

# Sustainable Development Goals, in Crisis



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) and its pledge to 'leave no one behind' is a global commitment to improve the lives of the most vulnerable among us. However, a new report from International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) – **SDG progress: Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind** – shows that millions of 'people caught in crisis' – people living in conflict, and/or who are displaced within their own countries or across borders – are in fact being left behind. Failure to take action now means that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be met, undermining the credibility of the international community and leaving millions to die unnecessarily.

2019 is a pivotal year for the SDGs. Heads of State will for the first time since 2015 attend the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on the SDGs. This is the moment to review progress and revise our strategy before it is too late.



<sup>1</sup>OECD, States of Fragility 2018, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2018-9789264302075-en.htm> (accessed 22 September 2018)

<sup>2</sup>Or 82% are either off track or lack the data for an assessment of progress. ODI & IRC (2018) 'SDG progress; Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind', p 8

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p 9

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p 20

<sup>5</sup>Uppsala Conflict Data Program, quoted in ODI & IRC (2018), p.13

<sup>6</sup>ODI & IRC (2018), p 12; p 41

152 million

people caught in crisis need humanitarian assistance

We're not doing enough to support them. The international community needs to step up action to leave no one behind.

SDG progress: Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind



## Fragility, people caught in crisis and the SDGs.

Fragile and conflict affected states are where the greatest needs and challenges to achieving the SDGs exist – and where 2.3 billion people will live by 2030<sup>1</sup>. The report finds that the vast majority – up to four in five – of fragile and conflict affected states are off-track to achieve select SDG targets by 2030<sup>2</sup>. These states will be home to around 85 per cent of those remaining in extreme poverty – some 342 million people – in 2030<sup>3</sup>. Current trends in these countries indicate that undernourishment is on the rise; lack of sanitation is expanding; the number of people living in slums will grow and early child-hood death remains endemic. By 2030, 70 per cent of under-five deaths – 2.4 million child deaths – will occur in fragile and conflict affected states<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, violent conflicts have more than doubled since 2000 and more people have been forced to flee their homes than at any time since World War II<sup>5</sup>. It is estimated that 152 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and 12 of the top 15 refugee-hosting countries are themselves considered fragile<sup>6</sup>. All projections point to greater deprivation of people caught in crisis by 2030. We will see a growing gulf in terms of people's outcomes – their well-being and needs – between fragile countries and the rest of the world and people caught in crisis will be even more excluded than they are now.

Behind all of these numbers is the harsh reality of disrupted lives: families without hope or a home, children out of school, young people with no jobs and poor health, struggling to survive and living in conflict or in a new country that is often already grappling with its own poverty and lack of opportunities. Conflict and crisis can have a catastrophic impact on basic services and infrastructure, from the demolition of schools and health clinics to overwhelming numbers of people relying on already stretched social services. This, in turn, can have devastating consequences for people's lives in key areas of health and nutrition, education, freedom from violence and decent work.

**Above left:** IRC mobile health team staff treat a severely malnourished child in Lahj, Yemen. *Kellie Ryan/IRC*

## How far behind are people caught in crisis?



Displacement exacerbates poverty, as people are forced to leave behind their assets and gradually sell what they have to flee conflict and survive in host countries. Levels of poverty for displaced people are significantly higher compared to levels in their host countries pre conflict. For example, more than two thirds of Syrian refugees live in poverty. Syrians exiled in Middle East and North Africa countries have poverty levels that are between 18 and 62 percentage points higher than their native counterparts<sup>7</sup>.



Conflict disrupts the delivery of food supplies, which in turn increases rates of acute malnutrition. 2017 was the worst year for acute malnutrition globally, due to active conflicts in South Sudan and Yemen, northeast Nigeria, and Somalia<sup>8</sup>.



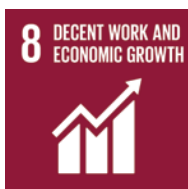
Good health and well-being. Destruction or closure of health facilities due to violent conflict, can lead to increased outbreaks of communicable diseases and previously eradicated diseases; for instance, once-eradicated polio has re-emerged in Syria since the start of the war. Poor health or the inability to access basic health care also jeopardises other goals such as education, decent work and freedom from poverty and violence.



For those able to flee to other countries, access to education can be highly problematic. Not only are local schools already overstretched, but refugees are often denied access to services or systems are unable to cope with highly traumatised children. For instance, 70 per cent of Syrian refugee children aged 5–14 years and enrolled in community-based education in informal settlements in Lebanon, could not read a letter of Arabic<sup>9</sup>.



