

Pursuing impact in public markets.
Can it make a difference, and how can we optimize impact?

Paul Ruijs – Impact Specialist

31 October 2025

Total impact = Impact per EUR invested x Amount invested

Investment practices do not necessarily have to meet all characteristics of impact investing to be *impactful*

$$I = i \times A$$

Where:

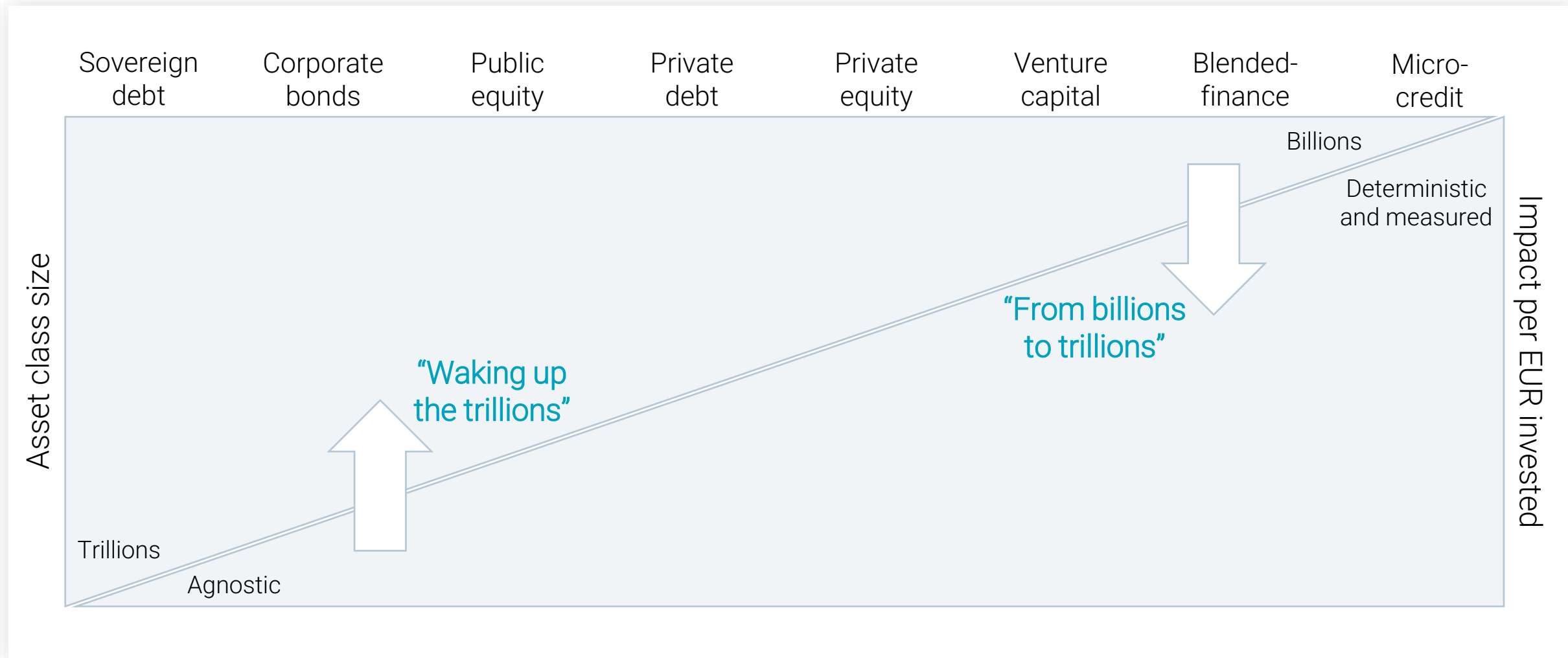
I = Total Impact

i = Impact per EUR invested

A = Amount invested

All asset classes play a role in closing the financing gap for the SDGs

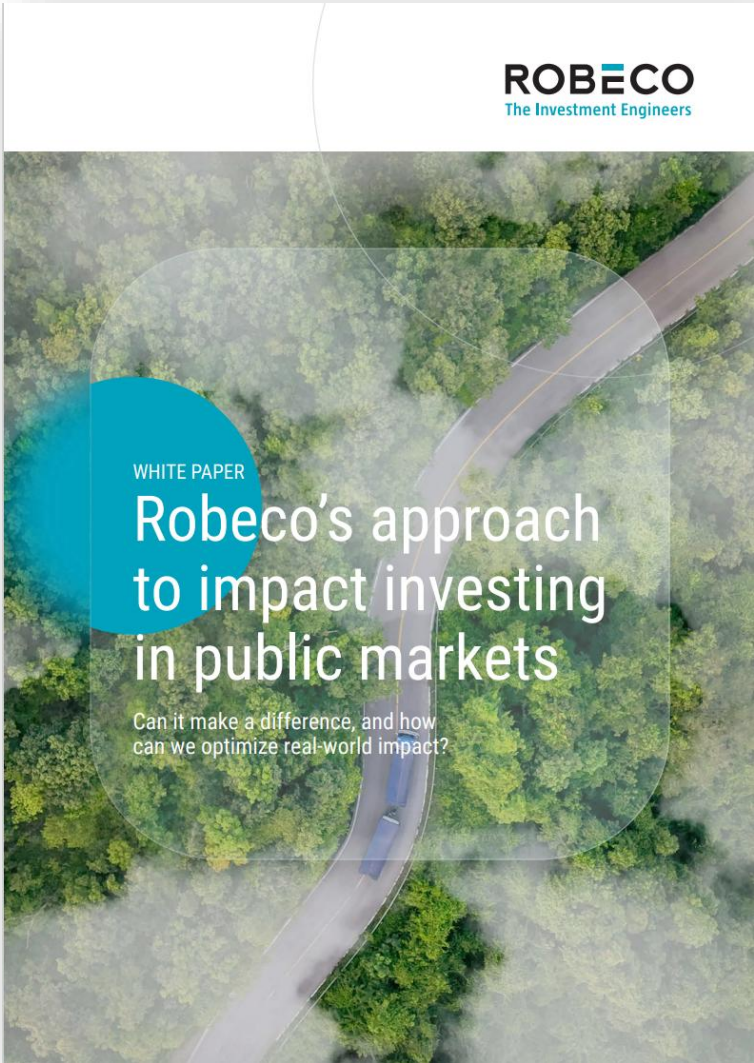
Our job: “Waking up the trillions”



