

# FRAGILITY AND AGENDA 2030: NAVIGATING SHOCKS AND PRESSURES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

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# Working Paper

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# Abstract

This working paper examines the reasons why fragile contexts have struggled to generate momentum towards the Sustainable Development Goals and why that matters for policy and practice in a post-COVID-19 world. Drawing on multidimensional analysis and consideration of trends and trajectories of the past decade, it identifies the main challenges (including consideration of the quality of data and knowledge) associated with fragile and conflict-affected contexts and considers what steps might be taken in this Decade of Action. A range of issues associated with sustainable development will be evaluated, predominantly through reference to the 57 fragile contexts identified in the OECD States of Fragility 2020 framework. These issues include projected population growth, global poverty trends and the impact of violence in fragile contexts. This paper also considers issues of governance, inequality, climate, and performance in the human capital areas of education and health.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAP	East Asia and the Pacific
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
IFS	International Futures
IIAG	Ibrahim Index for African Governance
IDP	Internally displaced people
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UN	United Nations
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime



# Executive summary

Examining states of fragility and sustainable development in 2020 requires double vision – seeing the established landscape of fragility that existed up to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and also the pandemic’s catalytic impact on this landscape. Progress for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership – the core of Agenda 2030 – is being compromised by chronic, dynamic and systemic fragility. Decades of steady progress on poverty and hunger could be lost if the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are not mitigated. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across dimensions of fragility has provided an accelerated, global experience of how shocks can reverberate. This is also visible in the parallel crisis of climate change as it impacts on societies, economies, politics, security and environments and where a global temperature rise of only 0.5°C is expected to increase risks across all dimensions of fragility. Prosperity in fragile contexts is challenged by the failure to support human capital in contexts struggling with weak governance and inequality. While conflict trends have not altered significantly since 2018, the global rise in protests and violence highlights the importance of investment in inclusive peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This is especially critical given that effective partnership for Agenda 2030 and action in fragile contexts has never looked less certain and the importance of understanding and confronting fragility is becoming increasingly apparent, relevant and urgent.

## Key findings

### ***One year into the Decade of Action, the 2030 Agenda has reached a critical juncture***

Fragile contexts are on track to achieve only one of the SDGs – SDG 13 (climate action) – and their progress is particularly challenged on critical SDGs related to hunger, health, and gender equality and women’s empowerment. The impact of COVID-19 shows the extent to which fragility intersects with populations, poverty and peace in fragile contexts. It is highly likely that more people than ever are at risk of being left behind. The global capacity to respond to fragility has been challenged more than at any time since the end of the Second World War. Confidence in multilateral institutions is low while autocratic forms of governance persist in fragile contexts. In 2019, 35 of the 57 fragile contexts were categorised as authoritarian regimes, compared to 31 from *States of Fragility 2018*. If the vision of the 2030 Agenda is to be maintained, then renewal and transformative responses are needed to achieve the SDGs in the Decade of Action.

### ***Progress on the 2030 Agenda was already slowing and the furthest behind are falling further behind***

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, progress on Agenda 2030 was slowing alongside a projected increase in the proportion of the world’s population living in fragile contexts. In 2020, 1.8 billion people, or 23% of the world’s population, live in the 57 fragile contexts. Their share of the global population is projected to grow to 26% (2.2 billion people) by 2030. Additionally, the number of people living in extreme poverty in fragile contexts is increasing. Fragile contexts are home to 460 million people living in extreme

poverty in 2020, or 76.5% of the global total. Urban areas are projected to become more populous overall than rural areas by 2030-35. Average life expectancy in fragile contexts reached a historic high in 2017, the most recent year for which data are available. However, at 64 years, life expectancy is 10 years less than in the average, non-fragile developing context.

### ***High numbers of violent conflicts persist and violence against civilians is growing***

In 2017 and 2018, the latest two-year period for which data are available, the number of violent conflicts on average worldwide was the highest of any two-year period since the end of the Second World War. The character of violence as it is experienced in fragile contexts is also changing. Incidents of violence against civilians in fragile contexts increased by 56% from January 2018 through December 2019. Most fragile contexts are struggling to achieve momentum towards SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and fragility is getting worse in most extremely fragile contexts, fuelling grievance and increasing the risk of violence. The number of protests recorded in the 57 fragile contexts covered in the 2020 OECD fragility framework increased from 2 509 in Q1 2018 to 5 238 in Q4 2019. More than two thirds (67%) of all refugees worldwide came from just five conflict-affected fragile contexts: Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, all of which are extremely fragile, and Myanmar.

### ***Multidimensional fragility affecting women and youth remains deeply entrenched***

The world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030, and progress on gender issues is slowing. One sign of the uneven progress is that 328 million women live in fragile contexts that lack legislation on domestic violence. In many fragile contexts, progress on women's participation in parliament has either stalled or declined since 2016. Multidimensional fragility is evident in the connected issues of poverty, gender, population and growth. In the 43 fragile contexts for which data are available, 66.1 million youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are not in employment, education or training and almost three fourths of these, or 47.9 million people, are women. Available data indicate widespread learning poverty in fragile contexts.

### ***The impact of COVID-19 highlights the systemic nature of fragility and is an example of how climate change will impact across dimensions of fragility***

Fragility may manifest most visibly in fragile contexts, but it is a global problem. The systemic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and highlighted fragility globally, underlining the central importance of addressing fragility as a means to achieving the SDGs. The COVID-19 shock underscores how deeply health, economic, environmental and climate-related fragilities are interconnected. The multidimensional impact of the pandemic is giving the world a clear preview of what the cascading effects of climate change will look like in the years and decades to come. With weak coping capacity, fragile states are particularly vulnerable to disasters. In 2019, 52.1 million people were affected by natural disasters in fragile contexts, the highest yearly number since 2010 and accounting for 55% of the total number of people affected by natural disasters worldwide. On average, 6 800 people have died from natural disasters in fragile contexts each year since 2011.

### ***Policy and practice must adapt rapidly, accept risks and failure, and embrace communications***

The slow rate of progress on Agenda 2030 in fragile and conflict affected contexts highlight the central importance of continued investment in thinking, policies and programmes to address fragility in all its forms. In 2018, OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members gave USD 37 million in support of statistical capacity building in fragile contexts, amounting to 0.1% of their total official development assistance to fragile contexts. Donors must continue to invest in data and analysis to drive evidence-based

decision making for fragile contexts and to inform collective approaches to complex problems both internal and external to fragile contexts. Data on women, children, the elderly, the disabled and other groups left behind in fragile contexts are particularly needed.

In recognition of the significant challenges of working in fragile contexts, humanitarian, development and peace actors should continue to implement the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and share their experience and knowledge so that they can consolidate success and respond more effectively to failure. Addressing fragility in fragile contexts is complex and frequently presents wicked problems that test even the best approaches. Failure can be sustained as part of the processes of engagement so long as it is matched by organised learning reactions, effective communications, and a willingness to adapt and change approaches to issues of fragility. Political leadership can play a role by encouraging public support and political will for change at multiple levels. Actors across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus must invest in, and improve communications strategies to address political and public apathy on issues affecting the SDGs in fragile and non-fragile contexts.

# 1 Policy and practice for fragile contexts and Agenda 2030

The state of fragility in 2020 pose a direct threat to the implementation of Agenda 2030. This chapter considers the complexity and scale of the challenge facing humanitarian, development and peace policy makers working in and for fragile contexts. It first looks at the magnitude of contemporary fragility and the complex political landscapes that shape responses to fragility. It then focuses on the challenges of policy making for fragility and Agenda 2030. Drawing on the trends and issues identified in subsequent chapters, it offers options for how to adapt policy approaches to navigate the shocks and pressures associated with contemporary fragility.

