

VOICE

UNDESA

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The biggest data event of the year

Over 2,000 participants from the data user and producer communities will come together this month to discuss some of the greatest data challenges in our changing world. The first-ever fully virtual UN World Data Forum, from 19 to 21 October, will bring together data experts from all parts of the world.

Over three days of animated discussions, they will identify innovative solutions for data in a changing world, intensify cooperation on data for sustainable development, and renew the urgent call for more and better funding for data.

“In a world wracked by COVID-19, we need data-based solutions to guide our way to a sustainable future,” said Francesca Perucci Assistant Director of UN DESA’s Statistics Division. “We need data for a changing world, and we need data for a better world.”

“This year has shown us that good data is essential to keep us safe and that data is everyone’s business,” said Claire Melamed, CEO the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, who is preparing to participate in the Forum. “The 2020 virtual World Data Forum will be the place where data experts from around the world come together to build the systems that can protect us.”

“If COVID-19 pandemic has shown us anything, it’s that quick decisions based on solid data and statistics can save lives,” added Shaida Badiee, Managing Director of Open Data Watch.

The Forum participants will draw lessons from the pandemic to discuss ways of putting data to a better use for policymaking and response to COVID-19. The experts will also consider how to improve data availability and use in order to leave no one behind. Finally, they will take a careful look at strategies to ensure the protection of privacy and ensuring trust in data.

The session on trust in data, on 20th October, will coincide with the World Statistics Day 2020, celebrated under the theme “Connecting the World with Data We Can Trust”.

World Statistics Day, established by the General Assembly in 2015, takes place every 5 years on the 20th of October. The day brings a spotlight to the role of statistics in advancing sustainable development for all. This year, the day focuses on the essential aspects of building and maintaining trust in data and statistics, especially in today's world, and the need for strengthening data ecosystems in countries to bring together quality data from various sources to provide more timely data.

This year, the World Statistics Day will be celebrated globally with local events organized by national statistical offices, regional and international statistical organizations, including the UN system organizations, and universities.

For more information:

[World Statistics Day](#)

[UN World Data Forum](#)

HIGHLIGHTS



The eradication of poverty is more pressing than ever

“Ending extreme poverty is at the heart of the world’s efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and build a sustainable future for all”, says UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Despite this, and the coming commemoration of International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October, this man-made crisis persists.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the extent of the underlying social and environmental inequities besetting our societies. It has revealed our hesitant and dismal collective efforts in addressing the interconnected issues of extreme poverty, social inequities and the environment. The need to address all the global goals has never been clearer.

A future with poverty is unsustainable. Symptoms of impoverishment range from the 1.4 million people dying each year from preventable diseases associated with poor sanitation and lack of access to clean drinking water, to the adverse impact environmental damage has on communities, even as it threatens to push humanity further into poverty.

On the UN’s 75th anniversary and the 25th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development, we commemorate a day to eradicate poverty just as a pandemic is exacerbating it. Homelessness makes victims vulnerable to the virus. Families experiencing extreme poverty are forced to live in overcrowded substandard housing with inadequate access to clean water and proper sanitation. Their children cannot access the tools and support needed to pursue their education during periods of lockdown. Millions of children who no longer receive school meals are going hungry.

Too often, these communities' ability to contribute positively to solutions is overlooked; they are not recognized as drivers of change, and their voices are not heard, locally or globally.

International day to be commemorated virtually

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty offers an opportunity to hear from those who are at the forefront of fighting poverty and resisting the impact of global crises.

On 17 October, an online global commemoration will feature video messages from those living in poverty and facing adversity, as well as messages from the UN Secretary-General and other international actors. These will show that social injustice and environmental injustice often go hand-in-hand. The solutions are therefore also closely linked, and their implementation requires the mobilization of all sectors of society.

Join the discussion by using #EndPoverty

For more information about the Day, please visit [this page](#) and follow [@UNDESA](#), [@UNDESASocial](#) on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

HIGHLIGHTS



Responding today for a better tomorrow

UN DESA entered 2020 with a concrete plan of action, placing it on firm footing to respond quickly to the needs of Member States, when the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly upended our daily lives. "In responding to this emergency, the Department immediately pivoted our intellectual resources toward understanding and projecting the real and potential socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic and identifying policy recommendations and concrete actions for Member States to consider," stated

Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin in the newly released UN DESA Highlights 2019-2020 report.