Adapted from: Scaling SDG Finance for the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Global Compact, 2019

Agenda

Content guide

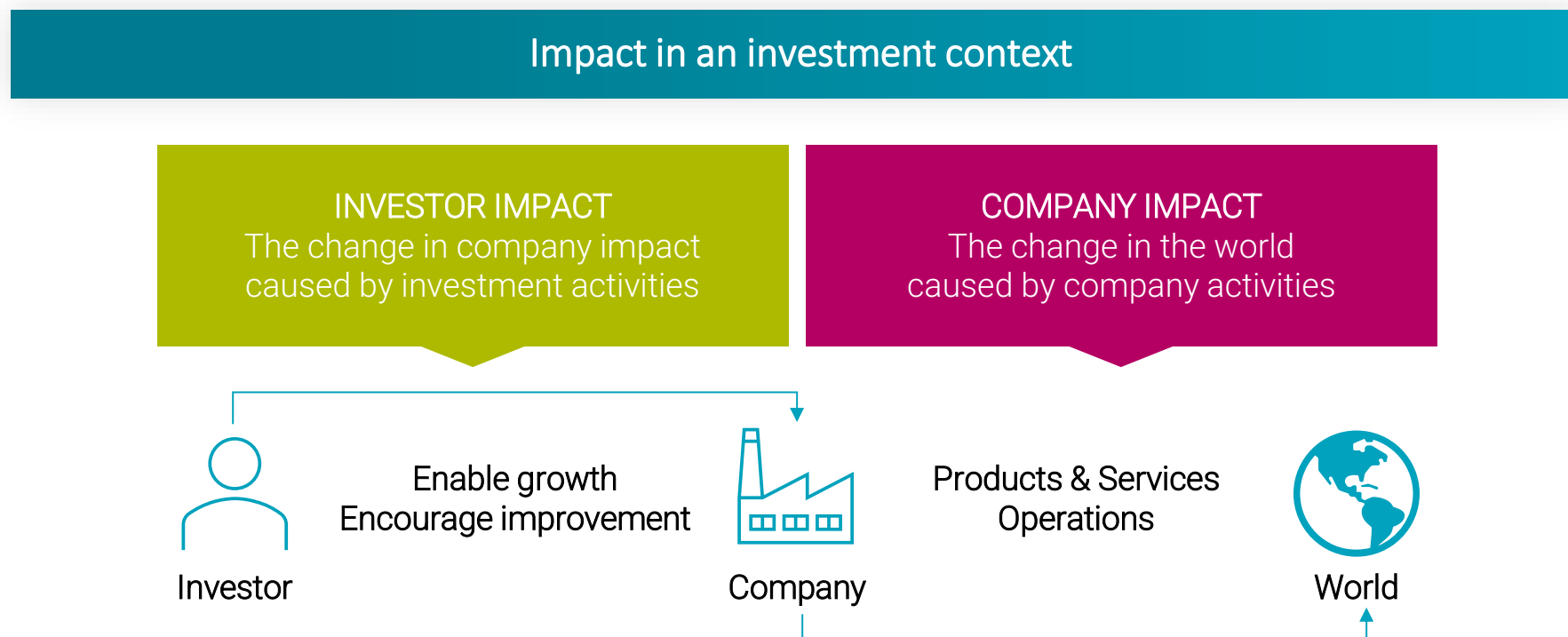


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Impact in public markets

Investor impact and company impact often get conflated...

... but there is an important distinction to be made

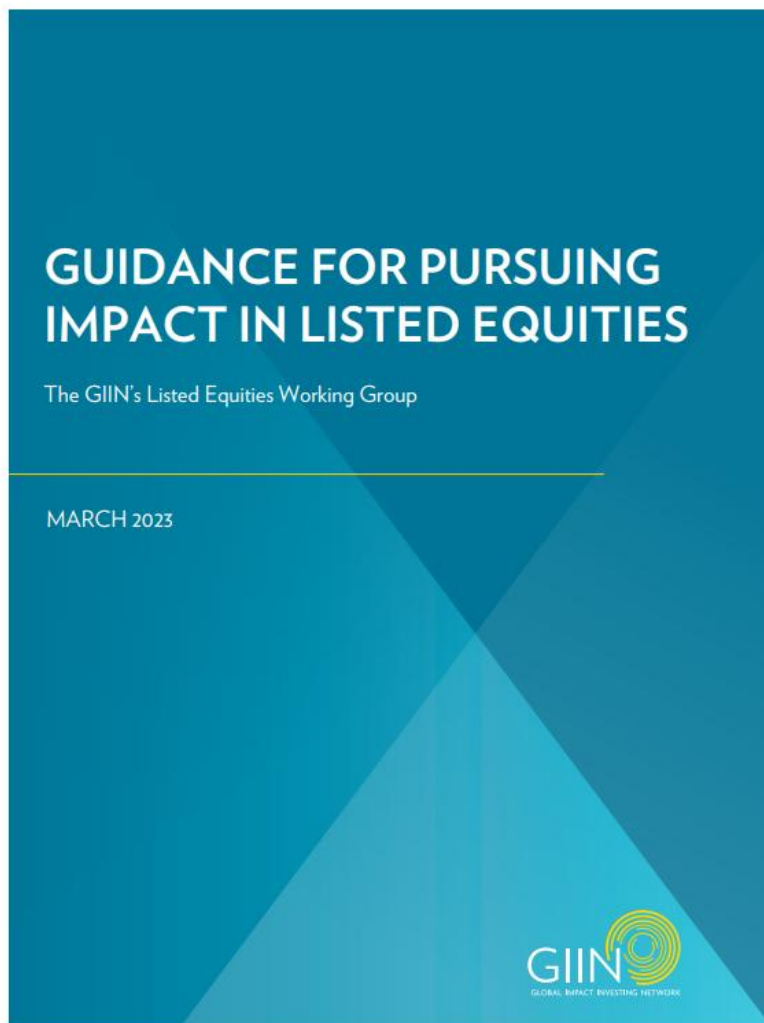


Derived from [UZH - Center for Sustainable Finance and Private Wealth - Investor Impact - How Can Investors Change the World?](#)

