



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Ensuring that no one is left behind

How do we protect the poorest and most vulnerable from the crisis and empower them to realize the SDGs?

Tuesday, 6 July 2021, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Secretariat Background Note

Background

When Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, they pledged that no one would be left behind, and that they would endeavor to reach the furthest behind first. They committed themselves to achieving sustainable development for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society.

While progress was made in economic and social development over the past decades, it has been uneven among countries and among various social groups. Poverty is still ravishing the lives of over 1 billion people, a number that has increased with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic has also increased global inequalities between those people and those countries which have wider access to good health and sanitation services, and increasingly importantly, quick and safe vaccinations.

The pandemic has exposed the global community to extremely high levels of vulnerability, and correspondingly, with unprecedentedly high demand for social protection measures. At the same time, the pandemic has also added urgency to close the digital gaps. The digital divide has given a new face to inequality, as digital access has become one of the critical determinants of livelihoods, well-being and recovery.

Modest gains had been made in reducing global inequality, for instance, reducing income inequality in some countries, continuing preferential trade status to lower-income



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countries, and reducing transaction costs of remittances. However, inequality persists in its various forms, whether income, wealth, opportunities or other dimensions. The Covid-19 pandemic has been exacerbating existing inequalities within and among countries, and hitting the most vulnerable people and the poorest countries hardest. It is projected to push back the poorest countries a full 10 years on their SDG progress. There is no doubt that principle of “Leaving No One Behind” has come under serious strain globally.

According to the Secretary-General report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2021,¹ slowing progress in poverty reduction since 2015 has been set back further by the pandemic. The global extreme poverty rate rose in 2020 for the first time in over 20 years. The pandemic and its impact have demonstrated the importance of social protection systems to protect people’s health, jobs and income. As a result, many new social protection measures have been introduced in 2020. But 4 billion people worldwide are still left without any social protection, the majority of whom are the poor and the vulnerable.

The pandemic has also intensified the vulnerabilities and inadequacies of global food systems. It has have pushed millions of people into chronic hunger. In addition, countries around the world continue to struggle with multiple forms of malnutrition.

Before the pandemic, progress had been made in many health areas, albeit not fast enough to meet the SDG 3 targets by 2030. The disruption caused by the pandemic has now halted or even reversed progress made in improving maternal and children health, increasing immunization coverage, and reducing communicable diseases. Many countries are still undergoing vast disruptions to essential health services.

In education, the impact of the pandemic has been drastic. School closures brought by the pandemic have had devastating consequences for children’s learning and wellbeing. Hundreds of millions of children and youth were falling behind in their learning, which will

¹ To be issued in July 2021, as official document.





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have long-term impacts. One year into the COVID-19 crisis, 2 in 3 students worldwide were still affected by full or partial school closures.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to act swiftly to address existing gender inequality which has remained pervasive globally. Women have played a critical role in the response to COVID-19, as frontline health providers, care providers and as managers and leaders of the response and recovery efforts. Yet, they have remained under-represented in critical leadership positions and their rights and priorities are often not explicitly addressed in response and recovery measures.

In 2020, millions of productive jobs were lost, at a rate four times greater than the loss during the global financial crisis in 2009. Young workers and women were particularly hard hit by the crisis in the labour market. While the global economy is slowly recovering, global income growth may remain below pre-pandemic trends for a prolonged period.

Leaving no one behind also means leaving no one offline. The accelerated pace of digital transformation spurred by the pandemic is a double-edged sword. While this has reinvigorated the benefits of meaningful connectivity in protecting people's health and livelihoods and supporting an inclusive recovery, it has also spotlighted on the pervasiveness of the digital divides -- that are further excluding those who are not digitally connected.

Purpose of the session

This session will examine these new dimensions of the global commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind, and the challenges towards protecting and empowering marginalized and vulnerable groups in society in the face of the pandemic, and towards increased resilience and recovery in the years ahead. From a gender-based perspective, the discussions will highlight how the well-being of various social groups, including older persons, young people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants, and those facing digital exclusion, has changed. It will also seek ways to use to the response to the pandemic as a way to relaunch comprehensive policies and strategies towards addressing



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intersecting forms of discrimination and ensuring inclusion and well-being of various social groups in order to get back on track to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda.

Proposed guiding questions

- What are the lessons from the pandemic in adjusting social and economic policies to cope with vulnerability and disadvantage and its diverse effects on families and various groups in society?
- How can we progress to the SDGs be resumed quickly and sustainably for the furthest behind, building back from addressing the setback in poverty, unemployment and exclusion caused by the pandemic?
- What lessons can be learned from the current crisis to formulate more inclusive economic and social policies for the post-pandemic world, while still facing the environmental challenges and climate change?
- How can we monitor recently enacted social protection and digital inclusion measures for their effectiveness and their ability to reach the furthest behind?



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