



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Sustainable Development Outlook 2021

Overview

*From anguish to
determination*





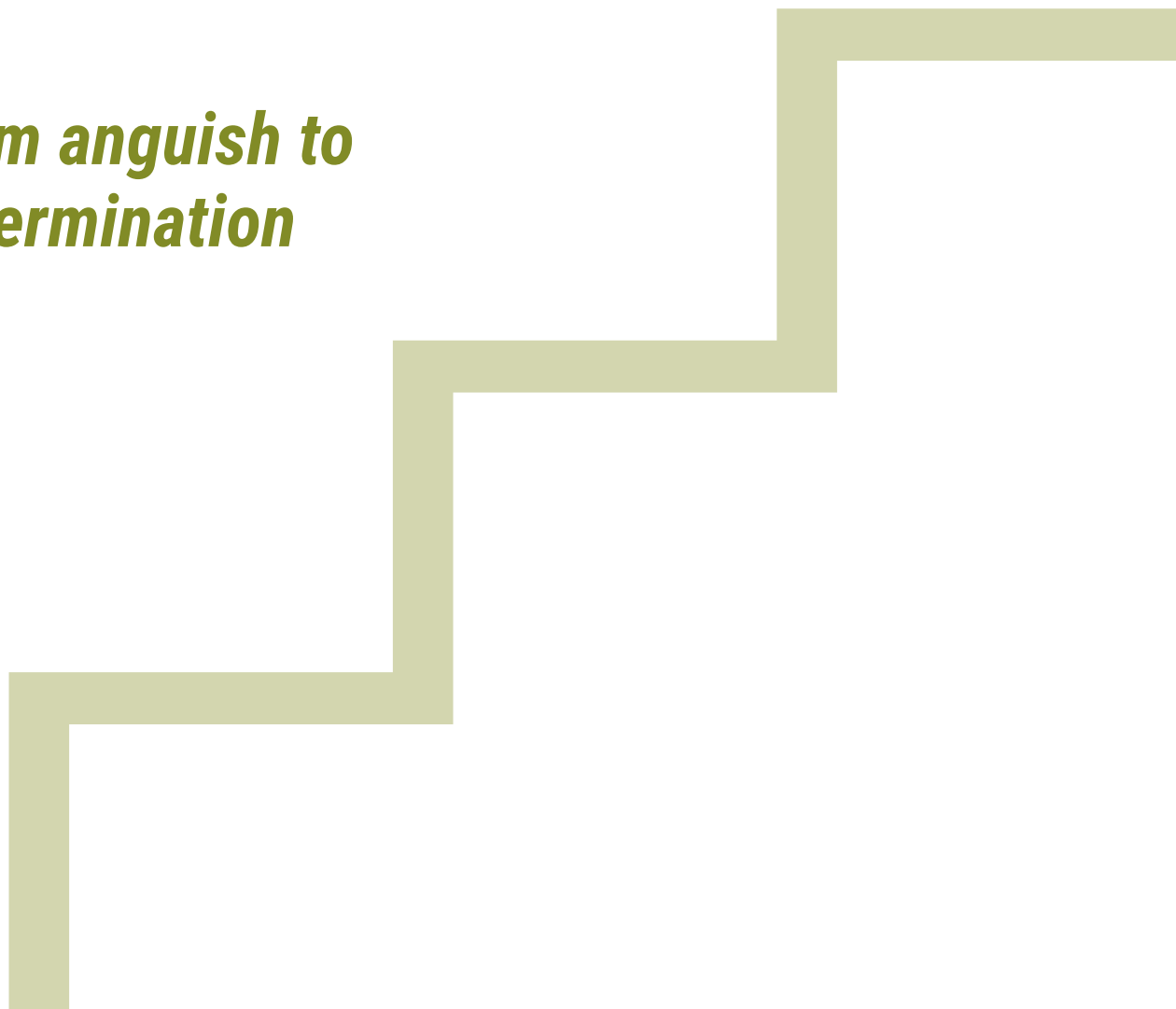
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The *Sustainable Development Outlook 2021* is a report prepared by the Development Research Branch in the Economic Analysis and Policy Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

UN DESA is a vital interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. The Department's mission is to promote and support international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all. Its work is guided by the universal and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with a set of 17 integrated Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. UN DESA's work addresses a range of crosscutting issues that affect peoples' lives and livelihoods, such as social policy, poverty eradication, employment, social inclusion, inequalities, population, indigenous rights, macroeconomic policy, development finance and cooperation, public sector innovation, forest policy, climate change and sustainable development.

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Table of contents

Introduction	5
Interlinkages among the SDGs	5
SDG 1 and 2: Poverty and hunger	7
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding poverty and hunger	7
Impact of COVID-19 on poverty and hunger.....	8
Outlook for the future	9
Policy suggestions	11
SDG 3: Health and well-being	13
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding health and well-being	13
Impact of COVID-19 on health and well-being.....	15
Outlook for the future	17
Policy suggestions	19
SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth	20
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding decent work and economic growth.....	20
Impact of COVID-19 on decent work and economic growth	23
Outlook for the future	24
Policy suggestions	25
SDG 10: Inequality	27
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding inequality.....	27
Impact of COVID-19 on inequality.....	29
Outlook for the future	31
Policy suggestions	31
Achieving the SDGs: the way forward	33
References	37

Introduction

As the saying goes, every cloud has its silver linings. The overarching silver lining of the COVID-19 cloud is the renewed global awareness that we are all in this world together. No nation can truly secure its own well-being without considering, to a certain extent, the well-being of all nations. Two other silver linings of a more concrete nature are the greater awareness of the following: First, quality and affordable universal health care and social protection systems should no longer be considered as “luxuries” of rich countries; instead, all countries should aim to have these systems, knowing that they can be customized to meet their specific conditions. Second, protection of the environment is necessary and urgent if we are to save the human race from yet another existential threat—namely frequent recurrence of zoonotic epidemics and pandemics, such as COVID-19 itself.

Illuminated by these silver linings, it is now possible to see the task of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a new light and use that knowledge to reinvigorate the efforts to accomplish this task. It is with this objective that the 2021 issue of the *Sustainable Development Outlook (SDO 2021)* is presented. It provides in-depth analysis of concrete experiences of both successes and challenges witnessed during the recent period, with the goal of deriving policy recommendations that States Members of the United Nations can find useful in achieving further progress towards the SDGs.

With the above goal in mind, the *SDO 2021* focuses on the following SDGs: SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 2 (hunger), SDG 3 (health and well-being), SDG 8 (growth and employment), and SDG 10 (inequality). In each case, *SDO 2021* begins by using the findings of the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* to identify particular targets and issues for investigation and to select the countries to be used as case studies. The report presents in-depth analyses, based on the case studies and the relevant literature, and uses the findings to present the outlook regarding the selected SDGs in the form of plausible scenarios under different assumptions. The report ends with recommended strategies and policies that can be helpful in realizing the desirable scenarios.

The *SDO 2021* is organized as follows. It begins with an introductory chapter (chapter I) which explains the background, rationale, and structure of the report. It also notes the possible interlinkages among the SDGs selected for review in this report and the consequent connections among the chapters. Chapter II discusses SDG 1 and SDG 2 together because of their close connections. Chapters III, IV and V are devoted to discussion of SDG 3, SDG 8 and SDG 10, respectively. Finally, a separate chapter (chapter VI) is devoted to bringing together the recommendations emerging from different chapters in a way that can more effectively capture the synergies, co-benefits, and trade-offs among the various SDGs considered in this report.

Interlinkages among the SDGs

While the relationship among all SDGs is widely acknowledged, the interlinkages of the SDGs reviewed in this report are particularly strong. For example, poverty (SDG 1) is a major cause of malnutrition (SDG 2), the lack of which adversely affects economic growth (SDG 8) and deprives low-income people of the income necessary to access health care (SDG 3), thus perpetuating and even aggravating inequality (SDG 10). Table O.1 presents these interlinkages at the more disaggregated level of SDG targets.

These interlinkages create the possibility of both virtuous and vicious cycles. They also create the possibility of synergies among policies and give rise to nodes, points of

Table 0.1
Interlinkages among targets of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8 and 10

Impacts of an SDG on the other SDGs				
SDG 1	SDG 2	SDG 3	SDG 8	SDG 10
<p>Positive impact</p> <p>Negative impact</p> <p>SDG targets are in parentheses</p>	<p>Secure tenure rights to land (1.4) enables better agriculture (2.3, 2.4)</p> <p>Financial constraints of the poor limit access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food (2.1, 2.2)</p> <p>Poverty compromises nutrition and consumption of vitamins and minerals (2.1, 2.2)</p>	<p>Poverty reduction can support good health and well-being (3.4)</p> <p>Poverty is a major cause of ill health and a financial barrier to accessing health care (3.8)</p> <p>Better nutrition can reduce non-communicable diseases and enhance well-being (3.4)</p> <p>Agriculture production diversity (2.5) contributes to dietary diversity and good health (8.3.4)</p> <p>Chronic hunger (protein intake) and/or hidden hunger (micronutrients intake) lead to higher health risks (3.4)</p> <p>Irregular food supply along with low quality food (2.1, 2.2) can compromise immunity (8.3.4)</p>	<p>Lower poverty reduces informality and unemployment for women and young people (8.3)</p> <p>Improved nutrition increases productivity, contributing to economic growth (8.1, 8.2)</p> <p>Malnutrition adversely affects physiological and mental capacity (3.4), lowering productivity (8.2)</p> <p>Malnutrition and slow growth early in life (2.2) impact economic performance later in life (8.2)</p> <p>Inadequate nutrition (2.1, 2.2) decreases human capital and threatens economic stability (8.1, 8.2)</p>	<p>Poor households cannot make investments to lead them out of poverty, resulting in persistent inequality (10.1, 10.2, 10.3)</p> <p>Rural households with limited access to economic opportunities and productive technologies cannot catch up, resulting in persistent inequality (10.1, 10.2, 10.3).</p>
<p>SDG 2</p> <p>Malnutrition (2.1, 2.2) reduces productivity, reinforcing poverty (1.1, 1.2)</p>			<p>Access to universal health care (3.8) supports formal employment and productivity (8.3, 8.6.1)</p> <p>Good health and well-being strengthen productive capacities, reduce fiscal spending, and contribute to economic growth (8.1, 8.2)</p>	<p>Higher health inequalities can exacerbate overall inequalities (10.1.1, 10.2.1)</p>
<p>SDG 3</p> <p>Good health and well-being support income earning and security (1.1.1, 1.2.1, 1.4.1)</p> <p>Higher health risks can be fatal for populations living under extreme poverty (1.1.1, 1.2.1)</p> <p>Income loss due to sickness and out-of-pocket spending on health care (3.8.2) pushes vulnerable groups into poverty (1.1.1, 1.2.1)</p> <p>Increased populations with large household health expenditure as a proportion of income (3.8.2) can exacerbate poverty (1.1, 1.2), hunger and malnutrition (2.1, 2.2)</p>	<p>A health-care system that provides immunization, early diagnosis and treatment (3.8, 3.b.1) reduces malnutrition (2.2.2)</p>			
<p>SDG 8</p> <p>Faster economic growth reduces poverty (1.1, 1.2)</p> <p>More inclusive growth reduces poverty in the most vulnerable groups (1.4)</p>	<p>Improved resource efficiency reduces pressures on land, water and other natural resources and makes food production more sustainable (2.1, 2.2)</p>	<p>Economic growth can enable countries to increase public health spending (3.7, 3.8)</p> <p>Inclusive growth with less informality leads to improved access to health care services (3.8)</p>		<p>Faster economic growth raises wages and increases job opportunities (10.1)</p> <p>Decent work can support lower inequality (10.2)</p> <p>Economic crises disproportionately hit vulnerable firms and households, exacerbating inequality (10.1, 10.2)</p>
<p>SDG 10</p> <p>Income disparity allows the malnutrition-poverty cycle to persist (1.1, 1.2, 1.4)</p>	<p>Reducing gender inequality in education and employment decreases child malnutrition (2.2)</p> <p>Income inequality increases the likelihood of food insecurity, undercutting the positive effect of economic growth (2.1, 2.2)</p>	<p>Economic inequality and disparity in access to public health resources and technologies leave disadvantaged households more vulnerable to the pandemic and other health risks (3.7, 3.8)</p>	<p>Lower income inequality boosts effective demand and fosters inclusive economic growth</p> <p>Pervasive prejudice and discrimination undermine access to decent work (8.5, 8.8)</p> <p>Income inequality erodes economic growth by reducing education opportunities for disadvantaged children, social mobility and the propensity to consume (8.1)</p>	

Source: UN DESA.

Note: For a description of SDG targets, see <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>.

convergence which can be used to influence several SDGs simultaneously. It will therefore be important to keep these interlinkages in mind in the discussion of the individual SDGs and the policies that may be pursued to accelerate the progress towards them.

Poverty and hunger

The eradication of poverty (SDG 1) and ending hunger (SDG 2) are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The success in both these areas directly affects the ability of countries to achieve many other Goals of the 2030 Agenda, as noted in the previous section.

