

# VOICE

— UN DESA —

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, VOL. 25, NO. 7 – JULY 2021



## If we act now, the global goals are still within reach

---

COVID-19 is threatening decades of progress to improve people's lives across the globe. Unless we take immediate action – now. We already have the best plan for a sustainable, people-centered and planet friendly recovery – the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. What is needed now is to turn these goals into reality, for people and planet.

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development taking place from 6 to 15 July, is just the right venue to make this happen.

“We need to move from death to health; from disaster to reconstruction; from despair to hope; from business as usual to transformation. The Sustainable Development Goals are more important now than ever,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

Thousands of participants are expected to join this year's hybrid edition of the HLPF, focusing on a sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic, while putting a spotlight on nine SDGs (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17). 43 countries will share

their experiences and their recovery strategy to realize the SDGs as part of the [Voluntary National Reviews](#).

International actors will be able to make their voices heard in over 300 side events, 17 [VNR Labs](#) and 17 exhibits and through six HLPF Special Events. UN DESA is also renewing the call for voluntary [SDG Acceleration Actions](#), encouraging actors to add their commitments to over 300 submissions made so far.

As COVID-19 continues to cause devastation, many countries face severe financial and fiscal distress due to lockdowns and disruptions. Data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [shows](#) that 29 countries face high risk of debt, with seven experiencing “debt distress”.

“Our global economy has reached a critical juncture. Decisions and investments taken today will shape the world’s ability to recover from the pandemic and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed.

At the same time, access to critical health resources in most developing countries remain a major challenge. “We have to take some decisive steps towards universal vaccination in order to end the pandemic, which is a prerequisite for economic recovery,” said ECOSOC President Munir Akram.

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted the SDGs in nearly all countries. Unemployment, discrimination, and the need for social justice are emerging challenges, while climate change and food insecurity have worsened.

“We must build back better, greener and fairer. We must put people at the center of all our recovery efforts,” UN DESA’s Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin stressed.

Learn more about this year’s [Forum](#) and follow live via [UN Web TV](#).



## EXPERT VOICES



### Nations come together to showcase actions for a better future

---

On 6-15 July, countries will gather at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. 43 of them will report on efforts to achieve the global goals, while dealing with one of the worst health crises in recent history. We spoke with Irena Zubčević in UN DESA’s Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination, about what to expect and how countries are working to get back on track.

**43 countries will share their actions for the SDGs this year. What can we learn from these actions? How have they been responding to the COVID-19 crisis this past year and a half?**

“The HLPF will be interested to know more about the national plans and strategies for a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19. We already saw last year that countries reported a regression on the SDGs. This is even more evident now, especially on goals related to health, education, unemployment, and inequality. Most countries have reported on their national response to the pandemic, with main actions focusing on social protection, health care, vaccination, economic recovery, food security, education, mental health, employment, debt relief, disaster resilience, data collection, monitoring digitalization, and systems approaches.”

**With less than 10 years left to the 2030 deadline, do you sense that countries are addressing the goals with more urgency now?**

“Yes, I think so, because many countries have realized that had they been more advanced in the SDG implementation before the pandemic, they would have been better prepared to cope with it. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed all the weak points of societies and nations have understood that if they accelerate actions, they will be able to achieve a sustainable recovery and be better equipped to deal with future crises.”

**What do you want to tell the people who call for scaling down the ambition of the SDGs? Is there still hope for achieving the goals?**

“It is our only hope to achieve societies that will share benefits more equally, be inclusive and preserve the environment. The SDGs cover all spheres of our lives and by achieving them, lives of all of us will improve, but for this to happen transformative changes are essential as well as engagement of all.”

**Which actions by the countries presenting this year inspire you the most?**

“I am most inspired by countries who have stepped up to the challenge and provided healthcare, economic and social measures to protect their citizens. Many of these countries are in the global south, which shows that steps in the right direction are not linked only to resources. I am also inspired by many countries who have shown solidarity with other countries and people, by providing assistance to those who need it most including access to the COVID-19 vaccine.” Countries have also shared in their VNR reports new and emerging challenges such as discrimination and social justice. Finally, I would like to mention a trend toward sub-national reporting, which has been proven to enhance and support the VNR process and SDG implementation.”

Learn more about the countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews [here](#).





## Six things you should know about the state of the SDGs

---

As we enter the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, how devastating is its impacts on the global goals? Can the SDGs guide the global community to a brighter future? We are at a critical juncture, where the tragedy of COVID-19 must serve as the wake-up call for the world to work together to achieve the global goals. As UN DESA prepares to launch the Sustainable

Development Goals Report 2021 at the High-level Political Forum, here are 6 things you need to know about the state of the SDGs.

### 1. COVID-19 halted or reversed years, or even decades of development progress

Global poverty rose for the first time in over 20 years. Over 100 million people were pushed back into extreme poverty and chronic hunger. The equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs were lost, and an additional 101 million children have fallen below the minimum reading proficiency level.

### 2. The pandemic has exposed and intensified inequalities

The poorest and most vulnerable are at greater risk of becoming infected by the virus and have borne the brunt of the economic fallout. Vaccine distribution has been a mirror of global inequities: as of 17 June 2021, around 68 vaccines were administered for every 100 people in Europe and Northern America compared with less than 2 in sub-Saharan Africa.

