

»»» How are fragility and achievement of the SDGs connected?

One Pager

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With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community has made a commitment to “leaving no one behind”. However, particularly fragile contexts and those affected by conflict, where the impacts of current crises are most noticeable, are falling behind in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The links between fragility and the achievement of the SDGs are presented below.

Shortfall in achieving the SDGs

Currently, around a quarter of the world’s population lives in countries characterised by fragility, conflict and violence (as defined by the OECD). In a global comparison, these countries are way behind in terms of achieving the SDGs. There is not a single fragile context in which the goals for poverty, hunger, health and gender equality could be met by 2030. In fact, more than half of the 60 countries classified as fragile by the OECD are experiencing stagnation or even setbacks in almost all aspects of the 17 SDGs.

Fragility hampers achievement of the SDGs

There are many reasons why fragile contexts in particular make slower progress towards achieving the SDGs:

Weak sovereignty: In fragile contexts, government capacities and institutions are often weak. Political legitimacy and authority are also usually lacking. Corresponding difficulties arise in these contexts when designing and implementing development strategies that aim for holistic achievement of the SDGs.

Lack of funds: According to the UNDP, the lack of financial resources is the main obstacle to achieving the SDGs. Many fragile contexts are characterised by weak economic performance (low tax base), corruption and capital flight. In addition, there is often a high dependency on raw material exports, fluctuating world market prices, declining *terms of trade* and a lack of credit standing. This severely restricts both opportunities to mobilise local funds and to access international financial markets, making it difficult to implement programmes to achieve the SDGs. In view of the disproportionately higher financing requirements, international development cooperation plays a particularly strategic role here.

High climate vulnerability: Many fragile contexts are also disproportionately affected by the negative effects of global climate change due to their geographical location (droughts, floods, lack of fresh water, steppe formation/desertification, etc.). This presents particular challenges for achieving numerous SDGs.

Low baseline level: Weak government capacity, lack of access to funds and high climate vulnerability on the one hand are up against the particularly great need in fragile contexts on the other: from low per capita income, to weak infrastructure (energy and water supply, transport), to deficient basic services (education, health, social protection), a lack of internal and external security and serious shortcomings in governance. The path to achieving the SDG goals is significantly longer here (and also significantly more complex due to the above factors) than in other contexts.

Low SDG achievement as a driver of fragility

At the same time, the low achievement of the SDGs can amplify the factors for multidimensional fragility:

- A persistent *lack of basic services* (SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7) promotes dissatisfaction among the population and loss of trust in government institutions.
- *Poverty, food insecurity and hunger* (SDGs 1, 2) foster social and political instability. Most food crises are located in fragile contexts.
- *Social inequality* (SDGs 5, 10) exists in every society. If it exceeds the socially tolerable level, it impairs social cohesion and can become a strong driver of fragility, conflict and violence.
- *A lack of inclusive economic growth and financial stability* (SDGs 8, 9, 12) prevents economic participation, preserves income poverty and hinders institution building. However, inclusive and legitimate institutions are crucial to reducing fragility.

Conclusion

The brief analysis shows the connection between fragility and shortcomings with regard to the SDGs. Conversely, although the question of causality cannot be clearly answered here, it can be concluded that progress in achieving the SDGs is completely dependent on success in overcoming fragility. This underlines the importance of measures to stabilise and reduce fragility as part of development policy efforts.■