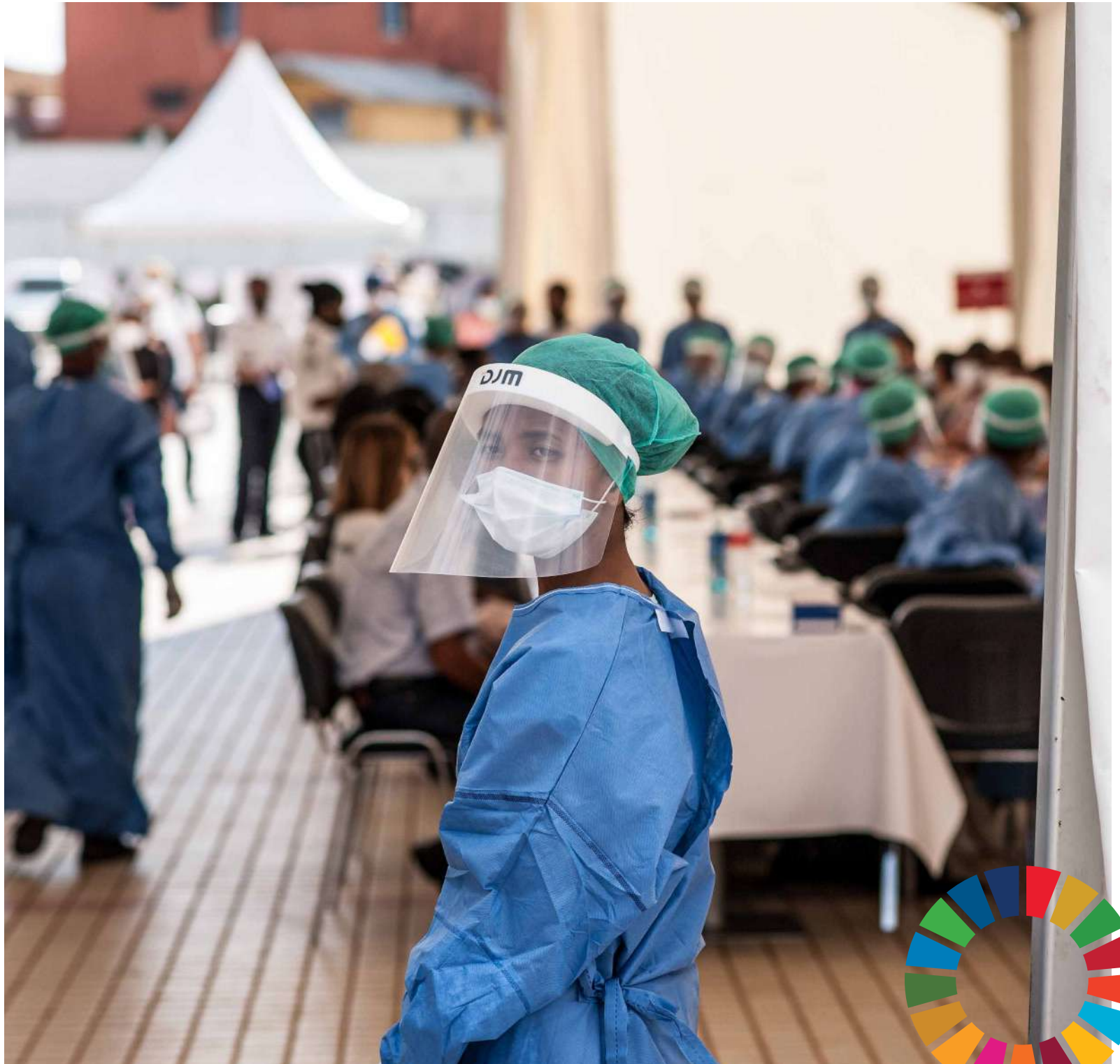


# The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020



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# The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020

# Foreword

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015 to end poverty and set the world on a path of peace, prosperity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demand nothing short of a transformation of the financial, economic and political systems that govern our societies today to guarantee the human rights of all. They require immense political will and ambitious action by all stakeholders. But, as Member States recognized at the SDG Summit held last September, global efforts to date have been insufficient to deliver the change we need, jeopardizing the Agenda's promise to current and future generations.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, together with the latest data to show us that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress remained uneven and we were not on track to meet the Goals by 2030. Some gains were visible: the share of children and youth out of school had fallen; the incidence of many communicable diseases was in decline; access to safely managed drinking water had improved; and women's representation in leadership roles was increasing. At the same time, the number of people suffering from food insecurity was on the rise, the natural environment continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate, and dramatic levels of inequality persisted in all regions. Change was still not happening at the speed or scale required.

