



The 2025 U.S. People's Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Compiled by Commission on Voluntary Service & Action



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Founded in 1945, CVSA is a consultative and coordinating body of nongovernmental, voluntary service organizations based primarily in North America as well as around the world. CVSA's mission is to promote, interpret, coordinate and extend the field of independent voluntary service and action programs serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions to economic, social and environmental problems. By exercising its Special NGO Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, CVSA provides a voice for independent, nongovernmental voluntary service and action organizations and the constituencies they serve, bringing local needs into global context and global context to local efforts. CVSA affirms the tenets of the UN Charter and is committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the U.S. and around the world.

CVSA mobilizes involvement of U.S.-based volunteer organizations and their allies for the achievement of the universal, transformative and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in order to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

We thank all the CVSA volunteers who assisted with the communications, recording, filing, writing, editing and designing of this report.

We thank the dozens of organizations whose work gave inspiration to this report and who contributed information and perspectives contained within it.

Cover design by Curren Mandon utilizes photos given to CVSA by member organizations, each of which was previously published in CVSA's INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action catalogue of volunteer opportunities.

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Foreword

The United States was among 193 nations that voted unanimously on September 25, 2015 for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets.

For the subsequent ten years there were no public service announcements, banners, billboards, commercials, talk show discussions or any other form of publicity in the U.S. emanating from the federal government about the promise to work towards the 2030 SDGs at home or abroad, calling for all stakeholders to participate. The U.S. mainstream media was silent in regard to the U.S. commitment to this plan for people, planet and prosperity. The topic of the SDGs was absent from political campaign speeches. No coordinating councils were established at the federal level. It is no wonder most people in the U.S. have still not heard of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals after ten years.

Since March 2025, U.S. government representatives have been announcing in the conference halls of the UN that the U.S. government “rejects and denounces” the 2030 SDGs, claiming they are “inconsistent with U.S. sovereignty and adverse to the rights and interests of Americans.”

As an entirely volunteer organization, CVSA has been dedicated for almost 80 years to the promotion, interpretation, coordination and extension of the field of independent voluntary service and action programs for serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions to the problems the SDGs aim to remedy. These constituencies confront economic, social and environmental problems with their unique programs and action plans. Since 2016, CVSA has carried out a grassroots, nationwide community education campaign for the implementation of the 2030 SDGs and will continue to do so.

People throughout the U.S. are taking action for the achievement of these Goals – including university professors and their students, business leaders, clergy, many local elected officials and some state officials, as well as the leaders and volunteers of hundreds of grassroots organizations. CVSA will continue to promote the SDGs



through the quarterly newsletter *ITEMS FOR ACTION*; through speaking engagements, workshops and information booths; in meetings with educators; through talks delivered to college classrooms, churches, temples, professional and business associations and all manner of leaders within community-based, volunteer-driven organizations. The voices of a cross-section of all these constituencies are represented in this report.

The threefold purpose of this **2025 U.S. People's Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** is:

1. To serve as an organizing tool for promotion of the 2030 SDGs in the hands of committed community leaders, organizers, teachers, students, business people, professionals, clergy and all who want to make a difference. It is our intention for it to be useful in explaining why we need the 2030 SDGs implemented in the U.S. and in cooperation with the rest of the world, to enable the mobilization of more people, institutions and organizations into action to accomplish all 17 Goals.
2. To bring to the attention of those in the U.S. government, at any level, who will listen and learn that the 2030 SDGs are being embraced by the people themselves and concerned people are proceeding to do what they can to achieve these goals, but demand their full-scale implementation and seek government pursuit of these Goals as policy priority.
3. To make available to the UN Economic and Social Council High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development a report on CVSA's work to achieve the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. (per paragraph 89 of *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*) and how grassroots nonprofit organizations in the U.S. are striving for them.

We wish to also note the key role the U.S. plays as a leader in the world economy. The gap between the very rich and the rest of the people in the U.S. is growing wider. The rejection of the SDGs isolates the U.S. in relation to the international community, where the leaders of developing nations and their allies are more united

than ever in tackling, through multilateral cooperation to implement the 2030 SDGs, the problems of poverty, global warming and the destruction of life on earth. The position that the SDGs are "inconsistent with U.S. sovereignty and adverse to the rights and interests of Americans" as announced by U.S. leaders is beyond rationality and reason when the opposite is true for 99% of all Americans.

At present the U.S. government maintains a military spending budget larger than the next 9 nations combined, while our infrastructure is falling apart, the health of the population is deteriorating, there is a nationwide crisis of too little affordable, decent housing, and we continue to be one of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases that are destroying the natural balance of our planet's atmosphere. The U.S., as one of the most advanced industrial nations in the world, and with the largest economy by some measures, bears a heavy burden to change course and set a positive example by achieving these Goals within our own borders involving all stakeholders in the process.

We call on the U.S. government at all levels to reify their 2015 commitment to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals with the 192 other member nations of the UN that adopted them; to put the hard work into concrete plans and concrete actions to achieve them as quickly as all the resources at their disposal certainly can make possible, with the full involvement of those who can and want to do the work, and those who are currently very much being "left behind."



INTRODUCTION

The 2025 U.S. People's Report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development compiled by the Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) is the product of reports to CVSA volunteers and organizers from leaders of nongovernmental community-based organizations across the country actively engaged in serving communities in need. We issue this report in solidarity with and to continue our commitment to our members as well as the 192 nations that remain resolute in striving to implement the SDGs, despite this year's pronouncement by the U.S. government that it rejects and denounces the 2030 Agenda.

This marks the third annual U.S. People's Report on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals compiled by CVSA. This report is aligned with the theme of this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, "Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind."

It focuses on conditions in the U.S. in relation to the five Goals receiving in-depth review by the High-Level Forum this July at the United Nations: **SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; and SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.** CVSA offers this report in the absence of contributions of substance from the U.S. government on these matters at the Forum.

This report is meant to be an educational working tool and an inspiration to action. We hope it will be useful to people in the U.S. building solutions and fighting for a world in which all people can live in dignity, free of poverty and in a healthy sustainable environment. It is available to be utilized by those in government who will join us and align their priorities with the urgent need to

achieve these Goals here in the U.S and in cooperation and solidarity with all other nations.

We invite all nongovernmental grassroots organizations, non-profits serving people and communities in need, student groups, professional and business associations, environmental and social justice organizations to join us in bringing the 2030 SDGs to the people of the U.S. and making them a reality.

CVSA calls on member organizations and all stakeholders to take ownership of the SDGs in your work and seek partnerships with others on the local and regional levels for implementation of the Goals. CVSA can provide consultation, coordination and tools to:

- Promote the SDGs in your community through the work your organization is already doing, and bring more stakeholders into this discussion by building alliances.
- Bring the Goals to the attention of your local government and seek their alliance in building and carrying out plans for their achievement with requisite involvement of all stakeholders and a process for accountability.
- Contribute information to CVSA on your organization's direct experience with installing the SDGs in the U.S. so that many organizations can benefit from each other's experiences.
- Join CVSA in building this movement to increase our collective strength and transform our world, while insuring no one is left behind!

Thank you.

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Photo courtesy of Remote Area Medical



Photo courtesy of Global Links



Photo courtesy of Beyond Toxics

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Goal 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Targets:

3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

3.3 By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases

3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

3.5 Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

3.6 By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs

3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination

with disabilities or on low fixed incomes in the United States are more alarming each year. Life expectancy in the U.S. is down. Non-communicable diseases are up. The U.S. spends the most on health care of any other developed peer nation, with the worst outcomes for the majority of the people. And more working people in the U.S. are losing their health and lives due to more frequent and deadly climate-related disasters. Goal 3 is one of the most critically needed of the 17 Goals for the people of the U.S.

Target 3.1: By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

Black Women for Wellness, a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles, California founded to aid women and girls with nutrition education, chronic disease prevention, sexual health education and protection from toxic chemical exposure from personal and hair care products, reports that while the U.S. maternity mortality rate of 32.9 per 100,000 live births falls well below the Target 3.1 of less than 70 per 100,000 live births, over the last 30 years there has been a steady increase in the country's rate of pregnancy-related maternal deaths.

The U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate among high-income countries, often ranking 55th or 45th globally, with a significantly higher rate of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births compared to other developed nations. American Indian and Alaska Native women have the highest mortality rate (106.3 deaths per 100,000 live births), nearly four times higher than the rate among White women (27.6 deaths per 100,000 live births), followed by non-Hispanic Black women (76.9 deaths per 100,000 live births).

Common reasons for death after birth include mental health conditions, excessive bleeding, preeclampsia, and cardiac and coronary conditions, such as blood clots. These are all things that medical attention can alleviate and prevent.

The U.S. has areas called "maternity deserts" with shortages of OB-GYN doctors. Today, more than a third of U.S. counties, mostly in rural areas and particularly in the South and Midwest, don't have a single obstetrician or birthing center. In 2022, the latest March of Dimes report on maternity deserts showed that 6.9 million U.S. women live in places where they struggle to get pre-natal or post-natal care.

Problems

The decline in overall health and the growing obstacles to accessing health care by children, working men and women, and people

Between 2011 and 2021, 25% of rural hospitals with OB-GYN units shut their doors to pregnant women. Many of those hospitals cited the causes as costs or staffing shortages. OB-GYN care in those areas is not a money-maker for the health care corporations.

The focus of Black Women for Wellness on maternal health has exposed how healthcare-related costs extend beyond delivery into long-term postpartum care costs that are often out-of-pocket and poorly supported by existing infrastructure. When continuous Medicaid coverage provisions rolled back following the COVID-19 public health emergency, many low-income and undocumented individuals, disproportionately women, faced coverage gaps that deepened their financial insecurity.

Target 3.2: By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

While the mortality rates for newborns and children under five in the U.S. already meet the Sustainable Development Target 3.2, its overall performance lags behind that of other high-income countries, with U.S. infant mortality rates more than double the average. In 2023, the U.S. recorded 5.61 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, which is the lowest rate in U.S. history, but it must be noted that 16 states maintain infant mortality rates that are significantly higher than the national rate.

Additionally, racial disparities persist: the mortality rate for Black infants is more than twice (2.4x) the rate of White infants, with Black infants nearly four times more likely to die from complications as a result of low birth weight. Additionally, the consequences of limitations on reproductive health care extends to peri-natal health, having an adverse impact on death rates. The data reveals a disparity in mortality rates between states with abortion bans and restrictions and those that are without restrictions. In 2021, states with abortion bans and severe restrictions experienced neonatal and under-five mortality rates that were 30% and 38% higher, respectively, than those in states with protective policies.

