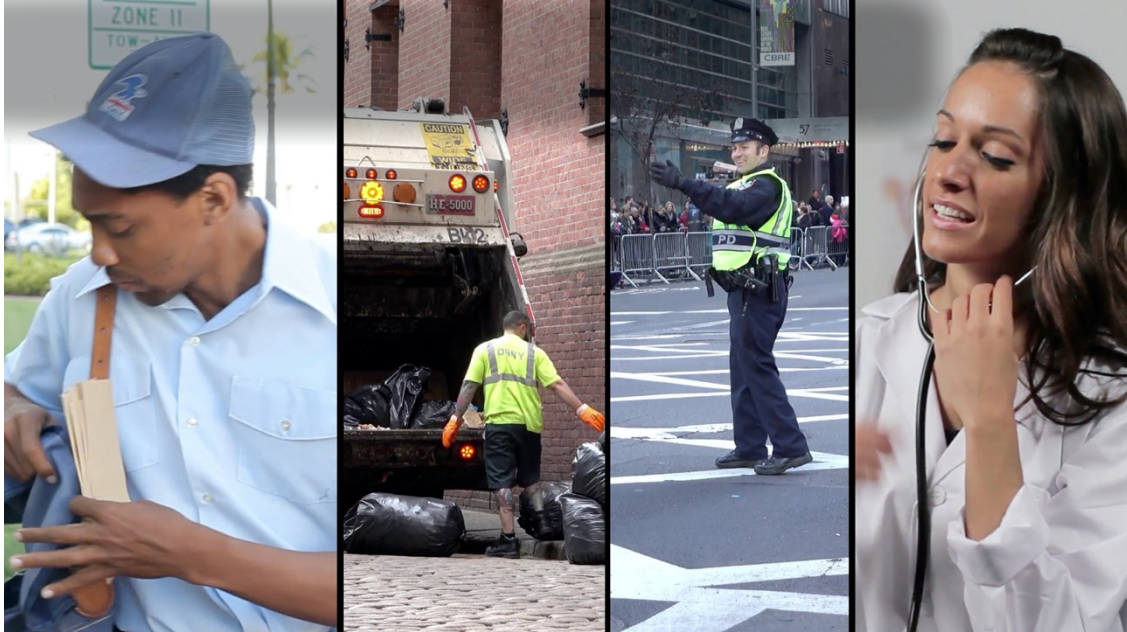


# VOICE

UNDESA

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## On the frontlines: serving the public during a pandemic

With its empty streets and shuttered businesses, the 'city that never sleeps' has been on pause since a COVID-19 lockdown came into effect in mid-March. Yet every night at 7 pm, New York City springs back to life as people take to their balconies, windows and rooftops clapping, cheering, and singing. The same scene plays out in London every Thursday, as it does across Spain, Italy, Republic of Korea, Colombia, India, Peru and many other places across the world.

What began in Wuhan in January as a gesture of solidarity and support for those fighting the pandemic has grown into a global movement of people showing their appreciation to the workers and public servants continuing to provide essential and often life-saving public services throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of these public servants work on the frontlines as nurses, doctors, and first responders actively fighting the disease, and risking their own lives in the process. Others still, such as sanitation workers, correctional officers, postal workers, teachers, social welfare officers, transport workers and others, continue to work tirelessly to ensure that public services that impact every aspect of our lives can continue.

The pandemic has underscored the fact that our lives and livelihoods depend greatly on the ability of our public servants to meet the challenges posed by such crises. Yet many of these public servants have been working under dangerous conditions, often lacking the basic protective gear that helps ensure their safety and the safety of others. While the United Nations has no official statistics, the International Council of Nurses data suggests that rates of COVID-19 infection among nurses are above 20 per cent in some countries—much higher than in the general population.

More must be done to ensure that public servants are better equipped to provide essential services without unnecessary risk to their own lives. While the world continues to direct much deserved applause to frontline public servants during the pandemic, one of the best ways to

show appreciation is for governments to enhance institutional resilience and preparedness for future crises, and in doing so, to better safeguard and invest in its key resource: public servants.