### 3. The economic slump did not slow down the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises

Concentrations of major greenhouse gases continues to increase. The world fell short on 2020 targets aimed at halting biodiversity loss while 5 trillion single-use plastic bags continue to be thrown away each year.

### 4. Governments, the private sector, academia and communities have shown remarkable resilience and action

Governments announced more than 1,600 new social protection measures. Scientists across the globe have worked together to develop life-saving vaccines in record time. And a worldwide digital transformation has changed how we interact, learn, work and conduct business.

### 5. Our future is in our hands and the next months will be critical

Our collective response over the coming 18 months will determine whether the COVID-19 crisis serves as a much-needed wake-up call to spur a decade of truly transformative action that delivers for people and planet.

### 6. Better data guide us in fighting COVID-19 and achieving the SDGs

Timely and high-quality data are more essential than ever before. Decision makers should treat data as a strategic asset and a priority in building back better and increase data financing from both international and domestic resources.



**SDG BLOG**



Amina J. Mohammed  
United Nations Deputy Secretary-General



## Ready to keep the promise of the SDGs

*By Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations*

During this pandemic, I had the honour of delivering a commencement speech. In preparing for my remarks, I thought about the future young people face today and how I felt at that age, full of energy and aspirations, ready to take on the world.

“Ready” is such a loaded word. These past 15 months have shaken up everyone on our planet. Very few communities or countries were prepared for everything that has come our way.

So how can this generation—coming of age in the middle of a pandemic, in a world facing gross inequalities, a climate crisis and an economic depression not seen in decades—be ready? How can any of us prepare for what comes next?

We can start by choosing to be guided by the compass of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs are a kaleidoscope of hope, 17 goals to be mixed and matched to help us realize a more inclusive, green and just world. From bridging the new digital divide to reaching net zero carbon, many of humanity's questions can be answered through the SDGs—if we act now.

### **Honour our shared and lived experience**

Humanity is going through a crisis that nearly every single person on earth has acutely felt. With more than 3.7 million deaths, 41 million people on the brink of famine and 220 million jobs lost—families and societies have been shattered.

Some parts of the world are picking up the pieces, while many regions are diverging to respond to third and fourth waves of the pandemic. As I write this, new variants creating additional waves are being announced, meaning more hopes and dreams are put on hold and more anxiety and fear is woven into our social fabric.

Every next step will be a better one if it can be taken with a deeper appreciation of our shared and lived experience.

We can channel our shared feelings of loss and frustration to push for safety nets for all who are being left behind. We can co-create a narrative that acknowledges the inequalities that exist globally and within our communities.

As much as we rely on data to drive us, lived experience can strengthen our skills and shape our mindset to what comes next.

### **Start something for people and for planet**

Each of us has the ideas and the strength of character to help the world respond to recover better from the health and socioeconomic impact of the virus.

This must begin with a united front in ensuring all people receive a vaccine.

Right now, almost 90% of the world has not been fully vaccinated. More than 3.5 billion young people need digital solutions for education. The year 2020 was among the warmest on record, with wildfires, droughts and storms intensifying. The challenges are real and present, especially for women and youth.

The silver lining in this pandemic is the real opportunity the SDGs bring to solutions and pathways for recovering better. Reaching the SDGs will make us more equally resilient and ready to meet tomorrow's challenge and help us recover faster from today's crisis.

There are solutions all around us. Programmes like [Giga](#) are connecting schools to the internet. There are strategies to close the [gender pay gap](#) and coalitions to build vaccine equity—like [COVAX](#).

We need inclusive solutions that address discrimination and inequality of all kinds.

People also need jobs—especially green jobs that can tackle the climate crisis: everything from clean electricity and clean electric transport to large-scale nature and biodiversity conservation. For every dollar spent on conservation, almost seven more are generated in the larger economy in the medium-term.

Before the pandemic, the financing gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals was US\$ 2.5 trillion per year. As we call for closing the fiscal gaps in our economic stimulus packages, the focus must be on directing these unprecedented investments to foster inclusive and sustainable growth, decent jobs, social protection, and connectivity for a green transition. With these steps, we will spur innovation at scale to ensure solutions reach everyone, everywhere.

## Keep the promise

Humanity merits a recovery that lives up to the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind; a recovery that will strengthen our human rights, health, education, and social protection systems, sharpen our focus on vulnerable communities, empower women in all settings and build resilience.

A recovery that is grounded in advancing a just transition in energy, food systems, digitalization and infrastructure—will help reduce emissions, support people who are shifting from the brown economy and create new and better jobs for a sustainable future.

A recovery that gives space to the intergenerational transition underway — from the frontlines to online will empower young people, especially young women, to build a more inclusive and equal world. All that is needed is for those with power to heed their vision.

A recovery built on the 2030 Agenda's commitment to partnerships and universality will ensure we move forward together, as one humanity, with a whole of society approach.

We all belong to our human family in this world. Now it is time for leaders, governments, businesses, cities, communities, and each of us to keep the promise of the SDGs for all of us and future generations.



## SDGs IN NUMBERS



Stay tuned for the  
SDG Report 2021  
coming out 6 July



### MORE FROM UN DESA

- Robust economic recovery is underway — for some
- Will the pandemic trigger a baby boom or baby bust?

COMING UP



6-15 July 2021



MORE

FIND US ALSO ON:



© United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Unsubscribe | Subscribe | Contact Us | Privacy Notice | Terms of Use | Copyright