This underscores the urgent need to address systemic inequities and the broader economic injustices that Goal 1 and Goal 5 address in their connection with Goal 3.

Target 3.3: By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, waterborne diseases and other communicable diseases

Today there are more than 1.2 million people estimated by Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) to be living with HIV in the U.S. and there were an estimated 31,800 new infections (cases among people who are both diagnosed and undiagnosed) in 2022. While care and treatment can make HIV a manageable chronic condition, about 8,000 people die with HIV-related illness as a contributing cause of death each year.

According to the most recent HIV Surveillance Report, an estimated 1,132,739 people aged 13 and older are currently living with HIV in the United States. In 2023, women accounted for approximately 1 in 5 (19%) of new HIV diagnoses, based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While HIV diagnoses among women have decreased by 25% over the past decade, women of color continue to be disproportionately affected.

Christie's Place, a nonprofit organization based in San Diego, California, dedicated to supporting women, children and families impacted by HIV, works to end the HIV epidemic in that area through accessible testing, trauma-informed care coordination, and, most importantly, empowerment and education rooted in culturally responsive programming. As a recognized leader in Southern California, the organization prioritizes hiring individuals with experience living with HIV, which helps foster trust and build stronger connections with clients. This peer-led model encourages individuals who are newly diagnosed or have detectable viral loads to engage in care and adhere to treatment, ultimately achieving viral suppression—rendering the virus undetectable and untransmittable.

Unfortunately, there are few organizations like Christie's Place in other areas of the U.S. where these services are needed, and the ability of Christie's Place to do their work is now curtailed until they secure funding to replace the U.S. government funding they had been receiving for large portions of their program, now terminated.

Target 3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

Noncommunicable diseases such as cancers, diabetes and cardiovascular disease are responsible for over 7 out of every 10 deaths in the United States and are being fueled by obesity, drug use, poor nutrition

due to poverty and toxic pollution in air and water near where people live and work. Preventive health care is a luxury that few uninsured and underinsured working people in the U.S. have access to.

Life expectancy at birth in the United States is the shortest of any developed wealthy nation and dropping: 78.4 years, compared to an average of 82.5 among peer countries, according to a 2023 CDC report. That figure also “varies dramatically depending on where one lives, the economic conditions in that location, and one’s racial and ethnic identity,” as detailed in the 2024 “The Ten Americas” report published by the world-renowned weekly medical journal *The Lancet*. The life expectancy gap among ethnic groups in the U.S. has widened to 20 years with, for example, American Indian and Alaska Native individuals living in the West suffering the largest decline in life expectancy, now at 63.6 years, and Black Americans living in rural, low-income counties in the South and Black Americans living in highly segregated cities, having the next lowest life expectancy, around 70.5 years for both populations.

Obesity is the most prevalent chronic illness in the U.S., affecting 42% of the population in 2022. It is linked to other noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. In 2022, the U.S. had the highest percentage of adults with diabetes at 12.5% compared to the average of 6.1% among peer nations. Since 2017, the U.S. has had the highest rate of asthma among peer nations, and currently the U.S. has almost twice the prevalence of asthma (11.0% in 2021) compared to the peer country average (6.6%).

The Appalachia Service Project (ASP), a nonprofit organization based in Johnson City, Tennessee, that mobilizes thousands of volunteers from across the country to make homes “warmer, safer, and drier,” particularly in the aftermath of disasters, points to the fact that unsafe housing exacerbates and sometimes causes noncommunicable disease. While the Federal Emergency Management Agency is tasked with supporting individuals after disasters, its financial assistance to homeowners in the area has historically averaged only \$3,000 to \$4,000 – a totally insufficient sum for restoration of damaged or destroyed homes to livable conditions. In 2024 alone, ASP aided 370 households in the Central Appalachian region with high-quality home repairs and replacements, involving the whole community in the process, building stronger ties within the community for mutual support. However, ASP receives 7,000 requests for

assistance a year from families in the 5-state area, which they cannot get to with their all-volunteer force. ASP says, “The government is missing the mark on the hierarchy of needs” and calls for government to carry out its responsibility for the people who have suffered major disasters or live with the disaster of poverty.

In central Appalachia, Bethlehem Farm also plays an important role in saving lives from health risks caused by substandard housing conditions; they work within a 45-mile radius of their location in Greenbrier, Summers, and Monroe Counties, West Virginia. Through the dedicated efforts of volunteers, the organization repairs homes and improves well-being by remediating critical issues such as mold, wood rot, and damaged flooring, which are particularly dangerous conditions for elderly residents. Bethlehem Farm emphasizes the need for better government support and policies to address these issues comprehensively for all in need.

Target 3.8: Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

Universal health coverage, as defined by the World Health Organization, is realized when all people and their communities have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. It requires care that is responsive to the needs of communities and is focused on not only illness treatment and prevention, but also committed to thriving communities with improved well-being. That means that care must be physically accessible. It must be financially affordable. It must be acceptable to the community, such that services and care are culturally competent and congruent, and encourage patients’ comfort with trust of care.

Along with being the sickest among developed nations, in 2024 more than 8% of the U.S. population, an estimated 27.1 million people of all ages, did not have health insurance, an increase of 3.4 million from the 2023 rate. Nearly 1 in 4 U.S. adults who do have health coverage are underinsured, facing high out-of-pocket costs and deductibles that force many to skip needed care or take on medical debt. Up to one-third of people with chronic conditions like heart failure and diabetes say they skip medication doses or don’t

fill their prescriptions because of the cost. 73.3% of uninsured individuals have one or more full-time jobs and 10.9% of the uninsured population work at least one part-time job. A survey in 2024 by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that in the United States only 54% of all firms (including private and public) offered health benefits. These policies often require steep co-pays for services used, which often prevents the worker from using the insurance.

As many as 40% of U.S. adults, or about 100 million people, are in debt because of medical or dental bills. Medical debt is a leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the United States. Black Women for Wellness points out that the medical debt reflected on credit reports represents only a fraction of what Americans actually owe for health care, as people turn to family to borrow funds, make arrangements directly with a hospital or provider to pay through an installment plan, or charge their medical bills to their credit cards, running up balances and incurring steep interest rates. The Commonwealth Fund found that 46% of respondents to their biennial survey said that they had skipped or delayed care because of the cost, and 42% said they had problems paying medical bills or were paying off medical debt. Additionally, the Kaiser Health Systems tracker found that people with medical debt report cutting spending on food, clothing, and other household items, spending down their savings to pay for medical bills, borrowing from friends or family members, or taking on additional debts.

Approximately 1 in 5 Americans live in rural areas. More adults residing in rural areas live in poverty, have adverse health conditions, and have greater unmet health needs than adults in urban areas. Populations in rural communities experience a severe shortage of primary care, behavioral health, and other specialist providers. Rural communities often depend on local hospitals to provide acute inpatient care, as well as outpatient services such as routine chronic, urgent, and emergency care in place of primary care. Despite their central role, over the past decade, more than 100 rural hospitals have closed due to financial distress. As a result, the millions of Americans who live in those communities no longer have access to an emergency room, inpatient care, and many other hospital services. In addition, 40 hospitals have eliminated inpatient services since the beginning of 2023 in order to qualify for federal grants that are only available for Rural Emergency Hospitals. More than 700 rural hospitals, over 30% of all such providers in the country, were at risk of closing as of August 2024, in the face of financial losses in providing patient care caused by inadequate reimbursement from private health

plans, according to a report by the Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform.

The country is also facing a shortage of nurses that threatens patient care and the well-being of health care workers, leaving hospitals understaffed. Approximately 100,000 nurses exited the profession during the COVID-19 pandemic due to overwhelming patient loads and insufficient staffing, exacerbating the mental and physical toll on health care workers. More than 138,000 nurses left the workforce since 2022, reporting stress, burnout, low pay and retirement as key reasons. In 2023 an additional 39.9% of RNs and 41.3% of LPN/VNs reported their intent to leave the workforce or retire within the next 5 years. This year, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing reports an increase in enrollment of students in nursing degree programs, however the workplace conditions causing so many nurses to leave still need to be addressed.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services terminated billions of dollars in federal funding for childhood vaccines in March, 2025. These cuts came just weeks after the Texas Department of State Health Services announced the second measles-related death, and 481 confirmed cases by April 2025 – mostly in children. Communities



Hundreds of people line up in Wise, West Virginia for a Remote Area Medical Free Health Clinic. Photo courtesy of Health Wagon.

like San Antonio, Texas are directly affected as their public health center, Metro Health, has now halted vaccine clinic operations for children due to the loss of federal support. As of June 5, 2025, a total of 1,168 confirmed measles cases were reported by 34 U.S. states, with 12% requiring hospitalization and 3 childhood deaths. Measles had become a disease totally preventable in the U.S and declared eliminated in 2000 due to high vaccination coverage. As the 2025 outbreaks unfolded, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, also being defunded, reported that 96% of the measles cases were unvaccinated children.

Community-based nonprofit organizations that involve volunteers to organize medical professionals and procure resources for provision of services to the most marginalized populations are under great pressure as the number of people in need and in pain coming to their clinics or advocacy sessions for help keeps growing.

Remote Area Medical (RAM), the largest volunteer-based medical aid operation of its type in the U.S., founded in 1985 by the late Stan Brock, delivers health services through mobile pop-up clinics across the country. RAM has 70 core staff members, with 300-400 core volunteers involved in various roles for medical, vision and dental care. By partnering with local churches, student organizations, community advocates and colleges, RAM has served nearly 30,000 individuals



Appreciative patient at one of RAM's Free Health Clinics. Photo courtesy of RAM.

annually in 21 states, nearly 1 million patients in 40 years, delivering an estimated \$10.75 million in health care services – medical, dental and vision – each year, free of charge on an entirely volunteer basis with no government funds. Hundreds of doctors, dentists, optometrists and nurses who care about the well-being of people volunteer their time because it is the only way they see that they can get health care to so many uninsured and underinsured people. RAM reports 47% of patients don't have health insurance. Nearly 70% of RAM patients don't have dental or vision insurance. Six in 10 adults report forgoing the medical, dental and vision care they need because of high costs.

