

# LIST OF BOXES, TABLES AND FIGURES (CONTINUED)

<b>Figure A.1</b>	COVID-19 cases and deaths per 1 million population in High Income, Developing and LDC countries	04
<b>Figure A.2</b>	COVID-19 cases and deaths per 1 million population in High Income, Developing and LDC countries	04
<b>Figure A.3</b>	Evolution of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Asia Pacific Least Developed Countries and Yemen from January 2020 to March 2021	06
<b>Figure A.4</b>	Evolution of COVID-19 cases and deaths in African Least Developed Countries and Haiti from January 2020 to March 2021	08
<b>Figure A.5</b>	COVID-19 vaccines in development	14
<b>Figure B.1</b>	Poverty estimates using 2011 PPP and US\$1.90/day poverty line	18
<b>Figure B.2</b>	Access to electricity (Percentage)	23
<b>Figure C.1</b>	Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in total population (percent) (3-year average)	32
<b>Figure D.1</b>	LDC shares of world exports (percent)	42
<b>Figure D.2</b>	LDC exports by main product group, 2010–2019 (USD billion)	43
<b>Figure D.3</b>	LDCs’ merchandise export product concentration index	44
<b>Figure D.4</b>	LDCs’ export of commercial services by sub-sector, 2010–2019 (USD billion)	45
<b>Figure D.5</b>	Active mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants	50
<b>Figure D.6</b>	Share of population using the Internet	50
<b>Figure E.1</b>	Annual GDP growth in LDCs (percent)	66
<b>Figure E.2</b>	Commodity price indices for key LDC exports (2010=100)	67
<b>Figure E.3</b>	Average number of LDCs providing support to households	70
<b>Figure G.1</b>	Migrant remittance inflows to LDCs by region (USD million)	92
<b>Figure G.2</b>	Average LDC debt (2011–2020)	97
<b>Figure I.1</b>	Percentage of households with and without persons with disabilities living under the international poverty line (US\$1.90 a day) in 3 LDCs	27
<b>Figure I.2</b>	Multidimensional poverty rates, for persons with and without disabilities, in 9 least developed countries, in 2002–2014	27
<b>Figure I.3</b>	Percentage of people who needed but did not receive welfare services in 5 LDCs	28
<b>Figure II.1</b>	Total final energy consumption and share of renewables by technology type in LDCs	62

# INTRODUCTION

As the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) is coming to an end, various assessments of its implementation are being conducted in the lead up to the Fifth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5). It is clear that progress in achieving the IPoA goals and objectives was slow and uneven among the 46 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), even before the COVID-19 crisis.

The United Nations (UN) defines the LDCs as the group of currently 46 Member States facing multiple, long-standing structural impediments to sustainable development and characterized by low human development and high vulnerabilities. These multifaceted impediments to sustainable development include remoteness from markets and smallness (with many being landlocked or small islands), low productivity, including in agriculture, and high burden of communicable disease as well as high prevalence of natural disasters. Quite a few are suffering conflict or emerging from one. The effects of these structural disadvantages do not just add up but are often mutually reinforcing.

In addition, LDCs have been facing challenges with respect to access to dedicated international support measures. For example, only few LDCs have been able to benefit from preferential market access and many continue to face obstacles in accessing development finance instruments. While LDCs make up 14 percent of the global population they account for only about 1.3 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and around 1 percent of global trade and 1.4 percent of global Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Nevertheless, LDCs also achieved progress in various areas such as health, education, gender, access to information and communications technology (ICT), sustainable energy, export concentration and governance. However, such progress has often not been sufficient to narrow the gap vis-a-vis more advanced countries, especially in areas that are crucial for accelerating progress, such as tertiary education and broadband subscriptions. In addition, LDCs continue to be disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, with cascading effects of different shocks, often at the same time.

While LDCs did not fully meet the IPoA objective of half of them reaching the graduation thresholds, progress accelerated considerably. By 2011 only 2 LDCs had graduated from the category, while 4 others graduated between 2011 and 2020.

In addition, 16 LDCs are meeting the graduation thresholds in 2021 and are at different stages in the graduation process. However, they remain highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic directly and indirectly affected LDCs in all priority areas of the IPoA. COVID-19 has not only taken a toll on health and livelihoods but also significantly affected international trade, through collapsing commodity prices, disruption of regional and global value chains for manufacturing and a virtual standstill of international tourism, leading to a sharp reduction in GDP growth and a rise in poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, and inequality. The pandemic has laid bare and further exacerbated pre-existing inequalities within and between countries. The digital divide between the connected and not connected has widened. Fragile education systems in LDCs have struggled tremendously while limited social protection could only partially compensate for the loss in income. The agricultural sector was also affected by the disruption of markets. Together with the widening fiscal deficit, the drop in FDI, portfolio investments, remittances as well as high illicit financial flows and unsustainable debt levels, it is expected that the effects of COVID-19 will jeopardize LDCs’ progress towards sustainable development for years to come.

