The Sustainable Development Goals Report
2021

United Nations

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The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021

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Foreword

The global community is at a critical moment in its pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More than a year into the global pandemic, millions of lives have been lost, the human and economic toll has been unprecedented, and recovery efforts so far have been uneven, inequitable and insufficiently geared towards achieving sustainable development. The current crisis is threatening decades of development gains, further delaying the urgent transition to greener, more inclusive economies, and throwing progress on the SDGs even further off track.

Had the paradigm shift envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development been fully embraced over the past six years, the world would have been better prepared to face this crisis – with stronger health systems, expanded social protection coverage, the resilience that comes from more equal societies, and a healthier natural environment. Regrettably, the SDGs were already off track even before COVID-19 emerged. Progress had been made in poverty reduction, maternal and child health, access to electricity, and gender equality, but not enough to achieve the Goals by 2030. In other vital areas, including reducing inequality, lowering carbon emissions and tackling hunger, progress had either stalled or reversed.

As the pandemic continues to unfold, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* outlines some significant impacts in many areas that are already apparent. The global extreme poverty rate rose for the first time in over 20 years, and 119 to 124 million people were pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020. There is a risk of a generational catastrophe regarding schooling, where an additional 101 million children have fallen below the minimum reading proficiency level, potentially wiping out two decades of education gains. Women have faced increased domestic violence, child marriage is projected to rise after a decline in recent years, and unpaid and underpaid care work is increasingly and disproportionately falling on the shoulders of women and girls, impacting educational and income opportunities and health. Notwithstanding the global economic slowdown, concentrations of major greenhouse gases continue to increase. With the global average temperature reaching about 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels, the climate crisis has well and truly arrived, and its impacts are being felt across the world. The pandemic has also brought immense financial challenges, especially for developing countries – with a significant rise in debt distress and dramatic decreases in foreign direct investment and trade.

Yet, with a surge in global solidarity and leadership from the highest political level, countries can still deliver on the 2030 Agenda and the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. A global vaccination plan, designed and implemented by the countries that can produce vaccines today or will be able to do so if properly supported, is an urgent first step in that direction.

A recommitment by Governments, cities, businesses, and industries to ensure that the recovery reduces carbon emissions, conserves natural resources, creates better jobs, advances gender equality and tackles growing poverty and inequalities is a further imperative. As this report shows, the availability of high-quality data is also critical, helping decision makers to understand where investments can have the greatest impact; but improved data collection will not happen without increased data financing, from both international and domestic resources.

The challenges are immense, but there are also reasons for hope. The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated inspiring community resilience, highlighted the Herculean work by essential workers in myriad fields and facilitated the rapid expansion of social protection, the acceleration of digital transformation and unprecedented worldwide collaboration on the development of vaccines. A brighter future is possible. We must use the crisis to transform our world, deliver on the 2030 Agenda and keep our promise to current and future generations.

António Guterres

Secretary-General of the United Nations

View from the pandemic: stark realities, critical choices

As we enter the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is abundantly clear that this is a crisis of monumental proportions, with catastrophic effects on people's lives and livelihoods and on efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Historically, pandemics have served as catalysts for political, economic and social change, and that still holds true today. The year 2021 will be decisive as to whether or not the world can make the transformations needed to deliver on the promise to achieve the SDGs by 2030 – with implications for us all.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021 uses the latest available data and estimates to reveal the devastating impacts of the crisis on the SDGs and point out areas that require urgent and coordinated action. The report was prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with more than 50 international agencies.

Years, or even decades, of progress have been halted or reversed. In 2020, the global extreme poverty rate rose for the first time in over 20 years. Hundreds of millions of people were pushed back into extreme poverty and chronic hunger. The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted one or more essential health services and poses major health threats beyond the disease itself. It has wreaked havoc worldwide on children's learning and well-being, and women have suffered a disproportionate share of job losses and increased care work at home.

The pandemic has exposed and intensified inequalities within and among countries. The poorest and most vulnerable people have a greater risk of becoming infected by the virus, and bear the brunt of the economic fallout. The crisis has threatened the livelihoods of 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy. The collapse of international tourism disproportionally affects small island developing States. And vast inequities exist in vaccine distribution: as of 17 June 2021, around 68 vaccines were administered for every 100 people in Europe and Northern America compared with fewer than 2 in sub-Saharan Africa.

The climate crisis, the biodiversity crisis and the pollution crisis persist, despite the pandemic. Concentrations of major greenhouse gases continue to increase despite the temporary reduction in emissions in 2020 related to lockdowns and other COVID-19 response measures. The world remains woefully off track in meeting the Paris Agreement. Biodiversity is declining, and terrestrial ecosystems are being degraded at alarming rates. Around the world, 1 million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute, and 5 trillion single-use plastic bags are thrown away each year.

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a mirror for the world. It reflects deeply rooted problems in our societies: insufficient social protection, weak public health systems and inadequate health coverage, structural inequalities, environmental degradation and climate change.

Resilience, adaptability and innovation bring us optimism. In the face of tremendous challenges, many Governments, the private sector, academia and communities have demonstrated quick responses, remarkable creativity and new forms of collaboration. Between 1 February and 31 December 2020, Governments around the world announced more than 1,600 new social protection measures in response to the crisis. Scientist across the globe have been working together to develop life-saving vaccines and treatments in record time. The pandemic has sped up the digital transformation of Governments and businesses, profoundly changing the ways in which we interact, learn and work.

Transformational changes are needed, and the SDGs provide the road map. The crisis demonstrates the interdependency and interlinkages among the various dimensions of sustainability – from health, well-being, and social and economic prosperity to climate and ecosystems. To address the vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, Governments and the international community should make structural transformations and develop common solutions guided by the SDGs. These include significantly strengthening social protection systems and public services (including health systems, education, water, sanitation and other basic services); increasing investments in science, technology and innovation; creating fiscal space in developing countries; taking a green-economy approach and investing in clean energy and industry; and transitioning to sustainable food systems.

Investing in data and information infrastructure is critical. The pandemic has taught us that weaknesses in data and information systems present an added and enormous challenge to decision makers. A year into the pandemic, only about 60 countries had data on COVID-19 infection and death rates that could be disaggregated by age and sex and that were publicly accessible. These data deficiencies have serious consequences for people's lives. Policies, programmes and resources aimed at protecting people during this challenging time will inevitably fall short without the evidence to focus and hone interventions. Investing in data and information systems is not money wasted. Statistical offices around the world have embraced innovative approaches and forged partnerships, improving the availability of data for evidence-based decisions. Increased investments in national data and statistical systems and the mobilization of additional international and domestic resources will be imperative if we are to build back better from the crisis and accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

Building back better requires effective multilateralism and the full participation of all societies. This global crisis demands a shared global response. In the face of the many challenges we face, a unified vision of coherent, coordinated and comprehensive responses from the multilateral system is more important than ever. Since the pandemic affects everyone, everywhere, the implementation of solutions requires action and participation from all sectors of society, including Governments at all levels, the private sector, academia, civil society and individuals – youth and women, in particular.

We are at a critical juncture in human history. The decisions we make and actions we take today will have momentous consequences for future generations. Lessons learned from the pandemic will help us rise to current and future challenges. Let us seize the moment to make this a decade of action, transformation and restoration to achieve the SDGs and make good on the Paris Climate Agreement.

Liu Zhenmin

Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

Investing in data to save lives and build back better

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers and business leaders have routinely had to make time-sensitive decisions, many of which have life-or-death consequences. Yet even basic data to guide decision-making – on health, the society and the economy – are often lacking. The pandemic has brought to the forefront the critical importance of such data. It has also accelerated the transformation of data and statistical systems and how the public perceives and uses that information. As policy- and decision makers were pressuring data providers for more up-to-date and accurate information, national statistical offices (NSOs) and their partners stepped up to the challenge. They forged new collaborations and leveraged alternative data solutions while increasing efforts to protect data privacy and confidentiality.

As the pandemic continues to unfold, and the world moves further off track in meeting the 2030 SDG deadline, timely and high-quality data are more essential than ever. Indeed, data are being widely recognized as strategic assets in building back better and accelerating the implementation of the SDGs. What is needed now are new investments in data and information infrastructure, as well as human capacity to get ahead of the crisis and trigger earlier responses, anticipate future needs and design the urgent actions needed to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Responding to an unprecedented demand for data

Despite major disruptions to statistical operations, many NSOs have adapted quickly. They have adopted new methods and tools to come up with data and have played a central role in Governments' COVID-19 responses. As of September 2020, 82 per cent of NSOs were involved in data collection on COVID-19 and its impacts, some through innovative methods such as online and telephone-based surveys, as well as the use of administrative, credit card and scanner data.

In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Office for National Statistics has responded to an urgent need for information on how COVID-19 is affecting the population through methods such as web-scraping Google mobility data and the introduction of new surveys. Together with partners, the office set up a COVID-19 Infections Survey in a matter of days, which has since become an indispensable source of data on the pandemic. As of June 2021, interviewers had covered 2.4 million households and performed 4.6 million swab tests. The survey detected an uptick of new infections and the prevalence of the so-called Delta variant. In mid-June, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson delayed by a month his plans to lift the last COVID-19 restrictions. The delay in reopening was intended to buy additional time for the health department to intensify its vaccination programme, which was also informed by data showing that new infections were largely driven by those who were not fully vaccinated.

In Ghana, the Statistical Service responded successfully to the sudden increase in data demand. When COVID-19 hit, "suddenly, the appetite for numbers grew," says Omar Seidu, the head of demographic statistics and SDG coordinator at the Ghana Statistical Service. In addition to the number of new COVID-19 cases, other important questions were raised, such as which regions were densely populated, how many people lived in crowded situations, and which parts of the country had no water for handwashing.

The Ghana Statistical Service was able to guide policymakers on crisis response and service delivery by bringing together a wide range of data and disseminating them through a central COVID-19 data hub, supported by a joint project on SDG monitoring with the United Nations and the Government of the United Kingdom (the UNSD-FCDO project). The Ghana Statistical Service also helped monitor lockdown compliance through mobility data gathered in partnership with a cell-phone carrier. The crisis expanded the role of statisticians in the country. "In the past, our role was more or less limited to data collection," says Mr. Seidu. "Ministers and other decision makers now want us to have a seat at the table, not only for COVID-19 task forces, but on development policy as a whole."

Advancing progress on data for SDG monitoring and improving people's lives

Considerable progress has been made on the availability of internationally comparable data on the SDGs. The number of indicators included in the global SDG database increased from 115 in 2016 to around 160 in 2019 and 211 in 2021.

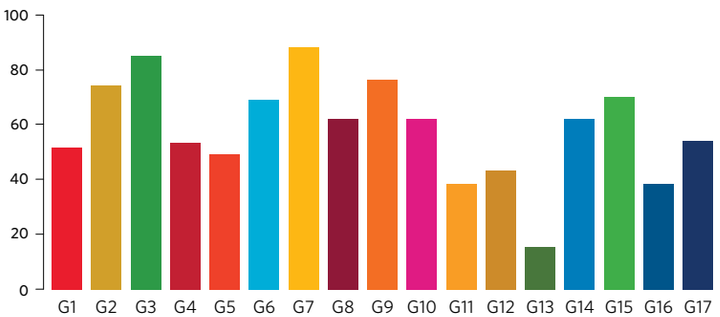
The advancements in data availability have had a direct impact on people's lives. Sugarmaa Batjargal was born on a cold February day in Mongolia's Alag-Erdene District. She was a healthy infant, thanks to the midwife who visited her mother during pregnancy and taught her about proper nutrition and ways to care for a baby in harsh weather conditions. These prenatal and neonatal services were put in place because of data that identified the region as high risk for child mortality. Between 1990 and 2019, the country's neonatal mortality rate dropped significantly, from 30 to 8 deaths per 1,000 live births. Only with the right data can Governments know which children are most at risk and how best to reach them.

Identifying data gaps to achieve the SDGs

For every success story like Sugarmaa's, there are many other stories of deprivation and inequity – the children who are not reached simply because there is no information about them. A lack of data severely limits a country's ability to reach children and their families – to ensure that they have the services, opportunities and choices they deserve to live life to the fullest. An average of 74 per cent of child-related SDG indicators either have insufficient data or show insufficient progress to meet the global targets by 2030.

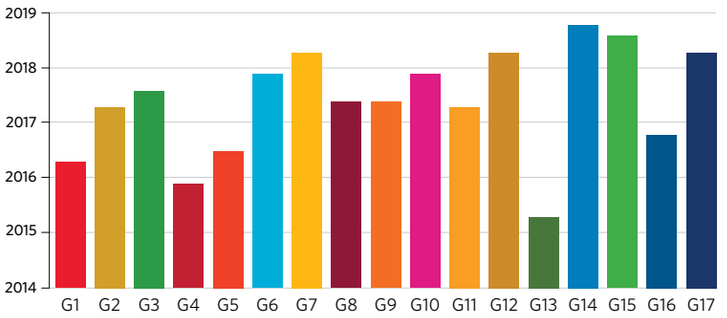
Despite improvements, big data gaps still exist in all areas of the SDGs in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and the level of disaggregation required. Intensified efforts need to be made to fill those gaps. An analysis of the indicators in the Global SDG Indicators Database reveals that, for 5 of the 17 Goals, fewer than half of 193 countries or areas have internationally comparable data. This lack of country-level data is particularly worrisome for Goal 13 (climate action), where, on average, only about 1 in 6 countries have data available. Country-level data deficits are also significant in areas related to sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16), sustainable production and consumption (Goal 12), and gender equality (Goal 5). What's more, lockdown measures implemented to control the spread of COVID-19 have hindered data collection efforts for much of 2020, widening gaps in the capacity of countries to report on many of the indicators.

Proportion of countries or areas with available data, by Goal (percentage)



Note: The data in this chart are not comparable with those presented in *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* due to changes in the SDG indicator framework and the calculation method. The SDG indicators framework was comprehensively reviewed and revised in 2020, resulting in 36 major changes to indicators in the form of replacements, revisions, additions and deletions.

The most recent year available (weighted average by indicator), by Goal



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Data timeliness has also been a challenge for SDG monitoring. For instance, the latest data point available for climate change indicators (Goal 13) is around 2015. The average of the latest available year for data on poverty (Goal 1) and education (Goal 4) is around 2016.

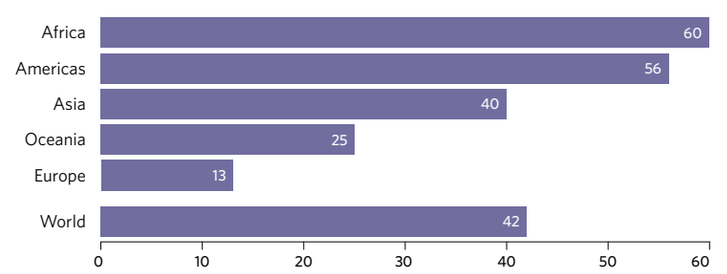
Addressing the vulnerability of data and information infrastructure

COVID-19 has further exposed the vulnerability of national data and information infrastructures. A seemingly straightforward question such as "How many people have died from COVID-19?" cannot be answered in many countries due to the absence of a complete and well-functioning civil registration system. Globally, only 62 per cent of countries had a death registration system that was at least 75 per cent complete in 2015–2019; the share in sub-Saharan African countries was less than 20 per cent.

During the pandemic, many countries also struggled with interruptions in data collection caused by lockdown measures. Face-to-face survey interviews were often stopped and statistical services reduced. In places where data and information infrastructure did not permit the use of alternative data collection tools (such as online or telephone-based surveys), data production was more severely affected. Countries with integrated and well-functioning household survey systems were more resilient. In a compilation of national COVID-19 impact surveys maintained by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, only 43 per cent of around 180 countries used a recent household survey as a sampling frame for telephone interviews; the remaining countries lacked a usable sample frame.

Important operations, such as population censuses, were seriously disrupted around the world. A survey of NSOs showed that about 42 per cent of countries have had to postpone censuses scheduled for 2020 or 2021 for at least one year. European countries, many of which typically use population registers rather than traditional censuses, were less affected. Only 13 per cent of the European country censuses were disrupted versus 60 per cent in Africa.

Proportion of countries that have postponed their censuses scheduled for 2020 or 2021



Overall, countries with the necessary information technology (IT) infrastructure and skill sets were more resilient, and their statistical operations were less affected. In mid-2020, 20 per cent of NSOs faced constraints in their ability to operate remotely due to inadequate IT equipment or infrastructure. Three out of four countries in the low- and middle-income group saw their production of monthly and quarterly statistics negatively affected by the pandemic. In contrast, production of short-term statistics was completely unaffected in two thirds of responding countries in the high-income group, attributable to their heavier reliance on administrative data sources and remote data collection modes. This disparity highlights the need for smart investments to build the necessary infrastructure and the right skill sets across national statistical systems to support remote work, training, and data collection and storage. Such investments are vital if NSOs are to operate during times of crisis and to spur the innovation and transformation needed to fulfil data demands during the recovery and to achieve the SDGs.

Driving innovation to advance SDG implementation

COVID-19 has introduced wide-ranging disruptions to national statistical systems. At the same time, it has pushed countries into trying new ways of doing things. The survey of NSOs, for example, showed that 58 per cent of countries carried out telephone instead of face-to-face interviews to monitor the impact of COVID-19. In May 2021, 58 per cent of NSOs surveyed indicated that their overall information and communication technology readiness has significantly improved over the past six months.

Innovative methods such as the integration of geospatial information and household survey data are also being used to produce more disaggregated and timely data. Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics is using satellite imagery and household surveys to produce municipality-level data on multidimensional poverty. This exercise, supported by the Data for Now initiative, has provided new insights into decision-making to combat poverty.

In addition, machine learning algorithms, when coupled with social science, can further understanding of public perceptions on issues such as discrimination. COVID-19 has prompted further innovative data collection methods such as measuring social distancing compliance with mobile phone data and uncovering disease transmission patterns using data from contact-tracing apps.

While encouraging, the emergence of innovation is not without risk. Proper data governance that guards the privacy of individual information needs to be put in place. Potential biases in data and algorithms should also be checked to ensure that inequality is not further exacerbated.

Leveraging the power of collaboration and partnerships

To meet data demands in the face of inadequate data infrastructure, partners at the national and international level have been working together closely. For the 2019 population census in Kenya, the National Bureau of Statistics partnered with the National Commission on Human Rights to work with communities who have historically been left behind. As a result, for the first time, intersex persons, persons with albinism, indigenous peoples and stateless populations were all counted in the census. This enabled the Government to tailor services, but it also demonstrated to members of these groups that they count. "I asked the enumerator to show me the 'I' mark [for intersex]. I saw it, and I got emotional," recalls one census respondent, the parent of an intersex child from Kajiado. "This is the beginning of a long journey, and it's going in the right direction."

In New Zealand, data gathered through citizen input is helping make life a little easier for the disabled.

Citizens help drive social change through data

The level of disability parking abuses in New Zealand has remained high over the past 10 years. To address this issue, an app was developed that can be used by citizens to report disability parking availability and misuse. The initiative was undertaken by CCS Disability Action, the country's largest support and advocacy organization for people with all kinds of disabilities, in partnership with Statistics New Zealand and SaferMe. Crowdsourcing information, generated by citizens through the app, is providing data on the availability and accessibility of disability parking in parks and open spaces, and will help reduce misuse.

At the international level, a technical advisory group of epidemiologists, biostatisticians, demographers and national statisticians worked tirelessly to help the World Health Organization and Member States obtain accurate estimates of deaths attributable to the pandemic. The group was convened by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Building statistical capacity in a more effective and sustainable way

The challenges of COVID-19 have prompted many statistical agencies, at both international and national levels, to rethink their training programmes. At least 75 per cent of all statistical capacity development events in 2020 were conducted online, compared with only about 5 per cent in 2019, according to the United Nations Statistics Division Global Calendar of Statistical Events, which includes information from major international agencies.

Given its efficacy, remote training is probably here to stay, even if combined with in-person initiatives. A question remains as to what other strategies can make statistical capacity-building more effective and sustainable. A study of national statistical training programmes in 15 countries, led by the Global Network of Institutes for Statistical Training (GIST), showed that many countries have been proactive in identifying training needs and offering training opportunities for their staff. Among the lessons learned, one stands out: a key element in effective capacity-building is to set priorities by internal needs, rather than those driven by external partners. Areas that are in high demand but often overlooked by traditional statistical trainings include the

coordination of the national statistical system, user engagement, management and financing.

International partners can also help fill gaps by making training materials easily accessible. Examples include the UN SDG:Learn Statistics portal, coordinated by GIST, and the provision of platforms to foster the exchange of experience among countries.

Ways to build national statistical capacity

Many statistical offices are working proactively to ensure that the training needs of their staff are met. The following examples are extracted from a GIST report called *Sustainable Statistical Training Programs at National Statistical Offices*:

Ireland identified 13 key skills with five levels of knowledge under each skill and linked them to the job descriptions of staff. A gap assessment is being carried out every year and training programmes are being designed based on the level of needs.

Morocco promoted the use of available e-learning courses. A total of 65 courses were identified by various providers and were paid for by the country's NSO for all staff. This approach has been particularly valuable during the pandemic.

Myanmar developed a training curriculum based on a gap assessment and encouraged development partners to deliver trainings that were in line with internal needs.

Improving data and metadata access

To support a rapid and effective response to a crisis, comprehensive and integrated data must be readily available, easy to find and able to be shared publicly, as appropriate. During the pandemic, many countries provided public dashboards with daily updates to monitor the spread of the disease. Some also provided greater access to utility data, such as the location of essential services, including supermarkets, pharmacies and petrol stations, as in the case of Mexico.

Open national data platforms for the SDGs have been adopted by many countries, allowing them to better meet the needs of a wide range of users. The National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan was one of the pioneers. Its SDG platform makes use of Open SDG, an open-source data platform solution developed in part by the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom and implemented with support from the UNSD-FCDO project on SDG monitoring.

Opening up SDG data to all users in Kyrgyzstan

The SDG platform of Kyrgyzstan and other related outputs were developed in response to users' requests. "Users need to be able to download, work and analyse the data on their own while we are collecting their feedback and, in turn, adapt our work to their needs," says Nazira Kerimalieva, head of sustainable development and environmental statistics for the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan. "Whenever a statistics user is requesting information, we make ourselves available, whether it is a student, journalist or policymaker," Kerimalieva explains. "We never say 'no', and we listen to our users' needs!"

The platform provides information on progress towards the SDGs and the availability of data and national SDG reports. It is targeted to the general public through easy-to-understand language and infographics and serves data experts through the downloading of data in open formats.

1 NO POVERTY

END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

COVID-19 HAS LED TO THE FIRST RISE IN EXTREME POVERTY IN A GENERATION

AN ADDITIONAL 119–124 MILLION PEOPLE WERE PUSHED BACK INTO EXTREME POVERTY IN 2020

THE GLOBAL POVERTY RATE IS PROJECTED TO BE 7% IN 2030

MISSING THE TARGET OF ERADICATING POVERTY

AS OF APRIL 2021, 118 COUNTRIES REPORTED NATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION STRATEGIES, UP FROM 45 IN 2015

GOVERNMENTS WORLDWIDE HAVE PUT IN PLACE 1,600 SHORT-TERM SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

BUT 4 BILLION PEOPLE ARE STILL NOT COVERED BY SOCIAL PROTECTION

2 ZERO HUNGER

END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC IS EXACERBATING WORLD HUNGER

WORLDWIDE, AN ADDITIONAL **70–161 MILLION PEOPLE** ARE LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED HUNGER AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC IN 2020

NUMBER OF UNDERNOURISHED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

PANDEMIC WILL WORSEN CHILD MALNUTRITION

22% (149.2 MILLION) OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 ARE STUNTED

6.7% (45.4 MILLION) OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 SUFFER FROM WASTING

5.7% (38.9 MILLION) OF CHILDREN UNDER 5 ARE OVERWEIGHT (2020*)

*THESE 2020 ESTIMATES DO NOT REFLECT IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

ALMOST ONE THIRD OF WOMEN OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE GLOBALLY SUFFER FROM ANAEMIA, IN PART DUE TO NUTRITION DEFICIENCIES

2.37 BILLION PEOPLE ARE WITHOUT FOOD OR UNABLE TO EAT A HEALTHY BALANCED DIET ON A REGULAR BASIS (2020)

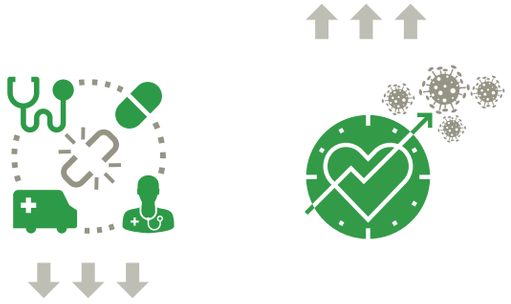
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

THE PANDEMIC

HAS HALTED OR REVERSED PROGRESS

IN HEALTH AND **SHORTENED LIFE EXPECTANCY**



90% OF COUNTRIES ARE STILL REPORTING ONE OR MORE

DISRUPTIONS TO ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES

A DECADE OF PROGRESS

IN

COULD BE STALLED OR REVERSED

BY COVID-19

A LACK OF DATA

HINDERS UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUE IMPACT OF COVID-19

COUNTRIES WITH DEATH REGISTRATION SYSTEM
AT LEAST 75% COMPLETE

(2015-2019)

SCALING UP **INVESTMENT IN UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE**

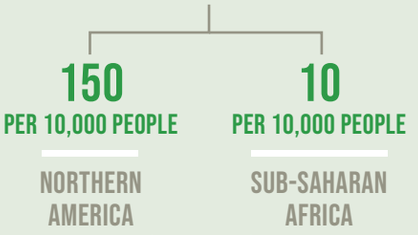
IS ESSENTIAL

HEALTH WORKERS

– IN SHORT SUPPLY IN MANY REGIONS –

HAVE BEEN STRETCHED TO THEIR LIMITS BY THE PANDEMIC

NURSES AND MIDWIVES



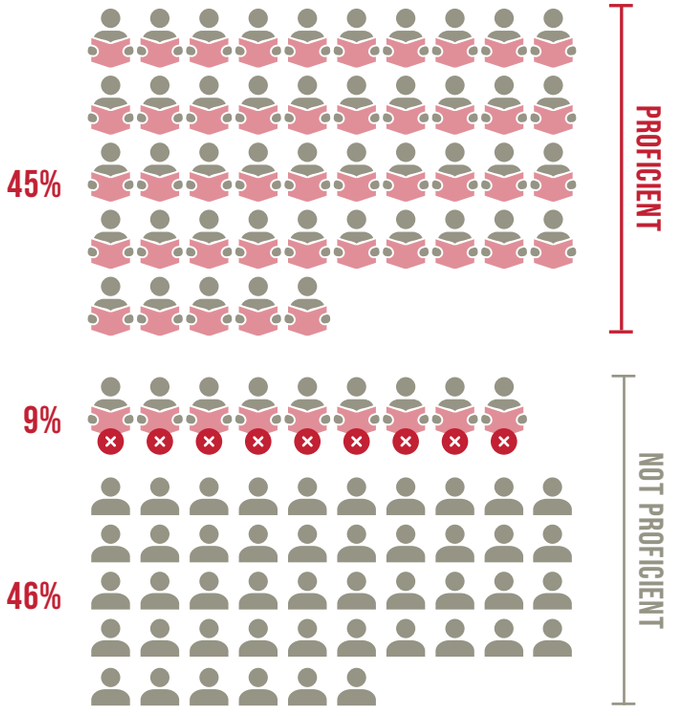
(2013-2019)

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

COVID-19 HAS WIPED OUT 20 YEARS OF EDUCATION GAINS

AN ADDITIONAL 101 MILLION OR 9% OF CHILDREN IN GRADES 1 THROUGH 8 **FELL BELOW** MINIMUM READING PROFICIENCY LEVELS IN 2020



PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED PRE-PRIMARY LEARNING INCREASED FROM **65% IN 2010** TO **73% IN 2019**

NOW, MANY YOUNG CHILDREN ARE ENTIRELY RELIANT ON CAREGIVERS AT HOME

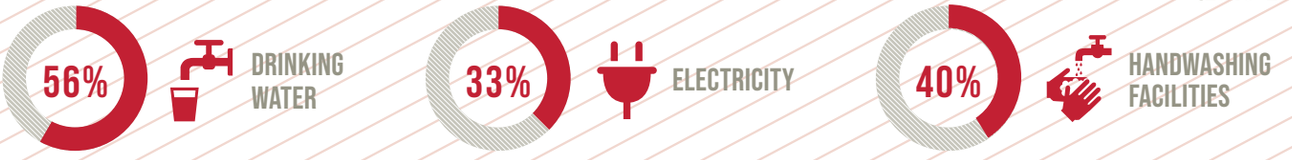
SLOW PROGRESS IN SCHOOL COMPLETION IS LIKELY TO GET WORSE

SCHOOL COMPLETION RATE

WORLD

BASIC SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE TO BUILD BACK BETTER IS LACKING IN MANY COUNTRIES

PROPORTION OF SCHOOLS IN LDCs WITH BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE (2016-2019)