Now, due to COVID-19, an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis is threatening lives and livelihoods, making the achievement of Goals even more challenging. As of the beginning of June, the death toll had surpassed 400,000 and was continuing to climb, with almost no country spared. Health systems in many countries have been driven to the brink of collapse. The livelihood of half the global workforce has been severely affected. More than 1.6 billion students are out of school, and tens of millions of people are being pushed back into extreme poverty and hunger, erasing the modest progress made in recent years.

Although the novel coronavirus affects every person and community, it does not do so equally. Instead, it has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and injustices. In advanced economies, fatality rates have been highest among marginalized groups. In developing countries, the most vulnerable including those employed in the informal economy, older people, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants and refugees are at risk being hit even harder.

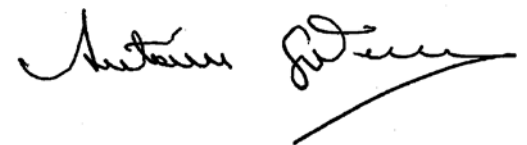
Across the globe, young people are being disproportionately affected, particularly in the world of work. Women and girls are facing new barriers and new threats, ranging from a shadow pandemic of violence to additional burdens of unpaid care work.

Far from undermining the case for the SDGs, the root causes and uneven impacts of COVID-19 demonstrate precisely why we need the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and underscore the urgency of their implementation. I have therefore consistently called for a coordinated and comprehensive international response and recovery effort, based on sound data and science and guided by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Health systems must be urgently strengthened in countries that are at greatest risk, with increased capacity for testing, tracing and treatment. Universal access to treatments and vaccines, when they become available, is essential. A large-scale multilateral response is needed to ensure that developing countries have the resources they need to protect households and businesses. Recovery packages must facilitate the shift to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and support universal access to quality public services. And leadership and support are needed to ensure statistical organizations have the tools and resources to facilitate timely and smart decision-making.

To guide and support these actions, the United Nations system has mobilized at all levels, leveraging the recent reforms of the United Nations development system.

At the start of this Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, I call for renewed ambition, mobilization, leadership and collective action, not just to beat COVID-19 but to recover better, together, winning the race against climate change, decisively tackling poverty and inequality, truly empowering all women and girls and creating more inclusive and equitable societies everywhere.



António Guterres

Secretary-General of the United Nations

# Finding transformative pathways in turbulent times

This year marks the start of the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It is a critical period to advance a shared vision and accelerate responses to the world's gravest challenges—from eliminating poverty and hunger to reversing climate change. Yet, in only a brief period of time, the precipitous spread of the novel coronavirus turned a public health emergency into one of the worst international crises of our lifetimes, changing the world as we know it. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 presents an overview of progress towards the SDGs before the pandemic started, but it also looks at some of the devastating initial impacts of COVID-19 on specific Goals and targets. The report was prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in collaboration with over 200 experts from more than 40 international agencies using the latest available data and estimates.

## No area has been spared the effects of the pandemic

One third of the way into our SDG journey, the world is not on track to achieve the global Goals by 2030. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, progress had been uneven, and more focused attention was needed in most areas. The pandemic abruptly disrupted implementation towards many of the SDGs and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress.

The crisis has touched all segments of the population, all sectors of the economy, and all areas of the world. Not surprisingly, it is affecting the world's poorest and most vulnerable people the most. It has exposed harsh and profound inequalities in our societies and is further exacerbating existing disparities within and among countries.

Forecasts indicate that the pandemic will push 71 million people back into extreme poverty in 2020, in what would be the first rise in global poverty since 1998. Many of these people are workers in the informal economy, whose incomes dropped by 60 per cent in the first month of the crisis. Half of the global workforce—1.6 billion people—support themselves and their families through insecure and often unsafe jobs in the informal economy, and have been significantly affected. The impacts of COVID-19 are also increasing the vulnerability of the world's one billion slum dwellers, who already suffer from inadequate housing with limited or no access to basic infrastructure and services.