## Tackling fragility is central to every Sustainable Development Goal

Can the ambitions set out in Agenda 2030 be achieved? The question is asked every year. This year, 2020, the question is more fraught than perhaps ever before. The world is experiencing a cascade of shocks – some familiar, some comparatively new and none entirely unforeseen. The impact of climate change has roiled Australia, Indonesia, Puerto Rico and elsewhere in the form of devastating natural disasters. Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic reverberate on every continent and in a still-unfolding global economic crisis. Seemingly endless conflicts grind away in Afghanistan, Mali, Syria and Yemen, among other places, with their attendant misery and displacement. In contexts afflicted by fragility, there were already signs that gains of the recent past are stalling, whether in governance, gender equality, justice or many of the other goals set out in the Agenda. Violent death, extreme poverty, weak health systems, struggling schools and a majority of the world's refugees remain concentrated in fragile contexts. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the backbone of Agenda 2030, means supporting and advancing progress in fragile contexts.

It is now starkly apparent that the international community, collectively and as individual states, faces several decision points. Its responses may determine the extent to which Agenda 2030 is realised. The stage was set in October 2019, when United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres issued his call for a Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs by 2030 (Guterres, 2019<sup>[1]</sup>). It was an ambitious timeline then. The mounting impacts of the systemic shocks now threaten to erase at least some of the progress made since 2015. On some issues such as poverty, these shocks could set back global progress by 30 years, with disproportionate impacts felt in the poorest and most fragile of places (Sumner, Hoy and Ortiz-Juarez, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>; Lakner et al., 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). Structural renewal and transformative responses are needed to activate the Decade of Action. The importance of understanding and confronting fragility has never been more apparent, relevant and urgent.

### ***Multidimensional fragility poses the greatest threat to Agenda 2030 in fragile contexts***

Though progress on the SDGs is evident, fragile contexts continue to be the furthest behind in actualising the 2030 Agenda. The OECD characterises fragility as the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks (OECD,

2018<sup>[4]</sup>). Fragility matters because its existence affects people's lives in fundamental ways as they cope with violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, natural disasters and other emergencies. Fragile contexts are the most difficult places on the planet in which to live and operate, buffeted as they are by conflict, famine, poverty, inequality, migration and climatic extremes that combine to present people, communities and their external partners with an intimidating array of issues that demand to be addressed (UN, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Chronic, dynamic and systemic fragility (exemplified by the impact of COVID-19) is exposing deficiencies in approaches to humanitarian response, development aid and peace activities. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and similar initiatives are vital to ensure co-ordinated responses to the interconnected and multidimensional challenges of fragility.

### ***The multi-level politics of tackling fragility can make or break progress towards sustainable development***

Fragility shapes and informs the pursuit of individual, national and collective interests in a hyper-connected world (World Bank, 2011<sup>[6]</sup>). The challenge facing policy makers is that policy for fragile contexts must appeal to each donor's domestic audience and also resonate with political leaders and communities in fragile contexts. Connecting these disparate audiences to achieve the SDGs in fragile contexts will encourage the "global partnership for sustainable development" envisioned in SDG 17 and commit it to the goal of leaving no one behind (Samman et al., 2018<sup>[7]</sup>). The issues that drive fragility – conflict, inequality, climate, poor governance and insecurity, among others – cut across all 17 SDGs and their 169 associated targets (Figure 1.1) and are always politically sensitive. Fragility informs the decisions of politicians, governments and institutions in and outside of fragile contexts. Directly and indirectly, it shapes the substance of threats, how political narratives are construed, how policy is undertaken, how money is spent and how societies respond to those actions. It drives thinking on foreign policy and on where the emphasis should fall on matters of state and human security. The politics associated with addressing issues of fragility are highly sensitive, but political will is vital for driving policy implementation. Political leaders from DAC member countries need to own their part of the fragility challenge every bit as much as the leadership in fragile contexts should ensure national and local ownership of actions to address issues of fragility.

Figure 1.1. The Sustainable Development Goals



Source: (UN, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>), *About the Sustainable Development Goals* (webpage), <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

## Thinking on the Decade of Action: Observations on policy and practice

Efforts to reach the SDGs needs to rapidly adapt if the shocks of the global pandemic and economic crisis are to be overcome and Agenda 2030 kept on track. To be effective, approaches to fragile contexts must be politically and systemically aware, operationally agile, and adapted to the specific needs of a context. Navigating complex systems within and beyond fragile contexts demands fresh commitment to nexus thinking as well as effective responses to failure, better communications and data systems that rise to the challenges of fragility.

### ***How fragility is analysed matters***

Responses to fragility must be driven by analysis that recognises the multidimensional and systemic dynamics influencing and shaping fragile contexts. The analysis of fragility can cut through complexity and is vital for prioritising and driving effective policy and practice in pursuit of the SDGs. This is especially important because in recent years, the prevailing rhetoric around achieving Agenda 2030 in fragile contexts has tended to be negative, particularly when considering the most fragile contexts and when set against increasing pressures in the multilateral system (Samman et al., 2018<sup>[7]</sup>; OECD, 2019<sup>[9]</sup>). This is no longer (if it ever was) a development challenge requiring development (only) responses. The production of clear and effective policy and practice is itself shaped by the diversity and complexity of actors in fragile contexts. The DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus points to this complexity (OECD, 2019<sup>[10]</sup>). While respecting the competencies of humanitarian, development and peace actors and their national counterparts, the Recommendation calls for an evidence-based understanding of fragility to facilitate coherence, complementarity and co-ordination among these actors and their national

counterparts. Over the past 15 years, several data frameworks and analytical approaches have emerged to bring clarity to the understanding of the substance of fragility, thereby informing the means to mitigate its worst effects. Various examples abound from academia, policy institutions, multilateral institutions and donor agencies. Box 1.1 describes some of the main indices and other methods of measuring fragility.

### Box 1.1. Indices, lists and approaches for measuring fragility

Various methods, indices and indicators are used to measure fragility. The following is not an exhaustive list but includes frequently cited and referenced measures as well as newer measures and those that are updated regularly.

**Table 1.1. Sources on fragility**

Measure	Type
Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Fragility Index	Think-tank/academic (Carleton University)
Constellations of State Fragility	Think-tank/academic (German Development Institute)
List of Fragile States	DAC member agency (United Kingdom Department for International Development)
Fragile States Index	Think-tank/academic (The Fund for Peace)
State Fragility Index	Think-tank/academic (George Mason University)
World Bank Fragility and Conflict Situations list	Multilateral institution

Source: (OECD, 2016<sup>[11]</sup>), *States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267213-en>; (OECD, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>), *States of Fragility 2018*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302075-en>; (CIFP, 2020<sup>[12]</sup>), *Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP) (database)*, <https://carleton.ca/cifp/>; (Ferreira, 2016<sup>[13]</sup>), "Measuring state fragility: a review of the theoretical groundings of existing approaches", <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1257907>; (Corral et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>), *Fragility and Conflict: On the Frontlines of the Fight Against Poverty*, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33324/9781464815409.pdf>.

### **The OECD fragility framework assesses fragility across multiple dimensions**

The framework, developed in the 2015 and 2016 States of Fragility reports, provides a mixed methods perspective on the multidimensionality and interconnectedness of fragility as it affects contexts and people worldwide. The framework was designed to respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognises the universality of challenges facing sustainable development. Evaluating fragility through its economic, environmental, political, societal and security dimensions balances the need to holistically analyse the complexity of fragility (to find the connections that matter) with the need to produce clear, effective and context-specific policy and programmes. The OECD Fragility Framework assesses a context's previous and current exposure to negative events such as armed conflict and disasters and its capacity to cope with such exposure. This allows for consideration of each context's unique experience of fragility based on the combination of risks and coping capacities.<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the understanding of what drives fragility is evolving through the identification of trends, trajectories and pressure points across networks and systems. The application of a multidimensional lens brings into focus the specific vulnerabilities that each context faces and its ability to cope with such vulnerabilities. It further offers important insights into policy successes and failures. The consideration of vulnerabilities and coping capacity provides the basis of a risk and resilience model to inform analysis of fragility (Desai and Forsberg, 2020<sup>[15]</sup>; Desai, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>).

