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RESEARCH

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2026: Tracking Performance and Progress Towards UN 2030 Agenda

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), adopted under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, provide a universal framework comprising 17 Goals and 169 targets to promote sustainable development across economic, social and environmental dimensions. With only four years remaining until the 2030 deadline, the aim of this paper is to analyse and assess the global performance and progress according to the the UN SDGs Report 2026.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH: The methodology adopted to analyse the UN SDGs Report 2026 uses quantitative and qualitative data, aligning global priorities with the SDG targets. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) uses available indicators and national statistics to evaluate whether progress is achieved, on track, moderately off track, seriously off track, or shows no progress. Moreover, the methodology adopted in the SDGs Report 2026 is based on a global monitoring framework that assesses progress using official statistics collected through the SDGs indicator framework. The assessment covers 17 SDGs, 169 targets and more than 230 indicators, supported by internationally agreed statistical methodologies. According to the report, between 2016 and 2026, the number of indicators in the SDG database increased from 115 to 233, while the number of data records expanded from approximately 330,000 to 3.2 million. By 2026, every SDG indicator had an internationally agreed statistical methodology, strengthening the consistency and comparability of global monitoring. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) Analysis Framework is used to assess the development performance using quantitative and qualitative data, aligning national priorities with SDGs targets. The framework uses available indicators and national statistics to evaluate whether countries are: achieved, on-track, moderately off-track, seriously off-track or no progress.

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Also if countries are facing data gaps or methodological challenges. Due to incomplete or inconsistent data, some assessments rely on proxy indicators or qualitative descriptions of progress. Each SDG is rated on a 0–5 scale to measure countries' progress towards the 2030 Agenda. This scale helps to quantify countries' SDGs performance, showing where strong progress exists and where further policy actions are needed.

FINDINGS: The analysis of the UN SDGs Report 2026 highlights that, despite notable achievements in areas such as social protection, health, access to safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity and digital connectivity, global progress remains uneven and insufficient to achieve the SDGs within the remaining timeframe. Out of the 139 assessable SDG targets, only 36% are on track or making moderate progress, while 49% are advancing too slowly and 15% have regressed below their 2015 baseline.

ORIGINAL/VALUE OF THE PAPER: The analysis of the report shows that although meaningful progress has been achieved in areas such as health, education, clean energy, water and sanitation, and technological innovation, overall global advancement remains insufficient to meet the 2030 Agenda.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS: The analysis acknowledges areas needing urgent attention which represent major global challenges, including declining official development assistance (ODA), rising debt burdens, conflict, climate change and economic instability, and emphasises the need for strengthened financing, international cooperation, improved data systems and the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: Stronger international cooperation, increased financing, and accelerated implementation efforts are essential to bridge existing gaps and ensure that no one is left behind in achieving sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: *United Nations; United Nations 2030 Agenda; Sustainable Development Goals; Voluntary National Reviews; Drinking Water; Sanitation; Electricity; Digital Connectivity; Official Development Assistance (ODA); Debt Burdens; Conflict; Climate Change; Economic Instability; International Cooperation; Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), adopted under the **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development in 2015, provide a universal framework comprising **17 Goals** and **169 targets** to promote sustainable development across economic, social and environmental dimensions. The SDGs Report 2026 presents a global assessment of progress with only four years remaining until the 2030 deadline. The report highlights that, despite notable achievements in areas such as social protection, health, access to safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity and digital connectivity, global progress remains uneven and insufficient to achieve the SDGs within the remaining timeframe. Out of the **139** assessable SDG targets, only **36%** are on track or making moderate progress, while **49%** are advancing too slowly and **15%** have regressed below their 2015 baseline. The report further identifies major global challenges, including declining official development assistance (ODA), rising debt burdens, conflict, climate change and economic instability, and emphasises the need for strengthened financing,

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international cooperation, improved data systems and the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate progress towards achieving the **2030 Agenda**. (**UNSD, 2026a; UNSD, 2026b**).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in The SDGs Report 2026 is based on a global monitoring framework that assesses progress using official statistics collected through the SDGs indicator framework. The assessment covers **17 SDGs**, **169 targets** and more than **230 indicators**, supported by internationally agreed statistical methodologies. Between 2016 and 2026, the number of indicators in the SDG database increased from **115** to **233**, while the number of data records expanded from approximately **330,000** to **3.2 million**. By 2026, every SDG indicator had an internationally agreed statistical methodology, strengthening the consistency and comparability of global monitoring (**UNSD, 2026a; UNSD, 2026b**).