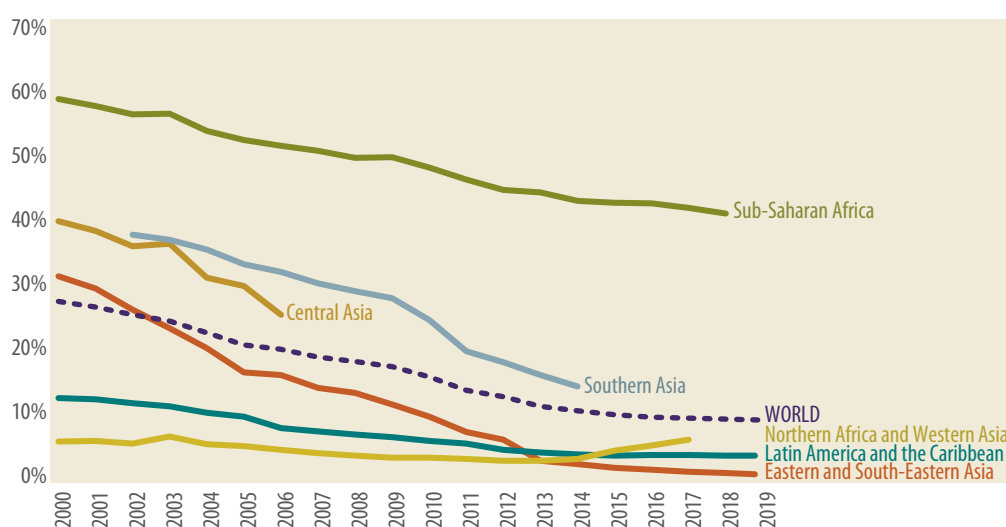
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding poverty and hunger

As the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* details, encouraging progress was made towards SDG 1 in the years before COVID-19, with the share of the world's population living in extreme poverty declining from 10.1 per cent in 2015 to 8.4 per cent in 2019 (United Nations, 2021a).¹ However, the rate of progress and the remaining levels of extreme poverty differed across regions, as shown in figure O.1.

Unfortunately, commensurate progress was lacking regarding undernourishment (SDG target 2.1) during the pre-COVID-19 years. The total number of people suffering from undernourishment (or malnutrition) increased from 653 million in 2015 to 690 million in 2019. This increase was largely due to the increase in undernourishment in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (figure O.2). The divergent trends show that reduction of poverty may not always translate into reduction of malnutrition.

Figure O.1

Extreme poverty headcount ratio (SDG target 1.1), by region, 2000–2019

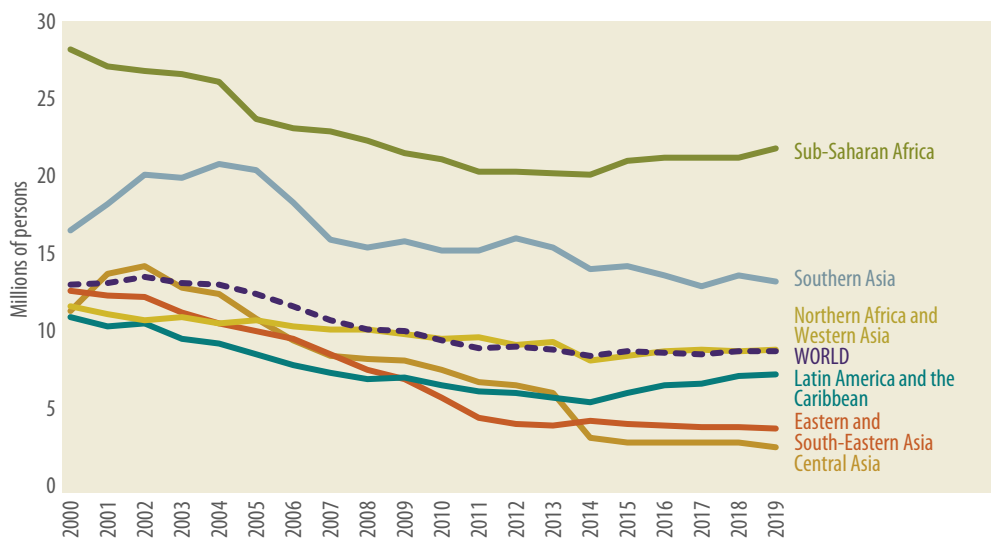


Source: UN DESA, based on data from UNSD Global SDG Indicators Database.

¹ All the data mentioned in this report on SDG progress are taken from *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*, prepared by the Statistical Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (United Nations, 2021a), if not indicated otherwise.

Figure 0.2

Number of people suffering from undernourishment (SDG target 2.1), by region, 2000–2019



Source: UN DESA, based on data from UNSD Global SDG Indicators Database.

Impact of COVID-19 on poverty and hunger

COVID-19 impeded progress towards SDGs 1 and 2 with particular force. The economic contraction caused by COVID-19 drove somewhere between 119 million and 124 million additional people into extreme poverty. This sudden jump pushed the poverty reduction trajectory further off from SDG target 1.1, even assuming that the pre-COVID-19 rates of reduction will hold.

Needless to say, the situation regarding progress towards SDG 2 also worsened due to COVID-19. The pandemic intensified the vulnerabilities and inadequacies of the global food systems and increased food insecurity by affecting supply chains and trade, causing a fall in income, reducing food availability, increasing food losses due to transportation challenges, and interrupting school meals. The number of people facing acute food insecurity had already doubled to about 265 million by the end of 2020, as compared to 135 million in 2019 (World Food Programme, 2020). According to the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021*, the pandemic has pushed an additional 83–132 million people into chronic hunger in 2020. In particular, wasting (low weight for height) is projected to be most impacted by COVID-19 in the short term, and the number of children under the age of five suffering from wasting may have increased by 15 per cent in 2020, making the achievement of SDG target 2.2 challenging.

Countries across the world tried in different ways to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the targets of SDGs 1 and 2. A number of countries used social protection measures to defend the pre-COVID-19 gains in reduction of poverty and hunger. India, for example, used its Public Distribution System, reaching around 800 million people, to quickly scale up the distribution of food grains, almost doubling the volume between April and November 2020. Similarly, about 40 million people could depend on India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGA) for employment and subsistence during June 2020, the largest ever enrolment in the programme. Similarly, the pre-existing *Bolsa Familia* programme helped Brazil to counteract some of the impact of COVID-19 on poverty and malnutrition. Pre-existing systems of social protection helped to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on poverty and hunger in many other countries too. Many countries

adopted new, emergency social protection measures to limit the aggravation of poverty and malnutrition.

Outlook for the future

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) projected that the extreme poverty headcount would decrease to 6 per cent in 2030. After incorporating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN DESA now estimates the global poverty rate to have increased to 10.3 per cent in 2020 and projects it to decline slightly to 9.2 per cent by 2030 (United Nations, 2021b). This would mean that by 2030, as many as 785 million people could find themselves in extreme poverty. Similarly, prior to COVID-19, the number of undernourished people was projected to reach 841 million in 2030. However, incorporating the impact of COVID-19, this number is likely to increase to 909 million in 2030. In other words, under the business-as-usual (BAU) scenario, neither SDG 1 nor SDG 2 will be achieved. Radical new initiatives are needed.

Redistribution combined with growth can produce the needed miracle

The rate of poverty, defined by an income cut-off, depends on two parameters: the mean level of income and the distribution of income among the population. The former depends on the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate, and the latter depends on the initial functional distribution of income and its subsequent redistribution through various tax and transfer mechanisms. Globalization and technological revolution have opened up different routes towards structural transformation and economic growth. For example, Ethiopia relied more on improving agricultural productivity; Viet Nam on the reallocation of labour from agriculture to manufacturing; and India on the expansion and upgrading of the service sector.

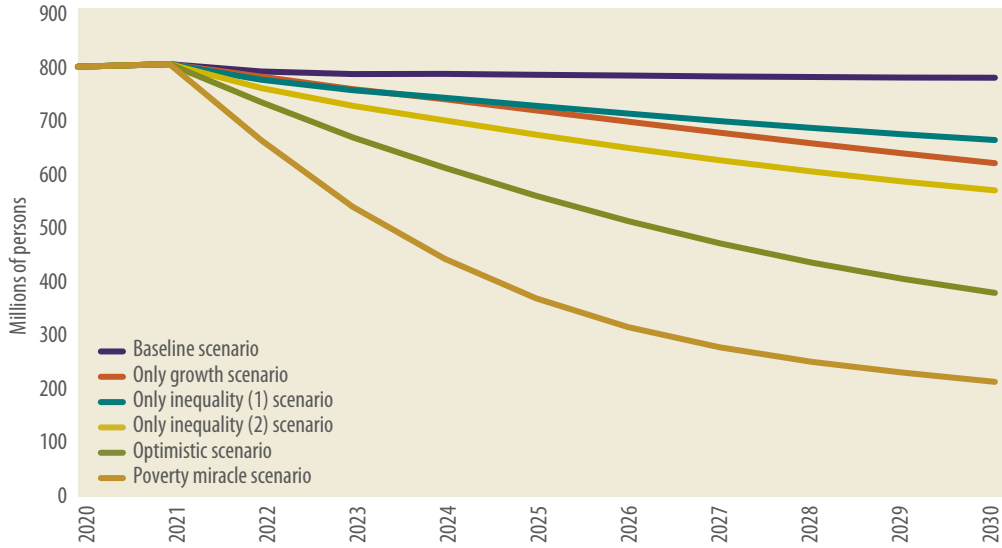
Calculations by UN DESA, however, show that relying on growth alone will not be enough to ensure achievement of SDG 1. Redistribution has to play an important role. For example, if a 1 per cent average annual reduction in income inequality is achieved in developing countries between 2022 and 2030, in addition to the average annual economic growth rate of 4.7 per cent projected by UN DESA, the global extreme poverty headcount could be reduced by 100 million people by 2030. Figure O.3 presents six alternative scenarios of poverty reduction under different assumptions regarding the growth of the mean income and the degree of reduction of inequality of distribution.

These projections also show that in order to achieve SDG target 1.1 (ending extreme poverty) by 2030, developing countries need to achieve a rate of average annual economic growth of 10 per cent, as compared with 4.7 per cent in the BAU scenario, and a drastic annual reduction in income inequality by 7 per cent. It is this combination that is needed for the *poverty miracle* scenario.

Ending hunger by shifting to sustainable food and agricultural systems

The number of people suffering from undernourishment was increasing in the pre-COVID-19 years, and the situation in this regard worsened with the pandemic, as noted above. The BAU scenario regarding SDG target 2.1 is therefore not encouraging, and the COVID-19-adjusted BAU scenario projects that about 909 million people could suffer from undernourishment in 2030 (figure O.4). However, with changed policies, it is possible to

Figure 0.3
Global projections for the number of people living in poverty, by scenario, 2020–2030

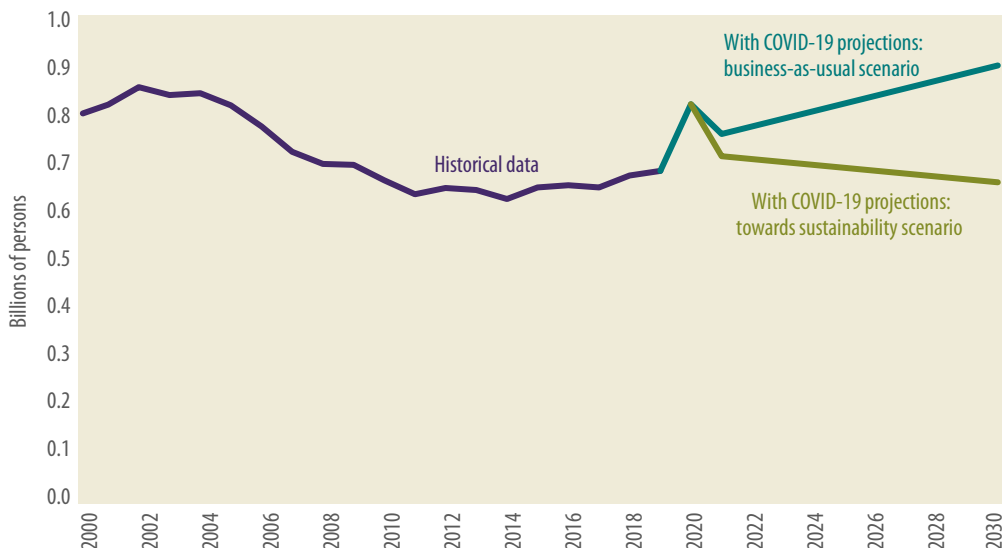


Source: UN DESA calculations.

Note: For details regarding the assumptions underlying different scenarios and measurement of inequality, see Sustainable Development Outlook 2021 full report.

achieve a *towards sustainability* scenario, under which the prevalence of undernourishment can be reduced by nearly a third, or to about 664 million, by 2030. This can be achieved through more efficient use of resources (allowing to conserve land and water); reducing wastage of food; switching to healthier diet; and promotion of circular economy, among others. Under this scenario, much of the negative impact of COVID-19 would be overcome, and the number of undernourished in 2030 would be similar to what it was in 2018 (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020).

Figure 0.4
Global number of undernourished persons under COVID-19 business-as-usual and towards sustainability scenarios, 2000–2019 and projections to 2030



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from FAO (2018) and FAO (2020).