### ***Sharing experience from fragile contexts can enable collective approaches***

The actions of humanitarian, development and peace actors are often criticised as repeating the mistakes of the past or as treating current circumstances “as somehow a special or somehow unique crossroads in time” (Bennett, Foley and Pantuliano, 2016<sup>[17]</sup>). It is a commonly held view that most of what humanitarian, development and peace actors do in fragile contexts is not new (UN, 2019<sup>[18]</sup>; Menkhaus, 2006, p. 231<sup>[19]</sup>). But practice has evolved as knowledge of fragility has evolved in tandem with increased human and financial investment in responding to issues of fragility. New concepts are constantly being tested in fragile contexts – on everything from data collection and the application of incentives to evolutions in peacekeeping, for example – for their purchase and effect. Each generation of policy makers must approach issues of fragility on its own terms, applying contemporary knowledge that is mindful of the past but not bound by it. In essence, the challenge facing fragile contexts revolves around the distinction between the nature of fragility (framed as exposure to risks and capacity to cope with those risks) and the character of fragility (chronic or dynamic, for instance, with facets that are more or less pronounced at a given point in time). The actions of humanitarian, development and peace actors must evolve as understanding grows about the nature and character of fragility in a post-pandemic reality. Sharing relevant experience through the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus will aid the process.

### ***Systemic shocks show the need for systems thinking on fragility***

While the potential for multidisciplinary and systematic thinking on fragility and development is acknowledged (OECD, 2014<sup>[20]</sup>), programme design and national and international policies have been slow to adapt (Hynes, Lees and Müller, 2020, pp. 80-81<sup>[21]</sup>). *States of Fragility 2018* highlighted a “dual-system problem”, in that aid packages pass through a complex aid system before they are applied in the complex system of a fragile context, leading to unpredictable outcomes in fragile contexts (OECD, 2018, p. 65<sup>[4]</sup>). The understandable tendency to focus on issues of fragility in fragile contexts can distract attention from the external sources of fragility beyond a contexts borders (OECD, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). In this sense, the climate, health and economic shocks that occurred since 2018 highlight the systemic vulnerability of fragile contexts to sources of fragility that lie beyond their direct control and point to the need for more investment in approaches that analyse external drivers of fragility.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, development co-operation has to adapt to an environment in which established ways of working – and funding – are being distorted or rendered obsolete. In many cases, their response is systemically informed and operationally agile. For instance, the Team Europe package extended finance to initiatives around poverty and inequality, support for refugees, and support for pandemic-related public health requirements (Borrell, 2020<sup>[22]</sup>). Sustaining this effort through a prolonged pandemic and deep global recession will be the defining challenge of this decade.

Previous shocks of similar magnitude, such as the financial crisis of 2008, created openings for fresh thinking that can unlock the solutions to challenges previously seen as insurmountable (Ramos et al., 2019<sup>[23]</sup>). Might today's global shocks also spur fresh approaches to Agenda 2030 that empower a new governing framework and binding constitution for implementation (Straw and Ison, 2020<sup>[24]</sup>)? Decision points are a regular feature of the political and policy landscape, and those that arise in the aftermath of a systemic shock can often offer greater scope for ambition and application (Scott, 2020<sup>[25]</sup>). However, it cannot be assumed that the future will be bright. The real-time experience of crises such as pandemics can be “protracted and messy” and, as the Versailles Peace Conference demonstrated in 1919, “badly designed responses to crises can put countries and continents on deeply negative pathways” (Green, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>).



### ***Addressing fragility means learning from successes and failures***

Fragility magnifies and compounds problems in complex and contested systems. That failures occur should neither be surprising nor a cause for undue pessimism. They provide an opportunity to adapt policies and practices. In many contexts where the efforts of national, bilateral and multilateral actors fail or fall short of expectations, fragility challenges are outpacing solutions. The causes of inefficiencies, sub-optimal outcomes and failures are increasingly understood; gaps in data and knowledge are gradually being addressed. In the complex systems of fragile contexts, the reality can be that failure is sometimes unavoidable, for example where some local actors maybe actively working towards alternative ends or where experimentation is necessary because a particular situation is encountered for the first time (Edmondson, 2011<sup>[27]</sup>). Failure can be sustained as part of the processes of engagement so long as it is matched by organised learning reactions, effective communications, and a willingness to adapt and change approaches to issues of fragility (de Weije, 2012<sup>[28]</sup>). These can be achieved by fostering an inclusive and open-minded work environment both for humanitarian, development and peace actors and for their national partners in fragile contexts; focusing on actions and processes that seek to learn from success and failure; building data on case studies; and sustaining broad networks (Janoch, 2019<sup>[29]</sup>).

### ***A communications deficit is undermining Agenda 2030 in fragile contexts***

The language of fragility and development is too easily criticised, dismissed or left unchallenged in popular discourse, and communication admittedly is not helped by the proliferation of oversimplified terms that are “sloppy, arrogant or just plain dumb” (Green, 2018<sup>[30]</sup>). As Agenda 2030 competes with a myriad of issues for government and public attention, the tendency for debate and communications to be limited to specialist communities is unhelpful if not detrimental to the success of the policies, programmes and projects that seek to achieve the SDGs. Communications strategies should try to connect communities in fragile and non-fragile contexts by moving beyond trite statements and engaging people with the substance of fragility in terms they understand and recognise. For example, it is important to place people at the centre of policy, as is often said in development work, but this is meaningless if people cannot connect to and picture themselves in what is being proposed in their name (Custer et al., 2018<sup>[31]</sup>). Communicating effectively with those most likely to be left behind in fragile and conflict affected contexts has the benefit of deepening knowledge and understanding between external and internal actors.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The methodology is explained on the States of Fragility Platform. See (OECD, 2020<sup>[86]</sup>) at <http://www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/about/0/>.

## 2 The global fragility landscape in 2020

Before COVID-19 captured the headlines, the year 2020 was already shaping up to be a pivotal year for the future of Agenda 2030. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres issued his call for a Decade of Action against a backdrop of growing concern over the impact of climate change and slowing progress on several issues of fragility relating to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The impact of COVID-19 compounds that fragility in every dimension. This chapter identifies some of the dominant features associated with fragility in 2020. It notes that Agenda 2030 was slowing or stalled according to many indicators and that the furthest behind – the most fragile – were falling further behind. The systemic shocks of the global pandemic and economic crises will almost certainly widen this gap, tipping more people into states of fragility while constraining the scope of and resources for effective responses. These shocks highlight the global interconnectedness of fragility and the need for more investment in data to drive analysis, policy development and action for fragile contexts.

### Arrested development and inertia on Agenda 2030

Even before the global shockwaves of 2020, there were significant challenges to achieving Agenda 2030 in fragile contexts (UN, 2019<sup>[32]</sup>). In eight of the SDGs for which data was available, progress in half or more of the extremely fragile contexts was stagnating or declining while it was increasing or on track for achievement in half or more of the non-fragile, developing contexts. Additionally, no fragile context was on track for achieving critical SDGs related to hunger, health, and gender equality and women's empowerment. Major challenges remain to the achievement of SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) in all 13 extremely fragile contexts (Sachs et al., 2020<sup>[33]</sup>).

