

## ACCOUNTING AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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### **Abstract**

*As sustainability becomes a growing priority for organizations worldwide, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are increasingly shaping accounting research and practice. Most of the companies are now expected to go beyond traditional financial reporting and demonstrate how their activities contribute to broader social and environmental objectives. In response to this shift, academic interest in SDG-related accounting has expanded noticeably in recent years. This study uses quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine how research on SDG accounting has developed over time, focusing on publication trends, influential contributions, patterns of international collaboration and how accounting contribute to SDG achievement and reporting. Based on articles indexed in the Web of Science database from 2015 to 2025, the analysis identifies the leading journals, authors and institutions in this area, as well as the most cited studies that have guided ongoing discussions. Also, the qualitative analysis identifies three major themes that were debated by the researchers. The findings show a steady rise in SDG accounting research, reflecting increasing demand for transparency and sustainable business practices. Overall, the study emphasizes the value of global cooperation in advancing SDG-focused accounting and offers useful insights into future directions for research in this evolving field.*

**Keywords:** *SDG, accounting, sustainability, qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis, literature review, bibliometric analysis*

**JEL Classification:** *M41, M48*

### **1. Introduction**

Since 2016, the mandatory disclosure of non-financial information has represented a pivotal transformation in corporate reporting within the European Union, challenging firms to expand transparency beyond traditional financial indicators. The EU Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD), introduced in 2014, required large companies with more than 500 employees to disclose not only their financial performance but also non-financial information, allowing firms to choose from national, European, or international reporting frameworks (EU, 2014). Since then, corporate reporting requirements have evolved significantly. In 2024, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) replaced the NFRD, greatly expanding both the number of companies required to report and the level of detail expected. The CSRD introduces comprehensive obligations across environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions, including mandatory assurance of reported information. These changes aim to ensure that corporate disclosures contribute to the EU's climate and sustainability goals. Ongoing updates in 2025 continue to refine the scope and requirements, reflecting efforts to balance rigor with practical feasibility for reporting companies. In this context, the EU *Omnibus* package, also adopted in 2025, further impacts sustainability reporting by adjusting the CSRD's coverage and thresholds. Under the Omnibus measures, only companies with more than 1,000 employees and specified financial criteria are now mandated to report, reducing the total number of obligated firms and easing administrative burdens for smaller entities. The package also introduces revised European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) with streamlined reporting requirements, delayed implementation timelines, and more limited obligations for value-chain reporting. While these adjustments aim to make reporting more manageable and focused, they may also reduce the scope of transparency and comparability of

corporate sustainability disclosures at a time when stakeholders increasingly demand detailed non-financial information.

At the international level, there is a large variety of non-financial reporting guidelines, standards, and frameworks issued by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC), Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), Climate Disclosure Standards Board (CDSB) (Raucci and Tarquinio, 2020) which at the end of the year 2020, have “co-authored an illustration of how their current frameworks, standards, and platforms, along with the elements set out by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)” which can suggest the beginning of the “development of global standards that enable the disclosure of how sustainability matters create or erode enterprise value” (CDSB, 2020). At the same time, the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB), established under the IFRS Foundation, issued two foundational sustainability disclosure standards - IFRS S1 on general sustainability - related disclosures and IFRS S2 on climate-related disclosures - to create a consistent global baseline for sustainability reporting that builds directly on the TCFD recommendations. Many jurisdictions around the world are now adopting or planning to adopt these standards, with implementation beginning in several markets in 2024–2025 and further rollouts expected through 2026 and beyond as part of efforts to harmonise sustainability reporting across borders and investor communities.

Although non-financial guidelines and regulations often present various challenges, the central concern remains the need for Sustainable Development (SD). This focus is far from new: as Bebbington (2001) notes that the concept of sustainability can be traced back to discussions during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt (McCormick, 1986; Sandbach, 1978). Moreover, the importance of sustainable development was formally addressed, as well as, in early 1949 at the United Nations Scientific Conference on the Conservation and Utilization of Resources (Bebbington, 2001).

