



## The Impact of COVID-19 on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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The United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, providing a shared vision for tackling some of the most enduring global challenges.<sup>1</sup> Notably, the third goal — *ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all* — refers to strengthening the capacity of all countries, particularly developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction, and management of national and international health risks. Today's novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) crisis has added dimensions of complexity to this problem.

While COVID-19 can initially appear an equal opportunity disease, the impact will be especially dire in some contexts and groups. Poverty and disease interact with and reinforce each other, becoming particularly acute when considering that over 736 million people in the world live in extreme poverty, disproportionately suffering from disease and ill health<sup>2</sup> (**SDG1: No Poverty**). COVID-19 is expected to create and exacerbate food-insecurity among millions of poor and low-income groups. There will be a great need for networks of food sources and quick action by policymakers to maximize public nutrition provisions to prevent increased hunger among vulnerable populations (**SDG2: Zero Hunger**). With lack of access to medical resources and necessities such as water and effective sanitation, it will be challenging to promote the health and wellbeing across groups and contexts. Also, it is well known that time between vaccine development, testing, and production can be quite long (**SDG3: Good Health and Well-Being**). With worldwide closing of educational facilities, the need to create inclusive opportunities is apparent. This is also an opportunity to engage students in cross-disciplinary learning about the virus through a variety of approaches including inquiry-based, problem-based, experiential-based, and much more. Sociology perspectives can also provide theoretical and methodological foundations for connecting frameworks and integrating analysis for public health and wellbeing (**SDG4: Quality Education**). Current trends show COVID-19 infecting men and women in about equal numbers. However, with the majority of careworkers in the world being women and also with expanded responsibilities typically falling on them for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty>

additional childcare due to mass school closures, COVID-19 is expected to impact women more than men (**SDG5: Gender Equality**). People who cannot afford such conveniences as the recommended hand sanitizers to ward off transmission do not have many options beyond basic soap and water. For vast numbers globally without access to clean water, the situation could get much worse (**SDG6: Clean Water and Sanitation**). The COVID-19 situation has highlighted the need to have long-term energy facilities to bolster security of supply. For example, lack of solar panel shipments from China has created delivery bottlenecks and could delay many projects impacting renewable energy provision (**SDG7: Affordable and Clean Energy**). COVID-19 represents a significant threat to the sustainability of businesses and jobs. While “social distancing” has been proposed to avoid infection, this has prompted some people to telework, also impacting other occupations. Related infrastructural effects will be impacted by absenteeism within sectors and levels of specific expertise required to sustain them. Initial assessments indicate the loss of as many as 25 million jobs worldwide resulting from COVID-19, pushing millions of people into unemployment, underemployment, and working poverty.<sup>3</sup> (**SDG8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**). COVID-19 is expected to affect social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Social determinants of health and resulting disparities are of particular concern. Policy attention must be given to increasing the ability to be tested freely, access to affordable face masks, basic utilities, guaranteed health benefits, and paid emergency leave. Also, if not universal, policies can fail to support disadvantaged and vulnerable populations (**SDG10: Reduce Inequality**). With more than half the global population living in cities, there is great potential to enhance pandemic risk. Moreover, pandemics often emerge from the edge of cities, with viral outbreaks transmitted via urban communities and transportation corridors at the outskirts before spreading to the interiors. Currently there is no formal city-preparedness pandemic index plan or policy to respond to outbreaks such as COVID-19 (**SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**). With school and business closings, demands for media consumption is bound to increase. Moreover, consumers are being forced to dramatically change their purchasing behaviors. Marked changes are occurring in proactive buying and reactive health management, with consumers in COVID-19 impacted areas stocking up on health-safety products, leading to continuous out-of-stock supplies and logistical problems in production and distribution systems (**SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production**). Impacts on climate already are apparent — dramatic drops in airborne nitrogen dioxide pollution due to China’s lockdown policy, and other parts of the world also seeing lowered emissions. Working remotely and teleconferencing are reducing traffic and related pollution. Such behavior changes help control carbon emissions and progress in decarbonization (**SDG13: Climate Action**). Deforestation and deterioration of coastal waters adversely affect ecosystems and biodiversity. For example, marine plastic pollution, coming from various sources -- fisheries, aquaculture, and illegal dumping -- is a major environmental problem. Research indicating that COVID-19 virus lives two times longer on plastic than cardboard may prompt use and disposal behavioral changes, even using less in households, which could ultimately impact marine plastic pollution. Also, research indicates that humanity’s destruction of biodiversity creates natural

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_738742/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_738742/lang--en/index.htm)

conditions for viruses like COVID-19 to arise<sup>4</sup> (**SDG14: Life Below Water; SDG15: Life on Land**). With COVID-19 creating an economic crisis, increased homelessness and hunger are expected. Related anxiety has ironically increased gun sales in countries like the U.S., where buyers believe violent acts and riots will erupt. Such behavior is not uncommon during crises in any country and governments should be prepared for associated civil disturbances (**SDG16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**). With a shared goal and vision for avoiding the spread of COVID-19, inclusive partnerships are needed at global, regional, national, and local levels. Policies must address a range of issues, including international and national cooperation and coordination, cross-sectoral exchanges and interfaces, and governmental and nongovernmental relations. Learning how other countries are controlling the pandemic through global partnerships, mobilizing funding and long-term investments, and creating government stimulus efforts can help fight the COVID-19 crisis as a united front (**SDG 17: Partnerships**).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/biodiversity-loss-is-hurting-our-ability-to-prepare-for-pandemics>