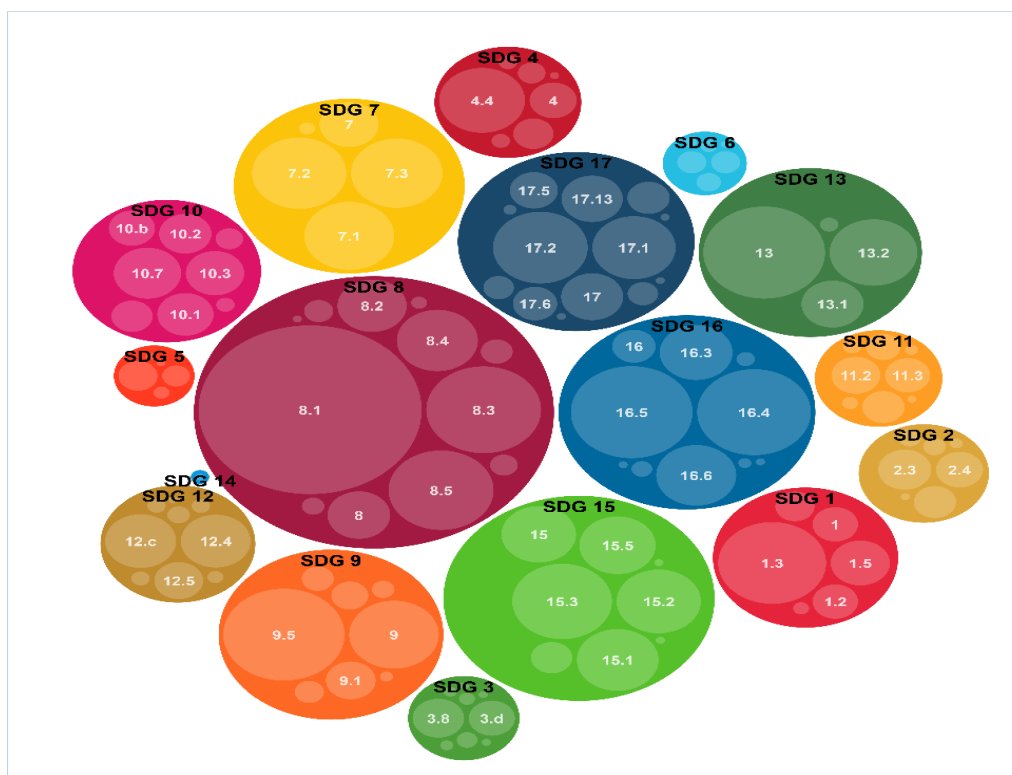


Figure 2. Distribution of specific targets of the Sustainable Development Goals within the framework of European funds intended for the Republic of Moldova (SDG Mapping analysis, 25 documents)

Source: own elaboration based on the results obtained by applying the SDG Mapper tool on the corpus of 25 analysed documents.

The figure, created in the form of a bubble chart using the SDG Mapping tool, offers a much more granular perspective on the alignment of European funds with the specific targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. While the first figure highlighted the aggregate distribution of the 17 SDGs, this representation allows for an in-depth analysis of the concrete directions of intervention, reflecting not only which objectives are priorities, but also through which thematic mechanisms they are supported.

The structure of the graph clearly shows that SDG 8 dominates not only at the general objective level, but also at the level of specific targets. The considerable size of the bubble associated with target 8.1 (maintaining economic growth per capita and, in particular, sustainable economic growth) indicates that European funds support sustainable economic growth as a priority. The importance of targets 8.3 (promoting development-oriented policies that support productive activities and entrepreneurship), 8.4 (improving resource efficiency) and 8.5 (full and productive employment) confirms the orientation of interventions towards strengthening the entrepreneurial environment, resource efficiency and job creation. This distribution suggests that economic sustainability is addressed structurally, by stimulating productivity and the economy's capacity to generate domestic value added.

Another significant area is represented by SDG 16, where targets 16.4 (reducing illicit financial flows and strengthening institutions), 16.5 (fighting corruption) and 16.6 (effective and accountable institutions) have visibly consistent weights. This distribution confirms that European funds contribute to strengthening the governance framework, an essential element for the efficient absorption of resources and for creating a stable investment climate. In the context of the Republic of Moldova, where institutional reforms are a central pillar of the European integration agenda, the impact on SDG 16 becomes fundamental for long-term economic sustainability.