RAM's work provides an example of how quality health care could be delivered to everyone in the country if the resources currently going into private profit were instead allocated to the actual delivery of needed services. Nonprofit, volunteer-dependent organizations cannot be in every community all year round delivering the care needed by millions. RAM is the first to say that what RAM does is not the solution – they just help stop the pain and suffering for as many people as possible as best they can.

This Goal of universal health coverage and access to services and medicines for all is one millions of people and medical professionals in the U.S. have been calling for decades.

As the number of communities devastated by increasingly frequent and deadly climate-induced disasters – fires, heat waves, tornadoes and floods – grows, the long-term health of most people in the U.S. is greatly diminishing, exacerbated by loss of housing, livelihoods, access to medication, exposure to contaminated water and/or toxic air, along with high levels of anxiety due to absence of adequate disaster relief and affordable health care.

Target 3.9: By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination.

The number of people in the U.S. breathing harmful air has increased by almost 25 million compared to last year and is the highest in the past decade. Extreme heat, drought and wildfires are contributing to worsening levels of air pollution across much of the U.S., exposing a growing proportion of the population to ozone and particle pollution that puts their health at risk. Blacks, Hispanics and poor Whites

in the United States suffer more health problems due to exposure to air pollutants and contaminated drinking water, causing preventable health problems and decreased longevity than people living in higher income communities. However, middle income and wealthy communities are discovering they are also not safe, as the 2025 State of the Air report by the American Lung Association reveals that 46% of Americans – roughly 156 million people – are living in places that have received failing grades for air quality.

Ozone exposure increases the likelihood of metabolic disorders like diabetes, reproductive and developmental harm, and cardiovascular disease. Research shows that even short-term exposure to ozone levels below the current national ambient air quality standard likely increases the risk of premature death.

According to the American Chemical Society, decades after federal environmental policy such as the Clean Air Act passed in late 1970, air quality in the United States has improved compared to the past levels and compared to the air breathed by the vast majority of people in the world. Yet, there are still 100,000-200,000 early deaths annually associated with exposure to air pollution in the U.S.; substantially more deaths than from murders and car crashes combined. Currently, the measures that were in place to monitor and curb air pollution, as inadequate as they were, are under threat of being totally dismantled by current government policy, and regulations that curbed a certain amount of pollution when they were enforced, are now being further relaxed.

Heat-related illnesses are also on the rise, with certain populations in higher risk of death than others: extreme heat along with exposure to pesticides and toxic chemicals are a significant danger to farm workers across the country who spend many hours in direct sunlight, harvesting food that feeds the nation and the world.

2024 was the warmest year by a wide margin since global records began in 1850, according to the scientists of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Human health is being significantly harmed by the continuous rise of global temperatures and heat waves worldwide as a result of climate change with increased heat-related illnesses, hospitalizations, and mortality, particularly among vulnerable populations like the elderly, children and those with pre-existing conditions.

In 2024, Idaho farming areas reached at least 105°F on a record 9 days during the summer and 5 deaths were reported. Oregon, with a population of over 150,000 agricultural workers and over 123,000 construction workers, saw a record 5 days of triple-digit temperatures, and 10 people died from heat-related illnesses in that July heat wave. Parts of Washington state hit 94°F or higher, breaking prior heat records and 7 workers died. Construction workers represent only 6 percent of the total U.S. workforce, yet they account for more than one-third of all reported occupational deaths associated with heat exposure. The deaths are preventable when proper policies allowing necessary frequent breaks from labor in the heat, access to water and cooling areas are enforced.

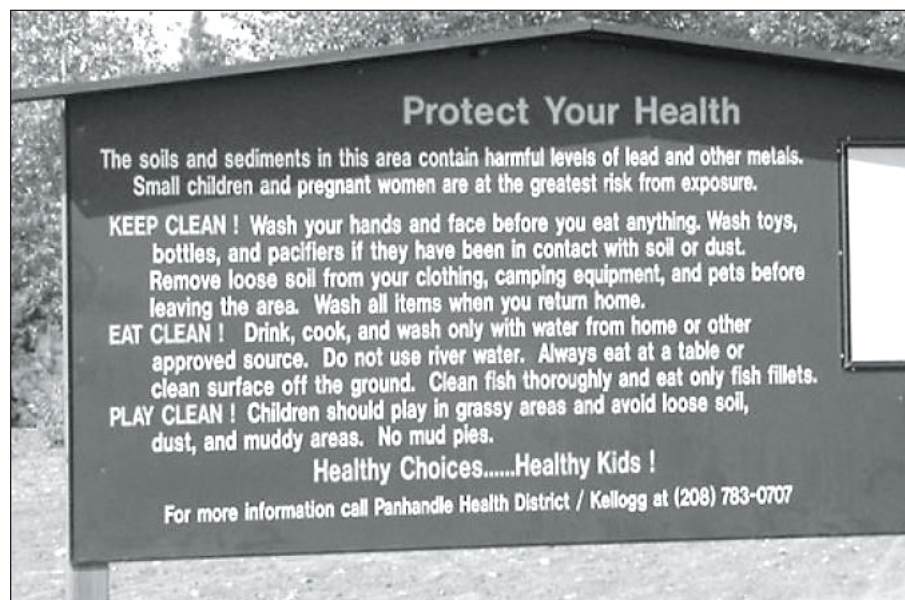
In Utah, the nonprofit organization HEAL Utah involves thousands of volunteers organizing for environmental protection and better public health across the state. Currently, HEAL Utah is confronting a range of serious environmental threats, including radioactive contamination from historic nuclear testing sites, increased radon exposure, toxic airborne dust from the drying Great Salt Lake, the



Clean-up volunteer post massive urban fire in Los Angeles, California. Photo courtesy of Pasadena Village.

proposed construction of a uranium mill on sacred Indigenous lands, and the planned expansion of nuclear power projects without sufficient public involvement. HEAL Utah works closely with stakeholders to improve air quality monitoring, reduce pollution, and support communities most impacted by environmental hazards. The organization also collaborates with partner groups to mitigate toxic dust storms and advocate for sustainable, community-centered solutions. HEAL Utah emphasizes the importance of including cleaner, more affordable energy alternatives in the state's future energy plans.

In the early 1980s, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched the Superfund program to manage the cleanup of the country's most hazardous waste sites and to respond to both local and nationally significant environmental threats. Of the close to 47,000 waste sites contaminated with various harmful chemicals or radioactivity, 1700 were put on EPA's priority list. As of March 5, 2025, the list still included 1,340 active sites across the United States yet to be cleaned up. Thousands of communities, including those on Native ancestral lands, are grappling with the long-term consequences of unmanaged hazardous waste.



Sign warning of toxins near public river in Kellogg, Idaho. Photo courtesy of Silver Valley Community Resource Center.

In Northern Idaho, the Silver Valley Community Resource Center (SVCRC) has been fighting for close to 40 years for clean-up of the lead contamination in their area stemming from the now-defunct Bunker Hill Silver-Lead-Zinc Mine. While billions of dollars in profits were extracted from this area over many decades of silver mining, local residents continue to suffer from the contamination left behind and inadequate federal response for the clean-up. In 1983 EPA had designated the 21-square-mile area as a top priority lead-contaminated Superfund zone to be cleaned up. Subsequently, new data showed the contamination spans more than 1,500 square miles, requiring they expand the zone designation. Despite the known dangers, rather than being remediated, the lead pollution has intensified, with lead levels inside many homes now exceeding those found at the original epicenter of the contamination through dust particles settling inside.

Federal law requires that every child in the U.S. be tested for lead exposure, however this law is not enforced unless a community organizes and demands the testing. The health impacts of lead exposure are profound and irreversible, including renal failure, cardiovascular disease, respiratory complications, and mental health conditions – such as heightened suicide risk. SVCRC did organize and implement community-wide lead testing and have been demanding a community health center be established to address the particular health problems of those with lead poisoning.

Conclusion

The paradox in the health care situation in the U.S. is the fact that more money is spent in the U.S. on health care than other high-income nations – almost twice as much – with the worst results of any of the high-income countries for the majority of the people. An estimated *\$4.87 trillion was spent on health care in 2023*, according to an analysis by Kaiser Family Foundation, yet the U.S. has the unhealthiest population of any developed nation. Where does that money go?

Nonprofit volunteer organizations that organize to provide free care and advocacy know where that money did *not* go: that \$4.87 trillion is *not* going into actual delivery of comprehensive medical care for the majority of the people.

Investors and venture capital corporations treat companies of any kind as assets to be bought and sold and as vehicles for extracting

wealth through financial strategies rather than primarily through productive activities. This is what has taken over the U.S. field of health care and medicine. Health care has proven to be a lucrative industry to grow their returns. In 2022, these companies paid \$170 billion to shareholders in dividends and stock buybacks. Nineteen companies alone made about 80% of the total payouts over this period. Drug companies dominated the list with Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Merck and Amgen paying out the most lucrative returns. The health insurance giant United Health Group, which collected \$499 billion in revenue in 2024 alone, ranked fifth. Pharmaceutical companies collectively returned \$1.2 trillion over the two-plus decades. Biotechnology and managed care companies ranked second and third on shareholder payouts.

The field of health and medicine has become an industry of tradable assets used to accumulate capital for the few, with decision-making driven by financial strategies rather than the best delivery possible of effective, comprehensive health care for all.

The people of the U.S. whose tax dollars subsidize this industry and pay further with their lives call for Goal 3 to be made policy priority in practice now, to change these unacceptable conditions. Poverty, the high cost of fresh nutritious food, the absence of robust public health systems, toxins in the water, air and land, and the increasing severity of the effects of climate change pose the largest dangers to the health and well-being of the population of the U.S. at this time. Achieving Goal 3 is directly linked to the necessity of achieving Goal 1, Goal 2, Goal 6, Goal 7, Goal 8 and Goal 13.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Solutions

- Per Target 3.8, provide free universal health care for all, as a human right. Prioritize the health of the people over the profits of the insurance and pharmaceutical monopolies.
- Make the responsible corporate parties pay for and clean up toxic waste areas their businesses created or allocate government funds to pay for this by eliminating subsidies granted to large pharmaceutical and chemical corporations and from budgets for weapons and wars abroad.
- Train more primary care physicians and nurses, improve patient to nurse ratios in hospitals, and make medical school less expensive.
- Open community clinics that provide comprehensive and preventive care in all communities.
- Open hospitals with free or affordable care in counties where there are none and with high poverty rates.
- Integrate social determinants of health into health files and care plans, and include facilitating access to affordable sanitary housing, clean water, residential utilities, legal services, social workers at hospitals and clinics working jointly to overcome poor housing, water, nutrition and inadequate patient education.
- Establish community-based health centers that provide services for positive STI/HIV/AIDS diagnoses including treatment, free check-ups, and medications that prevent HIV in all communities that need them.
- End subsidies to pharmaceutical corporations except to provide urgently needed free or at cost medicine including but not limited to public health emergencies.
- Carry out Goals 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 13 to ensure all people can live in a healthy environment, have decent affordable housing, and gain access to affordable fresh food and living wage jobs working in safe conditions with adequate protective and safety gear.