5 GENDER EQUALITY

ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

WOMEN'S EQUAL PARTICIPATION

IN DECISION-MAKING IS CRUCIAL FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY,

BUT GENDER PARITY REMAINS FAR OFF

WOMEN REPRESENT

IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

(2021)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

PERSISTS AT UNACCEPTABLY HIGH LEVELS AND IS INTENSIFIED BY THE PANDEMIC

1 IN 3 WOMEN (736 MILLION)

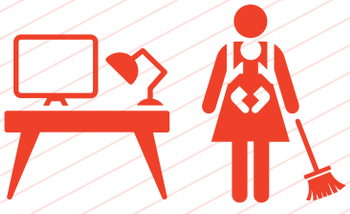
HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT LEAST ONCE IN THEIR LIFETIME SINCE THE AGE OF 15

(2000–2018)

UP TO 10 MILLION GIRLS WILL BE AT RISK OF CHILD MARRIAGE

OVER THE NEXT DECADE AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

IN ADDITION TO THE 100 MILLION WHO WERE PROJECTED TO BECOME CHILD BRIDES BEFORE THE PANDEMIC



PANDEMIC IS ADDING TO THE BURDEN OF UNPAID DOMESTIC AND CARE WORK AND SQUEEZING WOMEN OUT OF THE LABOUR FORCE

WOMEN ALREADY SPEND ABOUT 2.5 TIMES AS MANY HOURS AS MEN ON UNPAID DOMESTIC AND CARE WORK

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

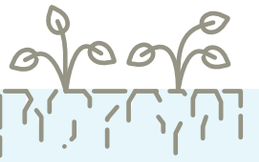
BILLIONS OF PEOPLE STILL LACK ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN 2020

2 BILLION PEOPLE
26%
LACK SAFELY MANAGED DRINKING WATER

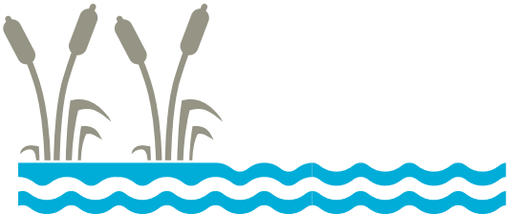
3.6 BILLION PEOPLE
46%
LACK SAFELY MANAGED SANITATION

2.3 BILLION PEOPLE
29%
LACK BASIC HYGIENE

ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR COVID-19 RECOVERY



2.3 BILLION PEOPLE
LIVE IN
WATER-STRESSED COUNTRIES (2018)



BETWEEN 1970 AND 2015, NATURAL WETLANDS SHRANK BY 35%

3 X THE RATE OF FOREST LOSS

129 COUNTRIES ARE NOT ON TRACK TO HAVE SUSTAINABLY MANAGED WATER RESOURCES BY 2030

CURRENT RATE OF PROGRESS NEEDS TO DOUBLE

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

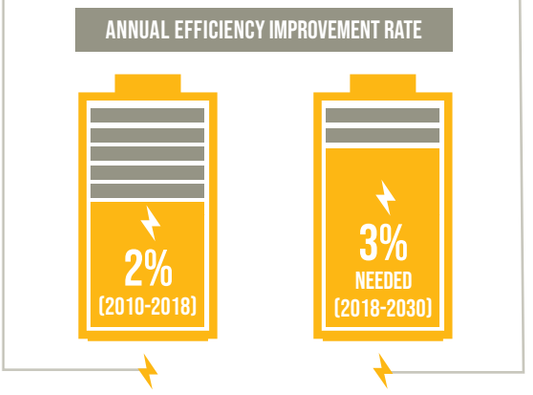
ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL

ONE THIRD OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION USE DANGEROUS AND INEFFICIENT COOKING SYSTEMS (2019)

759 MILLION PEOPLE LACK ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY

3 OUT OF 4 OF THEM LIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (2019)

ENERGY EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENT RATE NEEDS ACCELERATION



ACCELERATED ACTION ON MODERN RENEWABLE ENERGY IS NEEDED – ESPECIALLY IN HEATING AND TRANSPORT SECTORS

MODERN RENEWABLE SHARE OF TOTAL FINAL ENERGY CONSUMPTION (2018)

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

THE PANDEMIC

HAS LED TO THE LOSS OF THE EQUIVALENT OF

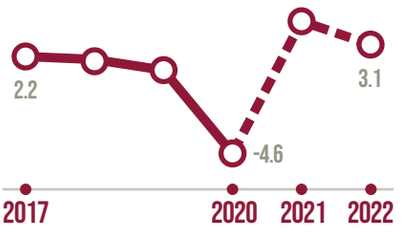
255 MILLION FULL-TIME JOBS

ABOUT **4X** THE NUMBER LOST DURING THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS (2007-2009)

1.6 BILLION INFORMAL ECONOMY WORKERS → WHO LACK A SOCIAL SAFETY NET, **WERE SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED** BY THE PANDEMIC

ECONOMIC RECOVERY IS UNDER WAY

GLOBAL REAL GDP PER CAPITA
(2017-2022)



BUT FOR MANY COUNTRIES, ECONOMIC GROWTH IS EXPECTED TO RETURN TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS ONLY IN **2022 OR 2023**

INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS

FELL FROM **1.5 BILLION** IN 2019 TO **381 MILLION** IN 2020 –

INTERNATIONAL TOURISM IS NOT EXPECTED TO RETURN TO 2019 LEVELS FOR UP TO **4 YEARS**

PANDEMIC WILL LEAD TO AN INCREASE IN YOUTH NOT EMPLOYED, IN SCHOOL OR IN TRAINING

YOUNG WOMEN

RATE OF YOUTH NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (2019)

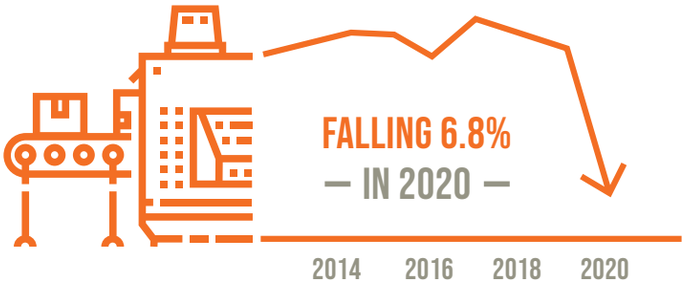
YOUNG MEN

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION

GLOBAL MANUFACTURING PRODUCTION PLUMMETED

AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS



MANUFACTURE OF **MEDIUM- AND HIGH-TECH PRODUCTS** FUELLED ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN LATE 2020

4% GROWTH COMPARED TO SAME PERIOD IN 2019 (4TH QUARTER 2020)

2020 WAS CATASTROPHIC FOR AIR TRAVEL DEMAND

AIR PASSENGERS DROPPED FROM 4.5 BILLION IN 2019 TO 1.8 BILLION IN 2020, **A 60% DECLINE**

ENHANCING RURAL ROAD CONNECTIVITY HELPS REDUCE POVERTY

ALMOST 300 MILLION OUT OF 520 MILLION RURAL DWELLERS **LACK GOOD ACCESS TO ROADS** IN **25 COUNTRIES** (2018-2019)

INCREASED INVESTMENT IN R&D IS ESSENTIAL TO FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR CRISES SUCH AS COVID-19

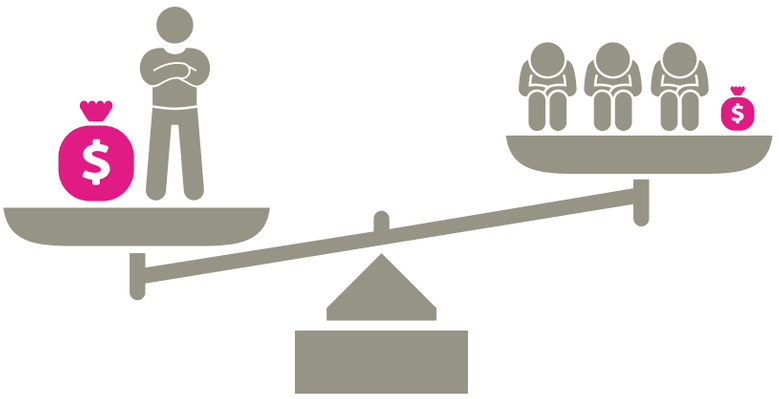
$2.2 TRILLION GLOBAL INVESTMENTS IN R&D (2018)

1,235 RESEARCHERS PER MILLION INHABITANTS (2018)

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

THE PANDEMIC IS LIKELY TO REVERSE PROGRESS MADE IN REDUCING INCOME INEQUALITY SINCE THE FINANCIAL CRISIS



COVID-19 ESTIMATED TO INCREASE THE AVERAGE GINI FOR EMERGING MARKET AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES BY 6%

THE GINI INDEX MEASURES INCOME INEQUALITY AND RANGES FROM 0 TO 100, WHERE 0 INDICATES THAT INCOME IS SHARED EQUALLY AMONG ALL PEOPLE, AND 100 INDICATES THAT ONE PERSON ACCOUNTS FOR ALL INCOME.

THE PROPORTION OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION WHO ARE REFUGEES HAS MORE THAN DOUBLED SINCE 2010

FOR EVERY 100,000 PERSONS, 311 ARE REFUGEES (2020)

REMITTANCE COSTS ARE AT AN ALL-TIME LOW AT 6.5% (2020)

FURTHER PROGRESS IS NEEDED TO REACH THE 3% TARGET

IN 2020, 4,186 DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES WERE RECORDED ON MIGRATORY ROUTES WORLDWIDE

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

THE PANDEMIC HAS WORSENED THE PLIGHT OF SLUM DWELLERS

THE MAJORITY OF THE MORE THAN
1 BILLION SLUM DWELLERS
RESIDE IN THREE REGIONS (2018)

EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ASIA
370 MILLION	238 MILLION	226 MILLION

16%

THE AVERAGE GLOBAL SHARE OF URBAN AREA ALLOCATED TO STREETS AND OPEN PUBLIC SPACES (2020)

SHORT OF THE TARGET
OF 30% STREETS AND 10–15% OPEN PUBLIC SPACES

156 COUNTRIES HAVE DEVELOPED NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES

BUT ONLY HALF ARE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

ONLY HALF OF THE WORLD'S URBAN POPULATION HAVE CONVENIENT ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT (2019)

500 METRES 1,000 METRES

CONVENIENT ACCESS MEANS RESIDING WITHIN
500 M WALKING DISTANCE OF A BUS STOP/LOW-CAPACITY TRANSPORT SYSTEM
AND 1000 M OF A RAILWAY OR FERRY TERMINAL

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS

THE GLOBAL "MATERIAL FOOTPRINT"

INCREASED BY 70%

BETWEEN 2000 AND 2017

1 MILLION
PLASTIC DRINKING BOTTLES
ARE PURCHASED
EVERY MINUTE

5 TRILLION
SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS
ARE THROWN AWAY
EACH YEAR

ELECTRONIC WASTE CONTINUES TO PROLIFERATE

AND IS NOT DISPOSED OF RESPONSIBLY

EACH PERSON

GENERATED ABOUT
7.3 KILOGRAMS
OF E-WASTE

BUT ONLY
1.7 KILOGRAMS
WAS RECYCLED

(2019)

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES STILL HAVE VAST UNTAPPED POTENTIAL FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

NEW RENEWABLE ELECTRICITY CAPACITY

880 WATTS PER CAPITA
DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

- 4X -

219 WATTS PER CAPITA
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

DESPITE PROGRESS, **FOSSIL FUEL SUBSIDIES** CONTINUE TO THREATEN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND 2030 AGENDA

$432 BILLION IN 2019

A DECLINE OF 21% FROM 2018

BY 2020,
A TOTAL OF 700 POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES WERE REPORTED
UNDER THE 10-YEAR FRAMEWORK OF PROGRAMMES ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
(FROM 83 COUNTRIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION)

13 CLIMATE ACTION

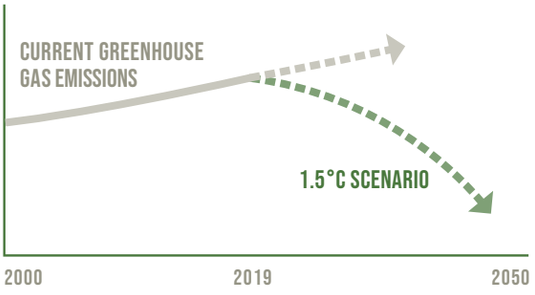
TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

THE CLIMATE CRISIS CONTINUES, LARGELY UNABATED

2020 GLOBAL AVERAGE TEMPERATURE AT **1.2°C ABOVE** PRE-INDUSTRIAL BASELINE

WOEFULLY OFF TRACK TO STAY AT OR BELOW **1.5°C AS CALLED FOR IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT**

RISING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS REQUIRE SHIFTING ECONOMIES TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRALITY



CLIMATE FINANCE INCREASED

BY **10%** FROM 2015–2016 TO 2017–2018, REACHING AN ANNUAL AVERAGE OF **$48.7 BILLION**

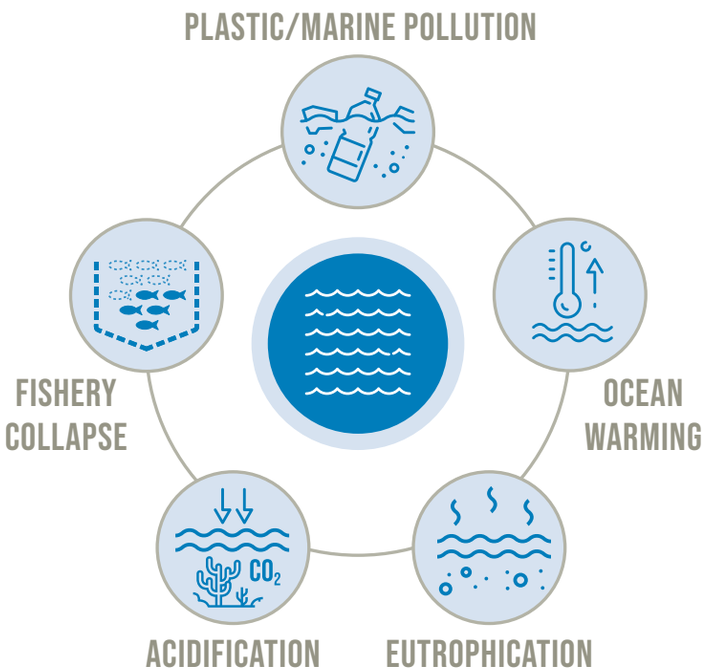
125 OF 154 DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE FORMULATING AND IMPLEMENTING NATIONAL CLIMATE ADAPTATION PLANS

HIGHEST PRIORITY AREAS INCLUDE

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEA AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

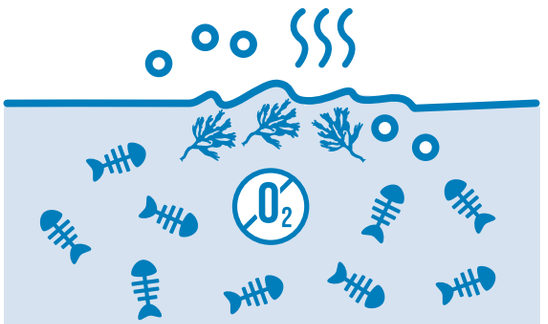
THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR OCEANS IS UNDER SEVERE THREAT



OVER 3 BILLION PEOPLE RELY ON OCEANS FOR THEIR LIVELIHOODS

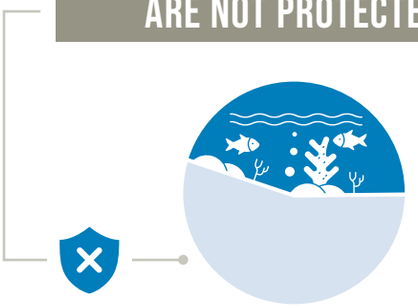
DEAD ZONES

ARE RISING AT AN ALARMING RATE, FROM 400 IN 2008 TO 700 IN 2019



"DEAD ZONES" ARE AREAS OF WATER THAT LACK SUFFICIENT OXYGEN TO SUPPORT MARINE LIFE

OVER HALF OF MARINE KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS ARE NOT PROTECTED



ABOUT HALF OF COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE HAVE ADOPTED SPECIFIC INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT SMALL-SCALE FISHERS

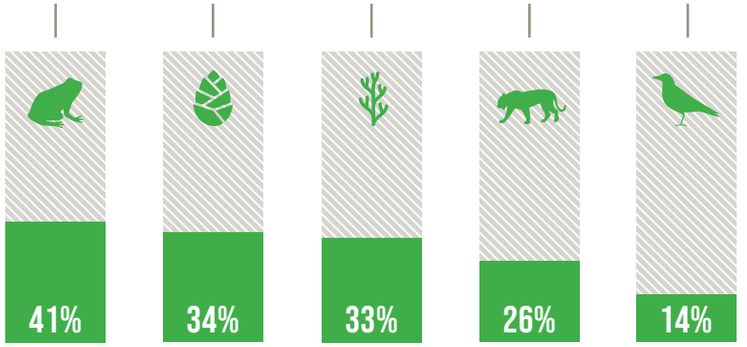
ON AVERAGE, ONLY 1.2% OF NATIONAL RESEARCH BUDGETS ARE ALLOCATED FOR OCEAN SCIENCE

15 LIFE ON LAND

PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS

MORE THAN A QUARTER OF SPECIES ASSESSED BY THE IUCN RED LIST ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

PROPORTION OF SPECIES THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

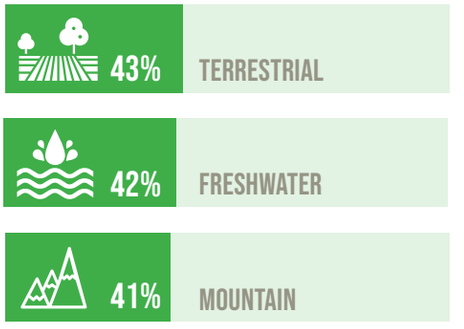


IUCN RED LIST

TRACKS DATA ON **MORE THAN 134,400 SPECIES** OF MAMMALS, BIRDS, AMPHIBIANS, REEF-BUILDING CORALS AND CONIFERS. **MORE THAN 37,400 SPECIES** ARE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION.

PROGRESS TO SAFEGUARD KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS HAS STALLED OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS

GLOBAL MEAN PERCENTAGE OF EACH KEY BIODIVERSITY AREA COVERED BY PROTECTED AREAS (2021)



PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

BUT THE WORLD HAS LOST
100 MILLION HECTARES OF FOREST
IN TWO DECADES
(2000-2020)

ALMOST ALL COUNTRIES HAVE ADOPTED LEGISLATION FOR PREVENTING OR CONTROLLING INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES NEGATIVELY AFFECT NATIVE BIODIVERSITY AND COST THE GLOBAL ECONOMY BILLIONS OF DOLLARS ANNUALLY.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS

THE PANDEMIC IS INTENSIFYING CHILDREN'S RISK OF EXPLOITATION

INCLUDING

TRAFFICKING AND CHILD LABOUR

1 IN 3

TRAFFICKING VICTIMS WERE CHILDREN (2018)

CHILD LABOUR ROSE TO **160 MILLION** (2020)

FIRST INCREASE IN TWO DECADES

IN 2020,

THE KILLINGS OF 331 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

WERE REPORTED IN **32 COUNTRIES**

AN 18% INCREASE

FROM 2019

ONLY 82 COUNTRIES HAD

INDEPENDENT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

IN COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

(2020)

BRIBERY IS AT LEAST FIVE TIMES MORE LIKELY

IN

LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES **37.6%** VS **HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES** **7.2%**

THAN IN

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

NET ODA
REACHED A RECORD HIGH OF
$161 BILLION
IN 2020

REPRESENTING
0.32%
OF DONORS' GNI

BUT STILL
SHORT OF
THE TARGET OF
0.7%
OF GNI

DEFYING PREDICTIONS,
REMITTANCE FLOWS
TO LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES REACHED
$540 BILLION IN 2020

ONLY
1.6% BELOW
2019 LEVEL

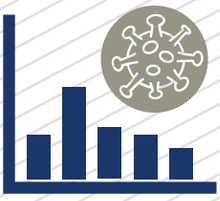
FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT DROPPED BY UP TO 40%

$1.5 TRILLION (2019)

BELOW **$1 TRILLION** (2020)

NEARLY HALF OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION
– 3.7 BILLION PEOPLE –
ARE STILL NOT ONLINE

DESPITE
THE IMMENSE NEED FOR CONNECTIVITY
DURING THE PANDEMIC



63% OF LOW-INCOME AND LOWER-MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES ARE IN NEED OF **ADDITIONAL FINANCING FOR DATA AND STATISTICS** TO FACE THE CHALLENGES POSED BY THE PANDEMIC

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

THE PANDEMIC
IS AMPLIFYING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

OLDER PERSONS (65 AND OVER)

14% OF CONFIRMED CASES

BUT **80%** OF DEATHS

VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

(AS OF 17 JUNE 2021)

EUROPE AND NORTHERN AMERICA
68 PER 100 PEOPLE

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
FEWER THAN 2 PER 100 PEOPLE

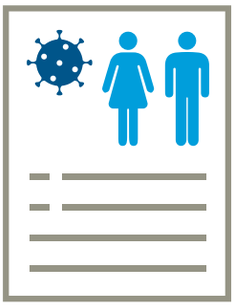
AMONG THOSE WITH DISABILITIES
ONE IN THREE
PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION

WITH HIGHER LEVELS AMONG **WOMEN**

– THE DRASTIC DROP IN –
INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

IS DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTING
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

DISAGGREGATED DATA
ARE ESSENTIAL
FOR TRACKING COVID-19



IN AFRICA,
SEX AND AGE INFORMATION WERE MISSING FROM NEARLY ALL COVID-19 CASE REPORTS

(1/2020-4/2021)

End poverty in all its forms everywhere

The effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have reversed much of the progress made in reducing poverty, with global extreme poverty rising in 2020 for the first time since the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. Even before COVID-19, the world was not on track to achieve the goal of ending poverty by 2030, and without immediate and significant action, it will remain beyond reach. The crisis has demonstrated more clearly than ever the importance of disaster preparedness and robust social protection systems. While the number of countries with disaster risk reduction strategies has increased substantially, and many temporary social protection measures have been put in place in response to the pandemic, increased efforts are needed on both fronts to ensure the most vulnerable are protected.

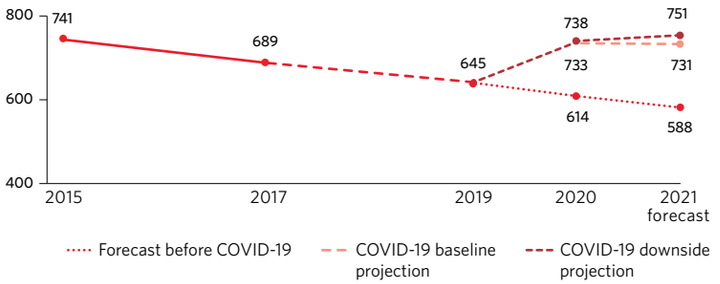
The Alimata family live in the Centre region of Burkina Faso. The parents work 103 hours a week to pay for food. Their one-room home has no electricity or toilet, and they spend 3.5 hours a week collecting water. They use charcoal and wood as fuel for their stove.

COVID-19 has led to the first rise in extreme poverty in a generation

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of the world's population living in extreme poverty fell from 10.1 per cent in 2015 to 9.3 per cent in 2017. This means that the number of people living on less than $1.90 per day dropped from 741 million to 689 million. However, the rate of reduction had slowed to less than half a percentage point annually between 2015 and 2017, compared with one percentage point annually between 1990 and 2015.

The pandemic has compounded the threats to progress raised by conflict and climate change. Estimates suggest that 2020 saw an increase of between 119 million and 124 million global poor, of whom 60 per cent are in Southern Asia. Nowcasts point to the first rise in the extreme poverty rate since 1998, from 8.4 per cent in 2019 to 9.5 per cent in 2020, undoing the progress made since 2016. The impacts of the pandemic will not be short-lived. Based on current projections, the global poverty rate is expected to be 7 per cent (around 600 million people) in 2030, missing the target of eradicating poverty.

Number of people living below $1.90 a day, 2015–2017, 2018–2020 nowcast, and forecast before and after COVID-19 (millions)

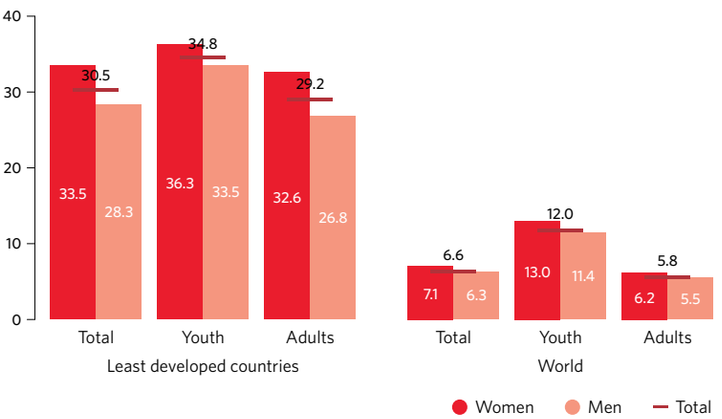


Working poverty disproportionately affects women and youth, and the pandemic is likely to magnify those disparities

The share of the world's workers living in extreme poverty fell by more than half from 2010 to 2019 – from 14 per cent to 6.6 per cent. However, lockdowns and related public health measures due to COVID-19 have severely affected the informal economy, where the vast majority of the working poor are employed. The related income losses threaten to roll back global progress on reducing working poverty.

Although the gender gap in working poverty globally has narrowed over the years, a substantial gap persists in many parts of the world, particularly in the least developed countries (LDCs). There, one third (33.5 per cent) of employed women were living in poverty in 2019, compared with 28.3 per cent of employed men. Worldwide, young workers are twice as likely to be living in poverty as adults, reflecting lower earnings and poorer quality jobs. Since the COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of women and young people, it is likely to exacerbate these longstanding disparities.

Proportion of employed population living below $1.90 a day, 2019 (percentage)

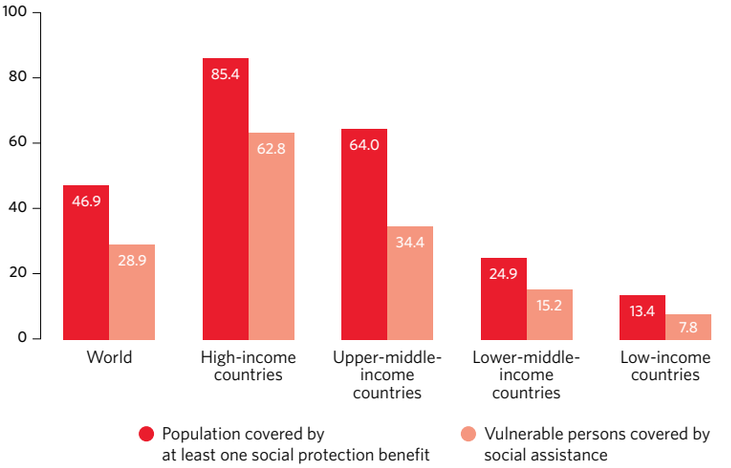


Governments have put new social protection measures in place, but most are only temporary

Social protection measures are fundamental to preventing and reducing poverty across the life cycle. Nevertheless, by 2020, only 46.9 per cent of the global population were effectively covered by at least one social protection cash benefit, leaving as many as 4 billion people without a social safety net. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of social protection systems to protect people's health, jobs and incomes, as well as the consequences of high coverage gaps. As a result, many new social protection measures were introduced in 2020: between 1 February and 31 December, the Governments of 209 countries and territories announced more than 1,600 such measures in response to the crisis, but almost all (94.7 per cent) were short term in nature.

Before the pandemic, most of the population (85.4 per cent) in high-income countries was effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, compared with just over one tenth (13.4 per cent) in low-income countries. The coverage gap is even greater for those considered vulnerable, only 7.8 per cent of whom were covered by social assistance in low-income countries.

