



Europe Snapshot: Stakeholder engagement around the SDGs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Executive Summary

This paper presents some key findings from a **survey** addressing the current and future impacts of COVID-19 on stakeholder engagement and partnerships for implementation, follow up and review of the SDGs. The main report - which assesses data at a global level - is available [here](#) and an Executive Summary highlighting key themes and findings can be found [here](#).

This additional data summary presents a snapshot of 61 European stakeholders who responded to the survey¹, providing insights from across the region on four key findings in the report. The largest single group of respondents to the survey were from civil society organisations and NGOs but a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector, academia, national, regional and local governments also responded.²

The survey was commissioned by UN DESA and supported through a grant from the European Commission. This regional summary for Europe has been developed in partnership between UN DESA and a research team from Newcastle University in the UK, with financial support from the University.³

Key Messages

(1) Stakeholders are making important and diverse contributions, and creating new partnerships, to advance the SDGs in Europe in the context of the pandemic.

Figure 1 demonstrates that stakeholders contribute to SDG implementation in a variety of ways. The most common contributions of stakeholder respondents were in providing knowledge and expertise (74% of 53 respondents), followed by sharing information (60%). Stakeholder respondents also perceive key roles in organizing advocacy and mobilization activities (36%) and supporting the engagement of vulnerable and marginalised groups (32%).

Figure 1

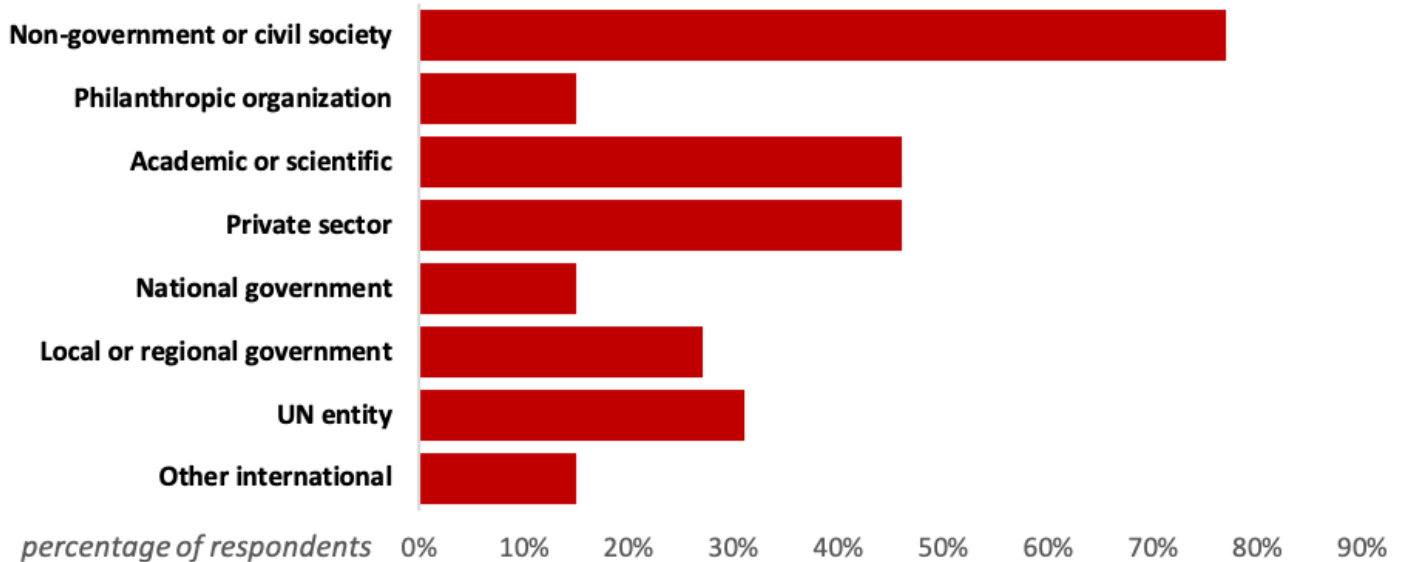
What kinds of contributions has your organization made to implementing the SDGs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis? (n=53)



Stakeholders were also asked what kinds of organizations they had formed partnerships with around SDG implementation activities during the pandemic. Figure 2 shows that stakeholder respondents identified non-government or civil society organisations as key partners (**77% of 26 respondents**). Academic or scientific bodies and private sector organisations were also perceived as significant partners (**both 46% of respondents**). The range of partners identified (**including 15% of 'other international organizations'**) demonstrates that all sectors are engaged, to some extent, in partnerships for implementation of the SDGs.

