



# Youth Session 2021

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## Dossier

# The Impact of Global Supply Chains

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## An Introduction to Sustainability

Over the last few years, thousands of youths and young adults have been taking to the streets, demanding decarbonisation and sustainable development, thus demonstrating that sustainability and the sustainable development of societies are issues close to their hearts. This is likely because it is them who will have to live with the consequences of our current actions and who will need to make important decisions in that regard themselves. If one works on sustainability and all that it entails, one is quick to realise that the challenges associated with it are of a global nature. Apart from local measures, a certain degree of international cooperation is therefore indispensable.

The most-cited definition of sustainability is found in the 1987 Brundtland Report and is as follows:

1. A development is sustainable if it meets the needs of the present without risking that future generations cannot meet their own needs (WCED 1987: 46);
2. On the whole, sustainable development is a process of change in which the use of resources, the goal of investments, the direction of technological progress, and institutional change are harmonised, enhancing the current and future potential to meet the needs and wishes of all human beings (WCED 1987: 49).

Therefore, this definition of sustainability includes not only intergenerational justice but also the demand of a holistic change of behaviour. This process of change is not limited to ecological aspects but includes economic and social elements, too, all of which must be brought together.

Similarly, the Youth Session is an instrument to coordinate the different views and opinions of youths and to create common strategies as to how to shape the future. Furthermore, it sensitises youths from Switzerland and abroad to the need of international cooperation and enables the participants to formally formulate their common visions and demands for a sustainable development *vis-à-vis* politics and society.

## Sustainability and its Relationship to the Agenda 2030

The 2030 Agenda does not have a goal that directly addresses supply chains or value chains. However, this topic is indirectly addressed in various SDGs and their sub-goals (targets):

SDG	Target	Objective
 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	12.2	By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	12.6	Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle
 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	12.1	Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries
 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	8.4	Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead
 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	8.a	Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries
 2 ZERO HUNGER	2.4	By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality
 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	9.3	Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

## Glossary

Supply Chain	All businesses and processes which are involved in a product or a service for a customer (e.g. raw material extraction, production, transport, final assembly, etc.) (see treeze Ltd & Rütter Soceco AG 2019, p. 5).
Sustainability	The Bruntland Report describes sustainable development as development which satisfies the needs of the present without impairing the condition of future generations ( <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Common_Future">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Common_Future</a> ).
Value Chain	In contrast to supply chains, value chains additionally contain the utilisation phase and disposal. Value chains therefore consider all businesses and processes from raw material extraction to disposal (see treeze Ltd & Rütter Soceco AG 2019, p. 5).  
Global Sourcing	The global acquisition of raw materials, products, services, etc. (see Christopher Kiel 2015).

## What Is It About?

The processes of globalisation show an ever-growing trend towards global sourcing. Many products contain resources from different countries and are processed and packed in various countries. There are many opportunities in this approach, but also some risks.

This dossier focusses on this very opportunities and risks. The Covid pandemic has increased the potential explosiveness of this topic. At least concerning goods of systemic importance, such as masks and medicine, there is an ongoing debate on whether more of these should be produced in Switzerland. Furthermore, more than three quarters of Switzerland’s total CO2 emissions occur abroad. Therefore, sustainability is of great importance with regard to imported goods and the associated supply chains (see BAFU 2018, p. 33).

## What is important?

- **Standards, labels, and ISO norms** are efforts to honour ecological, economic, and societal sustainability. Particularly for products with transnational supply chains, standards and labels are of great importance, since every country has different laws and regulations. Labels guarantee that the same requirements are met. This, however, necessitates periodic controls which should be as independent as possible. Max Havelaar is one example of how this approach works in practice (see [kompass-nachhaltigkeit.ch](http://kompass-nachhaltigkeit.ch), Max Havelaar).
- **Infrastructure** is a necessity for global supply chains. This is evident with regard to China’s New Silk Road: China created the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) which grant credits in order to implement an enormous Asian infrastructure project and to develop existing and open up new markets where businesses sell products and

services.<sup>1</sup> Switzerland invested some 700 million Dollar in the AIIB, hoping to profit indirectly. The total planned and placed investments is estimated to be 500 billion Dollar. At the time, a lot of money is invested in developing and expanding global supply chains, since a well-developed infrastructure is crucial to global supply chains (see EDA 2020, KOF ETHZ 2019).

