

RESPONSES TO GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Policies, actions and trade-offs

Sustainable, inclusive and just economies need solutions resulting from equitable participatory processes, structural reform for a just rule of law and progressive action from all actors. Huge investments in human capital, driven by education and technological advancements¹ and the promotion of foreign direct investments have allowed entrepreneurial ecosystems to emerge in low- and middle-income economies. But these have overwhelmingly benefited well-educated and urban populations and taken advantage of weaknesses in government regulation and social protection; exploited cheap labor (particularly from migrant workers, ethnic minorities and women, among others); and created vast income disparities between the urban middle class, urban poor, and rural poor.

Thus, important are policies that strengthen decent work conditions especially in vulnerable sectors; address entrenched barriers impeding vulnerable and marginalized groups from accessing decent work; proactively promote women's full and equal participation in the labor market; and provide an enabling regulatory environment to support 'green jobs', entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.² Similarly, all policy measures require a foundation of equity and universality of access, rule of law and democratic values.

In promoting inclusivity, governments must allocate resources to in-demand skills development, address the root causes of poor school attendance, and youth inability to transition to the labor force. In Mexico and the Philippines, for example, conditional cash-transfer programs have proven to increase school attendance, reintegration and retention.

But a focus on school-to-work transition inadequately addresses the root causes of poverty and the reality that 6 out of 10 workers, and 4 out of 5 enterprises operate in the informal economy. It is these workers who are in the greatest need of action for inclusive and just economies.

Three policy areas to address the inequalities that define the informal sector are universal social protection, investment in local informal enterprises through skills development and access to capital and strengthening of worker protection and representation – all of which must mainstream gender equality. Various examples from the global south demonstrate how conditional access to healthcare puts a significant economic burden on informal workers, especially on women. Thailand's experience shows how extending universal healthcare relieves the most marginalized of these constraints, resulting in greater opportunities to escape

¹ Boons, F., Wagner, M.A., 2009. *Assessing the relationship between economic and ecological performance: distinguishing system levels and the role of innovation*. *Ecological Economics* 68 (7), 1908e1914.

² Annex 1 includes a list of other proposed policy measures

extreme poverty.³ Meanwhile, investments in local enterprises via savings groups combined with skills development, from Plan's own experiences with village savings and loans associations, are a low-cost and highly scalable model that increases young people's access to finance, income, vocational skills development and local entrepreneurship.

Strengthening worker protection and representation remain a significant challenge, which is greatly amplified in the informal sector as globalization and the proliferation of global value chains has only ensured the further marginalization of the world's poor. Organized collective action, such as that in Brazil among organic rice farmers and their cooperatives, demonstrate the viability of a social movement that fights for gender, income equality and equitable land distribution while also running a business.⁴

The promotion of sustainable, inclusive and just economies does not result in trade-offs. The very notion of sustainability requires a rethinking of outdated growth models that have underscored compromises between 'progress' and inequalities and environmental degradation. Furthermore, there is a strong business case for social justice and environmental sustainability, evidenced from the wide range of gains that industries reap when human rights and the environment are protected. For instance, gender mainstreaming in the workplace, which companies previously see as costs, actually yield returns of investment. Plan International's 2019 research on women's economic empowerment in the Ready-Made Garment sector showed that the provision of interventions such as maternity support, daycare facilities, on-site health clinics and menstrual hygiene, accrued savings for participating factories that range from \$427,000 to \$1.7 million per year.

What these suggest is that everyone benefits from ensuring vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as young people, women, LGBTQ, ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees, have access to full and productive employment, social protection and representation. Agenda 2030 offers an ambitious promise of sustainable development for all – it cannot be achieved if there is a willingness to accept trade-offs on social and environmental justice.