Proportion of total population effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit and vulnerable persons covered by social assistance, by income-level of country, 2020 or latest available year (percentage)



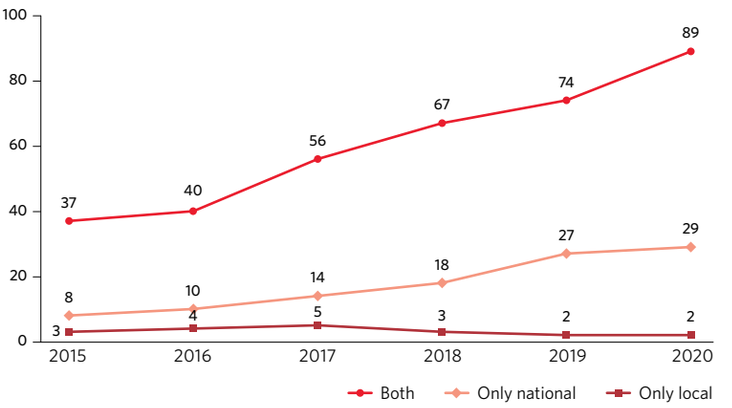
Good results from a global initiative to reduce disaster risk could be undermined by the pandemic

Disasters and their immediate impacts threaten to reverse development gains and slow poverty reduction and hunger alleviation. Based on the latest reporting under the Sendai Framework monitoring process, direct economic losses of $70.4 billion due to disasters were reported by 53 countries for 2019, of which 60 per cent ($42.5 billion) were recorded in the agricultural sector.

In 2019, over 24,000 deaths were attributed to disasters in 67 countries. This is a substantial reduction from 2018, when disaster mortality peaked at 126,000 (reported by 79 countries), and is consistent with an overall trend of declining mortality since 2005. However, COVID-19 is already reversing this progress, overwhelming health systems and highlighting underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities to biological hazards.

The adoption and implementation of robust multi-hazard disaster risk reduction strategies, which incorporate biological risks such as COVID-19, are critical. As of April 2020, 120 countries reported that they had developed and adopted national and/or local disaster risk reduction strategies, up from 48 during the Sendai Framework's nascent period in 2015.

Number of countries with national and/or local disaster risk reduction strategies, 2015–2020



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

Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 650 million people were going hungry, and some 2 billion people were suffering from food insecurity – figures that had been rising since 2014. The crisis has posed additional threats to global food security and nutrition. Disrupted food supply chains and economic slowdowns have affected food systems worldwide and threatened people's access to food, making the target of ending hunger even more distant. COVID-19 is expected to exacerbate all forms of malnutrition, particularly in children, due to a loss of household income, a lack of available and affordable nutritious food, reduced physical activity and disruptions in essential nutrition services. Even discounting the effects of COVID-19, around 230 million children suffer from malnutrition. Urgent short-term actions are needed to avert rising hunger, and a transformation of food systems is required to achieve a healthy and sustainable food future for all.

Students in the Lao People's Democratic Republic get at least one third of their daily energy and nutrition needs filled through a national school feeding programme. In poor rural areas, parents farm early in the morning and often don't have time to prepare school lunches for their children.

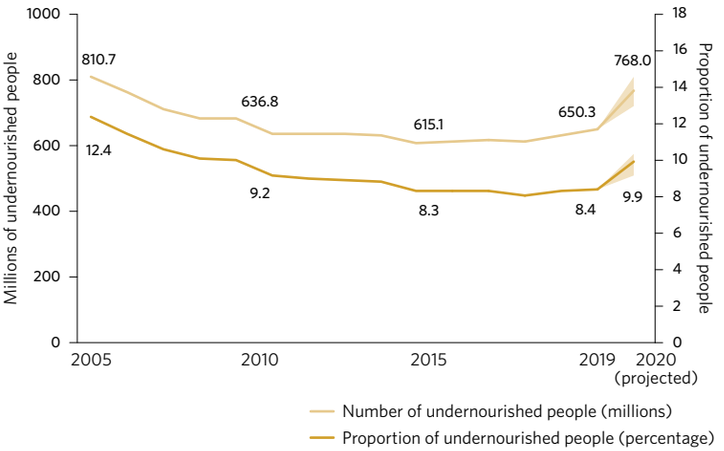
COVID-19 is pushing rising rates of hunger and food insecurity even higher

COVID-19 has had a further and profound impact on hunger and food security, triggered by disruptions in food supply chains, income losses, widening social inequities, an altered food environment and price hikes. Between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020, an increase of as many as 161 million from 2019.

The prevalence of undernourishment increased from 8.4 per cent in 2019 to 9.9 per cent in 2020. Hunger affects 21.0 per cent of the population in Africa, compared with 9.0 per cent in Asia and 9.1 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than half of the world's undernourished are found in Asia (418 million) and more than one-third in Africa (282 million).

Achieving food security goes beyond the eradication of hunger. Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity in 2020, an increase of almost 320 million from 2019. Such levels indicate that people are unable to eat a healthy, balanced diet on a regular basis, or that they run out of food and, at worst, go a day or days without eating. The highest levels of food insecurity were found in sub-Saharan Africa (66.2 per cent), while prevalence rose fastest in Latin America and Caribbean – from 24.9 per cent in 2014 to 40.9 per cent in 2020. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity being 10 per cent higher among women than men in 2020, compared with 6 per cent in 2019.

Number and proportion of undernourished people in the world, 2005–2020 (millions and percentage)



Note: Shaded areas show lower and upper bounds of the estimated range that considers statistical uncertainty.

Small-scale farmers are disadvantaged on many fronts, especially if they are women

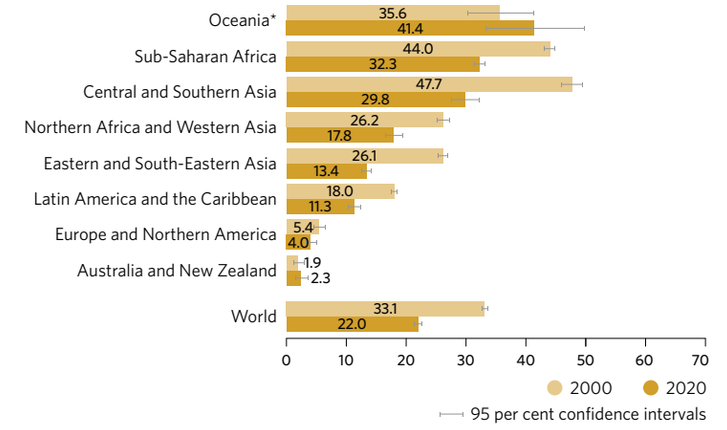
Small-scale food producers constitute the majority of food producers in the 37 countries surveyed; in some countries, they account for up to 91 per cent. Strengthening the resilience and adaptability of these small farmers is critical to reversing the trend towards rising hunger and reducing the share of people living in extreme poverty. Data from 11 countries show that the average labour productivity of small-scale food producers is lower than that of large-scale producers. Moreover, large-scale producers earn two to three times the annual income of small farmers. In almost all countries surveyed, households headed by men achieve higher labour productivity and earn a larger annual income than those headed by women. For example, in Bangladesh, households headed by women earn on average only half of the agricultural income of households headed by men, whereas in Bulgaria, the difference is threefold.

Pandemic-related shocks are likely to trigger a rise in stunting, which already affects more than one in five children

Children are considered stunted, or chronically malnourished, when they are too short for their age. In 2020,[1] 22 per cent of children under age 5 worldwide (149.2 million) suffered from stunting. This proportion is down from 33.1 per cent in 2000 and 24.4 per cent in 2015. These figures are based on the latest estimates, but the actual number of children affected is likely to be higher due to continued constraints in accessing nutritious diets and essential nutrition services during the pandemic. The full impact of the crisis on childhood stunting could take years to manifest.

The three regions with the highest stunting prevalence were Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) at 41.4 per cent, sub-Saharan Africa (32.3 per cent) and Central and Southern Asia (29.8 per cent). The latter two regions accounted for nearly three quarters of all stunted children globally. Particular attention needs to be focused on these regions since the pandemic is affecting the most vulnerable children disproportionately.

Proportion of children under age 5 who are affected by stunting, 2000 and 2020[1] (percentage)

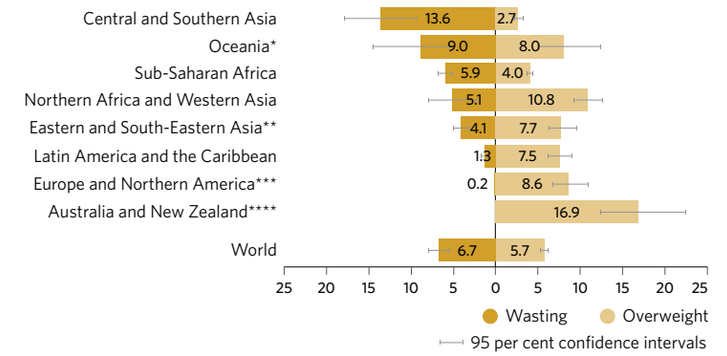


* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Childhood wasting and overweight are now at alarming levels, and are likely to get worse due to COVID-19

Wasting is a life-threatening form of malnutrition, measured by low weight for height. In 2020,[1] wasting affected an estimated 45.4 million children under age 5 (6.7 per cent); overweight affected 38.9 million children in the same age group (5.7 per cent). Wasting will be one of the conditions most affected by COVID-19 in the short term. Around 15 per cent more children than estimated may have suffered from wasting in 2020, due to deterioration in household wealth and disruptions in the availability and affordability of nutritious food and essential nutrition services. Overweight in children may also rise in some countries where unhealthy food replaced fresh, nutritious food, and movement restrictions limited opportunities for physical activity for long periods of time. Childhood wasting and overweight coexist in many developing regions at alarmingly high levels. For example, in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand), wasting prevalence was 9.0 per cent while overweight prevalence was 8.0 per cent.

Prevalence of overweight and wasting among children under age 5, 2020[1] (percentage)

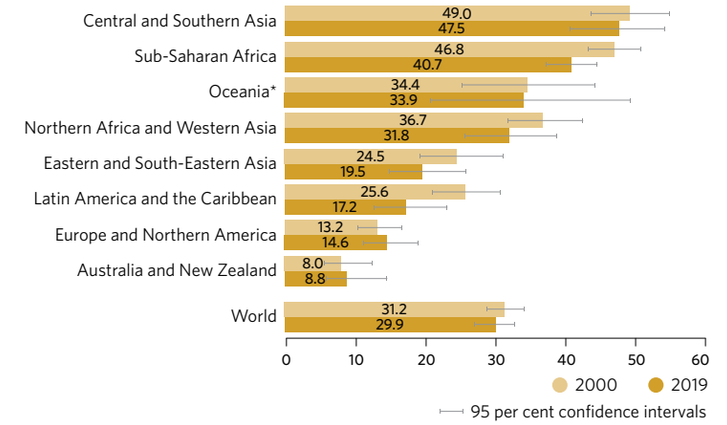


* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.
** Excluding Japan for the wasting estimate.
*** Wasting estimates are for Northern America only due to insufficient (< 50 per cent) population coverage for Europe.
**** Wasting estimates are not available due to insufficient (< 50 per cent) population coverage.

With little progress to show over the last 20 years, almost a third of women of reproductive age are still anaemic

Anaemia is a condition in which the concentration of haemoglobin is insufficient to meet the body's physiologic needs. In pregnant women, it increases the risk of adverse outcomes for both mother and baby. It may also be an independent risk factor for severe illness from COVID-19. In 2019, the global prevalence of anaemia was 29.9 per cent in women of reproductive age (over half a billion women), 29.6 per cent in non-pregnant women and 36.5 per cent in pregnant women. Almost half of women aged 15 to 49 in Central and Southern Asia suffer from anaemia. Since 2000, the prevalence of this condition globally in women of reproductive age has been stagnant. The disruption of health services and food systems, coupled with economic downturns caused by the pandemic, may worsen prevalence. Multisectoral efforts and interventions are needed to optimize anaemia-reduction efforts and close the gaps in achieving the global target of reducing anaemia in women of reproductive age by 50 per cent by 2030.

Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15 to 49, 2000 and 2019 (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Note: Anaemia is defined as the prevalence of haemoglobin concentrations below 110 grams per litre for pregnant women and 120 grams per litre for non-pregnant women.

[1] The 2020 estimates in this section do not reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the collection of household survey data on child height and weight were limited that year due to physical distancing measures.

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

Many health indicators were moving in the right direction before the threat of COVID-19 emerged. Maternal and child health had improved, immunization coverage had increased and communicable diseases had been reduced, although not fast enough to meet those 2030 targets. The pandemic has halted or reversed progress in health and poses major threats beyond the disease itself. About 90 per cent of countries are still reporting one or more disruptions to essential health services, and available data from a few countries show that the pandemic has shortened life expectancy. Not surprisingly, the virus is disproportionately affecting disadvantaged groups.

The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of universal health coverage and multisectoral coordination for health emergency preparedness. Moreover, to design effective pandemic policy interventions, Governments will need to improve and strengthen basic demographic and epidemiological data collection.

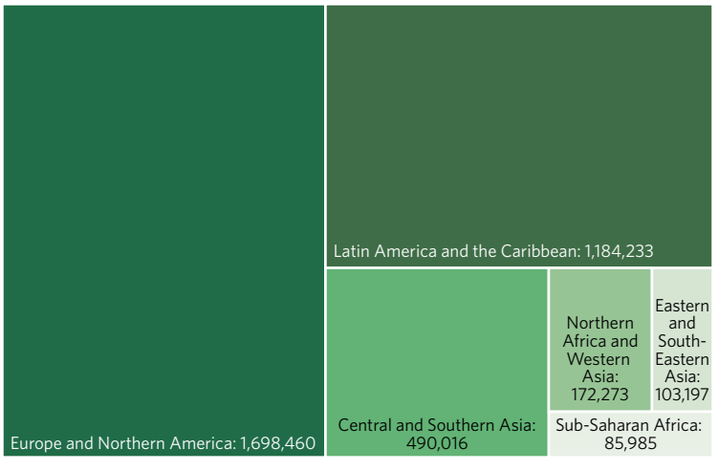
Jemila Tofik, an extension health worker at Logia Health Centre in Afar, Ethiopia, receives a COVID-19 vaccination.

Beyond millions of deaths worldwide, the full toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on health is not yet known

As of June 2021, total reported deaths from COVID-19 reached 3.7 million globally. Europe and Northern America experienced the largest loss at close to 1.7 million, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean at about 1.2 million, and Central and Southern Asia at slightly under half a million.

For those who survived the virus, COVID-19 may have lingering health effects, including long-term disability due to lung scarring and heart damage, along with mental health issues that could affect individuals for a prolonged period. Indiscriminate use of antibiotics during the pandemic could further increase antimicrobial resistance. Although it is still too early for existing data to reflect this impact, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse years of progress towards improved worldwide health. Evidence from countries with reliable and timely vital statistics indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply shortened life expectancy.

Cumulative number of reported COVID-19 deaths, as of 8 June 2021



A decade of progress in reproductive, maternal and child health could be stalled or reversed by the pandemic

Substantial progress has been made towards ending preventable child deaths. The global under-5 mortality rate was halved from 2000 to 2019 – falling from 76 to 38 deaths per 1,000 live births. Over the same period, the global neonatal mortality rate (death in the first 28 days of life) fell from 30 to 17 deaths per 1,000 live births. Still, 5.2 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2019, with almost half of these deaths (2.4 million) occurring in the first month of life.

Globally, 83 per cent of births were assisted by skilled health professionals, including medical doctors, nurses and midwives, according to data from 2014 to 2020. This represents a 17 per cent increase from 2007 to 2013. The global adolescent birth rate also showed progress – falling from 56.4 to 41.2 births per 1,000 adolescents aged 15 to 19 from 2000 to 2020. Declines varied considerably across regions, with the largest drops occurring in Central and Southern Asia, from 70.2 to 23.7 births per 1,000 adolescents over the same time period. Unfortunately, the proportion of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern contraceptive methods has stagnated at around 77 per cent since 2015.

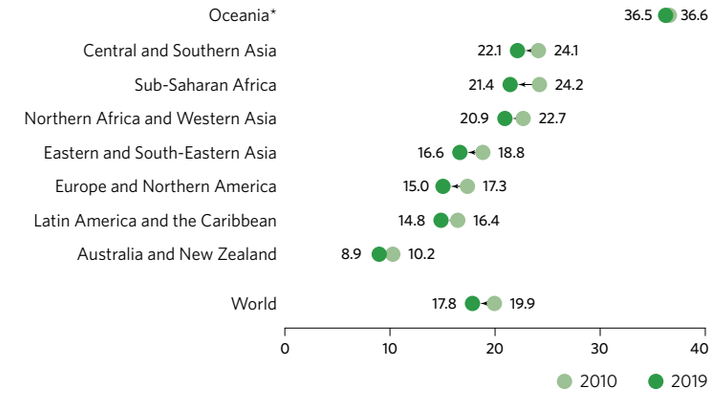
In 2020, 35 per cent of countries reported interruptions in reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health services, along with nutrition services. This magnitude of disruptions could stall or even reverse the progress highlighted above. Disruptions in health services due to the pandemic may have contributed to 228,000 additional child deaths and around 11,000 additional maternal deaths during 2020 in South Asia alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic is aggravating the burden of non-communicable diseases

Before the pandemic, steady progress had been made in reducing mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCD). Between 2010 and 2019, the probability of dying from any of the four main NCDs (cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease) for people between the ages of 30 and 70 declined from 19.9 per cent to 17.8 per cent. If the rates of decline since 2000 are sustained, Australia and New Zealand, as well as Europe and Northern America will be on track to reach the SDG target of reducing by one third premature mortality from NCDs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the challenges facing individuals with NCDs. Those with these underlying conditions or who use tobacco are at an increased risk of severe COVID-19 infection and death. Moreover, nearly half of countries reported one or more disruptions to essential NCD services. This could potentially result in a surge of complications and deaths over the long term in individuals with NCDs or related risk factors.

Probability of dying from any of the four main non-communicable diseases between the ages of 30 and 70, 2010 and 2019 (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

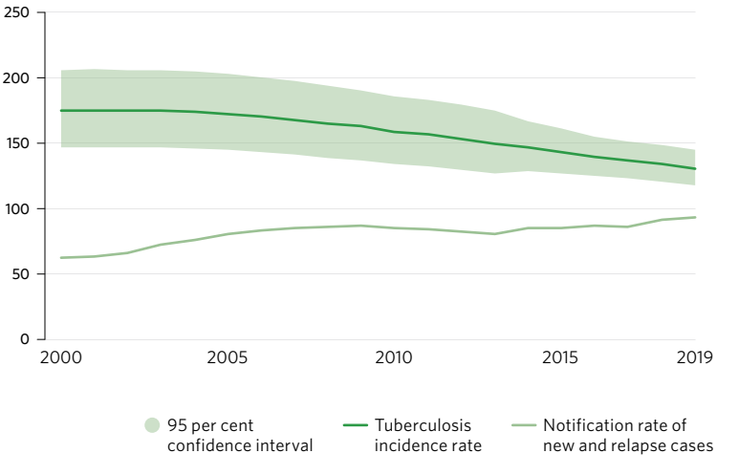
Disruptions in detecting and treating communicable diseases could undo years of focused effort

Globally, HIV incidence among adults aged 15 to 49 declined by 24 per cent over the last decade. It fell from 0.48 infections per 1,000 uninfected people in 2010 to 0.37 in 2019, when 1.7 million new HIV infections were reported – still three times the global target of fewer than 500,000 by 2020. The main reasons targets were missed were inequalities in access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment services across regions, countries and subpopulations within countries. The pandemic has caused considerable disruptions to HIV services.

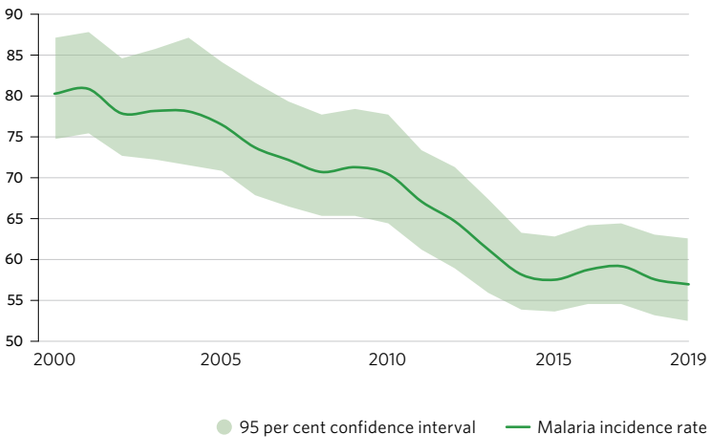
In 2019, an estimated 10 million people fell ill with tuberculosis (TB), the leading killer from a single infectious agent. Between 2015 and 2019, the global TB incidence rate declined from 142 to 130 new and relapse cases per 100,000 people. This 8.5 per cent decline fell short of the target of a 20 per cent reduction between 2015 and 2020. An estimated 1.4 million fewer people received the necessary care for TB in 2020 compared with 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a reduction in treatment of 21 per cent. In India, Indonesia, the Philippines and South Africa, four countries that account for 44 per cent of global TB cases, there was a 25 to 30 per cent drop in the reported number of people diagnosed with TB between January and June 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.

From 2000 to 2015, the incidence rate of malaria fell from 80 to 57 cases per 1,000 people at risk, and then plateaued from 2015 to 2019. In 2019, an estimated 229 million cases and 409,000 deaths due to malaria were reported worldwide. The Africa region carried a disproportionate share of the global malaria burden, with 94 per cent of malaria cases and deaths in 2019. Gaps in funding and access to life-saving tools are undermining global efforts to curb the disease, and the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to set the fight back even further. In the first three months of 2021, between 30 and 40 per cent of malaria-endemic countries reported some level of disruption to services involving malaria diagnosis and treatment. A 10 per cent disruption in access to effective treatment in sub-Saharan Africa could lead to 19,000 additional deaths.

Incidence rate and notification rate of tuberculosis, 2000–2019 (new and relapse cases per 100,000 people)



Malaria incidence rate, 2000–2019 (new cases per 1,000 people)



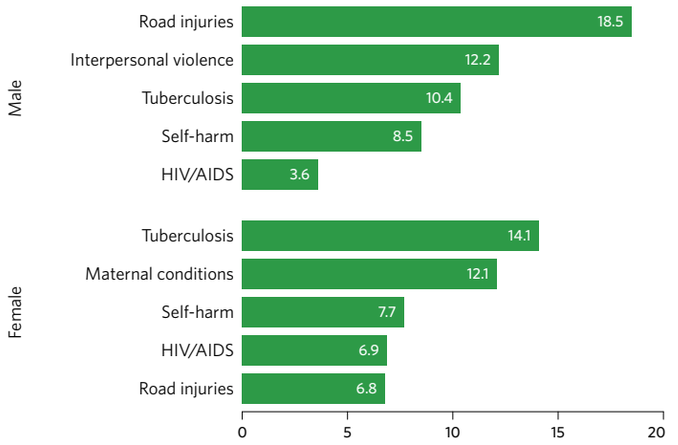
Support for mental health is being recognized by the vast majority of countries in their COVID-19 response plans

The global suicide death rate declined by 36 per cent between 2000 and 2019, from 14 to 9 deaths per 100,000 people. More than 700,000 suicides were reported globally in 2019, with men nearly twice as likely as women to kill themselves. Suicide is among the leading causes of mortality among people aged 15 to 29, constituting around 8 per cent of all deaths in this age group. The devastation of the pandemic has already had a marked effect on people's mental health. A World Health Organization (WHO) survey showed that 90 per cent of countries in early 2021 reported that mental health and psychosocial support were included in their COVID-19 response plans.

Increases in alcohol consumption during the pandemic could have an adverse impact on both physical and mental health. In 2019, an average of 5.8 litres of pure alcohol per person was consumed by people aged 15 and older. Europe has the highest per capita alcohol consumption in the world, at 11.0 litres per year.

Road injuries killed about 1.3 million people worldwide in 2019. The global mortality rate due to road injuries declined by 8.3 per cent from 2010 to 2019, from 18.1 deaths per 100,000 people to 16.7. During COVID-19 lockdowns, road traffic volume declined tremendously. Nevertheless, road injuries are the leading killer of men aged 15 to 29, contributing to 18 per cent of all deaths in this age group.

Top five causes of death among males and females aged 15 to 29, 2019 (percentage)



COVID-19 is amplifying health inequalities

COVID-19 disproportionately affects the elderly, the poor, refugees and migrants, and a broad range of vulnerable groups due to their specific health and socioeconomic circumstances, poor living conditions and lack of access to high-quality public health care. Moreover, the collateral effects of the pandemic resulting from the global economic downturn, social isolation and movement restrictions inequitably affect those who are already marginalized.

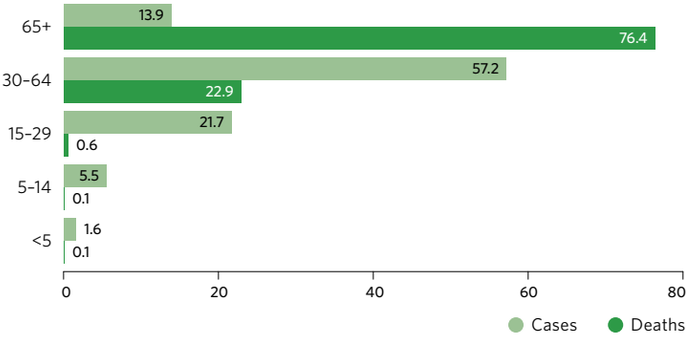
Older persons: Available age-disaggregated national data showed that people aged 65 and over comprised close to 80 per cent of all COVID-19 deaths, even though only 14 per cent of confirmed COVID-19 cases were for that age group.

The poor: Prior to the pandemic, an estimated 927 million people, or 12.7 per cent of the global population, made out-of-pocket health-care payments representing more than 10 per cent of their household budgets. This pushed almost 90 million people below the extreme poverty line. With increasing poverty due to the pandemic, out-of-pocket health spending will likely pose an even greater threat to the poor than spending on other essentials, such as food and education.

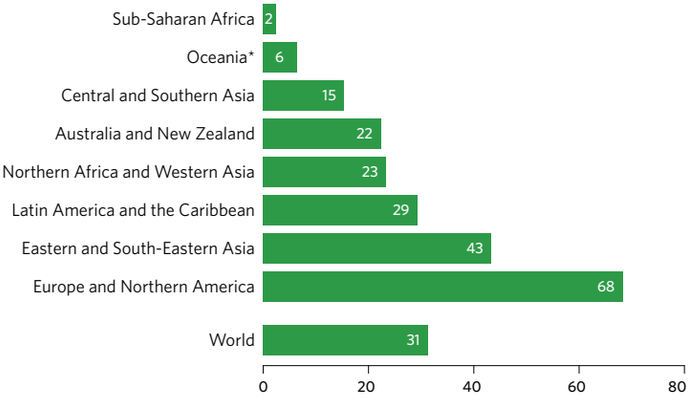
Refugees and migrants: The pandemic has worsened already-distressed living and health conditions of refugees and migrants. Around 5 per cent of survey respondents did not seek health care even when they had COVID-19 symptoms. The main reasons cited were inadequate financial resources, fear of deportation, and lack of health care or no entitlement to such care.

People living in developing regions: Equitable access to vaccines – with a focus on protecting priority populations, including health workers and those most at risk – is one of the most important measures that could be taken to mitigate health and economic impacts and bring the pandemic under control. As of 17 June 2021, close to 2.4 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses had been administered globally. Vast inequities exist in distribution, however: for every 100 people, around 68 vaccines were administered in Europe and Northern America, compared with fewer than 2 in sub-Saharan Africa.

Distribution of reported COVID-19 cases and deaths by age, January 2020 through April 2021 (percentage)



Number of COVID-19 vaccines administered per 100 people, as of 17 June 2021



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

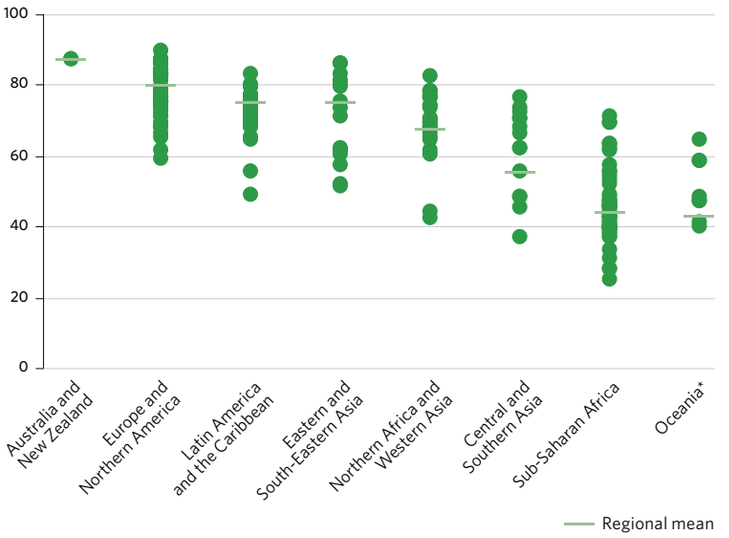
Countries are working hard to maintain essential health services despite the current crisis

Universal health coverage is a major factor in reducing inequality and fighting poverty. It means that all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without incurring financial hardship. It includes the full range of essential services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.