- **Free Trade Agreements** are agreements between countries intended to facilitate reciprocal trade (exchange of goods and services) by reducing or eliminating customs duties and import taxes. Switzerland has negotiated some 30 agreements with 40 partners. Free trade agreements are crucial for global supply chains since they made global sourcing and the current level of global division of labour possible (see Seco).
- The **consumption of natural resources** (water, raw materials, air, etc.) of Switzerland is high in many areas, and—according to the above definition—not sustainable. If every person on earth were to consume as many resources as the average Swiss resident, we would need some three earths to satisfy all these demands. Since Switzerland imports many resources and goods, a majority of this natural resource consumption takes place abroad (see BAFU and BFS).
- **Planetary Boundaries (ecological carrying capacity)** are the limits to which we can use the resources of our planet. With regard to the ozone hole and the consumption of fresh water, we are currently within safe limits (green). This means that these areas are currently sustainably used. Those areas (e.g. climate crisis, deforestation, land use) currently in the yellow range (range of uncertainty) are possibly already above the ecological carrying capacity. This is because many authors argue that the limits of ecological carrying capacity is somewhere within the yellow range, but it is difficult to say where exactly due to the many uncertainties. Research into carrying capacity has greatly influenced the UN's and EU's environmental goals, since if humans as a whole exceed these limits, it could have disastrous medium- and long-term consequences and could unbalance the world climate and the world as a whole. There is a danger of irreversible environmental changes which would destroy the basis of our existence. For 2015, many areas have values well beyond the planetary boundaries (see Steffen *et al.* 2015).
- The **environmental hotspots of Swiss supply chains** have been examined in the report "Umweltatlas Lieferketten Schweiz" ('environmental atlas of Swiss supply chains'), commissioned by the Federal Department for the Environment (FOEN). The goal was to demonstrate to Swiss manufacturers where they have some potential for improvement with regard to sustainability and consumption of resources. In order to do so, the researchers investigated the value chains of relevant (and particularly resource and energy intense) industries. They are usually part of complex and global supply chains. The aforementioned planetary boundaries were also included in the study, and it was examined to what extent these boundaries have already been surpassed. The study wants to indicate on what the different industries must focus in order to be more ecologically sustainable. On the whole, it was shown that in many industries the greatest need for change is at the very beginning of their supply chains, i.e. concerning raw material extraction and / or first processing (see BAFU, treeze Ltd & Rütter Sococo AG 2019, p. 5, 14-63).

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<sup>1</sup> Weclapp, Absatzmarkt Definition, 2021

## Supply Chains and the Covid Pandemic

Because of the economic restrictions during the covid pandemic, many businesses have realised just how susceptible for disruptions of their 'just in time' supply chains vulnerable they have become. The pandemic caused and continues to cause raw material shortages, production stoppages, and transport blockages. These disruptions were mostly caused by the government-ordered lockdowns and border closings. Supply chains, and therefore the whole economy, have suffered from economic restrictions. It is argued that speed, agility, and innovation are indispensable in order to meet future challenges. In order to assure their own continued existence, many businesses are prioritising the development of crisis programmes and the incorporation of sustainability into their supply chains by means of digitalisation and real-time analysis in their transformation strategies. The advantage of a fully digitally traceable supply chain is that it contains all supply relationships and all supplier of a given company and covers the whole value chain of a product.<sup>2</sup> This also improves transparency. The collection and sharing of real-time data increases efficiency and transparency in the entire supply chains and enables businesses to react faster to possible disruptions. At the same time, data collection along the entire supply chain is a significant administrative effort, given the currently implemented methods. The handling of trade secrets and confidentiality is a central challenge in this process (comment by Jean-Philipp Kohl, Swissmem, 2021).

## Legal Basis

- **Federal Act on Public Procurement** (PPA: SR 172.056.1):  
PPA § 2 (Purpose): The purpose of this Act is to ensure:
  - a) the cost-efficient use of public funds in a manner that is economically, ecologically and socially sustainable;
  - b) the transparency of the award procedure;
  - c) equal treatment and non-discrimination of tenderers;
  - d) the promotion of effective, fair competition among tenderers, in particular by means of measures against unlawful agreements affecting competition and measures against corruption.
- **Federal Act on the Protection of the Environment** (Environmental Protection Act, EPA: SR 814.01)  
EPA § 1 (Aim):
  - 1) This Act is intended to protect people, animals and plants, their biological communities and habitats against harmful effects or nuisances and to preserve the natural foundations of life sustainably, in particular biological diversity and the fertility of the soil.
  - 2) Early preventive measures must be taken in order to limit effects which could become harmful or a nuisance.