Figure 2

**What kinds of organizations/entities have you formed partnerships with to implement the SDGs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis?
(n=26)**

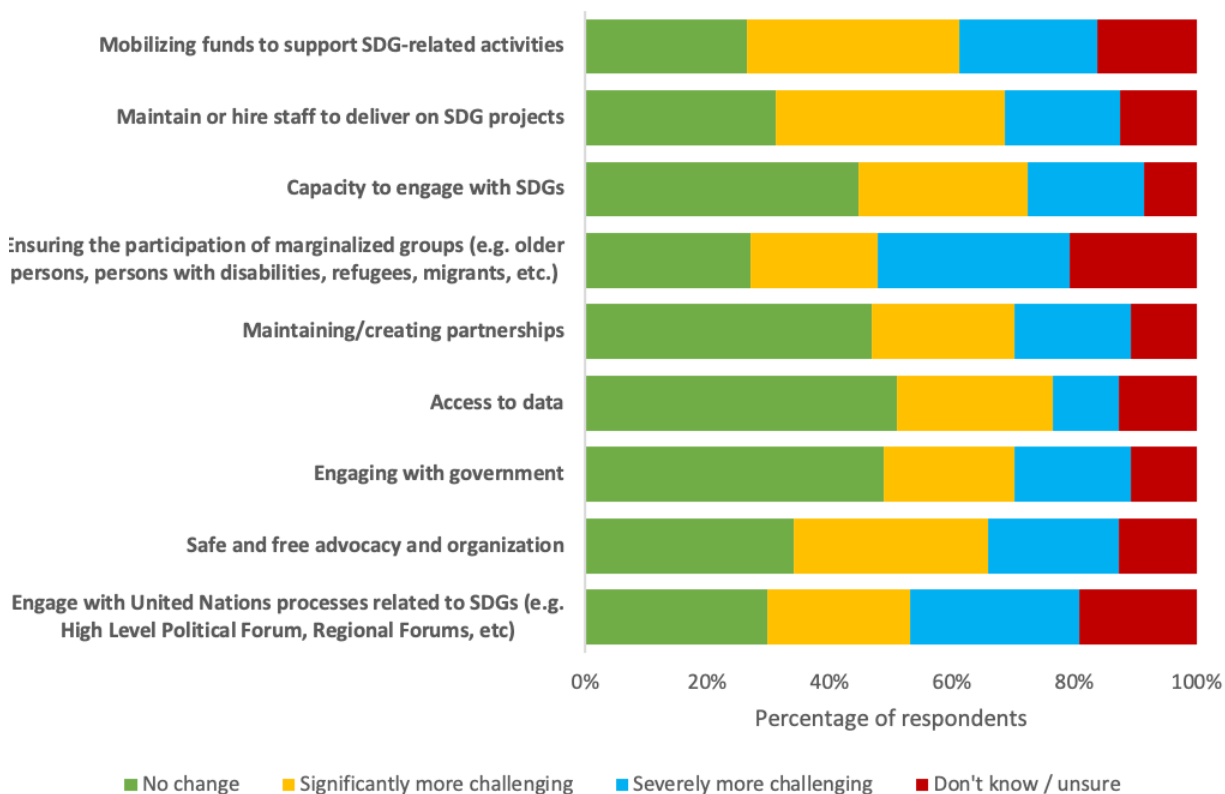


(2) COVID-19 has posed severe challenges for stakeholder organisations in Europe.

