

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Source: UN / Manuel Elias

On 13 March 2020, the Spanish government decreed a nationwide state of alert to curb the increase in cases of COVID-19 that were spreading in Spain. One year later, we can see that the pandemic has had a negative impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted and integrated by the UN General Assembly in the 2030 Agenda, aimed at influencing the environmental, social and economic spheres of countries in the interests of their development.

The Sustainable Development Goals are interdependent, which has meant that while not all of the SDGs have been directly affected by the pandemic this year, because they are interconnected, changes in one have created obstacles to achieving others.

Health and well-being, the Sustainable Development Goal associated with COVID-19, has highlighted the need for health preparedness and scientific progress in the face of pandemics capable of destabilising global health progress.

The pandemic has led to hospital collapses due to the increase in ICU cases. It has also caused delays in appointments for other illnesses, and aggravated mental health illnesses due to mobility restrictions in homes and lack of access to treatment staff.

The SDGs that focus on climate change and the environment have been hindered by COVID-19. Proof of this is the slowdown in the ban on the use of plastics, because one of the measures that has proved most effective in the effort to halt the spread of COVID-19 infection has been protective equipment, including suits, gloves and masks, regulated not only for use by healthcare workers, but also for the entire population. This exponential increase in the consumption of masks has had serious consequences, not only because of the material of which such equipment is made, but also because of the pollution they have generated due to their poor disposal in the seas and oceans.

SDG 5, relating to gender equality, has been detrimentally damaged with the advent of COVID-19. Mobility restriction measures have increased the risk of gender-based violence, as well as child abuse, where stress increases as a result of a continuous stay at home for all cohabitants and lack of access to educational staff, workers and social workers.

However, not only do we see a negative impact on the phenomenon of gender-based violence, but women have also been affected both professionally, as they comprise a high percentage of health care professionals, 80% of nursing staff, and in home care, as the pandemic has left a large number of children without schools and colleges, so that many women have had to combine home care with work.

However, the closure of schools not only has an impact on gender issues, but also directly affects the Sustainable Development Goal of Quality Education and the access of a large group of children from low-income families to both an education in schools and to the provision of essential food provided by schools during school hours.

In addition, the distance learning approach creates a gap in educational inequalities for those children who do not have access to the technological means necessary to implement this new form of education.

Fuentes:

- United Nations. (2020). *Informe de políticas: La educación durante la COVID-19 y después de ella.*

Zero Hunger, the second goal of the SDGs, has doubled the number of people at risk of severe hunger as a result of the pandemic, the economic situation and the climate crisis we are currently experiencing. The same has happened with the fight against the elimination of poverty, which, far from making progress towards its eradication, has suffered a setback.

According to estimates by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), some 207 million people will join the ranks of those living below the poverty line as a consequence of the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing the number of people living in poverty to one billion by 2030.

While it is true that COVID-19 stands as an obstacle to the achievement of the SDGs, causing a global crisis and increasing inequalities, it is worth mentioning the hopeful words of Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme:

"COVID-19 is a turning point and the decisions leaders make now could take the world in very different directions. We have the opportunity to invest in a decade of action that not only helps people recover from COVID-19, but restores a development pathway for people and the planet towards a more just, resilient and sustainable future".

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