23 June is United Nations Public Service Day. This year the United Nations is recognizing the public servants who have been putting their lives on the line during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Join us for a virtual event celebrating them on 23 June 2020, 9 am (EST). Learn more and see how to join here: [publicadministration.un.org/en/UNPSA2020](http://publicadministration.un.org/en/UNPSA2020)

## HIGHLIGHTS



### Intensified debt relief could save economies, prevent defaults

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many developing countries were at high risk of debt distress. These risks have now materialized. Help has been extended with partial suspensions of debt service to 76 low-income countries, and the IMF has offered debt service relief to 25 of the poorest countries. But these actions do not cover commercial and multilateral debt. Nor do they protect middle-income countries. More action is urgently needed to avoid defaults.

A new policy brief by UN DESA proposes courses of action for governments and the international community to ensure that people's lives and well-being are not sacrificed to unmanageable debt repayments.

The brief puts forward options for a full standstill on servicing of all bilateral, multilateral and commercial debt for all developing countries that request it, including middle-income countries. This could be done through a central credit facility for countries requesting assistance, managed by an international financial institution. The brief does not call for universal forbearance for all middle-income countries, however, as this would risk disrupting their access to financial markets.

Debt payback standstills would grant countries time to devise sustainable debt solutions – to build back better. The brief also lays out alternative proposals for debt relief, noting that debt relief should be part of broader financing and recovery strategies. Such strategies should consider SDG investment needs, which could be channeled through country-led integrated national financing frameworks.

The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity for the international community to come together to rethink and strengthen the international architecture for sovereign debt restructuring. The United Nations, which is not a creditor, provides a neutral forum for inclusive dialogue among sovereign debtors and creditors and other stakeholders, to discuss a way forward.

To read the full policy brief, please visit: <http://bit.ly/UNDESACovid>



## Governing in times of crisis

COVID-19 is changing life as we know it. It is also heavily impacting national institutions across the globe, disrupting the regular functioning of state bodies, such as parliaments and justice systems, while at the same time demanding their rapid response. The pandemic has affected whole institutional systems and the way public institutions interact with people. But national and international actors have stepped up to the plate, responding fast to these unprecedented challenges.

While there have been rapid and effective responses by governments, the pandemic has exposed shortfalls in countries' resiliency to crisis, and in particular in the way the state relates to its people in realizing the values and principles of effective governance. Resiliency and effective governance go hand in hand, and are also key elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Against this backdrop, the 19th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administrations took place for the first time in a virtual format in May due to the COVID-19 crisis. It focused on how to promote effective governance and institutional reform to accelerate delivery of the SDGs with particular reference to the Covid-19 pandemic response and recovery.

Among the topics discussed were the Principles of Effective Governance, accelerating delivery of the SDGs, government of the future, training and awareness raising for the SDGs, building institutions to promote peace and justice and budgeting for the SDGs.

The Committee noted that the 11 Principles of Effective Governance for sustainable development have been put to test in the pandemic and have proven useful to the future of government. The Committee recognized that many government institutions were not able to advance the SDGs at the desired scale and speed because of a general undervaluing of the public sector, which had impeded effective public administration, resulting in disregard of its public value and its critical role in service delivery. Moreover, silo-thinking continued to hamper the holistic implementation of the SDGs, hindering action to ensure that no one is left behind.

While the COVID-19 pandemic revealed weaknesses in institutional responses, the Committee also pointed to the ability of governments to take extraordinary steps in response, underlining their commitment to achieve the SDGs by 2030. In this regard, the Committee recommended action to recognize essential service workers in the public sector, strengthen public sector capabilities for the SDGs, invest in the future public-sector workforce, expand use of digital technologies and address digital divides, including through public-private partnership, and strengthen local government finance and financial management.

Learn about the work of CEPA [here](#) and about COVID-19 and resilient institutions in UN DESA's new policy briefs [here](#).

*Photo by Frederic Koberl on Unsplash*





## Keeping the momentum to #SaveOurOcean

The UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon has been postponed indefinitely due to the COVID-19 crisis, but it's no time to press snooze on ocean issues. In fact, the zoonotic coronavirus makes it clear that we must build our cities sustainably and avoid encroaching on wildlife habitats, to avoid increasing our risks for disease exposure.

Despite current challenges, 2020 is still a super year for biodiversity, and the UN is working hard this June to promote environmental issues in support of World Environment Day (5 June) and World Oceans Day (8 June). And there are a

number of ways to participate and get involved!