³ ² Stuart, E., Sammant, E., Hunt, A., 2018. *Informal is the new normal*. ODI. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11993.pdf>

⁴ ³ Karatepe, I.D., Scherrer, C., 2019. *Collective Action as a Prerequisite for Economic and Social Upgrading in Agricultural Production Networks*. Centre for Agrarian Research and Education for South (CARES). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2277976019838158>

2. Leaving no one behind

'Leaving no one behind' needs governments to ensure that the excluded, marginalized and (most) vulnerable access economic benefits and decent work. These groups include young people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees, rural populations, older people, women, LGBTQ+ people, and workers in the informal economy.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution will continue to rapidly reshape the labor market. This means individuals at the low-end of income distribution will be put at greater risk of displacement due to automation. But new industries, jobs and technologies are also on the rise – and hold significant potential to increase and improve economic opportunities for vulnerable groups. Earning basic education credentials and building up transferable and life skills will be essential to building the economic resilience of the vulnerable. Expanding people's employment options by promoting a gender-transformative and inclusive culture across industries also unlock opportunities in careers traditionally taken by certain groups (e.g. men, non-disabled persons).

With COVID-19, the inequalities and exclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups are heightened as a result of lockdowns and the global economic downturn. Among the hardest hit of workers are young people, who have been overwhelmingly employed in precarious, insecure or informal jobs. The recession has only amplified difficulties they face in accessing social protection, representation and collective bargaining, occupational health and safety, and economic security in general. Recent statistics show that job losses have hurt girls and young women more as they are disproportionately represented in temporary, flexible employment, and informal work. Lockdown measures have also resulted in greater burdens of unpaid domestic and/or care work, resulting in a higher time poverty that cause further disruptions in their education, training and employment. Tensions around physical, health and financial insecurities at home have also risked women and girls to domestic violence, exploitation and abuse, evidenced from recent reports of higher gender-based violence cases in both developed and developing countries.

The world needs a new social contract to address the multi-faceted challenges that the rapidly changing world of work brings, such as the rise of new economic areas with no or few safety nets. More than ever, a **guaranteed social minimum for everyone is critical**. Social protection helps break the cycle of poverty, provide economic security and an economic cushion to workers against various shocks. This can be facilitated by social insurance, social assistance, universal basic income, early childhood development programs, guaranteed minimum income, and so on. As it is, however, social protection mechanisms in many countries are either absent or ineffective.

Furthermore, labor market policies have a crucial role in **generating decent jobs** and equipping vulnerable, marginalized and excluded groups with the skills to access those jobs. Well-designed policies ensure that these people benefit from social protection and have rights at work by, among others, encouraging individuals to join workers' and employers' organizations that look after their welfare and represent their interests in tripartite dialogues.

Related to this is the need for labor market decision-making processes to **respect, protect and uphold the civic space**. As of 2030, only 3% of countries in the world have an open civil society. In more than half of the countries in the world, civil society has been restricted or oppressed.⁵ Even in global and regional processes, civil society activists such as the Major Groups and other stakeholders have struggled to be included in relevant discussions. A community-based approach to policymaking is essential for sustainable development, and it cannot be achieved without open civic spaces.

⁵ CIVICUS. (2020). [Civic Space in Numbers](#).

⁶ UNESCAP. (2019). [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2019](#).

⁷ Gates, B. (2020). [Handling CORONAVIRUS: How to respond to COVID-19 and prepare for the next epidemic, too](#).

3. Knowledge gaps

Knowledge gaps still exist in the following areas:

- Successful policy measures and program models have increased access to quality education - including education for sustainable development, training and decent work opportunities for the most marginalized children and youth
- Effective models for preparing young people for decent work in the Fourth Industrial Revolution
- Good practices in recognition of skills and qualifications obtained through informal and non-formal learning
- Good practices in addressing opportunities, challenges and provision of safety nets for young people on the move and returnees
- Examples of inclusive economic interventions across the humanitarian-development nexus that contribute to economic recovery and longer-term development goals
- Youth engagement in decent work processes, what would meaningful youth engagement look like and what measures development institutions need to set in place and enforce to uphold this consistently
- Mainstreaming sustainable development in education: teaching new paradigms, rewriting the curricula to reflect other development perspectives. Italy introducing climate change in the curriculum as an example of a great first step.

