



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#HLPF #SDGs #GlobalGoals [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020)

## Launching the decade of action at a time of crisis: Keeping the focus on the SDGs while combatting COVID-19

*(The impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs, SDG Progress report, 2020 targets, regional dimensions and countries at different levels of development including middle-income countries, data and institutions for integrated policy making)*

*Tuesday, 7 July 2020, 9:15 AM – 12:00 PM*

### Secretariat Background Note

Heads of State and Government came together at the SDG Summit in September 2019 to renew their commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They recognized that despite important advances in some areas, progress was uneven and, overall, the world was not on track to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. They adopted a political declaration launching a Decade of Action and delivery for sustainable development, urging all actors to dramatically increase the pace and scale of implementation efforts to deliver the SDGs by 2030.

Through 2019, SDG progress continued to be made in some areas: global poverty continued to decline, albeit at a slower pace than before; maternal and child mortality rates were reduced; and more people gained access to electricity. Countries have also been developing national policies to support sustainable development and signing international environmental protection agreements.

In other areas, however, progress had either stalled or been reversed: the number of people suffering from hunger has been on the rise; climate change has been occurring much faster than anticipated; and inequality has continued to increase within and among countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on all 17 SDGs has shown that what began as a health crisis has quickly become a human and socio-economic crisis. While the crisis is imperiling progress towards the SDGs, it also makes their achievement all the more urgent and necessary. It is essential that recent gains are protected as much as possible. A transformative recovery from COVID-19 should be pursued, one that addresses the crisis, reduces risks from future potential crises and relaunched the implementation efforts to deliver the 2030 Agenda and SDGs during the Decade of Action.





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Achieving the SDGs necessitates a transformation of economies, societies and human behavior. These transformations remain possible. It is known that certain policy changes or specific breakthroughs around key challenges have the potential to catalyze progress on several SDGs simultaneously. The Decade of Action can ensure that those changes and breakthroughs are advanced as a matter of priority. The 2020 High-level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC can highlight areas that can drive progress across all the SDGs, including during the continued response to COVID-19.

Except for SDGs 1, 5, 7, 10 and 16, all the remaining Goals count at least one target to be achieved by 2020. However, only a minority of those 2020 targets has been achieved and, for a few, the trend seems to be going in the opposite direction. Impediments to the realization of these targets, in addition to the COVID-19 crisis, include the difficulties that countries have been facing with regard to the collection and monitoring of relevant data. The 2020 targets show the necessity of collective efforts and accountability. The most vulnerable communities and least developed countries need the most support.

The poorest and the most vulnerable people are also affected disproportionately by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small island developing States and countries in humanitarian or fragile situations stand to be hit hardest in the long term due to the fragility of their health systems, limited coverage of their social protection systems, limited financial and other resources, vulnerability to external shocks, and excessive dependence on international trade. Middle-income countries also have vulnerabilities as many are still characterized by fragmented social and economic structures, with a significant share of employment in informal or low-productivity sectors.

A coordinated regional approach will be crucial to enable countries within regions to collectively find additional support to their national efforts and actions. Negative effects on poverty and inequality, worsening of economic, trade, debt and financial conditions, vast unemployment in the formal and informal sectors, major disruptions in education services as well as a sharp reduction in remittances can be immediate challenges. The pandemic has shown that more comprehensive regional strategies and national structural changes must be put in place if the recovery is to succeed in a globalized world of major disruptions.

The global crisis is also affecting critical operations across the entire global statistical and data system, with delays in planned censuses and surveys and serious disruptions in all statistical operations. National and international statistical organizations will need renewed action and support to ensure the continuity



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of key statistical compilation activities and the availability of data to inform emergency mitigation actions by governments and all sectors of society to respond to the crisis and to continue the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Moving forward, biotechnology, artificial intelligence and ubiquitous computing, facilitated by advances in the Internet of Things in combination with 5G, big data and nanotech, can offer avenues that may be scaled up for the SDGs.

Strengthening institutions for integrated policy making also remains a challenge. Implementing the 17 SDGs with their 169 targets in an integrated way requires innovative governance approaches to garner synergies and mitigate trade-offs between the individual SDGs. Implementation needs to be pursued in an integrated and networked manner, linking actions at all levels, from local to global.

To ensure that the world emerges from the COVID-19 crisis stronger and fulfills the Decade of Action and Delivery for sustainable development, the United Nations, all Governments and all partners need to stay the course together.

## Guiding questions

- Where do we stand in terms of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs at the time of COVID-19 and how can we protect advances made thus far on the SDGs?
- How can the responses to the impacts of COVID-19 accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs to build back better and have gender-sensitive recovery?
- What are the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis that can help increase country resilience and embark on risk-informed sustainable, resilient development pathways?
- Which regions or groups of countries are especially vulnerable and what are ways to ensure that actions do not leave anyone behind?
- How can we help countries to strengthen statistical capacities, improve the quantity and quality of disaggregated data and support evidence-based swift decision-making?