European stakeholder respondents identified the participation of marginalized groups as the most severe challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (**31% of 48 respondents identified this as 'severely more challenging'**), as shown in Figure 3 below. The challenge of funding was identified as 'significant' or 'severe' by **59%** of respondents, staffing by **56%** and safe and free advocacy by **53%**. Whilst all options received a 'significantly more challenging' and 'severely more challenging' combined response (yellow and blue in Figure 3) of at least **36%**, many stakeholder respondents perceived there to be 'no change' in their ability to engage with government (**49%**), create partnerships (**47%**) and access data (**51%**).

Figure 3

To what extent have the following issues become more challenging for your organization's activities around the SDGs in the context of COVID-19? (n=47-49)

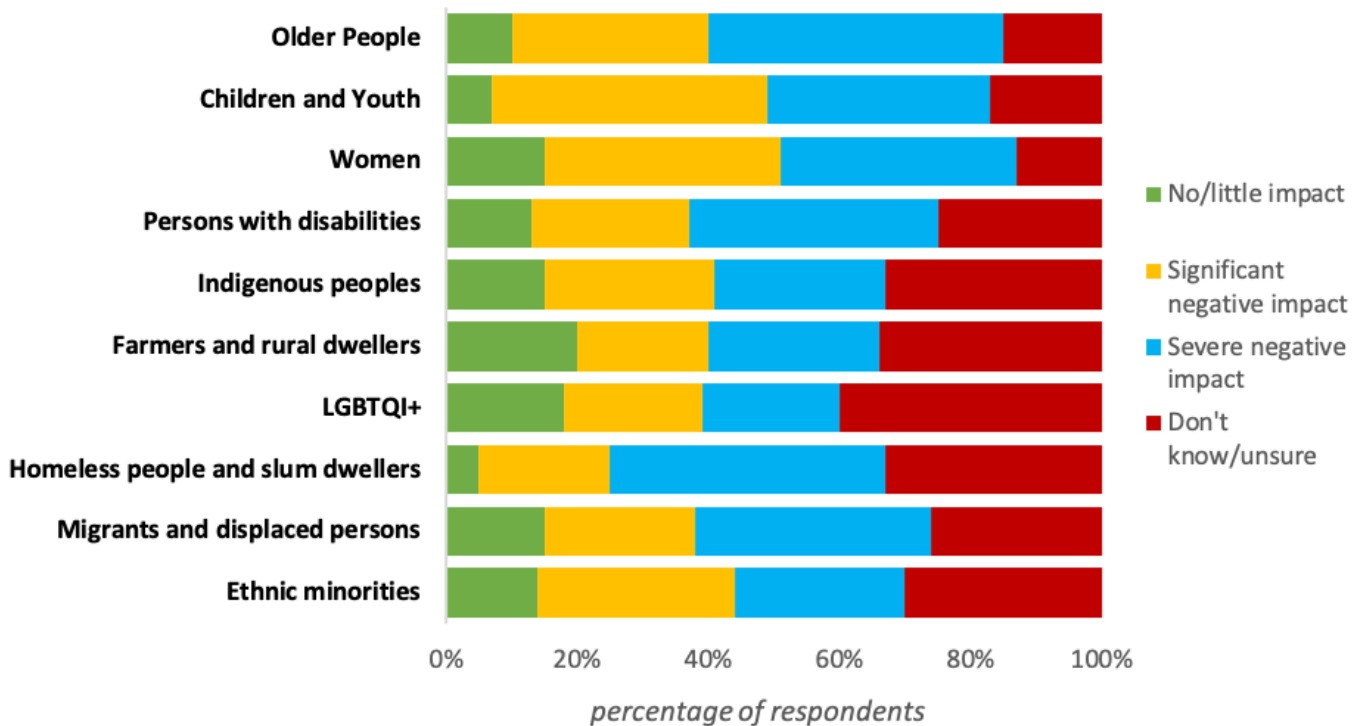


(3) COVID-19 threatens progress on SDGs for vulnerable and marginalised groups across Europe.