Regarding SDG 17, the significant weight of targets 17.1, 17.2, 17.5 and 17.13 indicates the emphasis on strengthening fiscal capacity, mobilizing domestic and external resources, attracting investment and macroeconomic stability. This suggests that European funds are integrated into a broader framework of partnership and co-financing, contributing to the creation of a more robust financial architecture. The impact on economic sustainability is not limited to the allocation of grants, but also involves developing the state's capacity to generate and manage its own resources efficiently.

The infrastructural and innovative dimension, reflected in SDG 9, highlights the importance of target 9.5 (stimulating scientific research and modernizing technological capacities), as well as targets 9 and 9.1 (developing reliable and sustainable infrastructure). This indicates that European funds contribute to digitalization, modernizing economic infrastructure and increasing competitiveness. In a converging economy, these investments are essential for integration into European value chains and for reducing development gaps.

The green transition is illustrated by the consistent weight of SDG 13, in particular targets 13.1 (strengthening climate resilience) and 13.2 (mainstreaming climate action into policies).

SDG 7 is also well represented by targets 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3, indicating investments in energy access, renewable energy and energy efficiency. These interventions directly contribute to reducing the energy vulnerability of the Republic of Moldova and to aligning with the objectives of the European Green Deal.

The impact on economic sustainability is twofold: reducing structural costs and stimulating the development of new economic sectors. SDG 15, through targets 15.1, 15.2, 15.3 and 15.5, highlights the component of ecosystem protection and sustainable management of natural resources. This indicates the integration of the environmental dimension into economic policies, contributing to a growth model that avoids the degradation of natural capital. Economic sustainability, in this logic, is closely linked to resource conservation and preventing future costs associated with environmental degradation.

The social dimension appears through SDG 1 (especially target 1.3 on social protection), SDG 10 (10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.7, 10.b) and SDG 4 (4 and 4.4). Although these bubbles are smaller compared to those associated with SDG 8 or 16, they indicate that European funds also contribute to poverty reduction, the reduction of inequalities and the development of skills. In particular, target 4.4 (the development of skills relevant to employment) is relevant for economic sustainability, as it strengthens the human capital necessary for a modern economy. Some goals, such as SDG 5 (gender equality) or SDG 6 (water and sanitation), appear with low weights, suggesting either their cross-cutting integration or a lower priority within the interventions analysed. SDG 14 is almost absent, an aspect that can be explained by the geographical specificity of the country.

Overall, the figure highlights that the impact of European funds on the economic sustainability of the Republic of Moldova is built on a combination of economic growth (SDG 8), institutional strengthening (SDG 16), partnerships and macroeconomic stability (SDG 17), infrastructure modernization (SDG 9) and green transition (SDG 7 and 13). The social and environmental dimensions are integrated into this framework, contributing to balanced development, but the core of interventions remains oriented towards the structural transformation of the economy.

Therefore, the analysis at the target level confirms and details the conclusions obtained at the aggregate level: European funds do not act only as instruments of punctual financial support, but as vectors of a systemic reform, oriented towards European convergence, economic resilience and long-term sustainable development.

CONCLUSION AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has highlighted that the European integration of the Republic of Moldova, supported by financial instruments such as the "Growth Plan for Moldova 2025-2027", represents a fundamental catalyst for long-term economic sustainability. However, the analysis of the literature and strategic reports indicates that the mere absorption of funds does not guarantee success, as it is

conditioned by institutional quality and the capacity to adapt to new climatic rigors.

Recommendations for political decision-makers and the economic environment in the Republic of Moldova:

- Strengthening absorption capacity and governance: Given the direct correlation between the quality of institutions and economic growth, it is imperative to professionalize public administration and digitalize the monitoring processes of EU-funded projects to minimize the risks of corruption and inefficiency.
- Rigorous integration of the principle of "do no significant harm to the environment" (DNSH): All infrastructure investments must pass through the filter of environmental sustainability. Early alignment with European environmental standards and carbon pricing mechanisms will protect the competitiveness of Moldovan exports in the Single Market.
- Stimulating innovation and intellectual capital: To avoid the "middle income trap", the Republic of Moldova needs to direct pre-accession funds towards research and development (R&D) and the digitalization of SMEs, moving from a model based on cheap labor to one based on high added value.
- Reducing regional disparities: It is necessary to implement financial decentralization mechanisms that ensure the equitable distribution of funds to rural areas and small towns, thus preventing economic and social polarization.

In conclusion, the Republic of Moldova is at a turning point. The strategic use of European assistance, coupled with deep structural reforms, can transform the current resilience into real and sustainable convergence, definitively anchoring the country in the European prosperity space.

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