



Only bold action can curb the economic fallout from COVID-19

Empty streets, shuttered shops, overflowing hospitals. The entire world is at war with an invisible enemy – the novel coronavirus. With a vaccine to protect against the disease still a distant possibility, our best weapon remains staying away from each other. But while social distancing saves lives, it drags down the global economy and threatens jobs.

The World Economic Situation and Prospects Monthly Briefing issued today by UN DESA found that the COVID-19 pandemic could shrink world economic output by 0.9 per cent in 2020, instead of growing 2.5 per cent, as previously projected. By comparison, the world economy contracted by 1.7 per cent during the global financial crisis in 2009.

“Urgent and bold policy measures are needed, not only to contain the pandemic and save lives, but also to protect the most vulnerable in our societies from economic ruin and to sustain economic growth and financial stability,” said Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General and head of UN DESA.

The UN DESA Briefing warns that millions of low-wage workers – in both formal and informal sectors – will suffer the most as they typically work in close proximity with others but often lack minimum social protection. The economic fallout could be even larger if restrictions on movement of people and range of economic activities extend beyond June and if fiscal responses fail to support income and consumer spending, especially those most affected by the pandemic.

But just how big a blow the virus will deal to our economies also depends on us and our policies. A well-designed fiscal stimulus package that prioritizes health spending and provides income support to households most affected by the pandemic would help to minimize the likelihood of a deep economic recession.

“While we need to prioritize the health response to contain the spread of the virus at all cost, we must not lose sight how it is affecting the most vulnerable population and what that means for sustainable development,” said Elliott Harris, UN Chief Economist and Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development. “Our goal is to ensure a resilient recovery from the crisis and put us back on track towards sustainable development.”

Stay updated on the impact of the novel coronavirus on economic, social and sustainable development through the [new UN DESA web portal](#) just launched.

HIGHLIGHTS



Everyone included: protecting vulnerable groups in times of a global pandemic

The world is at war with an invisible and deadly enemy: COVID-19. As the virus ravages across the globe, it causes serious illness, death and it disrupts life as we know it. “The virus does not care about ethnicity or nationality, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly. The most vulnerable – women and children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced – pay the highest price,” UN Secretary-

General António Guterres said in a recent video briefing on the global pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreak affects all segments of the population and is particularly detrimental to members of those social groups in the most vulnerable situations, including older persons, persons with disabilities, youth and indigenous peoples. The social crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, could further spur inequality, discrimination and unemployment around the globe.

How can we prevent this from happening? How can we protect vulnerable groups during this global pandemic? Here, our team in UN DESA’s Division for Inclusive Social Development gives updates and share actions to protect vulnerable people.

Older persons and COVID-19

Although social distancing is necessary to reduce the spread of the disease, if not implemented correctly, such measures can also lead to increased social isolation of older persons at a time when they may be at most need of support.

The discourse around COVID-19, perceived as a disease of older people, aggravates negative stereotypes about older persons. Such age-based discrimination may manifest itself in the provision of services, particularly where doctors and nurses must make difficult decisions regarding how to allocate too scarce resources, such as respirators. In such instances the treatment of older persons may be perceived to have less value than the treatment of younger generations.

Persons with disabilities and COVID-19

In countries around the world, persons with disabilities are disproportionately likely to experience poverty and to face challenges in accessing health-care services, education, employment, and other essential services, due to lack of availability, accessibility, affordability, as well as stigma and discrimination.

To ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access to information on COVID-19, it must be made available in accessible formats, including Braille, large print, and text captioning of videos for the hearing impaired.

Healthcare buildings must also be physically accessible to persons with mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments. Moreover, persons with disabilities must not be prevented from accessing the health services they need in times of emergency due to any financial barriers.

Youth and COVID-19

In terms of employment, youth are normally disproportionately unemployed, and those who are employed often work in the informal economy or gig economy, on precarious contracts or in service sectors that are likely to be severely affected by COVID-19.