Policy suggestions

In view of the strong linkages between SDGs 1 and 2, most policies addressing poverty also influence the outcomes regarding malnutrition, although additional policies are needed to address the latter. The following presents policies that address both:

- **Aim at both growth and equity by choosing the best route to structural transformation**

Growth alone will not be enough to reach SDGs 1 and 2; growth has to be combined with reduction in income inequality. The combination of growth and equity will provide more income in the hands of low-income people, allowing them to come out of poverty and access adequate nutritious food. Globalization and technological revolution have opened up different paths to structural transformation, and countries need to choose judiciously from among them, keeping in mind their specific conditions and the objective of achieving growth with equity.

- **Continue emphasis on human capital**

The emphasis on human capital must continue, because growth based on human capital is more conducive to reduction of poverty and malnutrition. The increasing role of digital technologies has further raised the importance of human capital in achieving SDGs 1 and 2. Narrowing the within- and across-country digital divide is imperative.

- **Put social protection systems in place to avoid setbacks during crises**

All countries need to either create new or bolster existing social protection systems. Pre-existing social protection systems can greatly help to address the adverse effects of crises and protect gains in achieving SDGs 1 and 2, as the COVID-19 experience has shown. Following the SDG target 1.3—calling for implementation of “nationally appropriate” social protection systems—low-income countries can customize their social protection systems to their specific conditions, making use of digital technologies to overcome resource constraints. Eligibility for social protection in many countries is often linked to residency, employment, and income levels. The COVID-19 experience has shown that social protection systems should be based on the principle of universality rather than tying these systems to requirements that can become a barrier in emergency situations.

Specific policies pertaining to SDG 2

- **Raise agricultural productivity**

Agricultural productivity of developing countries should be raised to higher levels through increased research, development and innovation, while ensuring environmental and social sustainability of the investments undertaken. Research and investment should focus on adapting agricultural technologies to the local contexts and making them more suitable for smallholder farmers.

➤ **Reduce food waste, adopt healthier diet and ensure equitable distribution of food**

Achieving the towards sustainability scenario will require a reduction in food loss and waste and a reduction of animal-based foods and vegetable oils and fats in the diet. This will require better regulatory frameworks; research and investment for improved storage and processing; pricing of food to better reflect its nutritional value and the broader economic, social, health and environmental costs associated with both production and consumption; and raising consumer awareness. *Available food should be equitably distributed* using both the price mechanism and direct distribution to those who lack the necessary purchasing power. As Sen (1983) showed, often the root cause of hunger lies not in the lack of aggregate availability of food but in unequal access to it.

➤ **Practice sustainable agriculture to protect the environment and to avoid recurrence of pandemics such as COVID-19**

The loss of forests and wilderness to expansion of human habitation, agriculture, and other economic activities is a major reason for the recurrence of epidemics and pandemics such as COVID-19. Protecting humanity from this new existential threat requires a wide-ranging shift, including a *switch to environmentally sustainable agriculture, requiring less land, water and other natural resources.* Such a switch can be achieved through adoption of new precision technologies in agriculture, reduction in the use of chemical inputs, and by promoting the practices of organic, circular and conservation agriculture.

Health and well-being

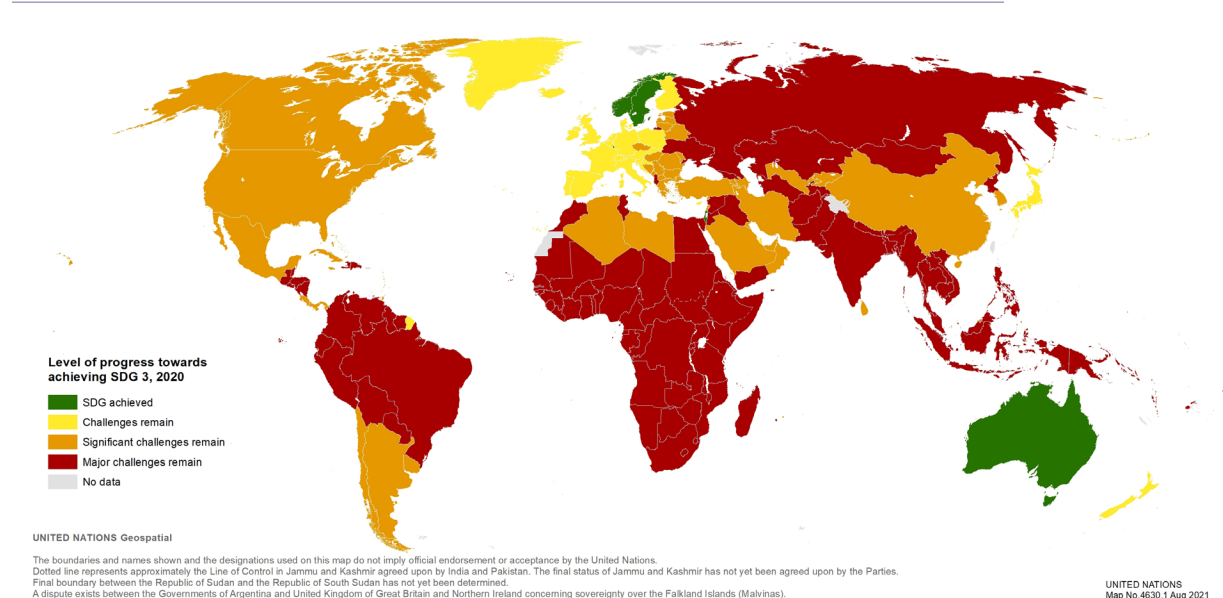
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding health and well-being

Overall progress

Figure O.5 presents the state of overall progress towards SDG 3 across countries around the world before the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that while very few countries (such as Australia, Norway and Sweden) were on track to achieving this goal, many others faced varying degrees of challenge.



Figure O.5
Progress towards SDG 3 across countries, 2020



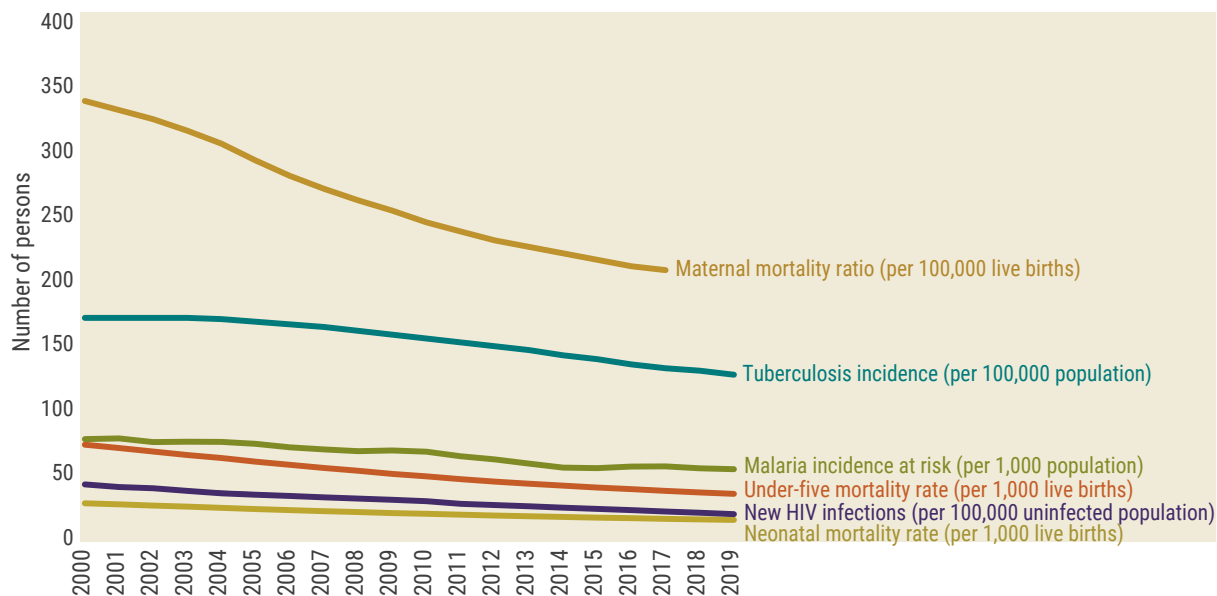
Source: Recreated from van Zanten and van Tulder (2020).

Progress in specific areas

Despite deficiencies in the overall progress towards SDG 3, there were improvements regarding many specific health and well-being indicators during pre-COVID-19 years, including maternal, child (under-five) and neonatal mortality rates, and in the incidence of tuberculosis, malaria and HIV infections (figure O.6).

There were, however, significant variations in this regard across different regions of the world. For example, progress in reduction of maternal mortality was more rapid in countries of sub-Saharan Africa and in least developed countries (LDCs), where these rates were initially higher. On the other hand, the decrease was expectedly less pronounced in countries where these rates initially were already low. An exception seems to be in small island developing States (SIDS), where mortality rates did not decline significantly, even though these were initially relatively high.

Figure 0.6
Pre-COVID-19 global trends of major communicable diseases and maternal, neonatal and infant mortality, 2000–2019

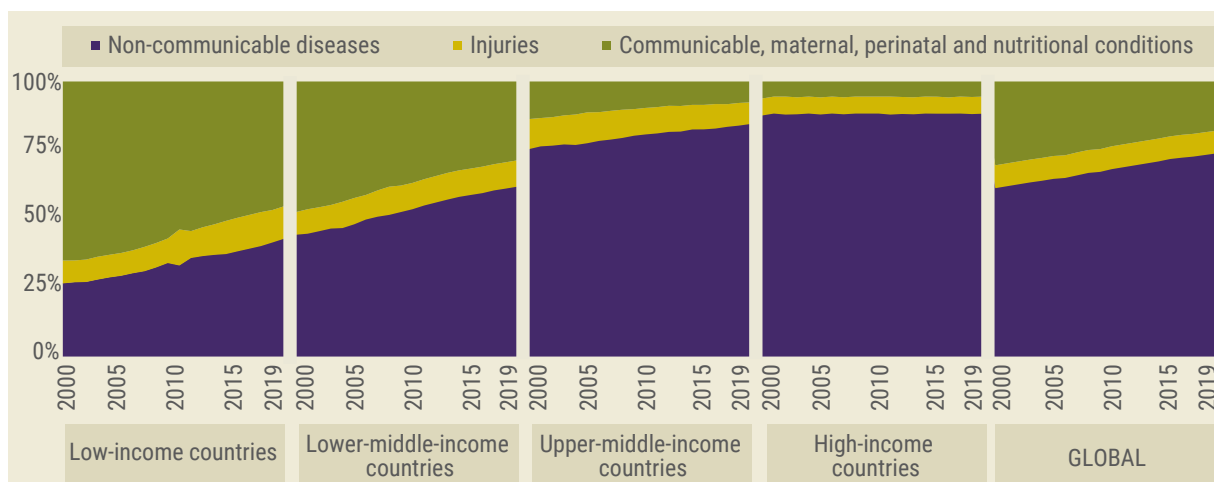


Source: UN DESA, based on data from UNSD Global SDG Indicators Database.

The difference in the pre-COVID-19 situation regarding health can also be seen across countries belonging to various income groups. Figure O.7 shows that in countries with higher per capita incomes, most of the deaths are caused by non-communicable diseases, whereas in countries with lower per capita incomes, more deaths are caused by communicable diseases.

The recent recurrence of zoonotic epidemics and pandemics such as COVID-19 has changed the above situation regarding the importance of communicable and non-

Figure 0.7
Relative importance of different causes of death in countries of different income levels, 2000–2019

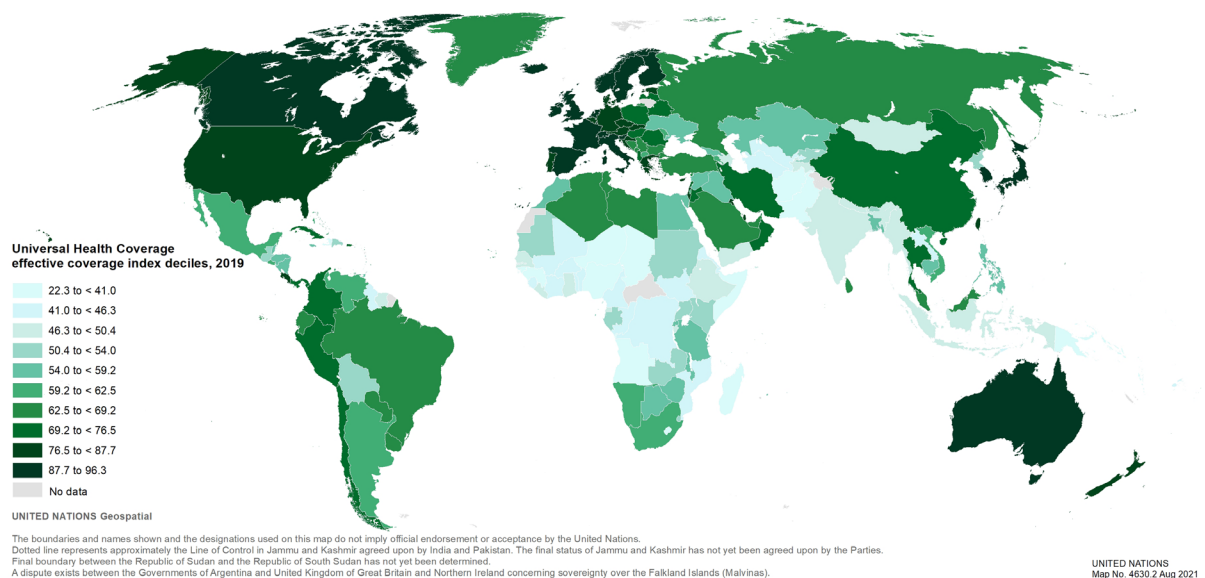


Source: Recreated from WHO (2021).

communicable diseases among different groups of countries. The highly communicable zoonotic diseases are a threat to all countries, and a multipronged response is necessary to deal with them. As many researchers and observers have pointed out, the increasing human encroachment on animal habitats has been a major driver of these diseases (Andersen and Rockstrom, 2020). In addition to strengthening health systems, it will therefore be necessary to stop further loss of forests and wilderness and to recover some of what has already been lost.

