



## The state of our world

The world economy has barely had the time to recover from a string of shocks that began with the 2007 financial crisis, and we can already see another global slowdown looming large. At the same time, high economic and social inequalities are fuelling some of the mass protests around the world. As we start a new decade, two reports by UN DESA offer a way out of this bleak situation.

The World Economic Situation and Prospects and the World Social Report, coming out in January, offer a birds-eye view of the economic and social state of our world. Going beyond pulse-taking, the two publications study some of the root causes of the situation today and analyse its implications for sustainable development.

The economic outlook is expected to be downgraded this year with trade tensions and policy uncertainty stifling investment and bringing the growth in international trade to a virtual standstill. At the same time, although the climate crisis is becoming an ever-greater challenge, its risks continue to be underestimated.

The economic growth we have had, has often failed to reach those who need it most, exacerbating inequalities, and fuelling discontent. But macroeconomy is not the only reason to blame for the widening gaps. Rapid technological change, climate change, unprecedented urbanization and international migration are all impacting inequalities between countries and between people in various ways.

And yet, both upcoming reports argue that the world is not locked-in on this road to perdition. “The future doesn’t have to be like this – we have the tools to put out the fires,” said UN Chief Economist, Elliott Harris. “The Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement are our fire extinguishers and all we need, is more political will to use them.”

The two UN DESA reports demonstrate that change is still possible and beneficial to countries, businesses and societies at large. They offer practical options for policymakers, governments and other actors to change the course of our planet and steer it towards a brighter, more prosperous future for all.

You can follow the launch of UN DESA's World Economic Situation and Prospects and the World Social Report on [UN Web TV](#). Stay tuned for the launch dates.

## HIGHLIGHTS



## Happy 75th Birthday, United Nations!

The United Nations makes a difference in the lives of everyone, everywhere. From providing food and assistance to 91.4 million people in 83 countries, supplying vaccines to 45 per cent of the world's children, to working with 196 countries to keep global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius. The examples are many of how this 193-Member-State strong global organization makes an impact on the ground. This year, we will commemorate and reflect on the organization's first

75 years of existence by inviting YOU to join the largest-ever global conversation.

The United Nations saw the light of day in 1945, when it was created in the wake of the devastating World War II, with pledges to save future generations from the atrocities of war and reiterate faith in fundamental human rights. Since then, the organization has played a vital role on the world stage, bringing countries together in addressing problems that transcend national boundaries and which no country can solve on their own.

But where do we stand today in our joint efforts for a sustainable and better future for everyone? As the United Nations kicks off its 75th anniversary, UN Secretary-General António Guterres is calling for a global reality check, turning to the people of the world through a global listening tour, launched on 1 January.

Through this UN75 initiative, the United Nations is embarking on the largest, most inclusive conversation on the role of global cooperation in building the future we want. The organization is calling on people from all walks of life to join dialogues hosted both online and offline, throughout the year. By bringing together people's voices and views in this way, the organization seeks to find out how enhanced international cooperation can help realize a better world by 2045, when the UN will celebrate its 100th birthday.

UN75 will ask three big questions: 1. What kind of future do we want to create? 2. Are we on track? 3. What action is needed to bridge the gap? The answers will be presented via four innovative data streams, building the first-ever repository of crowd-sourced solutions to major global challenges.

The UN75 dialogues, together with a "1-minute-survey" that anyone can take, opinion polling in 50 countries and artificial intelligence sentiment analysis of traditional and social media in 70 countries, will generate compelling data to inform national and international policies and debate.

Through this worldwide listening exercise, the UN75 initiative aims to foster a greater sense of global citizenship and to empower a critical mass of international actors to

address global issues. The views and ideas generated, will be presented by the Secretary-General to world leaders and senior UN officials on 21 September 2020 at a high-level event to mark the anniversary.

Find out how to join the UN75 conversation [here](#) and take the 1-minute survey [right away](#). Have your say. Shape your future!

The biggest global conversation on the world's future starts right now.