COVID-19 represents a critical juncture for fragile contexts and the 2030 Agenda. While some progress towards achievement of the SDGs is evident, fragile contexts continue to lag countries and contexts that are not fragile. *States of Fragility 2018* found that most fragile contexts were on track to meet SDGs 13 (climate action) and 17 (partnerships), and technically, this progress is continuing on SDG 13 (OECD, 2018, p. 94<sup>[4]</sup>). However, recent evidence suggests that SDG progress needs to be assessed against a broader set of factors (OECD, 2019<sup>[9]</sup>). For instance, the *Sustainable Development Report 2019* describes the trends related to climate (SDG 13) and biodiversity (SDGs 14 and 15) as “alarming” (Sachs et al., 2019, p. x<sup>[34]</sup>). Though climate-related financial flows have increased, “they are small in relation to the scale of the problem” (UN, 2019, p. 48<sup>[5]</sup>). In spite of the significant impact of COVID-19, climate change remains the “defining issue of our time and the greatest challenge to sustainable development” (UN, 2019, p. 48<sup>[5]</sup>). According to the World Meteorological Organization, “the five-year period 2015–2019 is likely to be the warmest of any equivalent period on record globally” (World Meteorological Organization, 2019, p. 3<sup>[35]</sup>).

Global remittances reached a record high in 2019, but now the progress made on SDG target 17.3, which calls for mobilising additional financial resources for developing countries and contexts, is rapidly being reversed (UN, 2019<sup>[36]</sup>; World Bank, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>). The challenges associated with SDGs 1 (poverty), 2 (hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) have either

remained the same or deepened (Chapter 3). Analysis of the 175 contexts covered in the OECD fragility framework for which data are available shows that fragile contexts consistently rank in the lower third in terms of SDG progress. Three extremely fragile contexts – Central African Republic, South Sudan and Chad – rank near the bottom, in 166th, 165th and 164<sup>th</sup> place, respectively (Sachs et al., 2020<sup>[33]</sup>).

***Violent and non-violent protests are increasingly common in fragile (and non-fragile) contexts, creating pressure points that heighten risk and deficiencies in coping capacity***

A rise in non-violent protests and a corresponding rise in countermeasures, particularly by repressive or authoritarian regimes, represent “a pronounced shift in the landscape of dissent” (Chenoweth, 2017<sup>[38]</sup>). This trend continued throughout 2018 and 2019, with the number of protests recorded in the 57 fragile contexts increasing from 2 509 (accounting for 69 fatalities) in Q1 2018 to 5 238 (accounting for 115 fatalities) in Q4 2019. Over the same period, the number of recorded riots in fragile contexts nearly doubled, from 679 to 1 255 (ACLEDA, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>). Protests are one of the means through which people press for social and political change and as such, expose both underlying issues and the nature of official (and non-official) responses. Frequently, the issues that drive unrest stem from perceptions of inequality, repression and injustice, issues considered in the OECD multidimensional fragility framework.

It remains to be seen whether the current wave of protests will be a short-term, localised phenomenon or a “prelude to longer-term competition across small and larger powers, proxy wars and extensive instability” (Raleigh, 2020<sup>[40]</sup>). But the protests point to a deteriorating situation for many of the indicators associated with SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). Enabled by modern communications technology and social media, the protests also sometimes arise from mass movements without a central leadership. These contemporary variations on such an established means of expression suggest that the international community’s tools to prevent conflict and support peace need to be adapted for wider and more effective communication. Traditional political tools based on elite bargaining and state-centric frameworks may no longer be enough.

***Politicians must have more defined roles in leading the response to the challenges of fragility***

That political engagement to mitigate fragility, both within and external to fragile contexts, remains detached from people’s experience of fragility (Solomon and Woocher, 2010<sup>[41]</sup>). This is a dual-faceted problem: the realpolitik of fragile contexts resists, or is impervious to, the peace, humanitarian and development support provided by developed countries that are themselves faced with rising inequality and fraying social cohesion (OECD, 2018<sup>[42]</sup>). In fragile contexts, progress can be achieved in the absence of strong government leadership, but local political will remains fundamental to advance change (OECD, 2011, p. 49<sup>[43]</sup>; Hynes, Lees and Müller, 2020, p. 81<sup>[21]</sup>), and this often requires sustained engagement on the part of donors.

Sustained engagement by humanitarian, development and peace actors can also benefit from political leadership from their countries of origin, both in making the case to domestic audiences for supporting fragile contexts and encouraging national and local political support for humanitarian, development and peace programmes through interaction with their peers in fragile contexts (Marley and Forsberg, 2020<sup>[44]</sup>). As the systemic shocks from the pandemic and global economic recession reverberate, the challenge of generating political will and leadership for supporting fragile contexts and Agenda 2030 has rarely been greater. At the same time, these shocks open a window of opportunity for decisive intervention.

Strategies for changing political will are typically based on applying various incentives, conditionality, coercion and normative pressure, either individually or in combination. These strategies will not change. However, if the multilateral response to the negative impacts of global pandemic and economic shock is to create positive spillovers (Gurría, 2020<sup>[45]</sup>), then the SDGs should remain as the guiding framework for

a global response. The call for a “new narrative and clean breaks”, as expressed in the *Development Co-operation Report 2019: A Fairer, Greener, Safer Tomorrow*, takes on new meaning in light of the events of 2020 (OECD, 2019, p. 19<sup>[9]</sup>). Meaningful leadership roles for politicians must be written into the strategic responses to fragility globally and for fragile contexts. States and institutions have previously rallied in the aftermath of systemic shocks to assess the impact and forge ahead based on an agreed strategy. Successful multilateral strategies tend to be driven by successful coalitions while also appealing to national interests in “the prevailing geo-political environment” (Moreland, 2019, p. 3<sup>[46]</sup>). In this way engaging political leadership and appealing (as far as possible) to national interests can enable local ownership of strategies for addressing issues of fragility. Agenda 2030 should be at the heart of, or closely aligned to, a new post-pandemic strategy for global recovery, one that blends political leadership and technical expertise to address global challenges and is mindful of national interests in fragile and non-fragile contexts.

## Living through global systemic shocks

In the space of four months, between January and April 2020, the world experienced systemic shocks of a magnitude akin to the shocks of the two world wars and the onset of the Great Depression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Green, 2020<sup>[26]</sup>). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic hit global trade and investment at unprecedented speed and scale, exposing the “fragility of the modern supply chain” (Lin and Lanng, 2020<sup>[47]</sup>). Unemployment is rising, with young people among the worst affected (ILO, 2020, p. 2<sup>[48]</sup>). Politicians are struggling with the enormity of the crisis and – unsurprisingly, given the recent tendency towards more nationalist approaches – they largely failed to fully embrace the macro-level options offered by the existing multilateral system (Bernes, 2020<sup>[49]</sup>).

### ***Vulnerable countries and contexts will be “hardest” hit***

Given the extent of multidimensional fragility, the impact of the pandemic will fall disproportionately on people living in fragile contexts. In April 2020, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva warned that “just as the health crisis hits vulnerable people hardest, the economic crisis is expected to hit vulnerable countries hardest”, emphasising that emerging markets and low-income nations that already have weaker health systems “face the dreadful challenge of fighting the virus in densely populated cities and poverty-stricken slums ... where social distancing is hardly an option”. Vulnerable countries, she added, also are “dangerously exposed to the ongoing demand and supply shocks [and] drastic tightening in financial conditions, and some may face an unsustainable debt burden” (Georgieva, 2020<sup>[50]</sup>). Emphasising the global reach of the crisis, she also said the initial expectation of positive per capita income growth in over 160 IMF member countries in 2020 had “been turned on its head”, and that the IMF projects more than 170 countries will experience negative per capita income growth in 2020 (Georgieva, 2020<sup>[50]</sup>).

