

2021 HLPF Thematic Review Expert Group Meetings

HLPF 2021 Theme and in-focus SDGs

The theme of the 2021 HLPF as decided in A/RES/74/298 is “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. Understanding the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2021 HLPF will have an in-depth focus on Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17. It will also cover the targets of the SDGs with a 2020 timeline.

Expert Group Meetings (EGMs) to inform HLPF thematic reviews

EGMs to prepare for the HLPF thematic reviews of the above theme and SDGs will take place during the week of 17 May bringing together a multi-stakeholder group of experts from academia, civil society, government experts participating in their individual capacity, and UN system technical colleagues. Participants will assess progress and challenges to achieving the in-focus SDGs in the context of the broader 2030 Agenda; consider how COVID-19 response and recovery efforts can contribute to achieving these SDGs; identify particular areas of concern and opportunities for transformation; and suggest partnerships and ways forward during the decade of action to mitigate trade-offs, harness synergies and leave no one behind.

The background notes from the 2020 HLPF, where all SDGs were reviewed, will be updated in parallel with the EGMs. These updated notes, together with the EGMs, will be used to help shape the thematic sessions at the HLPF.

EGM format

The EGMs will take place during an “EGM week” with a series of meetings in the week of 17 May through a virtual event platform. Parallel sessions will be dedicated to each of the in-focus SDGs. Updates on the “2020 targets” will be made available in advance of the HLPF, drawing upon the detailed review that was carried out in connection with the 2020 HLPF.

The SDG-specific parallel sessions will be followed by three plenary sessions – corresponding to the HLPF programme¹ - that bring all participants together to discuss cross-cutting issues. While these plenary sessions will each be organized primarily around small groups of SDGs, they will focus on interlinkages and impacts on overarching objectives that cut across the whole Agenda. SDG 17 will be addressed in these cross-cutting sessions (building upon more detailed discussions in the Science, Technology and Innovation Forum; the Forum on Financing for Sustainable Development, and other such meetings).

¹ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/275642021_HLPF_PROGRAMME.pdf

UN-system partners who have co-led reviews of the identified SDGs during the first quadrennial cycle of the HLPF will be invited to assume a similar role during this process, and other entities can also join to support as per interest and availability.

DSDG will provide a powerpoint template to help shape each parallel SDG-specific session, and co-leads will prepare a summary of the session that answers the questions in the template.

EGM schedule (all times in EDT)

18 May		
8:00-8:30	Opening plenary	Welcome and overview
8:45-10:15	In-focus SDGs (Parallel sessions)	Progress, challenges and opportunities (SDGs 1, 2, 8)
19 May		
8:00-9:30	In-focus SDGs (Parallel sessions)	Progress, challenges and opportunities (SDGs 3, 10, 12, 13, 16)
9:45-11:15	Cross cutting session	How do we get on track to end poverty and hunger, and transform towards inclusive and sustainable economies? (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 17 and interlinkages among those goals and with other SDGs)
20 May		
8:00-9:30	Cross cutting session	How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change? (SDGs 12, 13, 17 and interlinkages among these goals and with other SDGs)
9:45-11:15	Cross cutting session	How do we get on track for building more peaceful, equal and inclusive societies (SDGs 3, 10, 16, 17 and interlinkages among those goals and with other SDGs)

Session guiding questions (indicative)

Following are sets of questions that can guide the dialogue in each session.

1. Parallel sessions on in-focus SDGs (1,2,3,8,10,12,13,16)

- What is the current status of the Goal or target, in terms of actual measured progress and trends?
- What has changed since the last time this Goal was reviewed at the HLPF?

- Any deviations in progress from what was expected (including due to COVID-19)?
- Additional obstacles or opportunities in implementation including through interlinkages with other Goals, and connections to related processes?
- New/promising openings for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?
- What are promising strategies to accelerate action (by UN and partners) and to mobilize other stakeholders to advance implementation?
- How would one monitor action for implementing these?