UNSDGs Report is analysed using quantitative and qualitative data, aligning global priorities with the SDG targets. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) uses available indicators and national statistics to evaluate whether progress is achieved, on track, moderately off track, seriously off track, or shows no progress.

Due to incomplete or inconsistent data, some assessments rely on proxy indicators or qualitative descriptions of progress. Each **SDG** is rated on a **0–5 scale** to measure global progress towards the **2030 Agenda**. The scale is applied to assess global performance across all **17 SDGs**.

0 – No Progress: No measurable progress or data available.
1 – Severely Off-Track: Very little advancement; major gaps persist.
2 – Off-Track: Limited progress with minimal improvement.
3 – Moderately Off-Track: Some progress achieved, but key challenges remain.
4 – On-Track: Noticeable progress made; close to achieving the target.
5 – Achieved: Goal fully met, with sustained performance and monitoring in place.

This scale helps quantify global SDGs performance by identifying areas where substantial progress has been made and where further policy actions are required.

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The report assesses SDG progress using historical trend analysis where sufficient data are available. Progress is evaluated for **139 targets** with reliable trend data and classified into five categories: on track or target met, moderate progress, marginal progress, stagnation and regression. The overall assessment shows that **15%** of the targets are on track or have already met the target, **21%** are making moderate progress, **32%** are showing only marginal progress, **17%** are stagnating and **15%** have regressed below their 2015 baseline. These classifications provide the basis for assessing progress at both the global and individual Goal levels (**UNSD, 2026a; UNSD, 2026b**).

The assessment relies exclusively on official statistics produced through national statistical systems and internationally harmonised by the global statistical community. The report emphasises that SDG monitoring has strengthened national statistical systems, expanded data-sharing arrangements, increased the use of administrative records, geospatial information and other innovative data sources, and improved country coverage. The share of indicators with good country coverage increased from roughly one third to almost **70%**, providing a stronger evidence base for monitoring sustainable development and informing policy decisions (**UNSD, 2026a; UNSD, 2026b**).

The report also highlights that the assessment is constrained by data availability. While substantial improvements have been achieved in health, water, energy and partnerships, important data gaps remain for several Goals, particularly gender equality, sustainable cities, climate action, and peace and justice, where fewer than one third of the indicators have sufficient trend data. Many countries also continue to face challenges in producing disaggregated statistics by income, education, disability, migration status and other characteristics, limiting the ability to fully assess whether no one is being left behind.

ANALYSIS

The summary table presents the analytical scores assigned to each of the **17 SDGs** based on the evidence contained in the UNSDGs Report 2026. The scores provide a consistent overview of global progress while preserving the original UN data, figures and years (See Table 1).

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Table 1. SDG Assessment (1-17) (2026)

SDG	Score (0–5)	Analysis & Justification
SDG 1 – No Poverty	2	- Extreme poverty remains at **10%** globally, only slightly below 2015 levels. - Social protection expanded but **3.8 billion** people remain unprotected. Progress has largely stalled.
SDG 2 – Zero Hunger	2	- Hunger and food insecurity remain above 2015 levels despite slight improvements since 2021. - Agricultural sustainability is improving but not fast enough to meet 2030 targets.
SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being	4	- Strong improvements in maternal and child health, HIV reduction, TB control, and reproductive health. - However, maternal mortality remains almost three times the SDG target, and inequalities are substantial.
SDG 4 – Quality Education	3	- School completion rates improved, but **273 million** children remain out of school, and learning outcomes in reading and mathematics remain weak.
SDG 5 – Gender Equality	3	- Some gains in women's representation and legal reforms, but violence against women, child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and unequal land rights remain widespread.
SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation	4	- Significant gains in access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene. - Nevertheless, billions still lack safely managed services and water stress remains severe in many regions.
SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy	4	- One of the stronger-performing goals. - Electricity access reached **92%**, clean cooking access expanded, and renewable energy capacity is growing rapidly, especially in developing countries.