The report presents an overview of the support UN DESA has continued to provide to Member States to advance sustainable development, even amidst a global pandemic.

Covering the period of the 74th session of the General Assembly (September 2019-August 2020) the volume showcases UN DESA's broad expertise across many areas critical to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and demonstrates the Department's well-structured and integrated work towards sustainable development for all.

As the secretariat to the High-level Political Forum for sustainable development, and as a docking station for financing for sustainable development, UN DESA began the 74th session of the General Assembly by providing critical support to the outcomes of the SDG Summit, High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development and the High-level Midterm review of Implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

"Our increased focus, in UN DESA publications, on identifying and forecasting the trajectory of persistent and emerging social, economic, demographic, political and environmental megatrends, and on tracking and forecasting their impact on sustainable development, proved a valuable asset as the United Nations sought to shape the multilateral response to the social and economic impacts of intersecting crises," said Mr. Liu.

"Working with stakeholders across the international community, we will continue to push forward evidence-based policies and build the capacities [...] for moving the world towards sustainable development for all."

UN DESA has come through the period of the 74th General Assembly seeing its impact and relevance grow across the international development sphere. With the 75th session of the General Assembly now underway, UN DESA will build on these achievements to help the world recover better and forge ahead in the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Access the UN DESA Highlights 2019-2020 report [here](#).

GET INVOLVED



Calling for nominations for the prestigious UN Public Service Awards

Every year, the United Nations recognizes institutions around the world for excellence in delivering public services. The UN Public Service Awards (UNPSA) is an annual competition, promoting the role, professionalism and visibility of public service. This year, from among the 403 institutions from 67 countries that were nominated, seven institutions from seven countries were selected to receive the prestigious award. The call has now been made to

find the 2021 honorees.

In launching the nomination process, UN DESA's Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin noted the importance of the 2021 awards as 'the world continues to grapple with the wide-ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic'. He noted that 'the innovation, accountability and effectiveness of public administrations to respond to the crisis and to ensure a green, inclusive and sustainable recovery is more crucial than ever.'

The UNPSA will recognize innovations in the public sector that contribute to more effective and responsive public administration in countries worldwide, including those that contribute to achieving the global goals.

Mr. Liu stressed the importance of gender responsive governance and public service delivery, noting that 'throughout the world, women have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, threatening hard-won advances in closing gaps between women and men across all areas of development'. In support of this, UN DESA will continue its collaboration with UN Women for the awards.

Public sector institutions are invited to submit nominations under one of four categories for the 2021 cycle:

1. Fostering innovation to deliver inclusive and equitable services for all including through digital transformation.
2. Enhancing the effectiveness of public institutions to reach the SDGs.
3. Promoting gender-responsive public services to achieve the SDGs.
4. Institutional preparedness and response in times of crisis.

Initiatives must have been in operation for at least two years at the time of submission, be nominated by a public sector institution, including in the case of public-private partnership initiatives.

Join our webinar to learn more about the awards

Want to make a nomination? On 6 October, UN DESA will host a webinar to showcase the work of the 2020 UNPSA winners, as well as share details on the 2021 process to better prepare institutions to submit a nomination. Details on the webinar can be found [here](#).

Additional details and nomination forms in all six UN languages can be found [here](#). The deadline for submissions is 18 November 2020.

EXPERT VOICES



Shaping the trends that shape our world

Climate catastrophes, a global pandemic, automation of jobs – the interconnected crises unleashing havoc on our world seem to have slipped out of our control and taken a life of their own. But a new report by the UN Economist Network stresses that the five greatest challenges facing humanity are all human-made and can be shaped by our policies. We talk to UN Chief Economist Elliott Harris who has led this analysis by economists in dozens of UN entities.

The new UNEN report identifies five megatrends that will shape our world over the next 75 years. Why these five?

“First of all, each of these five megatrends has a direct link to the 2030 Agenda. Four of them have their “own” SDG – climate change, urbanization, technological innovation and inequalities. The fifth megatrend, demographic developments, features prominently in the targets of several goals. Combined, these megatrends can make or break our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Secondly, all of these megatrends are closely interlinked. Each exerts a direct influence on the others, reinforcing their impacts, or slowing or counteracting them. “

And that is the key takeaway from this sweeping research: the fact that none of these megatrends can be regarded in isolation. What are the implications of this finding?