For more information: [UN75 – Shaping our future together](#)

## HIGHLIGHTS



### UN DESA leads preparations for major 2020 conferences on sustainable transport and the ocean

The need for collective, accelerated action to realize the Sustainable Development Goals is more apparent than ever, with one scientific report after the other, showing that more urgent action is needed at all levels to achieve the 17 goals by 2030. This year, UN DESA will take the lead on two major issues crucial for the well-being of our

planet and the life it hosts – sustainable transport and healthy oceans.

Coinciding with its 75th anniversary, the United Nations has kicked off a “Decade of Action and Delivery” to inspire new policies and investments for SDG implementation, and UN DESA is boosting these efforts by organizing two major conferences: the [Global Sustainable Transport Conference](#) (5-7 May, Beijing, China), which will work towards securing inclusive, resilient and low-carbon transport solutions; and the [2020 UN Ocean Conference](#) (2-6 June, Lisbon, Portugal), that will look to scale up ocean action based on science and innovation.

Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, will serve as Secretary-General of both conferences, and UN DESA’s Division for Sustainable Development Goals is already busy with preparations as the conferences’ Secretariat. The events will build on the outcomes of the previous UN conferences on sustainable transport (2016) and the ocean (2017), and draw from recent discussions and reports including the [Global Sustainable Development Report 2019](#), the [2019 SDG Progress Report](#) and reports on global warming and the ocean and cryosphere from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

First, in May, all modes of transport—road, rail, aviation and waterborne—will be addressed in Beijing at the Global Sustainable Transport Conference. Recent scientific and technological advances will be deliberated, and the concerns of vulnerable groups and developing countries will receive particular attention. Key transport objectives, such as access for all, green mobility, low carbon solutions, efficiency and safety, will be discussed.

The Global Sustainable Transport Conference, which is being convened by the UN Secretary-General, will comprise plenaries, parallel thematic sessions and special forums. These forums—the Ministers’ Forum, the Business Forum and the Science, Engineering and Technology Forum—will highlight game-changing contributions from a wide array of government offices, businesses and civil society organizations. The official programme will be complemented by side events, field visits and an exhibition.

The outcome of this Sustainable Transport Conference will be a forward-looking visionary statement calling for global action to further advance sustainable transport worldwide. There will also be a Conference summary, and a compilation of voluntary commitments, partnerships and initiatives to support sustainable transport.

In June, the UN’s attention shifts to the state of the world’s ocean as the UN Ocean Conference is co-hosted by Portugal and Kenya. The Ocean Conference will consist of plenary sessions and eight interactive dialogues addressing challenges and opportunities to implementing SDG 14 and its ten targets with a special emphasis on scaling up ocean action through science and innovation.

The Ocean Conference is expected to result in an intergovernmentally agreed declaration, summaries of the interactive dialogues and a list of new voluntary commitments in support of SDG 14.

The progress and commitments made at both conferences will build on the UN’s recent work in these subject areas and provide valuable context and inputs to July’s High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York, the Convention on Biological Diversity Conference (CBD COP 15) in Kunming, China, and the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), to take place in Glasgow in November. Together, they will help show the world that there is political will, interest from businesses and collective desire for SDG action.

“The window for action is small—just a decade—and the need is urgent,” said Mr. Liu. “The way forward is also clear. All we need now is to get it done!”

## GET INVOLVED



## 2020 kicks off new decade of action for people and planet

What kind of a world do we want to create? As we dive into a new decade, the United Nations is launching a massive campaign to bridge the gap between the world we hope for and the world we may end up living in if we don’t better manage the dire challenges we are facing, including current climate change and inequality trends.

The new “Decade of Delivery and Action,” is fully backed by the highest levels of officials within the UN and among international actors. At the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development last July, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on Member States and other stakeholders to “kickstart a decade of delivery and action for people and planet” in 2020, given the short time left to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

This theme was also reflected in the political declaration, “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development,” unanimously adopted at the opening of the SDG Summit in September 2019. UN Member States pledged to mobilize financing, enhance national implementation and strengthen institutions to achieve the sustainable development objectives by the target date and leave no one behind. This January, the Secretary-General will deliver a New Year’s address in which he is expected to rally more enthusiasm for the decade.