What global systems will look like after COVID-19 remains unclear but the pandemic has already challenged many of the traditional notions on the world of work. A special attention needs to be paid to tackling potential loopholes that follow greater adoption of remote working. Moreover, for many, remote working remain an unattainable privilege because of the lack of access to digital infrastructure. Measures guaranteeing that 'essential workers', young and old, have enhanced physical protection and improved social safety nets is critical. It is equally important to increase decision-makers' understanding about the unique needs, challenges and opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized groups, as well as the kinds of policies and programs that need to be implemented to promote accessible and equitable markets. Above all else, policy measures that ensure governments and other stakeholders remain just, transparent and accountable during the pandemic are sorely needed in a time where the need for 'protection' has resulted in governments imposing further restrictions.

Gaps remain in measuring progress of the SDGs as an overreliance on economic data has made it challenging to measure social and environmental development.⁶ The experiences of vulnerable populations, including young people, girls and women, LGBTQ+ people, elderly, ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities and rural populations, are largely missing in official SDG reports from governments. Given COVID-19's impact on progress with the SDGs, monitoring of the pandemic would benefit from investing a transparent and accessible multinational disease surveillance.⁷ Some promising initiatives have emerged on this, usually driven by academic institutions and resulting in platforms that collect and sharing information for all to access and see (e.g. the Johns Hopkins tracker; Oxford University Government response tracker; the Lancet publications on COVID-19). Humanitarian resources exist as well -- for instance Reliefweb and OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchange. The current challenge is to ensure that related thematic materials linked to COVID-19 are equally easily accessible and connected to the current COVID-19 platforms to prevent duplication and ensure efficiencies in information exchange.

4. Relevant means of implementation and the global partnership for development (SDG 17)

The most important partnerships in the next years will be sustained and meaningful ones with civil society organizations. To achieve this kind of participation, the UN needs to rely on (1) genuine commitment and follow-through with development institutions and governments to respect, uphold and protect the civil society space; (2) reframing the development narrative from seeing CSOs as a consulting body to seeing us as a development partner, with equal stake and participation in policy and program processes; and (3) recognizing the heterogeneity of civil society actors and responding to the differentiated access, influence, resources and capacity of groups to actively participate in decision-making. This extends to discussions in the economic sphere, where representation has been a major issue that can result in either tokenistic forms of representation, exclusion of marginalized groups, or outright repression.

Especially in the youth employment sector, evidences demonstrate that partnerships between the government, private sector, multilateral institutions, international development organizations, and civil society achieve scalable impact by combining resources and various means of implementation. An example of such partnerships and networks are the UN Global Compact, Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) Network, The Global Youth Economic Opportunities (GYEO) Summit, The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, among others.

In addition, existing UN partnerships can increase its efficacy in supporting synergies by moving from hierarchical structures to collaborative networks, where the main engine of the network is collective ownership. For example, there are numerous initiatives and efforts surrounding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, there is no synergy among organizations to collaborate and have large-scale dissemination. The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth is an example of such a collaborative network where the members are the driver of the impact, with the ILO playing a facilitating and networking role. Such networks include actors from the spectrum of roles needed to achieve a sustainable impact. This practice can be replicated and adjusted to fit other contexts or a set of goals and targets from the Global Goals.

With the current global crisis, the nature of partnerships need to transform to be more diverse and inclusive, facilitating a cross-cultural and cross-generational, multi-sectoral collaboration for more cohesive and impactful actions. This will also ensure that often left-behind groups like young people, women and other vulnerable and marginalized groups are also represented and have their meaningful role. We need partnerships that harness the potential of the rapidly evolving technology and science, but we shouldn't forget that these are just tools and they can also be biased. Hence, partnerships should be human-centric.

At the same time, with the rise of public-private partnerships and blended finance, it is important to remember that these are not silver bullets. These collaborations require additional transparency and accountability to ensure that development access is given to actors that demonstrate genuine commitments to the SDGs. A safeguard to protect the participation of all sectors would be to implement mandatory clauses of intersectoral cooperation in all partnerships between the UN and the private sector. Another example would be the Guiding Principles of The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, which includes principles in the areas of impact, enablers, approach and scope of the initiative. Cost-sharing between governments, private sector and civil society is also a viable option – but only when *all* stakeholders are equitably engaged.