As far as strengthening health systems is concerned, the experience of COVID-19 has confirmed again that an important determinant of health outcomes is the extent and quality of universal health coverage (UHC). There are large variations in this regard, with only a handful of countries having coverage extending to 75 per cent or more of their population. On the other hand, for many countries the coverage is less than 25 per cent (figure O.8).

Figure O.8
UHC effective coverage index, by decile, 2019



Source: Recreated from GBD 2019 Universal Health Coverage Collaborators (2020).

Note: Deciles indicate the distribution of UHC effective coverage index values per country.

However, evidence shows that it is possible to have a high degree of coverage even with low levels of expenditure. Figure O.9 shows that even within \$500 of per capita pooled health expenditure, the UHC effective coverage can vary from about 20 per cent to about 70 per cent. This shows that even low-income countries can achieve a high degree of UHC coverage.

Impact of COVID-19 on health and well-being

Among the SDGs covered in this report, COVID-19 affected SDG 3 most directly. As of 12 August 2021, 4.33 million people have died from COVID-19, and the number of confirmed cases have reached 205 million. Apart from these direct effects, progress towards SDG 3 suffered due to various indirect effects of COVID-19. The economic downturns

Figure 0.9

UHC effective coverage index relative to pooled health spending per capita, by region, 2018–2019



Source: UN DESA, based on data from GBD 2019 Universal Health Coverage Collaborators (2020) and World Development Indicators online.

Note: Pooled health expenditure per capita includes domestic general government health expenditure, domestic private health expenditure and external health expenditure (all measured in PPP, current international dollars).

caused by COVID-19 led to people having less income to access health care. Also, as resources were diverted to deal with the virus, less medical facilities and attention were available to be devoted to other diseases and health care programmes. As a result, some of the progress achieved in past decades in maternal, reproductive and child health was lost. Advances made in reducing yellow fever, malaria, tuberculosis, neglected tropical diseases, HIV and hepatitis B and C have also been severely affected (United Nations, 2021a).

People with low income, those engaged in informal employment, and those lacking housing and social security were less able to comply with various restrictions needed to avoid COVID-19 infection. By contrast, people who were able to work remotely, to access telemedicine, and who enjoyed more economic security were better able to reduce their exposure to the COVID-19 risk (Sirleaf and Clark, 2021). These opposite circumstances amplified pre-existing health, income and wealth inequalities. These inequalities are now compounded by inequalities regarding vaccination both within and across countries. Most developing countries lack enough vaccines, and due to either structural reasons or discriminatory policies, low-income groups in these countries have even less access to whatever quantities of vaccines these countries can obtain.

One of the important lessons of COVID-19 is that no part of the population within a country can be safe if safety cannot be ensured for the rest. Similarly, no one country can be safe if safety cannot be ensured for all countries. This experience has strengthened

the rationale for ensuring quality and affordable UHC in all countries, including those with low per capita income. Similarly, it has strengthened the rationale for high-income countries to help low-income countries achieve UHC.

Outlook for the future

Figure O.10 indicates possible scenarios of fatality impacts of immunization disruption and postponement due to COVID-19 in some developing countries (Gaythorpe and others, 2021). It shows predicted number of deaths per 100,000 people due to measles and meningococcal A during 2020–2030 under the following four scenarios:

- (i) Scenario 1: Business as usual (BAU), i.e., no total disruption;
- (ii) Scenario 2: Disruption of routine immunization (RI) by 50 per cent;
- (iii) Scenario 3: Postponement of 2020 supplementary immunization activities (SIA) to 2021;
- (iv) Scenario 4: Disruption of RI by 50 per cent and postponement of 2020 SIAs to 2021.

Figure O.10 shows that, in the case of measles, the effects of a reduction in RI coverage in Bangladesh in 2020 will not show up in the immediate future—thanks to the past progress in immunization—but will result in an increased risk of outbreaks and deaths during 2028–2030 (Scenario 2). By contrast, in Ethiopia, a drop in RI would bring a higher risk of death sooner, with an average increase of 2.26 deaths during 2020–2030 (Scenario 2), while the postponement of SIA from 2020 to 2021 would also bring higher risk of death sooner (Scenario 3). The disruption to RI and postponement of SIA in Kenya will not lead to increased risk of deaths, due to high coverage of the first dose of measles vaccine and better-timed campaigns in preventing outbreaks during 2020–2030 (Scenario 4). In Nigeria, the reduction in RI in 2020 brings forward the risk of the projected outbreak to 2025 from 2030 (Scenario 2). In South Sudan, the postponement of SIA will not show up in the short-term—thanks to past progress in SIA—but will result in increased risk of death during 2027–2028 (Scenario 3).

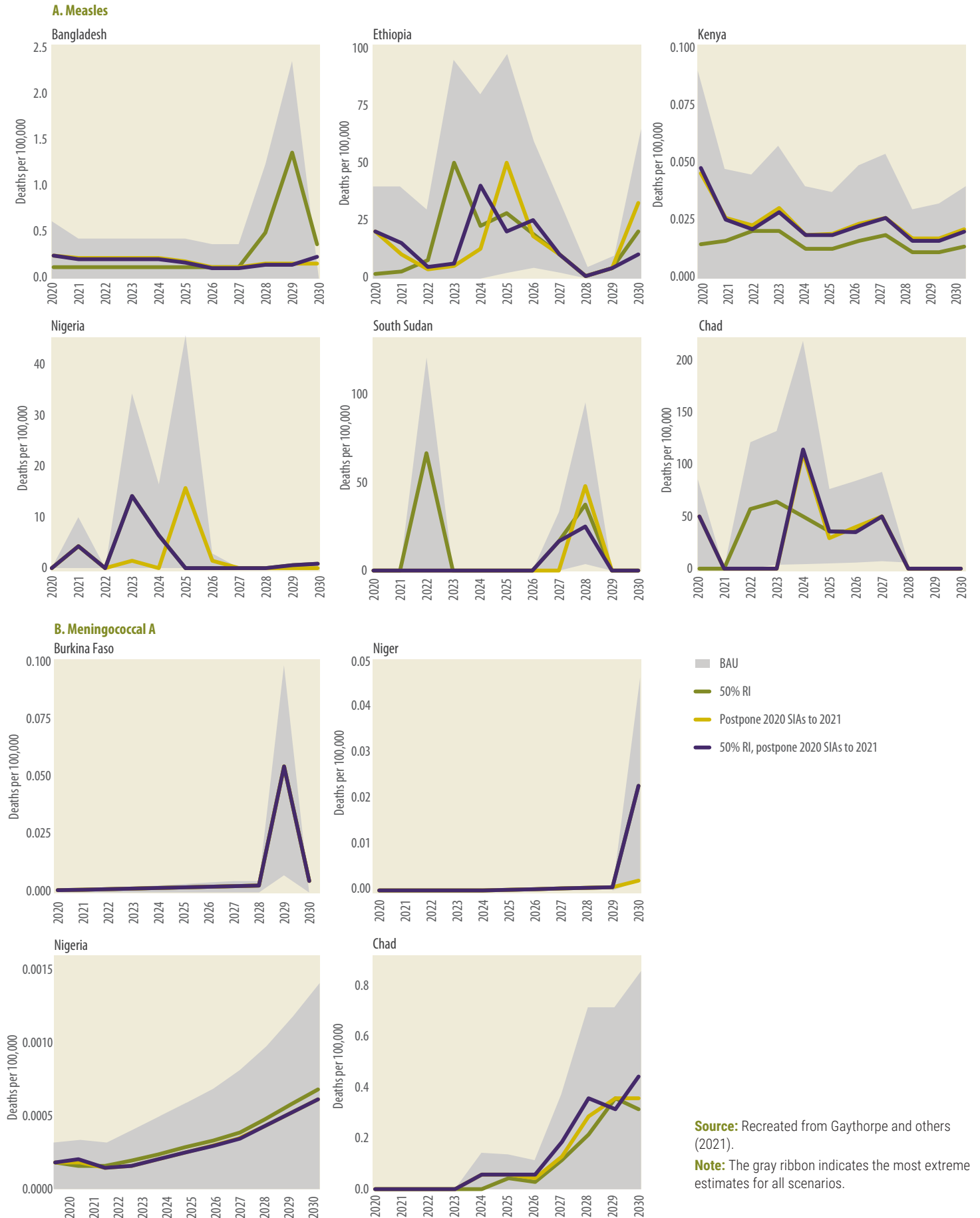
In the case of meningococcal A, a short-term disruption to RI in Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Chad (Scenario 2) and short-term disruption of SIA in Nigeria and Chad (Scenario 3) would not have significant effects in the short run because they conducted SIA during 2010–2014 and introduced the vaccine into their RI schedules during 2016–2019. Yet, as time progresses beyond 2025, the disease burden and risk of death would rise. A maximum of a 4 per cent increase in deaths is projected over the long term.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 389 million more people will benefit from UHC effective coverage by 2023, falling short by about 1 billion people of the target set by the WHO Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW13) for 2019–2023 (World Health Organization, 2019). Although providing UHC at a sophisticated level is a challenge for many low-income countries, they can first set up a system of basic universal primary health care and then build it up over time. They can also make effective use of the new opportunities that digital technologies, including telemedicine, are creating to overcome resource constraints. The experience also shows the importance of preparedness and capacity to mount coordinated action from central to local levels; trust in government; and past experiences with epidemics and other public health emergencies in confronting crises such as COVID-19.

The COVID-19 crisis has also revealed the importance of globally coordinated action to contain and overcome pandemics, including through quick development of vaccines and rapid vaccination of people across the globe. The exceptions to the Trade-Related Aspects

Figure O.10

Scenarios of immunization disruption and impacts on deaths from measles (figure A) and meningococcal A (figure B), 2020–2030



of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) granted for public health reasons need to be expanded and fully utilized. In the current context of COVID-19, more efforts need to be made to support the initiatives by WHO that promote licensing, pool vaccine production capabilities, etc. in order to quickly expand production and distribution of vaccines. Countries with firms producing COVID-19 vaccines may also consider compensating these firms to share their patented vaccine formulas with competent vaccine producing firms in other countries in order to quickly increase global vaccine supply.

Policy suggestions

➤ Reduce inequality in health-care opportunities

Inequalities in health-care opportunities both within and across countries need to be reduced because, as COVID-19 has shown, no part of the population of a country is safe unless safety can be ensured for all parts; and no country can be safe unless safety can be ensured for all countries. This effort has to begin with reduction of inequality regarding COVID-19 vaccination.

➤ Accelerate access to UHC

Going forward, *all countries should set up a universal health-care system*, beginning with a universal system of primary health care and building it up over time, making maximum use of the opportunities created by digital technologies for overcoming resource constraints. The COVID-19 experience has revalidated SDG target 3.8, calling for access to quality and affordable UHC, which can, in particular, prevent reversal of the progress made in controlling infectious diseases through immunization. The experience has also shown that even low-income countries can achieve UHC.

➤ Overcome the gaps caused by COVID-19 in the attention paid to non-communicable diseases and other health-care objectives

Going forward, it will be important to *rapidly close the gaps that COVID-19 has created regarding attention to non-COVID-19 health-care issues and objectives*, such as non-communicable diseases, child immunization, and care for expecting mothers. The consequences of the gaps should not be allowed to jeopardize the progress towards related SDG 3 targets.

➤ Make the COVID-19 vaccine a public good

More flexibility should be shown regarding the TRIPS for protection of public health as stipulated by SDG target 3.B and validated by the COVID-19 experience. Furthermore, countries with firms producing COVID-19 vaccines can compensate them to share their patented vaccine formulas with competent vaccine producing firms in other countries so as to quickly increase the vaccine supply worldwide.

➤ Pay attention to linkages between health goals and socioeconomic and environmental goals

More efforts should be made to protect forests and wilderness in order to avoid recurrence of zoonotic epidemics and pandemics such as COVID-19, which has revealed more clearly the close interlinkages between health, socioeconomic and environmental outcomes.