Those in crisis are far more likely to suffer from gender based violence (GBV). In conflict zones in South Sudan, up to 65 percent of women and girls experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, twice as high as the global average<sup>10</sup>. GBV undermines the attainment of all other SDGs for women and girls, including their ability to participate in peacebuilding (SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong institutions).



Most refugees face huge challenges in accessing labour markets, meaning poverty only intensifies as the length of displacement increases. Although 17 of the world's top 20 refugee hosting countries allow refugees to work, in practice refugees are often excluded from formal employment owing to administrative restrictions, discrimination and a lack of associated rights, such as freedom of movement. Women are doubly excluded as they are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, violence and abuse<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees quoted in ODI & IRC (2018), p 43

<sup>8</sup>Flowers cited in ODI & IRC (2018), p 32

<sup>9</sup>IRC cited in ODI & IRC (2018), p 37

<sup>10</sup>Murphy cited in ODI & IRC (2018), p 38

<sup>11</sup>ODI & IRC (2018), p 44

## People caught in crisis are being left out and left behind

Three years into Agenda 2030 and it is clear that people caught in crisis are already being left behind.

Collective outcomes – the results of our joint action that can be observed in the daily lives of people, and measured by meaningful indicators and targets – are the central premise of Agenda 2030. The SDGs provide a good framework for defining measurable outcomes for reducing the causes and consequences of poverty but are yet to be translated to address the specific challenges faced by people caught in crisis.

All of the SDGs are relevant to people in crisis but this group is not explicitly recognised in the language of goals and targets and only a handful of indicators call for disaggregation by status. At the country level, refugees are not commonly included in national development or sector plans. For example, Kenya's national development plan, Vision 2030, makes no reference to refugees or displacement.

These groups are largely left out of governments' plans to reach the SDGs. Our report finds that of the 43 countries that presented their progress towards the SDGs to the UN in 2017, just 25 mentioned refugees or migrants as a left-behind group. In 2018, just 15 of the 46 countries that submitted VNRs mentioned these populations. And among the VNRs that did mention this group, data was inconsistently reported. An analysis of progress reports (Voluntary National Reviews, or VNRs) for major refugee-hosting countries – Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, and Lebanon – shows SDG outcomes for refugees are rarely reported and refugees are not highlighted as a population at risk of being left behind<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, these groups are routinely left out of national data collection (such as household surveys) and thus are invisible in global SDG reporting.

Displaced populations in particular fall between the cracks of different authorities' responsibilities. The proposed *Global Compact on Refugees* aims to bring together development and humanitarian agendas and align with Agenda 2030 but fails to set out specific objectives, indicators and targets to measure improvements in the lives and livelihoods of people caught in crisis. It does not call for the inclusion of refugees in national development plans or VNRs. Without consistent data on core indicators of well-being and a more concerted effort to work across global frameworks, the international community has no way to assess progress of these groups, much less target interventions to deliver the goals to marginalised and vulnerable people.

## What needs to change?

Our analysis shows that progress is possible even in the most challenging situations. Three areas of action are crucial as we look towards the pivotal meeting of world leaders at the HLPF in 2019.

### Take Charge

*First, world leaders should acknowledge this challenge and take charge so that people caught in crisis are not forgotten. The SDGs will not be achieved without urgent action now, to catalyse change in time for the High level Political Forum (HLPF) and **inaugural Global Refugee Forum** in 2019, and beyond.*

- **Drive political commitment: In the HLPF Declaration, Heads of State should specifically acknowledge how far behind refugees and other people caught in crisis are in achieving the SDGs and call for inclusion of refugees and people caught in crisis.** This political signal is required to ensure people caught in crisis are not forgotten.
- **Make people caught in crisis visible in reporting:** In the lead up to the HLPF and going forward, **Member States should make people caught in crisis visible in the SDGs by developing and adapting targets and indicators for these groups, and pledging to include them in Voluntary National Reviews.** Illustrative indicators are provided in the Annex.
- **Ensure global frameworks align with the SDGs: Member States should make concrete policy commitments at the inaugural Global Refugee Forum to deliver on SDG targets – especially those towards improving education and jobs – for refugees and other people caught in crisis.** UNHCR should work with host countries, donors and civil society to ensure that outcomes and indicators defined as follow-up to the Global Compact on Refugees are aligned with the SDGs, and support host countries to incorporate these outcomes into Comprehensive Refugee Response Frameworks (CRRF) and in SDG implementation plans.

## Many refugees are 'doubly marginalised' as they flee to other fragile countries

- 12 of the 15 top refugee-hosting countries are themselves considered fragile
- 13 of the 15 are low and middle-income countries.