Therefore, in 2015, the United Nations (UN) incorporated the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its 2030 Agenda, building upon and expanding the framework established by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which concluded that same year. Hajer et al. (2015) argue that the SDGs have the potential to serve as a unifying vision for both civil society and organizations in the pursuit of long-term prosperity. However, realizing this potential requires moving beyond a narrow, centralized perspective - the so-called “cockpit” - and actively engaging a diverse range of actors, including governments, to implement and advance these goals.

The SDGs can serve as a foundation for organizations seeking to transition toward more sustainable business models (Costea et al., 2025; Izzo et al., 2020). While companies play a critical role in promoting sustainability, their primary focus has traditionally been on economic development (Dunning & Fortanier, 2007; Kolk & van Tulder, 2010). Recent research has begun to examine the concrete actions individual firms take to advance sustainable development (Lukács et al., 2025; Van Zanten & Van Tulder, 2018). However, further studies are needed to explore how organizations integrate their contributions to the SDGs within existing accounting and reporting practices (Bebbington & Unerman, 2018). Additionally, there is a gap in understanding the relationship between companies, industry dynamics, and SDG implementation relative to competitors. The tools, indicators, and mapping frameworks provided by the SDGs can support companies in developing innovative strategies and enhancing their competitive positioning while contributing to sustainability objectives (Sundarasan et al., 2025; Mio et al., 2020).

The introduction of the SDGs has generated significant scholarly interest in how this new framework for sustainable development may influence organizational reporting practices and the broader implications of these changes. In this context, the article examines current knowledge on sustainable development, the SDGs and the role of accountants in supporting their implementation. Insights and questions emerging from this analysis will provide the foundation for future research in this area.

Through a literature review analysis, this article examines the relationship between accounting and the SDGs, with the aim of contributing to the existing literature. It also identifies gaps in current research and suggests directions for future investigation. The central research question guiding this research is: How can accounting support and contribute to the achievement and reporting of the SDGs? Furthermore, the article examines the following subsidiary questions to highlight possible directions for future research: (1) How has the literature on SDG-related accounting evolved? (2) What are the main challenges in accounting’s contribution to SDG implementation and reporting?

## 2. Methodology

To systematize the existing literature on SDG reporting and accounting, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted. The SLR is recognized as an organized, transparent, and replicable method for analyzing prior research (Erin et al., 2025; Mio et al., 2020; Jaramillo et al., 2019; Delbufalo, 2012) and provides a critical perspective based on evidence and previous scholarly experiences (Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey, 2011). As highlighted in prior studies, the SLR is increasingly becoming a standard approach in accounting research, allowing for a focused investigation of specific topics through structured research questions that generate critical insights and suggest avenues for future research (Tommasetti et al., 2020; Guthrie et al., 2012).

For this review, bibliometric and content analysis were employed to examine the literature from multiple perspectives. In particular, VOSviewer software (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) facilitated the bibliometric analysis by mapping keyword co-occurrences and generating visual representations that capture the structure and interconnections of the literature. The content analysis complements this approach by identifying recurring themes, patterns, and trends within the literature, providing an opportunity to systematically categorize research topics, highlight methodological approaches, and uncover gaps or emerging areas for future study. This dual approach ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the SDG reporting and accounting literature, combining quantitative insights from bibliometrics with qualitative depth from content analysis (Erin et al., 2025; Valentinetti & Rea, 2024; Puntillo, Gulluscio & Veltri, 2025).

The analysis draws on data extracted from the Web of Science (WoS) database, a leading platform for academic publications that is widely used in bibliometric research. WoS is commonly employed in studies across diverse academic fields, including SDG research, due to its comprehensive coverage and robust indexing. Recent studies have emphasized its usefulness in mapping publication trends, identifying research gaps, and analyzing collaborative networks related to the SDGs (Marco-Lajara et al., 2023).