First up, UN DESA has been organizing a [webinar series](#) to keep up the momentum for ocean action and engage different stakeholder groups on the latest in SDG 14 implementation and offer them a place to network and inspire new partnerships. The first webinar in May brought together more than 400 youth activists, and the second was aimed at private sector representatives. Our next webinar takes place on 3 June for Asia-Pacific stakeholders, and one for local and regional governments will take place later. To join our webinar on 3 June, sign up [here](#) by 1 June.

We also hope you can join the [UN World Oceans Day](#) celebration on 8 June, where special attention will be given to this year's theme, "innovations for a sustainable ocean." The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Peter Thomson, will kick off a "Spotlight Solutions" segment in which eight ocean scientists and entrepreneurs will present their innovations in a "Shark Tank"-style format. Other speakers include the Secretary-General, the actress Cara Delavigne and the environmental activist Bill McKibben.

Additionally, be sure to check out the [Reboot the Ocean](#) event—a global hackathon featuring inspiring young people with innovative and techy solutions to today's ocean challenges. And don't miss cooking demonstrations by world renowned chefs using sustainably-sourced seafood, live on the [@unworldoceansday](#) Instagram account.

Finally, if you or your organization are making efforts to care for the ocean and its resources, we encourage you to register your commitment with UN DESA. Launched in 2017, ahead of the first UN Ocean Conference, [the registry](#) now has more than 1,600 commitments, ranging from sustainable fishery programmes, to mangrove and coral reef conservation projects and marine data collection efforts. Behind each commitment is an inspiring story of ocean action. UN DESA has coordinated all of the commitments into nine active [Communities of Ocean Action](#) that are following up on their implementation and facilitating collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

The challenges facing our ocean haven't stopped with COVID-19, and the UN continues working hard to provide many ways to take ocean action now.

Photo: Henley Spiers, [UN World Ocean Day](#) competition 2019



## A vaccine will not end the pandemic unless everyone can get it

Nearly every day brings news of promising developments in the unprecedented global quest for a vaccine to COVID-19. Yet, finding an effective vaccine will not put an end to the pandemic unless countries can agree to cooperate on its development, production and distribution and ensure it is affordable and accessible to all, warns Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Professor of International Affairs at The New School and Member of the UN Committee for Development Policy.

### **If scientists announced tomorrow that they have found an effective and safe vaccine to COVID-19, what do you think would happen?**

“Even when an effective vaccine is developed, it will not end the pandemic unless it is within reach of all people in all countries. And without production at scale, countries and pharmacies will be competing over scarce supplies. As the Financial Times wrote last week, ‘the ugly battle between nations over limited supplies of tests and personal protective equipment will be a sideshow compared to the scramble over a vaccine.’”

### **Is there anything countries can do now to avoid this dog-eat-dog scenario?**

“In a strong show of global solidarity, governments of the world at the World Health Assembly last week overwhelmingly adopted a resolution calling for universal, affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. But this commitment itself will not be enough to make universal vaccine a reality. International cooperation is needed to finance research and development, and free up vaccines from monopoly pricing, exclusive production, and nationalistic distribution.

This will be difficult, and mired in the politics of contestation over intellectual property and sharing of knowledge in the pharmaceuticals sector. The World Health Assembly resolution makes an important commitment to use the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) flexibilities that allow countries to import or produce vaccines for wide distribution at low cost. But there was also pushback from those who argued that patent protection was needed to incentivize private investment.”

### **How do you expect the situation to evolve from here?**

“The language adopted stops short of the call, supported by many countries of the North and South, for a broader sharing of knowledge and eliminating monopolies on the essential vaccines and medicines to end the pandemic. The contestation will continue and compromises will be found. The urgency to end the pandemic, a precondition for economic revival, is an opportunity to mobilize new alliances and new multilateral action.”



## The COVID-19 pandemic unravels the world economy

As nearly 90 per cent of the global economy came under some form of lockdown in the second quarter, the world faces the grim prospect of the most severe recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The world output is projected to contract sharply by 3.2 per cent in 2020 with the pandemic disrupting global supply chains, depressing consumer demand and putting millions out of work. By 2021, cumulative output losses worldwide are expected to \$8.5 trillion, wiping out nearly

all gains of the previous four years.

The unprecedented crisis portends significant setbacks for sustainable development. Low-skilled low-wage workers – economically marginalized and vulnerable who cannot work remotely – have been disproportionately affected by job losses, which will inevitably exacerbate poverty and income inequalities. An estimated 34.3 million people are projected to fall into extreme poverty this year, with the bulk of this increase occurring in Africa. By 2030, about 130 million more people may live in extreme poverty than previously expected, dealing a huge blow to global efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger.