The launch of the decade coincides with the 75th anniversary of the UN (#UN75), which will be celebrated under the theme “Shaping our future together,” and which seeks to involve people from all walks of life to join the largest-ever global conversation. Also, the UN’s Act Now campaign continues to gain steam, and this year it will offer tips for reducing your carbon footprint as it relates to oceans and sustainable transport – just in time for UN DESA’s two major conferences on those issues this year.

We can achieve the SDGs only through thoughtful collaboration and teamwork, so let’s get our voices heard and shape our future together!

For more information: [Decade of Action for People for Planet](#)

## EXPERT VOICES



### How unequal are we?

Economic inequality is often blamed for the growing waves of discontent around the world. But is the voice of the street right? Are the rich growing richer and the poor getting poorer? Is the one per cent of top earners owning ever more of the world’s wealth? We ask Marta Roig, lead author of UN DESA’s upcoming World Social Report.

### How do we know if the world is becoming more or less equal?

“Today, people are more educated, healthier, better connected and even richer, on average, than ever before. But average measures, including GDP or GDP per capita, are no longer sufficient to assess people’s well-being.

More and more people around the world agree that income inequality is a big problem and that it should be reduced. Income disparities create unequal opportunities, prevent some people from reaching their full potential and, as we are witnessing, breed frustration and discontent.

Despite persistent data limitations, the metrics that are available do confirm that income and wealth inequalities are very high and, in many cases, continue to grow. As the data improve, they increasingly back people’s perceptions that our world is growing more unequal.

For instance, in almost all countries that have them, distributional accounts data suggest that income is increasingly concentrated among top earners. Unfortunately, many developing countries still do not have the necessary data to assess whether this is a universal trend.”

Different studies on inequality sometimes come to dramatically different conclusions. What can we say with certainty about inequality?

“Inequality has many dimensions. Conclusions depend, in part, on the focus of different studies. The forthcoming World Social Report shows, for instance, that inequalities may be declining in basic indicators such as child health or primary education, but they are still growing in more advanced achievements, such as secondary education. Inequalities between urban and rural areas may be falling while disparities among ethnic groups continue to grow.

Despite these differences, all sources of data lead to some common conclusions: First, income inequality levels are at a historical all-time high. And secondly, income inequality levels and trends vary significantly across countries and regions. Latin America and Africa are still the regions with the highest levels of inequality but have seen income inequality decline since the late 1990s. In developed countries and in the two most populous countries in the world, China and India, inequality has grown.”

Why does the choice of indicators matter when we evaluate inequality trends?

“When it comes to income inequality, different indicators lead to different conclusions. The average Gini coefficient of income inequality within countries has slightly declined since the mid-1990s. At the same time, the share of income going to top income earners has grown in countries with data.

This is in part due to differences in data sources. The Gini coefficient is a summary measure of inequality and therefore allows us to make general conclusions on inequality trends. The Gini is based on survey data. Surveys contain a lot of information but are not well suited to capture the very high or very low incomes. Recent efforts that combine data from different sources, such as surveys, tax records and national accounts give us a better picture of income concentration at its extremes.

But the integration of data from different sources and the additional indicators they give us—like the share of income earned by the bottom 10 per cent or top 1 per cent of the population—are not available for many developing countries. And in countries with data, researchers still disagree on how to best combine these different sources. In addition, one single indicator (like the share of income of the top one per cent) alone, does not provide full information on the income distribution, while the Gini coefficient does.

All in all, each measure has pros and cons. When possible, it is important to rely on more than one indicator of inequality. Different indicators are not fully comparable and cannot be easily interchanged with another.”

We are entering a decade of action to achieve the Global Goals. What type of action do we need to prioritize to reduce inequalities by the targets set for 2030?