Improvements in coverage have been recorded in all regions and in all income groups: the Universal Health Coverage Service Coverage Index increased from an average of 45 (out of 100) in 2000 to 66 in 2017. The most progress was made in sub-Saharan Africa, with the index almost doubling from 2000 to 2017 – from 23 to 44. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic compounds the challenges faced by countries with weaker health systems.

To mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic, most countries have established policies, plans and mechanisms to support the maintenance of essential health services. A WHO survey shows that approximately 9 out of 10 responding countries have defined a core set of essential health services to be maintained. Nearly two thirds of countries have allocated additional funds to ensure the continuity of essential health services, and around 60 per cent have adopted approaches to provide vulnerable groups with access to care.

Universal Health Coverage Service Coverage Index, 2017



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Health and care workers – in short supply in many regions – have been stretched to their limits

Health and care workers are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic response. This has further constrained the delivery of essential health services, especially for countries with a limited health workforce. According to data from 2013–2019, the density of nursing and midwifery personnel in Northern America is over 150 per 10,000 people – over 15 times that of sub-Saharan Africa and 8 times that of Northern Africa and Southern Asia. The density of medical doctors in Northern America, Oceania and Central Asia is around 25 per 10,000 people, compared with 2 per 10,000 in sub-Saharan Africa.

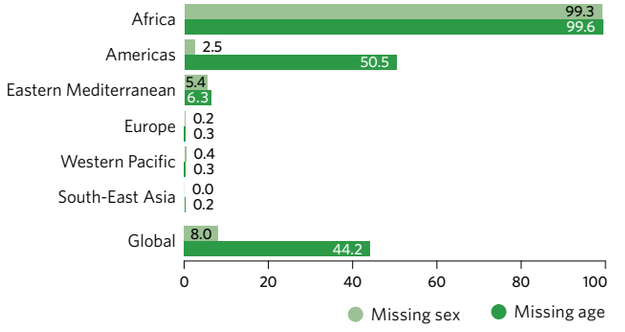
In performing their jobs, health and care workers are at risk of COVID-19 exposure: national COVID-19 surveillance data reported to WHO indicated that health and care workers comprised 10 per cent of all new COVID-19 cases in the earlier months of the pandemic. Health and care workers face challenging working and psychosocial conditions related to COVID-19, including stigma and discrimination, lack of personal protective equipment, strike actions, quarantine and self-isolation.

A lack of data is the main stumbling block to understanding the true impact of COVID-19

The main obstacle to understanding the true magnitude and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a lack of data. Globally, only 62 per cent of countries had a death registration system that was at least 75 per cent complete in 2015–2019; the share in countries in sub-Saharan Africa was less than 20 per cent. The pandemic is further challenging many civil registration systems. A survey carried out by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division in April/May 2020 showed that 13 per cent of reporting countries designated civil registration as "non-essential", following national restrictions in service delivery.

While public health surveillance systems have made tremendous efforts in reporting COVID-19 cases to WHO, basic characteristics such as age and sex are often missing. Overall, between January 2020 and April 2021, information on age was missing from the reports of 44 per cent of all cases. For countries in Africa, sex and age information were missing from nearly all case reports.

Proportion of case report forms with missing attributes, January 2020 through April 2021 (percentage)



Note: Regional groupings are those used by WHO.

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

A boy learns through a Radio Education in Emergencies programme. For two years, starting in mid-2017, more than 9,200 schools closed across eight African countries due to rising insecurity, leaving 1.9 million children without education.

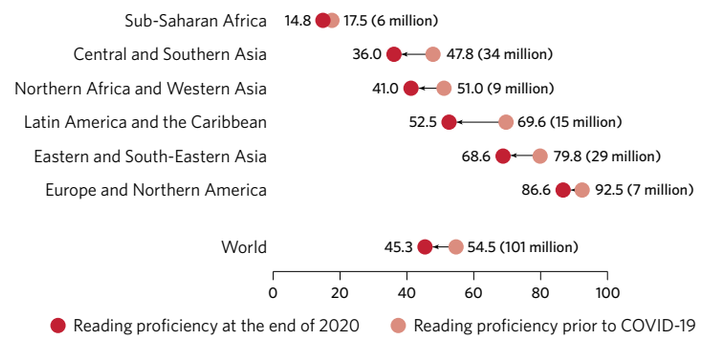
COVID-19 has wreaked havoc worldwide on children's learning and well-being. Before the pandemic, progress in education was already too slow to achieve Goal 4 by 2030. One year into the crisis, two in three students were still affected by full or partial school closures. One hundred million more children than before fail to demonstrate basic reading skills. The poorest and most vulnerable children are bearing the brunt of the crisis, exacerbating longstanding inequalities. Many risk never returning to school; some are forced into child marriage or child labour. Special efforts are required to recover learning losses caused by COVID-19. However, an estimated 65 per cent of Governments in low- and lower-middle-income countries, and 35 per cent in upper-middle- and high-income countries have reduced funding for education since the onset of the pandemic.

Exceptional measures are needed to get students back on track after a catastrophic year for education

Even before COVID-19, the world was not on track to meet reading and mathematics targets. In 2019, only 59 per cent of children in grade three were proficient in reading. The pandemic is projected to cause an additional 101 million children (roughly 9 per cent of those in primary and lower secondary school) to fall below the minimum reading proficiency threshold, increasing the total number of students falling behind to 584 million in 2020. This wipes out the progress achieved in education over the past 20 years. Similar declines are observed in the area of mathematics.

Nearly two thirds of the children falling behind live in Central and Southern Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. The proficiency rate was already very low in sub-Saharan Africa before the pandemic, so learning losses in this region would likely occur among children below the minimum level of proficiency. Recovery of the learning deficit globally could occur by 2024, but only if extraordinary efforts are made.

Change in reading proficiency for grades one to eight, from 2019 to 2020 (percentage and millions of children)



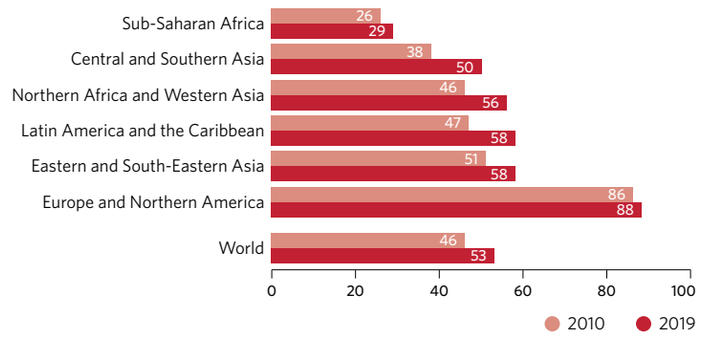
Note: Values in parentheses represent the number of children falling below the proficiency threshold in 2020.

Large disparities in school completion are likely to get worse, especially among poor or vulnerable children

Progress to ensure that all children complete primary and secondary school has been slow. Between 2010 and 2019, the global primary and secondary school completion rates increased from 82 per cent to 85 per cent and from 46 per cent to 53 per cent, respectively. In sub-Saharan Africa, the primary completion rate rose from 57 per cent in 2010 to 64 per cent in 2019, while the secondary rate grew from 26 per cent to 29 per cent, leaving that region furthest behind.

Large disparities among population groups remain pervasive. Almost half of countries with data did not reach gender parity in primary school completion. Disparities by location and wealth are even more stark: only a third of countries reached parity in primary school completion between rural and urban students, and just one sixth of countries reached parity between students in the poorest and richest households. The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to further slow or even reverse progress in education completion. Growing poverty and the shift to remote learning make children from the poorest households and other vulnerable groups less equipped to participate and more likely to drop out permanently or for extended periods.

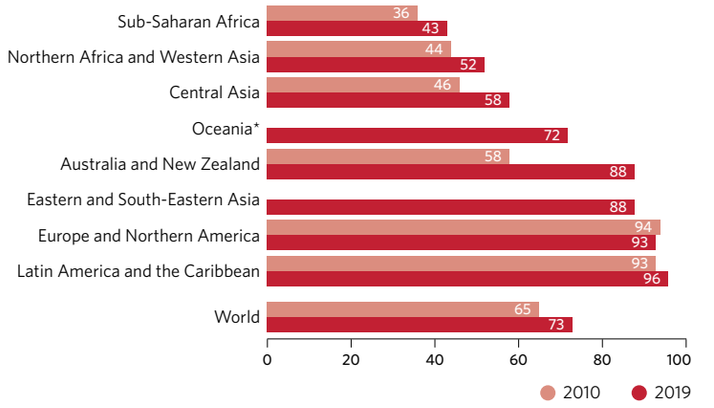
Secondary school completion rate, 2010 and 2019 (percentage)



Good progress in early childhood education has been brought to a halt by the pandemic

Pre-COVID-19 data for 2012–2020 drawn from 76 mostly low- and middle-income countries and territories show that around 7 in 10 children aged 3 and 4 years are developmentally on track. Participation in organized pre-primary learning (one year before the official age for primary school entry) rose steadily before the pandemic, from 65 per cent in 2010 to 73 per cent in 2019, with gender parity achieved in every region. However, considerable variation was found among regions. Participation in early learning in 2019 was 43 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 96 per cent in Latin American and the Caribbean. This progress has been threatened since 2020, since childcare and early education facilities have closed in most countries. Many young children are now entirely reliant on their parents or other caregivers at home. Unsafe conditions, negative interactions with caregivers, and lack of adequate stimulation and learning opportunities during the early years can diminish children's chances of success throughout their lives.

Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official entry age for primary school, 2010 and 2019 (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

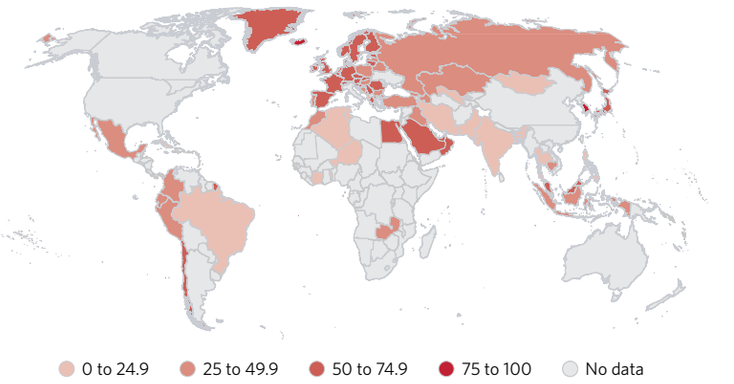
Note: Data for Southern Asia and 2010 data for Oceania* and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia are not shown due to low population coverage of available data.

Broader participation in continuing education and training is needed to create resilient and adaptable workers

Continuing education and training are key to improved livelihoods and to developing a labour force resilient to economic shocks and adaptable to technological change. Prior to the pandemic, the average participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education was only 25 per cent, with significant variation across the 73 countries with data. In nearly half of them, participation rates were below 10 per cent, but were 40 per cent and above among countries in Europe and Northern America. Gender parity in participation rates was achieved in less than a fifth of the countries.

With schools and workspaces transitioning online due to COVID-19, information and communication technology (ICT) skills have become critically important. However, available data from 2017–2019 indicate that less than 40 per cent of youth and adults reported performing one of the basic ICT skills in the last three months, such as sending an email with an attachment. Large differences in skill levels are found among various groups and occupations, but relatively smaller gender differences, especially at younger ages.

Proportion of youth and adults with basic ICT skills, latest year available in 2017–2019 (percentage)



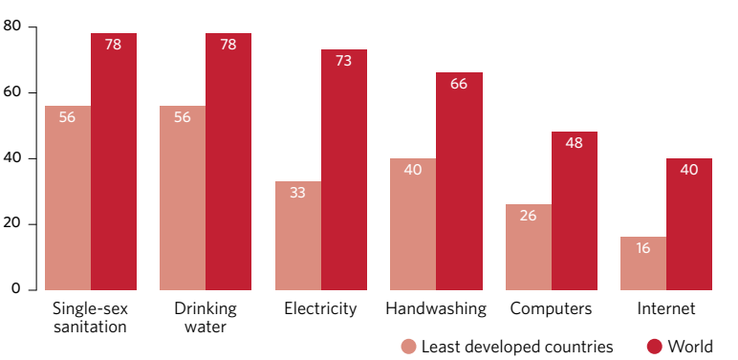
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Building back better from the crisis can start with basic school infrastructure, which is sorely lacking in many countries

Improving basic school infrastructure is critical for school reopening, a first step on the road to recovery from COVID-19. Data from 2016 to 2019 show that, globally, more than a fifth of primary schools lacked access to basic drinking water or single-sex toilets, more than a third lacked basic handwashing facilities, and one in four did not have electricity. Internet service and computers in schools are even more scarce. Schools in LDCs face the biggest challenges. Almost half of primary schools in LDCs lack single-sex toilets – an important factor in girls' attendance – and more than two thirds are without electricity. The pandemic is spotlighting the importance of adequate sanitation facilities in keeping children safe at school and the need for ICT infrastructure to support remote learning. It is also highlighting additional infrastructure considerations, such as adequate classroom space, air filtration in school buildings, and access to the Internet and computers at home.

The economic fallout of the crisis on education budgets and capital spending is likely to affect the ability of countries to make progress towards these ends, especially in the poorest countries.

Proportion of schools with basic infrastructure, 2016–2019 (latest) (percentage)



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

The social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have adversely affected progress towards gender equality. Violence against women and girls has intensified; child marriage, on the decline in recent years, is expected to increase; and women have suffered a disproportionate share of job losses and increased care work at home. The pandemic has highlighted the need to act swiftly to address pervasive global gender inequalities. Women have played a central role in the response to COVID-19, as frontline health workers, care providers, and as managers and leaders of recovery efforts. Yet they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, and their rights and priorities are often not explicitly addressed in response and recovery measures. The crisis presents an opportunity to re-shape and rebuild systems, laws, policies and institutions to advance gender equality.

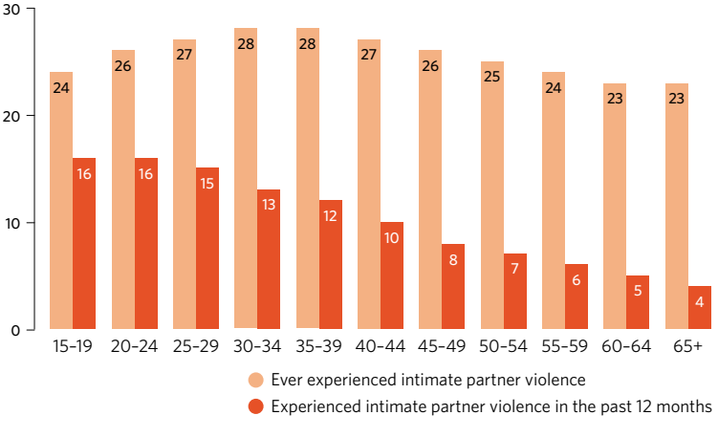
Women travel across Africa to take part in a six-month training programme to become solar engineers. The photo above shows graduates from Liberia and Malawi.

Violence against women persists at unacceptably high levels and has been intensified by the pandemic

Nearly one in three women (736 million) have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence at least once since the age of 15, usually by an intimate partner. Intimate partner violence starts early. Among girls and women who have ever been married or had a partner, nearly 24 per cent of those aged 15 to 19 years have been subjected to such violence, as have 26 per cent of those aged 20 to 24.

Disparities in intimate partner violence are found across regions, with consistently higher prevalence in low- and lower-middle-income regions compared with high-income regions. These variations are likely to reflect the challenges that women often face in leaving abusive relationships, such as insufficient economic resources, limited availability and access to formal support services, weak social support networks, and fear of repercussions associated with social stigma. The current pandemic has heightened the challenges of women in abusive relationships.

Global prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence against women, by age group, 2000–2018 (percentage)



COVID-19 threatens global progress against child marriage

Over the past decade, the practice of child marriage has declined significantly, with the global proportion of young women who were married as children decreasing by 15 per cent, from nearly one in four to one in five. As a result, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. However, the profound effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are putting girls at higher risk of early marriage due to a combination of economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in reproductive health services. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic, in addition to the 100 million who were projected to become child brides before. Most child marriages due to the pandemic are expected to occur in the near term, though the impact is likely to be felt for at least the next decade.

The pandemic is adding to the burden of women's unpaid work while squeezing them out of the labour force

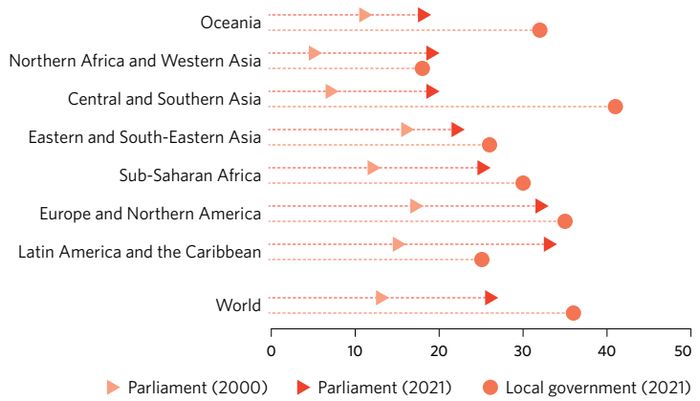
On an average day, women spend about 2.5 times as many hours on unpaid domestic work and care work as men, according to data from 90 countries and areas collected between 2001 and 2019. Both women and men have increased their unpaid workloads during the crisis, but women are doing a disproportionate share. Moreover, more women than men are leaving the workforce to provide childcare. In a 16-country study, the amount of time spent on childcare has increased for both women (from 26 hours a week before the pandemic to 31 hours after) and men (from 20 hours a week to 24 hours). Evidence from Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico shows that partnered women with children have experienced sharper drops in labour force participation than men, particularly women living with children under 6 years of age.

Women's equal participation in decision-making, crucial for COVID-19 response and recovery, remains a distant target

The pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities and threatens to undermine progress on women's empowerment. More than ever, women are needed as equal partners in crafting gender-responsive laws, policies and budgets to build back better and ensure a gender transformative agenda in both private and public spheres. However, as of 1 January 2021, women's representation was far from parity: the global average of women in single or lower chambers of national parliaments was only 25.6 per cent, and 36.3 per cent in local deliberative bodies, continuing a slow upward trend. At the current rate, it will take no fewer than 40 years to achieve gender parity in national parliaments. Only 23 countries have at least 40 per cent female representation in their lower or single chambers of parliament; 22 countries in local government. Most achieved such progress through the use of gender quotas. In 2020, the share of parliamentary seats won by women in countries with legislated quotas was 27.4 per cent, compared with 15.6 per cent in countries with no quota systems. At the local level, use of legislated quotas increased a country's representation of women by 7 percentage points.

Though women accounted for nearly 39 per cent of the global labour force in 2019, they occupied only 28.2 per cent of managerial positions, only 3 percentage points higher than in 2000. The pandemic's disproportional impact on women in the workforce, and especially on women entrepreneurs, threatens to roll back the little progress that has been made in reducing the global gender gap in managerial positions.

Proportion of seats held by women in parliaments and local governments, 2000 and 2021 (percentage)



Discriminatory laws and legal gaps continue to deprive women of their human rights

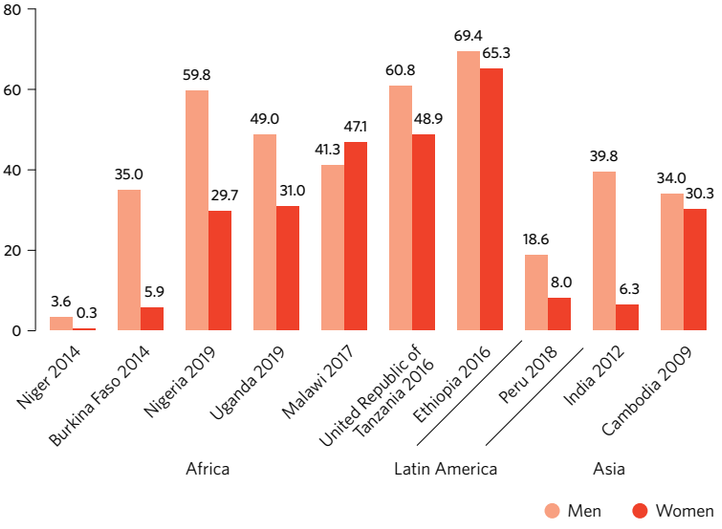
Discriminatory laws and legal gaps continue to prevent women from enjoying their full human rights, based on data collected in 95 countries across four areas of law in 2020. In the area of overarching legal frameworks and public life, more than half of the countries with data lacked quotas for women in national parliaments, and close to one fifth maintained discriminatory nationality laws. In the area of violence against women, 83 per cent of countries included budgetary commitments to implement legislation addressing violence against women, but 63 per cent lacked rape laws based on the principle of consent. In the area of employment and economic benefits, over 90 per cent of countries mandated non-discrimination on the basis of gender in employment, but almost half of them continued to restrict women from working in certain jobs or industries. In the area of marriage and family, almost a quarter of countries failed to grant women equal rights with men to enter into marriage and initiate divorce, and three quarters of countries did not stipulate 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for women and men, with no exceptions.

Giving women equal access to land would go a long way towards alleviating poverty and food insecurity

Women's ownership or control of land is critical to their economic empowerment. Land ownership gives rise to a host of benefits for women through an increase in their bargaining power within households and the economy. These benefits are not limited to women. Studies suggest that if women had equal access to land, poverty and food insecurity would be significantly reduced around the world.

That vision is far from realized. In most countries, less than 50 per cent of women and men engaged in agriculture have ownership or secure tenure rights over agricultural land. In 9 of the 10 countries assessed, relatively few women have such rights compared to men. It is not always the case that landowners who are men outnumber landowners who are women, but this is by far the most common situation, found in 7 out of the 10 countries for which data are available. In five of these countries, men outnumber women in land ownership by at least two to one.

Share of women and men in the adult agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, selected countries (percentage)



Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Over 100 households and 1,600 schoolchildren now have better access to safe water in South Upi, Maguindanao, Philippines, thanks to a joint project by the International Labour Organization and the Government of Japan.

Billions of people around the globe live without safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services. COVID-19 has underscored the need for universal access to these services to combat the pandemic and promote a healthy, green and sustainable recovery.

Water is required across all sectors of society to produce food, energy, goods and services. Over the last century, global water use has increased at more than twice the rate of population growth. Many water sources are drying up, becoming more polluted or both. In addition to water stress and water pollution, countries are facing growing challenges linked to degraded water-related ecosystems, water scarcity caused by climate change, underinvestment in water and sanitation, and insufficient cooperation on transboundary waters. The world is not on track to achieve Goal 6. A dramatic acceleration in current rates of progress and integrated and holistic approaches to water management are badly needed.

Universal access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene is fundamental to the COVID-19 response

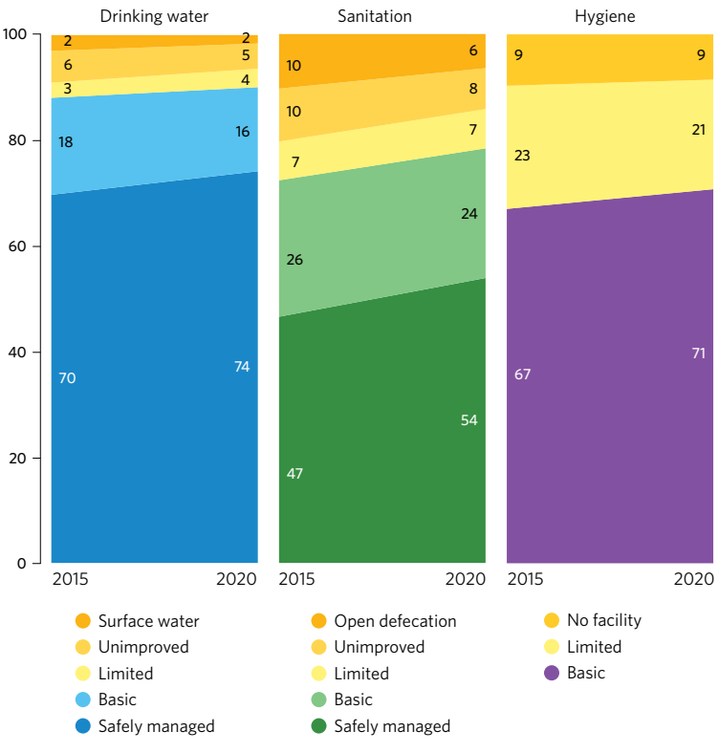
Between 2015 and 2020, the proportion of the global population using safely managed drinking water services increased from 70.2 per cent to 74.3 per cent, with the largest numbers of people gaining access in Central and Southern Asia. Despite this progress, another 2 billion people still lacked safely managed drinking water in 2020, including 771 million who were without even basic drinking water. Half of those lacking basic drinking water services (387 million) live in sub-Saharan Africa.

The proportion of the global population using safely managed sanitation services increased from 47.1 per cent in 2015 to 54 per cent in 2020. However, 3.6 billion people still lacked safely managed sanitation in 2020, including 1.7 billion who were without even basic sanitation. Of these people, 494 million practised open defecation, down from 739 million in 2015. While the world is on track to eliminate open defecation by 2030, achieving universal access to safely managed sanitation by 2030 will require a quadrupling of current rates of progress.

The proportion of the global population with basic hygiene rose from 67.3 per cent in 2015 to 70.7 per cent in 2020. This means that, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2.3 billion people worldwide (one in three) still lacked a basic handwashing facility with soap and water at home, and 670 million had no handwashing facility at all.

Universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene services goes well beyond household use. Globally, only two in three schools had basic drinking water and sanitation services, and three in five schools had basic hygiene services in 2019. This means that 818 million children lacked basic handwashing facilities at their schools at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In least developed countries, only one in two health-care facilities had basic water services, two in five had basic sanitation services, and three in four had basic hygiene services in 2019. To ensure that we build back better from the COVID-19 crisis, Governments will need to accelerate their efforts to ensure access to drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for all.

Global coverage of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, 2015 and 2020 (percentage)

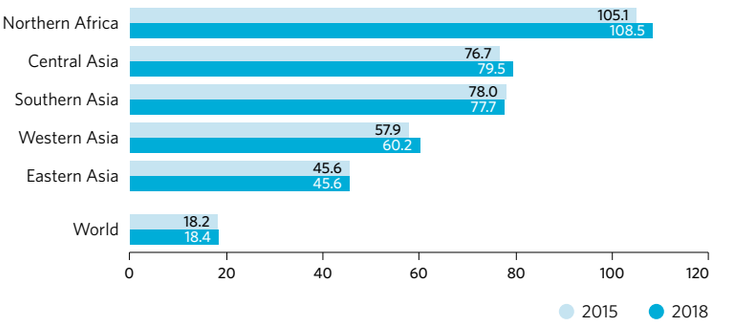


Water stress is getting worse in subregions with already high or critical levels

When a country or territory withdraws 25 per cent or more of its renewable freshwater resources, it is water stressed. This challenge affects countries on every continent. In 2018, 2.3 billion people lived in water-stressed countries, of whom 721 million lived in countries with high or critical levels. Between 2015 and 2018, water stress in some subregions with already high or very high levels, such as Northern Africa, Central Asia and Western Asia, increased by over 2 per cent.

Improving water-use efficiency is one key to reducing water stress. Water-use efficiency worldwide rose 10 per cent, from $17.30 per cubic metre in 2015 to $19.00 per cubic metre in 2018. All economic sectors have seen their water-use efficiency improve since 2015, with a 15 per cent increase in industry, 8 per cent in agriculture and 8 per cent in the service sector. More concrete measures are needed to save water and increase water-use efficiency, particularly in those regions that have or are close to having a high to critical level of water stress (above 75 per cent).