This study focuses on the period from 2015, the year the SDGs were formally adopted, to 2025, representing the most recent data available. An advanced search was conducted in the WoS database within the Topic field, using the representative terms “SDG” OR “Sustainable Development Goals” OR “sustainability” and “accounting”. We selected only Economics, Business Finance, Management or Business as Web of Science Categories. This initial search returned 710 documents. Further refinement excluded editorial materials, book chapters, early access or retracted publications, which determined 661 documents. Thereafter, we filtered to include only articles published in English, resulting a final dataset of 632 articles for analysis.

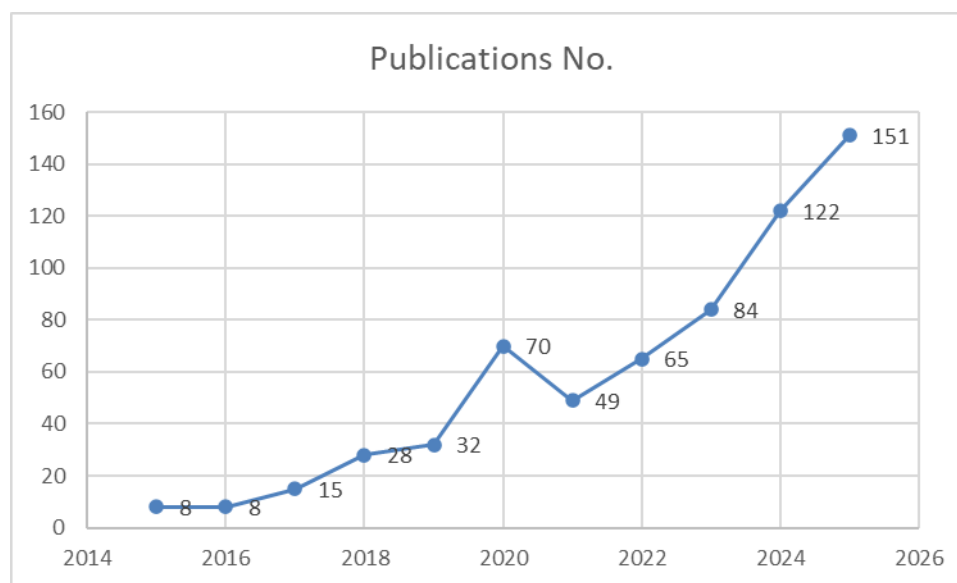
### 3. Literature Review Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the articles is trying to find responses to the research question: How the literature on SDGs accounting evolved.

#### 3.1 Quantitative analysis

##### *Publication distribution over the period 2015 – 2025*

The results illustrate the evolution of research output over the analyzed period, highlighting a marked and growing scholarly interest in SDG accounting. According to the publication years of the 632 articles, there is a constant increase in the research topic since 2020, as presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – Publications distribution**

Source: Own processing

##### *Journal distribution of articles*

Analyzing the journals in which the sample of articles are published, the podium leading journals are “Baltic Journal of Economic Studies”, “Meditari Accountancy Research” and “World Development”. The table below presents the journals that contain at least 10 articles.