Older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees are more likely to experience severe effects from COVID-19 due to their specific health and socioeconomic circumstances. Similarly, the pandemic is taking a toll on the world's women and children. Disrupted health care and limited access to food and nutrition services could result in hundreds of thousands of additional under-5 deaths and tens of thousands of additional maternal deaths in 2020. About 70 countries reported moderate-to-severe disruptions or a total suspension of childhood vaccination services during March and April 2020. Many countries have seen a surge in reports of domestic violence against women and children. Millions of unintended pregnancies can be expected as tens of millions of women are unable to access family planning supplies and services.

School closures kept 90 per cent of students out of school and caused over 370 million children to miss out on school meals this spring. Prolonged absence from school results in lower retention

and graduation rates and worsens learning outcomes. It also has an adverse effect on the social and behavioural development of children and youth. As more families fall into extreme poverty, children in poor and disadvantaged communities are at much greater risk of child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. In fact, the global gains in reducing child labour are likely to be reversed for the first time in 20 years. In short, the crisis is having life-altering consequences for millions of children and youth worldwide.

The economic impacts of the crisis are equally sobering: the world is now facing its worst recession in generations. Even the most advanced and developed countries are struggling to cope with the health, social and economic fallout of the pandemic, but the poorest and most disadvantaged countries will inevitably be hit the hardest. Estimates suggest that world trade will plunge by 13 to 32 per cent, foreign direct investment will decline by up to 40 per cent, and remittances to low- and middle-income countries will fall by 20 per cent in 2020. Many poorer countries are already experiencing acute food insecurity. All of these external shocks, together with job losses, fragile health systems, insufficient basic services and low coverage of social protection systems have aggravated their vulnerabilities. Without support from the international community, the crisis could destabilize the economies of already impoverished nations.

## We must hold firm in our convictions

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to its very core. However, we must hold firm in our convictions and not let the crisis derail our hopes and ambitions. In fact, the principles on which the SDGs were established are key to building back better in the post-COVID-19 recovery. The continued pursuit of these universal Goals will keep Governments focused on growth, but also on inclusion, equity and sustainability. Our collective response to the pandemic can serve as a “warm-up” for our preparedness in preventing an even larger crisis—that is, global climate change, whose effects are already becoming all too familiar. Governments and businesses should heed the lessons learned from this wake-up call to formulate the kinds of transitions needed to build a healthier, more resilient and more sustainable world. Central to such transitions are timely and disaggregated data and statistics, from which effective and equitable measures and policies can be shaped.

In September 2020, the United Nations will commemorate its seventy-fifth anniversary amidst extraordinary global challenges. While commitment to the purpose and principles of the United Nations and the 2030 Agenda remains strong, the COVID-19 pandemic is a vivid reminder of the need for global cooperation and solidarity. We must strengthen and combine our efforts to leave no one behind and to forge the transformative pathways needed to create a more livable world.



Liu Zhenmin

Under-Secretary-General  
for Economic and Social Affairs

# The need for data innovations in the time of COVID-19

The importance of timely, quality, open and disaggregated data and statistics has never been as clear as during the COVID-19 crisis.

Such data are critical in understanding, managing and mitigating the human, social and economic effects of the pandemic. They are also essential for designing short-term responses and accelerated actions to put countries back on track to achieve the SDGs.

Many of the data challenges encountered during the first five years of SDG implementation are severely limiting COVID-19 responses. These include the lack of basic health, social and economic data. To make matters worse, the crisis is disrupting routine operations throughout the global statistical and data system, with delays in planned censuses, surveys and other data programmes.

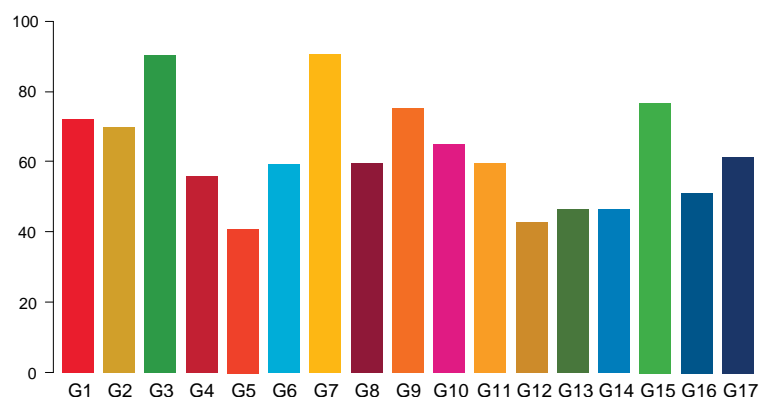
In response, members of the statistical community have quickly set up mechanisms to ensure operational continuity by adapting and innovating data production methods and processes. Assessments of statistical operations around the world show that investments and support for data innovations are urgently needed. These will help to both inform policy responses to the crisis and support SDG acceleration efforts over the coming decade.