Levels of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources), regions with high and very high water stress, 2015 and 2018 (percentage)

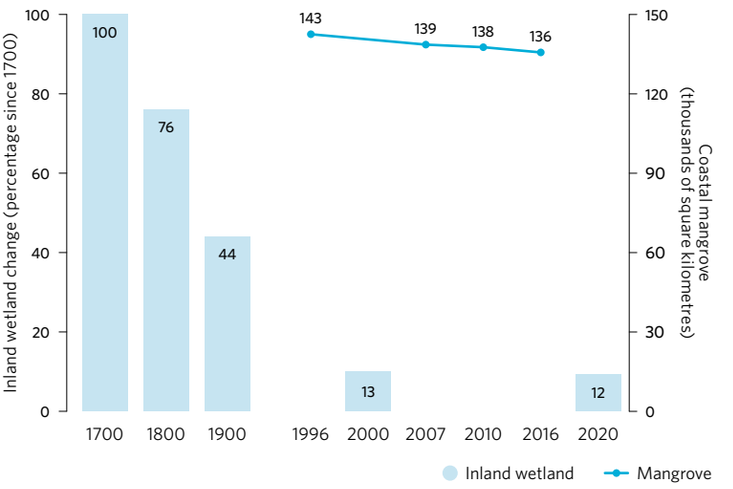


Freshwater ecosystems are changing dramatically, signalling the need for an urgent response

Water-related ecosystems play a fundamental ecological role and provide essential products and services. That said, freshwater ecosystems are changing dramatically. One fifth of the world's river basins are experiencing either rapid increases or decreases in surface water area. Globally, lakewater quality is poor: of the 2,300 large lakes assessed in 2019, nearly a quarter recorded high to extreme turbidity (water cloudiness). High turbidity can adversely impact human and ecosystem health. An assessment of 10 per cent of the world's large lakes in 2019 showed that at least 21 million people, including 5 million children, live within a 5-kilometre radius of lakes with high turbidity.

Natural wetlands around the world are in long-term decline. More than 80 per cent are estimated to have been lost since the pre-industrial era. Between 1970 and 2015, inland and marine/coastal wetlands each shrank by approximately 35 per cent, three times the rate of forest loss. The area covered by coastal mangroves declined globally by 4.9 per cent between 1996 and 2016. Efforts to protect and restore water-related ecosystems must be urgently scaled up and accelerated.

Loss of inland wetlands over three centuries 1700–2020 (percentage), and coastal mangrove area, 1996–2016 (thousands of square kilometres)



Ensuring that operational arrangements cover all transboundary water basins by 2030 will require a major acceleration in effort

Transboundary water cooperation is crucial to encouraging regional integration, promoting peace and sustainable development, tackling regional security challenges and supporting climate change adaptation. Globally, 153 countries share rivers, lakes and aquifers. However, only 24 countries had all of their transboundary basin area covered by operational arrangements in 2020; 22 countries had more than 70 per cent covered. On average, 58 per cent of transboundary basin areas have an operational arrangement for water cooperation. Europe and Northern America and sub-Saharan Africa show the greatest coverage.

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 128 out of 153 countries sharing transboundary basins submitted national reports on the status of their cooperative arrangements. More efforts are needed to accelerate progress so that all transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers are covered by operational agreements by 2030.

Countries are lagging in the implementation of integrated management of water resources, central to a sustainable future

To balance competing demands for water, many countries have strengthened water laws, developed relevant policies and reinforced institutions. Globally, the average implementation rate for the integrated management of water resources increased from 49 per cent in 2017 to 54 per cent in 2020. The current rate of progress needs to double, as 129 countries are not on track to achieve sustainable management of water resources by 2030. To accelerate progress, countries must build on their multi-stakeholder monitoring processes to understand major barriers and identify priority actions. In many countries, COVID-19 has actually led to wider stakeholder engagement in water resources management through online consultations. Some of the most common priorities include establishing sustainable financing mechanisms, and improving management and monitoring of basins and aquifers on the basis of hydrological – rather than administrative – boundaries.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Solar energy systems in rural Rwanda are electrifying homes, primarily benefiting women and children.

Over the last decade, access to electricity has expanded, use of renewable energy in the electricity sector has increased, and energy efficiency has improved. Still, millions of people are without electricity, and one third of the global population lack clean cooking fuels and technologies. Progress in ensuring energy access has been uneven across regions, leaving the most vulnerable even further behind.

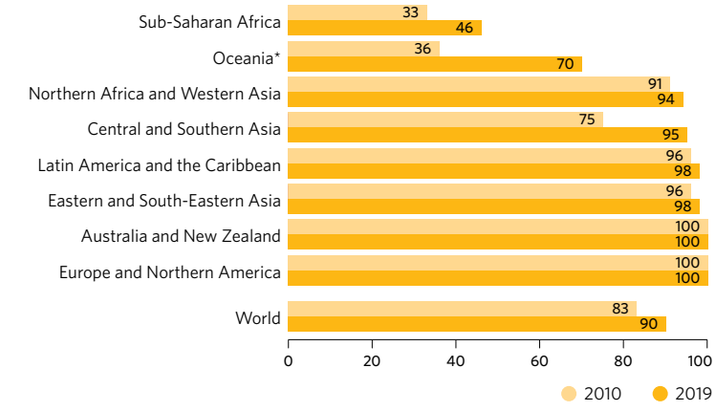
The pandemic is reversing progress and causing millions of people to lose access to electricity. Moreover, depressed oil and gas prices are likely to discourage uptake of clean energy technologies. On the positive side, lower fossil fuel prices provide an opportunity for Governments to reform fossil fuel subsidies. Stimulus plans designed to boost economic growth, protect workers and create jobs could scale up the deployment of clean energy technologies.

The lights are going out in parts of Africa and Asia due to the effects of growing poverty

The global electricity access rate improved from 83 per cent in 2010 to 90 per cent in 2019, with 1.1 billion people receiving electricity for the first time. However, 759 million people were still without access in 2019, with three quarters of them in sub-Saharan Africa (97 million in urban areas and 471 million in rural areas). At the current pace, 660 million people will still be without electricity in 2030, the vast majority of whom (555 million) will be in sub-Saharan Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic could reverse progress in some countries. In Africa, the number of people without electricity increased in 2020 after declining over the previous six years. In developing countries in Africa and Asia, basic electricity services are now unaffordable for more than 25 million people who had previously gained access, due to population growth and increasing levels of poverty. An additional 85 million people, mainly in developing countries in Asia, may be forced to scale back to basic electricity access because of an inability to pay for an extended bundle of services.

Proportion of population with access to electricity, 2010 and 2019 (percentage)

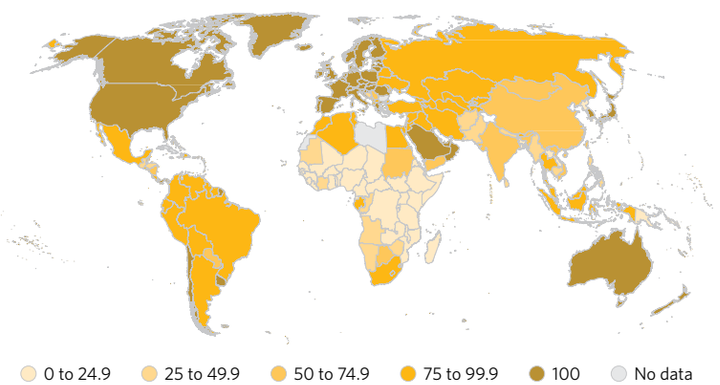


* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

At the current rate of progress, one third of the world's population will still be using dangerous and inefficient cooking systems in 2030

In 2010, 57 per cent of the global population were using clean cooking fuels and technologies, rising to 66 per cent in 2019. This means that 2.6 billion people have been left behind. In sub-Saharan Africa, population increases outstripped growth in access, leaving about 85 per cent of the population reliant on inefficient and dangerous cooking systems. The majority of the poor rely on harmful and polluting fuels such as wood and charcoal to cook, making them especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Meanwhile, the pandemic and resulting lockdowns threaten to derail progress. Unless rapid action is taken, one third of the global population will still be without clean cooking fuels and technologies in 2030, resulting in significant adverse health effects and environmental degradation.

Share of the population with access to clean cooking systems, 2019 (percentage)



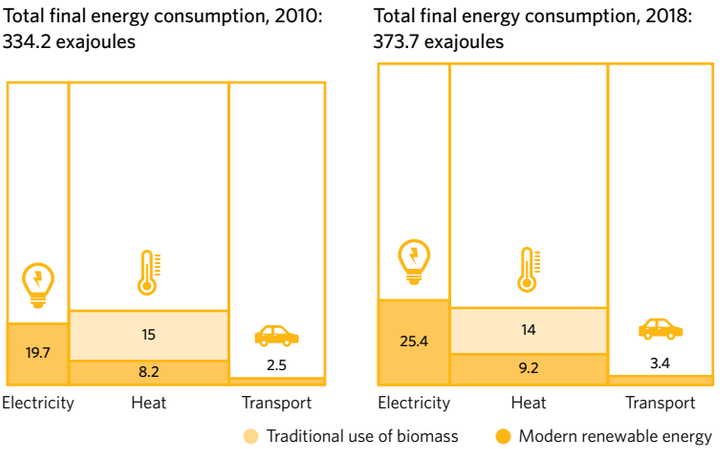
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Effective climate action will require accelerated action on modern renewable energy, especially for heating and transport

The share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption gradually increased to 17.1 per cent in 2018, up from 16.4 in 2010. The main contribution came from the electricity sector, where the share of renewables now exceeds 25 per cent. Nonetheless, electricity makes up only around 21 per cent of final energy use. The remaining portion is concentrated in the heat and transport sectors, where, in 2018, modern renewables penetrated 9.2 per cent and 3.4 per cent of the global market, respectively. Traditional uses of biomass – such as the burning of wood for heat – still account for almost 14 per cent of global heat consumption.

Excluding traditional uses of biomass, Latin America and the Caribbean shows the highest share of modern renewable energy in total final energy consumption. This is largely due to significant hydropower generation, and to the use of bioenergy in industrial processes and biofuels for transport. In 2018, more than a third of the global annual increase in modern renewable energy consumption took place in Eastern Asia, where wind- and solar-generated electricity dominated growth.

Share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption and by end use, 2010 and 2018 (percentage)

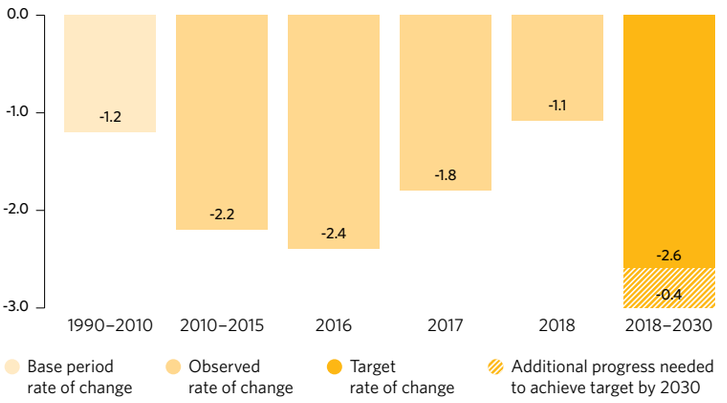


Note: The squares represent the total final energy consumption (TFEC) for 2010 and 2018. The column widths represent the share of the sector in TFEC. The height of the shaded area of each sector represents the share of renewables.

The world will reach the global target for energy efficiency only through substantial investment on a systematic scale

Improving energy efficiency – along with increasing renewable energy deployment – is central to the global goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The 2030 target calls for a doubling of the historical annual improvement rate in energy intensity between 1990 and 2010. Global primary energy intensity, defined as total energy supply per unit of GDP, improved from 5.6 megajoules per dollar in 2010 to 4.8 in 2018, an annual rate of improvement of 2 per cent. This is well below the 2.6 per cent required to meet the target. As a result, progress in energy intensity up to 2030 will now need to average 3 per cent a year. This remains within reach only with significant investment in cost-effective energy efficiency improvements on a systematic scale. While early estimates for 2019 indicated an improvement rate of 2 per cent, the outlook for 2020 suggests a low level of progress at only 0.8 per cent. In the immediate term, energy efficiency improvements continue, thanks to ongoing investments.

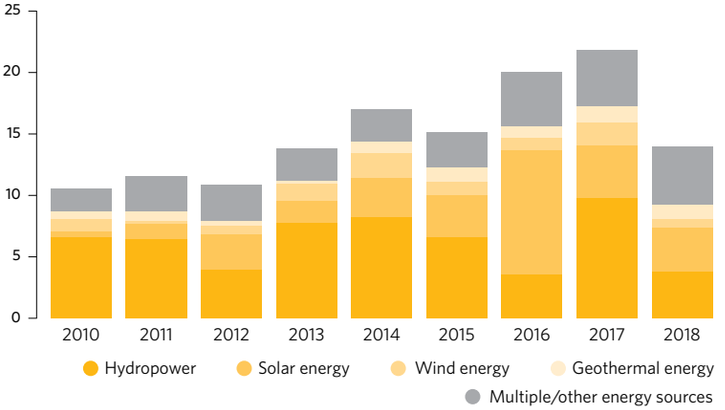
Growth rate of primary energy intensity, 1990–2030 (percentage)

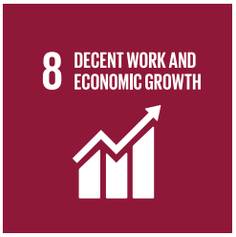


Least developed countries receive only a fraction of international financing for renewable energy

International financial flows to developing countries in support of clean and renewable energy reached $14 billion in 2018, 35 per cent lower than in 2017. Such annual fluctuations are mostly due to variations in large hydropower commitments. Hydropower, solar, geothermal and wind projects received 27 per cent, 26 per cent, 8 per cent and 5 per cent of 2018 flows, respectively. Public financial flows continue to be concentrated in a few countries. Argentina, India, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey, for instance, received 30 per cent of total commitments from 2010 to 2018. In contrast, the 46 least developed countries together received only 20 per cent of commitments over the same period. Most of the countries with the lowest levels of electricity access are LDCs (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa), but many receive far less international public funding than the global average when measured on a per capita basis.

International financial flows to developing countries in support of clean and renewable energy by type of technology, 2010–2018 (billions of dollars at 2018 prices and exchange rates)





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

Even before the pandemic hit, global economic growth had slowed. The COVID-19 crisis disrupted economic activities around the world and caused the worst recession since the Great Depression. In 2020, 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost (relative to the fourth quarter of 2019), equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs – about four times the number lost during the global financial crisis in 2007–2009. The pandemic has put workers in informal employment at risk, as they lack protection against illness or lockdowns. Young workers and women have been particularly affected by the crisis. With the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines and continued fiscal and monetary support, the United States of America and China are expected to experience strong growth in 2021. However, for many other countries, economic growth will remain below pre-pandemic trends for a prolonged period.

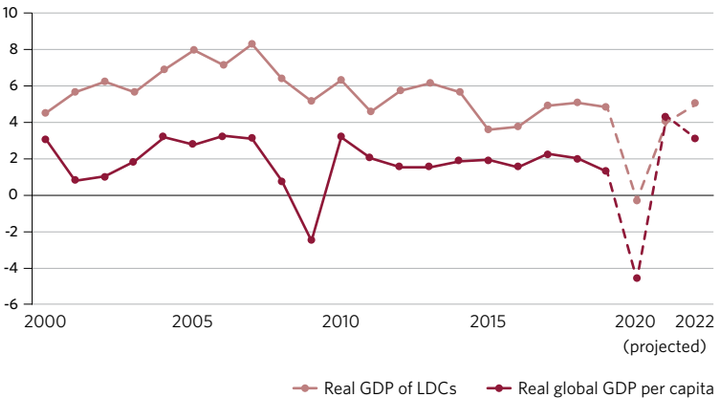
A self-employed worker with a hearing impairment earns an income through the production of clay pots in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

For many countries, the road to economic recovery may be a long, bumpy ride

The global economy grew by an average of about 2 per cent from 2014 to 2018. In 2019, real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increased by only 1.3 per cent globally and is estimated to have decreased by 4.6 per cent in 2020. With the roll-out of vaccines and government aid, a global economic recovery is under way, led by China and the United States. Global GDP per capita is projected to increase by 4.3 per cent in 2021 and 3.1 per cent in 2022. However, for many countries, economic growth is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2022 or 2023.

For LDCs, real GDP increased by 4.8 per cent in 2019 and is expected to have decreased by 0.3 per cent in 2020 due to pandemic disruption. In 2021 and 2022, real GDP growth in LDCs is projected to pick up again – reaching 4.0 and 5.0 per cent, respectively. However, it is expected to remain well below the 7 per cent target envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Annual growth rate of global real GDP per capita and annual growth rate of real GDP of LDCs, 2000–2022 (percentage)

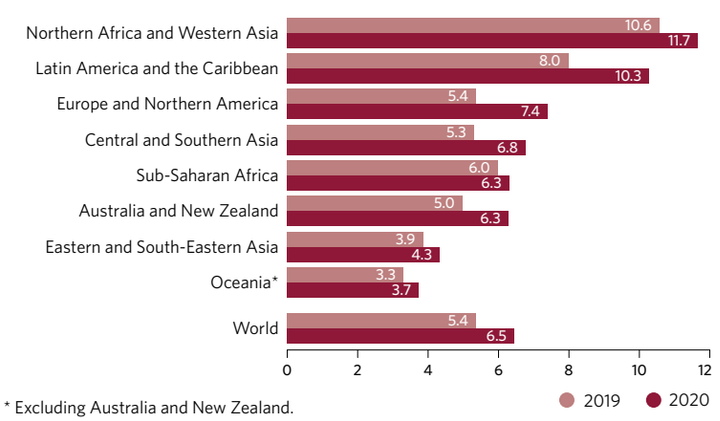


COVID-19 has led to massive job losses, particularly among youth and women

By 2020, the global unemployment rate reached 6.5 per cent, up 1.1 percentage points from the previous year. The number of people unemployed worldwide increased by 33 million, reaching 220 million. Another 81 million people left the labour market altogether. Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Northern America recorded increases in the unemployment rate of at least 2 percentage points.

Youth and women were especially hard hit, with employment losses of 8.7 per cent and 5.0 per cent, respectively, in 2020, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults and 3.9 per cent for men. Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate of youth was already three times that of adults. During the crisis, women were more likely than men to drop out of the labour force in order to care for children. This further increased longstanding gender gaps in labour force participation rates.

Unemployment rate, 2019 and 2020 (percentage)



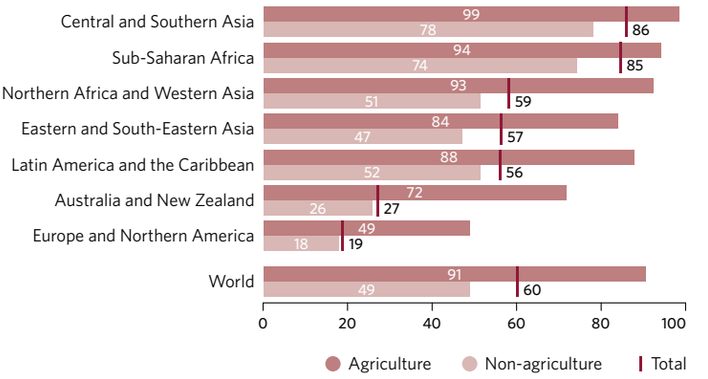
* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

The lack of a social safety net has left informal workers on their own to cope with the COVID-19 fallout

Before the pandemic, informal employment represented 60.2 per cent of global employment. This means that 2 billion people worldwide worked in jobs characterized by lack of basic protection, including social protection coverage. The share is much higher in LDCs, where the proportion of informal employment in total employment was 88.7 per cent in 2019. Globally, the share of informal employment was 90.7 per cent in the agriculture sector, compared with 48.9 per cent in the non-agricultural sector.

Estimates suggest that three quarters of informal economy workers (1.6 billion) were significantly affected by lockdown measures and/or were working in the hardest-hit sectors. Among them, women were overrepresented in so-called high-risk sectors: 42 per cent of women workers were engaged in those sectors, compared with 32 per cent of men. These workers face a high risk of falling into poverty and will experience greater challenges in regaining their livelihoods during the recovery.

Proportion of informal employment in total employment and by sector, 2019 (percentage)



The worst year on record for international tourism disproportionally affected small island developing States

In the decade before the pandemic, the GDP generated by international tourism increased at a higher rate than the rest of the economy, representing 4.1 per cent of global GDP in 2019. However, as one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, a reversal in this trend is expected for 2020 and the coming years. International tourist arrivals fell drastically from 2019 to 2020 – from 1.5 billion to 381 million. This represents a 74 per cent decline, which takes tourism back to levels seen 30 years ago. It also translates into an estimated loss of $1.3 trillion in global inbound tourism expenditure (spending by non-resident visitors), more than 11 times the loss experienced as a result of the 2007–2009 global financial crisis. An estimated 100 million to 120 million tourism jobs have been put at risk due to the pandemic, disproportionally affecting women.

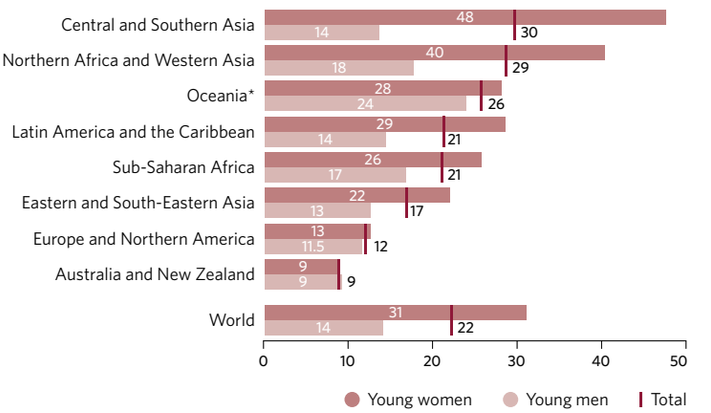
The massive drop in tourism affects all regions, with millions of livelihoods and businesses at risk, and jeopardizes progress towards the SDGs. The impact is especially pronounced in small island developing States (SIDS), since they are more reliant than other countries on tourism as a source of income and employment. Among those States with available data, inbound tourism expenditure represents 25 per cent of GDP on average, compared with 5 per cent among non-SIDS with data. Worldwide, many countries have been able to alleviate the impact of the crisis through the domestic tourism market. However, this is not a feasible alternative for SIDS in the short term, since they are heavily dependent on international tourism and have relatively small domestic markets. International tourism is not expected to return to 2019 levels for up to four years, leaving the poorest island States disadvantaged in terms of progress towards the SDGs.

The pandemic has led to an increase in youth who are not employed, in school or in training

In 2019, 22.3 per cent of the world's youth were not engaged in either education, employment or training (NEET), a share that has shown no reduction in over a decade. Moreover, quarterly figures indicate that the NEET rate worsened from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2020 in 42 out of 49 countries with available data. This is not surprising, as young workers were more severely affected than older workers by employment losses in 2020. Both technical and vocational education and on-the-job training suffered massive disruption, forcing many to quit their studies.

Worldwide, young women are twice as likely as young men to be jobless and not engaged in education or training. In 2019, the global NEET rate was 31.1 per cent for young women, compared with 14.0 per cent for young men. Since more women than men have been pushed out of the labour force during the pandemic, the crisis is likely to worsen the NEET gender gap.

Proportion of youth not in education, employment or training, by sex, 2019 (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Due to tariffs and trade tensions between the world's dominant economies, global manufacturing growth was already in decline before the COVID-19 pandemic. When it struck, the movement of people and goods was restricted, disrupting global value chains, as well as global manufacturing and transport industries. Small-scale industries in particular have been severely affected. The lack of resilient infrastructure, information and communication technologies, and basic services limits a country's ability to perform and adjust to shocks. For the global community to achieve Goal 9, industrialization, improvements in infrastructure, and the promotion of technological innovation by increasing investment in research and development are key. The development and production of vaccines against COVID-19 in record time is one example of the power of technological innovation, which has given the world cause for hope.

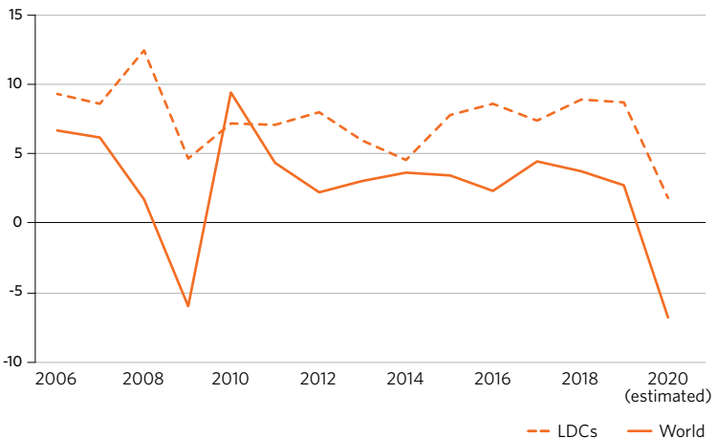
Workers at a manufacturing shop in Harare, Zimbabwe, produce face masks.

Global manufacturing production plummeted as a result of the COVID-19 crisis

The pandemic hit the manufacturing sector harder than during the 2007–2009 global financial crisis, resulting in a drop in production of 6.8 per cent in 2020. The share of manufacturing value added (MVA) in global GDP fell – from 2019 to 2020 – from 16.6 per cent to 16.0 per cent. Across 49 countries with available data, manufacturing employment declined by an average of 5.6 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 and 2.5 per cent in the third quarter of 2020, relative to the same periods in 2019. Losses in working hours were even greater, at 11.9 per cent in the second quarter of 2020 and 4.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2020.

Manufacturing in LDCs is projected to have grown by a negligible 1.9 per cent in 2020 compared with 8.7 per cent in 2019. The share of MVA in these countries' total GDP grew from 10.1 per cent in 2010 to 12.8 per cent in 2020 – far too slowly to reach the target of doubling that share by 2030. On a per capita basis, MVA was only $136 in LDCs in 2020, compared with $4,296 in Europe and Northern America.

Growth of manufacturing value added, 2006–2020 (percentage)

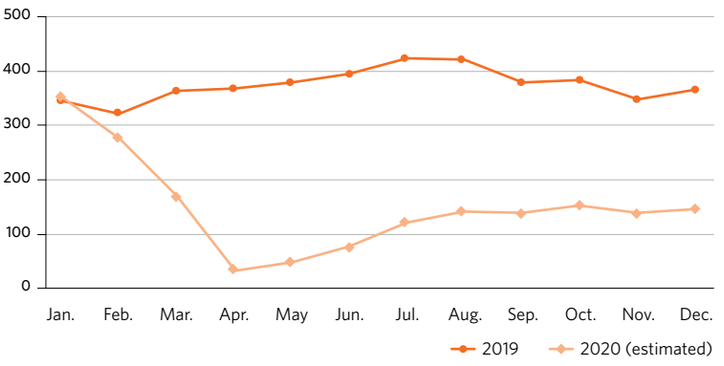


Aviation had its gravest moment in history with a collapse in demand for air travel

The year 2020 was catastrophic for air travel demand. Air passengers dropped from 4.5 billion globally in 2019 to 1.8 billion in 2020, a 60 per cent decline. As a result, jobs supported by the air transport industry fell by 52.5 per cent over the course of 2020 – from 87.7 million to 41.7 million. Airline financial losses are projected at $371 billion in 2020, with an extra $115 billion and $13 billion in losses for airports and air navigation services providers, respectively.

A constantly changing list of open- and closed-destination countries has added a level of uncertainty. Air transport is not projected to get back to pre-pandemic levels until 2024. Governments should coordinate and do what they can to bolster the air transport industry to restore lost jobs and get the global economy back on track.

Number of air passengers, January 2019 to December 2020 (millions)

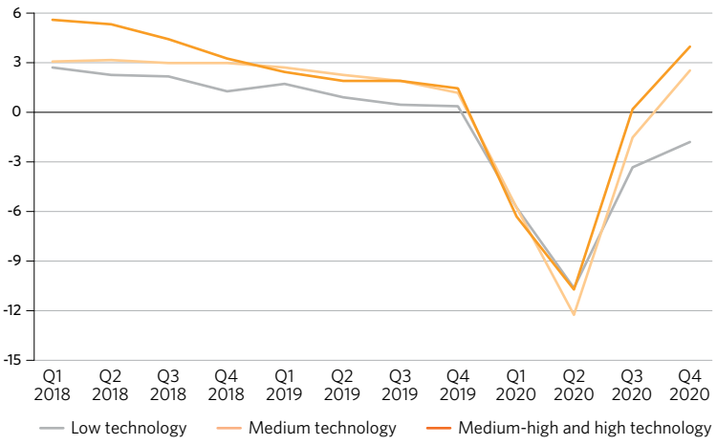


Economic recovery in the latter half of 2020 was fuelled by the manufacture of medium- and high-tech products

The structural transition within manufacturing is best reflected in the shift towards more technologically complex products. Medium- and high-tech products dominate manufacturing in industrialized economies. In 2018, the share of medium- and high-tech manufacturing was 49.0 per cent in developed regions and 41.4 per cent in developing regions, compared with 8.9 per cent in LDCs.