"Our analysis highlights the interlinkages among the megatrends. It means that policies to shape a given megatrend can also influence the other megatrends, possibly generating co-benefits. This is key to designing better policies and prioritizing interventions."

The analysis also allows us to see more clearly how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting various groups differently. For example, the increase in online work because of lockdowns has accelerated the digitalization of the economy and is driving further technological innovation. But not all jobs can be done online, and high-speed access to the Internet is very uneven. This means COVID-19 is accentuating the digital divide and exacerbating inequalities."

The report calls on policymakers to consciously shape the trends that will shape our world. Is this achievable in the current political climate? And if so, how?

"The COVID-19 crisis is a huge setback, and it endangers the achievement of the SDGs. But if we react to it with enough foresight, we can recover in ways that put the global community back on the path to sustainable development and accelerate our progress. With their courageous and decisive crisis responses, many governments have demonstrated great adaptability and flexibility. This can be harnessed to drive the policy changes that we need to achieve the transformation that the 2030 Agenda demands.

However, not all countries are equally well placed to undertake an effective response. This underscores the need for collective and coordinated support from the global community. With the SDGs as our blueprint for the recovery, we can reimagine many of our institutions, economic and social structures, behaviours and activities to orient them decisively towards sustainable development."

For more information:

[Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time](#)

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



SDGs can fill the deep divides exposed by the pandemic, UN DESA chief says

A devastating global pandemic, inequalities, hunger, poverty and a burning climate emergency. As the United Nations celebrates its 75th anniversary, it must contend with an unprecedented onslaught of crises of global magnitude. Luckily, the world has a blueprint and tools to fight these crises

and recover better. If we let the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guide our response, the world will rise stronger.

The ravages of COVID-19 are extensive, but the pandemic has also laid bare the underlying conditions, which have been plaguing our societies for decades. In this trying time, UN DESA head Liu Zhenmin appeared at the virtual SDG Action Zone, on the sidelines of the 75th UN General Assembly, to share a message of hope.

"The SDGs can help fill the deep social and economic fissures that the current pandemic has laid bare," he said in a video statement today. "They can guide us to a greener and more sustainable recovery path. They will not only help us overcome the devastating impacts of the pandemic – but build a stronger foundation for multilateralism and international cooperation, to address future crises."

Mr. Liu went on to outline how UN DESA is supporting the international community to overcome the crises and to recover better.

"Our experts have been working round the clock to help the world navigate the tough policy choices ahead, including: making stimulus packages inclusive; preventing a global debt crisis; supporting countries in special situations and protecting the most vulnerable; and strengthening the role of science and technology," he said in his message.

The UN DESA chief stressed that putting down the multiple fires spreading across the world will be ineffective, if our recovery efforts do not contribute to a more sustainable, resilient and just world. The Decade of Action for Sustainable Development can bring about such a change. UN DESA is helping countries to deliver on the Decade's promise in five key areas:

1. Promoting equality and inclusive growth,
2. Supporting evidence-based decision making through high-quality data and statistics,
3. Strengthening the science-policy interface,
4. Working at the synergies of climate action and SDG achievement, and
5. Supporting countries to incorporate demographic trends into development policy and planning.

The SDG Action Zone will continue over the course of three days during the UN General Assembly, convening leading thinkers, actors, creators, and activists in frank debate, challenging discussions, inspiring showcases and creative experiences to drive the exponential change on three core areas for accelerating action on the Goals: People, Planet and Partnerships.

For more information: [SDG Action Zone](#)

A wake-up call for a more united world

SDG BLOG



Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General
UN DESA



By Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world, but it has not broken us. Over a million people have died worldwide, and the death toll continues to rise. We must confront the onslaught of the pandemic with fortitude, resolve and unity, not with fear, division and despondence. The history of humanity is the history of triumph against all odds. This time will be no different.

The global economy is in crisis, with the world output projected to shrink by nearly \$5 trillion this year. Millions of jobs have already been lost, many of which will never come back. Yet we are seeing slivers of hope. The economies of the United States, China and Germany are showing signs of resilience and recovery. Consumer confidence is rising, and retail spending is on the rebound. Defying market expectations, the Chinese economy grew by 3.2 per cent during the second quarter of 2020.