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SDG	Score (0–5)	Analysis & Justification
SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	3	- Unemployment is historically low, but productivity growth is weak, informal employment remains widespread, and labour rights protections have deteriorated in many regions.
SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	4	- Manufacturing, trade, R&D spending, and digital connectivity continue to expand. - However, major gaps persist between high-income and low-income countries, especially in advanced technologies such as **5G**.
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities	3	- Some countries reduced income disparities, but discrimination remains widespread and refugee numbers have more than doubled since 2015.
SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	2	- Slum populations continue to grow and affordable housing shortages are worsening. - Urban services have improved but are not keeping pace with urbanisation.
SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production	2	- Material consumption, food waste, and e-waste continue to rise. - Fossil-fuel subsidies remain extremely high, undermining sustainable consumption efforts.
SDG 13 – Climate Action	2	- Climate risks are accelerating. - The period 2015–2025 was the hottest on record, emissions continue rising, and current commitments are insufficient for the **1.5°C** pathway.
SDG 14 – Life Below Water	3	- Major governance achievements such as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, fisheries subsidies agreement, and over **10%** ocean protection are positive, but ocean warming and acidification continue to threaten ecosystems.

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SDG	Score (0–5)	Analysis & Justification
SDG 15 – Life on Land	3	- Biodiversity governance has strengthened and deforestation has slowed, but extinction risk continues to increase and forest loss remains significant.
SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	2	- Homicide and civilian conflict deaths have declined, yet violence remains high, corruption persists, and human-rights defenders face increasing threats.
SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	2	- ODA fell by a record amount, debt burdens reached historic highs, and investment continues to bypass many least developed countries.

Source: (UNSD, 2026a; UNSD, 2026b).

SDG Performance Score (average of SDG 1–17)

Overall Average Score: **2.9/5** (approximately **3/5**). This indicates moderate overall progress, with the strongest performance in **SDGs 3**, **6**, **7**, and **9**, while **SDGs 1**, **2**, **11**, **12**, **13**, **16**, and **17** remain significantly off-track. The 2026 SDGs Report indicates that global progress is moderate but insufficient, with notable achievements in health (**SDG 3**), water and sanitation (**SDG 6**), clean energy (**SDG 7**), and innovation (**SDG 9**), while climate action (**SDG 13**), responsible consumption (**SDG 12**), poverty (**SDG 1**), and hunger (**SDG 2**) remain significantly off-track for the **2030 Agenda**. This indicates moderate but insufficient progress, consistent with the report's conclusion that the world remains significantly off-track for achieving the **2030 Agenda**.

Regional Comparison

The 2026 SDGs Report highlights significant disparities in progress across the world's seven major regions: East and South Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Europe and Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and Western Asia, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa. While some regions have achieved notable improvements in areas such as health, education, and energy access, others continue to face persistent challenges related to poverty, food insecurity, climate vulnerability, and financing constraints. A regional comparison provides valuable insight into the uneven pace of SDG implementation and helps identify areas requiring greater policy attention and international support (See Table 2).

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Table 2: Regional Analysis for SDG Performance

Region	Analysis
East and South Asia	- This region shows the strongest overall SDG progress, driven by rapid economic growth, poverty reduction, expanded infrastructure, and improvements in access to health, education, and energy services. - However, environmental sustainability and climate challenges remain significant.
Central and Southern Asia	- Moderate progress is evident in poverty reduction, education, and infrastructure development, but the region still faces substantial challenges in nutrition, gender equality, sanitation, and climate resilience.
Latin America and the Caribbean	- Progress is mixed, with improvements in social development indicators such as education and health, but economic instability, inequality, and governance challenges continue to slow overall SDG achievement.
Northern Africa and Western Asia	- Some gains have been achieved in health, infrastructure, and access to services, yet regional conflicts, water scarcity, and economic vulnerabilities continue to constrain progress.
Sub-Saharan Africa	- This region faces the largest SDG gaps. - Although there have been improvements in education, health, and energy access, high poverty rates, food insecurity, debt burdens, and limited financing continue to hinder progress across many goals.
Europe and Northern America	- The region performs relatively well on social and economic indicators and has strong institutional capacity. - However, challenges remain in sustainable consumption, climate action, biodiversity conservation, and reducing inequalities.
Oceania	- Progress is uneven across countries. Small Island Developing States face particular vulnerabilities related to climate change, disaster risks, economic shocks, and limited infrastructure capacity.

Source: (UNSD, 2026a; UNSD, 2026b)

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Overall Regional Findings

The report indicates that East and South Asia have made the fastest overall progress since 2015, while Sub-Saharan Africa remains furthest from achieving many SDG targets due to persistent structural challenges and financing constraints. Meanwhile, higher-income regions such as Europe and Northern America generally perform better on social and economic goals but continue to struggle with environmental sustainability, especially under **SDG 12** (Responsible Consumption and Production) and **SDG 13** (Climate Action). The findings highlight that progress is highly uneven and that regional disparities remain a major obstacle to achieving the **2030 Agenda**.