Goal 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Targets:

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Problems

Target 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls

While the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly protect against sex discrimination, women in the U.S. have made many gains in job opportunities and wages in the last 50 years as a result of their labor organizing efforts.

However, while there is an increased presence of women in the highest-paying jobs, women remain overrepresented in low-paid, insecure, and unregulated jobs. The gender pay gap persists across all levels of educational attainment. Women who work full

time, year round in wage-earning jobs are typically paid an average of \$.82 for every dollar paid to their male counterparts, according to the Women's Law Center. The imbalance in pay is even greater for women of color. Black women earned an average of only \$.64 on the dollar compared to White, non-Hispanic men, while Latina women earned just \$.51, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In the case of jobs that are low-paid for both the men and women workers of all races, such as in farm work, fast food work and other service work, women's demands are *not* for equal pay with their male low-paid counterparts of any race, but for living wages for both men and women workers of all races.

The U.S. is the only developed, high-income country that has no federal law requiring businesses to provide paid family leave. This forces new mothers to return to work soon after childbirth, risking their physical and mental health while balancing work and childcare. Additionally, the absence of guaranteed paid paternity leave reinforces traditional gender roles by placing the burden of care-giving on women and forcing many to choose between their careers and family responsibilities, often resulting in professional, financial and personal setbacks.

Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, nearly 1 in 5 women in the U.S. have been raped in their lifetimes. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, nearly 3 in 10 women in the U.S. have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner.

Women are often punished for being victims. The Sentencing Project, a nonprofit research and advocacy centre addressing racial disparities in the criminal justice system, reports that all too often, survivors of domestic violence are arrested, prosecuted and punished. For instance, survivors may be criminalized for coerced criminal acts or for protecting themselves or a loved one. Victimization can also result in long-term destabilization that also leads to prosecution: loss of housing, income and savings push individuals into committing crimes to meet basic survival needs. Coping with the effects of

trauma can also lead individuals to substance use and arrest. These are some of the circumstances that led the 190,600 women currently in U.S. prisons to incarceration. Further, at least 90% of women in prison for killing men report having been abused by those men.

There are many volunteer-dependent grassroots organizations across the country organized to provide support to women experiencing domestic violence – and yet there are not enough of them to meet the need. Mujeres Unidas en Justicia Educacion y Reforma (M.U.J.E.R.), a grassroots nonprofit based in Southern Florida, has been providing support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence and abuse since 1994. M.U.J.E.R. uses an holistic approach to heal and protect the safety and well-being of victims of domestic and sexual violence, on-the-scene support response at the hospital or at-the-scene of the crime and a 24/7 hot line, along with community education activities. Almost a quarter of U.S. women experience domestic violence in their lifetime. Domestic violence is a social problem fueled by economic hardship and inequality, generational learning, unorganized healthcare aid and family stresses, as explained by M.U.J.E.R.

Immigrant women more often do not seek help for fear of deportation and/or loss of their children. This not only endangers the victims but also has lasting effects on children who witness the violence, many of whom attempt to intervene to protect their mothers. Many of the women M.U.J.E.R. serves include individuals and families that have emigrated from South and Central America to the United States. Some women find work in plant nurseries where women, especially undocumented women, are often paid less than men, leaving them vulnerable to labor trafficking lures and workplace exploitation.

To address these disparities, M.U.J.E.R. has built partnerships with plant nurseries and agricultural businesses to educate workers on domestic violence and labor rights. Through outreach, awareness, and culturally relevant education, they have empowered women and girls to understand their rights, helping more of them to report abuse and get out of those situations.

In the United States, the rate of female imprisonment has increased twice as much as that of men since 1980, with now over 190,600 women incarcerated. Over 60% of imprisoned women in state and federal prisons have a child under the age of 18.

Hour Children, a nonprofit organization in Queens, New York, founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph, provides comprehensive services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children. Their programs, which include parenting classes, therapy, and reintegration services, have resulted in strong post-release connections between mothers and children. Some of the women who seek services with Hour Children are working with volunteer lawyers to reduce their sentences under the Domestic Violence Act, and can only succeed in navigating this process with the help of a supportive organization like Hour Children.

Grassroots organizations are vital lifelines for women experiencing violence, trauma and discrimination. However, for those organizations that have relied on government funding to support these services, these programs are at risk of random federal policy changes and priorities. M.U.J.E.R. is now struggling to diversify their funding and organize broader community support to sustain and expand their essential services.

Black Women for Wellness reports that Black and Latina women, who are overrepresented in the incarcerated population in the U.S., are particularly vulnerable to medical neglect and violence, often entering jails or prisons during their reproductive years. Pregnant women put in prison face elevated risks of premature birth, low birth weight and other complications due to inadequate prenatal



Walk In My Shoes march. Photo courtesy of M.U.J.E.R.

care and high rates of coexisting conditions. The inhumane practice of shackling during labor and giving birth while in prison, though banned in at least 37 U.S. states, still exists. A 2018 nationwide study of nurses found that over 80% had witnessed shackling of incarcerated patients during pregnancy or postpartum, despite the presence of anti-shackling legislation.

Target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

Damayan is a Filipino workers association based in New York City. It was started in 2002 by a group of Filipina domestic workers experiencing employer abuses, such as illegally refusing to pay minimum wage, termination without cause or notice, and being forced to work overtime without compensation. They focus on labor rights, how to overcome employer mistreatment, combat labor trafficking, win back stolen wages and develop leaders through organization. They also established a worker-owned social enterprise to provide opportunities for their members to gain non-abusive employment, called Damayan Workers Cooperative (DWC). They promote their worker-owners who are experienced, trained, reliable and trustworthy care providers and offer services to families in New York City, taking care of children and the elderly, and nurturing clean, healthy and safe homes and offices for a decent wage. This is a



Hour Children volunteers with mothers and children in the day care center. Photo courtesy of Hour Children.

too-rare example in the U.S. of a group of exploited domestic workers successfully improving their economic situation through building strong organization.

Uncompensated labor also takes place in prisons. According to Prison Policy Initiative, incarcerated people put into prison labor programs earn an average wage of \$0.86 an hour. (See also Goal 8.) Hour Children reports that most of the women who are incarcerated were unemployed, underemployed, or being paid low wages, and had limited access to education to begin with before they were arrested. Forced work programs while in prison do not aid in their ability to obtain gainful employment when they are released. To support women's ability to enter the work force post release and be able to support themselves and their children, Hour Children provides access to educational and vocational training, including medical technology programs, internships and apprenticeships. The organization has seen success for many, with some women earning bachelor's degrees and securing full-time jobs following their internships. Much more is needed to prevent the systemic injustices that brought the women to this position in the first place. Both M.U.J.E.R. and Hour Children attribute successful outcomes to their practice of listening to the needs of the women they serve rather than imposing assumed solutions.

Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

While in the U.S. public sector, 25% of U.S. senators are women, 32.7% of the state legislators are women, and 13 states have women governors, few of them come from poor or working class backgrounds, and so it cannot be said that they represent the majority of women. In the U.S., running for public office at state or federal level typically requires campaign costs of millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars. Whether an elected official is male or female doesn't change the fact that the majority of women and the majority of the whole working class in the U.S. are blocked from attaining national or state public office.

Hour Children and M.U.J.E.R. emphasize that many of the women who have benefited from participation in their programs return as mentors, helping others find their voices and building leadership abilities. While increasing women's representation in policy-making leadership at all levels is critically needed, organization

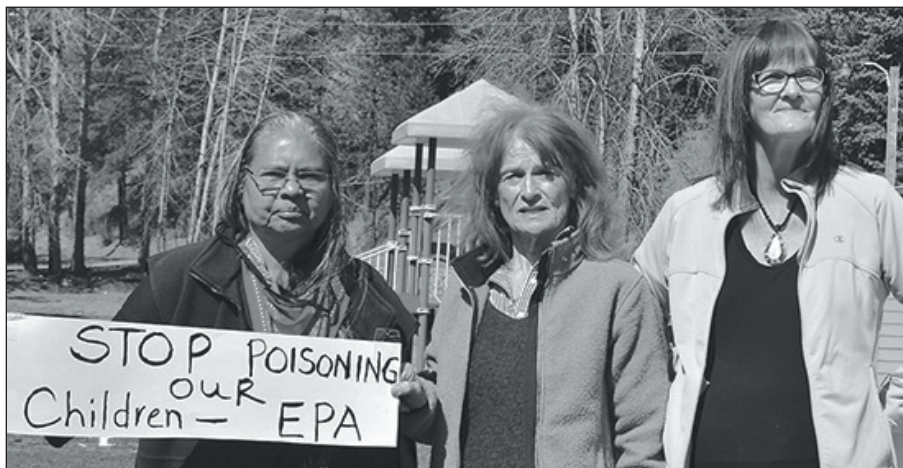
is required to raise that leadership, back them up and keep them accountable once there.

Solutions

- Pay living wages to all workers – both women and men; eliminate poverty pay scales for people of all races and genders.
- Take money out of elections and prioritize advancing women to leadership positions for full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- Carry out all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, with women in the lead, especially Goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8, to create a more just society that does not threaten the survival and well-being of families, nor pit people against each other in order to survive.
- Fund outreach and education to end domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- Make paid maternity leave a right, subsidized and enforced by law.



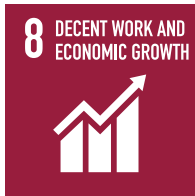
Women helping women during Covid-19 pandemic. Photo courtesy of Women's Lunch Place.



Women organizing to save their community. Photo courtesy of Silver Valley Community Resource Center.