## Serious data gaps remain in assessing country-level progress towards the SDGs

Over the years, good progress has been made in increasing the availability of internationally comparable data for SDG monitoring. However, huge data gaps still exist in terms of geographic coverage, timeliness and the level of disaggregation required. Moreover, challenges remain in compiling and disseminating metadata to document the data quality of SDG indicators at local and national levels.

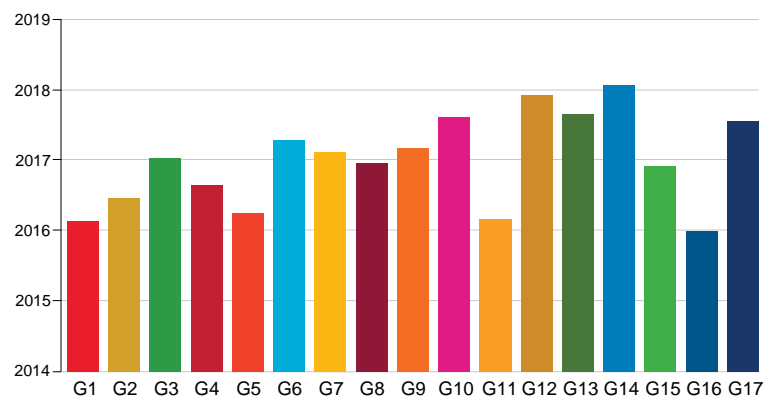
An analysis of the indicators in the Global SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database>) reveals that for 4 of the 17 goals, less than half of 194 countries or areas have internationally comparable data. This lack of country-level data is particularly worrisome for Goal 5 (gender equality), where on average only about 4 in 10 countries have data available. Country-level data deficits are also significant in areas related to sustainable production and consumption (Goal 12) and to climate action (Goal 13). What's more, even countries with available data have only a small number of observations over time, making it difficult for policymakers to monitor progress and identify trends.

Data coverage: proportion of countries or areas with available data (weighted average across indicators), by Goal (percentage)



In addition, a large number of SDG indicators are available only with a significant time lag. For instance, in at least half of countries or areas in the database, the latest data point available for poverty-related indicators (Goal 1) is for 2016 or earlier. A similar situation is found for indicators on gender equality (Goal 5), sustainable cities (Goal 11) and peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16).

Data timeliness: the most recent year available (weighted average of the median country by indicator), by Goal



## The pandemic is jeopardizing the production of data central to the achievement of the SDGs

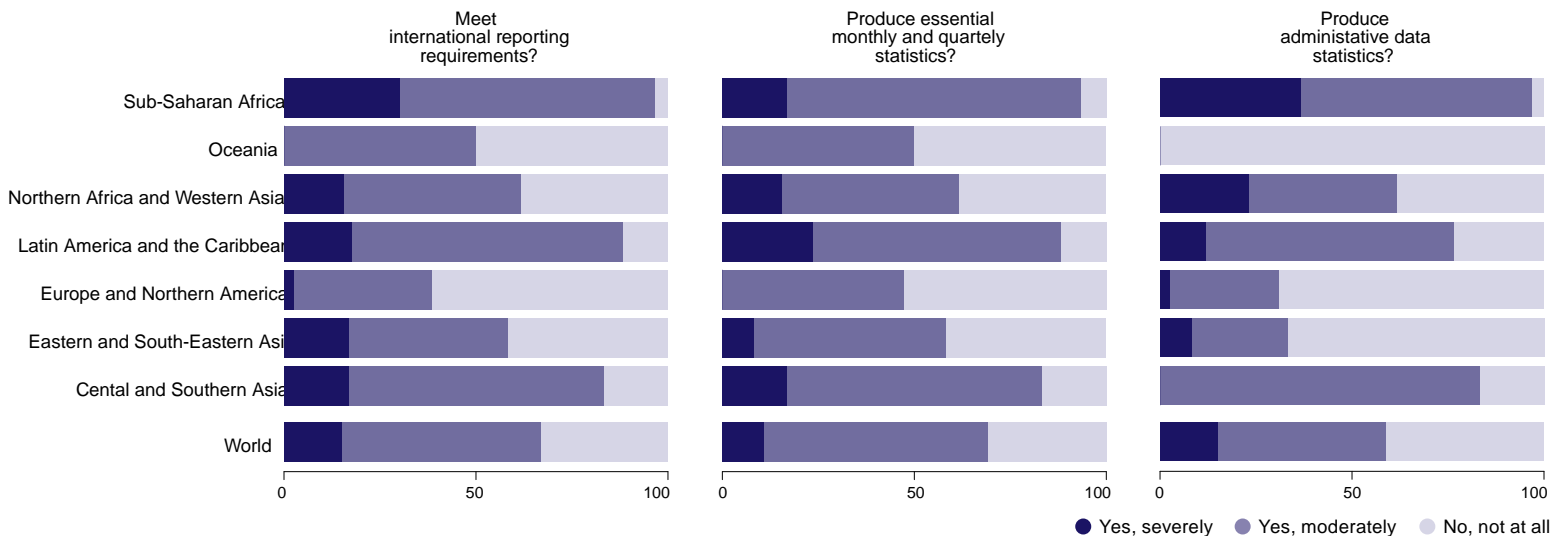
As Governments attempt to contain the spread of the coronavirus, field data collection operations are being disrupted. This is limiting the ability of many national statistical offices to deliver official monthly and quarterly statistics as well as the data necessary to monitor progress on the SDGs.