### ***The impacts of the pandemic are compounding fragility across dimensions***

Societies across the globe must adjust to austere and grim realities as their health services struggle to contain and mitigate the worst effects of the coronavirus. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic is putting new pressures on fragile communities such as refugees, who find themselves cut off from medical responses and associated resources and compounding already dire situations in many (Chapter 3). Education, too, is being severely disrupted, which highlights inequalities in fragile contexts with limited or no capacity to transition to interim measures such as online learning (Thomas, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). The COVID-19 pandemic highlights as well the deep interconnectivity of health, economic, environmental and climate-related aspects of fragility. The cascading impact of the pandemic is an example of how climate-induced shocks will similarly affect all dimensions of fragility. It remains to be seen if the pandemic will spur a reset

of the climate change response on more ambitious and decisive terms (UN, 2020<sup>[52]</sup>). But it has shown, on a global scale, the costs of failing to effectively address underlying issues that can give rise to shocks, thus reinforcing the arguments for transformative change (Cartier, 2020<sup>[53]</sup>). Underlining the systemic interconnectedness of fragility, the pandemic aggravates human security issues, evident most notably in the rise in gender-based violence and domestic abuse due to community lockdown, and increases risks associated with security indicators by eroding critical coping capacity in the economic, societal and political dimensions of fragility (Chapter 3). While some conflicts experienced ceasefires – an example is the declaration of a ceasefire by the National Liberation Army in Colombia (BBC, 2020<sup>[54]</sup>) – such responses were short-lived. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project, tracking conflict and violence indicators during the first eight weeks of the pandemic, finds it had a range of impacts that vary by region and that mob violence – violence by spontaneous, unarmed or crudely armed groups – has risen worldwide since March 2020 when the pandemic was declared (Pavlik, 2020<sup>[55]</sup>).

***DAC members responded swiftly when the crises broke out, but need to think long term to ensure that Agenda 2030 gains are not reversed***

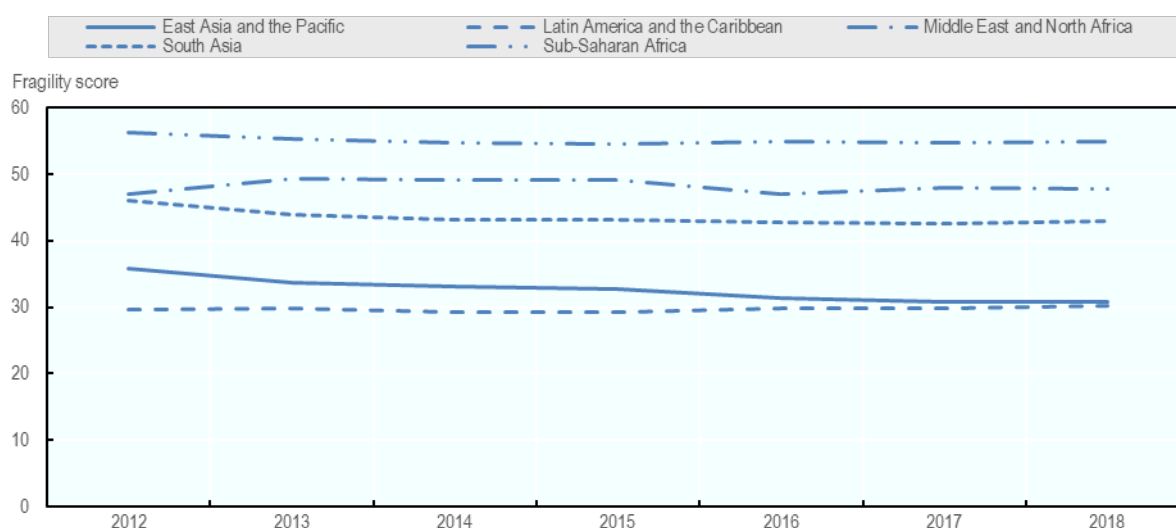
DAC members' initial encouraging response must be sustained as the full impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic crises becomes clear. The systemic shocks of 2020 challenge the financial capacity of developed, non-fragile contexts to support fragile contexts. The prioritisation of national recovery is both understandable and prudent. But if recovery in non-fragile contexts is sought at the (partial) expense of support to fragile contexts, then global recovery will be flawed and incomplete and sources of global risk will be fuelled instead of mitigated. It is important to note that many DAC members focused on such support from the earliest stages of the crises through initiatives such as the humanitarian response plan to mitigate the impact for countries affected by COVID-19. DAC members also responded to an appeal from the United Nations (UN) to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency allocated USD 11 million from its humanitarian reserve to support efforts in low-income countries (Donor Tracker, 2020<sup>[56]</sup>).

**The furthest behind are falling further behind as extreme fragility increases**

The people furthest behind on Agenda 2030 predominantly live in extremely fragile contexts. Despite the commitment to leave no one behind, extreme fragility is intensifying for those affected by it. Globally, aggregate fragility has declined at a modest rate from 2012-18, though this progress is vulnerable due to the impact of COVID-19. Additionally, as shown in Desai and Forsberg (2020<sup>[15]</sup>), the gap in levels of fragility between extremely fragile and non-fragile, developing contexts has increased year-to-year from 2012 through 2018, suggesting growing inequality.

Unsurprisingly, progress on fragility varies by region (Figure 2.1). East Asia and the Pacific, with six fragile contexts, shows the highest rate of improvement, while fragility has increased during this period in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The relative position of regions in terms of aggregate fragility trends has been constant: sub-Saharan Africa is consistently the most fragile region, MENA is the second most fragile region, and South Asia is the third. Given the consistent trends in regions over time and analysed in this way, geography may point to inherent regional characteristics that play a part in defining their fragility profile. The analysis of connectivity, fragility currents and pressure points in Chapter 3 describes some of the aspects of regional fragility, including how they impact on people's individual experience of fragility.

Figure 2.1. Fragility across regions and over time, 2012-18



Notes: The fragility score for each region is calculated using a population-weighted average of the fragility scores of the ODA-eligible contexts in each region, using population statistics in 2019 from UN DESA (2020<sup>[57]</sup>). ODA-eligible contexts consist of those on the DAC list of ODA recipients for reporting on aid in 2018 and 2019.

Sources: UN DESA (2020<sup>[57]</sup>), *World Population Prospects 2019* (database), <https://population.un.org/wpp/>; list of regions from World Bank (2020<sup>[58]</sup>), *World Bank Country and Lending Groups*, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>; OECD (2020<sup>[59]</sup>) *DAC list of ODA recipients for reporting on aid in 2018 and 2019*, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC-List-of-ODA-Recipients-for-reporting-2018-and-2019-flows.pdf>.

Extreme fragility has intensified in the most fragile contexts. But a granular analysis across regions is even more concerning. While fragility has trended downwards over time in the fragile contexts in three of these six regions, it has increased notably in the seven fragile contexts in MENA and in the five fragile contexts in LAC from 2012 to 2018.

The findings of the clustering analysis from the 2020 version of the OECD fragility framework show that all extremely fragile contexts are experiencing high to severe fragility in the security dimension. Additionally, 10 of the 13 extremely fragile contexts were experiencing active armed conflict in 2019: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen (Pettersson, Högladth and Öberg, 2019<sup>[60]</sup>; Gleditsch et al., 2002<sup>[61]</sup>). Given the deepening fragility, particularly in the worst-off contexts, achieving the 2030 Agenda in this Decade of Action calls for focusing on the furthest behind first (UNDP, 2018, pp. 3-5<sup>[62]</sup>).

### **Poverty and income disparities between fragile and non-fragile contexts are increasing**

Fragile contexts were home to 460 million people living in extreme poverty in 2020, before the impact of COVID-19. This figure amounts to 76.5% of the total number of people living in extreme poverty. The pandemic is expected to result in 26 million additional people falling into extreme poverty in fragile contexts by the end of 2020, or 43% of the global total<sup>1</sup> (Lakner et al., 2020<sup>[3]</sup>).

The projections above are the latest from the World Bank as of 1 September 2020 and are the ones referenced in *States of Fragility 2020*. Using projections of extreme poverty prior to the pandemic from the Pardee Center for International Futures (2020<sup>[63]</sup>), based on the International Futures (IFS) model 7.45 that uses different methods from the World Bank source, it was projected that the number of people living in extreme poverty in fragile contexts would rise from 521 million in 2020 to 586 million by 2030 (OECD, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). The latter was estimated to represent 83.5% of the world's poorest by that time, a share similar to what was reported in *States of Fragility 2018*. Given the uncertainty of the world economic outlook due to

the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper does not report a 2030 projection of the share of the world's poorest in fragile contexts that accounts for the pandemic's impact.