**5 GENDER
EQUALITY**





Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Targets:

8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances

8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

8.4 Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead

8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men

8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

Problems

The predominant financial and economic policies in the U.S. that impact all the above targets are thrusting the majority of the working men, women and youth of the U.S. in the opposite direction of this goal and leaving many people behind.

Target 8.1: Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances

Restratification downward since the 1970s: In early 2024 the Community Service Society of New York and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies commissioned the Urban League to do a study on people's ability to cover the true cost of being economically secure, i.e. not poor. The study found that 52% of people in the U.S. are economically insecure and have little hope of thriving economically. They often work more than one job to stay afloat and not fall into poverty. Calculation for this True Cost of Economic Security (TCES) measurement includes a wide range of income, including wages, money from a side job, tax credits, public assistance, pensions, alimony and the value of family members helping out with childcare. The TCES threshold considers a wide range of costs such as housing, food, health care, childcare, transportation, mobile telephone, internet, taxes, loans and debt, and factors in savings.

More than 80% of people in single-parent households fall below the TCES threshold to cover their true living expenses. Half of all families with two children and two adults under age 65 cannot cover their TCES. The study found that their situation is driven more by deficient economic resources and income, rather than overspending. Most of these people work. Many work more than one job. Yet they cannot cover basic expenses of what it costs to live in the U.S. The share of American adults who live in middle-income households has decreased from 61% in 1971 to 50% in 2021. This downward trend has progressed since 1971, with each decade ending with a smaller percentage of adults living in middle-income households than at the beginning of the decade. As the wealthiest in the U.S. have gotten wealthier, the majority of the people, per capita, have gotten poorer, with the gap widening every year.

Steady waves of layoffs and lower wages: In 2024 the technology sector had significant job cuts, following large reductions in the previous two years. Companies like Tesla, Amazon, Google, TikTok, Snap, and Microsoft were among those with large layoffs. Layoffs have also been taking place in industries such as government, retail, accounting, manufacturing and logistics. The professional and business services sector, which includes consulting, legal and other services, had large layoffs at the beginning of 2024. The thousands of workers across many sectors who set out to find new jobs, including media and technology, found that wages for available positions are lower than their previous pay – even for the same jobs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2025 that 8.9 million Americans now work multiple jobs, the highest number since the agency began tracking this metric in 1994. This figure does not include informal unregistered jobs that people carry on the side that the Bureau is not able to count.

Growth of the billionaire class: In stark contrast, at the close of 2024 the 813 billionaires in the United States had reaped an increase in income by \$365 billion in that year, according to Oxfam and based on data from Forbes, giving them a combined total wealth of \$6.72 trillion.

Target 8.2: Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

While this Target is largely understood to be more directly relevant to low-income developing nations, it can be applied to areas of the U.S. too. The people of the east coast Appalachian mountain region working with grassroots organizations like Appalachian Voices and Relmagine Appalachia have developed concrete proposals for how to economically transform their communities that are grappling with unemployment from loss of coal mining and other industry jobs, low income wage levels from the existing service providing jobs, black lung disease and environmental degradation. They are calling for investments in former coal communities to create the needed job training and other resources for carrying out the transition to a clean energy economy involving the local people.

Relmagine Appalachia Campaign points to a once-in-a-generation chance to respond to the climate crisis while repairing the nation's infrastructure, cleaning up dangerous pollution, investing in working families and jump-starting the clean energy future – turning the

Appalachia region into a global powerhouse while creating good paying jobs.

The Climate and Energy program of the Union of Concerned Scientists also advocates that a key factor to the successful clean-energy transition across the country is in how the needs of the workers most likely to suffer job losses from the former industries are addressed with retraining in new technologies and renewable energy industries and related business opportunities.

Another aspect to achieving higher levels of economic productivity for all through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation and leaving no one behind, is in the STEM education available to all children in U.S. schools. The U.S. math scores from K-12 schools currently lag behind those of other developed nations. For example, the U.S. ranked 28th out of the 38 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in math in 2023. In science, the U.S. rank 12th out of the 38 OECD countries. [OECD members are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the U.S.] The reasons for the lower quality education with available curriculum are inadequate funding for the public schools, and underpaid teachers. Expensive private schools have higher performance in math and science, and the disparity between the quality of education in public schools in low-income areas and private schools in higher-income areas is growing. Quality education for all children in the U.S. is one key to a future economy that provides decent jobs for all – if the other factors in creating the jobs are also carried out.

Target 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

Small businesses are the foundation of the U.S. economy, employing 61.6 million people representing 45.9% of all U.S. workers. But small businesses in general have a very difficult time surviving in the U.S. Their owners often working long hours seven days a week. Among the roughly 6 million small businesses with employees, 49% have just 1 to 4 workers.

Small businesses are the backbone of Appalachia, representing 99% of all businesses in the region. Of these businesses, 77% are owner-operated with no employees. Appalachian Voices reports that many small business owners in the region struggle to access capital and the necessary resources to grow, as they receive less capital and fewer loans on average than elsewhere in the country. In Appalachia, closures of local bank branches and the consolidation of banks have left communities with few sources of financial services. Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and local credit unions play a major role in serving rural and distressed communities.

The Inclusiv Network of Community Development Credit Unions (CDCUs) works to remove barriers to financial opportunities for people living in economically distressed communities across the U.S. CDCUs provide vital banking services that help people with low incomes build some wealth, and CDCUs reinvest locally by making affordable loans to expand homeownership, finance small businesses, grow environmental sustainability, and support financial security.

In Puerto Rico, with nearly 40% of residents living below the U.S. poverty line, the people suffer disinvestment in their local economy as well as devastation from increasingly intense natural disasters with the hurricanes Maria in 2017 and Fiona in 2022. Community development credit unions and Cooperativas have been financial first responders in these disasters, providing critical humanitarian relief and

financial services to their communities. These community-based and owned institutions have developed in the last decade because of the assistance from the New York-based Inclusiv network of CDCUs. The network has branches in 75 of the 78 municipalities on the island. The Cooperativa Network played a critical role in recovery efforts when Hurricane Fiona hit the island in September 2022, not only by ensuring access to cash and financial services throughout the crisis but also going above and beyond to transform into community centers for families to access electricity, food, water and other supplies which are consistently cut off due to lack of fiscal investment by the U.S. Congress in this territory of the U.S.

Across the U.S., small businesses are burdened with so many taxes – federal, state, local, payroll, sales taxes and more – that owners report they are often glad to at least break even with no debt at the end of the year once taxes are paid. To further jeopardize small businesses with narrow margins of profit, rising food prices, energy costs and inflation have further strained local economies, which negatively impact small businesses. Some insurance providers have dropped policies or made access to coverage more expensive. Despite these obstacles to those who are the backbone of the economy, government intervention has remained minimal, with only temporary tax deferrals offered as relief.

Big corporations in the U.S., on the other hand, making billions of dollars in profits, often receive tax breaks from the government, or hire accountants to find deductions and loopholes to pay no taxes. Some large corporations offshore their assets and profits, enabling them to bypass state and federal taxes altogether in the U.S. The practical result is that those possessing and obtaining the greatest wealth effectively shift the tax burden onto those who face a disproportionate burden, negatively impacting the ability of small businesses to expand operations, create more jobs and invest in the communities in which they work.

Target 8.6: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

In 2024, about 40.5% of recent college graduates – 22 to 27 year olds with a bachelor's degree or higher – were underemployed or working in a job that does not require a bachelor's degree. Given



Day laborers on clean-up crews post urban fire in Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of National Day Laborers Organizing Network.

that American students owe about \$1.6 trillion in student loans as of June 2024, 42% more than what they owed a decade earlier, these young people will be saddled with debt for a long time. Solutions are needed to make higher education affordable. Good jobs in the fields young people care about, that will make a difference in solving the country's social, economic and environmental problems, need to be developed to provide those opportunities to them.

For more than a decade, from 7% to 10% of U.S. teens – over 2 million teenagers – were not working or in school. Youth who are disconnected from both employment and school more often come from low-income areas, from families with housing insecurity and are vastly overrepresented by Native American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Black and Latino youth, together accounting for 70.9% of disconnected youth. This is a systemic problem that can be addressed by working towards the achievement of Goal 1, Goal 3, Goal 4, Goal 9, Goal 11 and Goal 13.

Growing lack of job security for educators in higher education: It used to be that 70% of academic faculty held tenured or tenure-track positions. Today, that number has flipped, with 68% of faculty locked out of tenure eligibility and 48% working in part-time, contingent roles, and their livelihoods subject to student enrollment numbers and unstable funding. Young people pursuing degrees and thinking of going into academia can no longer consider this a secure career.

Target 8.8: Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

Day laborers: Day laborers work in construction, in warehouses, environmental remediation and landscaping, farm work, as well as domestic work for private households, among other jobs.

Founded in California in 2001, National Day Laborers Organizing Network is an alliance of 12 community-based organizations with 70 workers' centers across the country committed to improving the lives of day laborers and low-wage workers. Day laborers and immigrant workers are at risk of extreme exploitation and unethical working conditions. Migrant workers contribute significantly to the U.S. economy by expanding the labor force, boosting economic growth and filling critical labor needs. According to the Immigrant Research

Initiative, migrant labor accounts for 17% of U.S. GDP. In California, migrant workers contributed 8.5 billion dollars in taxes to local and state governments in 2022.

The mean wage for a day laborer is \$22.93 per hour in southern California (where typical housing costs exceed \$2,000 per month on the low end), with construction paying an average of \$24.32 per hour, and cleaning roles being the lowest paying at an average of \$19.02 per hour. These jobs provide no benefits – no sick leave, no health coverage and certainly no vacation pay. While a laborer might gross \$1,000 in one week with five 8-hour days of work, he or she may have no work the next week or longer, or suffer an injury with no access to compensation for lost work days.

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) calculated that low-wage workers lose as much as \$50 billion annually due to wage theft. Recovering stolen wages is extremely challenging, and only a fraction of all potential wages stolen are recovered through the aid of pro-bono legal help and grassroots organizations. When day laborers are migrants, they are more susceptible than others to wage theft. A survey in the New Orleans area by a day laborers organization reported that wage theft is frequent and widespread, with half of all survey par-



Farm workers in the fields of California. Photo Public Domain.

ticipants reporting they have been victims of wage theft. Employers use various tactics of lies and deception as well as outright refusal to pay. In some cases, employers abandon day laborers at job sites or underpay them, and workers may reluctantly accept the lower wage because they fear that if they protest, they will not be paid anything at all or will not be offered work in the future.