Decent work and economic growth

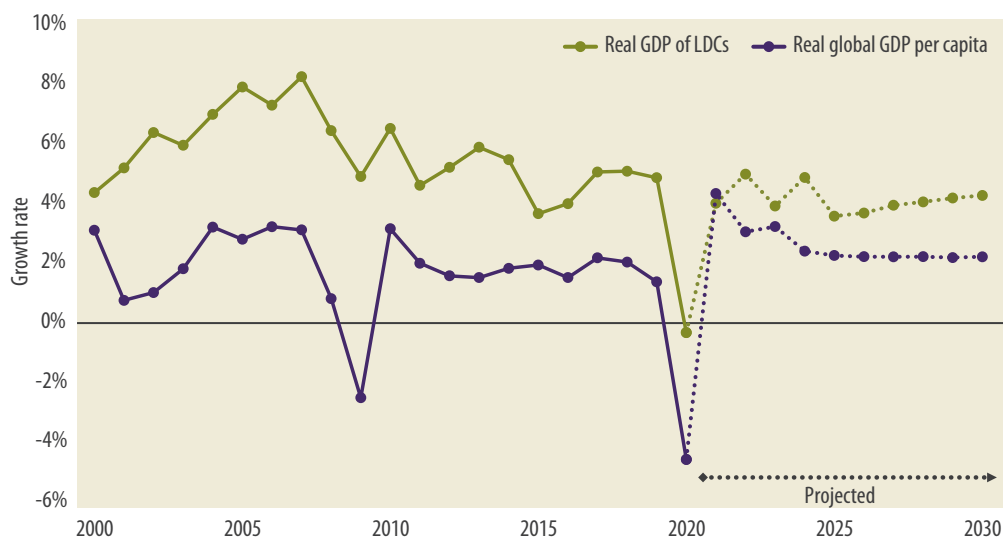
Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding decent work and economic growth

Slowdown in GDP growth rate

SDG 8.1 calls for accelerating economic growth. However, the GDP growth rate had been slowing in much of the world even prior to the pandemic. The average growth rate of global real per capita GDP declined since 2010, dropping to below 2 per cent per year between 2010 and 2019, just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (figure O.11). It also shows that real GDP growth of LDCs slowed down from an average annual rate of 6.0 per cent during 1998–2012 to 4.7 per cent during 2013–2019.

Figure O.11

Annual growth rates of global real GDP per capita and real GDP of LDCs, 2000–2019 and projections to 2030



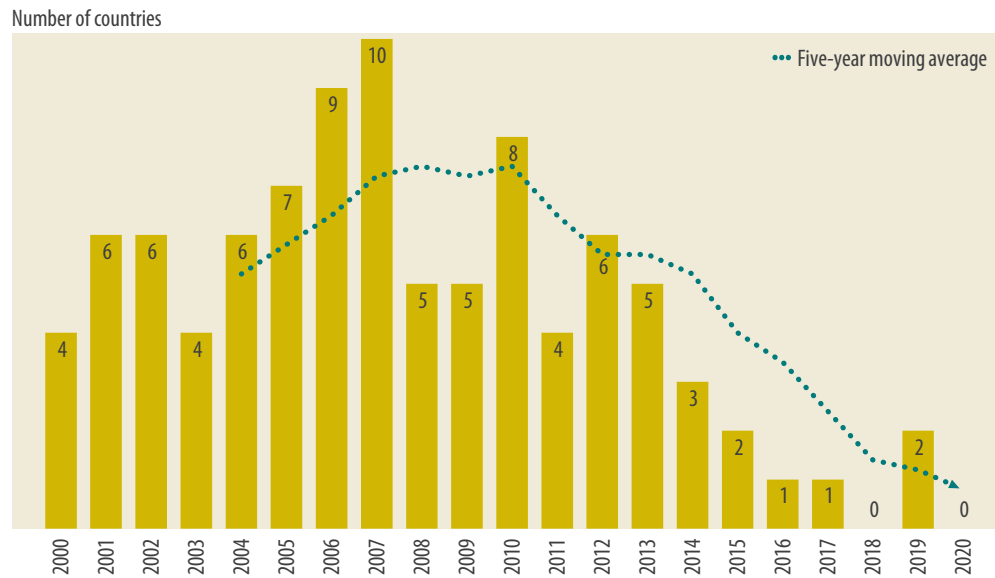
Source: UN DESA, based on data from the World Economic Forecasting Model (WEFM).

SDG target 8.1 requires the GDP of LDCs to grow by at least 7 per cent per year. Meeting this target proved challenging, even though growth in the LDCs has been more rapid than the world average. Of the 46 LDCs, only 6 have averaged GDP growth above 7 per cent per year during 2013–2019. Since 2010, the number of LDCs that have reached a yearly per capita growth of 7 per cent or higher has decreased significantly (figure O.12).

Informality of employment

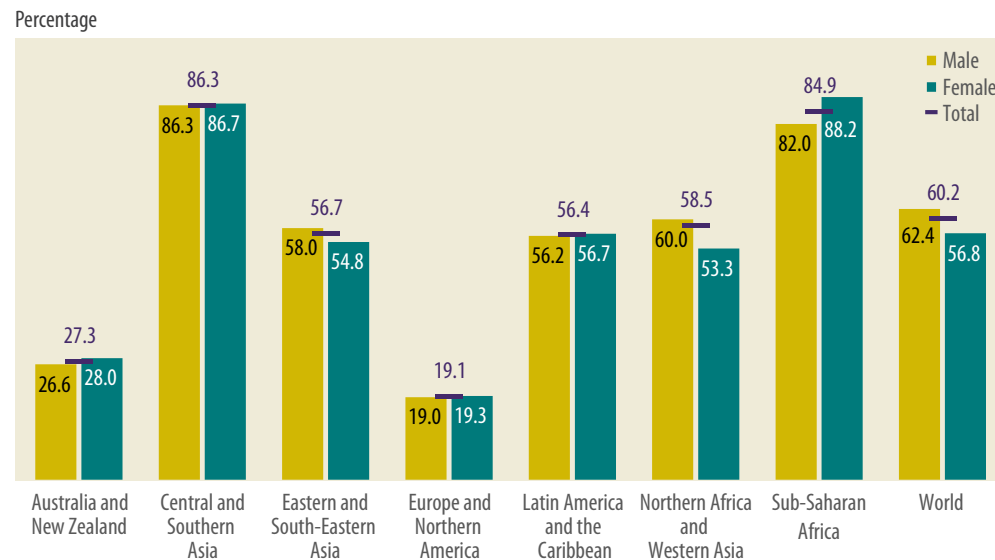
SDG target 8.5 asks for “encouraging formalization and growth of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises.” In 2019, over 60 per cent of the world’s workers—2 billion people—were in informal employment arrangements. In sub-Saharan Africa, informality reached 85 per cent of the continent’s total workforce. In Central and Southern Asia, informality was higher, at 86 per cent (figure O.13). In some countries, the informality declined due partly to policies (Amarante, 2021).

Figure 0.12
Number of LDCs that achieved over 7 per cent per capita growth annually, 2000–2020



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from the World Economic Forecasting Model (WEFM).

Figure 0.13
Proportion of informal employment, by region and gender, 2019



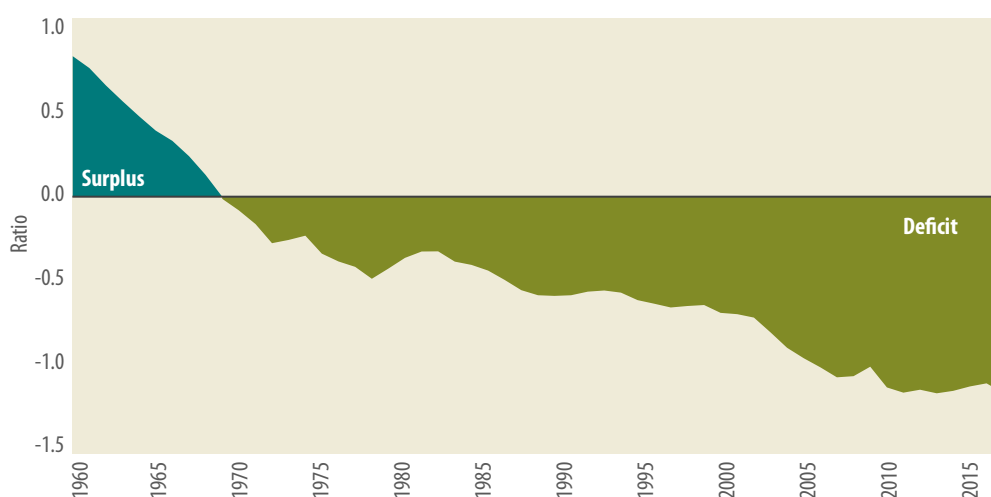
Source: UN DESA, based on data from UNSD Global SDG Indicators Database.

Material requirements of growth: limited progress in decoupling

SDG target 8.4 enjoins countries “to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation”. Due to rising levels of natural resources required for increasing levels of production, the total ecological footprint per capita is now double the per capita biocapacity of the earth, and the gap is increasing (figure O.14). Sustainability requires a reversal of this process by decoupling growth from material resource requirement.

Figure 0.14

Ratio of per capita ecological footprint relative to biocapacity, 1961–2017



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from Global Footprint Network.

Note: Footprint and biocapacity divided by the population, measured in global hectares per person.

Responding to this objective, countries across the world have been making efforts to lower the material requirement per unit of GDP (figure O.15). Unfortunately, despite the progress in some regions, for the world as a whole, the material requirement per unit of GDP increased by 0.1 kg between 2000–2004 period and the 2013–2017 period (a nearly 10 per cent increase). The most significant increase in the consumption of materials per unit of GDP occurred in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia as a result of the rapid industrialization of countries such as China. The enormous demand of China for materials helped drive the overall global increase observed.

Figure 0.15

Change in domestic material consumption per unit of GDP, by region, 2000–2004 and 2013–2017 averages

Kilograms per constant 2010 United States dollars



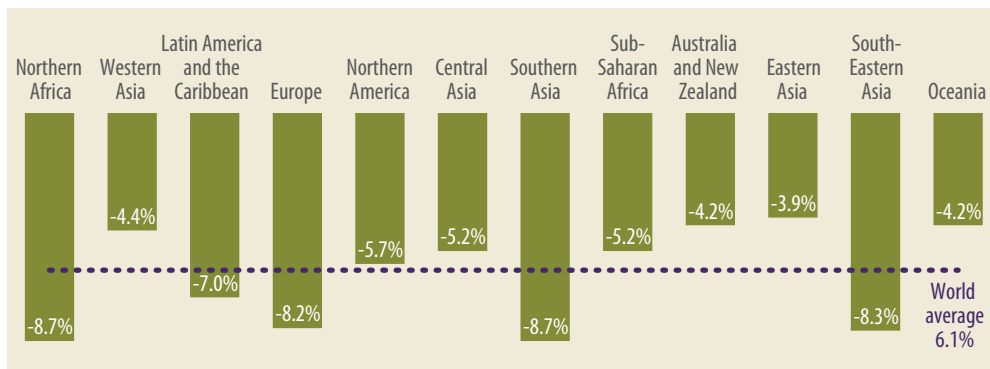
Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from UNSD Global SDG Indicators Database.

Note: Domestic material consumption measures the total quantity of materials (in kilograms) directly used within an economic system.

Impact of COVID-19 on decent work and economic growth

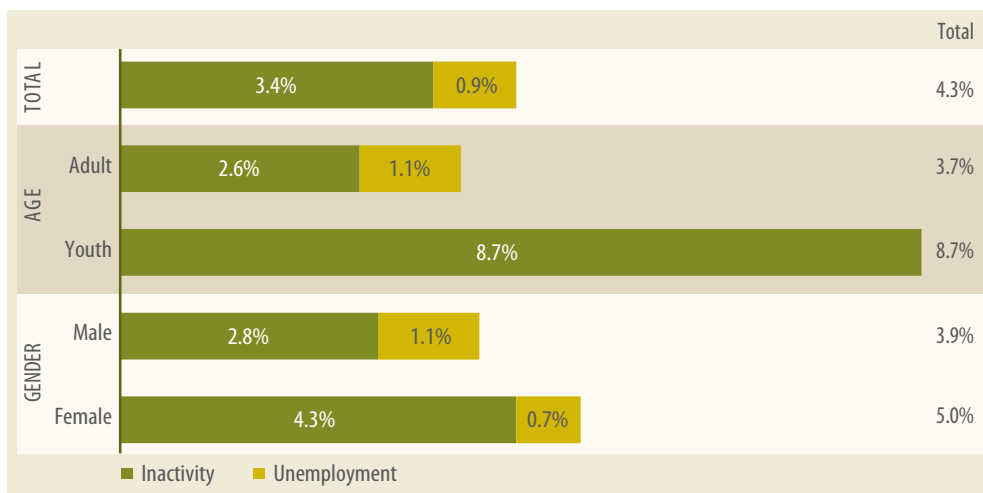
As the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* notes, growth and employment suffered major setbacks due to COVID-19. The economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 was more severe than that caused by the global financial crisis of 2008 and affected every part of the world (figure O.16).

Figure O.16
Change in real GDP growth, by region, 2019–2020



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from United Nations (2021b).

Figure O.17
Global employment losses relative to pre-pandemic forecasts, by types of loss, age and gender, 2020



Source: Recreated from ILO (2021).

The contraction of economic activity also meant significant losses in employment. Total employment losses amounted to 4.3 per cent relative to the pre-pandemic forecasts (figure O.17). Young workers were particularly impacted. The drop happened despite significant efforts to shield businesses and workers from the worst effects of the lockdowns. Many governments provided subsidies to employers to keep workers on their payroll and direct financial support to workers that were forced to stay home.