The pre-pandemic baseline of indicators for the most fragile contexts presents a similarly stark picture of those furthest behind. For example, before the impact of COVID-19, it was estimated that 95% of people in extreme poverty in 2030 will be living in contexts experiencing severe or high societal fragility. Of the 57 fragile contexts, 27 are classified as low income. Together, these represent 93% of all countries classified by the World Bank for its 2021 fiscal year. The other 30 fragile contexts are middle income; of these, 24 are lower middle-income, accounting for 48% of all countries classified as such, and 6 were upper middle-income, or 11% of the total.

Moreover, in 2019, the average unemployment rate in fragile contexts was 5.35%, compared to 5.62% in non-fragile, developing economies<sup>2</sup> (World Bank, 2020<sup>[64]</sup>). Of those employed in the average fragile context, 46% were concentrated in the agriculture sector, 40% in services and 14% in industry. By way of comparison, 50% of employment globally is in services and only 27% in agriculture and 23% in industry. The share of employment towards agriculture in the average fragile context dropped by 10 percentage points from 2000 to 2019. Some impacts of the pandemic and associated economic shocks may be less severe in extremely fragile contexts and more severe in those other fragile contexts, for example Bangladesh and Pakistan, that have greater exposure to global value and logistical chains affected by sudden drops in global consumption. For other fragile contexts, the impact may be more specific but not less significant. An example is Gambia, a fragile context that has shown improvement since 2018 but where the collapse of tourism and fall in remittances are likely to severely affect livelihoods in the country (Fitch Solutions Group Ltd, 2020<sup>[65]</sup>).

### ***Populations are growing fastest in contexts with the most fragility***

In 2020, 1.8 billion people, or 23% of the world's population, live in the 57 fragile contexts. Their share of the global population is projected to grow to 26% (2.2 billion people) by 2030, and by 2050, fragile contexts will be home to 31% of the world's population (3.1 billion people) (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>). In addition, fragile contexts are expected to experience some of the highest population growth by 2050: 13 of the fragile contexts on the 2020 OECD fragility framework are among the top 15 contexts globally with the highest projected population growth; the other 2, Benin and Malawi, are not classified as fragile. By 2050, according to projections, approximately half the world's population will live in fragile contexts experiencing severe or high environmental fragility and severe or high security fragility (Desai and Forsberg, 2020<sup>[15]</sup>).

### ***Realising the potential demographic dividend in fragile contexts requires further investment in human capital***

The median age the average fragile context in 2020 is only 19.5 years. This is expected to rise to 21.5 years by 2030 and to 26 years by 2050, while in the average non-fragile, developing context, the median age is expected to be 38 years (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>). The demographic dividend offers significant potential for economic growth and productivity in fragile contexts, but it will not be realised without greater investment in human capital (Canning, Raja and Yazbeck, 2019, p. 6<sup>[66]</sup>). Investing in human capital has emerged as clear determining factor for change. It is the means through which a "gender dividend" can be pursued (Mason and Lee, 2019<sup>[67]</sup>) and the potential of young populations in fragile contexts realised. Effective policies for health, education and social protection are vital to nurture the development of resilient communities and institutions that help fragile contexts build self-reliance. The evidence up to 2020 points to steady progress in terms of health indicators, but no impact in terms of indicators on education and social protection, where women and the youth demographic are most affected (Chapter 3). The economic impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in all fragile contexts – reduced economic activity, unemployment, and falling remittances and foreign direct investments – will reshape national and donor priorities for the next decade (Forichon, 2020<sup>[68]</sup>).



### ***Humanitarian, development and peace responses must be mindful of the global and regional sources of fragility that exist outside of fragile contexts***

These sources are evident in all the dimensions of fragility, span fragile and non-fragile contexts, and flow through multidimensional systems and networks. The interconnectedness of fragility at multiple levels is not due simply to push and pull factors, but also to a more complex interplay of issues that often manifest at local levels (Van Hear, Bakewell and Long, 2018<sup>[69]</sup>). For example, climate change is already reverberating through the different dimensions in fragile contexts where people are living with its immediate impact on their access to water, desertification and sea levels. Globally, climate change is increasingly driving demographic shifts, inequality and weak governance. In turn, environmental factors such as pollution and deforestation and issues such as quality of governance and access to healthcare can compound the impact of climate change on fragility. Where these pressures exist, the interplay of structural weaknesses, on one hand, and proximate drivers on issues including livelihood, human rights, pollution, education and security, on the other hand, combine to shape decision making at all levels (Van Hear, Bakewell and Long, 2018, p. 931<sup>[69]</sup>).

### ***Fragility affects decision making in and for fragile contexts***

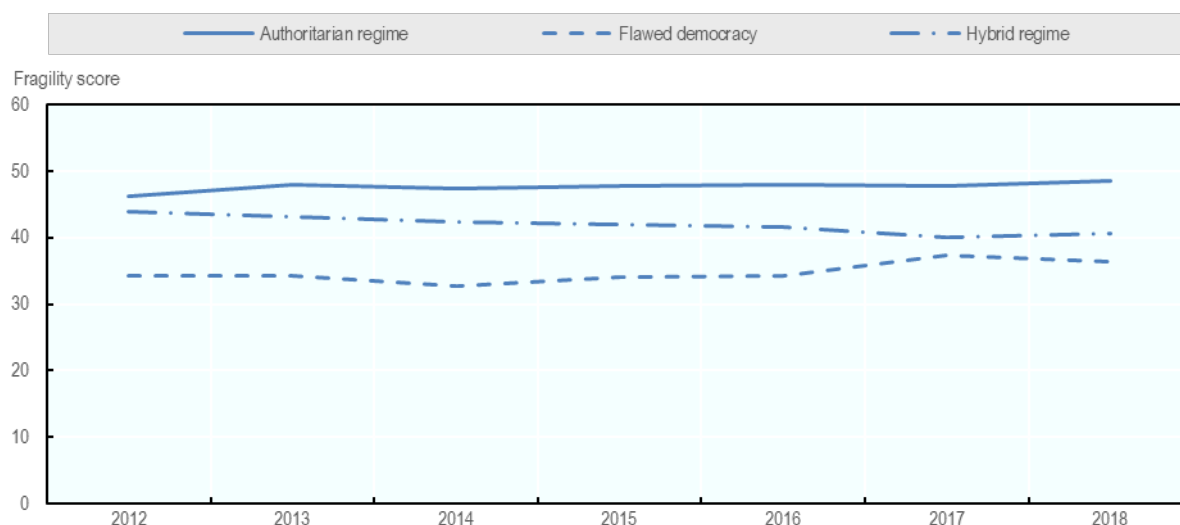
As noted, external pressures and the immediate impact of COVID-19 can combine and cascade to stress coping capacity at all levels. Driven by a desire to survive in the face of multidimensional fragility and in the absence of effective governance systems, people in fragile contexts will seek support through the means available (including violent actors such as terrorist, criminal or extremist groups). Where governments are unable or unwilling to respond to citizens' demands, such groups can actively seek to exploit the vacuum by offering various forms of security and social protection (Grynkewich, 2008<sup>[70]</sup>). Many terrorist and criminal groups adapted rapidly to the changes brought about by responses to COVID-19 and sought to exploit the situation through violent and non-violent means (Columbo and Harris, 2020<sup>[71]</sup>). In fragile contexts, where individuals and families (however reluctantly) were already choosing to engage with such groups to facilitate migration (Dib, 2019<sup>[72]</sup>), donors must avoid the further securitisation of the response to global migratory trends and focus instead on risks associated its underlying causes and drivers (Abebe, 2020<sup>[73]</sup>).