In the first half of 2020, world manufacturing suffered a severe slump triggered by global lockdowns. However, by the third and fourth quarters of that year, most economies showed signs of recovery, led mainly by medium- and high-tech manufacturing. During the fourth quarter of 2020, these industries registered growth of nearly 4 per cent compared with the same period in 2019. This growth was fuelled by the rise in demand for computer electronics due to a global shift towards working from home, remote-learning and e-commerce. Global manufacturing of low-tech products saw negative growth in the last quarter of 2020 (-1.8 per cent).

Growth rate of global manufacturing production compared with the same quarter the previous year, by technological intensity, first quarter of 2018 to the last quarter of 2020 (percentage)

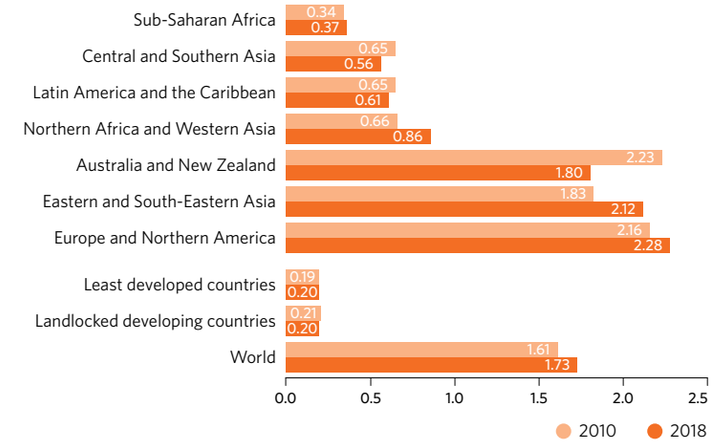


Increased investment in research and development is essential to finding solutions for crises such as COVID-19

The importance of investing in research and development (R&D) has never been more apparent. The rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines demonstrates the critical role of innovation in unexpected crises. Global investment in R&D reached $2.2 trillion (purchasing power parity) in 2018, up from $1.4 trillion in 2010. As a result, the proportion of global GDP invested in R&D increased from 1.61 per cent in 2010 to 1.73 per cent in 2018. The number of researchers per million inhabitants worldwide jumped from 1,022 in 2010 to 1,235 in 2018.

The pandemic is not the only crisis the world is facing, and it will not be the last. Policy commitments towards financing for R&D, especially in developing economies, need to continue and be strengthened. Most developing regions fell short of the world average. Spending on R&D as a share of GDP ranged from 0.37 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa to 0.86 per cent in Northern Africa and Western Asia. For LDCs and landlocked developing countries, the average was 0.20 per cent. This is only a small fraction of the proportion spent in more developed regions.

Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP, 2010 and 2018 (percentage)



Small-scale industries in the poorest countries still struggle with access to credit

Small-scale industries have been severely affected by the pandemic, and many continue to face existential challenges. According to establishment-level surveys conducted from 2006 to 2020, almost one in three small industrial enterprises benefit from a loan or line of credit. Access to credit remains uneven across countries and regions of the world. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and LDCs suffer the most from a lack of credit: approximately one in six small-scale industries in these countries have a loan or line of credit, compared with almost half in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although some Governments have responded to the pandemic with economic support measures – transferring cash to businesses, delaying loan payments or refinancing loans to more favourable terms – policymakers in LDCs and emerging economies have far less leverage to provide such measures. In a post-pandemic world, access to finance will play an essential role in economic recovery.

Vast swathes of the global population are still unable to connect, either through rural roads or cyberspace

Rural road connectivity provides farmers and their families easy access to markets, along with health and education facilities. This helps reduce poverty by elevating agricultural productivity, business profitability and employment. Rural access index data – measuring the proportion of people within two kilometres of an all-season road – from 25 mostly developing countries for 2018 to 2019 indicate that almost 300 million out of 520 million rural dwellers lack good access to roads.

In 2020, almost the entire world population lived within range of mobile networks, with 85 per cent covered by a fourth-generation (4G) network. Between 2015 and 2020, global 4G coverage doubled. However, "coverage" does not necessarily mean "usage": only 51 per cent of the population used the Internet in 2019, leaving 3.7 billion people without Internet access. In LDCs, only one in five people were online in 2020, failing to achieve the target of universal and affordable Internet access.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Reduce inequality within and among countries

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, various measures of inequality were moving in the right direction. Income inequality had fallen in some countries. Low-income countries continued to benefit from preferential trade status. The transaction costs of remittances were going down. Most countries with available data had policies that facilitated orderly, safe and responsible migration. However, inequality persists, whether in income, wealth, opportunities or other dimensions. Those considered vulnerable also face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The pandemic is exacerbating existing inequalities within and among countries and hitting the most vulnerable people and the poorest countries hardest. Tackling inequality will be crucial for reducing vulnerability to health and other emergencies and for enhancing the resilience of societies.

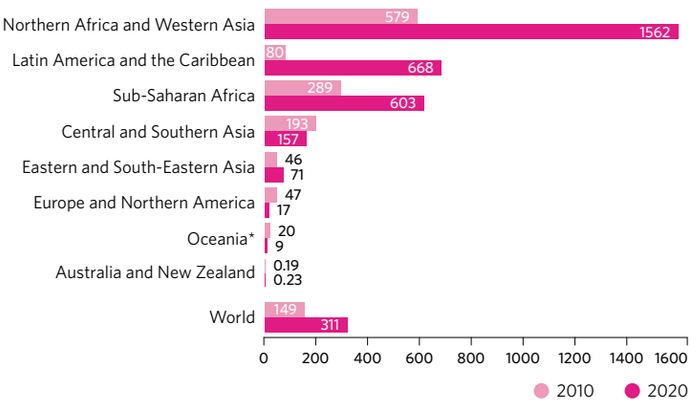
A family from Africa cross the Darién Gap, a jungled portion of land straddling the border between Colombia and Panama. Migrants describe the Darién Gap as the most dangerous and difficult stage of their journey to North America.

The proportion of the global population who are refugees has more than doubled since 2010

By the end of 2020, the number of people who had fled their countries and become refugees due to war, conflict, persecution, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order had grown to 24.5 million, the highest absolute number on record. For every 100,000 people, 311 are refugees outside their country of origin, more than double the number in 2010.

Among people originating from Northern Africa and Western Asia, the share of refugees increased from 579 to 1,562 per 100,000 between 2010 and 2020. The Syrian Arab Republic has been the main country of origin for refugees since 2014. The share of people from Latin America and the Caribbean who fled across international borders and received international protection increased from 80 to 668 out of 100,000 over the same period. The COVID-19 pandemic has proved particularly challenging for refugees. At the peak of the pandemic in 2020, 164 countries had fully or partially closed their borders, of which 99 made no exceptions for people seeking asylum, increasing the vulnerability of these populations.

Proportion of the population who are refugees, by region of origin, 2010 and 2020 (per 100,000 population in the country of origin)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Note: This indicator does not include refugees from Palestine under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. It includes Venezuelans displaced abroad without formal refugee status.

Despite thousands of migrant deaths each year, not all countries have comprehensive policies on migration

Even with mobility restrictions on borders around the world due to COVID-19, tens of thousands of people continue to leave their homes and embark on dangerous journeys across deserts and seas. In 2020, 4,186 deaths and disappearances were recorded on migratory routes worldwide. Though this is fewer than in previous years, some routes saw an increase in fatalities. Most notably, at least 849 people died en route to the Canary Islands in 2020, compared with 210 recorded in 2019 and 45 in 2018. The true number of deaths globally may be higher, as the pandemic has increased the challenges to collecting these data. The latest figures show that, as of 2019, just 54 per cent of countries had a comprehensive set of policy measures to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, based on the 111 countries with available data.

Income inequality has been going down since the global financial crisis; the pandemic could reverse that trend

The Gini index is one of the most commonly used measures of income inequality. It ranges between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates that income is shared equally among all people, and 100 indicates the extreme situation where one person accounts for all income. Prior to COVID-19, the average Gini index for emerging market and developing countries had been falling. However, the *World Economic Outlook, October 2020* of the International Monetary Fund estimates that COVID-19 will increase the average Gini index for these countries by 2.6 points to 42.7 (a 6 per cent increase). This will reverse the fall in inequality since the global financial crisis in 2007–2009. For low-income countries, the impact is projected to be even larger, despite the fact that those countries made less progress in reducing inequality since 2008.

Fiscal policies that help shape more equitable societies play a small role in low-income countries

Some of the most effective mechanisms Governments have for reducing economic inequalities are taxes, and cash and in-kind transfers. The difference in the Gini index before and after taxes and social transfers provides a measure of how effective these policies are at redistributing incomes and lowering inequality. As countries struggle to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, the distributional impacts of such fiscal policy responses are becoming even more important.

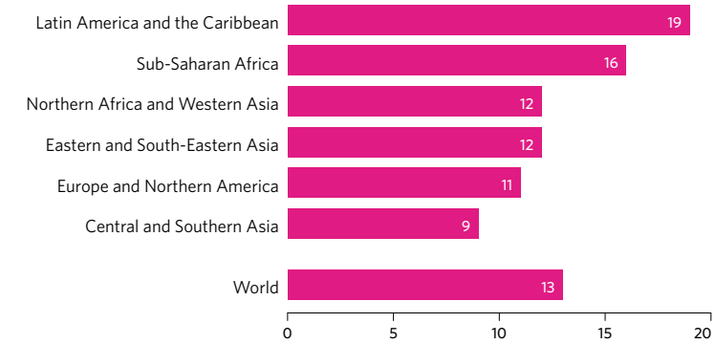
Data for 77 countries between 2013 and 2018 show substantial differences across countries in the effects direct taxes and cash transfers have in reducing inequality. Overall, the impacts are largest in high-income countries, with an average reduction in the Gini index of 10 percentage points, compared with just 1 percentage point among the low-income countries. This greater redistribution is partly explained by a much larger personal tax base in high-income countries, which reduces inequality directly through richer individuals paying a larger proportion of their income in taxes, as well as supporting social protection programmes.

Redistributive impact of direct taxes and cash and near-cash transfers, around 2017

Relative low incomes mean that many are being left behind

Measuring the share of the population living below 50 per cent of the national median income is useful for monitoring the level and trends in social inclusion, relative poverty and inequality within a country. If the median grows over time, while the share of the population living below 50 per cent of the median increases, this means the poorest are falling behind in relative terms. The latest estimates show that in some countries, as much as 25 per cent of the population live on less than half the median income. On average, 13 per cent of people experience relative low income across the 104 countries with available data, although considerable differences are observed among regions. In countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, almost one in five people live on less than half their national median income, on average, although some progress has been made in many countries since 2010. Around 9 per cent of people live on less than half the national median in countries in Central and Southern Asia, the lowest level among all regions.

Proportion of the population living below 50 per cent of the national median income, around 2017 (percentage)

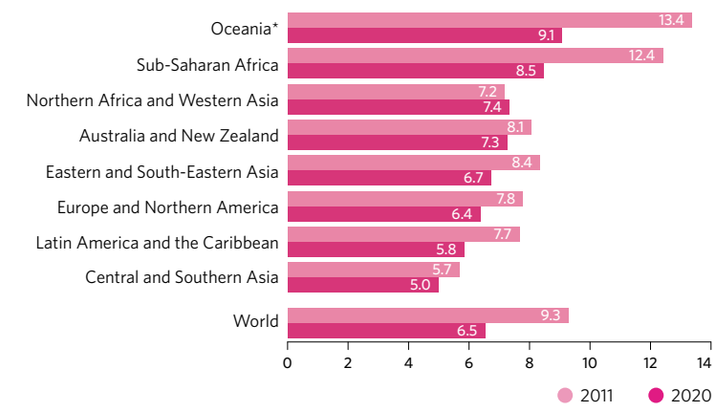


Note: Figure is based on unweighted averages across countries with available data within each region. Differences in levels need to be interpreted with caution, due to a mix of income and consumption surveys used across countries.

Remittance costs are at an all-time low, but more effort is still needed to meet the agreed target

Over the past decade, significant progress has been made in reducing the transaction cost of remittances. The global average cost of sending $200 was 9.3 per cent in 2011. Despite the pandemic, the cost of sending money reached a record low of 6.5 per cent in the final quarter of 2020. That year, it was most expensive to send money to Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and sub-Saharan Africa – with costs of 9.1 per cent and 8.5 per cent, respectively – although substantial progress has been made in both regions since 2011. Regional remittance costs have declined overall since 2011, but only Central and Southern Asia has fallen below the targeted 5 per cent threshold so far. Coordinated efforts by public authorities, service providers and non-governmental organizations remain necessary to achieve the target of a global average cost of 3 per cent, along with costs to senders for all regions of 5 per cent or less, by 2030.

Average costs of sending $200 by region, 2011 and 2020 (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Cities in many countries have become epicentres of COVID-19, exposing their vulnerabilities stemming from lack of adequate and affordable housing, insufficient public health systems, and inadequate urban infrastructure such as water, sanitation and waste services, public transport and open public spaces. Deeply rooted inequalities have led to disproportionate pandemic-related impacts on migrants, the homeless, and those living in urban slums and informal settlements. That said, in responding to the crisis, some cities have emerged as engines of economic recovery, centres of innovation and catalysts for social and economic transformation. Recovery from the pandemic offers the opportunity to rethink and reimagine urban areas as hubs of sustainable and inclusive growth.

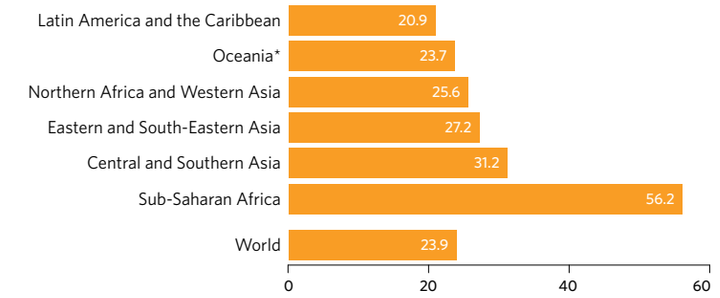
A *favela*, or slum, rises on the outskirts of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil.

COVID-19 has only worsened the plight of slum dwellers, further marginalizing those already vulnerable

Between 2014 and 2018, the proportion of the urban population living in slums worldwide increased from 23 per cent to 24 per cent, translating to over 1 billion slum dwellers. Slum dwellers are most prevalent in three regions: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (370 million), sub-Saharan Africa (238 million) and Central and Southern Asia (226 million). The needs and concerns of these people are rarely taken into account in conventional urban planning, financing and policymaking, leaving an enormous segment of the global population behind.

The pandemic has disproportionately affected low-income households and those working in the informal sector. This has further increased the number of slum dwellers and those whose living conditions have deteriorated, making them even more vulnerable. Without concerted action on the part of Governments at all levels, in collaboration with civil society and development partners, the number of slum dwellers will continue to rise in most developing countries.

Proportion of the urban population living in slums in selected regions, 2018 (percentage)



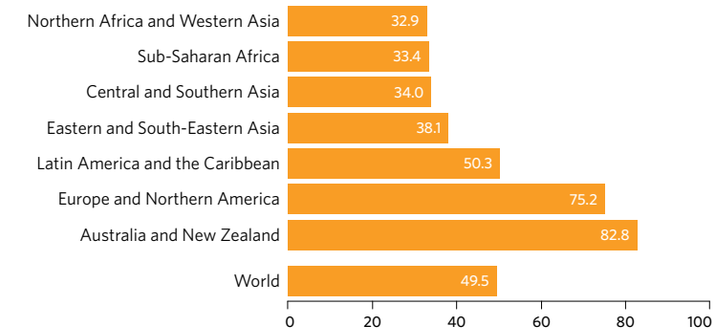
* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

The pandemic has drawn attention to the need for safe, accessible and reliable public transport

Poorly planned and managed urbanization translates to a disconnect between the provision of infrastructure and residential concentrations, leading to inadequate networks of streets and a lack of reliable transport systems. This diminishes the potential of cities to leverage economies of scale and agglomeration. Only about half of the world's population live within 500 metres walking distance of low-capacity transport systems (such as buses or trams) and within 1,000 metres of high-capacity systems (such as trains and ferries), according to 2019 data from 610 cities in 95 countries.

Access to public transport was significantly disrupted during the pandemic – from partial closures and guidelines on reduced capacities to total network closures. As the pandemic response continues, countries and cities need to provide options for accessible, safe, reliable and sustainable public transport systems. Such systems should be well-integrated with walking and cycling paths through long-term policies, sustainable urban mobility plans and targeted investments.

Proportion of urban population with convenient access to public transport, 2019 (percentage)



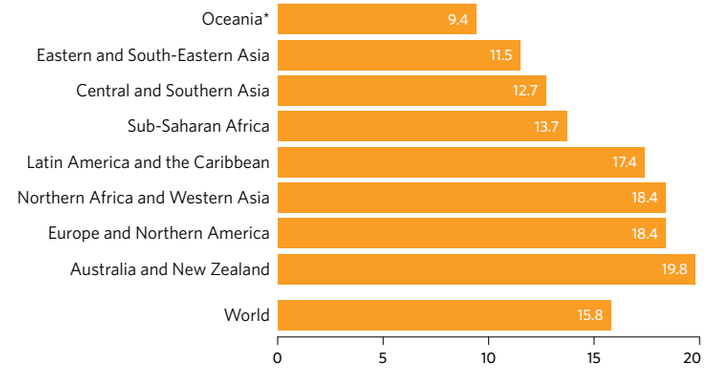
Note: Based on data from 610 cities: 28 in Australia and New Zealand, 94 in Central and Southern Asia, 102 in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 63 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 97 in Europe and Northern America, 85 in sub-Saharan Africa, and 141 in Northern Africa and Western Asia.

The world's urban areas fall well short of the target for streets and open public spaces

Any future response to the pandemic and other health-related risks require an urgent rethinking of urban spaces. At the centre of this reconfiguration are open public spaces, particularly streets and recreational areas. Adequate provision of streets, for example, also caters to pedestrians and cyclists and, combined with mixed developments, enhances the use of non-motorized transport. This is not only healthy for residents but can also reduce COVID-19 risks through less congested public transport systems.

The share of the global urban area allocated to streets and open public spaces averages about 16 per cent, according to data from a sample of 911 cities from 114 countries in 2020. This is well below the UN-Habitat recommendation of 30 per cent streets and an additional 10 to 15 per cent open public spaces. The task of doubling the current shares of land to streets and open spaces may be an uphill battle at the start. However, the pandemic has reminded us that such long-term changes and adjustments can reduce risks while promoting healthier, more liveable cities.

Proportion of the global urban area allocated to streets and open public spaces (percentage)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Note: Based on data from 911 cities in 114 countries: 28 cities from 2 countries in Australia and New Zealand, 119 cities from 22 countries in Europe and Northern America, 141 cities from 19 countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia, 253 cities from 21 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 84 cities from 18 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 196 cities from 14 countries in Central and Southern Asia, 80 cities from 12 countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and 10 cities from 6 countries in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand.

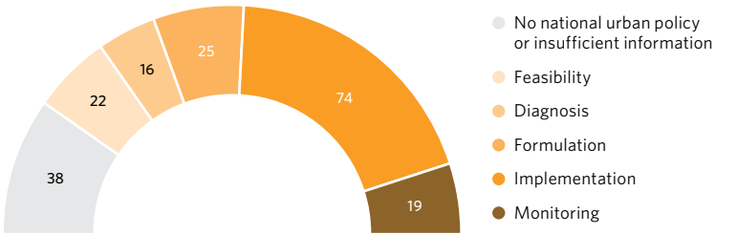
Countries are increasingly adopting national urban policies, which are key to managing pandemic-related and other risks

National urban polices are a coherent set of guidelines developed in a collaborative way with all stakeholders that promote transformative, productive, inclusive, equitable and environmentally resilient urban development over the long term. When implemented well, such policies can successfully tackle the multidimensional and far-reaching challenges of urbanization. They do so in part by ensuring sectoral, territorial and jurisdictional integration and coordination.

Countries around the world are increasingly adopting national urban policies. As of March 2021, 156 countries had developed such policies. Almost half of these countries were already in the implementation stage, 40 per cent were in the early stages of developing policies, and 12 per cent were monitoring and evaluating how well these policies were functioning. The stages of national urban policy development vary by region. In Europe and Northern America, Latin America, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, at least three quarters of national urban policies are under implementation. Conversely, Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and Northern Africa and Western Asia are far behind, with about 60 per cent of urban policies still in the early stages of development, including feasibility, diagnosis and formulation.

With COVID-19 disproportionately affecting urban areas, updates to existing national urban policies are urgently required. The objective is to redesign urban configurations to prepare for, respond to and build resilience to current and future risks.

Stages of national urban polices, 2020 (number of countries)



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

An employee dismantles electronic equipment at a facility established in conjunction with Rwanda's national e-waste management and recycling strategy. The construction of the facility and implementation of the strategy was made possible through an investment by the Rwanda Green Fund.

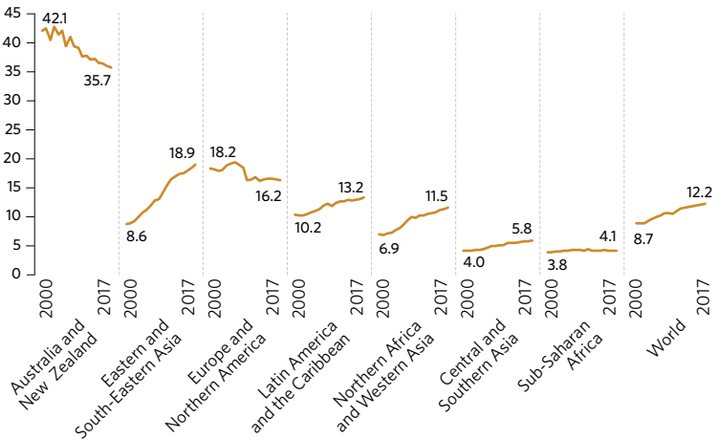
A growing global population combined with the unsustainable use of natural resources is having a devastating impact on our planet – propelling climate change, destroying nature and raising pollution levels. About 14 per cent of the world's food is lost along the supply chain prior to the retail level. Around the world, 1 million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute, and 5 trillion single-use plastic bags are thrown away each year. The global material footprint increased by 70 per cent between 2000 and 2017.

Today, we have a historic window of opportunity to design a transformative COVID-19 recovery strategy to build sustainable and resilient economies and societies. It is time to fully embrace the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation, a reduction in carbon emissions, improvements in resource efficiency, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.

The rapidly growing rate of natural resource consumption is unsustainable

Globally, domestic material consumption per capita, the total amount of materials directly used by an economy to meet its consumption needs, rose by more than 40 per cent from 2000 to 2017 – from 8.7 to 12.2 metric tons. All regions except Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand experienced significant increases over the past two decades. Rising domestic material consumption in developing regions is mainly due to industrialization, including the outsourcing of material-intensive production from developed regions. Natural resource use and related benefits, along with environmental impacts, are unevenly distributed across countries and regions. A path for sustainable consumption and production requires circular economy approaches, designed to reduce or eliminate waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems.

Domestic material consumption per capita, 2000 to 2017 (metric tons per capita)

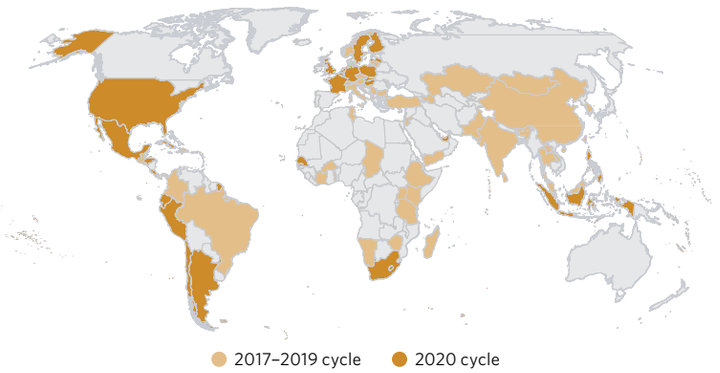


Progress to promote sustainable production and consumption is uneven

Shifting to sustainable consumption and production patterns is a prerequisite to addressing global crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and is central to achieving sustainable development. There is a positive trend in the development of national instruments and strategies aimed at supporting this shift. By 2020, 83 countries and the European Union reported a total of 700 policies and implementation activities under the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production. However, only 50 policies and implementation activities were reported in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 374 in Europe and Northern America.

As of December 2020, 40 countries had reported on sustainable public procurement policies or action plans (or equivalent legal dispositions), which encourage the procurement of environmentally sound, energy-efficient products, and promote more socially responsible purchasing practices and sustainable supply chains.

Countries reporting on national action plans or policies on sustainable consumption and production, 2017–2019 reporting cycle and 2020 reporting cycle



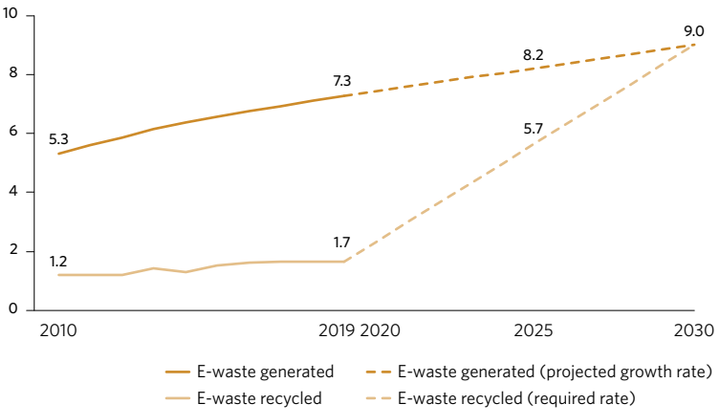
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Electronic waste continues to proliferate and is not being disposed of in a responsible way

In 2019, the world generated 53.6 million metric tons of electronic and electrical equipment waste (e-waste), an increase of more than 20 per cent since 2014. Each person generated about 7.3 kilograms of e-waste in 2019, of which only 1.7 kilograms was documented to have been managed in an environmentally sustainable way. Improper disposal of e-waste causes poisonous chemicals to be released into the soil and water, putting environmental and human health at risk. It results in a significant loss of scarce and valuable raw materials, such as gold, platinum, cobalt and rare earth elements. As much as 7 per cent of the world's gold may currently be contained in e-waste.

E-waste generation is expected to grow by 0.16 kilograms per capita annually, reaching 9.0 kilograms per capita in 2030 (or 74.4 million metric tons in total). However, the realized annual growth rate of e-waste recycling in the past decade was only 0.05 kilograms per capita. It will need to be at least 10 times higher to ensure recycling of all e-waste by 2030.

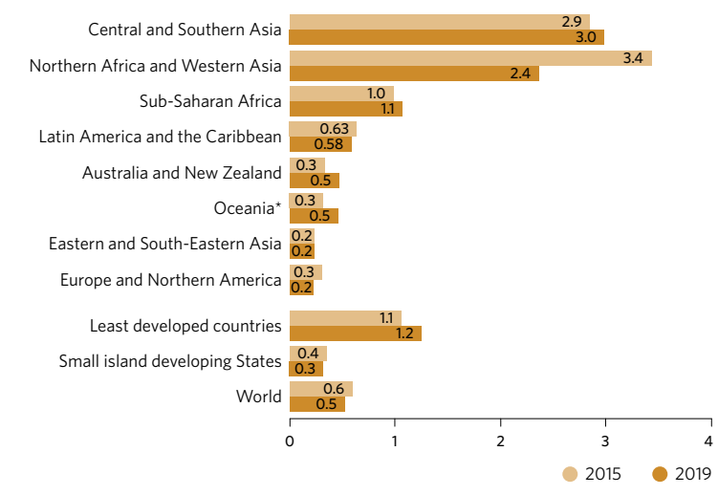
E-waste generated and recycled, 2010–2019, projected e-waste generated and required growth in recycling, 2020–2030 (kilograms per capita)



Progress to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies remains uneven, threatening the achievement of the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda

Fossil fuel subsidies from Governments provide incentives to produce and consume fossil fuels, such as coal, crude oil and natural gas, over the development and use of clean and renewable energy. They contribute to the climate crisis and air pollution, and negatively impact public health. Fossil fuel subsidies saw a decline in 2019 to $432 billion due to lower fuel prices, breaking an upward trend from 2017 ($450 billion) and 2018 ($548 billion). Subsidies were expected to decline sharply in 2020 due to cratering demand and the oil price shock. That drop in fossil fuel subsidies (measured as a proportion of GDP) is likely to be smaller than expected, however, due to a simultaneous decrease in GDP worldwide in 2020. With lower fuel prices over the last two years, many countries took the opportunity to press for reforms and phase out subsidies. However, progress remains uneven. With fuel prices rising sharply in 2021, there is also a danger of regressing and failing to meet the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement.