About 1.6 billion people in informal work were employed in the sectors that were hardest hit or significantly impacted by the lockdown measures. Globally, the income of

informal workers is estimated to have fallen by 60 per cent in the first months of the crisis (International Labour Organization, 2021). Paradoxically, the rate of informality has declined in some regions during the pandemic due to people dropping out of the labour force (in Uruguay, for example) and informal businesses closing down at a higher rate (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example). This is a change in the historical dynamic: in the 2008 crisis, the informal sector acted as a buffer and absorbed displaced workers from the formal sector.

The impact of COVID-19 on natural resource use is not yet possible to identify definitively, due to a lack of timely data and difficulty in disentangling the impact of the economic contraction from efficiency gains that resulted from changes in the composition of GDP activity and technological advances. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to expect that the pandemic has reduced resource use as economies went into lockdown in 2020. Many large cities around the world reported a significant improvement in air quality due to the reduction of fossil fuel consumption.

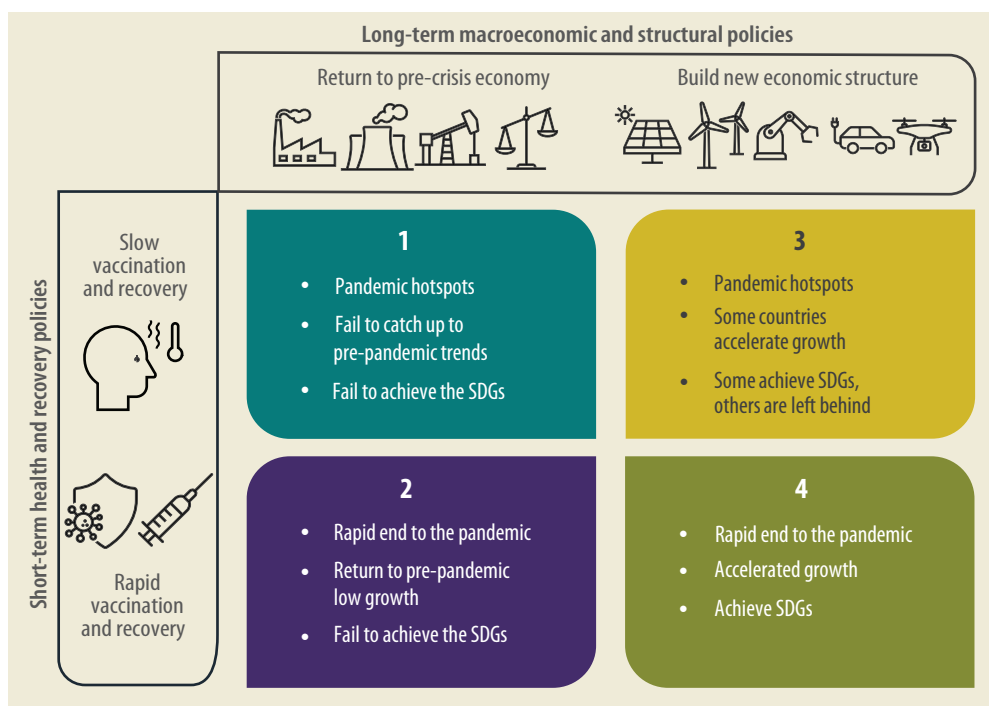
Outlook for the future

Per capita GDP growth is expected to average just over 2 per cent per year during 2021–2030 (figure O.11). The pace of growth in the years immediately following the current crisis and beyond will depend on the rate of vaccination and whether the economic policy package adopted by a country is oriented towards a return to the pre-pandemic economic structures or towards “building back better” and the creation of a new economic structure (figure O.18). A combination of rapid vaccination and “building back better” is likely to produce the best outcome.

In the short run, the outlook for employment remains gloomy, but there is hope for a quick recovery. The baseline estimates—assuming a strong recovery starting in the

Figure 0.18

Short- and long-term drivers of the different post-pandemic outlooks

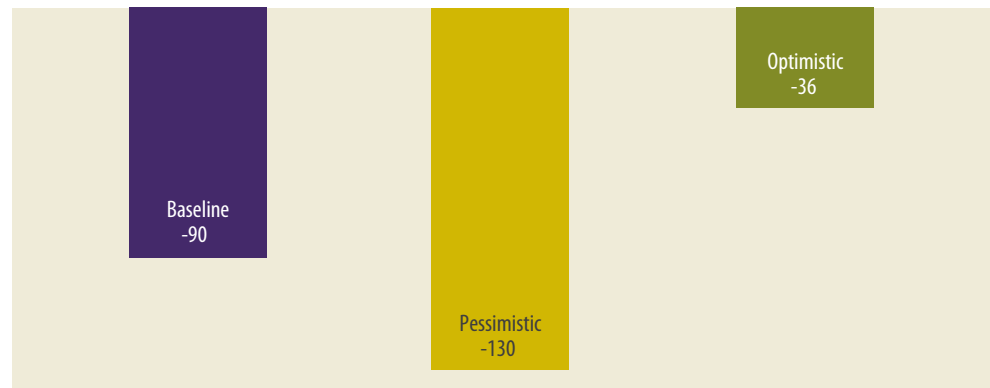


Source: UN DESA.

Figure O.19

Estimated job losses in 2021, by scenario

Millions of equivalent full-time jobs



Source: UN DESA, based on data from ILO (2021).

Note: Losses are relative to the last pre-crisis quarter (the fourth quarter of 2019).

third quarter of 2021, due to rates of vaccination—suggest employment losses in 2021 of 90 million equivalent full-time jobs (figure O.19). More pessimistic estimates—assuming weaker growth recovery—push this number to 130 million. If rapid vaccination allows for the quick return to work of the currently unemployed to work, losses will be limited to 36 million equivalent full-time jobs.

Given the strong connection between the two, the outlook for informality will likely move in line with the path of economic growth. That is, the speed of economic reopening will depend on health measures and fiscal and monetary actions, and this will determine how quickly formal labour markets can absorb the currently unemployed. The longer-term trends in labour formalization will also be largely determined by the speed of long-term productivity and economic growth, the rate of investment in productive activities in the formal sector, and the effect of fiscal and monetary policies on the incentives to expand formal sector employment. Recall that COVID-19 had an atypical impact on informal markets that normally would absorb unemployed formal workers during crises. The recovery may also see an atypical increase in informality if the pre-crisis conditions represent a structural characteristic of a given economy.

The outlook regarding environmental decoupling depends on the policies deployed as economies rebuild. For example, switch to renewables, electrification of transportation combined with improving building standards to reduce material demand, and progress towards sustainable consumption can help to promote the necessary decoupling (International Resource Panel, 2019). The difference in outcomes between a continuation of current policies and trends, and a drastic improvement in many areas, is significant (table O.2).

Policy suggestions

SDG 8 calls for sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and employment. The policies below are therefore classified under these three headings, although they often prove to be cross-cutting.

➤ Design policies to accelerate and sustain growth

The immediate task is to resume growth and employment, which first requires controlling the health crisis. The key to the latter is rapid and adequate vaccination, along with a mix of education, health mandates and lockdowns as appropriate for national conditions. Adequate fiscal support for workers and private firms, with strong investment in social programmes,

is needed to speed up the recovery. Governments also need to reverse the long-term trend of slowing productivity and wage growth by investing in strategic industries, economic diversification, technological upgrading and capacities for innovation.

➤ Make growth more inclusive

In choosing areas of investment for recovery and growth, priority should be given to job creation and formalization of labour, along with elimination of discrimination based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. Equal pay for equal work has to be ensured. Administrative barriers need to be reduced and tax incentives should be provided to firms to promote formalization of work. Special attention should be given to promoting youth employment to ensure the future workforce and well-being of the country.

➤ Decouple growth from resource use

Investments for recovery and growth should be directed towards new economic structures that will not just make growth faster and more inclusive, but will also reduce its impact on the environment. Governments need to provide incentives to lower the demand for resource-intensive products and to promote sustainable production and consumption. More investment should be directed to research and development leading to the development of environment friendly technological innovations in the highest-polluting sectors. Governments also need to promote reuse, recycling and waste management that closes the material use loop.

Table O.2

Key drivers and outcomes of two outlook scenarios for resource decoupling

Business-as-usual scenario	Optimistic scenario
Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Global material resource use doubles in the 2015–2060 period ➤ Material extraction growth is highest in low-income raw material producers ➤ A slight well-being decoupling is possible due to some convergence in technology and productivity between countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Compared to the BAU scenario, global resource extractions grow 25 per cent slower per year, and amount to 25 per cent less extractions overall compared to BAU ➤ Per capita resource use converges across different country groups ➤ Natural resource use is substantially decoupled from economic outcomes (income, energy services and food) ➤ Global resource productivity increases by 27 per cent by 2060
Policies needed to achieve the outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Historical trends continue ➤ No significant policy changes are needed to achieve greater resource efficiency ➤ Improvements in sustainable production and consumption would not be achieved at a level that reduces material use ➤ Continued economic and population growth leads to additional demand for construction and infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Large gains in resource efficiency are achieved ➤ Other SDGs are simultaneous impacted ➤ Greenhouse emissions are consistent with 2.0°C warming ➤ The rate of energy efficiency improvements is doubled by 2030 relative to BAU ➤ The expansion of land used for agriculture is limited ➤ Crop-based biofuels are eliminated ➤ Zero net global deforestation is achieved by 2030 ➤ Water stress from irrigation is substantially reduced ➤ Consumers shift to healthy diets and reduce food waste

Source: Adapted from International Resource Panel (2019).

Inequality

Pre-COVID-19 situation regarding inequality

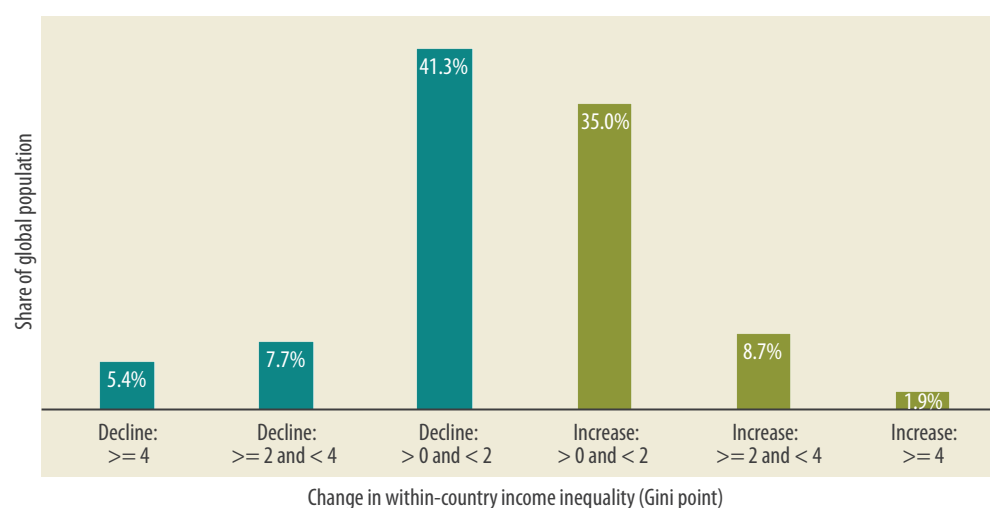
Inequality outcomes

In the ten years following the global financial crisis (2010–2019), there have been some improvements in the reduction of inequality. During this decade, about 55 per cent of the global population lived in countries where inequality decreased (see figure O.20 on page 28). In particular, many emerging market and developing countries saw their Gini index of income inequality fall. Figure O.21 shows the shares of global population that experienced different magnitudes of income inequality change during the period.

Despite these improvements, inequality persists. Across countries, on average, 13 per cent of the population still live below 50 per cent of the national median income, highlighting the substantial additional efforts required to address within-country inequality.

Figure O.21

Extent of income inequality changes across countries, 2010–2019



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from the UNU-WIDER World Income Inequality Database, IMF Fiscal Monitor Database and the Standardized World Income Inequality Database.

Note: Each bar denotes the share of global population living in countries that experienced the level of income inequality changes indicated under each bar during 2010–2019.