Engagement is a key component of impact investing in listed equities

Guidance for pursuing impact in listed equities - GIIN

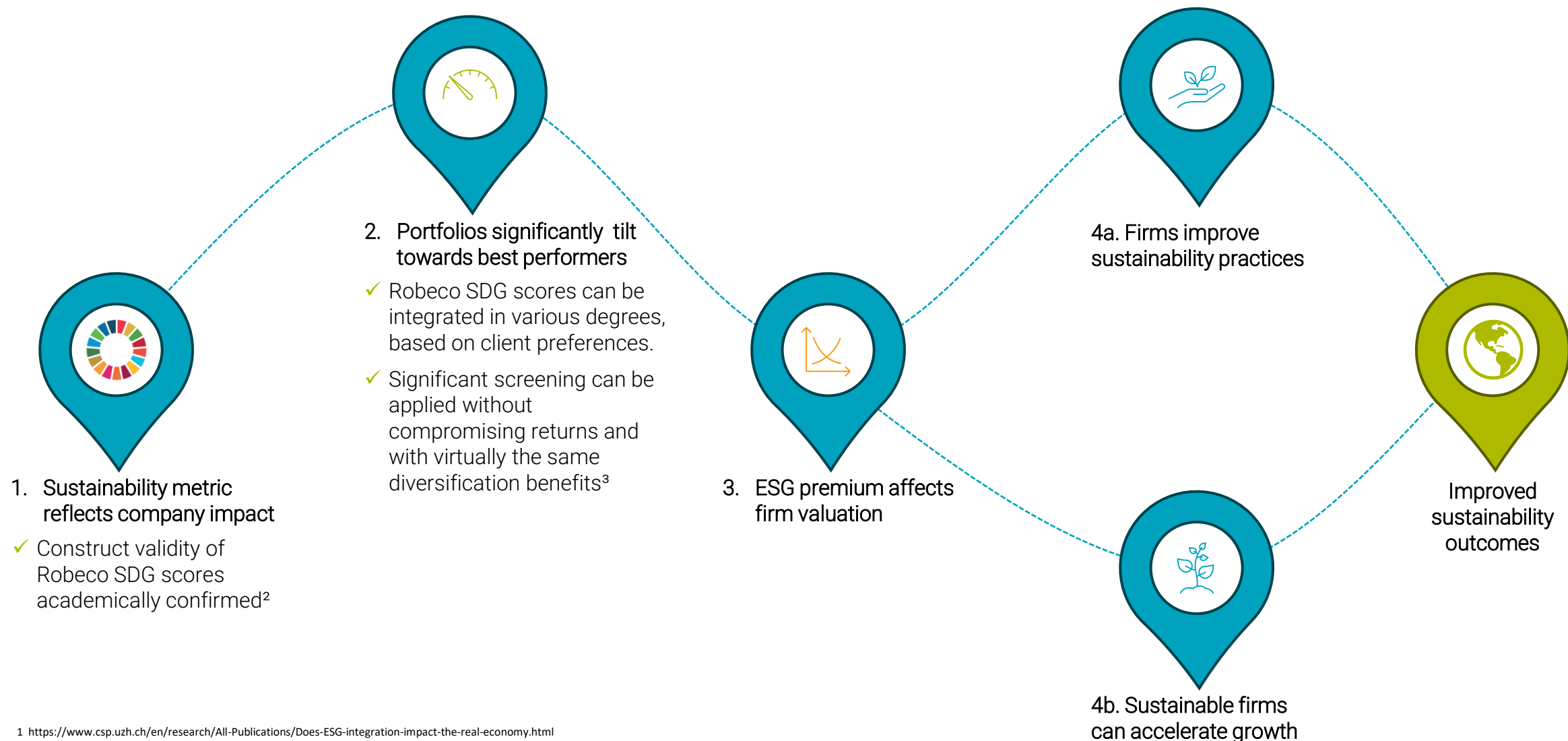
“as a minimum, investors in listed equities should pursue **contributions through engagement** with their portfolio holdings to influence business strategy or operations”



Impact-aligned investing

Investor contribution: does impact-aligned investing have a real-world impact?

Several criteria need to be met¹, some of which are within the investor's control



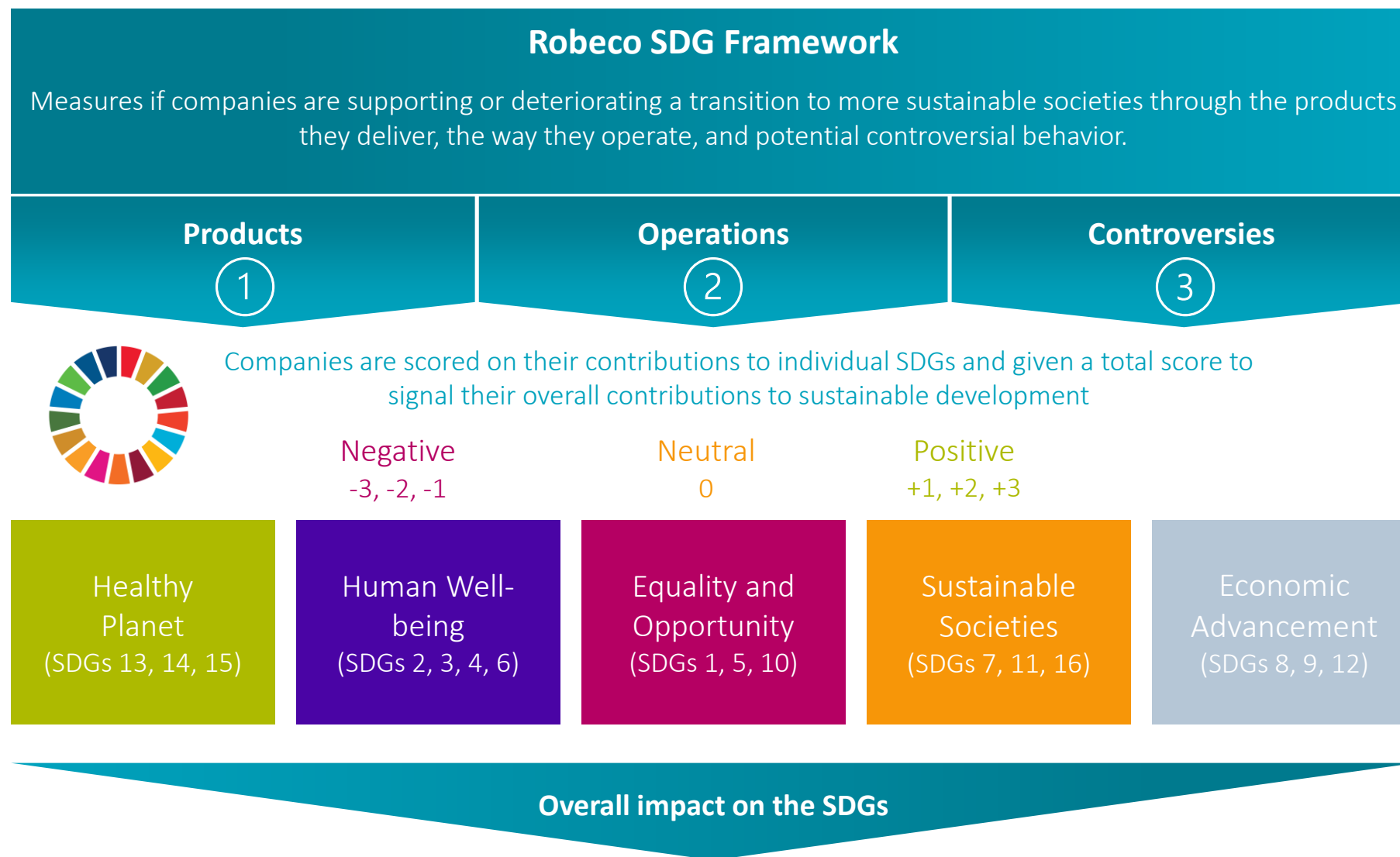
¹ <https://www.csp.uzh.ch/en/research/All-Publications/Does-ESG-integration-impact-the-real-economy.html>