**Tabel 1. Top Article distribution per journal**

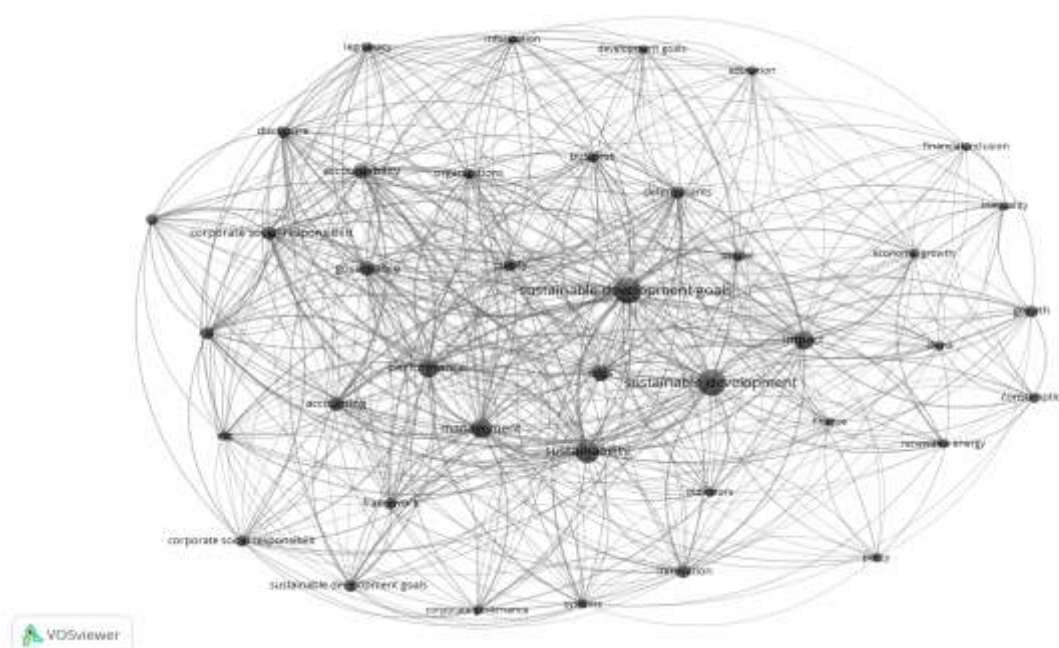
Journal	Number of articles
BALTIC JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC STUDIES	24
MEDITARI ACCOUNTANCY RESEARCH	19
WORLD DEVELOPMENT	18
COGENT BUSINESS MANAGEMENT	17
FINANCIAL AND CREDIT ACTIVITY PROBLEMS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE	15
SUSTAINABILITY ACCOUNTING MANAGEMENT AND POLICY JOURNAL	15
ACCOUNTING AUDITING ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNAL	13
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	12

Source: Own processing

The results show that journals in the area of accounting are interesting to publish papers related to SDG accounting, but more open to this issue are journals in the area of Management and Business and the journals in the domain of Sustainability.

### *Most common keywords of the articles*

An interesting visualization of the frequency of the keywords found in the title and abstract is represented in Figure 2. The most common keywords are represented by “sustainable development”, “sustainable development goals”, “sustainability” followed by “performance” and business-related words which sustain the link between sustainability, accounting and reporting area.



**Figure 2 – Relevant keywords used**  
Source: Own processing with VOSviewer

### *Number of citations per article*

According to the results that emerged from the database, the top 10 papers generated a number of 2,674 citations in the WoS database. Table 2 outlines the number of citations per article.

**Tabel 2. Top 10 List of citations per article- data extracted from WoS**

Title of the article	No. of citations
Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An enabling role for accounting research (Bebbington and Unerman, 2018)	636
Sustainable development goals and inclusive development (Gupta and Vegelin, 2016)	462
Sustainability, FinTech and Financial Inclusion	330