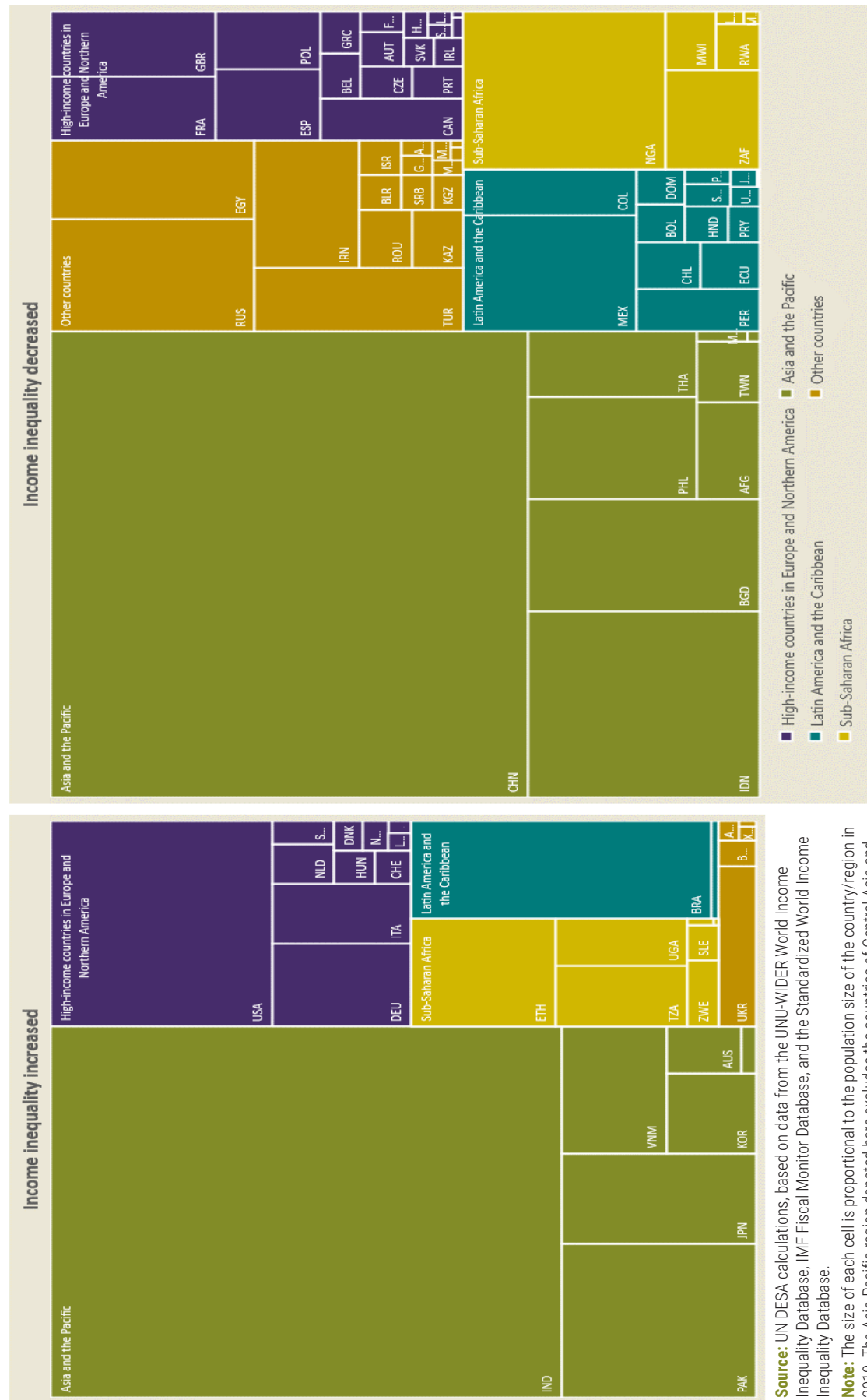
Adding to the wide-ranging within-country inequality is the significant between-country development gap. While there has been some reduction in the difference in average incomes across countries—largely driven by rapid growth of emerging economies in Asia—many developing countries still have a staggering income gap with developed countries. For example, the average income in North America is 16 times higher than that in sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations, 2020).

Drivers of inequality

Inequality persists as the world is constantly changed by the interaction of megatrends that have major distributional effects. Economic transformation, globalization, environmental degradation and the climate crisis, growing rural-urban divide, and rapid technological



Figure 0.20
Geographic distribution of within-country inequality changes, by region, 2010–2019



change have created unevenly distributed gains and losses. However, persistent inequality ultimately reflects the policies regarding income and wealth distribution; the pervasive prejudice and discrimination against certain groups; and the uneven distribution of power that both results from and reinforces economic inequality, hampering the achievement of SDG targets 10.2 and 10.3. At the cross-country level, differences in countries' development priorities (e.g., investment in education, infrastructure and technologies, etc.), the efficacy of institutions, and geographic factors have all played notable roles in explaining income differences.

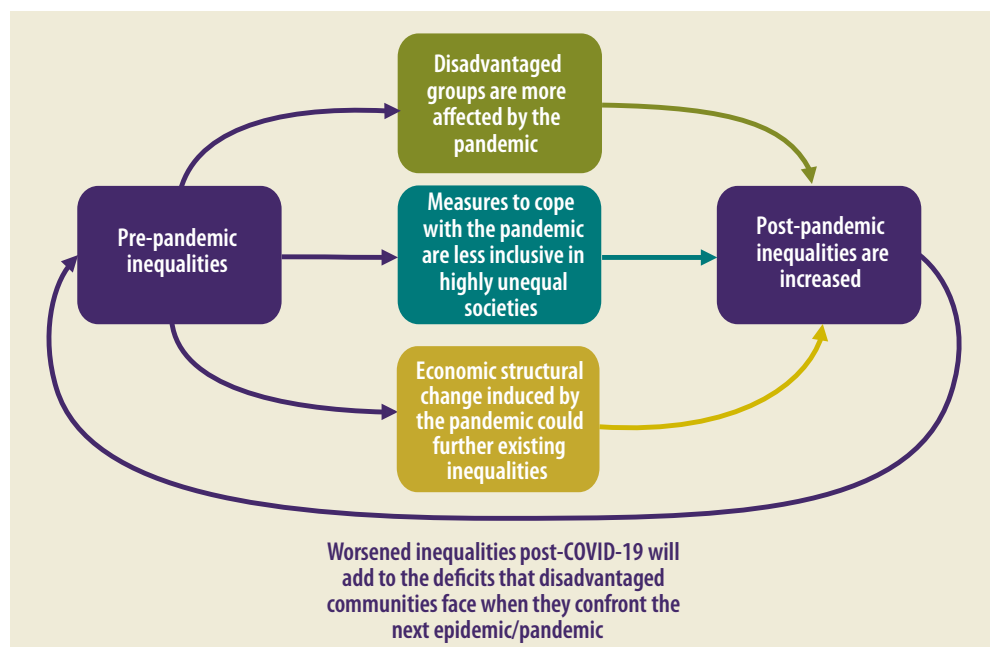
Impact of COVID-19 on inequality

For many countries, COVID-19 is acting as an accelerator of inequality. In developed countries, a few estimates that are available based on real-time data all point to an increase in economic inequality during the pandemic, although some of these countries were able to reverse the increase later with policy measures targeted at lower-income groups. In emerging market and developing economies, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates, the average of the Gini index would increase by at least 6 per cent due to COVID-19; and the increase could be higher in low-income countries (United Nations, 2021a, p. 46). It would be a notable change, considering that the average Gini index of these countries was on a decline prior to the pandemic.

Evidence shows that inequality played an important role in the distribution of COVID-19-related cases and deaths. Among countries with similar average incomes, those with higher inequality tended to have more COVID-19 cases relative to the size of the population (Wildman, 2021). Within-country, pre-existing inequality was generally reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic through several channels (figure O.22).

Figure O.22

The vicious cycle between inequality and the pandemic

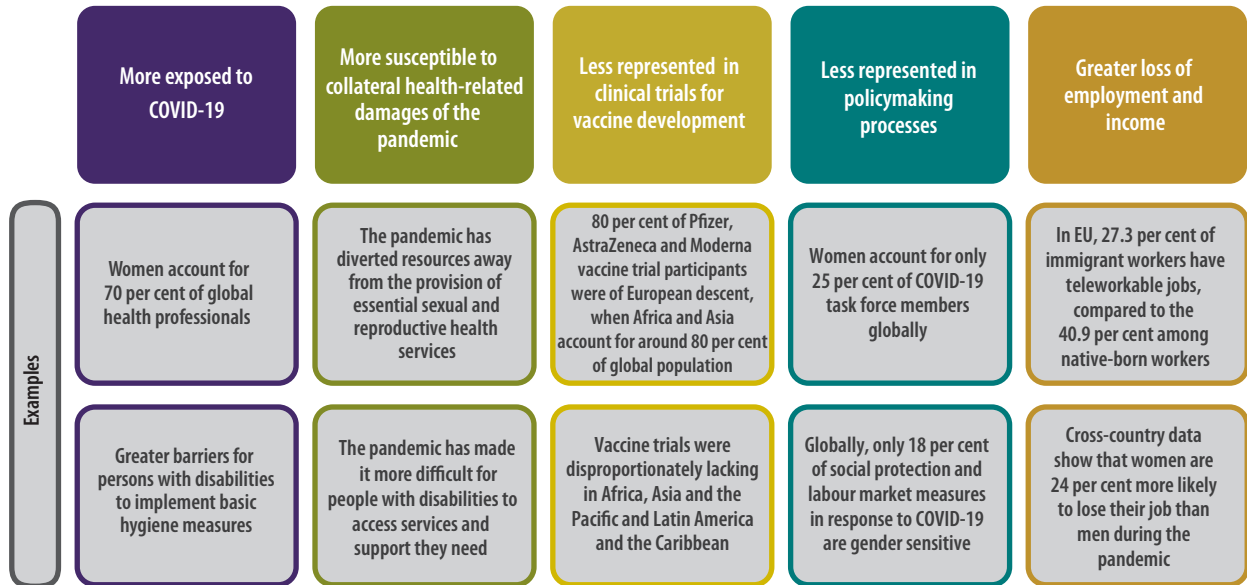


Source: UN DESA.

A main channel through which the pandemic reinforces existing inequality is its disproportionate effect on the disadvantaged groups (figure O.23). In particular, COVID-19 has exacerbated gender inequality. Unlike in previous recessions when male workers experienced more loss of employment, the COVID-19 recession saw the opposite, with females losing more (figure O.24) (Alon and others, 2020).

Figure O.23

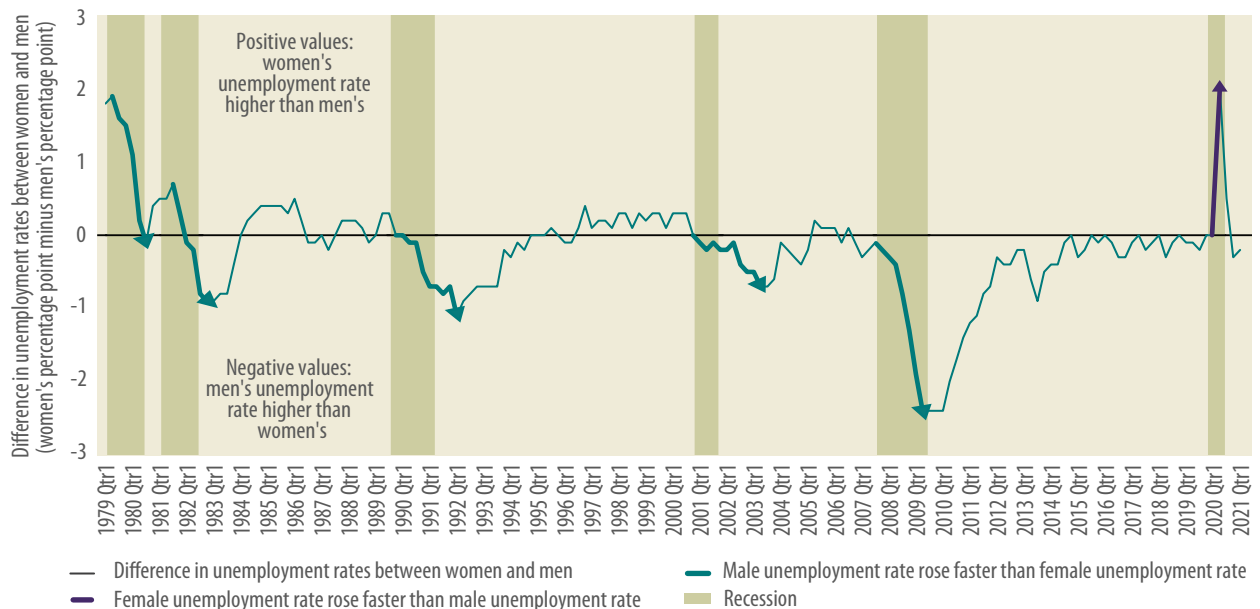
Unequal distribution channels of COVID-19's adverse effects



Source: UN DESA.

Figure O.24

Difference between unemployment rates for women and men: the case of the United States, 1979–2021



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Many Governments have taken swift monetary and fiscal policy actions in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. For example, expansionary monetary policy was adopted to provide the needed liquidity support to the overall economy. However, experience shows that fiscal policy can be more effective at providing targeted support to vulnerable firms and households (UN DESA, 2020).

Social protection programmes and labour market policy instruments that were in place before COVID-19 and expanded during the pandemic proved to be effective at mitigating its distributional effect. For example, Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)—a well-designed, flexible social protection programme—helped to negate almost all of COVID's adverse effect on food security (Abay and others, 2020). Similarly, Brazil's long-standing *Bolsa Familia* programme was integrated into the country's emergency aid packages and helped to prevent worsening of inequality due to COVID-19 (Menezes-Filho, Komatsu and Rosa, 2021). Among developed countries, Germany's short-time work scheme—which provides subsidies to employers to reduce their employees' working hours, instead of terminating their employment—helped the country to be one of the few that did not experience an increase in income inequality during the initial months of the pandemic (Clark, Ambrosio and Lepinteur, 2020).

COVID-19 could exacerbate between-country inequality as countries recover at an uneven pace due to differences in policy space to support the economy; their labour forces' ability to adjust to the post-COVID-19 work environment; and progress in vaccination.