“Clearly, no single set of policies is applicable to all countries and contexts. The forthcoming World Social Report highlights three building blocks of a coherent and integrated policy strategy to reduce inequalities: First, promoting equal access to opportunity for instance, by ensuring that education helps to reduce inequalities rather than reinforces them. Secondly, promoting redistribution, including strengthening social protection systems, ensuring the availability of universal programmes. Thirdly, tackle prejudice and discrimination.

The UN has advocated for measures under each of these building blocks for decades. Inaction is not due to lack of sound technical advice or even, in most cases, adequate capacity. But politics matter. Many inequality-reducing measures challenge the status quo, and thus are likely to encounter resistance. Understanding the political constraints to reducing inequality and devising ways to overcome them is key to breaking the current stalemate.”

Read the [UN DESA Social Development Brief on Income inequality trends](#)

## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



### When persons with disabilities lead and participate, the whole world benefits

Every year on 3rd December, the world marks the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, promoting the participation and inclusion of over 1.5 billion people who live with some kind of disability today.

This year, the International Day celebrated the leadership of persons with disabilities in making the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development a reality.

“When we secure the rights of people with disabilities, we move closer to achieving the central promise of the 2030 Agenda – to leave no one behind,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his message for the day.

He stressed that the UN is determined to lead by example on disability inclusion. The most tangible proof of that is the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) launched in June last year to raise the UN’s standards and performance on disability inclusion across all areas of work around the world.

Speaking at the International Day celebrations at the UN New York Headquarters, Assistant Secretary-General at UN DESA Elliot Harris said that the 2030 Agenda cannot be implemented unless persons with disabilities can participate meaningfully as agents of change. “When persons with disabilities lead and participate, the whole world benefits,” he stressed.

Activists for the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities also spoke at the event, sharing their vision for a more inclusive, tolerant world that they would like to see in the year 2030.

“From the perspective of persons with disabilities, I envision a world where a lot of my accomplishments, what I am talking about, what’s [considered] so ‘exceptional’ — I want to see that being the norm,” said Thomas Iland, author, motivational speaker and certified public accountant who was diagnosed with autism at the age of 13.

“I want people to really tap into their own potential so that they can become their best selves and live the life that they want,” he added.

Annika Emmert, a 14-year-old sport and disabilities advocate shared her inspiring story of finding strength and resilience through playing soccer: “It’s one of the things I’ve never wanted to give up, no matter what people said to me. Throughout my life, other players have always thought of me as an easy mark and always seen my differences as a weakness. But I’ve always proven them wrong.”

For more information: [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#)

## MORE FROM UNDESA

### What gives me hope for the next decade



**By Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General, UN DESA**

Reading the news these days can be a nerve-racking experience. The headlines tell stories of an unprecedented wave of protests and of wildfires, stoked up by climate change, that are engulfing the green lungs of our planet from the Amazonian rainforest to Australia. And yet, I remain hopeful for our common future. Here is why.

Imagine, if you will, a world in which all global leaders come together and pledge to accelerate their common efforts to achieve a more just, peaceful and sustainable future in 10 short years.

What if I were to tell you, this is exactly what our world leaders pledged to do? What if I told you that this pledge did not happen at some unique moment of unprecedented good will and trust in international relations, but just this September, when multilateralism is otherwise under attack from many sides?

And what if I added that this shared vision, which they committed to achieve, is not some pie-in-the-sky wish list, but a set of 17 ambitious goals, with 169 targets and over 230 measurable indicators?

This **is** the world we live in. At a recent UN summit, leaders of over 190 countries called for a Decade of Action to achieve these 17 ambitious objectives – called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – by their 2030 deadline. And this year, the countries will meet again at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) to find concrete ways of accelerating action.

This means that despite a barrage of negative news and international tensions, we can still agree on the kind of world we want to see in 2030 and on the way to get there. What we need now is to bridge the gap that still yawns wide between promises and concrete actions.