Prison Labor: Of the 1.2 million people incarcerated in state and federal prisons in the U.S., nearly 800,000 are prison laborers, most of them by force. “Prison labor” refers to the work performed by individuals incarcerated in prisons, permitted under the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment for crime. In the United States, prison labor generates billions of dollars in goods and services annually, with little of that going into the hands of the incarcerated workforce. Most of these workers are employed in facility maintenance and operations, such as janitorial duties, food preparation, grounds maintenance, and laundry – tasks that keep the institutions that imprison them running – and are paid \$0.14 to \$0.63 an hour. Of the other roughly 20%, about 17% work for government-run businesses, where they might staff Department of Motor Vehicles call centers or wash laundry for public institutions, or are placed on public projects tasked with hazardous spill cleanup or firefighting duties in state-owned forests. The other 3% work for private-sector employers who have contracted with the state to place their factory in the prison producing goods for industries across the U.S. economy – everything from clothing to furniture and eye glasses – and pay from \$0.23 to \$1.15 per hour. This sector has been growing in the prisons over recent decades. In seven Southern states – Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas – almost all work by prisoners remains unpaid.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



As long as this large source of low-cost and free labor is maintained, and as long as there is also a strata of low-paid unrecognized day laborers, temporary and part-time workers doing the construction work, farm work, and service work jobs, everyone’s jobs are susceptible to re-stratification downward.

Solutions

- Eliminate federal labor laws that curtail and hinder labor organizing, and criminalize its most successful tactics.
- Mandate living wages for all who can work, at 47 ½% of the output dollar or enough to support a family commensurate with the actual cost of living.
- End coerced prison labor, and ensure workers in prison industries and jobs receive parity pay. Involve former inmates in the development of rehabilitative job training programs in prison that will enable formerly incarcerated people to enter the workforce on release, with job programs that pay wages equivalent to wages paid for the same work outside of prison.
- Provide tax credits to small and micro-businesses for development and growth. Tax large corporations commensurate with their real revenues.
- Provide more support for Community Development Credit Unions to advance equitable economic growth.
- Make access to financial institutions and loans easier for small businesses. Remove regulatory barriers to small and minority Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI) funds and provide robust funding for the CDFI Fund in areas where there are no financial services in low-income and working class communities.
- Address inequities in the financial system and stop predatory lending.



Goal 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Targets:

14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

in danger. Care for the health of the oceans is a global concern and can only be tackled through global cooperation. Yet, the U.S. government prohibited its scientists – the experts from the federal scientific and regulatory agencies National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) – from attending the 2025 UN Ocean Conference held this June in Nice, France, where the top ocean policy and marine researchers of the world gathered to determine the best courses of action.

While the U.S. government was absent from this conference, 140 American scientists from private nongovernmental institutions and universities did attend. Participating also was the mayor of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, LaToya Cantrell. She highlighted the importance of local U.S. leadership taking action to protect the oceans, citing the importance of the Mississippi River Delta to the Gulf South's economy and culture, and underscored the need for immediate action to protect the coast. She stressed the role of local, community-driven innovation and the necessity of inclusivity and youth leadership. She described local initiatives like stormwater parks and workforce development programs that are under way, with a call for global support to fund and follow local leadership, for sustainable development.

Mayor Cantrell exemplifies the many local U.S. officials who are taking action to solve problems not being recognized at the federal level, and are involving nongovernmental stakeholders in the planning. They are calling for the needed federal government support but are not waiting for it.

Target 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

Sewage and Stormwater run-off: Surfrider Foundation, a nonprofit organization with chapters across the U.S. composed of science, environmental and legal professionals and others committed to protecting the ocean, provides reports regularly on how coastal water quality and public health are threatened by increasing storm

Problems

Overview

The ecosystems of the world's oceans and the ability of the oceans to absorb carbon and produce the oxygen all life depends on is

water, urban and agricultural runoff as well as sewage and industrial discharges.

Currently, U.S. beaches and ocean fronts are plagued by frequent spills of raw and under-treated sewage. Much of the country's wastewater infrastructure, including septic systems, sewer lines, cesspools and combined sewer overflows, are outdated and failing, releasing harmful pollution into our waterways that threaten public health, coastal ecosystems and tourism-based ocean economies. Over 900 billion gallons of raw sewage are released into U.S. waterways each year from sewer overflows alone. For example, sewage spills in Florida are getting worse with more frequent and severe hurricanes and extreme weather events, where over-burdened, aging wastewater infrastructure threatens public health and life in the ocean. Failure to acknowledge and adequately fund the upkeep and modernization of these systems has led to a backlog of roughly \$271 billion worth of necessary infrastructure upgrades. (This relates directly to Goal 9: Industry Innovation and Infrastructure.)

In addition to sewage, 10 trillion gallons of untreated stormwater runoff flows into U.S. waterways every year, carrying a cocktail of pollutants including road dust, oil, animal waste, fertilizers, and other chemicals, many of which end up in the ocean. More frequent heavy rain storms and hurricanes in recent years have sent greatly increased amounts of untreated runoff into the waterways and the sea. These pollutants are devastating to marine life.

Sewage and stormwater runoff wreak havoc on coastal ecosystems with excess nutrients that fuel harmful algae blooms that put human health at risk and result in fish kills, coral reef die-offs, and even the recent mass starvation of 2,000 endangered manatees in Florida's Indian River Lagoon.

For humans, the Centers for Disease Control estimates that more than 5 million people get sick from swimming in contaminated water each year. Untreated sewage discharged in the water can contain bacteria, viruses and parasites that cause gastrointestinal symptoms, rashes, skin and eye infections, flu-like symptoms, and worse. (This directly relates to Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being.)

Surfrider's Blue Water Task Force is the largest volunteer-run beach water testing program in the U.S., with a national network of 60

chapter-led labs that process over 10,000 water samples to measure bacteria levels at more than 600 locations across the country on both coasts and on the south gulf. In 2024, 80% of beaches and sampling sites tested (483 of 604) yielded high bacteria levels that exceeded state health standards in at least one sampling, and 25% of all samples measured high bacteria levels, up from 22% in 2023.

Surfrider Foundation volunteers work to build awareness in the communities around these beaches about the pollution problems and provide critical public health information. They offer assistance and call for government at all levels to do what is necessary to find and fix the sources of pollution.

Heal the Bay, an environmental nonprofit in Santa Monica, California, dedicated to making California coastal waters safe and healthy for people and marine life, reported a 6% drop in beach water quality grades in 2025 for the California beaches they test. An estimated 10 billion gallons of untreated stormwater runoff enter local Los Angeles waterways each year now, carrying bacteria, toxins and plastic that harm public health and marine life. This pollution leads to algae blooms, dead zones, and wildlife hazards. Heal the Bay advocates for stormwater infrastructure upgrades and nature-based solutions to improve water quality and protect coastal ecosystems.

In the U.S., more than 100 million people enjoy U.S. beaches each year. The beach towns that rely on coastal tourism and ocean recreation sustain 2.5 million jobs nationwide and contribute \$240 billion in gross domestic product to the national economy annually. The health of the people and those local economies are increasingly at risk. The health of life in the ocean is increasingly at risk without the



necessary responsible investments being made in preventing these sources of contamination.

Plastic: Fifty percent of plastic produced in the world today is “single use” and 11 million tons of plastic enters the ocean every year on top of the estimated 200 million metric tons that currently circulate in our marine environments. Recycling isn’t enough to solve the problem. Even California, for example, can’t recycle most of the plastic that residents put into their blue recycle bins. The state’s facilities can’t keep pace with plastic’s exponential growth, and they can’t handle most types of plastics produced today. Only an estimated 9% of the plastics ever produced have been recycled and 12% have been incinerated. The remainder is either still in use, or has been disposed of in landfills or released into the environment, including the oceans. In the U.S., 73% goes into landfills, 19 % is incinerated, only 4% is recycled, and 4% is unaccounted for – scattered in places like beaches and the ocean.

To date, humans have created around 11 billion metric tons of plastic, an amount that surpasses the biomass of all animals, both terrestrial and marine. Currently, about 430 million tons of plastic is produced yearly, according to the United Nations Environment Program. Although several bio-based plastics have been developed, they still make up less than 1% of the market, due to lack of investment and pressure from the oil and gas corporations invested in expanding the production and use of petroleum based plastic.

Heal the Bay reports that the unchecked plastic waste stream poses a significant global threat, wreaking havoc on animals, outdoor places and ecosystems. Heal the Bay found that 70% of waste from public beach clean-ups done by volunteers in Los Angeles County is plastic. These clean-up programs that volunteer groups, local businesses and municipalities often sponsor cannot keep up with the amount of plastic trash that ends up on beaches along all the coasts.

Microplastics, tiny plastic particles, have been increasingly found in water and soil and in the bodies of marine animals and humans. These particles lead to the spread of harmful pathogens, increasing the risk for chronic health conditions such as cancers, birth defects, impaired immunity, endocrine disruption and other serious health issues.

World Wildlife Fund reports that at least 100,000 marine birds and animals die from plastic pollution every year, either by ingestion or entanglement. Plastic harms even small sea creatures. Phytoplankton often attach to microplastics, which can damage their photosynthesis and cells. In addition to being an important part of the entire ocean food chain, phytoplankton produce 50-80% of the Earth’s oxygen through photosynthesis, and they absorb carbon in the process. They are essential to human and ocean life.

The U.S. plastic industry also produces 232 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent gas emissions (CO₂e) annually in the process of producing plastics, equal to 116 coal-fired power plants. This is further accelerating global warming including the ocean, and disrupting the plankton, thus further feeding the upward global warming trend.

Rising temperature of the oceans: Warmer waters contribute to marine heat waves, which disrupt ecosystems, drive harmful algal blooms and cause habitat loss for species like the large kelp forests, which are critical for marine biodiversity. An algal bloom in Southern California in spring of 2025 caused domoic acid poisoning of local marine mammal species. Warming ocean water is understood by local scientists to be the cause of sea star wasting disease. A major bout of this wiped out all sunflower sea stars in California over the last decade and resulted in a rise of purple sea urchins that prey on



Sea otters and their pups live in and rely on kelp forests for protection and food foraging. Photo courtesy of Ruth Ann Angus.

kelp leading to major kelp forest loss. Many small fish and crustaceans seek refuge from the tumultuous open ocean in kelp forests, and baby fish hide there from predators before they grow to their adult size. Kelp forests also provide protection to coastlines from erosion, an important role in a world facing sea level rise and more frequent storms. Action is needed to restore and preserve kelp forests in our oceans.