The group of LDCs has called for a global stimulus package for the least developed countries to be funded and implemented rapidly to address the impacts of COVID-19 and build back better. The underlying components of the stimulus package include, in the short run, (1) Emergency public health package for the LDCs; (2) Support for social protection systems; (3) Education support for students; (4) 0.15 percent of gross national income of DAC donors as ODA to LDCs; (5) Full debt cancellation; (6) Lifting trade barriers and scaling up aid for trade; (7) increased SDR allocations for LDCs; and (8) Protection of migrants of least developed countries and promotion of their remittances.<sup>2</sup> However, there is a need to develop measures to enhance sustainable resilience to various future shocks to lay the foundation for accelerated graduation from the category.

As the international community gathers around preparations for the Fifth UN Conference on the LDCs in the midst of continued uncertainties surrounding the pandemic duration, building back better has now become a central policy objective as a shared responsibility requiring strong global solidarity. The

<sup>1</sup> See UN document E/2021/33.

<sup>2</sup> See UN document A/74/843.





A volunteer helps a woman fill out paperwork before her COVID-19 vaccine in Rwanda. COVAX is the only global initiative that is working with governments and manufacturers to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available worldwide to both higher-income and lower-income countries.

Photo: WHO/Andre Rugema

most urgent priority is to stop the pandemic. It is a moral responsibility of the global community to go beyond nationalistic interests and maintain focus on its poorest, most vulnerable members, since the pandemic will not be over anywhere — as a public health crisis or as a drag on the global economy — until it is under control everywhere.

New integrated approaches that go beyond the actions agreed in the IPoA and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are needed to build systemic resilience to future shocks in all LDCs, through mechanisms that allow them to deal with risks associated to various types of shocks, both in terms of

preparedness and recovery. Focus should be on the transformation of systems from agriculture, digital economy and social protection to the international finance architecture, taking a more integrated approach. The capacity of LDCs and development partners to handle risk and jointly develop new solutions, including through the use of new technologies needs to be strengthened. This means going beyond increased support for LDCs but focus on the creation of opportunities for LDCs to truly take the leadership in their own development and the building of inclusive societies.

## A. SPREAD OF COVID-19 AND DIRECT HEALTH EFFECTS

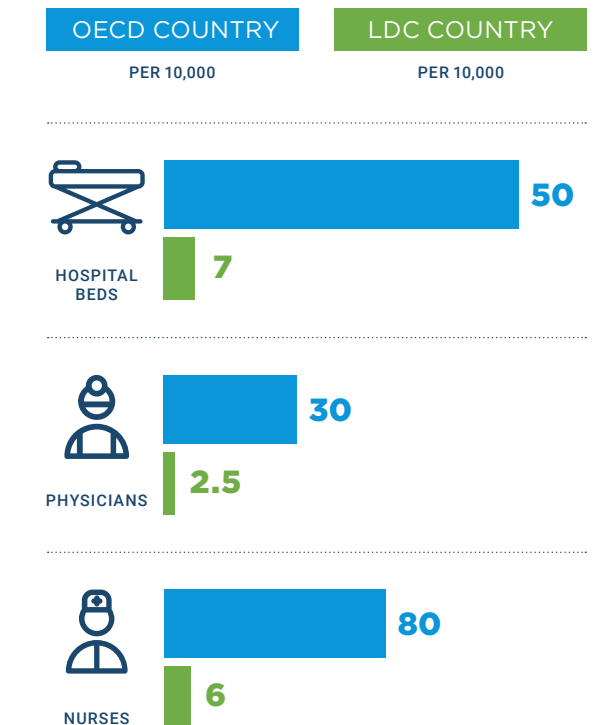
### A.1 THE STATE OF COVID-19 IN LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

With over 124 million confirmed cases and 2.7 million deaths world-wide, reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) (at the time of writing),<sup>3</sup> the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest global challenges in the history of the United Nations. No country was ready to face the novel coronavirus, an invisible enemy that quickly spread across the globe wreaking havoc on even the most advanced public health systems and economies, causing immeasurable human suffering and an unprecedented global social and economic crisis. Grave concerns were immediately voiced about the disastrous effects the pandemic could have on the poorest countries with the weakest health care systems in the world, i.e. the least developed countries.

Almost one year later, the only solution to the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be finally within reach. Several effective vaccines have been developed but the pandemic will not be over anywhere—as a public health crisis or as a drag on the global economy—until it is under control everywhere. Equitable global distribution of effective vaccines is both a moral responsibility of the global community and a global public good requiring strong global solidarity. Until that is assured, the virus and its variants will continue to ravage the world.

Only a handful of least developed countries have so far been spared by the health effects of the virus, thanks to their extreme geographical remoteness further accentuated by the implementation of border closures and travel bans. The rest of the LDCs, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, have seen the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths grow since the beginning of the pandemic, even if at a much lower rate than elsewhere at least initially. Figures A.1 and A.2 show the spread of COVID-19 in the LDCs as compared to other developing countries as well as high-income countries.

### Healthcare System Capacities: OECD countries versus Least Developed Countries



<sup>3</sup> The cutoff date for the data analysis in this section is 25 March 2021. All data is from the WHO database on COVID-19, unless otherwise stated. The database is constantly updated: <https://covid19.who.int/>.