Facing an unprecedented health, social and economic crisis, governments in developed economies have rolled out massive stimulus packages to minimize the fallout of the pandemic. The picture is different for most developing economies, as they are saddled with chronic fiscal deficits and already high levels of public debt, which constrain their ability to implement much-needed support measures. Notwithstanding bold fiscal measures, the depth and severity of the crisis presage a slow and painful recovery.

Stronger global cooperation is critical to contain the pandemic and extend economic support to countries hardest hit by the crisis. To protect jobs and prevent a further rise in income inequality, governments need to ensure that the monetary and fiscal support measures boost productive capacities, rather than simply driving up asset prices. At the same time, the crisis presents a window of opportunity for “recovering better”. Renewed global solidarity can help strengthen public health systems, build resilience to withstand economic shocks, improve social protection systems, and address the climate change emergency.

The full report is available at [bit.ly/wespmidyear](https://bit.ly/wespmidyear)

Photo: World Bank / Sambrian Mbaabu

## Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the SDGs will help us build back better

**By Erna Solberg and Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo**



Our world today is grappling with a crisis of monumental proportions. The novel coronavirus is wreaking havoc across the globe, upending lives and livelihoods. The human life cost of the pandemic is painful, but the effects on the global economy and on sustainable development prospects are also worrying. While the full economic impact of the crisis is difficult to predict, [UN DESA estimates the global economy could lose US\\$8.5 trillion](#), wiping out the gains of the previous four years.

The pandemic has exposed fundamental weaknesses in our global system. It has shown how the prevalence of poverty, weak health systems, lack of education, and a lack of global cooperation exacerbate the crisis.

If there was any doubt that our world faces common challenges, this pandemic should categorically put that to rest. The crisis has re-enforced the interdependence of our world. It has brought to the fore the urgent need for global action to meet people's basic needs, to save our planet and to build a fairer and resilient world. We face common, global challenges that we must solve through common, global solutions. After all, in a crisis like this we are only as strong as the weakest link. This is what the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global blueprint to end poverty, protect our planet and ensure prosperity, are all about.

Sadly, this pandemic hit at a time when the SDGs were gaining traction and a significant number of countries were making good progress. As the world is seized with containing the spread of the virus and addressing its negative impacts, the reality is that countries are resetting their priorities, and reallocating resources to deal with the pandemic. This certainly is the right thing to do because the priority now is to save lives, and we must do so at all costs.

That is why we must all support the call by the United Nations to scale up the immediate health response to suppress the transmission of the virus, end the pandemic and focus on people



particularly, women, youth, low-wage workers, small and medium enterprises, the informal sector and vulnerable groups already at risk. Working together we can save lives, restore livelihoods and bring the global economy back on track.

But what we cannot afford to do, even in these crucial times, is shift resources away from crucial SDG actions. The response to the pandemic cannot be de-linked from the SDGs. Indeed, achieving the SDGs will put us on a firm path to dealing with global health risks and emerging infectious diseases. Achieving SDG 3 (Good Health) will mean strengthening the capacity of countries for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks.

This pandemic has exposed the crisis in global health systems. And while it is severely undermining prospects for achieving SDG 3 by 2030, it is also having far-reaching effects on all other SDGs.

Emerging evidence of the broader impact of the crisis on our quest to achieve the SDGs is troubling. [UNESCO estimates that nine in 10 students worldwide are affected](#), posing a serious challenge to the attainment of SDGs Goal 4 (Quality Education). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates some [25 million people could lose their jobs](#), with those in informal employment suffering most from lack of social protection. Unfortunately, these are just the tip of the iceberg.

Crucially, in many parts of the world, the pandemic and its effects are exacerbated by the crisis in achieving clean water and sanitation targets (SDG 6), weak economic growth and the absence of decent work (SDG 8), pervasive inequalities (SDG 10), and above all, entrenched poverty (SDG 1) and food insecurity (SDG 2). UN DESA estimates the crisis will push over [34 million people to fall into extreme poverty](#) before the year is over.

Even at this stage in the pandemic, we cannot deny the fact that the crisis is teaching us, as global citizens, the utmost value in being each other's keeper, in leaving no one behind, and in prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable.