² https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4186680

³ <https://www.robeco.com/en-ch/insights/2022/03/indices-insights-can-passive-investors-integrate-sustainability-without-sacrificing-returns-or-diversification>

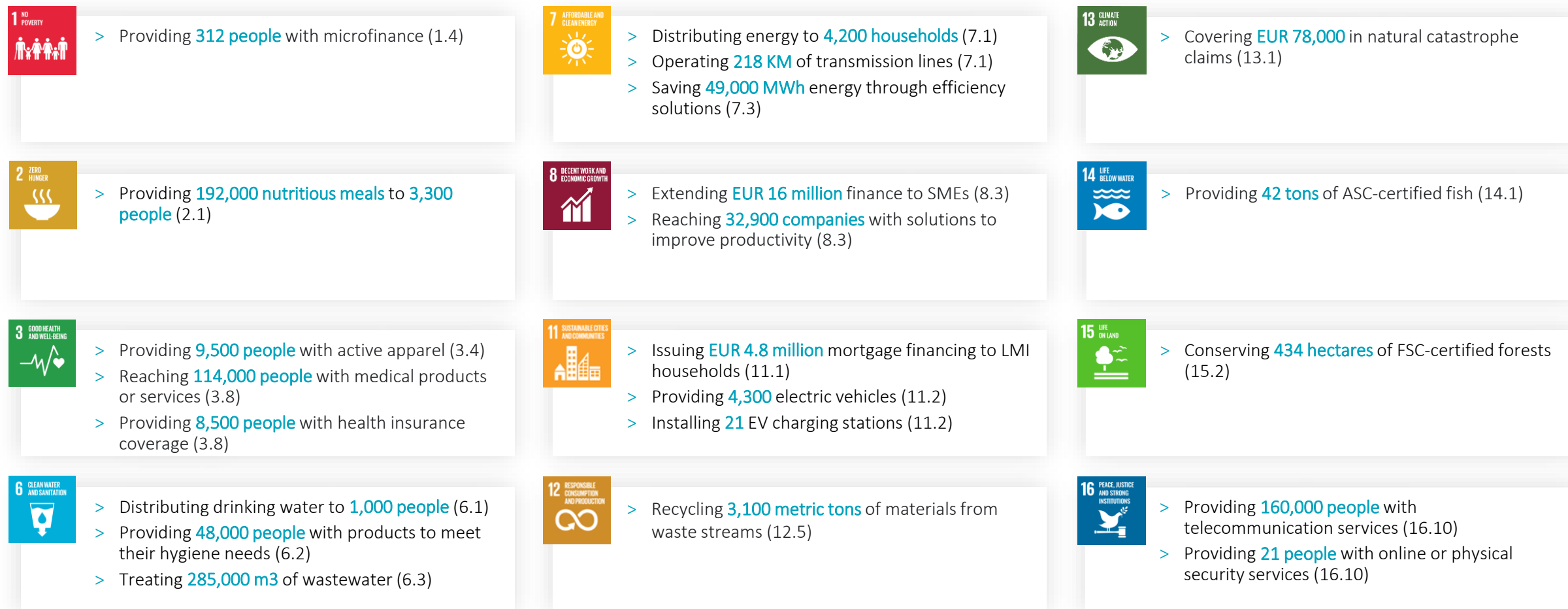
Measurability: companies' impacts are assessed through our SDG Framework

A systematic, rules-based approach



Measurability: impacts are quantified and reported on portfolio level

Estimated impacts of investee companies attributed to the portfolio



Source: Robeco, Sustainable Development Goals. The numbers in brackets represent the official UN SDG target or indicator the impact metric is linked to.

The impact of 177 companies in the portfolio representing 58.8% of its market value has been aggregated and rounded. The graphic displays an estimation of the associated impact of the companies in which the strategy is invested. It shall not be assumed that an investment in the portfolio does result in a direct or additional impact. The total investment is associated with the following ownership-adjusted impact over a 1-year period. Holdings as of March 29, 2024, assuming that stable proportion of the companies are held. Market value of the holding is normalized by the company's enterprise value.