5. Science, technology and innovation

Science, technology and innovation (STI) alone can do little for sustainable development, and technocratic approaches are increasingly in opposition to people-centered paradigms. At their core, STI are tools – while neither inherently good nor bad, they do amplify the prevailing norms, biases and dynamics of society. In this regard, they can either produce significant development gains or further exacerbate exclusion.

To reap the benefits of STI, vulnerable and marginalized people need to increasingly be able to actively participate. Without significant efforts to increase their access to relevant skills and opportunities, boost investments in digital infrastructure, and uphold personal security, especially the right to data privacy, the digital divide will continue to widen. For instance, the gender divide is largely intact – there are fewer girls and women who access, use and benefit from the internet than men globally. Girls are five times less likely than boys to pursue a career in STI. Moreover, gender-blind innovations are projected to cost trillions of dollars in losses as they fail to recognize and meet women audiences' needs. What this shows is the disparaging reality that women and underrepresented groups are left behind, unless the various complex factors that impede them are addressed.

Targeting low hanging fruits can yield immediate benefits. For example, if governments and telecommunication companies work together to make mobile phones and data packages more affordable and Internet service stronger, this can serve as a steppingstone to bringing the digital world closer.

Closing the digital gender gap, however, requires transformative partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector to create programs primarily aimed at equipping girls, young women, and underrepresented groups with skills that:

- Enable them to get the most out of their devices and the Internet (such as accessing information, building skills and furthering education, expanding their business online, conducting transactions remotely, seeking help and joining supportive communities);
- Keep them and others safe from harmful information and the many malicious elements in digital space; and
- Empower them to pursue an education and career in STEM and participate in creating solutions that address the needs they themselves are the most familiar with.

Furthermore, in order to promote women's and girls' participation in STI: (1) increase women's representation in STEM fields; (2) make available opportunities to build on their digital literacy; (3) provide fiscal and non-fiscal support to STI innovations of women and other marginalized groups; (4) address underlying issues impeding access to STI. In the workplace, this includes the lack of women in STI fields, especially in leadership and decision-making roles, harassment and wage gaps. The role of social norms in influencing education and career preferences, time poverty and the 'motherhood penalty' needs to be acknowledged and similarly addressed. Among developers, an example of emerging practices includes adherence to the [Gender-Transformative Principles for Digital Development](#), which helps address the tendency of technology to mirror and amplify adverse gender norms and stereotypes; and providing training, advocacy and resources to support digital literacy among marginalized groups, including girls and young women, usually in collaboration with civil society actors.

A key takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic is the undeniable reality that (quality) Internet is a right – and must be accessible to all.

Annex 1: Policy Measures for Question #1

Key actions to promote decent work and transition to sustainable production and consumption systems	Examples of concrete policy measures
Providing social protection to vulnerable and marginalized groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a ‘living wage,’ with careful definition taking into account such matters as average wage and cost of living, and should apply to all contract workers, workers in the gig-economy and other forms of nontraditional employment; • Mandating collective and sectoral bargaining; • Context appropriate welfare-to-work programs and conditional cash transfers to vulnerable families (potentially even UBI, as the pandemic has showed); • Prioritized demographic groups for market reintegration strategies.
Addressing gender gap in labor market participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal and non-fiscal incentives for employers that demonstrate gender balance at all levels in their companies, and an equitable drafting of such indicators • Government provision of childcare and social welfare services in communities • Provision of equal amounts of <i>paid</i> paternity and maternity leaves which are non-transferable between partners until we truly close the gender pay gap. • Scholarships and fiscal incentives to support training and employment of women and men in non-traditional sectors • Transparency in wages and bargain rights • Make unequal wages a criminal offence for employers
Increasing transparency and accountability of supply chain actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency and liability for decent work and human rights violations, and unsustainable production throughout companies’ supply chains (e.g. California Transparency Act, UK Modern Slavery Act) • Mandate environmental indicators in supply chain analyses
Cultivating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, innovation and sustainable livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of entry barriers due to age, gender, ethnicity, (migrant) status; • Reframing of the discussion around entrepreneurship so it is seen as an opportunity as opposed to a necessity. The government should be the decent employer of last resort, and no one should be forced into entrepreneurship if they don’t want to be; • Loan repayment schedules allowing newer businesses time to get off the ground and other such conditional investments.