What is acutely needed is enhanced political will and commitment. Our world has the knowledge, capacity and innovation, and if we are ambitious enough, we can muster the resources needed to achieve the Goals. Buoyed by the spirit of solidarity, Governments, businesses, multilateral organizations and civil society have in the shortest possible time been able to raise billions, and in some cases, trillions to support efforts to combat this pandemic. If we attach the same level of importance and urgency to the fight against poverty, hunger, and climate change, we will find success in this [Decade of Action on the SDGs](#).

As the world responds to this pandemic and seeks to restore global prosperity, we must focus on addressing underlying factors through the Sustainable Development Goals. We must not relent our efforts, even amid this crisis. While some SDG gains have been eroded, this should not deflate our energy. They should rather spur us to accelerate and deepen our efforts during this Decade of Action to 'recover better', and build a healthier, safer, fairer and a more prosperous world.

Originally published by the [Thomson Reuters Foundation](#).

*\*The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



# SDG 17 in numbers



Strengthening global partnerships and enhancing the means of implementation for the SDGs has remained challenging due to scarce financial resources, trade tensions, technological obstacles, and lack of data. The pandemic is adding more hardships in the implementation of the SDGs.

As COVID-19 continues to spread, over \$100 billion in capital has flowed out of emerging markets since the outbreak; the largest outflow ever recorded. World trade is expected to plunge between 13% and 32% in 2020. Strengthening multilateralism and global partnerships are more important than ever before.

## Finance

- Net ODA flows totaled \$147 billion in 2019, almost the same level as in 2018, but with an increased share going to the neediest countries. Bilateral ODA to LDCs rose by 3% in real terms from 2018, aid to Africa rose by 1%, but humanitarian aid fell by 3%.
- Global foreign direct investment (FDI) flows continued their slide in 2018, falling by 13% to \$1.3 trillion from a revised \$1.5 trillion in 2017. It is projected that the pandemic may cause global FDI to shrink by 30% to 40% during 2020-2022.
- Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries are estimated to have reached \$554 billion in 2019, exceeding official aid by a factor of three since the mid-1990s. Remittances to low- and middle-income countries are projected to fall by 20% in 2020 to \$445 billion, due to the pandemic.

## Information and communications technology

- More than half of the world's population is now online. At the end of 2019, 53.6% of individuals, or 4.1 billion people, were using the Internet.

## Trade

- The share of LDC exports in global merchandise trade remained marginal at just above 1% in 2018. Growth in global exports of LDCs stagnated over the last decade, missing the target of doubling the share of global LDC exports by 2020 from 2011.

## Data, monitoring and accountability

- In 2017, countries received \$689 million in support from multilateral and bilateral donors for all areas of statistics, which accounts for only 0.34% of total ODA. International funding for data and statistics is only around half the level that it needs to be.

Get more [SDGs data](#) from UN DESA's Statistics Division.

## Emerging economies in full-blown unemployment crisis



As economic activities ground to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of people are losing jobs or experiencing significant reductions of income or working hours in Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa and other emerging economies.

Unemployment rates are skyrocketing while underemployment and informality also rise sharply. Inequalities that, even before the pandemic, separated societies along educational, gender, age and immigration divides, are defining the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the labour market. The so-called low-skilled workers – especially among women, youth and migrants – are more exposed to lay-offs and wage cuts. With weak or no social protection, workers in the informal sector are particularly hard hit.

The emerging economies will face enormous challenges to recreate the millions of jobs being lost, which will likely lead to permanently higher levels of unemployment and further polarization of skills and income.

More alarmingly, job losses will lead to substantial increases in poverty and inequality. This is especially problematic, as some emerging economies, including South Africa, Brazil, India and Mexico, are already among the countries with the highest levels of income inequality in the world.

Beyond emergency stimulus measures that are underway, governments will need to implement large employment programs to create enough decent jobs to absorb the newly unemployed workers.

These large emerging economies will also need to consider universal, redistributive and solidarity policies for social protection, which is essential to inclusive growth. Without it, emerging economies will be even more susceptible to recurrent development setbacks, which can lead to social unrest, political upheaval or worse.

Learn more from the [June Monthly Briefing on the World Economic Situation and Prospects](#) published on 1 June.

#### UPCOMING 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 or are being held virtually. Find out the latest information about the affected events: [UN DESA Calendar](#)

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