Intentionality: SDG scores can be integrated in various ways and degrees

SDG-alignment for different client needs, across asset classes and investment styles



SDG Aligned Strategies

- > Using total SDG scores
- > Identifying improvement potential as input to company engagements
- > Definition of sustainable investing under SFDR

Individual SDG Scores

- > Using SDG sub-scores
- > Alignment with client sustainable development priorities
- > Provide input to company engagements

Example investment strategies

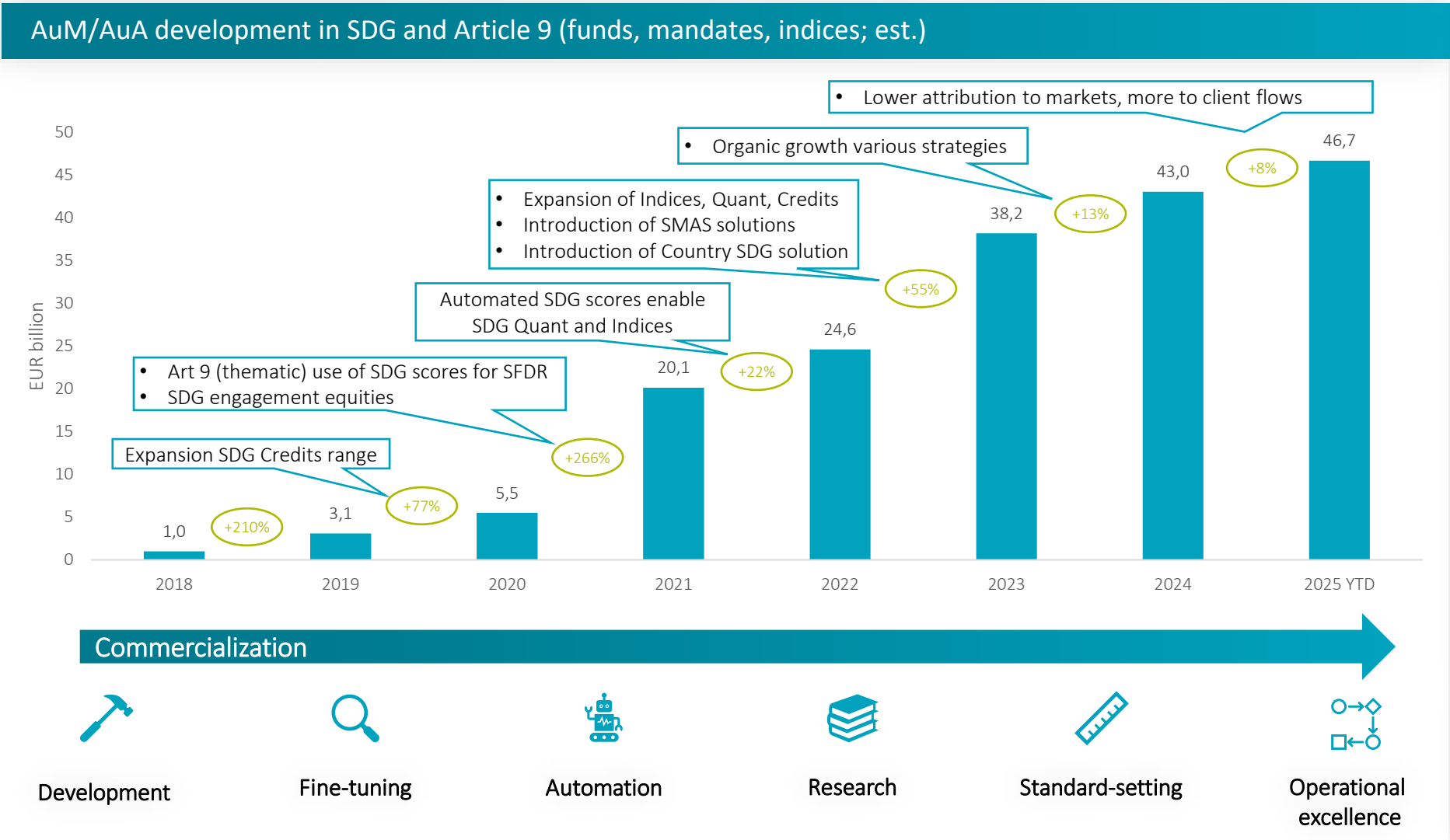
SDG integration across asset classes and investment styles



Asset class	Equity			Fixed Income	
Investment style	Quant	Fundamental	Indices	Quant	Fundamental
Example strategy	Robeco QI Global SDG and Climate Beta Equities	Robeco Global SDG Equities	Robeco SDG Low Carbon Indices	Robeco QI Global SDG & Climate Multi-Factor Credits	Robeco Global SDG Credits
Objective	'Better beta' solution by attaining index-like exposure with a significantly improved sustainability profile on multiple dimensions , particularly SDGs and climate	The strategy aims to outperform the global market over time by investing in sustainable companies with a direct positive link to the SDGs	provide investors with solutions that offer SDG alignment and carbon footprint reduction, while using a relatively low tracking error budget.	long-term capital growth while advancing the SDGs and the goal of the Paris Agreement to keep the global temperature rise well-below 2C.	The strategy targets long-term capital growth while contributing to the SDGs .
Level of SDG integration	≥0	≥+1	≥0	≥0	≥0

A brief history of Robeco SDG scores

Development of assets in dedicated SDG strategies



Key numbers 2025 YTD

47bn ^{+8%}

Managed/advised in dedicated SDG or Art 9. strategies (see chart)

96bn ^{+20%}

Quant equity

18bn ^{+350%}

Indices

2.6bn ^{-2%}

Quant Fixed Income

155bn ^{+2%}

Art 8 & 9 funds using SDG scores for SFDR compliance

Tilt towards positive scores
*Can also be counted in graph

Source: Robeco. All AUMs in EUR

Summary

How Robeco optimizes impact in impact-aligned investment strategies



Intentionality

Refrain from investing in companies with a significant negative impact or even only invest in companies with a positive impact.



Measurability

We assess the impacts of portfolio companies through our proprietary and academically verified SDG Framework and quantify this in real-world terms



Investor contribution

Limited investor contribution through capital allocation, but part of broader market forces. Partnering and sharing data with peers to reach required scale

Impact generating investments
Pursuing impact through engagement

Intentionality: Theory of Change

Driving positive change through engagement

Robeco

Inputs

After thorough engagement research we formulate engagement objectives to foster positive impact.



Activities

Through an active dialogue we request investee companies for improvements on key sustainability issues.



Investee company

Output

Outputs reflect companies' responses to our requests. Per objective we monitor the (lack of) progress we see.



