



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Progress, gaps and obstacles: are we on track for leaving no one behind?

Tuesday, 9 July 2019, 10:00 AM–1:00 PM, Conference Room 4

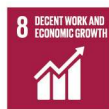
Background Note

Introduction

The report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2019/68) provides an overview of the world's implementation efforts to date, highlighting areas of progress and areas where more action needs to be taken to ensure no one is left behind. It describes progress according to the latest data available to the United Nations, and also looks beyond the data to examine the wealth of actions that have been taken in response to the 2030 Agenda.

Although the collection of timely, disaggregated data across all countries and all targets and indicators remains a challenge, the report describes some clear trends in the state of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals four years after their adoption in 2015. However, a comprehensive and thorough review of global and scientific data trends and developments from the environmental, social and economic dimensions must also highlight knowledge-based analyses and conclusions from audits of SDG implementation, share practical success stories and unique experiences, focus on a variety of development trends, examine the unique vulnerabilities faced by countries at various levels of development and populations at risk of being left behind.

The principle to leave no one behind is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, which highlights the need to give special attention to African countries, least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing States (SIDS), countries in conflict and post-conflict situations and the challenges faced by middle-income countries (MICs). Populations identified as at risk of being left behind include children and





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youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants.¹

Status and trends²

Recent positive trends include the continued reduction of extreme poverty and child mortality rates, progress against diseases including hepatitis and progress toward areas related to gender equality such as more gender-responsive budgeting. Electricity access in the poorest countries is rapidly increasing, and global labor productivity is on the rise, while global unemployment rates and the proportion of urban populations living in slums are both falling. The proportion of waters under national jurisdiction covered by marine protected areas has more than doubled since 2010, and means of implementation are being more rapidly mobilized in some areas.

Governments have made great progress in prioritizing the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into their national plans and policies, and are creating institutional arrangements that will help drive and monitor progress towards the transformation needed in their economies and societies. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) show that there has been a near-universal response, and that country ownership of the 2030 Agenda remains strong. Regional and local governments, businesses, civil society, academia, youth and other are aligning their actions and initiatives toward implementation of the SDGs, and the United Nations development system is undergoing reforms to respond to the paradigm shift at the heart of the 2030 Agenda.

However, the extreme poverty rate also is projected to be 6 per cent in 2030, missing the global target to eradicate extreme poverty. Hunger is on the rise for the third consecutive year, and little progress is being made in countering overweight and obesity among children under the age of five. Biodiversity is being lost at an alarming rate, with roughly one million species already facing extinction, many within decades. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, the required level of sustainable development financing

¹ A/RES/70/1, Paragraph 22-23.

² This section was taken from the Report of the Secretary-General, Special Edition: Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2019/68).





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and other means of implementation are not yet available, and institutions are not yet strong or effective enough to respond adequately to these massive interrelated and cross-border challenges.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda's central principle of leaving no one behind, there is progress, albeit at a slow pace. Population groups with documented disadvantages largely remain excluded. Globally, youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Children are overrepresented among the poorest people – one child in five lives in extreme poverty. Rural and urban differentials are also evident in such areas as education and health care. Persons with disabilities and those living with HIV/AIDS continue to face multiple disadvantages, denying them both life opportunities and fundamental human rights.

Gender inequalities also persist. Women represent less than 40 per cent of those employed, occupy only about a quarter of managerial positions in the world and (according to data available from a limited set of countries) face a gender pay gap of 12 per cent. About one fifth of women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical or sexual partner violence in the past 12 months. There is simply no way that the world can achieve the 17 SDGs without also achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Furthermore, the commitment to multilateral cooperation, which is central to implementing major global agreements, is now under pressure. Significant divergences persist across regions and among countries in very different situations, and the most vulnerable countries are bearing the heaviest weight of the current obstacles to SDG implementation. Conflicts and instability in many parts of the world have intensified, causing human suffering and reversing progress. Developing countries are hosting more than 85 per cent of the 68.5 million people forcibly displaced in 2017, and pressures on existing support systems are immense.

Direct economic losses from disasters have increased by more than 150 per cent over the past 20 years, with losses disproportionately borne by vulnerable developing countries. Without a surge in mitigation, global warming will continue at a rapid pace, amplifying





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the challenges of adaptation and entrenching a sense of vulnerability and insecurity among large population groups.

Economic changes also present obstacles to progress: global economic growth is anticipated to remain slow and uneven across regions amid lingering trade tensions and unsustainable levels of household and corporate debt. Debt vulnerability in low-income countries has increased substantially in recent years. In addition to an expected slowdown in emerging economies, lower growth rates are projected in developed economies in general. And several Governments are taking more protectionist approaches across the board, risking growth rates, poverty reduction and economic diversification.

Rising income and wealth inequality threaten to erode social cohesion, entrench insecurity and dampen productivity growth. Rising intolerance in many parts of the world threatens fundamental human rights and human progress. The nexus among inequality, injustice, insecurity and lack of sufficient trust in Governments and institutions can further erode the necessary conditions for advancing sustainable development.

Based on the information that has emerged from the voluntary national reviews and many other intergovernmental forums that have contributed to the high-level political forum, fundamental changes are required in a number of systemic and cross-cutting areas. The Secretary-General's report on *Progress Toward the SDGs* identifies eight such areas where more attention need to be devoted to achieve lasting transformation. There include: leaving no one behind; mobilizing adequate and well-directed financing; strengthening effective and inclusive institutions for implementing integrated solutions; accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals locally; building resilience; investing in data for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda; realizing the benefits of science, technology and innovation for all; and solving challenges through international cooperation.





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Guiding questions

- What have been areas of progress in realizing the SDGs and where are we lagging behind?
- What challenges do countries at various levels of development face in implementing the SDGs and how can we accelerate actions to reach the goals by 2030?
- What needs to be done to ensure more equitable access to basic services and greater equality between countries and people?
- How can we best identify those left behind, and how can we best identify policies and strategies to make their voices heard in the determination of local and national priorities, and so they can exert their rights?