A recent survey conducted by the United Nations and the World Bank (with responses from 122 countries) shows that the pandemic has affected the operations of the vast majority of national statistical offices: 65 per cent of headquarters are partially or fully closed, 90 per cent have instructed staff to work from home, and 96 per cent have partially or fully stopped face-to-face data collection. In sub-Saharan Africa, 97 per cent of countries surveyed indicated that the production of regular statistics was affected, and 88 per cent of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean indicated that they were having difficulty meeting international data reporting requirements.

According to survey results, 9 in 10 national statistical offices in low- and lower-middle-income countries have seen funding cuts and are struggling to maintain normal operations during the pandemic. In fact, 73 offices—61 per cent of those responding to the questionnaire expressed the need for external support in addressing challenges associated with COVID-19. Priority areas cited included technical assistance and capacity-building, financial aid, and software for remote data collection.

If these needs are not filled, they will have a lasting effect on countries' ability to produce timely and disaggregated data for a large number of SDG indicators. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic is not only creating a massive setback in the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but it is also exacerbating global data inequalities. The statistical community and donors must urgently provide technical and financial support to national statistical offices most in need.

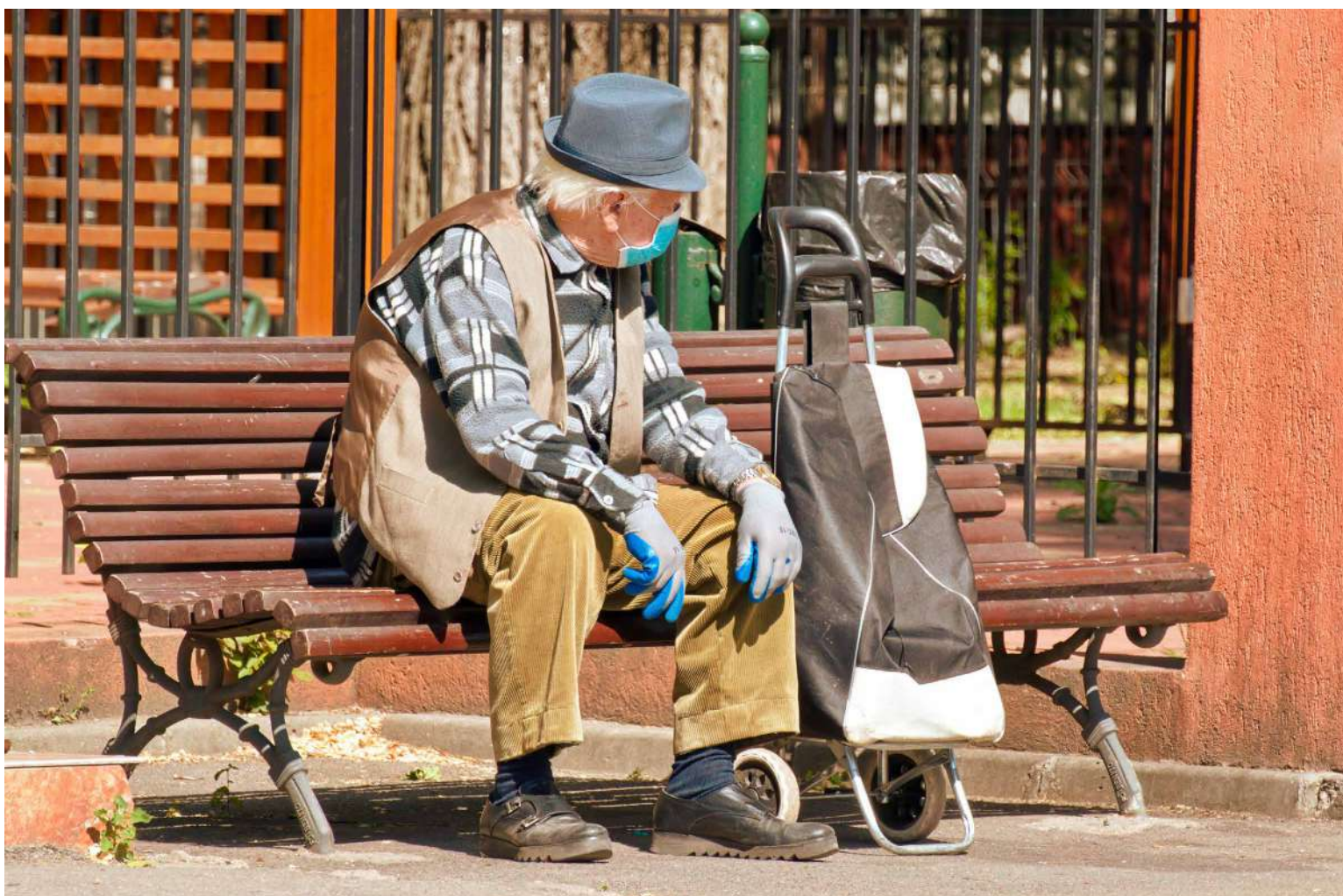