## What Is Currently Happening in Politics?

- **(Federal Council Plan of Action) Report on Green Economy:** A report by the FOEN, commissioned by the Federal Council. It contains a plan of action specifying federal measures intended to make the economy more sustainable with regard to the environment and the use of resources.

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<sup>2</sup> Huawei Politikbrief, 2020

- **(Federal Council Plan of Action) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Position paper and plan of action 2020–2023 on the responsibility of businesses *vis-à-vis* society and the environment.
- **(Federal Council Plan of Action) National Plan of Action 2020–2023 on the economy and human rights:** Demonstrates how Switzerland is implementing UN guidelines and presents 35 measures.
- **Strategy on sustainable development:** The Federal Council demonstrates which areas he intends to emphasise with regard to medium- and long-term sustainability in order to fulfil the Agenda 2030 goals.
- **19.4286 Postulate (B. Heim):**<sup>3</sup> This postulate demands a report by the Federal Council on how the supply of vital medicine such as antibiotics can be assured continually.
- **19.3810 Interpellation (A. Thorens Goumaz):**<sup>4</sup> In this interpellation, the MP is asking the Federal Council a series of question on the observance of the polluter-pays principle and on the responsibility of corporations abroad. In addition, she asks if the Federal Council intends to incorporate foreign efforts as a source of inspiration into his plan of action ‘Green Economy’. In his answer, the Federal Council pointed out the implementation of the principle of manufacturer liability with regard to electric and electronic devices, batteries, and beverage packaging. With regard to waste disposal, the polluter-pays principle is largely implemented, because according to the 2018 environmental report, 73% of the environmental impact of Swiss consumption takes place abroad.

## Decision-Making Bases and Key Arguments

The environmental atlas study provides important insights with regard to supply chains in Switzerland. It has examined the different environmental footprints (greenhouse gases, biodiversity, water, air pollution, fine dust pollution, etc.) of different industries. In principle, all industries have potential for improvement and leave behind an oversized environmental footprint, i.e. they exceed planetary boundaries. The food industry has the biggest environmental footprint, followed by the real estate sector. Furthermore, it is usually large industries which have complex supply chains. There are businesses (e.g. Fairphone in the consumer electronics industry) which are actively trying to source raw materials which are extracted in an environmentally friendly way and are traded fairly. However, this can make

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<sup>3</sup> “A postulate mandates the Federal Council to examine and report on whether to submit a bill to the Federal Assembly or to take a measure. A postulate may be submitted by the majority of the members of a committee, by a parliamentary group or by an Assembly member. The postulate is accepted when one Council [i.e. either the National Council or the Council of States] accepts it.” (Lexicon of Parliamentary Terms: <https://www.parlament.ch/en/%C3%BCber-das-parlament/parlamentsw%C3%B6rterbuch/parlamentsw%C3%B6rterbuch-detail?WordId=177>, 8<sup>th</sup> October 2021)).

<sup>4</sup> “An interpellation is a procedure used by Council members, a majority of the members of a committee, or a parliamentary group to request information from the Federal Council on important domestic or foreign events or on federal matters. The Federal Council normally responds before the next session. The author of an interpellation may express their level of satisfaction with the answer, and can also demand a debate on the answer. In practice, a debate of this type is only held in the Council of States; the National Council only debates interpellations that have been declared urgent. Interpellations can be declared urgent by the offices of the Councils, which means that the Council concerned must deal with them in the current session. In the National Council, if at least 75 members request a debate on current issues in relation to specific urgent interpellations, this debate must be held.” (Lexicon of Parliamentary Terms: <https://www.parlament.ch/en/%C3%BCber-das-parlament/parlamentsw%C3%B6rterbuch/parlamentsw%C3%B6rterbuch-detail?WordId=116> (8<sup>th</sup> October 2021)).

products more expensive, thus necessitating a certain responsibility and awareness on the part of consumers.

### **Possible Advantages and Disadvantages of Global Supply Chains:**

#### Advantages:

- Cheaper products: if production costs are high in a given country, it is possible to switch to a cheaper country;<sup>5</sup>
- Larger access to resources.
- New markets: Due to free trade agreements, tariffs are abolished, and production standards are harmonised;
- More jobs and value creation in developing countries;
- Larger and global choice from products and services: each country is specialised in certain natural resources and materials: Chile, for example, is a major Copper exporter for the German industry, and China trumps all other countries with regard to its mineral and rare earth deposits (indispensable components in microelectronics). Thus, global sourcing opens up access to important resources which are not available domestically.
- Division of labour (specialised countries with high quantities).