The ocean absorbs excess heat from rising global temperatures. Scientists have determined that the ocean, which covers 70% of the earth's surface, absorbs more than 90 percent of the excess heat which is attributed to greenhouse gas emissions. The greater levels of deep ocean heat coincides with increases in global average land and sea surface temperatures. At this time, 90% of global warming is occurring in the ocean, causing the water's internal heat to continuously increase since modern record keeping began in 1955. Major effects of ocean warming include sea level rise due to thermal expansion, coral bleaching, accelerated melting of Earth's major ice sheets and intensified hurricanes and typhoons and threats to the sustainability of many ocean species. (This links the life of the ocean to Goal 13 – Climate Action.)

Target 14.2: By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

Temperature stress and ocean acidification, which lead to coral bleaching and less coral growth respectively, are global problems seen in the U.S., mostly in Florida. Florida's Coral Reef, a barrier bank reef, is the largest reef system in the continental U.S. and it is dying. Decades ago, the reef tract stretched 350 miles from end to end, and was full of life. Hints of that richness remain, but instead of colorful coral gardens, thick mats of grass-like seaweed known as algae turf now cover much of the reef. According to NOAA estimates, the reef's healthy coral cover has fallen 90% since the late 1970s due to a combination of disease, heat stress, sediment and nutrient pollution, development, hurricanes and damage from boats.

In summer 2023, a period of record-high water temperatures further damaged the reef. The Straits of Florida faced water temperatures of 87° Fahrenheit (31° Celsius) and above as early as mid-June, and they remained, in many places, above that level

into October. In some areas, water temperatures occasionally soared above 93°F.

In addition to the rising temperature of the sea and the growing frequency and severity of storms, coral disease outbreaks are now one of the major causes of reef degradation and coral mortality around the globe. Many factors are contributing to the problem, including pollution, septic and agricultural runoff, and warming ocean temperatures.

NOAA reports that despite these threats, management actions can make a difference, but federal support combined with public participation in preservation and conservation of coral reefs is needed to protect and restore Florida's coral reef.

Off-shore Drilling: Drilling for oil and gas, especially in the Gulf of Mexico, is an increasingly alarming danger for U.S. estuaries, coasts and all of ocean life. The BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 was one of the most catastrophic human-caused disasters in history. According to the National Wildlife Federation, as many as 8,000 sea birds, sea turtles, mammals, and other species were found injured or dead in the first six months of the oil spill. Fifteen years later, oil from this spill is still having a detrimental



Off-shore oil rig on horizon. Photo public domain.

impact on the salt marshes of the Gulf Coast, affecting the entire ecosystem. While there has been progress, the more heavily impacted salt marshes will still take many years to recover.

In May 2025, leaders of the Business Alliances for Protecting the Pacific and the Atlantic Coasts – which together represent over 50,000 business and 500,000 fishing families – wrote a lengthy joint letter to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management of the U.S. Department of the Interior, strongly opposing any expansion of offshore drilling. They point to the fact that since the Deepwater Horizon spill, there have been more than 7,300 oil spills in federal waters, including in recent years two major oil spills off Southern California.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, which manages commercial and recreational fisheries for more than 65 marine species, and whose industry supports over 36,000 jobs, also wrote in June 2025 to the Bureau in opposition to any expansion of off-shore drilling. Whether the federal government heeds the voices of the people and their businesses remains to be seen.

In the Florida panhandle, the Apalachicola River drains from the Carolinas in the Appalachian Mountains into the Gulf of Mexico. Apalachicola Riverkeeper, a nonprofit grassroots organization, has worked for more than a quarter century holding polluters and policy makers accountable, educating about the ecosystem and its importance, training young people to be caretakers of the river and bay, and exposing environmental injustices to the people who depend on the environment in many ways. Apalachicola River monitors the gap between science and policy, debunking misinformation, and scrutinizing solutions. Their recent year-long effort to block a Louisiana company's plans to operate a wildcat oil rig along the environmentally fragile Apalachicola River recently succeeded in reversing the Florida Department of Environmental Protection decisions to permit an exploratory oil well along the river.

The people who live around the Atchafalaya Basin, located in south-central Louisiana extending from the confluence of the Mississippi, Red and Atchafalaya Rivers near Simmesport, Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico, are another example of a community in action protecting waterways, wetlands and the ocean, forming Atchafalaya Basinkeeper which reports that despite it being the most important habitat for migratory birds in the Northern Hemisphere, one of the most

productive wetlands in the world and the last of its kind in North America, the basin is under siege. They have mobilized to protect the basin from oil field pollution including oil waste and mercury pollution; illegal development; dredging of oil field canals that change the natural hydrology of the Basin, accelerating siltation and water quality problems; failures on the part of regulatory agencies to enforce the law, and privatization of the land.

Of national and international concern, the U.S. executive branch unilaterally declared, in April 2025, its authorization for deep sea mining to commence in U.S. and international waters – flouting the decision by the rest of the world to put such exploits on hold until further research is carried out into the damage it will do to the ocean's ecosystems. These unilateral decrees not only impede global efforts to build international cooperation on saving the people of all nations from further environmental crisis, but also are contrary to what the majority of the people in the U.S. have been calling for: restore and protect our planet, end fossil fuel use, stop global warming.

Many community-based organizations in U.S. coastal areas, bays, estuaries and river areas are expanding their efforts at this time to fight for the protection and restoration of their waterways and the ocean.

Target 14.3: Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

Ocean acidification refers to a change in ocean chemistry in response to the absorption of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is in equilibrium with that in seawater, so when atmospheric concentrations increase, so do oceanic concentrations. Carbon dioxide entering seawater reacts to form carbonic acid, causing an increase in acidity.

Each year, the ocean absorbs about one-quarter of the carbon dioxide emitted from the burning of fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas). Since the Industrial Revolution, ocean acidity has increased by about 30%, a rate more than 10 times what has previously occurred for millions of years. Further, ocean acidity levels are expected to increase by an additional 40% above present levels by the end of this century with the current rate of carbon dioxide emissions.

Increases in ocean acidity reduce the availability of dissolved salts and ions needed by corals to form their calcium carbonate structure.

According to Heal the Bay, ocean acidification is having impacts in California waters, which are particularly vulnerable due to coastal upwelling which brings naturally acidic waters to the surface, and due to nutrient runoff, which further exacerbates ocean acidification. It is weakening the shells of animals like oysters, mussels, and others like pteropods and coccolithophores, which are part of the plankton community and a critical part of the marine food web. These changes threaten coastal communities and fisheries that depend on shellfish and seafood for their livelihoods and threaten the entire life cycles of all species. Without a reversal in carbon emission levels, necessary infrastructure to prevent run-off and sewage contamination and halt to what causes human-induced global warming, acidification of the oceans will hasten the collapse of the oceans' ability to support life.

Shipping, which transports around 90% of world trade and accounts for nearly 3% of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, has faced calls from environmentalists and investors alike to deliver concrete action toward decarbonizing the industry.

A new Net-Zero Framework is set for international adoption at the next International Marine Organization meeting in October 2025. It will provide a path for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including



A volunteer teaches school children about sea animals. Photo courtesy of Heal the Bay.

fuel intensity limits and the first global greenhouse gas pricing system for an entire sector. These initiatives also require scaling up technology and financing for development of alternative fuels, to drive a just and inclusive energy transition – to which the U.S. could be a valuable contributor. Without bringing the issue up for review by the people and related businesses and scientists of the U.S., the federal government has withdrawn from those talks and announced U.S. rejection of any and all efforts to impose economic measures against its ships based on greenhouse gas emissions or fuel choice, and will consider “reciprocal measures” to offset any fees charged to U.S. ships. Stand.earth, a U.S. and Canadian-based environmental advocacy and action organization, pointed out, “Because of the international nature of shipping, there is no way for the U.S. to diplomatically remove themselves from the impacts of this climate crisis whether they are part of the solutions or not. Either way, like withdrawing from the Paris agreement, all this does is ensure that the U.S. is left behind as the rest of the world moves towards a decarbonized future.”

All life on the planet depends on the oxygen produced by ocean plankton and on the health of all the ecosystems of the ocean; to not take all measures necessary to stop carbon emission and reverse global – and ocean – warming, puts the human race on a suicidal track.

Target 14.4: By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

Almost 90% of global marine fish stocks are fully exploited or overfished, requiring more regulation and enforcement to curb illegal fishing methods and quantities and to continue to protect certain species. More than 820 million people in the world depend on fisheries and aquaculture for food, nutrition and income. But the ability of the world's fisheries to provide jobs and nutrition is being threatened by an unprecedented crisis of overfishing and improper resource management.

The largest fishery collapse the world had seen occurred when the Atlantic cod population on the U.S. northeast coast collapsed in 1992 due to overfishing, bringing their population down to less than 1% of its historic biomass. Oceana, an international nonprofit with offices in

five U.S. locations, points to the history of fisheries mismanagement as the cause. Under a 1976 law that was amended in the 1990s, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service now develops management plans for 45 fisheries, setting quotas and determining the start and close of fishing seasons, in consultation with federal government scientists and local fishermen, to avoid overfishing of any particular species. Efforts to rebuild overfished fish populations in the United States have been successful, with a number of species regaining healthy levels, such as the Atlantic sea scallop, the Mid-Atlantic bluefish (which had almost disappeared in the late 1990s but was successfully restored to healthy levels by 2009), the red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico (recovered from depletion with ten years of conservation methods), and the Cape Cod and Gulf of Maine stocks of Yellowtail flounder that have recovered to healthy levels. This cannot be achieved and maintained without ongoing regulation and management, as most fisherman and industry associations of America's \$320 billion fishing industry acknowledge and appreciate.

Yet, in May 2025, an executive order issued by the U.S. executive branch declared fishing regulations lifted, allegedly for the purpose of "helping" U.S. fishermen catch more fish than foreign competitors. Organizations of fisheries and conservation groups are mobilizing in protest.