Survey results (percentage): Is the current COVID-19 pandemic affecting your ability to



### Investments in data and innovation are key to responding to the crisis and to supporting SDG acceleration

Investments in data and statistics are needed to maintain adequate coverage of all population groups as well as to guarantee the internal consistency, comparability and overall quality of data produced to advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example, many countries would benefit from support to fully digitize their data collection instead of using traditional paper-based methods. This could include telephone and web-based surveys, and using administrative data along with newer, more innovative data sources to produce official statistics.

One important area of innovation is the integration of geospatial and statistical information. The integrated analysis and visualization of geospatially enabled data on SDG indicators enhances the ability of policymakers and the public at large to understand and respond to local circumstances and needs across geographic space and time. It also offers insights into data connections and relationships that can be further explored by combining traditional and non-traditional sources of data, statistics and information.



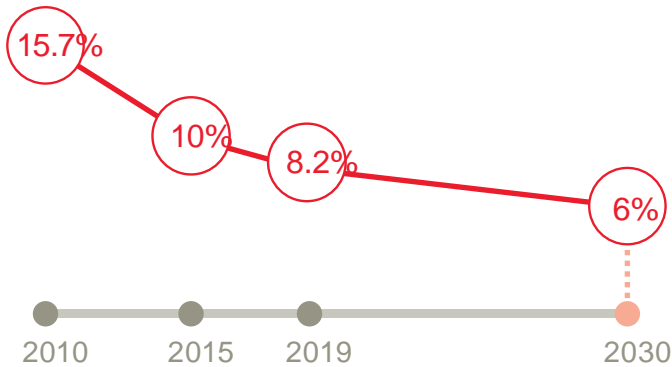
1 NO POVERTY



# End poverty in all its forms everyw

## Before Covid-19

The world was **off track** to end poverty by **2030**

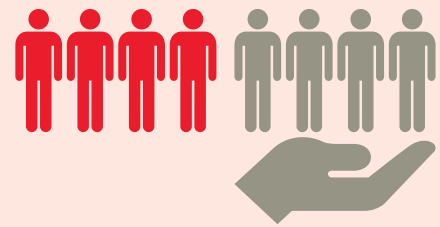


**Young workers** twice as likely to be living in extreme poverty as adult workers (2019)

## Covid-19 Implications



**COVID-19 causes the first increase** in global poverty in decades



**4 billion people** did not benefit

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