#### Disadvantages:

- Traceability and sustainability standards are made difficult (e.g. fair labour standards, environmental compatibility, no child labour, etc.);
- Danger of exploitation of economically weaker nations;
- More and less stringent laws in different countries;
- Long transport routes using many resources;
- Currency exchange risks;
- Language problems, longer communication paths;
- Political and legal uncertainties which may lead to delivery disruptions and / or delays.

(see Christopher Kiel 2015; Discussion with experts).

Switzerland is an export nation and thus can profit from globalisation. Nevertheless, it is exposed to the risks inherent in global supply chains. For Switzerland and the rest of the world being able to trade fairly, these disadvantages must therefore be eliminated or reduced.

According to a study by the World Bank, businesses which are part of global supply chains are more productive and more capital intensive compared to those which are not of such supply chains. Because employment increases in these industries due to the redistribution of labour, poverty is reduced.<sup>6</sup> Many countries have profited from globalisation and increased their standards of living. Nevertheless, the fruits of globalisation have been and continue to be unequally distributed, both between and within nations (see discussion with experts, Alvaredo *et al.* 2018).

In order to make supply chains more sustainable and to further develop them, these are strategies proposed by different organisations:

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<sup>5</sup> wlv – inside business, Globale Beschaffung: Vorteile, Nachteile und die richtige Strategie, 2021

<sup>6</sup> Economiesuisse, Weltbank-Studie: Weniger Armut dank globalen Wertschöpfungsketten, 2021

## Trade Associations:

- Sustainability should be increased by trusting the individual responsibility, sensitisation, and innovation of businesses. Therefore, it should not be necessary to impose new regulations (see Economiesuisse, p. 4).
- The promotion of global supply chains and free trade agreements is a win-win situation for all parties involved, leading to greater prosperity and sustainable development in the developed countries because more jobs are created. They would like to advance further free trade agreements, particularly the Mercosur free trade agreement with Latin American countries and the Institutional Framework Agreement with the EU, the latter providing easier access to the European common market (see Aargauische Industrie- und Handelskammer 2019: Guest Contribution by Dr. Jean-Philipp Kohl, p. 88).
- Implementation of resource-saving business models (see Roth Christine 2021).
- Global CO<sub>2</sub> tax (see Roth Christine 2021).

## Environmental Organisations:

- Producing and buying fewer products of a higher quality which are long-lasting, repairable, and / or recyclable.
- Global CO<sub>2</sub> taxes, so that the effective costs caused by environmental pollution are covered, both in production and transportation.
- An even more sustainable public procurement (e.g. net zero emissions, building materials from sustainable sources only (see definition of “sustainable” in the glossary)) in order to meet the Paris Climate Accords’ goals as well as to be an exemplary role model. ‘Public procurement’ is an umbrella term for all building and buying undertaken by the state.  
(See Greenpeace; WWF; Klimaallianz Schweiz)

## Human Rights and Aid Organisations:

- Fair working conditions abroad when producing for the Swiss market (see Verein Konzernverantwortungsinitiative).

## Further Information

Links	QR Code
<p>Various Labels (<a href="#">EPA</a>)</p>	
<p>Study <a href="#">Umweltatlas Lieferketten der Schweiz</a> (in German); (see particularly pp. 11–14)</p>	
<p>Conservation of resources and circular economy (green economy) on the website of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transportation, Energy, and Communication <a href="#">FDETEC</a> (in German)</p>	
<p>Corporate Social Responsibility on the <a href="#">website</a> of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs</p>	
<p>Economy and Human Rights on the <a href="#">website</a> of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (in German)</p>	

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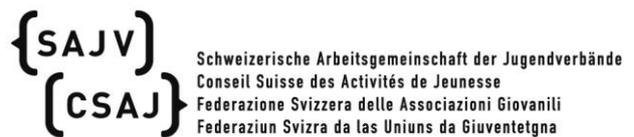
Gespräch Experten\*innen: Informationen aus den Mails, Telefonaten und Videotelefonaten der Experten\*innen (Susanna Fieber (BAFU), Till Berger (ARE), Dr. Jean Philippe-Kohl & Dr. Christine Roth (Swissmem))  
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