Currently, more than one billion youth are no longer physically in school after the closure of schools and universities across many countries. The disruption in education and learning could have medium and long-term consequences on the quality of education. At the same time, efforts by teachers, school administrations, local and national governments to cope with these unprecedented circumstances should be recognized.

Many vulnerable young persons, such as migrants or homeless youth are in precarious situations. They are the ones who can easily be overlooked if governments do not pay specific attention, as they tend to be already in a situation without even their minimum requirement for support being met on health, education, employment and well-being.

Indigenous peoples and COVID-19

Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable due to their almost universally lower life expectancy and health status compared to that of the general population and owing to the lack of access to healthcare. In some parts of the world, indigenous peoples are not registered at birth, and therefore do not have legal access to free healthcare.

The first point of prevention is dissemination of information in indigenous languages that will ensure that all people are reached and informed of the current situation and how to stay protected.

Five key actions to protect vulnerable people against COVID-19

- Provide social protection and economic relief to people who are severely affected by COVID-19;
- Make public health communication, particularly information on COVID-19 accessible to all;
- Ensure that public health communication messages are respectful and non-discriminatory;
- Promote new technologies and digital tools to support people in isolation;
- Ensure that COVID-19 emergency and mitigation measures are inclusive.

“A society’s overall health depends on the health of its poorest people,” stressed UN DESA Head, Liu Zhenmin, in a message on the COVID-19 pandemic.

We need solidarity, political will and innovative policy action to protect vulnerable people and their well-being, and uphold the right to health, including access to information, care and medical services.

When everyone is included, everyone benefits.

For more information: UN DESA's Division for Inclusive Social Development
New UN DESA web portal on COVID-19

Photo: Unsplash/Macao Photo Agency

HIGHLIGHTS



Financing for Development Report: COVID-19 poses risk to achieving the SDGs

With the global economy reeling from the fall out of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 Financing for Development Report (FSDR), which will be launched on 8 April 2020, aims to give governments the necessary tools for achieving the Global Goals, even in times of a global health crisis.

The report finds that already tepid economic growth is expected to slow markedly in 2020, with high risk of a global recession. The economic and financial shocks associated with COVID-19 – including disruptions to industrial production, rising insecurity, job losses, and financial market volatility – are compounding existing risks and derailing implementation of the SDGs.

Amid these destabilizing trends, the FSDR finds that there was a backsliding in key action areas even prior to the pandemic outbreak: decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA) (4.3 per cent overall and 2.1 per cent towards LDCs in 2018); rise in debt risks with 44 per cent of LDCs; increasing trade restrictions; and growing financial risks over an extended period of low interest rates.

The report recommends immediate and longer-term actions, including:

- The global community must take concerted, forceful, and swift action to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, maintain economic and financial stability, promote trade and stimulate growth. This includes helping countries with weak health and fiscal systems, including through technical support.
- Donors should immediately reverse the decline in ODA, particularly to LDCs;
- The international community should immediately suspend debt payments from least developed countries that request forbearance. Official bilateral creditors must lead, and others should consider similar steps or equivalent ways to provide new finance.
- Regulators should discourage over-leverage in the private sector if debts contracted are not intended for productive investments but only for increasing shareholder returns.

The FSDR identifies two medium-term accelerators to help reverse the backward trend: leveraging digital finance, the topic of this year's thematic chapter, and developing tools to foster greater private sector resources for sustainable financing.

In the light of the restrictions due to COVID-19, the 2020 SDG Investment Fair has been cancelled and the fate of the 2020 Financing for Development Forum is still to be decided. However, the FSDR will serve as the basis of the Forum's negotiated outcome, moving the work to finance the SDGs forward.

Unique in the constellation of UN publications, the FSDR is a joint product of the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, which is comprised of more than 60 UN agencies and international organizations, chaired by Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin of UN DESA.

The full copy of the report and the annex will be available [here](#).

GET INVOLVED



Be safe, be smart, be kind?

Have you been experiencing elevated levels of fear and anxiety lately? Are you feeling trapped or hopeless? Don't worry, these are not the symptoms of the novel coronavirus, they are perfectly natural reactions to a global pandemic. One of the best antidotes to the sense of powerlessness in face of the COVID-19 virus is to take action against it. Here's what you can do!