SDG progress: Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind


## Prioritise

Second, world leaders must collectively prioritise better to ensure that funding gets to those who need it most and that the right action is taken.

- **Orient financing towards people in crisis:** **Half of overseas development assistance should be spent in least developed countries**, which host the majority refugees. **Donors and UN agencies should increase multi-year funding** to support refugee responses. **Bilateral donors, international financial institutions and governments should pilot more 'beyond aid' solutions** to incentivise positive policy changes and drive economic growth in host countries.
- **Align policies and programs with trends of displacement:** Approaches to displacement crises need to chart a pathway from short-term emergency response to long-term resilience. **Governments should include refugees in their national development and sectoral plans.** They should harness the SDGs to promote policies that enable refugees to become self-reliant, such as through access to quality social services, access to the labour market, and freedom from violence and discrimination.
- **Generate and publish timely and accurate data:** **The World Bank and UNHCR Joint Data Center should serve as a data hub and provide technical assistance to support the generation of data on the socioeconomic wellbeing of refugees and other people in crisis.** Data collection should be driven by clearly defined outcomes, targets and indicators aimed at delivering the SDGs to people in crisis.
- **Join up humanitarian and development efforts:** **Humanitarian and development donors should coordinate on needs assessments and program planning** from the start of a crisis to reduce overlaps and gaps and ensure that immediate and longer term needs are met.

## Proposed SDG targets and indicators for people caught in crisis

Indicators for crisis settings, with country-specific baselines, would provide contextually-relevant measurement criteria to frame collective outcomes. Annex 1 provides more illustrative examples of this across different SDGs.

Sustainable Development Goal	SDG target (by 2030)	SDG indicator(s)	Proposed outcome for people in crisis	Proposed target for people in crisis	Proposed indicator(s) for people in crisis
	Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day	Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/ rural)	People in displacement contexts generate sufficient income to meet basic needs	Reduction in poverty rates	% of households with income below national poverty lines;  % of households receiving livelihoods support within 2 weeks of a crisis

## Innovate

Third, world leaders together with donors, the private sector and non-government organisations must commit to find new and better ways to meet the needs of people in crisis.

- **Pursue innovative funding models:** **Donors and their partners should implement innovative funding models, such as refugee compacts.** The refugee compact model piloted in Jordan and Ethiopia – which have included concessional or grant financing, trade concessions and other diplomatic arrangements – should be replicated and refined to support policy changes and programmes that improve the lives of refugees and hosts.
- **Form new partnerships:** **Business, international organisations and governments should be encouraged to partner to drive job creation, fuel growth and improve conditions for refugees.** Business, in partnership with international organisations, should develop innovative goods and services that respond to refugees' needs and promote job opportunities that tap into their diverse skills.

In advance of the first HLPF with world leaders to discuss SDG progress at the UN General Assembly in 2019 there is an urgent need to galvanise international solidarity so people caught in crisis and countries hosting these vulnerable groups are not left out and forgotten entirely. Without this action, the world will fail to meet the SDGs. But it's not too late if we act now.

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	End all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age	<p>Prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age;</p> <p>Prevalence of malnutrition among children under 5 years of age, by type</p>	Children in displacement contexts have optimal age-appropriate dietary intake	Reduced malnutrition rates	% of children under 5 years of age with moderate and severe acute malnutrition
	Ensure all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills, by sex	Girls & boys in displacement contexts demonstrate literacy, numeracy, SEL skills according to development potential	Improved learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional (SEL) skills	% of students with developmentally appropriate literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional (SEL) skills
	Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation	Proportion women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner or by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence, age and place of occurrence	Women and girls in displacement contexts are protected from and treated for the consequences of GBV	<p>Reduced incidence of GBV;</p> <p>Increase in availability, speed of services for survivors of GBV</p>	<p>% of women and girls who experience GBV, who receive at least 1 supportive service within 48 hours of reporting their experience;</p> <p>% of women and girls who report an ability to make decisions about their safety</p>
	Achieve full, productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	<p>Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age, persons with disabilities;</p> <p>Unemployment rate, by sex, age, persons with disabilities</p>	Women, men and youth in displacement contexts can access local labor markets and obtain safe and decent work (equal pay for work of equal value)	<p>Increase in available jobs;</p> <p>Increase in employment, including self-employment</p>	<p>% of people with legal right to work, able to realise it;</p> <p>Unemployment rate by sex, age, status, disability;</p> <p>Avg. hourly earnings by job, sex, age, status, disability</p>