Fossil fuel subsidies as a proportion of GDP, 2015 and 2019 (percentage)

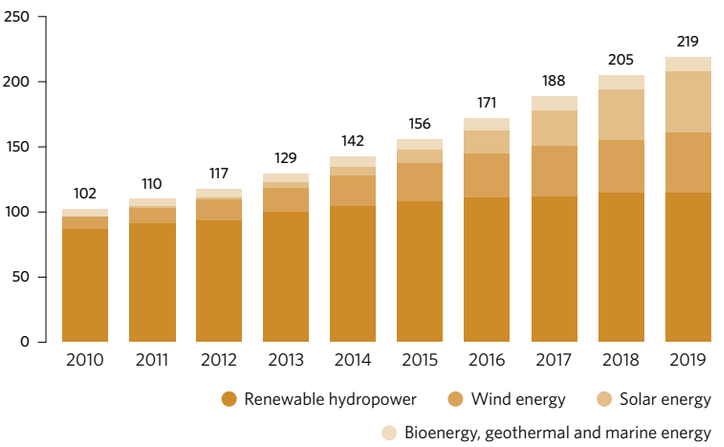


Despite progress, developing countries still have vast untapped potential for renewable energy

Globally, new renewable electricity capacity installations witnessed remarkable development over the past decade, outpacing installations in non-renewable electricity capacity since 2012 and consistently since 2015. In 2018, for the first time, the majority of new renewable electricity capacity was installed in developing countries. The significant increase in capacity in these countries can be attributed primarily to the uptake of new solar and wind capacity, which increased by a compound annual growth rate of 72 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively, from 2010 to 2019. The most recent data show that renewable energy capacity continued to grow at an even higher level in 2020, despite COVID-19.

In 2019, developing countries had 219 watts per capita of renewable energy capacity. However, renewable energy capacity was 880 watts per capita in developed countries, four times higher than that of developing countries, suggesting there is still room for growth.

Installed renewable energy-generating capacity in developing countries, by technology, between 2010 and 2019 (watts per capita)



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Despite a pandemic-related economic slowdown, the climate crisis continues largely unabated. A temporary reduction in human activities resulted in a dip in emissions. However, concentrations of greenhouse gases continued to increase in 2020, reaching new record highs. It was one of the three warmest years on record, with the global average temperature about 1.2°C above the 1850–1900 baseline. The world remains woefully off track in meeting the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and reaching net-zero carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions globally by 2050.

In the face of looming catastrophe, climate action is gaining momentum. In June 2020, the Race to Zero campaign was launched to form a coalition of businesses, cities, regions and investors around net-zero carbon emission initiatives, and set out specific near-term tipping points for more than 20 sectors of the global economy. As of December 2020, over two thirds of the world's GDP was being generated in places with actual or intended "net zero by 2050" targets, covering over half of the world's population and emissions.

An aerial view of disappearing ice at the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in the United Republic of Tanzania.

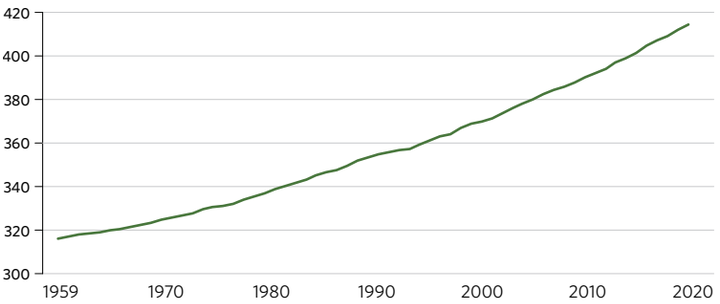
The global pandemic has laid bare humanity's vulnerabilities. It has shown the world how much damage can be wreaked by a crisis that pales in comparison to a full-scale climate emergency. We must heed this wake-up call and seize the opportunity to rebuild in a way that will reduce emissions and increase resilience to climate change.

Greenhouse gas emissions will continue to increase without critical steps to shift economies towards carbon neutrality

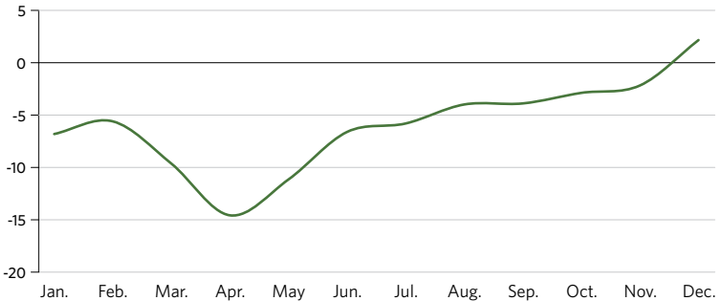
In 2015, 196 Parties to the Paris Agreement committed to transforming their development trajectories towards sustainability and called for limiting global warming to well below 2°C – ideally 1.5°C – above pre-industrial levels. To meet these goals, global carbon dioxide emissions need to be reduced by 45 per cent by 2030 from 2010 levels, and reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Greenhouse gas concentrations reached new highs in 2020, with globally averaged mole fractions of CO_2 exceeding 410 parts per million.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced human activities in 2020, leading to a temporary fall in CO_2 emissions. Developed countries saw the steepest declines, averaging drops of almost 10 per cent, while emissions from developing countries fell by 4 per cent relative to 2019. Despite the temporary reduction in emissions overall in 2020, real-time data from specific locations, including Mauna Loa, United States, and Cape Grim, Tasmania, indicate that concentration levels of CO_2, methane and nitrous oxide continued to increase in 2020. By December 2020, emissions had fully rebounded and registered 2 per cent higher than the same month in 2019. As the world recovers from the pandemic, emissions are expected to rise further unless critical steps are taken to shift economies towards carbon neutrality.

Concentrations of carbon dioxide, 1959–2020 (parts per million)



Monthly evolution of global CO_2 emissions, 2020 relative to 2019 (percentage)

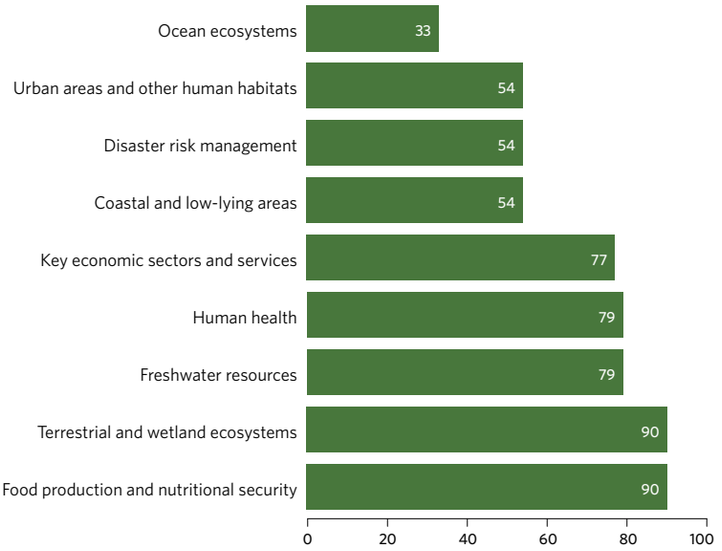


Notwithstanding a global pandemic, countries are advancing climate action, with a focus on adaptation

The voluntary efforts countries are making to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change are described in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Each Party to the Paris Agreement is requested to prepare, communicate and maintain successive NDCs that it intends to achieve. As of May 2021, 192 Parties had submitted their first NDCs to the Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat. Moreover, as of December 2020, 48 of them were submitted as new or updated NDCs, representing 75 Parties and accounting for 30 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2017. Adaptation information was included in 39 of these 48 new or updated NDCs. Countries are articulating more quantified targets and indicators for adaptation, and identifying links between adaptation, the Sustainable Development Goals and other frameworks. The highest-priority areas for adaptation identified in the NDCs are: food security and production, terrestrial and wetland ecosystems, freshwater resources, human health, and key economic sectors and services.

An increasing number of countries are also prioritizing the formulation and implementation of national adaptation plans to boost their efforts to adjust to a changing climate. These include building flood defences, setting up early warning systems for cyclones, or switching to drought-resistant crops. As of May 2021, 125 of 154 developing countries were in the process of formulating and implementing national adaptation plans, and 22 countries have submitted their plans to the Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat. Developed countries are stepping up their efforts to provide technical guidance and support to LDCs – which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change – to develop and carry out such plans.

Priority areas identified in adaptation components of nationally determined contributions among countries that included adaptation information, 2020 (percentage)



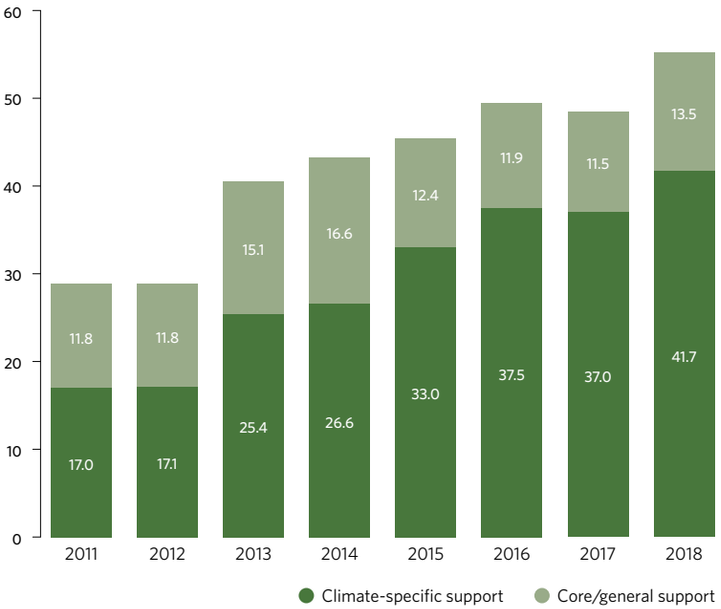
The global transition to a low-emission, climate-resilient future is backed up by increasing financial support

Climate finance provided by developed to developing countries continues to increase, reflecting an ongoing commitment to support the global transition to a low-emission and climate-resilient future. Total climate finance reported by Annex I Parties to the Paris Agreement reached an annual average of $48.7 billion in 2017–2018. This represents an increase of 10 per cent over 2015–2016. While over half of all climate-specific financial support for 2017–2018 was targeted at mitigation, the share of adaptation support is growing, and many countries are prioritizing adaptation in their provision of financial support.

Two thirds of financial support provided in 2017–2018 (equivalent to an annual average of $32.3 billion) flowed through bilateral, regional and other channels, while the remaining third was channelled through multilateral institutions and funds, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Support for the formulation of national adaptation plans through the GCF Readiness Programme is steadily increasing in all regions and groups. Eleven developing countries have submitted 23 project proposals to the GCF, of which 7 – totalling $464 million – have been approved.

In 2017–2018, climate-specific support constituted the largest share of total climate finance ($36.2 billion). The share of core/general support (financial support provided to multilateral and bilateral institutions that is not considered climate-specific) has been decreasing over time, from over 40 per cent of the total in 2011–2012 to roughly 25 per cent in 2017–2018.

Total financial support provided, as reported by Annex I Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, 2011–2018 (billions of dollars)



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

More than 3 billion people rely on the ocean for their livelihoods, and over 80 per cent of world merchandise trade is carried out by sea. Oceans contribute to poverty eradication, sustained economic growth and food security. However, the benefits they provide are increasingly undermined by human activities. Rising CO_2 emissions are driving ocean warming, acidification and deoxygenation, which threaten marine ecosystems and the people who depend on them, and are overwhelming the capacity of oceans to moderate climate change.

Overfishing depletes fish stocks, a third of which are already overexploited. Land-based pollutants, including plastic pollution and nutrient and sewage runoff, adversely affect coastal habitats and communities. These changes have long-term repercussions that require urgent scaling up of protection of marine environments, investment in ocean science, and support for small-scale fishing communities and the sustainable management of the oceans.

Local fishers in the Caribbean are benefiting from a project to help regenerate the marine ecosystem, manage marine resources while improving the fisheries market, and develop coastal eco-tourism.

The sustainability of our oceans demands renewed efforts to safeguard key biodiversity areas

The extent of marine protected areas has increased significantly, with 2020 coverage reaching 7.74 per cent of global coastal waters and oceans. The 10 per cent target set for 2020 may still be met, because several sites planned for designation in 2020 were delayed. Between 2000 and 2020, the mean percentage of key biodiversity areas (KBAs) covered by protected areas grew from 28 per cent to 44 per cent. However, increases have plateaued, and coverage rose by only 1 percentage point over the last five years. On average, over half of each KBA remains outside of any form of protection.

Safeguarding KBAs remains crucial to the sustainability of oceans. A recent example from the South Atlantic used satellite tracking data for 14 species of seabirds and seals to pinpoint breeding grounds and feeding sites crucial to the preservation of these and other species. This information was used to revise the management of a marine protected area by extending the closure of fisheries by two months and expanding several permanent no-fishing zones, while allowing commercial fishing to occur in a regulated manner.

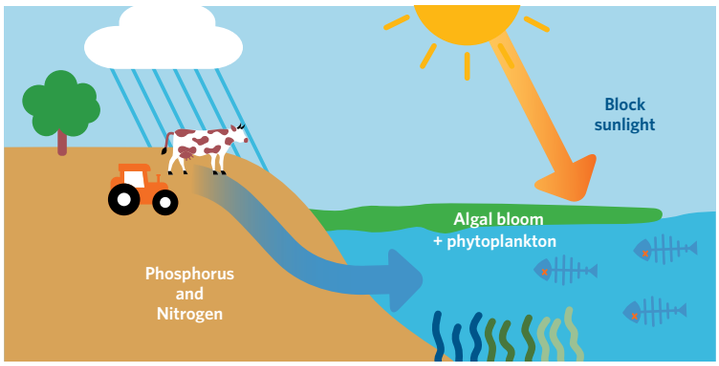
The number of dead zones in the world's coastal waters is growing at an alarming rate

Coastal areas, home to almost 40 per cent of the world's population, face growing risks from eutrophication – excess nutrient loading into coastal environments resulting from human activities. The primary drivers of eutrophication are fertilizer run-off, livestock waste, sewage discharge, aquaculture and atmospheric nitrogen emissions. Coastal eutrophication is detrimental to the environment and coastal populations, and is associated with harmful algal blooms, hypoxia, fish kills, seagrass die-off, loss of coral reef and nearshore hard-bottom habitats, and health hazards to swimmers and fishers. The number of dead zones worldwide – areas of water that lack sufficient oxygen to support marine life – increased from around 400 in 2008 to approximately 700 in 2019.

Changes in eutrophication can be indirectly monitored by analysing algal growth and chlorophyll-a (the pigment that makes plants and algae green). Global satellite data show that countries' exclusive economic zones have higher levels of chlorophyll-a compared with baseline values from 2000–2004. Still, there are some signs of progress: the frequency of chlorophyll-a anomalies in countries' exclusive economic zones fell by 20 per cent from 2018 to 2020.

Efforts to reduce nutrient inputs into coastal areas are yielding results in some regions; however, algal blooms suggest that coastal eutrophication remains a challenge.

Eutrophication and resulting impacts



Agricultural run-off and other pollutants (which contain nutrients) are flushed into the ocean by rains or drainage, causing phytoplankton and algae to grow and bloom on the surface, reducing water quality. This algal bloom can block sunlight from penetrating the water, inhibiting photosynthesis of the plant life below and eventually killing it. The dying algae and decomposing plants consume oxygen through decomposition, leaving the water with little oxygen (a state of hypoxia) and devastating the ecosystem.

Implementation of international instruments to conserve and responsibly use ocean resources remains uneven, highlighting the need for increased support

Achieving Goal 14 requires the implementation of international instruments, through legal and institutional frameworks, for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans in a cross-sectoral and integrated manner. While progress has been made, implementation varies among the instruments, highlighting the need for renewed effort and increased support.

1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and its implementing agreements

To date, 168 Parties (including the European Union) have ratified or acceded to UNCLOS. In addition, Member States have also ratified or acceded to its implementing agreements (150 Parties for the 1994 Part XI Agreement and 91 Parties for the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement). A large number of States Parties to these treaties have taken steps to implement them through legal, policy and institutional frameworks. However, the extent of ratification, accession and implementation varies by country. Data collected in 2021 from 45 States and the European Union show that in terms of ratification and accession, 84 per cent of the countries score very high or high, and 16 per cent score low or very low; with regard to implementation, 69 per cent score very high or high, 12 per cent score medium, and 19 per cent score low or very low. Effectively implementing UNCLOS and its implementing agreements requires understanding existing bottlenecks for countries. Targeted and sustained capacity-development initiatives, particularly for developing countries, are key to removing such obstacles.

Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

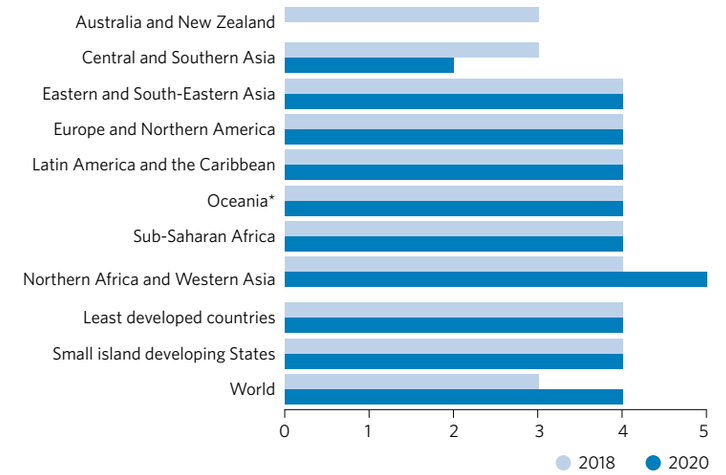
Fisheries resources are frequently poached, leading to the collapse of local fisheries and undermining efforts to manage fisheries sustainably. Part of the framework developed over the past decades to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing includes the Agreement on Port State Measures – the first binding international agreement that specifically targets IUU fishing. The Agreement came into force in 2016 and currently includes 66 Parties (including the European Union). Its objective is to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing by preventing vessels engaged in it from using ports and landing their catches. Between 2018 and 2020, the average degree of implementation of international instruments to combat IUU fishing improved, with the global composite measure rising from 3/5 to 4/5 over this period. This slight improvement in the global trend helps bring the target of eliminating IUU fishing closer to being met. However, more concerted efforts are needed.

Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

The Voluntary Guidelines are an internationally agreed instrument that promotes improved governance of small-scale fisheries, including in value chains, post-harvest operations and trade. About half of countries worldwide have adopted specific initiatives to support small-scale fishers. Such fishers contribute about half of global fish catches in developing countries and employ more than 90 per cent of the world's capture fishers and fish workers, about half of whom are women. These small-scale fishing communities are largely marginalized and tend to have limited or disadvantaged access to resources and markets. The situation is compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, which has triggered reduced global demand and transportation restrictions.

Since 2015, most regions have expanded the adoption of regulatory frameworks that support small-scale fisheries and promote participatory decision-making. Globally, the average composite score for implementation of these frameworks improved from 3/5 to 4/5 between 2018 and 2020. At the regional level, Northern Africa and Western Asia reflects this leap, while Central and Southern Asia reduced its regional score from 3/5 to 2/5, highlighting the need for redoubled efforts. While countries' commitment is gaining traction, increased support for small-scale fishers is critical in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Degree of implementation of international instruments to promote and protect small-scale fisheries, 2018–2020



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Funding for marine research pales in comparison to the enormous economic contribution of the world's oceans

Marine research can be expensive and logistically challenging, requiring advanced technologies and equipment, research vessels and specially designed sensors and facilities. However, the proportion of gross domestic expenditure on research and development devoted to ocean science is decidedly smaller than that of other major fields of research and innovation. On average, only 1.2 per cent of national research budgets were allocated for ocean science between 2013 and 2017, with shares ranging from around 0.02 per cent to 9.5 per cent. This proportion is miniscule compared with the modestly estimated $1.5 trillion contribution of the ocean to the global economy in 2010.

The United States of America reported the highest budget for ocean and coastal activities, a figure that includes ocean science, as well as other ocean and coastal government programmes ($12 billion), followed by Japan ($600 million) and Australia ($511 million) in 2017.

The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ocean science is still unknown. Immediate effects have included dramatic reductions in ocean observations with almost all research vessels called to home ports. Mooring arrays (buoys and moored systems with instruments and communication equipment) are at risk of failure, threatening long-lasting repercussions for international ocean research.

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

Ending environmental decline and restoring our planet is fundamental to sustainable development. Nevertheless, forests are being cut down, biological diversity is declining, and terrestrial ecosystems are being degraded at alarming rates, with profound consequences for human survival and well-being. Land degradation now affects one fifth of the Earth's land area. Wildlife trafficking threatens human health, economic development and security through the spread of zoonotic diseases (transmitted from animals to humans), which now represent the majority of emerging infectious diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that by threatening biodiversity, humanity threatens its own survival.

To address these challenges, considerable efforts are being made to expand sustainable forest management and to protect sites critical to biodiversity. Countries are also enacting legislation and accounting principles to make nature "count" and to address threats to biodiversity, such as the growing spread of invasive alien species. It is time to put the health of the planet at the centre of all our plans and policies.

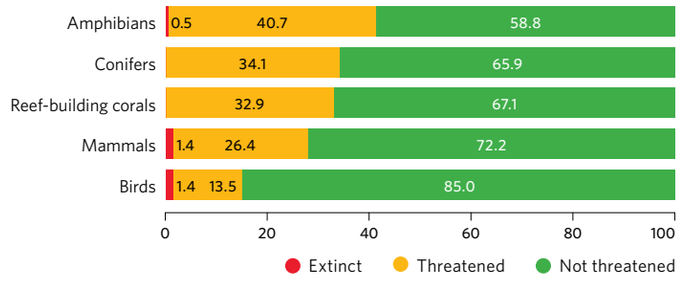
A boy walks through Argentina's biodiverse terrain. The Sustainable Natural Resources Management project aims to improve management of forest resources and conserve biodiversity in protected areas and forest landscapes.

More than one quarter of the species assessed for the IUCN Red List are threatened with extinction

Human activities are causing biodiversity to decline faster than at any other time in human history. The world has fallen short on its 2020 targets to halt biodiversity loss. The Red List Index of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which monitors the overall extinction risk for various species, shows a 10 per cent decline since 1993. Among 134,400 species assessed, 28 per cent (more than 37,400 species) are threatened with extinction, including 41 per cent of amphibians, 34 per cent of conifers, 33 per cent of reef-building corals, 26 per cent of mammals and 14 per cent of birds. The main drivers of species loss are agricultural and urban development; unsustainable harvesting through hunting, fishing, trapping and logging; and invasive alien species.

Fortunately, conservation actions could stave off further species losses. For example, many bird and mammal species have benefited from invasive species control, conservation in zoos and other collections, and site protection. Since 1993, conservation actions have prevented the extinction of 21 to 32 species of birds and 7 to 16 species of mammals. Considering that 10 bird and 5 mammal species were confirmed or suspected to have been driven to extinction over this period, such actions have reduced extinction rates by three to four times compared with what would have been anticipated.

Best estimates of the proportions of species threatened with extinction in the Red List Index, by species group, 2021 (percentage)



Progress to safeguard key biodiversity areas, essential for environmental sustainability, has stalled

The protection of key biodiversity areas (KBAs) has long been considered a cornerstone of biodiversity conservation. In 2020, on average, 43 per cent of each terrestrial KBA, 42 per cent of each freshwater KBA and 41 per cent of each mountain KBA were within protected areas, an increase of around 13 to 14 percentage points since 2000. However, increases in coverage have plateaued over the last five years. On average, more than half of each KBA remains outside of protected areas.

Carefully targeted policy interventions can safeguard KBAs and the communities that depend on them. In Cameroon, in August 2020, the Government cancelled a logging operation in the Ebo Forest, which makes up half of the Yabassi KBA. Ebo is a large intact forest system that is home to 12 species of plants found nowhere else on Earth. Animal inhabitants include gorillas, chimpanzees, forest elephants, Preuss's red colobus monkeys and many others. Ebo Forest is also the ancestral land of more than 40 communities whose livelihoods are intertwined with the area's abundant and diverse natural resources.

Sustainable forest management is gaining ground, but forest loss continues at an alarming rate

Forests are repositories for most of the world's biodiversity, covering 4.1 billion hectares of land. They help regulate the water cycle, mitigate climate change and are a direct source of food, income, shelter and energy for some 1.6 billion people. Sustainable forest management aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental value of all types of forests, for current and future generations. There was notable progress towards the sustainable management of the world's forest from 2000–2010 to 2010–2020. The area of forest under certification increased or remained stable at the global level and in most regions, as did the proportion of forests in protected areas or under long-term management plans, and the above-ground forest biomass per hectare.

Although the rate of decline has slowed, the loss of forests globally remains alarming. The proportion of forest area fell from 31.9 per cent of the world's total land area in 2000 to 31.2 per cent in 2020. This translates to a net loss of almost 100 million hectares. The rate of forest loss has increased in South-Eastern Asia and Africa, and also in LDCs, landlocked developing countries and SIDS, mostly due to the conversion of forest to agricultural land. Deforestation and forest degradation remain monumental challenges, especially in the tropics. The continuing disappearance of forests signals the need for accelerated action to reduce deforestation, restore degraded lands and implement sustainable forest and land management practices. Such actions will also enhance the resilience of ecosystems to climate change, protect biodiversity and support rural livelihoods.

Progress towards sustainable forest management dashboard

Region	Annual forest area change rate, from 2000–2010 to 2010–2020	Above-ground biomass stock in forest, change from 2010 to 2020	Proportion of forest area within legally established protected areas, change from 2010 to 2020	Proportion of forest area under a long-term forest management plan, change from 2010 to 2020	Certified forest area, change from 2010 to 2020
Central and Southern Asia	▲	●	▲	▲	▲
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Northern Africa and Western Asia	▼	▲	▲	▲	▲
Sub-Saharan Africa	▼	●	▲	▲	▲
Europe and Northern America	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
Latin America and the Caribbean	●	▲	▲	▲	▲
Oceania*	▼	●	▲	●	▲
Australia and New Zealand	▲	▼	▲	●	▲
Least developed countries	▼	●	▲	▲	▲
Landlocked developing countries	▼	●	▲	▲	▼
Small island developing States	▼	●	▲	▲	▲
World	●	▲	▲	▲	▲

▲ Positive change ● No/small change ▼ Negative change

* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Note: The annual forest area change rate is calculated using a compound annual change formula.

Funding is needed to implement legislation adopted in almost all countries in response to invasive alien species

Invasive alien species are animals, plants or other organisms introduced by humans into ecosystems outside their natural range, which have become established and negatively affect native biodiversity. Such species are a major driver of biodiversity loss and species extinction. They also negatively impact ecosystem services, human livelihoods and well-being, and economies. Invasive alien species are introduced to new areas either intentionally – by hunting or fishing, for example – or unintentionally, through a contaminant on traded goods, for instance, or as a "hitchhiker" on vehicles or boats. With the increased movement of people and goods around the world, the number of established alien species is expected to increase by 36 per cent between 2005 and 2050.

Preventing the introduction of invasive alien species is the most cost-effective way to address their impacts, which are estimated to cost the global economy billions of dollars annually. Governments are responding. Nearly all countries (98 per cent) now have national legislation to prevent or control invasive alien species, but the sectoral coverage of such legislation varies widely. Most countries have adopted legislation relevant to plant and animal health in agriculture (92 per cent and 82 per cent, respectively), but fewer have legislation focused on the environment (42 per cent) or fisheries and aquaculture (27 per cent).

Adequate resources are crucial to an effective response. However, only 55 per cent of countries have reported allocations from their national budgets to deal with invasive species, while only 37 per cent have accessed global financing mechanisms.

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

The world is still a long way from achieving the goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Hundreds of millions of people are living in fragile and conflict-affected States. At the end of 2020, about 1 per cent of the global population – 82.4 million people – had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict or generalized violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and intensified inequality and discrimination. In fact, the crisis has created major disruptions in government functioning and has tested, weakened and sometimes even shattered countries' systems of rights and protection. The pandemic is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable worldwide, with children at high risk. Recovery from the crisis and sustainable development must be built on a foundation of peace, stability, respect for human rights, effective governance and the rule of law.

A woman and her two young children flee their home to escape fighting. Each year, tens of millions of people are displaced due to persecution, conflict or generalized violence.