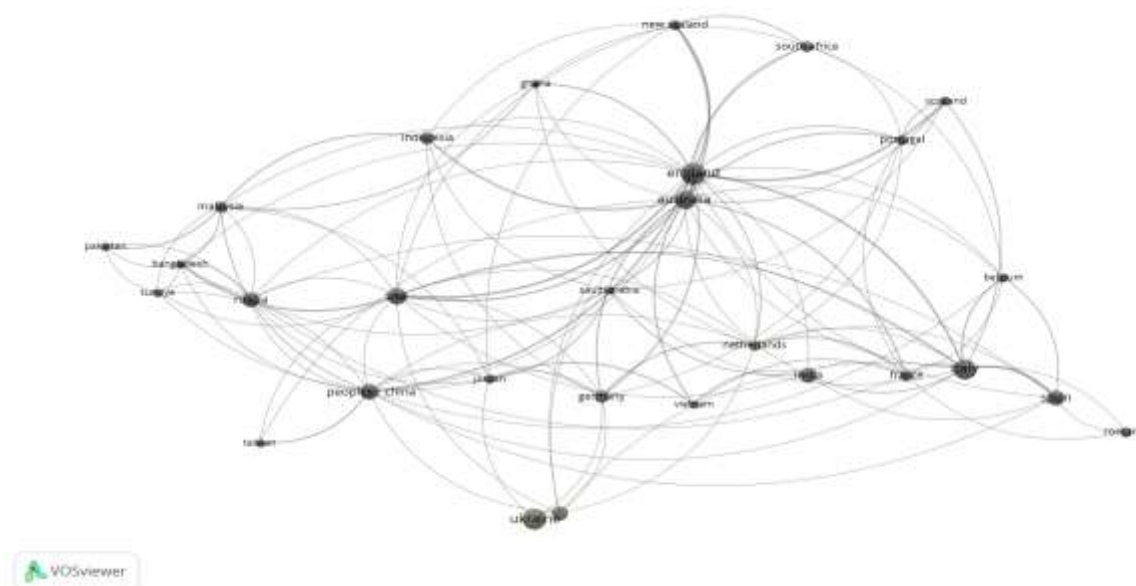
(Arner et al., 2020)	
Sustainable tourism: Sustaining tourism or something more? (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018)	299
Advancing research into accounting and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Bebbington and Unerman, 2020)	186
SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth - A gendered analysis (Rai et al., 2019)	174
Pathways to achieve a set of ambitious global sustainability objectives by 2050: Explorations using the IMAGE integrated assessment model (van Vuuren et. al, 2015)	159
Voluntary disclosure of Sustainable Development Goals in mandatory non-financial reports: The moderating role of cultural dimension (Pizzi et. al, 2022)	144
Sustainable development goal indicators: Analyzing trade-offs and complementarities (Barbier and Burgess, 2019)	143
Assessment of corporate social responsibility by addressing sustainable development goals (Lu et. al, 2021)	141

Source: Own processing

The leading cited articles are “Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: An enabling role for accounting research” from Bebbington and Unerman (2018), followed by the “Sustainable development goals and inclusive development” (Gupta and Vegelin, 2016), which opened the path toward the future research on SDGs.

#### Country collaboration of co-authors analysis

Country-level co-authorship analysis in SDG accounting highlights global collaboration patterns and knowledge exchange. The UK, Australia USA, China and Italy emerge as key hubs, with the highest number of links (20, 18, 17, 15 and 14) and total link strength (58, 47, 31, 22 and 33), positioning them as central nodes in international research networks. Five collaboration clusters were identified: Cluster 1 has at its top USA, China, Canada, Russia and Malaysia; Cluster 2 is led by the UK and Australia; Cluster 3 includes Italy, France and Spain as the main countries; Cluster 4 connects the Netherlands and Germany; and Cluster 5 centers on Jordan, Saudi Arabia, India and Vietnam. Overall, the analysis underscores the leading role of developed countries in SDG accounting, while emerging economies are gradually increasing their participation in global sustainability research.



**Figure 3 - Country collaboration of co-authors analysis**

Source: Own processing with VOSviewer

### 3.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis of the research is trying to respond to the research question: How does accounting contribute to SDG achievement and reporting?

According to the analysed literature, to answer the research question mentioned, three categories in which the articles were grouped were identified: Accounting Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals Reporting and SDG Contributions: A Cross-Country Investigation.

#### *Accounting Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals*

Accounting Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals section outlines which are the expected roles for accountants. Nechita (2019) conducted a qualitative analysis of earlier studies and public reports to explore the accounting implications of the SDGs, highlighting the role of regulatory bodies in measuring sustainability and noting that the accounting profession actively contributes to several SDGs. The author suggested future research on accounting techniques addressing ecological, educational, and economic responsibilities. Similarly, Tsalis et al. (2020) and Christ and Burritt (2019) emphasized the importance of academics and business scholars in supporting SDG implementation, proposing frameworks to enhance collaboration between businesses and academia through knowledge generation and transdisciplinary engagement.

Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala (2020) examined the contribution of Southern intellectuals to SDGs, critiquing the global focus on underdeveloped countries, while Muff et al. (2020) explored tools for developing responsible leadership competencies in business owners, highlighting sustainability education. Moon et al. (2018) investigated Higher Education Institutions' SDG commitments, finding that only a few adopt a holistic approach, often focusing on single goals for convenience or marketing.

Institutional contributions to SDGs have also been studied. Pirmana et al. (2019) analyzed the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) in developing countries, showing its potential to integrate SDG indicators into monitoring systems. Sobkowiak et al. (2020) examined national biodiversity accounting in the UK, illustrating practical challenges in SDG data collection, while Moyer and Hedden (2020) highlighted that many poorer countries require support to meet SDG targets. Cross-country analyses by Campagnolo et al. (2018), Resce

and Schiltz (2021), and Fiorini and Hoekman (2018) underscored variations in SDG performance, with industrialized countries often lagging in environmental outcomes. Le Blanc (2015) emphasized the interconnectedness of SDG targets, advocating for sector- and country-specific studies.

From a business perspective, Bebbington and Unerman (2020) and Mio et al. (2020) highlighted gaps between corporate SDG adoption at strategic versus operational levels, calling for further research into disclosure practices and organizational integration. Lu et al. (2021) developed a framework for evaluating CSR in the context of SDGs, noting limitations for SMEs. Monitoring frameworks like UNGC and GRI help link corporate activities to SDG achievement, while Hörisch (2021) demonstrated the COVID-19 pandemic's mixed impact on SDGs, emphasizing the role of accountants in supporting sustainability reporting and governance in response to crises.

#### ***Sustainable Development Goals Reporting***

The emergence of the SDGs has prompted a holistic examination of how societies, businesses, and governments can contribute to sustainable development. Early research has focused on macro-level policy implications. Swain and Ranganathan (2021) examined SDG linkages to guide policymakers in prioritization, highlighting a broader connectivity compared to the MDGs, while Biggeri et al. (2019) proposed an Integrated Sustainable Development Index to better understand trade-offs and synergies between goals. Similarly, Weber and Weber (2020) analyzed environmental SDGs through the lens of Ecological Modernization Theory, emphasizing the alignment of SDG objectives with political and environmental strategies, although their focus remained on measurement rather than organizational implementation.

A growing body of research has examined business engagement with the SDGs. Beverelli et al. (2018) demonstrated that liberalized trade and investment policies positively affect SDG access, while Salimova et al. (2020) explored the influence of SDGs on Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0. Sector-specific studies include Consolandi et al. (2020), who investigated healthcare contributions to SDG 3 using SASB materiality, and Shokouhyar et al. (2019), who highlighted sustainable supply chain innovations in the Iranian automotive sector. Kumar et al. (2020) applied a TOPSIS framework to identify supply chain indicators supporting SDG achievement, revealing an environmental focus in corporate strategies.

At the organizational level, several studies have proposed frameworks and assessment tools. Sinkovics et al. (2020) developed a responsibility matrix to evaluate firm activities across SDGs, while Van Zanten and Van Tulder (2021b) introduced a nexus approach linking direct, indirect, and transformational contributions to SDGs. Muff et al. (2017) expanded the SDG Compass through the Gap Frame, illustrating national-level sustainability gaps and providing educational and benchmarking tools. Large-scale analyses by Elalfy et al. (2020) and Cho et al. (2020) revealed that larger and public-listed firms are more likely to report SDG contributions, with environmental and sensitive sectors showing higher engagement.