Target 14.5: By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

There are five U.S. designated marine national monuments, underwater protected zones designated to protect unique and relatively undisturbed marine ecosystems. They are: the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument located in the Mariana Archipelago in the Pacific Ocean; the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument located in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of southern New England; the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument, formerly known as the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, in the Pacific Ocean; the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument located in the Pacific Ocean, encompassing the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands; and the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument located in the Pacific Ocean, in American Samoa.

The Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument is the largest of these, a fully protected ocean sanctuary that has served as a

'fish bank' allowing fish populations to recover, while protecting the habitats in which they thrive. The U.S. executive branch in May 2025 declared more than 408,000 square miles of this protected area now open to commercial fishing, claiming it would help U.S. fisherman compete internationally.

Rather than offering leadership in conserving more marine areas and applying successful conservation measures that maintain the stocks the fishing industry depends on in the areas designated for them, the U.S. is now taking protected areas away and removing protective management regulations – contrary to the best available scientific information.

Oceana and many other environmental and fishery business groups have warned that deregulation of the U.S. fishing industry will not help; it will harm the fishing industry and further endanger hundreds of marine species.

Target 14.6: By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fishery subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

Fifty years ago, 90% of fish stocks in the world were biologically sustainable – the level of fishing meant stocks could replenish themselves. By 2021, that figure had fallen to only about 62%. In 2022, after two decades of negotiations, the member nations of the World Trade Organization (WTO), including the U.S., came to consensus on rules they would abide by to collectively address the problem of subsidies to large-scale industrial fishing companies that do not use sustainable fishing practices and are depleting the stocks, and the U.S. was among the first four nations to accept the agreement.

In June 2025 the Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reported that some of the world's marine fisheries, previously depleted, are recovering under strong, science-based management, but many others remain under pressure. The report is based on data from over 650 experts from more than 200 institutions and over 90 countries, giving the clearest picture to date of the state of global

marine fisheries. The report confirms that 64.5 percent of all fishery stocks are exploited within biologically sustainable levels, with 35.5 percent of stocks classified as overfished. 77.2 percent of the fisheries caught globally and commercially sold come from biologically sustainable stocks.

In marine fishing areas under effective fisheries management, sustainability rates far exceed the global average. In the Northeast Pacific, for example, which includes the coastal waters from Alaska to California, extending into the broader North Pacific basin, 92.7 percent of stocks are sustainably fished.

Not all areas are on track. For example, off the west coast of Africa, only 47.4 percent of stocks are sustainably fished. In these countries fisheries are central to food security and nutrition, employment, and poverty reduction, particularly through small-scale and artisanal operations. These governments need international support for the achievement of their poverty alleviation and sustainable development programs and in their pursuit of all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Then they will be able to also install management programs for their fishing practices. This is an example of how important international cooperation is for each nation to thrive without harming other nations.

Conclusion

As the participation of the Mayor of New Orleans in the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France this June, and the work of thousands of volunteers with organizations like Surfrider Foundation, Heal the Bay and many others demonstrate, the people and the local leadership of towns and cities across the U.S. urgently seek to solve the problems that destroy the life of our oceans, and call for Goal 14 to be taken up at all levels of government.

Solutions

- Ensure the protection and conservation of marine areas, strengthen compliance mechanisms, increase surveillance through technology, and support local communities in conservation efforts.
- Stop offshore fossil fuel extraction, subsidize renewable energy systems such as solar and wind and other non-carbon energy generating solutions.

- Increase public education so everyone can be better stewards of the ocean, its coastal eco-systems, marine life and marine wilderness areas.
- Administrate an end to the use of fossil fuels nationwide; stop the fossil fuel industry from blocking necessary progress in development and implementation of alternatives to carbon and other greenhouse gas-emitting sources of energy in all industries in order to slow and reverse global warming, climate change, sea level rise, and ocean acidification.
- The U.S. government should take the lead in fulfilling its overdue commitment to capitalize the Green Climate Fund to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions, and inspiring the other developed nations to do the same through its actions. The funds required are a small fraction of the profits made by the enormous fossil fuel, carbon-emitting corporations that pay little or no taxes.
- Fund wetland restoration, effective groundwater management and the use of natural infrastructure for shoreline protection to strengthen coastal neighborhoods and habitats.
- Invest in the production of biodegradable plastics or alternatives and improve operations and programs aimed at plastic waste management, recycling and re-use.
- Provide funding for local and regional farmers who are regenerating the land and growing food with natural methods to decrease chemical runoff into the ocean. Stop subsidies to the largest corporate landowners who are growing monocultures, degrading the lands, not restoring them.
- Support increased involvement in management and stewardship of public lands by Tribes, Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives and territorial governments.
- Communities must organize to lead advocacy, education, and policy change work to fight for these solutions.



Goal 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

This important Goal calls for an increase in international cooperation and solidarity between nations and sharing of resources necessary to make the other 16 Goals possible.

Goal 17 has 19 targets in the categories of finance of official development assistance commitments; technology; capacity-building; trade; and systemic issues such as “enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries” and “Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.”

Problem

At least since March, 2025, the U.S. government has rejected the very premise this Goal stands on, and all of the Sustainable Development Goals. The U.S. government increasingly shuns international multilateral cooperation and respect for international law and agreements.

Solutions

To end the scourge of poverty and war that wracks the world, to achieve sustainable economic development for all, and to succeed in stopping the global threats of global warming and loss of the earth’s biodiversity and ecosystems, we must recognize the interdependence of all nations and work cooperatively.

While the U.S. government is acting unilaterally with apparent disregard for the necessity of building cooperation among nations, it is also acting against the true historic and long-term interests of the majority of the people in the U.S., and thus isolating the country from the many international bodies that work to solve or prevent

crisis. However, there are many sub-national partnerships by cities, counties and states as well as international professional associations and business associations based in the U.S. that *will* continue to engage in positive and productive international relations focused on the achievement of one or more of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. These efforts need to keep growing.

In our work of promoting voluntary service and action in the U.S. and internationally, Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) assists nongovernment grassroots organizations working for the systemic solutions needed to the economic, social and environmental problems faced in their communities. CVSA advances Goal 17 by building partnerships and alliances with educational institutions, faith-based groups, other nongovernmental organizations and business associations, to join forces for the 2030 SDGs.

In 1982, the U.S. military budget was \$180 billion. In December 2023, the U.S. government allocated \$841.4 billion to the military budget, and increased it further to \$953 billion in April 2024. The U.S. military budget is larger than the next ten largest national military budgets combined. More than half the nation’s federal budget is allocated to the military. That money could be used instead to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals and solve domestic problems and the causes of international conflict. But powerful financial interests and the billionaire class in the U.S. impede this shift in priorities.

The approach of Commission on Voluntary Service & Action to Goal 17 is to build alliances and partnerships with other nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, faith-based groups and business and professional associations in order to mobilize people into action for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in solidarity with the people of all nations.

International respect for the U.S. will also greatly increase when it ends the illegal (by international law) unilateral trade and financial

blockade on Cuba, and economic sanctions on numerous other developing countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa. For over 24 years the U.S. has refused to abide by the annual near-unanimous UN General Assembly vote to end the inhumane and illegal blockade it has held on Cuba since 1960. Cuba is respected worldwide for its international humanitarian aid to countries throughout Latin America, Africa, Asia and even Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. is isolated in its refusal to build normal relations with the island country and with all other developing countries who have chosen a path to development that is different from that of the U.S., which is their sovereign right.

Since its founding in 1945, CVSA has sought to build people-to-people friendship among nations to prevent the scourge of fascism from ever rising again and promote peace and prosperity for all people. That work is not finished and CVSA will do its part to organize and fight for the accomplishment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S. and the world toward that end. We hope you will join us.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Photo courtesy of UN Photo/Evan Schneider



CVSA volunteers on community outreach about the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and volunteer opportunities.: CVSA Photo.

Organizations whose work provided inspiration for this report and contributed data to its content:

Appalachia Service Project, Johnson City, Tennessee
asphome.org
Brings volunteers from around the country to Central Appalachia to repair and replace homes for low-income families.

Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, Inc., Plaquemine, Louisiana
basinkeeper.org
Works to protect and restore the swamps, lakes, rivers, streams and bayous of the Atchafalaya Basin.

Apalachicola Riverkeeper, Apalachicola, Florida
apalachicolariverkeeper.org
Protects the Appalachian River and Bay.

Appalachian Voices, Boone, North Carolina
appvoices.org
Brings people together to protect the land, air and water of Central and Southern Appalachia and advance a clean energy economy.

Bethlehem Farm, Alderson, West Virginia
bethlehemfarm.net
Transforms lives through service throughout the local community and the teaching of sustainable practices.

Black Women for Wellness, Los Angeles, California
bwwla.org
Community-based, grassroots, works to eliminate health inequities, systemic racism and misogyny.

Christie's Place, San Diego, California
christiesplace.org
Serves women, children and families whose lives are HIV-impacted.

Damayan, New York, New York
damayanmigrants.org
Organizes and serves low-wage Filipino migrant workers.

Heal The Bay, Santa Monica, California
healthebay.org
Environmental research and advocacy organization for safe, healthy and clean coastal waters and watersheds.

HEAL Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah
healutah.org
Engages communities to advocate for clean air, clean energy, and comprehensive solutions to radioactive and toxic waste.

Hour Children, Queens, New York
hourchildren.org
Provides services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children in New York State.

Inclusiv, New York, New York
www.inclusiv.org
Helps low- and moderate-income people and communities achieve financial independence through credit unions.

M.U.J.E.R., Homestead, Florida
mujerfla.org
Addressing issues of family violence among Latino low-income families living in the Deep South Miami-Dade County.

National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON), Pasadena, California
ndlon.org
A network of associations and worker centers for day laborers, migrants and low-wage workers.

Remote Area Medical, Rockford, Tennessee
ramusa.org
Provides free healthcare services to those in need through the operation of mobile pop-up clinics around the country.

SELAH Neighborhood Homeless Coalition, Los Angeles, California
selahnhc.org
Community-led response to homelessness in Los Angeles

Silver Valley Community Resource Center, Kellogg, Idaho
silvervalleyaction.org
Organizes the community in their demand for the clean up of 1500 square miles of contamination from 100 years of silver mining.

Surfrider Foundation, San Clemente, California
surfrider.org
Dedicated to protecting the world's oceans, waves and beaches.

Women Against Military Madness, Minneapolis, Minnesota
womenagainstmilitarymadness.org
Action-oriented peace and justice organization.

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