The pandemic is intensifying children's risk of exploitation, including trafficking and child labour

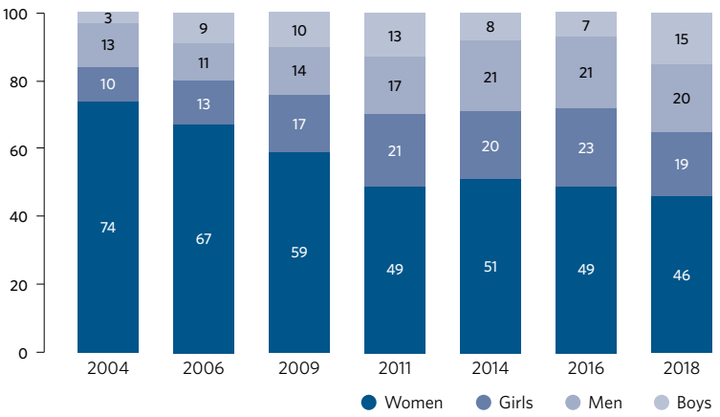
Millions of children around the globe face different forms of exploitation, including trafficking and child labour. The risk to children is increasing due to the combined effects of pandemic-related school closures and economic distress.

Trafficking in persons is found in every country. Perpetrators engaged in this criminal activity target the marginalized and impoverished, including children. Globally, one in three trafficking victims detected in 2018 were children; in low-income countries, the share was one half. Girls are primarily victims of sexual exploitation (72 per cent of detected girl victims), while boys are mainly subjected to forced labour (66 per cent of detected boy victims). Previous economic crises suggest that the sharp increase in adult unemployment rates and an asymmetric global recovery from COVID-19 is likely to increase the risk of trafficking. Therefore, in all countries, investments in job creation for adults and young people of legal working age, along with economic recovery, could reduce risks to children of various forms of exploitation.

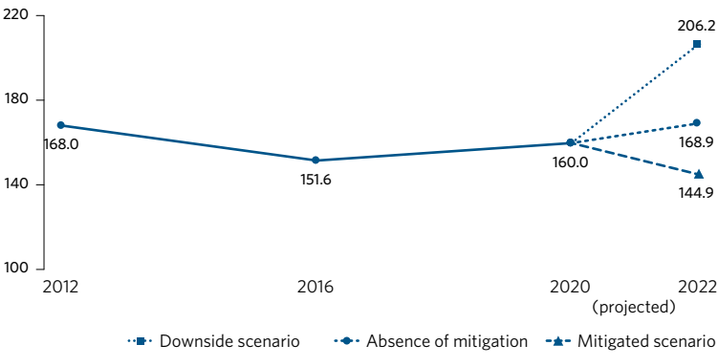
Child labour and child trafficking are interrelated. In countries with a larger share of trafficking victims that are children, there is also a higher prevalence of child labour. Global trends point to a rise in child labour for the first time in two decades. At the start of 2020, the number of children engaged in child labour (not including its worst forms, such as children in bonded and forced labour or in commercial sexual exploitation) totalled 160 million (63 million girls and 97 million boys). This translates to almost 1 in 10 children worldwide. Nearly half of children in child labour were engaged in hazardous work (79 million).

The impacts of COVID-19 threaten to push an additional 8.9 million children into child labour by the end of 2022, as families send children out to work in response to job and income losses. Urgently expanding income support and social protection coverage could help offset this rise.

Share of detected trafficking victims by sex and age, 2004–2018 (percentage)



Number of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in child labour, 2012–2020 and projected to 2022 (millions)



Note: Downside scenario reflects a slippage in social protection coverage due to austerity measures or other factors. Absence of mitigation reflects an increase in poverty due to the absence of additional mitigation measures. Mitigated scenario reflects an increase in social protection coverage.

Bribery is at least five times more likely in low-income than in high-income countries

Corruption is antithetical to sustainable development, aggravating income inequality, reducing domestic and foreign investment, and significantly lowering the quality of public sector services. Yet it is commonplace in many countries to be asked to pay bribes to access essential public services related to health care, education, water, electricity and the justice system. A country's social and economic development is a key factor in corruption risk. According to the latest available data in more than 120 countries and territories over the period 2011 to 2020, the average prevalence rate of bribery in low-income countries is 37.6 per cent, versus 7.2 per cent in high-income countries. Along with more obvious ramifications, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented opportunities for corruption. Addressing corruption will support a more inclusive recovery based on integrity and accountability.

Widespread civilian deaths in armed conflicts persist, although progress has been made in most regions

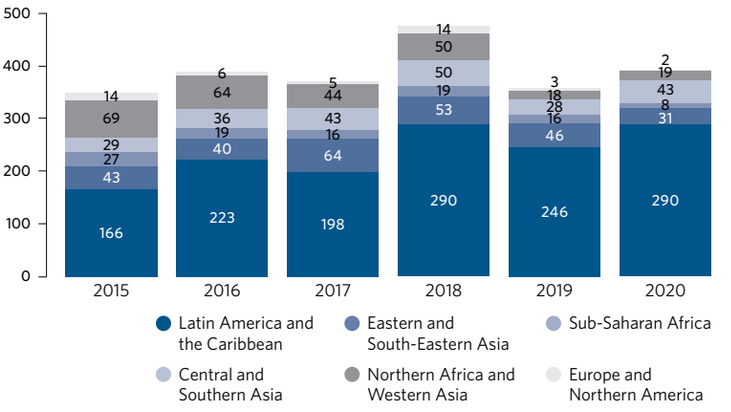
Armed conflict results in civilian deaths, injury and trauma, displacement and damaged essential infrastructure, including health care. It is associated with rampant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including against children. At least 176,095 civilian deaths were recorded in 12 of the world's deadliest armed conflicts between 2015 and 2020. Despite this high toll, the annual number of civilian deaths globally actually decreased by 61 per cent over this period. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, civilian deaths in conflicts increased by 66 per cent. The reduction in civilian deaths at the global level is attributable to some of the deadliest conflicts becoming less lethal, along with collective efforts to enhance the protection of civilians.

In 2020, 5 civilians per 100,000 people were killed in armed conflicts, and 1 in 7 of those were women or children. Most civilian deaths were caused by small arms and light weapons (27 per cent) or by heavy weapons and explosive munitions (24 per cent). Throughout 2020, the United Nations has consistently called for a global ceasefire to protect civilians from the deadly combination of armed conflict and COVID-19.

The slaying of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists remains unacceptably high

Since 2015, the killings of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists have been reported in over one third of Member States. These deaths have persisted despite the pandemic. In 2020, the killings of 331 human rights defenders were reported in 32 countries (an 18 per cent increase from 2019), along with 19 enforced disappearances in 14 countries. Women comprised 13 per cent of the victims, and Latin America remains the region most affected. In 2020, 62 journalists were also killed, the lowest annual death toll in the past decade. Impunity is a key driver in these killings; in some contexts, pandemic measures have been used to avoid accountability. Mustering the political will to prosecute perpetrators is key to preventing more deaths. In addition, Member States should publicly applaud the vital contributions of these courageous individuals towards building more just societies based on the rule of law.

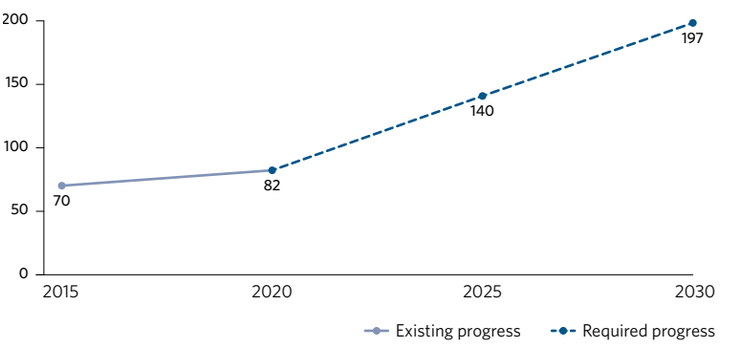
Number of human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists killed, by region, 2015–2020



Efforts to establish national human rights institutions, which have proven invaluable during the pandemic, need to be reinvigorated

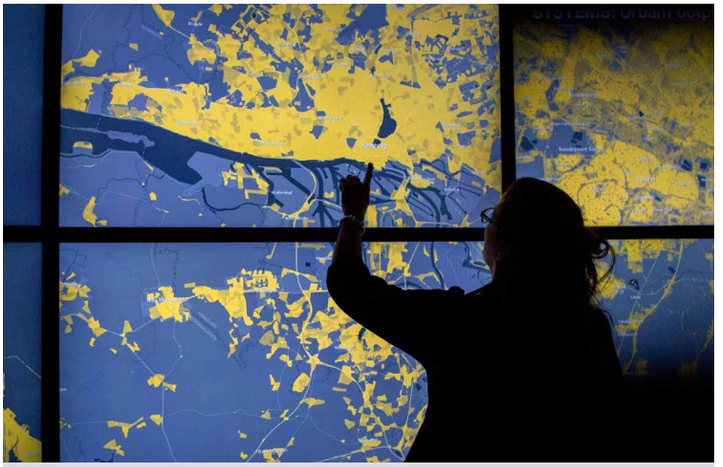
National human rights institutions (NHRIs) are independent bodies that promote and protect human rights. They have played a critical role during the pandemic by examining and monitoring impacts on health and other areas and by highlighting the human rights implications of the crisis. They have also combated the spread of inaccurate and misleading information and worked to protect vulnerable groups. In 2020, 82 countries had independent NHRIs that successfully achieved compliance with international standards, a 17 per cent improvement from 2015. One in three LDCs now have an internationally compliant NHRI, compared with one in five in 2015. These gains, however, are not enough to meet the 2030 target. Progress has stalled in most regions, where no new independent NHRIs have been recognized or established since 2018. Efforts will need to be redoubled to establish and strengthen NHRIs and ensure broader access to human rights promotion and protection services.

Number of countries and territories with independent NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles, 2015–2020, and required progress to meet the target, 2020–2030



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

The pandemic is further testing multilateral and global partnerships that were already shaky. Although official development assistance (ODA) increased and remittance flows declined less than expected in 2020, foreign direct investment (FDI) dropped by 40 per cent. The impacts of the pandemic are leading to debt distress in many countries, and also limiting countries' fiscal and policy space for critical investments in recovery (including access to vaccines), climate action and the SDGs, threatening to prolong recovery periods. The interconnected global economy requires a global response to ensure that all countries, developing countries in particular, can address compounding and parallel health, economic and environmental crises and recover better. Strengthening multilateralism and global partnerships is more important than ever.



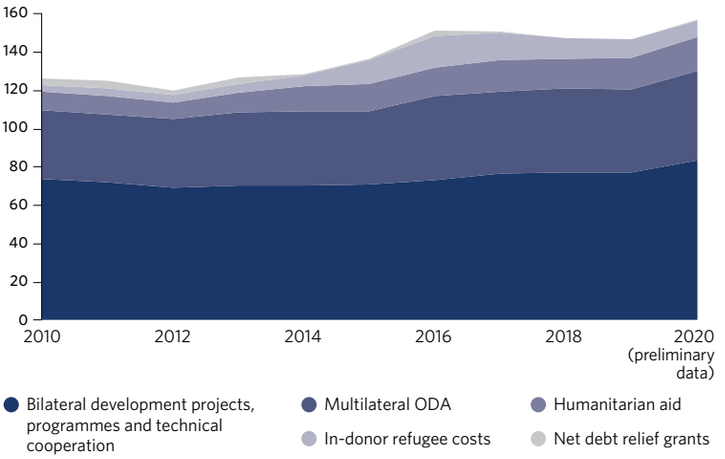
The integration of geospatial and statistical data supports decision-making and policy formulation, including for the implementation of the SDGs.

Foreign aid reached an all-time high during the crisis, but donors are still not living up to their commitments

Net ODA flows by member countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reached $161 billion in 2020, an increase of 7 per cent in real terms from 2019, driven by members' support of an inclusive global recovery in light of the pandemic and an increase in bilateral sovereign lending by some loan-giving members. Net ODA flows represented 0.32 per cent of donors' combined gross national income (GNI) in 2020, falling short of the 0.7 per cent target. Most members were able to maintain their planned ODA commitments, and some were able to rapidly mobilize additional funding. But more is needed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

Net bilateral flows to low-income countries were $25 billion, a decrease of 3.5 per cent in real terms compared with 2019. Net bilateral ODA increased by 6.9 per cent to lower-middle-income countries, and by 36.1 per cent to upper-middle-income countries, reaching $33 billion and $18 billion, respectively.

Components of net ODA flows, 2010–2020 (billions of constant 2019 dollars)



Foreign direct investment flows fell sharply in 2020, especially to poorer regions

In 2020, FDI fell by up to 40 per cent, dropping below $1 trillion (from $1.5 trillion in 2019) for the first time since 2005. Lockdown measures slowed existing investment projects, and the prospect of a deep recession led multinational enterprises to reassess new projects. Policy measures taken by Governments included new investment restrictions.

International private sector investment flows to developing and transition economies in sectors relevant to the SDGs fell by about one third in 2020. Except for renewable energy (where growth in new projects continued but was cut to one third of the pre-COVID level), investment activity fell sharply across all SDG sectors, with the fall more pronounced in poorer regions. Looking ahead, the projection for FDI is gloomy in 2021. Related risks include the latest wave of the pandemic, the slow pace of the vaccination roll-out and uncertainty about the global investment policy environment.

Remittance flows remained strong in 2020, despite the pandemic

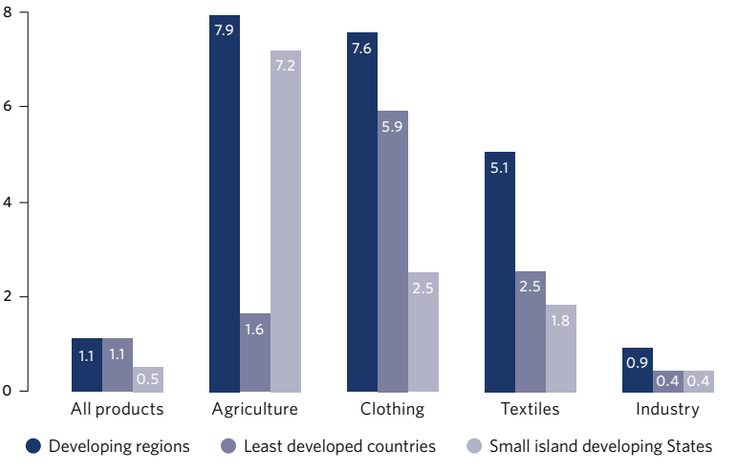
Defying predictions, officially recorded remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries reached $540 billion in 2020, only 1.6 per cent below the 2019 level. Drivers included fiscal stimulus that resulted in better-than-expected economic conditions in host countries, a shift in flows from cash to digital and from informal to formal channels, and cyclical movements in oil prices and currency exchange rates. Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries surpassed FDI for a second year. Remittances have become an important consumption-smoothing mechanism for recipient households. As such, they form an increasingly important (private) element of global social protection systems. Remittance flows rose by 6.5 per cent to Latin America and the Caribbean, by 5.2 per cent to Southern Asia, and by 2.3 per cent to the Middle East and Northern Africa. Flows to sub-Saharan Africa fell by 12.5 per cent, by 9.7 per cent to Europe and Central Asia, and by 7.9 per cent to Eastern Asia and the Pacific.

The target of doubling the global share of LDC exports by 2020 has been missed

Between 2017 and 2019, the worldwide weighted tariff average remained stable at around 2 per cent. Moreover, exports of developing countries and LDCs have been given preferential treatment by developed countries. After reaching the lowest level ever of about 1.1 per cent in 2011, the average tariff applied by developed countries to imports from developing countries and LDCs has remained flat due to a lack of new commitments. Agriculture, a particular concern for developing countries, accounted for the highest tariff imposed by developed countries in 2019 (7.9 per cent).

The share of LDC exports in global merchandise trade remained constant in 2019 at 1 per cent. Over the last decade that share has stagnated, after significant improvements from 2000 to 2010, largely due to a commodities boom. The target of doubling the global share of LDC exports by 2020 from the 2011 level (increasing it to 2 per cent) is unlikely to have been achieved.

Tariffs faced by developing regions, least developed countries and small island developing States in developed country markets, by sector, 2019 (percentage)

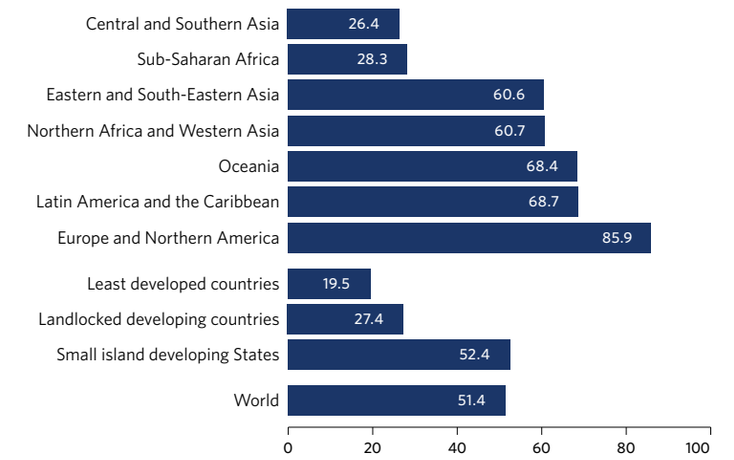


Despite the immense need for connectivity during the pandemic, nearly half of the global population are still not online

In 2019, 86 per cent of the population in Europe and Northern America were using the Internet, and most people in that region were able to work, shop and learn remotely during COVID-19 lockdowns. In Central and Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, just over a quarter of the population were connected. The cost of Internet access and Internet-connected devices, and the lack of related skills, are the highest barriers to access for large parts of the world.

To ensure no one is left behind, continued collective efforts are needed to connect the remaining 49 per cent of the world's population. A close collaboration among governments, policymakers and network operators is required to bring them fully online. Fixed broadband has a significant impact on the world economy. In LDCs, fixed networks are almost completely absent, with only 1.3 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.

Individuals using the Internet, 2019 (percentage)

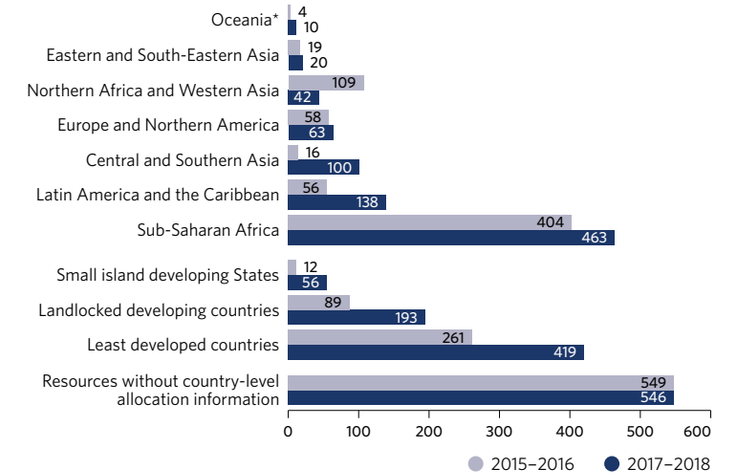


Notwithstanding a surge in data demand, international support for data and statistics remains inadequate

Since the adoption of the SDGs, funding for data and statistics has increased four years in a row. It grew from $591 million in 2015 to $693 million in 2018, with significant increases for SIDS, landlocked developing countries and LDCs. However, support was levelling off in 2019. Despite a surge in data demand to inform pandemic-related policymaking, development support to data and statistics has not risen commensurately. A recent survey found that 63 per cent of low-income and lower-middle-income countries are in need of additional financing for data and statistics to face the challenges posed by COVID-19.

In 2020, 132 countries and territories reported that they were implementing a national statistical plan, with 84 having plans that were fully funded. Only 4 out of the 46 LDCs reported having fully funded national statistical plans that year. Countries could face more difficulties in implementing and funding such plans due to costly and labour-intensive activities (such as censuses and household surveys) that were moved to 2021 due to the pandemic.

Total official development assistance dedicated to statistical capacity-building activities, 2015–2016 and 2017–2018 (millions of current dollars)



* Excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Note to the reader

Global indicator framework for the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals

The information presented in this report is based on the latest available data (as of June 2021) on selected indicators in the global indicator framework[1] for the SDGs.The global indicator framework is used to review progress at the global level and was developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017 (see resolution 71/313, annex).

The choice of indicators used in this report does not represent a prioritization of targets, since all goals and targets are equally important. The composition of regions and subregions cited in this report is based on United Nations geographical divisions, with some modifications necessary to create, to the extent possible, groups of countries for which a meaningful analysis could be carried out.[2]

Data sources and basis for the analysis

The values for most of the indicators presented in this report represent regional and/or subregional aggregates. In general, the figures are weighted averages of country data, using the reference population as a weight, and calculated from national data compiled by international agencies, according to their respective mandates and specialized expertise, from national statistical systems. The national data compiled by the international agencies are often adjusted for comparability and, where lacking, are estimated. As decided by the Statistical Commission and in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6, estimates used to compile the global indicators should be produced in full consultation with national statistical authorities. The criteria and mechanisms for validation by national statistical authorities are outlined in the report of the IAEG-SDGs[3] and were endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its fiftieth session.[4]

The collaboration between national statistical systems and regional and international organizations is essential for the effective flow of internationally comparable data. Such mechanisms can be improved by strengthening the coordination function of national statistical offices in national statistical systems.

A database of available global, regional and country data and metadata for the SDG indicators accompanying this report is maintained by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division and is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs. Due to the emergence of new data and revised methodologies, data series presented in this report may not be comparable with previous data series.

Although the aggregate figures presented in this report are a convenient way to track progress, the situation of individual countries within a given region, and across population groups and geographic areas within a country, may vary significantly from regional averages. Presenting aggregate figures for all regions also obscures another reality: the lack, in many parts of the world, of adequate data to assess national trends and to inform and monitor the implementation of development policies.

Investing in data to build back better and accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Timely, good-quality, open and disaggregated data are vital in enabling Governments, development partners, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and the general public to make informed decisions. The COVID-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated how data can effectively guide decision-making at each step of the pandemic response. At the same time, it has called attention to the fact that even the most basic health, social and economic data are often absent. Without adequate data, the most vulnerable populations who need help the most remain invisible. Many national statistical systems across the globe have faced serious challenges in tracking progress on the SDGs, which requires an unprecedented amount of data and statistics at all levels.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, financial and technical support for data and statistical systems are needed to ensure continuation of statistical operations, monitoring of emergency response efforts, and preparation of mitigation and recovery strategies. Increased investments in national data and statistical systems and the mobilization of additional international and domestic resources are imperative if we are to build back better from the crisis and accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

Over the last few years, progress has been made on the integration of innovative data sources and the use of new data solutions. This was made possible, in part, through partnerships with civil society, the private sector and academia, and by integrating geospatial information and statistical data. However, data innovation is not benefiting all countries equally, compounded by the fact that data disparities have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The Dubai Declaration, announced at the United Nations World Data Forum in 2018, stresses the critical importance of implementing the Cape Town Global Action Plan for sustainable development data (launched at the first United Nations World Data Forum in 2017). The Declaration calls for an innovative demand-driven funding mechanism that can respond quickly and efficiently to the priorities of national statistical systems, with the goal of mobilizing both domestic and international funds. At the virtual United Nations World Data Forum in October 2020, the data community reaffirmed the urgency of accelerated action on the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan and the Dubai Declaration as a key response to the COVID-19 pandemic and for the achievement of the SDGs.

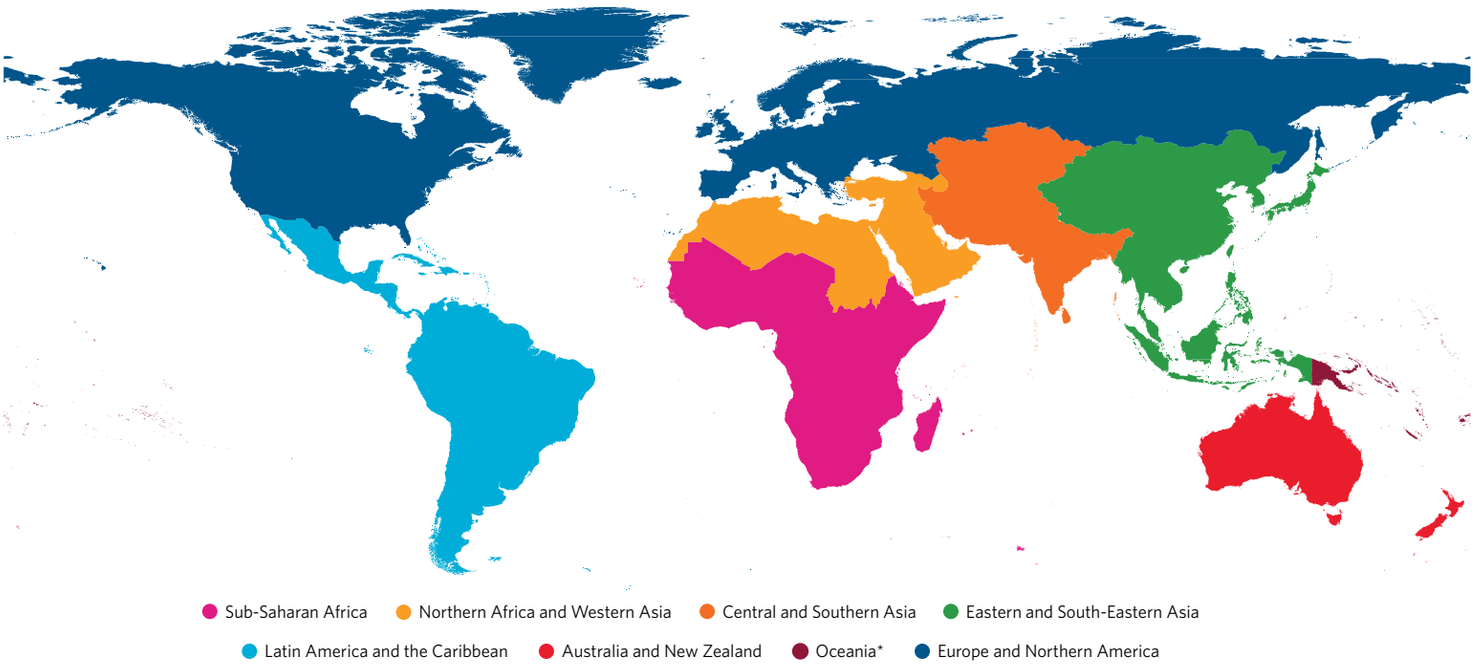
[1] The complete list of indicators is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list.

[2] The composition of the subregions is shown in the section on regional groupings.

[3] See Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (E/CN.3/2019/2), annex I.

[4] See Report of the Statistical Commission on its fiftieth session (E/2019/24-E/CN.3/2019/34).

Regional groupings



Notes:
- Oceania* refers to Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand, throughout the publication.
- The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this and other maps throughout this publication do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

This report presents data on progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals worldwide and by various groups. The country groupings are based on the geographic regions defined under the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (known as M49)[5] of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division. The geographic regions are shown on the map above. For the purpose of presentation, some of the M49 regions have been combined.

The use of geographic regions as the basis for country groupings is a major change from *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016* and the progress reports on the Millennium Development Goals. Previously, data were presented for countries in "developed" regions and countries in "developing" regions, which were further broken down into geographic subregions. Although there is no established convention for the designation of "developed" and "developing" countries or areas in the United Nations system, data for some indicators in this report are still being presented for developed and developing regions and countries for the purpose of statistical analysis only, and are based on the practice employed by the international agencies that provided the data.[6]

In addition, the text and figures present, to the extent possible, data for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, which are country groups requiring special attention.

A complete list of countries included in each region and subregion and country group is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/regional-groups.

The term "country" as used in the text of this publication also refers, as appropriate, to territories and areas. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

[5] Full details of the M49 standard can be found on the Statistics Division website at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49.

[6] The discussion note, "Update of the regional groupings for the SDG report and database", of 31 October 2016 describes the details of this change and is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/regional-groups.

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Alliance of Small Island States
Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
International Energy Agency
International Labour Organization (ILO)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
International Renewable Energy Agency
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
International Trade Centre (ITC)
International Union for Conservation of Nature
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peace Operations
Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth
Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21)
Peacebuilding Support Office, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Sustainable Energy for All
United Nations Capital Development Fund
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
United Nations Mine Action Service
United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
UN-Energy
UN-Ocean
UN-Water
World Bank Group
World Health Organization (WHO)
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
World Trade Organization (WTO)

For more information, visit the Sustainable Development Goals website of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs.

"The Sustainable Development Goals are more important now than ever. Now is the time to secure the well-being of people, economies, societies and our planet."

— *António GUTERRES*
Secretary-General of the United Nations

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