For all the expressions of commitment to the 2030 Agenda, a recent UN DESA report found that only a handful of countries have so far embedded the SDGs in their budget processes. The shifts in policy required to eradicate poverty have not materialized either, and by the latest estimates, **six per cent of us** will still be living in extreme poverty 10 years from now. Progress is even slower on ending hunger, which is rising again after years of decline. All while the 1.5°C climate goal is treading on the edge of becoming impossible to reach.

With so little time and so much left to do, why am I still hopeful that we will be able to achieve the ambitious vision we've committed ourselves to?

The answer lies in the interconnected nature of the modern world. The 2030 Agenda is the first-of-its-kind global plan to recognize that the world's ills can only be solved if tackled together – all at the same time. While this integration makes for an unwieldy policy proposal and an extremely challenging institutional adjustment, it can also work to our advantage. In a highly interconnected world, such as ours, taking action on one issue, can greatly accelerate progress on multiple others.

The recent **Global Sustainable Development Report**, supported by UN DESA, identified 20 such “levers of change.” Take cities for example. With the majority of humanity already living in urban areas and with their share rapidly growing, making our cities sustainable, accessible and inclusive will have profound consequences for poverty reduction, gender equality, climate action, sustainable production and consumption, clean energy and many more goals.

Many countries, international organizations, civil society organizations and businesses are already heeding the call of the Decade of Action. So far, they have officially announced over **140 SDG Acceleration Actions**, ranging from Sweden's ambitious plan to become the first fossil-fuel free state, to the Maldives' vision of becoming a model of sustainability and ocean protection for other small island states. And at this year's HLPF, close to 50 countries have already volunteered to present their review of progress for the Goals.

But governments and large organizations are just some of the actors driving change. UN DESA has found inspiring action for the SDGs on every level and in every corner of the world. We compiled our findings into a database of **over 500 Good SDG Practices**, including projects as immense as the European Union's circular economy plan, and as local as a group of Brazilian students transforming their neighbourhood as part of the curriculum.

The Political commitment, the determined action at every level and the guidance of science show that there is hope for humanity to make enormous progress in the next 10 years. Poverty, hunger, climate change and inequalities are all human-made crises, which means that we have the power to “unmake” them.

We know the world we want and we have a road map to get there. Now, it is up to everyone – from students in Brazil to governments at the UN – to push the levers of change as hard as we can to accelerate action for sustainable change to benefit people everywhere.

## Giving NGOs a platform to engage with the UN



Ever since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has been actively engaged with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and has recognized the importance of partnering with them to advance its ideals and support its work. In 1946, only 41 NGOs were granted consultative status by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). But this number has grown and today, 5,500 NGOs enjoy this status with the Council. These organizations are represented all over the world and work in many different areas including education, health, poverty eradication, human rights, gender equality and indigenous issues.

On 20-29 January 2020, the 2020 Regular Session of the Committee on NGOs will convene in New York to consider new applications by NGOs for consultative status with ECOSOC as well as applications deferred from earlier sessions. It will also review quadrennial reports of NGOs that are already in consultative status.

The Committee on NGOs is a standing Committee of ECOSOC, tasked with considering applications from NGOs for consultative status with ECOSOC. Consultative status enables NGOs to contribute to the work of the ECOSOC and the United Nations agenda, in many ways, including by participating in meetings and events and having their voice heard through the submission of oral and written statements.

The meetings of the Committee will take place in Conference Room 1 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. each day during the session (except on 29 January when it will only meet in the morning). The Committee will reconvene on 7 February 2020 to adopt its report of the session. The session's recommendations will be sent to the Economic and Social Council for its approval in June 2020.

For more information: [The Committee on NGOs](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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|-------------------------|--|
| 16 January              | Launch of the World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP)  |
| 19-21 January, Egypt    | International Forum on Migration Statistics                  |
| 20-29 January, New York | Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, Regular session |
| 21 January              | Launch of the World Social Report                            |

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