Society

Outcome

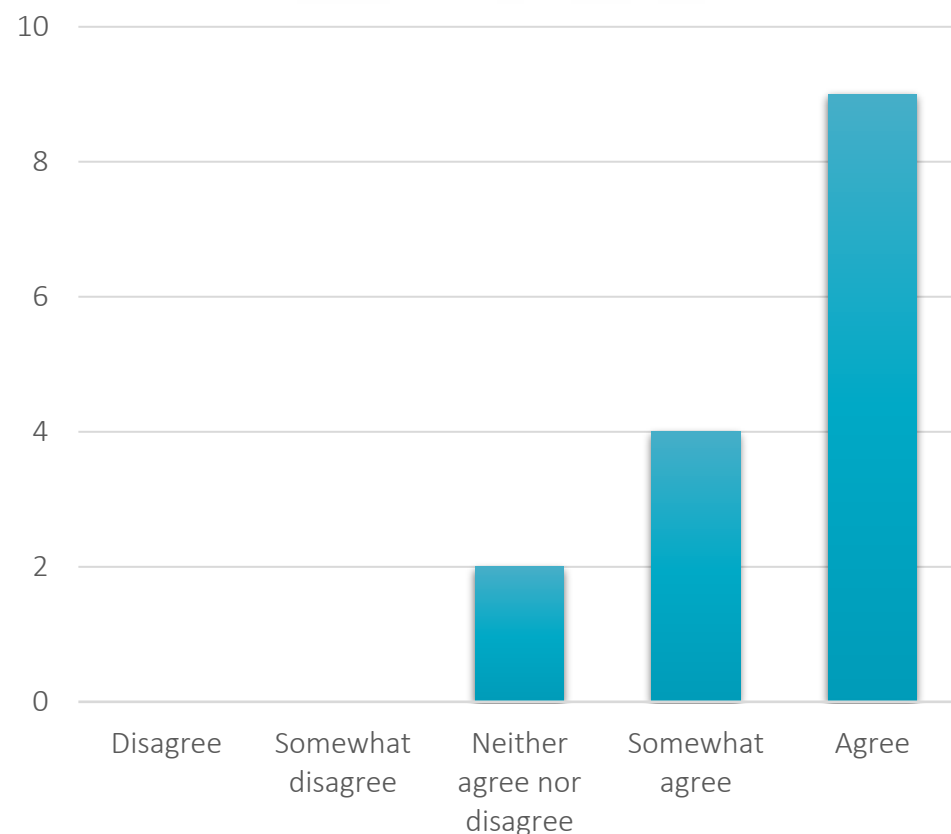
When companies improve their performance on these issues this drives positive real-world impact.



Investor contribution: understanding our impact through annual engagement survey

Adding value by truly understanding investee companies' business models

Robeco is well-informed on the issues most relevant to our business



Robeco's engagement has helped us:



Measurability: assessing the societal impact of our engagement activities

Case study

Company	Company X				
Company profile	Company X is a Portuguese food distributor and retailer, selling quality food to families in Portugal, Poland and Colombia				
Milestone	Implement the Nutri-Score on all own products (private label)			Milestone status:	Achieved
Intended impact	Improved health outcomes for its customers through better-informed choices				
Who			Neither well-served nor underserved		While there is ample information available related to nutrition, this can be contradicting and misleading ^[i]
Scale				Very large scale	The company reaches around 10 million consumers every year ^[ii]
How Much				Very high degree	Among the positive outcomes of better dietary index intake are reduced risk of cardiovascular diseases and cancer ^[iii] , which are considered to be very important
Depth					
Contribution				high	The company indicated the engagement made a tangible difference in achieving this change
Likelihood			Neutral		Most studies show that Nutri-Scores are effective in both (i) changing customers behaviour and (ii) improving health outcomes ^[iv]

^[i] <https://www.insead.edu/newsroom/2019-food-packaging-claims-mislead-consumers-with-ideas-of-health>

^[ii] <https://www.jeronimomartins.com/en/about-us/who-we-are/company-profile/>

^[iii] <https://cejph.szu.cz/pdfs/cjp/2021/01/12.pdf>

^[iv] https://www.ernaehrungs-umschau.de/fileadmin/Ernaehrungs-Umschau/pdfs/pdf_2017/12_17/EU12_2017_WuF_Nutriscore_englisch.pdf

Example investment strategies

Pursuing impact through engagement

	Engagement Equities	Fashion Engagement Equities	Biodiversity Equities
Objective	Provide long-term capital growth while advancing the SDGs	Achieve long-term returns and reduce the adverse impact from the fashion industry	Provide long-term capital growth while halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity
Strategy	Invest in and engage with companies that are best positioned to have a clear and measurable improvement in their contribution to these goals over three to five years via active engagement	Invest in and engage with companies throughout the entire fashion value chain that have the intention or potential to drive structural change by addressing the industry's sustainability challenges	Invest in companies that develop technologies, products and services that help to reduce biodiversity threats or restore natural habitats, as well as motivate selected companies to improve their footprint through engagement
Holdings under engagement	100%	80%	25%

Summary

How Robeco optimizes impact in impact generating investment strategies



Intentionality

Company-specific engagement strategies with concrete objectives that advance the SDGs. Minimum percentage of holdings under engagement



Measurability

We go beyond activity and progress reporting by measuring the real-world impact of our achieved engagement objectives across key impact dimensions



Investor contribution

Add value by truly understanding our investees' business. Evidence of investor contribution through annual engagement survey