Institutional and governance factors also influence SDG adoption. Rosati and Faria (2019) found that organizational adoption is higher in countries with weaker employment laws, greater climate vulnerability, and lower power distance. Van Zanten and Van Tulder (2018, 2021) demonstrated that multinational companies prioritize internally actionable SDG targets, favoring harm-avoidance over positive impact. García-Sánchez et al. (2020) showed that foreign and pension fund ownership boosts the quality of SDG reporting, highlighting the role of institutional investors. Rosati and Faria (2019) further emphasized firm-level characteristics, including size, workforce composition, and economic performance, in shaping SDG disclosure practices.

Empirical research in national and sectoral contexts confirms varied adoption patterns. Pineda-Escobar (2019) found that Colombian firms show interest in SDGs but provide limited detailed reporting, while Nichita et al. (2020) revealed that chemical companies in CEE countries largely focus on SDG 8, with minimal attention to goals such as SDG 14 or 2. Avramou et al. (2019) assessed European banks' SDG disclosure using GRI indicators, showing low overall

coverage and emphasizing the need for longitudinal monitoring. These studies collectively suggest that while SDG reporting is growing, its depth, quality, and alignment with organizational practices remain inconsistent, highlighting the need for more standardized indicators, multi-stakeholder engagement, and cross-sectoral analyses to maximize impact.

*SDG Contributions: A Cross-Country Investigation*

National-level studies have examined how companies integrate SDGs into their strategies across diverse contexts. In Spain, Forcadell and Aracil (2019) introduced the concept of CSRIN (CSR with the aim at institutional necessities) to explore how institutional changes shape CSR initiatives, showing that multinational companies align CSR strategies with institutional necessities. Lopez (2020) analyzed 14 Spanish MNCs (multinational companies) and found that while SDG information is included in CSR reports, engagement with stakeholders through communication channels remains limited. Ferro et al. (2019) validated the Triple Bottom Line framework among Spanish organizations, highlighting economic, social, and environmental dimensions, and Lassala et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between SDG adoption and financial performance, noting that in some configurations SDG implementation may not immediately translate into higher profitability. Diaz-Sarachaga (2021) developed a scoring tool for Spanish SMEs, linking 33 relevant SDG indicators to business activities, providing a practical method to evaluate contributions to sustainability.

In Italy and Greece, studies reveal similar challenges. Di Vaio and Varriale (2020) analyzed sustainability disclosure practices in seven major Italian airports, finding that SDG reporting is often partial and inconsistent. Izzo et al. (2020) examined 40 Italian listed companies, showing that only a small fraction (5%) disclosed SDG-specific KPIs in their reports. In Greece, Tsalis et al. (2020) focused on the quality of SDG disclosure, finding uneven coverage across industries, with SDGs 7, 9, and 13 being most addressed while SDG 16 remained largely neglected. These findings highlight that disclosure quality and depth are influenced by organizational engagement, sectoral priorities, and the maturity of sustainability practices.

Evidence from other national contexts further underscores the role of institutional pressures and stakeholder expectations. In Russia, Blagov and Petrova-Savchenko (2020) observed that organizations prioritize SDGs 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 17, with the involvement of CSR and sustainability departments increasing over time. Ike et al. (2021) showed that Japanese MNEs implement sustainability initiatives to support local legitimacy, though inconsistencies exist between headquarters and subsidiaries. In Portugal, Santos and Bastos (2020) found that stakeholder expectations are the primary driver for SDG adoption, while in India, Poddar et al. (2019) demonstrated that CSR spending is sector-specific, with financial services being most active. In the Czech Republic and Poland, Šebestová and Sroka (2020) reported that SMEs are motivated by customer demand and regulatory pressures, with Czech firms showing higher engagement in waste management and “green” practices than Polish counterparts.

Methodologically, these national studies predominantly rely on qualitative case studies, content analysis, interviews, and scoring frameworks, often triangulating data from corporate reports, websites, and regulatory databases. For instance, Lopez (2020) combined case studies with stakeholder analysis, while Ike et al. (2021) applied interviews and legitimacy theory lenses to understand Japanese MNE practices. Diaz-Sarachaga (2021) and Ferro et al. (2019) used structured scoring and Triple Bottom Line frameworks, providing measurable insights into SDG contributions. This methodological diversity reflects both the complexity of SDG integration and the need for tools that capture qualitative and quantitative dimensions of corporate sustainability performance.