However, the outlook for the rest of the world is less promising. Poverty is rising, not only in the developing world but also in the most advanced economies. This will inevitably lead to higher levels of inequality, with serious consequences for social cohesion, peace and stability.

The glimmers of hope notwithstanding, we must guard against complacency. Let us not focus too narrowly on the growth numbers or the shape of the recovery this year. Economic growth this year matters, but what matters more is how it will affect growth during the next five or 10 years.

The economic response and the choices we are making now will shape the path of the world economy for years to come. There is little room for mistakes. We must resist the temptation of seeing recovery as a zero-sum game among countries, with a few winning the race while others fall behind. We are all in this together, and we must recover together.

The United Nations is commemorating its 75th anniversary. As the community of nations, the UN has prevented another great war, and delivered unprecedented prosperity over the past decades. But our cherished goal of an inclusive, equitable and sustainable world is still a long way off. We are off track to achieve the Sustainable Development

Goals. Thus, our vulnerability to the pandemic must serve as a wake-up call for a more united world. We must take this opportunity to recover better, leaving no country and community behind.

There are four objectives that we must prioritize now.

First, as we strive to save lives, we must also save livelihoods. When confronted with difficult trade-offs, we must keep in mind that loss of jobs will exacerbate hunger, poverty and inequality. We must deploy resources carefully – not only to bring back jobs that have been lost – but also to fill the job deficits that persisted before the pandemic.

Second, boosting investments – building and rebuilding physical infrastructures – must remain a critical priority for creating jobs and greening our economies. This is our path to a more interconnected, interdependent and climate-resilient future.

Third, we must prioritize improving our human capital. There is a pressing need for augmenting investments in health, education, skills and technical know-how, to ensure the livelihoods of future generations. This will also require us to rethink, pace and sequence technological progress to prevent a recovery that is jobless.

Finally, it is the time for us to put our commitment to universal social protection into action. The pandemic has shown us that we are as strong as our weakest link. For far too long, social protection has been a footnote in mainstream economic policies that prioritized efficiency and profit, over the well-being of people. The current crises should allow us to change course in the direction of universal social protection.

In order to realize these objectives, we must deploy all tools at our disposal. We must ensure that trade – a critical tool of development and well-being – does not become collateral damage of the pandemic. Indeed, international trade is not just the glue that binds nations together. It is also the wellspring of jobs, investment, technology transfers and innovation.

The gains from trade enabled the governments in Europe, North America and East Asia to create more inclusive and prosperous societies by extending safety nets to those who had not benefitted in the past. The developing countries must have their opportunity, too.

We must not retrench from trade or follow our worst instincts of protectionism and isolationism. In our darkest hours, we must strengthen multilateralism and global dialogues to rekindle the spirit of mutual trust, unity, partnership and interdependence. We must collectively safeguard and promote international trade to boost investment, protect livelihoods, promote well-being.

This is the only way for us to recover better and rise stronger.

SDG 16 in numbers

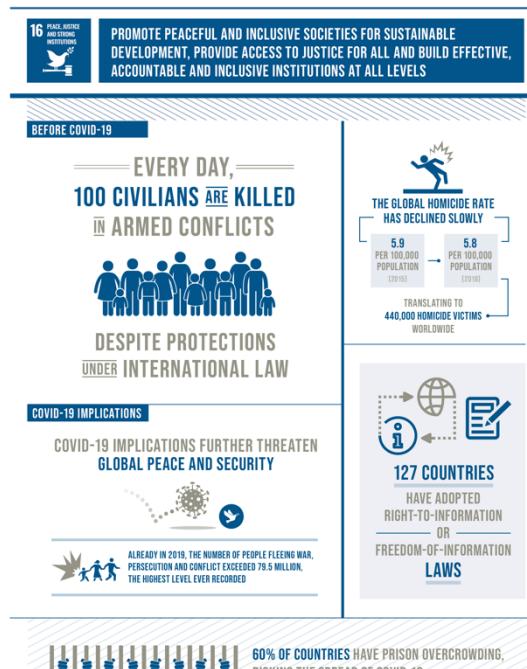


Conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice remain threats to sustainable development. In 2019, the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 79.5 million, the highest level recorded since these statistics have been systematically collected.

