



Milestones

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Pulled Backward

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDG 5

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. How has progress towards this end been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? A new report, the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, released in July by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 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. We focus here on SDG 5: Gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Data indicates that there has been considerable progress over the last decades with more girls in school, despite regional variations, and a reduction in maternal mortality, which fell by 38 percent between 2000 and 2017, as well as an increase in legal and regulatory reforms in support of gender equality. Data from 133 countries shows that women now have better access to decision making positions at the local level, mainly through legislated gender quotas. Women continue to face higher barriers in getting jobs and even when they get employed, they are often excluded from decision making positions. The gender gap in labour force participation among adults aged 25 to 54 has stagnated over the past 20 years standing at 31 percentage points. Globally, while 39 percent of employed women work in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, only 14 percent of agricultural landholders are women. The COVID-19 pandemic may reverse any progress and exacerbate existing inequalities as women are having take on additional unpaid domestic and care work as schools and day-care centres are closed. Women also account for nearly 70 percent of health and social workers globally which means that they are in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. The pandemic is also intensifying the risk of violence against women and girls and many of those seeking help, including medical

help, are not able to because of lockdowns and service disruptions. Women in fisheries who form the bulk of the post-harvest sector have also been hit hard with disrupted supply-chains, lock-downs and lack of public transport that has restricted fish vendors from reaching landing centres and markets.

In the case of the fisheries sector, women play a crucial role throughout the fish value chain, providing labour in both commercial and artisanal fisheries. However, SDG 5 data is not available in a disaggregated manner for the fisheries and aquaculture sector. From fisheries and labour at sea to migration and human trafficking via waterways, gender equality is critical to the effective protection and sustainable management of the ocean and marine resources. These are being addressed through a number of voluntary commitments for SDG 14 which would also positively impact SDG 5 building on gender and ocean initiatives launched at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference by countries, civil society and business (Gender equality grows as key aspect of sustainable ocean management. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2020/03/gender-equality-grows-as-key-aspect-of-sustainable-ocean-management/>). These commitments can be found in <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>. Examples include Blue Justice for Small Scale Fisheries (TBTI Global), Small-Scale Fisheries Academy in Senegal (Mundus maris asbl), Enhancing Coastal Communities Social and Ecological Resilience and Reducing Vulnerabilities towards Fisherfolk Empowerment (Tambuyog Development Center) and Pacific Women Defend the Commons, Pacific Communities Defend the Commons (Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji).

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 can be accessed at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>

The report on SDG 5 can be accessed at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-05/>