Outlook for the future

Figure O.25 shows the projected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Gini index during 2022–2027 under three scenarios that differ in terms of the pandemic's duration. The analysis shows that the Gini index would be 1.3 points higher by 2027 (relative to the level in 2021) if the pandemic does not end in a country until 2022. This increase is about three times higher than if the pandemic would have ended last year. These projections suggest that the effect of COVID-19 on inequality can be highly significant, especially if the pandemic persists for much longer.

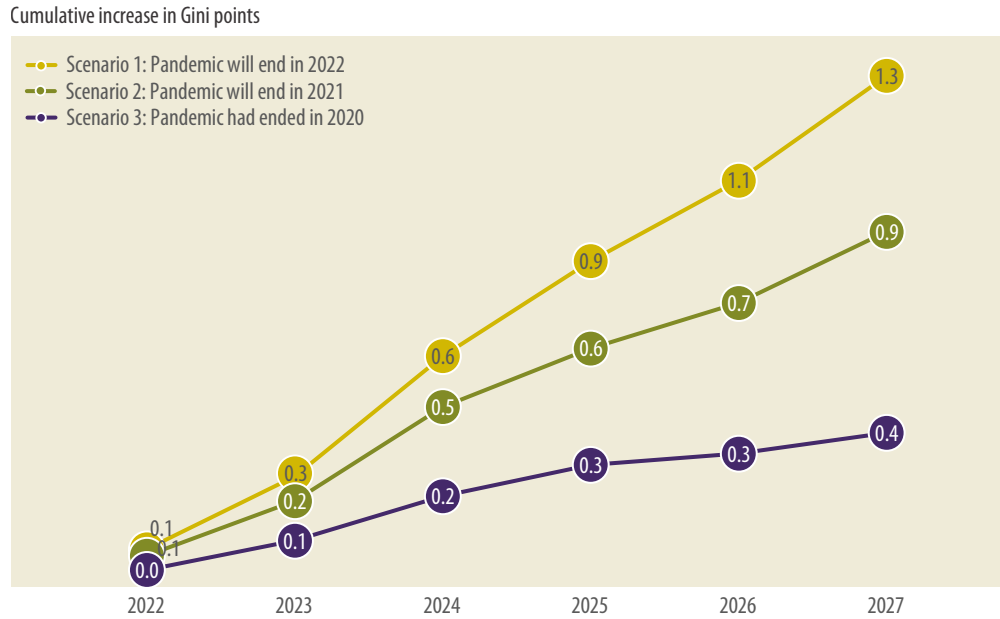
The duration of COVID-19 depends to a large extent on the progress in vaccination, which has been uneven across countries. For example, as of 26 July 2021, high-income countries had received 30 per cent of global vaccines even though they only account for 15 per cent of the global population (Schellekens, 2021). Moreover, it appears that the world will continue to experience a global gap in vaccination rates going into 2022 (see figure O.26). This looming reality makes a strong case for countries to work together to accelerate the production and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines that prioritize developing countries.

Policy suggestions

► Adopt a whole-of-government approach

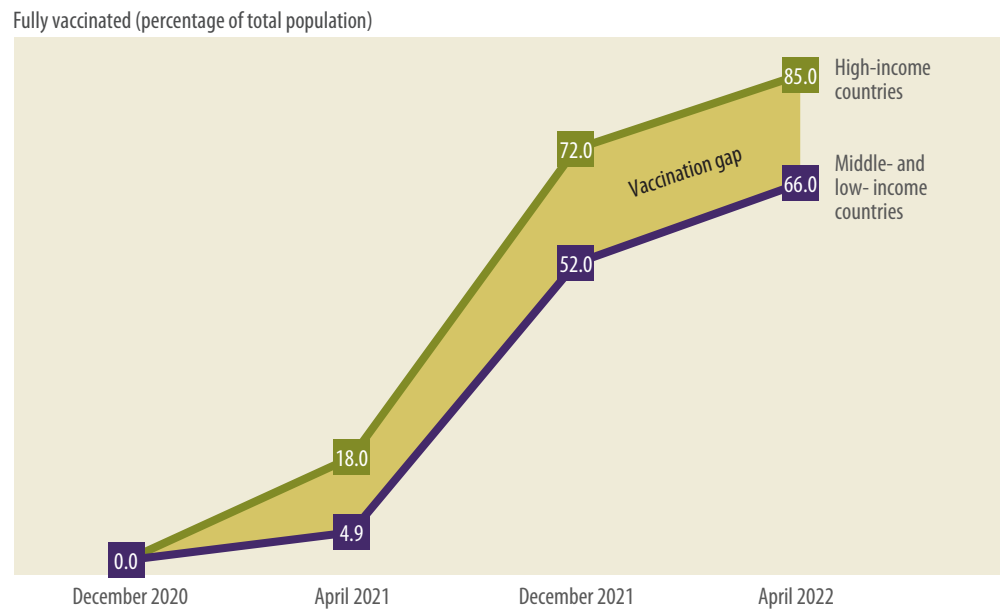
A whole-of-government approach is necessary to address inequality. Fiscal transfers, social protection, and labour market policy instruments are all needed to address the adverse effect of COVID-19 on inequality. However, addressing the structural factors behind such persistent inequality requires more concerted efforts at reducing inequality in assets and improving economic and market structures, leading to more fair outcomes regarding distribution.

Figure 0.25
Alternative scenarios of increase in income inequality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022–2027



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on estimates from Furceri and others (2021).

Figure 0.26
Vaccination gap projection, high-income countries versus middle- and low-income countries, December 2020–April 2022



Source: UN DESA calculations, based on data from Agarwal and Gopinath (2021).

➤ Accelerate vaccine production and distribution

Presently, *ensuring adequate and equitable distribution of vaccines is the key to prevent worsening of inequality both within and across countries*. Some options for vaccine technology transfer include voluntary licensing, sharing licenses through the WHO COVID-19 Technology Pool initiative, and waiving intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines through a World Trade Organization agreement (Ghebreyesus 2021). Some form of compensation to the vaccine originators could be considered to facilitate the sharing of their intellectual property.

➤ Bridge significant fiscal space gaps

Policies are needed at both country and global levels to meet the extraordinary financial needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the country level, Governments can collect more revenues by imposing a temporary “solidarity tax for COVID recovery” on a progressive scale. The revenues so generated need to be directed primarily to low-income people who lack employment, income and savings to tide them over through the COVID-19 crisis. At the international level, the global community can facilitate comprehensive debt restructuring with compulsory involvement of private creditors; recapitalize multilateral development banks; and support greater international tax cooperation, including moving towards a global minimum corporate tax.

➤ Overcome political economy barriers

The experience of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis can be used to overcome the persistent political barriers to reducing inequality, because a crisis often enables people to see things differently than they did during normal times. It may create a readiness for bolder institutional reforms and policy decisions aimed at improving inclusiveness in the decision-making processes and reducing inequality. Establishment of universal health-care and social protection systems, funded by progressive income taxation, are concrete examples. However, similar changes can be brought about in many other areas in order to achieve SDG 10.

Achieving the SDGs: the way forward

Policies emerging from the review of individual SDGs were presented at the end of the respective sections. However, as the interlinkages noted at the outset of this report suggest, the effect of many of these policies goes beyond the particular SDGs under which they have been listed. This section charts out a way forward to achieving the SDGs by focusing on the strategies, principles and policies that are cross-cutting in nature and hence can allow synergies to play out their roles and help accelerate progress across a broad front.

Accelerate vaccination by making the COVID-19 vaccine a public good

The international community should accelerate vaccination to resume progress towards the SDGs by making vaccines a public good. Options for rapidly increasing the global vaccine supply include relaxing TRIPs-related conditions regarding COVID-19 vaccines, and sharing licenses through the WHO COVID-19 Technology Pool. The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility can play an important role in this regard and should be fully funded and accelerated. Countries with firms producing COVID-19 vaccines may

consider compensating these firms for their patented rights in order to facilitate sharing of the vaccine formulas with pharmaceutical firms in other countries that are competent to manufacture vaccines. Distribution of vaccines should prioritize countries that lag behind in vaccination, and especially those that do not have the capacity to manufacture vaccines, even with licensing.

Strengthen access to quality and affordable universal health coverage

All countries should either create or strengthen systems of universal health coverage. Experience has shown that developing countries that had universal health coverage in place, however rudimentary, did better than comparable countries in confronting COVID-19. Experience has further shown that countries with low per capita income can also have universal health coverage, beginning with a robust universal primary health-care system, ensuring child and maternal health care, and building on it over time to make it more comprehensive and of higher quality, while maintaining affordability. Emphasis should be placed on prevention and preparedness, to minimize cases of full-blown disease that cause significant health damage and require expensive treatment. Appropriate attention should be given to both communicable and non-communicable diseases. In the immediate future, steps should be taken to overcome the shortfalls in various immunization and other health-care programmes caused by COVID-19, in order to avoid their future adverse effects.

Put in place universal and flexible social protection

All countries should either create or bolster existing systems of universal social protection. Experience has shown that flexible universal social protection proves to be particularly helpful during crises, when the needed financial assistance can be scaled up quickly to offset the negative effects of the crises. Experience also shows that low-income countries can have universal social protection systems as well, systems that are appropriate to their national conditions, as called for by SDG target 1.3. Additionally, experience indicates that social protection systems should be based on the principle of universality, unencumbered by residence requirements and other such limitations.

Choose the path to structural transformation aimed at growth, equity and protection of the environment

Countries need to make a judicious choice from among the alternative paths to structural transformation that globalization and the technological revolution have opened up, keeping in mind both their current conditions and future prospects. No matter which particular path is chosen, the transformation should aim at ensuring that the growth is sustained, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. To meet these requirements, economic growth has to focus on building human capital, expansion of employment, and decoupling from resource requirement. Investment in education, training, science and technology, and research and development, and other strategic areas needs to be emphasized, because the role of knowledge will only increase over time for success in whichever path to structural transformation a country chooses. All types of discrimination in employment—those based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, etc.—have to be avoided, and equal pay for equal work has to be ensured. Education, training and employment of young people should be emphasized in order to build and ensure a productive labour force for the future.

In the immediate future, attention needs to be paid to the recovery of employment that was lost due to COVID-19 and on overcoming the shortfalls resulting from the pandemic in education, training, and other human capital building processes. The setbacks in employment and human capital development must not be allowed to adversely affect the relevant long-term trajectories.

Raise international solidarity to a higher level

International solidarity needs to be raised to a new level, both to overcome the setbacks caused by COVID-19 and to ensure progress towards SDGs in the years ahead. Just as COVID-19 has shown that no part of the population is safe unless safety can be ensured for all parts of the population, so has it shown that no nation can be truly safe unless safety can be ensured for all nations of the world. Recognition of this reality may make more people see the imperative for all nations to bind together for survival. Efforts must therefore focus on making use of this recognition to bring about changes in the international arena that have proved difficult so far.

Apart from making the vaccines a public good, wealthy nations need to support low-income developing countries' efforts to have more fiscal space to undertake social protection and stimulus programmes needed to tide countries over through the COVID-19 crisis and make progress towards achieving the SDGs. To this end, the international community needs to facilitate comprehensive debt restructuring with participation of private creditors, recapitalize multilateral development banks, and support greater international tax cooperation, including moving towards a global minimum corporate tax. The international community should also recognize the need to reorganize international trade and financial institutions on more equitable principles, which allow the voices of developing countries to be better heard and their needs better addressed.

Share the Earth equitably with other species

It is necessary to stop further encroachment and loss of animal habitats in order to protect the human race from the new existential threat arising from the recurrence of zoonotic epidemics and pandemics, such as COVID-19. The continuing loss of forests and wilderness—resulting from unbridled expansion of agriculture, industry, and other commercial enterprises, and human habitats—and the relentless pursuit of higher levels of material consumption and wealth is leading to risky overlaps between human and animal habitats, allowing easy transfer of viruses from the latter to the former. The international community therefore should make a forceful move towards putting an end to further loss of forests and wilderness and to restoring some of what has already been lost. The earth should be more equitably shared with non-human species in the interest of the survival of the human species itself.

More vigorous steps need to be taken to stop the loss and wastage of food that accounts for about 40 per cent of the total food produced. Progress in this regard can increase the food availability for the hungry and malnourished, and it can also greatly reduce the land, water, and other resource requirements and allow more space for animal habitats. Similarly, more efforts need to be made towards promotion of a healthy diet, which can both reduce resource requirements and help to reduce obesity, which has become a major health problem in many countries and is causing many other diseases.

Make use of the crisis to overcome political barriers to difficult policy changes

Societies should try to make use of the COVID-19 crisis to overcome political barriers to moving towards a more equitable society—precisely the kind of society that is necessary for achieving reduction of poverty and for setting up universal systems of social protection and health care, progressive taxation systems, and other such progressive systems and institutions. History shows that crisis often creates the opportunity to make changes that are not possible during normal times. The ephemeral nature of life and the dependence of one on all for being safe from a deadly virus—realities that were witnessed and reinforced during COVID-19—may enable people to see things differently and make them ready for changes that faced political barriers in pre-COVID-19 years. Policymakers should make use of these possibilities to facilitate progress towards achieving the SDGs.

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