One in four children continues to be deprived of legal identity through lack of birth registration, often limiting their ability to exercise rights in other areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to amplify and exploit fragilities across the globe. In March 2020, the Secretary-General launched an appeal for an immediate global ceasefire to aid in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and open channels for diplomacy, in particular for those most vulnerable to COVID-19. The measure is being met with support, but implementation challenges still exist.

Access more data and information on the indicators for SDG 16 in the SDG Progress Report 2020.



COVID-19 legacy: a high-debt, low-growth trap



Governments around the world have taken extraordinary steps to halt the spread of COVID-19 and limit the economic and social fallout from the crisis. While their interventions may have reduced the immediate economic damage, they have left governments with record debt burdens and major fiscal challenges.

The situation is especially precarious for many developing countries where the pandemic has created a perfect storm for public finances at a time when fiscal positions were already strained. In many cases, the COVID-19 crisis constitutes the third major shock to public finances in just over 10 years. Fiscal balances deteriorated sharply in the wake of the 2008-09 global financial crisis, during the 2014-16 commodity price downturn, and now again in 2020.

As a result, public debt levels have drastically increased. At 58 per cent, the median government-debt-to-GDP ratio of developing countries is almost twice as high as in 2007 and at the highest level since the multilateral debt relief programs of the early 2000s.

With fiscal vulnerabilities building for over a decade, it comes as little surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis are pushing more and more countries to the brink of default. In June, 36 low-income countries were either already in debt distress or were at high of it. At the same time, sovereign debt downgrades by major credit rating agencies have soared.

Even if the worst-case scenario of widespread debt distress and disorderly defaults does not materialize, many developing countries could become trapped in a vicious cycle of high debt and low growth. Persistent fiscal consolidation pressures could trigger large cuts to public investment and social spending, jeopardizing countries' prospects of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

This vicious cycle can only be broken if countries manage to return to a more robust and sustained economic growth. Premature moves to fiscal austerity would further weaken the economies and hinder repayment capacity. Current initiatives by the international community are a first step, but bolder, more comprehensive and more forward-looking measures are needed to avoid protracted fiscal paralysis.

Learn more from the World Economic Situation and Prospects Monthly Briefing for October.

Tracking data on gender equality



What are the latest data on women and what do they tell us about the state of gender equality in the world? In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+25), UN DESA's Statistics Division will hold the technical launch of the Secretary-General's flagship report "The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics (WW2020)" on 20 October 2020 at the third Virtual United Nations World Data Forum.

In line with the previous editions of *The World's Women* series produced at five-year intervals, WW2020 presents the latest assessment of progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women and girls since 1995, analyzing women's situation compared to men's worldwide.

"The report is produced with innovation at its core," said Francesca Grum, Chief of Social and Gender Statistics in the Statistics Division, who has overseen the production of WW2020. "We wanted to improve the user experience by moving away from a physical publication to an online platform. This will provide easy navigation and search features across gender stories and related data to help users explore the report's content from different perspectives, including by major thematic areas and special geographic regions."

Reaching out to the broader public, WW2020 is a collection of around 100 brief stories that will provide easy-to-read, non-technical narratives with the latest statistics on critical gender issues grouped under the following themes: population and families, health, education, economic empowerment and asset ownership, power and decision-making and violence against women and the girl child. Additionally, for the first time, users will be able to unpack and query the report's content by special focus areas intersecting with gender, including: Covid-19, ethnicity, persons with disabilities, youth, older persons, income, indigenous peoples, urban/rural areas.

The report is the outcome of unprecedented collective efforts, involving a multitude of contributors that have collaborated with the Statistics Division over the past year, including more than 30 national statistical offices, regional commissions and members of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics. The collaboration has enabled WW2020 to zoom into gender data also at the national and sub-national levels, unlocking additional spatial insights for selected countries.

The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics (WW2020) will become available on the website of UN DESA's Statistics Division.

Photo: UN Women Moldova/Diana Savina

UPCOMING EVENTS

As a preventive measure amidst the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some of the high-level meetings organized by UN DESA worldwide have been postponed, cancelled or are taking place virtually in a scaled down format. Others are still being reviewed. Find out the latest information about the affected events: [UN DESA Calendar](#): [UN DESA Calendar](#).

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