



Executive summary

SDG progress

Fragility, crisis and leaving no one behind

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Cover photo: Syria. Elderly returnee couple repairing their home in rural east Aleppo. Taha and his wife started to repair their home by themselves after it was damaged by the conflict. Al Dreisiyeh village, located 15 km south of Al Kahfesh in rural east Aleppo, has witnessed the return of 90 families (according to local residence). UNHCR is providing 13,250 returnee families from rural east Aleppo with non-food items such as solar lamps, plastic sheets, mattresses, blankets and winter clothes. These kits will be a great support to those who have returned with no personal belongings or source of income. © UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf. All rights reserved.

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| A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones
(Nelson Mandela, 1995)

As they signed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all countries pledged to reach and deliver progress for those who are furthest behind first. This commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ is at the heart of the SDGs: not only is it morally unacceptable to keep vast swathes of people structurally locked out of progress but delivering on it is a prerequisite for achieving Agenda 2030.

This report highlights one left-behind group that has received too little attention: people caught in crisis. These people – those living in conflict, and those who are displaced within their own countries or across borders – often fall through the cracks of different authorities’ responsibilities or are explicitly excluded by governments in their national and sectoral plans (IRC, 2018a). **Without the concerted efforts of the international community to address the needs of people caught in crisis and to measure the impact of this support, we will not achieve the SDGs for all, and the gap between this marginalised group and the rest of the world will grow.**

Many vulnerable refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are hosted in fragile and conflict-affected states. And there are most likely many more that the data doesn’t capture. With the number of violent conflicts doubling since 2000 and displacement on an upward trend, these populations could continue to grow. However, there is limited accountability for meeting these populations’ needs and ensuring that they are not left behind.

In September 2019, heads of state will for the first time attend the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) meeting where progress on the SDGs is monitored and reviewed. This will be a pivotal moment for the international community to prioritise leaving no one behind – a part of the 2030 Agenda that actors are still not addressing with sufficient urgency. Increased action, based on understanding of current gaps, challenges and opportunities, is needed to catalyse updated or new commitments from all stakeholders at this critical meeting.

This report aims to prepare the ground in the lead up to the September 2019 HLPF – also known as the SDG Summit. It identifies the gaps in SDG progress for fragile and conflict-affected states, highlights the challenges and opportunities for meeting the SDGs for people caught in crisis and makes recommendations for further action – both in terms of preparation ahead of the September 2019 HLPF meeting and commitments to be made at the meeting itself. The recommendations focus on accelerating progress for *all* marginalised groups and people living in poverty generally – the step change needed across the entire agenda – as well as on specific steps needed to deliver progress for people caught in crisis.

Key findings

- **Limited progress against targets.** On average, 35% of low- and middle-income countries (LICs and MICs) are ‘on track’ to meet selected SDG targets (those relating to meeting basic needs). Just 18% of fragile states are ‘on track’. This means 82% are either off track or lack the data for an assessment of progress.
- **Deprivation increasingly concentrated in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS).** Across the goal areas, on current trend, we forecast unmet basic needs in 2030 to be increasingly concentrated in fragile states. We estimate that FCAS will be home to nearly one-third of the population of LICs and

MICs in 2030 but will house disproportionate shares of people lacking electricity (96%) and people who are extremely poor (85%), among other deprivations. This finding indicates that people caught in crisis risk being even more excluded from progress in 2030 than they are now.

- **Rising numbers of people facing deprivations.** Our projections suggest that, on trend, the absolute number of people in FCAS facing certain key deprivations will rise significantly – the number of undernourished people will rise by 84.5 million, the number lacking improved sanitation by 45 million, and the number living in slums by at least 106 million. This means that, as of 2030, a larger number of people in crisis, most of whom live in fragile states, are likely to face these unmet basic needs.
- **Left behind by national plans and data.** Our study shows that refugees, IDPs and other people caught in crisis are not systematically included in countries' SDG progress reports (Voluntary National Reviews, VNRs), national surveys to determine socioeconomic status and needs, or national development and sectoral plans (IRC, 2018a). This makes it extremely difficult to track progress, much less intervene in ways that will make it possible for these marginalised groups to meet the goals.

Recommendations

We recommend the following necessary preparations in advance of the September 2019 HLPF:

1. **Establish a high-level panel to drive further commitment and action on leave no one behind.** The panel, consisting of former or present heads of state and global leaders, would highlight what action is needed for all left-behind groups, including people caught in crisis. The United Nations (UN) Secretary General should appoint this panel by the end of 2018 to ensure its recommendations for left-behind groups are reflected in the outcome declaration of the first head-of-state-level meeting of the HLPF in September 2019.
2. **Ensure governments and donors have a formal process to track, review and debate progress towards achieving the leave no one behind agenda.** The UN Secretary-General should require each member state to submit plans and report on progress for leaving no one behind. This should consider people caught in crisis; for example, including refugees and IDPs in national development and sectoral planning. In the case of fragile settings, governments and partners should work together to create explicit targets for displaced populations and a mechanism for tracking and reviewing progress on leave no one behind for people caught in crisis (e.g. in the case of refugees through the Global Compact for Refugees).

We recommend that the following are considered for action at the September 2019 HLPF:

1. **National governments and development partners should prioritise policies and actions that meet the needs of the groups most at risk of being left behind.** Examples include improving access to basic services, labour market participation, and institutional and legal reforms to protect rights and promote freedom from violence and discrimination (Stuart et al., 2016). Donors, FCAS and countries hosting large numbers of refugees should scale up interventions and partnerships that drive incentives for policy changes that will unlock progress towards the SDGs among people caught in crisis. These could include compact agreements and private sector partnerships. The UN should also take a lead role in institutionalising greater coordination and coherence between humanitarian and development approaches to meet the challenge of protracted crises.
2. **National governments and donors should orient financing towards left-behind groups.** Half of all overseas development assistance should be spent in least developed countries (LDCs) (Manuel et al., 2018a), 95% of whose population are in FCAS. At the national level, governments should scale up financing for social protection and commit to allocating public spending according to need. Development partners and governments should prioritise overseas development assistance for

people caught in crisis, and to FCAS and LICs that host large numbers of refugees. This may require additional financial incentives, such as no-interest-rate loans or more grants, and non-aid incentives such as trade concessions.

3. **National governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector should support efforts to improve data collection.** All relevant stakeholders should sign up to the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data's (GPSDD) Inclusive Data Charter, and National Statistics Offices and international actors should be encouraged to experiment with new technologies to fill data gaps for marginalised groups, including people caught in crisis, who are often excluded from traditional means of data collection.

Many governments waited 10 years before they started the serious work of implementing the precursor to the SDGs, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Binat Sarwar, 2015). But the longer countries take to start delivering on leave no one behind, the more expensive it will be to do so (Stuart et al., 2016). It is vital, then, that within the next 12 months, governments and the international community prioritise and fast-track global and national action in pursuit of this agenda if the world is to achieve the SDGs by 2030.



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