

# Executive summary

**The 2030 Agenda sets out ambitious goals for people, the planet and prosperity.** How far have OECD countries travelled to reach the SDGs? How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted countries' progress? And how much is the assessment of where OECD countries stand being affected by what we currently do not know? The OECD report *The Short and Winding Road to 2030: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets* aims to help Member countries evaluate where they currently stand with regard to the SDGs, to assess the direction and pace of their recent trajectory, and to identify areas where additional effort is needed. It also sets out the statistical agenda ahead – showing how much we do not yet know and how this might affect both the achievement of the SDGs and decisions about what to prioritise across this vast agenda.

## Where do OECD countries stand with respect to their 2030 commitments?

**With less than 10 years left, stronger policy actions are needed to fulfil the 2030 Agenda.** So far, the OECD area as a whole has met 10 of the 112 targets for which performance can be gauged and it is considered to be close to 18 more (mainly those related to securing basic needs and implementing policy tools and frameworks), but much remains to be done. Twenty-one targets appear to be far from being met, and none of these can be considered as on track. In particular, there is considerable scope to strengthen countries' efforts in several key areas: to ensure that no one is left behind, to restore trust in institutions and to limit pressures on the natural environment. Yet the 2030 Agenda is global by essence, and OECD countries should sustain efforts even beyond their borders.

**OECD countries should foster inclusion.** One in eight OECD residents is income poor, and over the past decades most OECD countries have not made progress towards poverty reduction. Many groups, including women, young adults and migrants, face greater challenges than the rest of the population. For instance, despite progress, women's rights and opportunities are still limited in both private and public spheres. In addition, unhealthy behaviours such as malnutrition and tobacco consumption, which appear to be more common among low socio-economic groups, and disparities in education tend to exacerbate further inequalities.

**While the pandemic has underscored the importance of trust for democracies, OECD countries remain far from achieving related targets.** Trust and transparency are critical for a society's capacity to absorb and bounce back from shocks. Yet available data show a long-term decrease in people's trust in institutions in developed countries. Trust in government reflects a mix of economic, social and political interactions between citizens and government. OECD countries have not yet made enough progress towards targets related to areas that are critical for trust, including accessibility, accountability, transparency and diversity in public institutions.

**Environmental pressures are rising.** The displacement abroad of resource- or pollution-intensive production has allowed some progress in a few areas in OECD countries. Yet the use of material resources to support economic growth remains high, and many valuable materials continue to be disposed of as waste. On the climate front, despite some progress in the decoupling of greenhouse gas emissions from

population and GDP growth, emissions are still rising in some countries, and despite a pledge by G20 countries to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, major economies still support their production and consumption. As for biodiversity, despite some encouraging developments in the protection of ecosystems, threats to terrestrial and marine biodiversity have continued to rise, and none of the 21 Aichi Biodiversity Targets that should have been fulfilled by 2020 have been met by all OECD countries.

## How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected progress towards the SDGs?

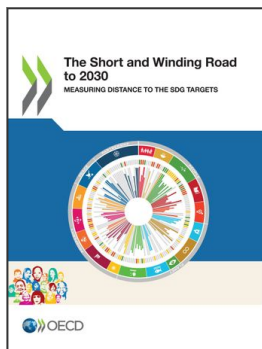
**OECD countries' progress towards the targets of the 2030 Agenda has been significantly affected by the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic** since late 2019. By November 2021, OECD countries reported over 2.3 million deaths due to COVID-19. Beyond the large number of deaths, the crisis induced by the pandemic is unprecedented in many ways.

**The recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most severe – as well as the shortest – since World War II.** While OECD countries did their best to respond to the crisis at the necessary scale and speed, most governments were unprepared to confront the crisis. The pandemic has also exacerbated some long-standing structural weaknesses of OECD countries, challenged institutions and put sources of public financing under pressure.

**The pandemic has also brought about some positive developments.** The reduction in economic activity due to the COVID-19 crisis led to a temporary improvement of environmental conditions. The COVID-19 crisis has also prompted OECD governments to revisit long-held assumptions about the role of macro-economic policies, leading to fiscal responses on a scale not observed over the past 50 years. The recovery packages deployed by most OECD governments provide an opportunity to “build back better” and strengthen systemic resilience to cope with future shocks.

## How is this snapshot affected by missing data?

**Ensuring that all countries have the capacity to track progress towards the SDGs is critical for the overall success of the 2030 Agenda**, as well as to ensure that COVID-19 recovery measures are broadly consistent with the SDGs. One challenge still facing OECD governments is addressing the many blind spots in our understanding of how far they have progressed with respect to the SDGs and what the road to 2030 will look like going forward. Data gaps influence how we assess progress towards the 2030 Agenda – if not carefully understood, they may lead to biased conclusions. For instance, if the SDG reporting framework is incomplete or not up to date, or fails to represent all segments of the population, any inference about the efficiency of policies risks being flawed. The same is true if diagnostic tools cannot provide a comprehensive assessment of the most recent trends, especially in times of uncertainty. While available data make it possible to cover 136 of the 169 targets, some of the data do not properly gauge current outcomes nor performance over time. Beyond availability, many other gaps – such as timeliness or granularity – influence our understanding of progress towards the 2030 Agenda.



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