Respondents were asked to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the progress towards the SDGs for vulnerable and marginalised groups. Figure 4 shows that older people (45% of 37-41 respondents), homeless people and slum dwellers (42%), and persons with disabilities (38%) were most widely perceived to be 'severely negatively affected'. However, respondents identified 'significant' and 'severe' negative impacts across all vulnerable and marginalised groups including children (76% 'severe' and 'significant' combined) and women (72%). Respondents were unsure or didn't know the extent of the impact of the pandemic on several groups, for example LGBTQI+ community (40% 'don't know/unsure' responses) and farmers and rural dwellers (34%).

Figure 4

In your experience, to what extent has COVID-19 impacted on progress towards the SDGs for the following marginalized and/or vulnerable segments of society? (n=37-41)



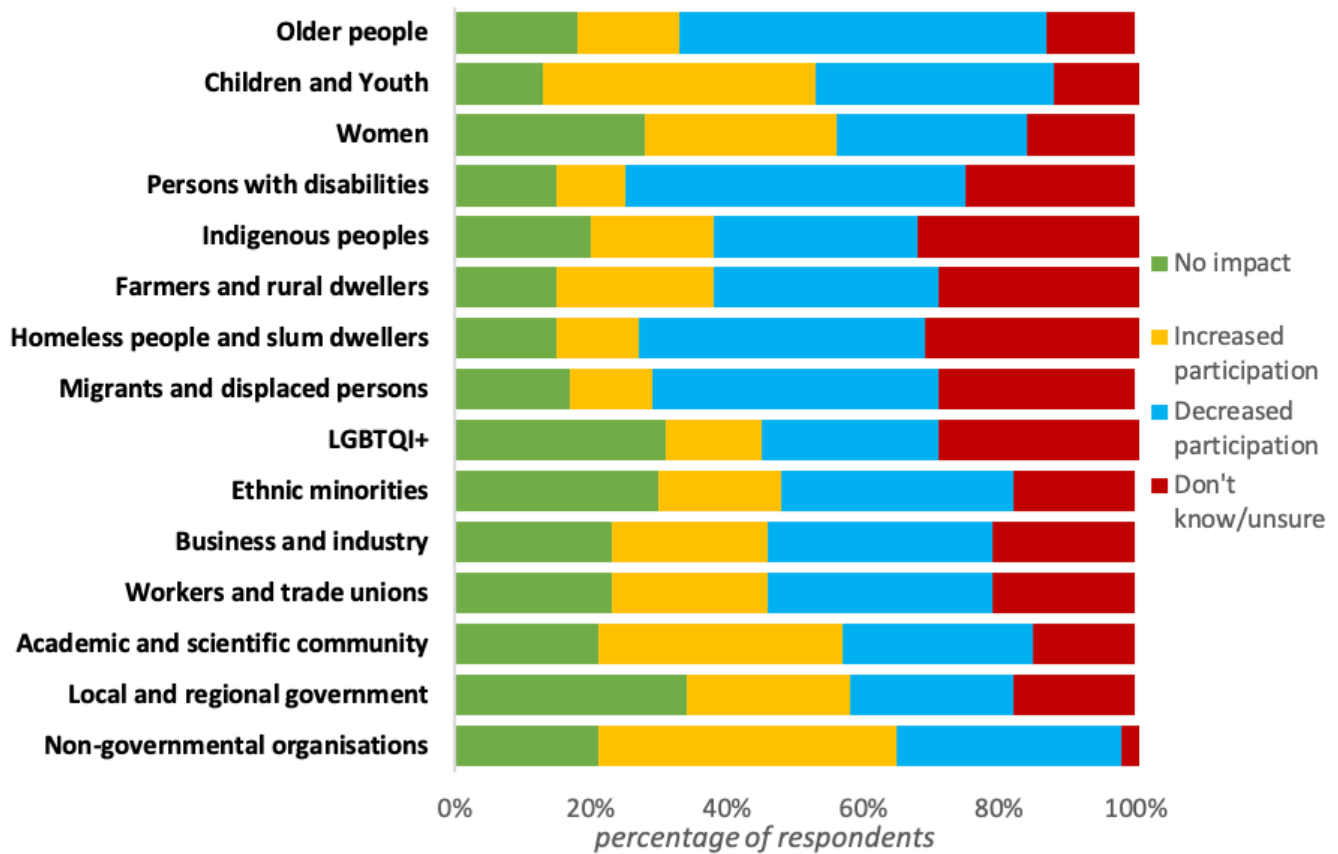
(4) Vulnerable and marginalised groups across Europe risk being 'left behind' by efforts at engagement in the context of COVID-19.