### ***The potential for cascading fragility is driving choices on modes of governance***

None of the 57 fragile contexts in the 2020 OECD fragility framework are considered full democracies in the latest Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2020<sup>[74]</sup>) Democracy Index, which classifies contexts as either authoritarian, flawed democracy, full democracy or hybrid regime type. Among fragile contexts, 35 are considered authoritarian regimes, 17 are hybrid regimes, and 2 are flawed democracies. Fragile contexts thus mainly present either as hybrid regimes or weak democracies (suffering chronic, often highly visible fragility) or as authoritarian and/or dictatorial regimes that are frequently resilient. This resilience, however, could be built on coercive coping capacity that is evident in the political and security dimensions and vulnerable to collapse due to chronic and endemic fragility in the societal, environmental and economic dimensions. As shown in Figure 2.2, overall fragility has intensified from 2012 through 2018 in authoritarian regimes and in the two fragile contexts that are flawed democracies, and it has declined among those that are hybrid regimes. There is a significant gap in fragility over time between authoritarian and/or hybrid regimes on one hand and flawed democracies on the other. This suggests the need for differentiated approaches to address fragility in hybrid and authoritarian regimes.



**Figure 2.2. Trends in aggregate fragility among fragile contexts by regime type, 2012-18**



Note: This figure uses consistent categories of regime type, based on the 2019 EIU Democracy Index. The fragility scores are calculated for each regime type using an arithmetic average of the fragility scores of the fragile contexts in each regime type.

Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit (2020<sup>[74]</sup>), "Democracy Index 2019", <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.

In contexts with severe political and governance fragility, authoritarian regimes' centralised control and coercion often take the form of hard security, as seen in Burundi and Myanmar. The latest Freedom House (2020<sup>[75]</sup>) ratings show Burundi suffered the biggest ten-year decline in freedom and that Myanmar's status declined over 2018-19 from "partly free" to "not free" due to reduced freedom of movement from the escalating conflict between the military and an ethnic minority rebel group. Additionally, both Burundi and Myanmar are experiencing severe societal fragility, whereas Burundi is also facing severe environmental fragility while Myanmar is facing high environmental fragility. This leaves both countries particularly vulnerable to sudden shocks such as regime collapse or change that in turn can swiftly deepen fragility, as happened in Iraq (2003), Libya (2011) and Syria (2011), albeit from different starting points.

Engaging with regimes that ignore, seek to exploit or simply cannot cope with fragility is a challenge, highlighting the importance of effective collective action. Renewed emphasis on implementing the conflict prevention agenda set out by the World Bank in 2017 would facilitate such enhanced collective action and application of more nuanced approaches that target root causes and drivers of fragility (Desai, 2020<sup>[16]</sup>).

## Mind the gaps: Data gaps are closing but remain substantial

There is progress in measuring sustainable development, but the toolkit is still limited, especially in fragile contexts (Samman et al., 2018<sup>[7]</sup>; Sachs et al., 2019<sup>[34]</sup>; Moyer and Hedden, 2020<sup>[76]</sup>). As of December 2019, half of the 231 indicators in the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDGs indicator framework are either not regularly produced or do not have an agreed methodology for measurement (UN, 2020<sup>[77]</sup>). These are Tier II (limited coverage) and Tier III (no methodology) indicators. It is important to acknowledge improvements over time. For instance, in the inaugural SDGs framework of 2016, 65% of the indicators were Tier II and Tier III. There were 88 Tier III indicators in 2016 but only 20 in 2019. This trend reflects the recognition that a "data revolution for sustainable development" is needed to achieve Agenda 2030 (MacFeely and Nastav, 2019<sup>[78]</sup>).

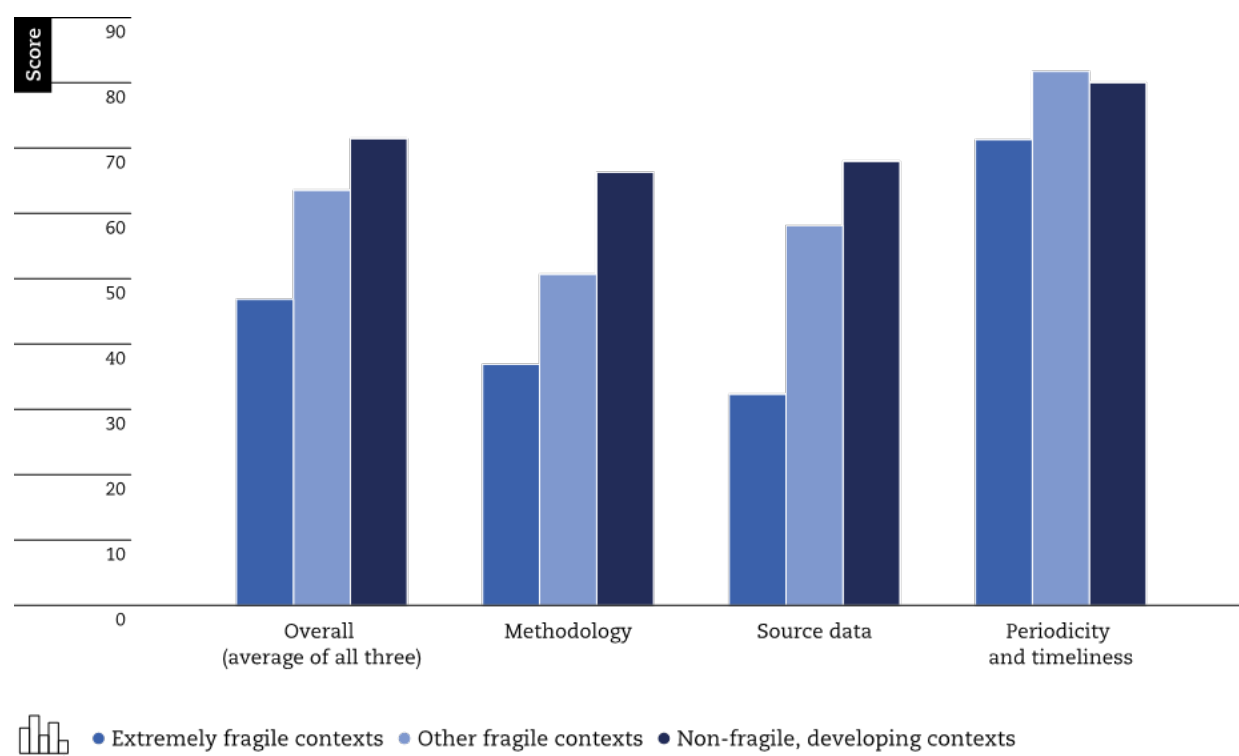
At the same time, the quality, timeliness, and accessibility of available indicators vary across countries and regions. For example, the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020* finds that sufficient data were

available for only 42% of SDG indicators for the region in 2019 (UN, 2020<sup>[79]</sup>). The 2019 SDG Index for Africa, which assesses countries across only 97 of the most available indicators, notes that 13 of 54 African countries and contexts are missing data for at least 10% of the indicators (SDG Center for Africa and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019, p. 36<sup>[80]</sup>). Data gaps inhibit comparisons within and across countries and contexts. They distort perceptions of need and result in policies that lack a sound evidence base.

### ***The challenges associated with data availability are acute in fragile contexts***

Statistical systems in fragile contexts are poorly equipped to measure sustainable development progress. There are significant data gaps on key indicators such as health, education and livelihood outcomes. As shown in Figure 2.3, which compares the statistical capacity of fragile and non-fragile contexts, non-fragile, developing contexts fare better overall in their ability to collect, analyse and disseminate high-quality data on sustainable development. Extremely fragile contexts perform poorly relative to others on the source data measure, which gauges the strength of data collection and administrative systems. Fragile contexts also struggle on the methodology measure, which assesses their ability to adhere to internationally recommended standards and is particularly pertinent for indicators tracking sustainable development progress. The relative performance of the 44 other fragile contexts on the periodicity and timeliness measure, however, suggests that while these contexts have the capacity to make data accessible in a timely way, there is room for improvement on data collection and quality assurance in line with international standards.