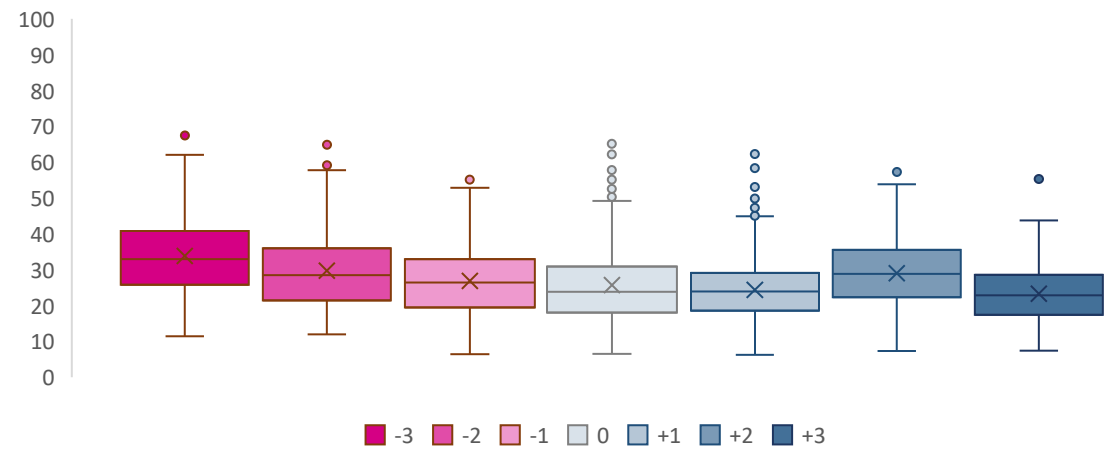


Annex

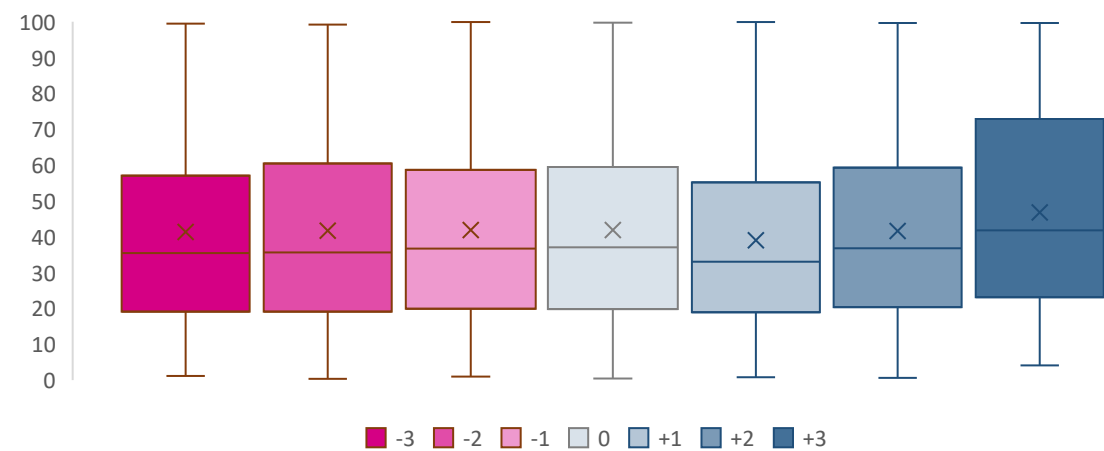
How do SDG scores compare to ESG ratings?

Of the top 30% ESG companies, one quarter has negative impacts on the SDGs

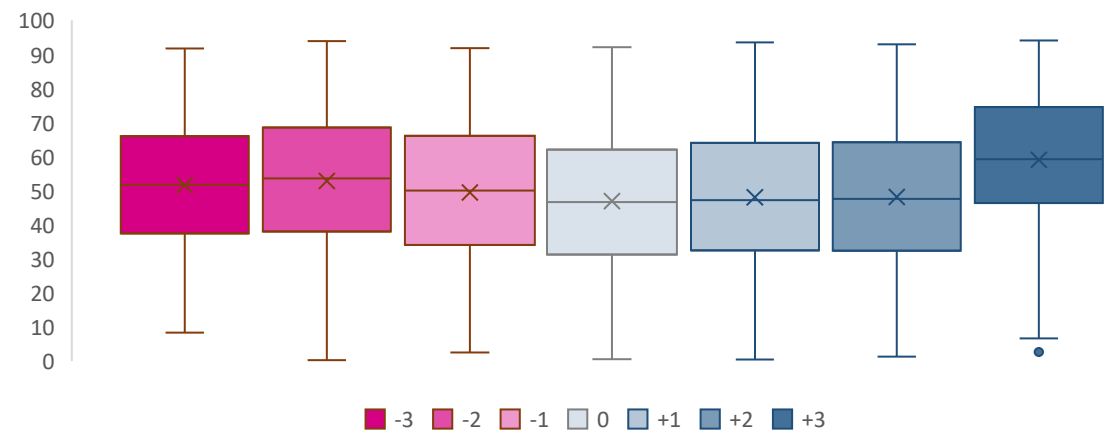
Sustainalytics ESG risk score (n = 6,219)



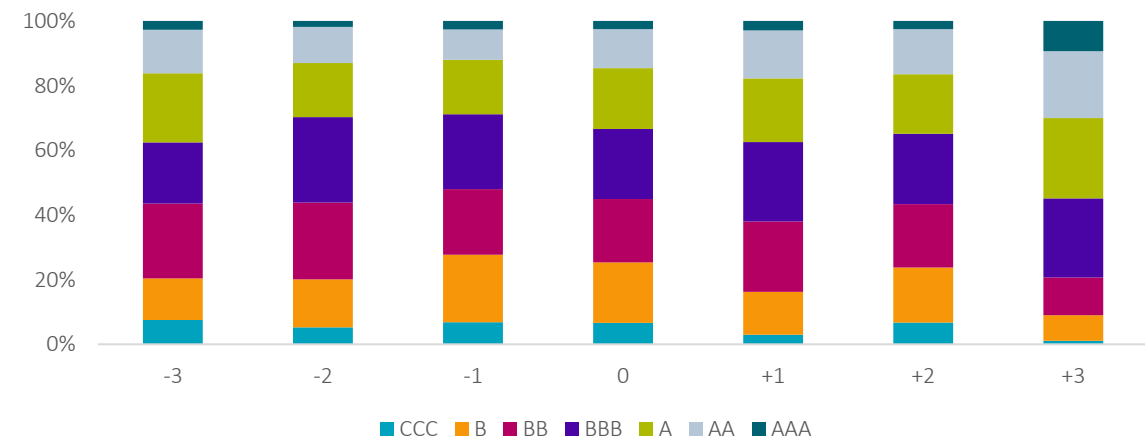
S&P CSA score (n = 6,391)



Refinitiv ESG score (n = 5,327)



MSCI ESG Rating (n = 5,767)



Source: [van Zanten & Huij \(2022\)](#)

SDG scores are not (really) correlated with ESG scores

... so how might we test which of these metrics best captures companies' impacts?

- > There is no objective list of which companies are most sustainable
- > We develop three tests to see if our SDG score measures what it is supposed to measure:
 1. Does the SDG score align with investors' revealed sustainability preferences?
 2. Does the SDG score align with the emerging EU taxonomy?
 3. Does the SDG score align with climate science?
- > We find that the SDG score performs well on all three tests, while ESG ratings do not

ESG to SDG: Do Sustainable Investing Ratings Align with the Sustainability Preferences of Investors, Regulators, and Scientists?