Figure 5 shows that stakeholder respondents see the COVID-19 pandemic to have decreased the participation of the majority of vulnerable or marginalized groups. Older people (**54% of 38-41 respondents**) and persons with disabilities (**50%**) are the groups most identified as having decreased participation. The only vulnerable group whose participation was perceived, on balance, to have increased was children (**40% of stakeholders responded 'increased participation' and 35% 'decreased participation'**). Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic is widely perceived to have impacted the ability of already marginalised groups to participate in SDG processes.

Stakeholders perceived the pandemic to have had a mixed impact on the participation of organisations. **33%** of the respondents perceived decreased participation by businesses and workers/trade unions, but **23%** perceived an increase in participation. Similarly, while a larger proportion of stakeholders noted an increase in the participation of NGOs (**44%**) and academic and scientific institutions (**36%**), a significant proportion identified a decrease in each case (**33% for NGOs and 28% for academic institutions**): in the case of local and national government, both 'increased participation' and 'decreased participation' received **26%** of responses. The COVID-19 pandemic, then, has had a mixed impact on organisations, but vulnerable and marginalised groups were clearly identified as negatively affected.

Figure 5

In your experience, how has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the participation of the following groups in SDG implementation and review? (n=38-41)



That some groups are perceived as 'left behind' in both progress and participation reinforces the need for meaningful and inclusive approaches to stakeholder engagement. However, European countries' efforts at the most meaningful and inclusive kinds of engagement are perceived as most under threat from the effects of the pandemic – reflecting a similar pattern at global level. The answers to other questions asked in the survey (**addressing 18 practices of engagement around implementation and review**) provide evidence for this.

In general, stakeholders see the greatest current and potential impacts of COVID-19 as falling on efforts at *inclusivity* – for example, making resources available to overcome barriers to participation in review (**57% of 40 respondents perceiving 'severe' or 'significant' impacts here**); including 'left behind groups' in review processes (**60% of respondents**) - and on especially *meaningful* engagement, such as the inclusion of stakeholders in policymaking processes (**48% of respondents**).

Results from the North America region

Since Canada and the USA are UNECE member states, this box briefly presents the survey results from North American stakeholders. Around 20 responses – a relatively small number - were received from North America, with numbers of respondents varying between questions.

Overall, the results for North America are close to those for Europe. Knowledge and expertise is the top contribution of respondents (**74% of 19 respondents**) and NGOs/CSOs feature most heavily as partners (**80% of 15 respondents**). Similar challenges for stakeholders were identified overall, such as funding (**66% 'significant' or 'severe'**). However, in a contrast with results for Europe, no respondents identified maintaining/creating partnerships as 'severely' impacted, with staffing for SDG projects identified as most 'severely' impacted (**40% of respondents**) instead. In terms of SDG progress, older people were identified most commonly as being 'severely affected' (**67% of 12 respondents**).

An interesting disparity emerges around the effects of COVID-19 on participation. The participation of older people and persons with disabilities was still felt to have decreased (**40% of 15 respondents**) but in contrast to results from elsewhere, a larger proportion of respondents felt that the participation of women, children and youth, indigenous peoples (**all 47%**) and ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ (**both 40%**) had 'increased' in the context of the pandemic (see, for contrast, section 4 of the Europe snapshot report). Nevertheless, respondents still saw impacts from COVID-19 falling heaviest on efforts to include 'left behind' groups (**55% of 11 respondents seeing "serious or severe" impact**) and to involve stakeholders in policymaking (**55%**).

¹Responses were received from stakeholders in Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

²Numbers of respondents vary between questions and choices, as noted below.

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