Thematic analysis across these national studies reveals recurring patterns and gaps. Stakeholder engagement, communication channels, and standardized indicators emerge as critical areas requiring improvement. While companies increasingly report on SDGs, disclosure often emphasizes strategic commitment over measurable outcomes, and cross-country comparisons show

substantial variation in focus, particularly between developed and emerging economies. Additionally, the alignment between CSR initiatives and SDG contributions remains inconsistent, suggesting that companies often adopt SDGs symbolically rather than operationally.

Overall, these national-level studies demonstrate that corporate SDG reporting is growing but uneven in scope, quality, and impact. They highlight the importance of institutional frameworks, stakeholder pressures, and sector-specific factors in shaping corporate sustainability practices. Future research should explore cross-country and sectoral comparisons, longitudinal tracking of SDG adoption, and the effectiveness of quantitative indicators and reporting tools. Such studies would help identify best practices and support organizations in embedding SDGs into their core strategy, governance, and operational decision-making, ultimately enhancing their contribution to sustainable development.

#### 4. Conclusions

This review integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence drawn from a systematically structured database of academic contributions addressing the intersection between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and accounting. Its primary objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of empirical research on SDG-related contributions and disclosure practices. The results indicate a clear and sustained increase in scholarly interest since the adoption of the SDGs, reflecting their growing relevance in both academic and professional debates. However, this body of research remains fragmented, with studies generally positioned either at a macro level, examining the global, institutional, or policy implications of the SDGs or at a micro level, focusing on firm-level reporting practices and organizational responses.

The findings also reveal that the role of accountants is widely acknowledged as pivotal in facilitating SDG adoption within organizations, particularly in relation to measurement, reporting, and accountability. Nevertheless, most studies concentrate on the outcomes of SDG disclosure through corporate reporting frameworks, rather than critically examining how accountants actively shape SDG integration processes. As a result, the literature tends to prioritize the evaluation of disclosure quality and reporting tools, while the professional role, competencies, and decision-making influence of accountants remain underexplored. This suggests the need to first clarify how accountants contribute to SDG implementation before assessing whether existing disclosure practices are adequate or merely symbolic.

Moreover, empirical investigations into organizations' actual contributions to the SDGs are still relatively limited. The majority of studies rely on national-level samples, which restricts the ability to capture broader patterns and cross-country dynamics. Research is also geographically concentrated, with a strong focus on European Union countries such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, while evidence from non-European contexts remains sparse. Cross-country and multi-level analyses are rare, particularly those adopting qualitative approaches capable of uncovering organizational practices, motivations, and challenges in contributing to the SDGs. These gaps highlight significant opportunities for future research to advance a more nuanced and globally inclusive understanding of SDG accounting and contribution practices.

In addition, the literature reveals a strong emphasis on disclosure as a proxy for SDG engagement, often assuming that increased reporting corresponds to meaningful contribution. However, relatively few studies critically assess the extent to which disclosed information reflects actual strategic alignment, operational change, or measurable impact on the SDGs. This overreliance on disclosure-based evidence risks reinforcing a compliance-oriented view of sustainability reporting, rather than encouraging research that evaluates substantive performance, outcomes, and long-term value creation linked to the SDG agenda.

Finally, the review points to a lack of integration between accounting research and broader sustainability and governance theories. While legitimacy, stakeholder, and institutional theories are frequently applied, they are often used descriptively rather than to explain how accounting systems

can actively drive organizational transformation toward sustainable development. Future research could benefit from adopting interdisciplinary perspectives and longitudinal designs to examine how accounting tools, professional judgment, and governance mechanisms interact over time to support or constrain organizational contributions to the SDGs. Such approaches would strengthen the theoretical and practical relevance of SDG accounting research.

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