Be Safe

It may sound counterintuitive, but one of the best things you can do for other people at the moment... is to keep away from them. Social distancing is still our most powerful weapon against the coronavirus. If you find yourself in a COVID-19 hotspot, and if urged by local authorities to help flatten the curve, heed the call! This may be the only time in your life when you can literally save lives by simply staying home.

Watch and retweet to learn how you can protect yourself and others from the coronavirus in seven easy steps.

Be Smart

Inform yourself about the virus from a trusted source, such as the official websites of the [United Nations](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) or your local health authority.

You can also learn about UN DESA's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic through a [new web portal](#) just launched. The portal will shine a light on the cutting-edge analysis and policy advice to addressing this global crisis.

It's good to keep everybody else informed, but be sure to only share facts, not rumours. Never share sensationalist or unverified information. By spreading misinformation, you may be helping the spread of the virus instead of stopping it!

Be Kind

No amount of fear can excuse prejudice and discrimination. The coronavirus pandemic is a human crisis that calls first and foremost for human solidarity. Stand up to racism, xenophobia and stigma.

Show solidarity with those affected:

- Volunteer your skills and effort.
 - Fight disinformation
 - Help older persons to stay in touch...
or to safely receive their necessities.
 - Support children to continue their education.
- We are all in this crisis together and we will get through it together

EXPERT VOICES



Trust in institutions in time of a global pandemic

When a crisis strikes, trust in public institutions can mean the difference between life and death. The success or failure of our fight against the current coronavirus pandemic hinges on whether people heed their governments' recommendations, warnings and public health announcements. How can institutions build the trust and authority necessary to guide the public through the times of crisis? We asked Abdelhak Saihi, member of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration.

Most of our modern-day institutions are not used to dealing with crises of such magnitude as the COVID-19 pandemic. How were they able to adapt so quickly?

"Historically, multiple and diverse crises have rattled and bewildered public institutions, often forcing them to live up to their responsibilities. Some have used their experiences in the face of crises as a springboard to evolve, just like a living organism. By questioning their working methods, crises are often an opportunity for reflection and adaptation. The best practice for dealing with crises comes from facing a crisis with flexibility and intelligence. How institutions achieve that is a very important question, worthy of further studies and analysis."

What qualities should public institutions have to respond to a crisis effectively?

"I would highlight three main elements: Firstly, a public institution should be open and focused on the citizen. It should take concrete steps to demonstrate its good will and build trust.

Secondly, the institution should be strict about its quality control to ensure an optimal management of quality services for the public.

Thirdly, a public institution should continuously adapt the kinds of services rendered to the citizens as requirements of optimal management evolve.

Fulfilling these conditions, a public institution is able to gain the confidence of its citizens and provide them with quality services.”

How can institutions build trust and rapport with the people they serve?

“Gaining the trust of the public is a two-way street. If a public institution is accustomed to top-down communication, it should work on becoming more attuned to the voices of the public and their grievances.

To build trust of the citizens it serves, an institution should support them, respond to their concerns and attend to their real needs – within its area of responsibility.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can become a learning experience, from which public institutions must draw the necessary lessons.”

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



Update of SDG indicators will boost global monitoring efforts

The world has 231 measurable indicators tracking progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will help the international community achieve a better world by 2030. As the global statistical community recently convened at the 51st session of the United Nations Statistical Commission on 3-6 March

2020, Member States adopted 36 changes to this SDG indicator framework.

“The update of the indicator framework will give support and a further boost to the SDG monitoring efforts, including by helping ensure that no one is left behind,” UN DESA’s Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin, said when addressing the Commission.

Indicators related to the goals on nutrition, health, education, inequality, climate action and global partnership saw changes proposed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). This was the result of its 2020 comprehensive review process. Many Member States congratulated and praised the IAEG-SDGs on this work, which greatly improve the quality of the framework while keeping the same number of indicators as in the original framework adopted in July 2017.