42 Pages • Posted: 12 Aug 2022

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[Joop Huij](#)

Erasmus University - Rotterdam School of Management; Robeco; Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) - Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM)

Date Written: November 6, 2022

Abstract

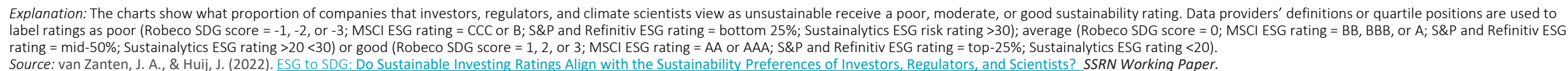
Sustainable investors aim to invest in companies that contribute to sustainable development. However, there is disagreement on how best to measure corporate sustainability performance. We assess the construct validity of two types of sustainability ratings: (i) a novel score that measures companies' impacts on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and (ii) established ESG ratings that assess if companies face environmental, social, and governance risks. We develop three tests that gauge if these sustainability ratings can identify companies that investors, regulators, and scientists view as being (un)sustainable. Our findings show that, unlike ESG ratings, the SDG score: (i) captures investors' revealed sustainability preferences; (ii) aligns with the EU taxonomy regulation; and (iii) supports climate change mitigation. We conclude that, as a sustainability rating, the SDG score has high, and ESG ratings low, construct validity. While concepts like ESG, sustainability, and impact can be used complementarily, we caution against using them interchangeably.

Keywords: Sustainable investing, ESG, impact investing, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustainable finance, EU Taxonomy

Suggested Citation:

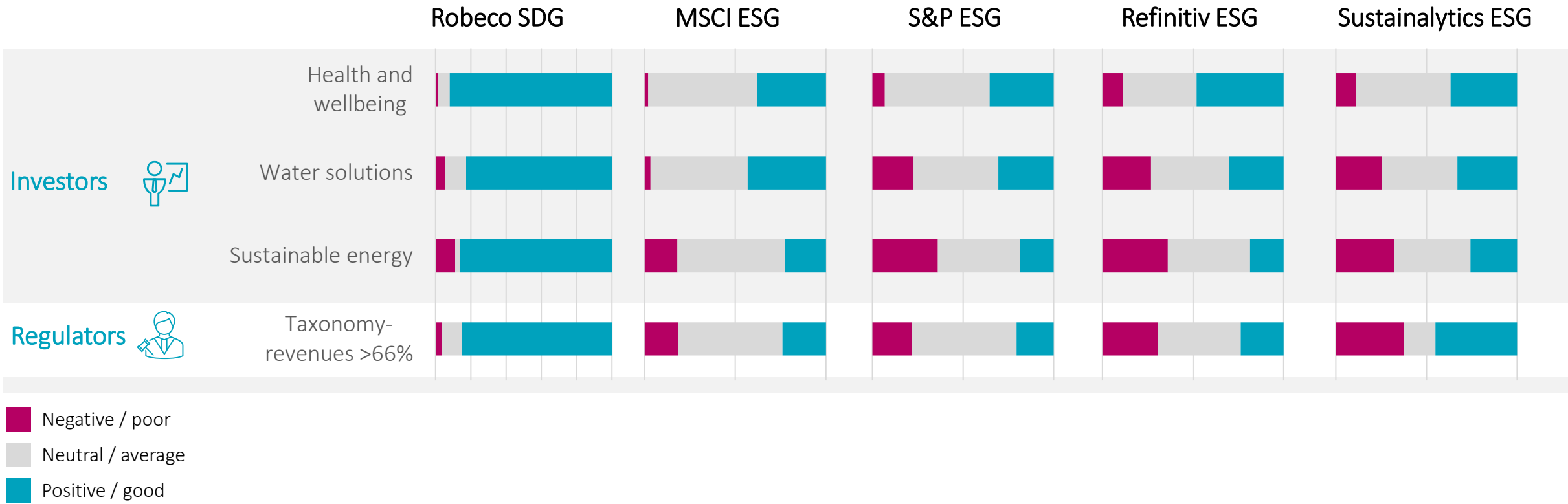
van Zanten, Jan Anton and Huij, Joop, Corporate Sustainability Performance: Introducing an SDG Score and Testing Its Validity Relative to ESG Ratings (August 10, 2022). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4186680> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4186680>

Source: van Zanten, J. A., & Huij, J. (2022). [ESG to SDG: Do Sustainable Investing Ratings Align with the Sustainability Preferences of Investors, Regulators, and Scientists?](#) *SSRN Working Paper*.



And do companies providing sustainability solutions get good sustainability ratings?

Comparing the SDG score to ESG ratings



Explanation: The charts show what proportion of companies that investors, regulators, and climate scientists view as unsustainable receive a poor, moderate, or good sustainability rating. Data providers' definitions or quartile positions are used to label ratings as poor (Robeco SDG score = -1, -2, or -3; MSCI ESG rating = CCC or B; S&P and Refinitiv ESG rating = bottom 25%; Sustainalytics ESG risk rating >30); average (Robeco SDG score = 0; MSCI ESG rating = BB, BBB, or A; S&P and Refinitiv ESG rating = mid-50%; Sustainalytics ESG rating >20 <30) or good (Robeco SDG score = 1, 2, or 3; MSCI ESG rating = AA or AAA; S&P and Refinitiv ESG rating = top-25%; Sustainalytics ESG rating <20).

Source: van Zanten, J. A., & Huij, J. (2022). [ESG to SDG: Do Sustainable Investing Ratings Align with the Sustainability Preferences of Investors, Regulators, and Scientists?](#) SSRN Working Paper.

ESG is about risk, while the SDGs are all about impact

ESG and SDG can support one another



ESG Integration

How does sustainable development affect a company?



Focus on financial materiality, influence on performance



Emphasis on ability of a company to generate value in mid- to long-term.



SDG Investing

How does a company affect sustainable development?



Focus on societal value and stewardship: Ethics and Norms-based



Exclusions are part of impact investing: avoiding harm

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Important information

Robeco Institutional Asset Management B.V.

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Additional Information relating to RobecoSAM-branded funds/services

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Additional Information for investors with residence or seat in the United Arab Emirates

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investment Fund in performing their duties and responsibilities.

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Robeco is temporarily deemed authorized and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Details of the Temporary Permissions Regime, which allows EEA-based firms to operate in the UK for a limited period while seeking full authorization, are available on the Financial Conduct Authority's website.

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The sale of the Fund qualifies as a private placement pursuant to section 2 of Uruguayan law 18,627. The Fund must not be offered or sold to the public in Uruguay, except under circumstances which do not constitute a public offering or distribution under Uruguayan laws and regulations. The Fund is not and will not be registered with the Financial Services Superintendency of the Central Bank of Uruguay. The Fund corresponds to investment funds that are not investment funds regulated by Uruguayan law 16,774 dated September 27, 1996, as amended.