Global SDGs Assessment

The 2026 SDGs Report indicates that global progress towards the **2030 Agenda** remains insufficient despite notable achievements in several areas. Out of the assessable SDG targets, only **36** per cent are on track or making moderate progress, while **15** per cent have regressed below their 2015 baseline levels. These findings suggest that the world is not advancing quickly enough to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Positive developments have been recorded in health, education, water and sanitation, energy access, and technological innovation. Improvements in maternal and child health, expanded access to electricity and clean cooking solutions, and increased availability of drinking water and sanitation services demonstrate that targeted interventions can produce meaningful results. Progress in digital connectivity and infrastructure development has also contributed to socioeconomic advancement in many countries.

However, major challenges persist across several goals. Extreme poverty and hunger remain widespread, climate change impacts continue to intensify, and unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are placing increasing pressure on natural resources. In addition, rising debt burdens, declining development assistance, ongoing conflicts, and widening inequalities continue to hinder progress, particularly in vulnerable and developing regions.

Overall, the report concludes that while important gains have been achieved since 2015, global progress remains uneven and largely off-track. Accelerated action, stronger international cooperation, and increased investment will be essential to close existing gaps and advance the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

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Major Challenges

- Only **36%** of SDG targets are on track or making moderate progress, while **15%** have regressed since 2015.
- Extreme poverty and hunger remain persistent in many regions.
- Climate change impacts continue to intensify, with rising temperatures and increasing environmental pressures.
- Unsustainable consumption and production patterns, including growing material use, food waste, and e-waste, remain major concerns.
- Rising debt burdens, declining ODA, and financing gaps limit progress in developing countries.
- Ongoing conflicts, inequalities, and governance challenges continue to undermine sustainable development efforts.

Key Lessons Learned

- Sustained political commitment and targeted investments can deliver measurable SDG progress.
- Integrated approaches linking social, economic, and environmental objectives are more effective than isolated interventions.
- Strong institutions and international cooperation are essential for addressing complex global challenges.
- Investments in health, education, energy, and infrastructure generate broad development benefits.
- Progress is uneven across regions, highlighting the need for context-specific strategies and support.

Notable Contribution

- Maternal mortality declined from **228** deaths per **100,000** live births (2015) to **197** (2023), while skilled birth attendance increased from **80%** (2015) to **87%** (2025). The global under-5 mortality rate fell by **13%** since 2015, and **134** countries achieved the SDG target by 2024.
- Since 2015, new HIV infections decreased by **30%** and AIDS-related deaths fell by **35%** by 2024. In addition, **780 million** fewer people required treatment for neglected tropical diseases.
- Global electricity access reached **92%** of the population by 2025, with approximately one-third supplied by renewable sources.

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- Access to clean cooking fuels and technologies increased to **75%** in 2024, up **11** percentage points since 2015. Around **1 billion** fewer people relied on polluting cooking methods compared with 2010.
- Since 2015, hundreds of millions of people have gained access to safe drinking water and sanitation services.
- Global Internet access increased from **40%** in 2015 to **74%** in 2025, significantly expanding digital inclusion worldwide.
- The share of renewable energy in global final energy consumption rose from **15.6%** (2015) to **18.0%** (2023), while modern renewables increased from **10.2%** to **13.4%**.
- By 2025, **59** countries had eliminated at least one neglected tropical disease, while disaster-related deaths fell by **65%** compared with the previous decade.
- By 2026, a global database containing **3 million** data points covered nearly all SDG indicators, compared with limited data availability for around half of the indicators a decade earlier.

Recommendations

- Accelerate implementation efforts to recover lost progress and meet the 2030 targets.
- Increase financing for sustainable development, particularly in developing and vulnerable countries.
- Strengthen climate action and environmental protection measures.
- Expand social protection systems and reduce inequalities.
- Enhance international partnerships, technology transfer, and capacity-building initiatives.
- Promote sustainable consumption and production practices across all sectors.
- Improve data systems and monitoring mechanisms to support evidence-based decision-making.

Conclusion

The 2026 SDGs Report shows that although meaningful progress has been achieved in areas such as health, education, clean energy, water and sanitation, and technological innovation, overall global advancement remains insufficient to meet the **2030 Agenda**. With only **36%** of assessable targets on track or making moderate progress and **15%** experiencing regression, significant challenges persist in poverty reduction, food

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security, climate action, inequality, and sustainable consumption. Therefore, stronger international cooperation, increased financing, and accelerated implementation efforts are essential to bridge existing gaps and ensure that no one is left behind in achieving sustainable development.

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BIOGRAPHY



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