2. Cross-cutting session 1 - How do we get on track to end poverty and hunger, and transform towards inclusive and sustainable economies? (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 17 and interlinkages among those goals and with other SDGs)

Poverty and hunger are on the rise after years of decline, a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and past progress in many areas of eliminating poverty in all its dimensions is facing headwinds. It is projected that as many as 163 million additional people could be pushed into extreme poverty through 2021, and as many as 132 million additional people went hungry in 2020 because of the COVID-19 crisis. Economic growth can help to lift people out of poverty, but COVID-19 recoveries cannot mark a return to business-as-usual approaches to growth. Rather actions can be taken to transform economies and food systems to deliver on the SDGs in an integrated manner, through the generation of decent jobs in green sectors and service provision, and with investments in low-carbon infrastructures and climate-friendly agriculture. The pandemic has also renewed focus on social protection. Scaling up successful initiatives and investments for systemic transformations can help eradicate poverty and hunger while building resilience for the future.

- How can increasing poverty and hunger be tackled while transforming economies and food systems towards increased resilience and lowered climate/environmental impacts?
- How can economic recoveries be shaped to ensure more inclusive and sustainable patterns of growth that generate decent jobs and support carbon-neutrality and a better balance with nature?
- How can food systems be transformed to deliver better nutrition for all, while improving their balance with nature?
- What are the opportunities to be realized (and pitfalls to be avoided) in the immediate and medium terms towards these ends? How can international cooperation support?
- What are some ways to create fiscal space to combat poverty and hunger and respond to the COVID-19 crisis in ways that enable more inclusive, equitable, resilient and sustainable development?

3. Cross-cutting session 2 - How do we revamp and transform consumption and production and address and mitigate climate change? (SDGs 12, 13, 17 and interlinkages among these goals and with other SDGs)

Temporary declines in green-house gas emissions due to the pandemic are set to be reversed during the recovery, absent deep structural changes. At the same time, the increasing number of carbon neutrality commitments by different stakeholders indicate rising momentum for action. Such transitions would need to take place on an accelerated timeline in order to retain a reasonable expectation of keeping climate change within the objectives of the Paris agreement. At the same time, they should also be supported by, and help support, transformations towards sustainable consumption and production. Rapid deployment of technologies during the pandemic as well as changes in consumption patterns could potentially have an important role in achieving these objectives.

- What broad-based transformations are needed in consumption and production systems to arrest climate change and rebalance the relationship between human society and nature?
- How can transformations towards carbon neutrality also promote sustainable consumption and production?
- How should these transformations also ensure that no one is left behind?
- What are the opportunities to be realized (and pitfalls to be avoided) in the immediate and medium terms towards these ends? How can international cooperation support?

4. Cross-cutting session 3 - How do we get on track for building more peaceful, equal and inclusive societies (SDGs 3, 10, 16, 17 and interlinkages among those goals and with other SDGs)

Inequalities in many dimensions have been identified as major determinants of the diverse impacts of the pandemic and the prospects for recovery, driving outcomes that vary within and across countries. In addition, past progress in many areas of health and well-being, including declining maternal mortality and expanding childhood vaccination programmes, is at risk of backsliding with the onset of COVID-19. Consistently, these outcomes are especially adverse for groups considered vulnerable along different dimensions. In many cases, institutions intended to promote more peaceful, just and inclusive societies have fallen short. COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of digital transformation with positive effect, but this could also exacerbate existing inequalities in multiple dimensions both within and among countries. Taken together, the pandemic risks further entrenching inequalities along different dimensions, increasing social tensions and polarization and weakening social cohesion. At the same time the increased awareness and attention to addressing these challenges could indicate the possibilities for initiating breakthroughs towards achieving these objectives.

- What has the pandemic revealed about how deep-seated inequalities determine lifetime opportunities and outcomes including in good health and well-being?

- Has the pandemic introduced new forms of inequality within and across countries that now also need to be addressed?
- How can countries make effective and enduring changes towards more equitable, inclusive and just societies?
- What are the opportunities to be realized (and pitfalls to be avoided) in the immediate and medium terms towards these ends? How can international cooperation support?