The 2020 comprehensive review aimed to improve the framework, while at the same time providing the necessary guidance to countries in implementing their national frameworks and reporting platforms. The IAEG-SDGs intended to keep changes limited in scope, and the size of the framework the same, in order to avoid imposing additional burden on national statistical work or undermine their on-going efforts based on the established list of indicators.

Following a yearlong open and transparent consultative process with countries, agencies and other stakeholders, the IAEG-SDGs proposed 36 major changes. The revised indicator framework does not include any Tier III indicators, meaning all indicators have established methodologies and have data collection in countries. In

addition, the total number of unique indicators in the revised framework is now 231, approximately the same number as in the original framework.

The IAEG-SDGs emphasized that the proposals not included in the revised framework, still have a valuable role to play in the follow-up and review process of the SDGs through national, regional and thematic monitoring and can provide important additional information and complement the global indicator framework.

For more information: [Revised global SDG indicator list](#)

MORE FROM UNDESA

SDG 3 in numbers



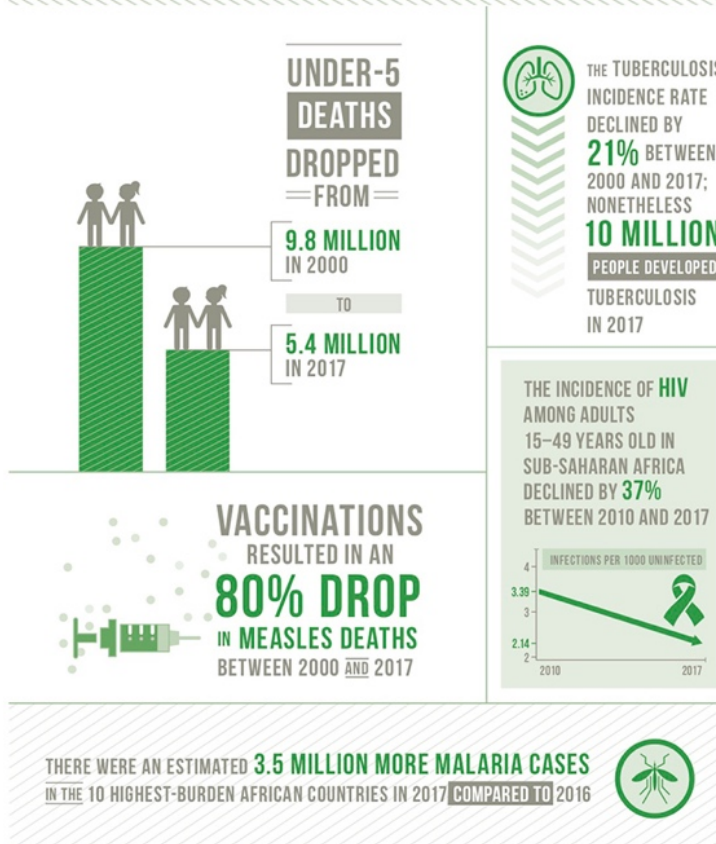
Major progress has been made in improving the health of millions of people. Maternal and child mortality rates have been reduced, life expectancy continues to increase globally, and the fight against some infectious diseases has made steady progress.

In the case of other diseases, however, progress has slowed or stalled, including global efforts to eradicate malaria and tuberculosis. Far too many deaths occurred because trained health workers or routine interventions, such as immunizations, were not available. In fact, at least half the world's population, many of whom suffer financial hardship, are still without access to essential health services. In rich and poor countries alike, a health emergency can push people into bankruptcy or poverty.

Concerted efforts are required on these and other fronts to achieve universal health coverage and sustainable financing for health; address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, including mental health; and tackle antimicrobial resistance and environmental factors contributing to ill health, such as air pollution and the lack of safely managed water and sanitation.

Access more data and information on the indicators for SDG 3 in the [SDG Progress Report 2019](#).

ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES



DESA 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 or cancelled. Others are still being reviewed. Find out the latest information about the affected events: [UN DESA Calendar](#)

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