**Figure 2.3. Statistical capacity in extremely fragile, other fragile and non-fragile developing contexts**



Note: Overall scores are an arithmetic average of the methodology, source data, and periodicity and timeliness scores.

Sources: World Bank (2020<sup>[81]</sup>), *Statistical Capacity Score* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IQ.SCI.OVRL>; World Bank (2020<sup>[81]</sup>), *Methodology Assessment of Statistical Capacity* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IQ.SCI.MTHD>; World Bank (2020<sup>[81]</sup>), *Periodicity and Timeliness Assessment of Statistical Capacity* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IQ.SCI.PRDC>; World Bank (2020<sup>[81]</sup>), *Source Data Assessment of Statistical Capacity* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IQ.SCI.SRCE>.

### ***There is momentum on statistical systems, but more investment is needed***

OECD DAC donors recognise the importance of investments in statistical systems, as discussed in both the *Development Co-operation Report 2017: Data for Development* (OECD, 2017<sup>[82]</sup>) and *States of Fragility 2018* (OECD, 2018<sup>[4]</sup>). The data revolution is the subject of continuing attention, as evidenced by recent initiatives such as the Bern Network on Financing Data for Development, which calls for a Data Financing Facility (OECD, 2019<sup>[83]</sup>), the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) (GPEDC, 2019<sup>[84]</sup>) and the World Bank's focus on data for development in its 2021 World Development Report (Goldberg, 2020<sup>[85]</sup>). In 2018, according to data from the OECD Creditor Reporting System, DAC donors gave USD 37 million in support of statistical capacity building in fragile contexts, which amounts to 0.1% of their total official development assistance to fragile contexts (OECD, 2020<sup>[86]</sup>). With just ten years remaining to achieve Agenda 2030, it is especially important that donors' work in fragile contexts is supported by sound data and evidence. Further investment in statistical systems in such contexts will pay dividends in terms of identifying needs, helping the poorest people and achieving sustainable development for all. Data on women, children, the elderly, the disabled and other groups left behind in fragile contexts are particularly needed. Data on subnational outcomes is also important to identify and address pockets of fragility as they arise (Manuel et al., 2019<sup>[87]</sup>). Moving forward, the OECD States of Fragility platform will be adapted and applied to explore the potential for collecting and analysing such data to provide a greater evidence base for donors and the international community in their engagement in fragile contexts.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The poverty estimates in this and the previous sentence are based on author calculations using estimates/projections produced by Lakner (2020<sup>[3]</sup>). The authors thank Daniel Gerszon-Mahler (World Bank) for providing these data, although all omissions/errors are our own.

<sup>2</sup> These estimates were calculated using a weighted average of country-level estimates of unemployment, total (as a % of the total labour force), weighted by the total labour force of each country from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (data retrieved June 21 2020). This methodology follows the best practice.

# 3

## How fragile contexts are faring on issues affecting Agenda 2030

This chapter highlights some of the main challenges affecting the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in fragile contexts through an examination of some of the most prominent issues associated with peace and sustainable development. It analyses indicators of population and demographics, poverty, inequality, governance, education, gender equality, health, violence, disasters and migration to identify trajectories, pressure points and potential impacts of shocks on the 57 fragile contexts in the 2020 OECD fragility framework. The thematic trends highlighted in this chapter provide a signpost as to how fragile contexts have fared thus far on Agenda 2030 relative to other contexts. They also point to where these trends could go in this Decade of Action.

Before the pandemic, the overall picture for fragile contexts was one of stalled or slowing progress. The shocks resulting from COVID-19 will inevitably have consequences on their progress. As one example, the World Bank is suggesting that extreme poverty will increase for the first time since 1998 due to the pandemic (Mahler et al., 2020<sup>[88]</sup>), with an estimated 26 million people (according to projections published on 1 June 2020) at risk of falling into extreme poverty in fragile contexts by the end of 2020 (Lakner et al., 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). Another is that remittances, on which so many people and governments in fragile contexts rely, are expected to fall worldwide by 20%, or USD 445 billion, hurting the poorest and furthest behind (World Bank, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>). The findings in this chapter reinforce the importance of global co-operation to advance sustainable development to reach the furthest behind first.

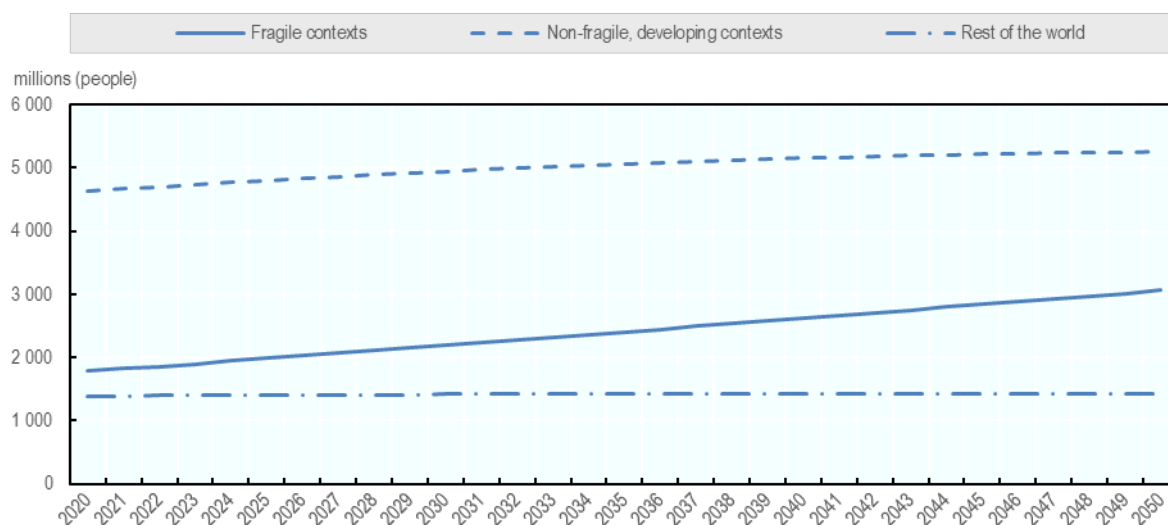
### Population and demographics

As noted in Chapter 2, approximately 1.8 billion people, or 23% of the world population, now live in fragile contexts. With no change in current trajectories, their numbers will grow to 2.2 billion people, or 26% of the world's population, by 2030 (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>). By 2050, it is projected that 3.0 billion people – 31% of the global population – will be living in fragile contexts (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>). Population growth brings both risks and opportunities for fragile contexts, where a youth bulge, in particular, will increase pressures on cities, labour markets and international migration (OECD, 2018, p. 191<sup>[89]</sup>).

### *Population pressure is building exponentially in fragile contexts*

Figure 3.1 illustrates projected population growth to 2050 in extremely fragile, other fragile and non-fragile contexts. At present rates, the global population is expected to increase by 10% over 2020-30 and by 25% over 2020-2050 (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>). However, growth rates are much lower in non-fragile contexts, where a 6% increase is projected by 2030 and an 11% increase by 2050. It is fragile contexts that are driving population growth globally. By 2030 and 2050, the population in 13 extremely fragile contexts will grow by 29% and 90%, respectively. In the 44 other fragile contexts, they will grow by 22% and 67%, respectively. Contexts experiencing severe environmental fragility are forecast to experience sharply higher growth, with their population projected to increase by 29% by 2030 and to almost double by 2050.

Figure 3.1. Projected population growth, fragile and non-fragile contexts, 2020-50

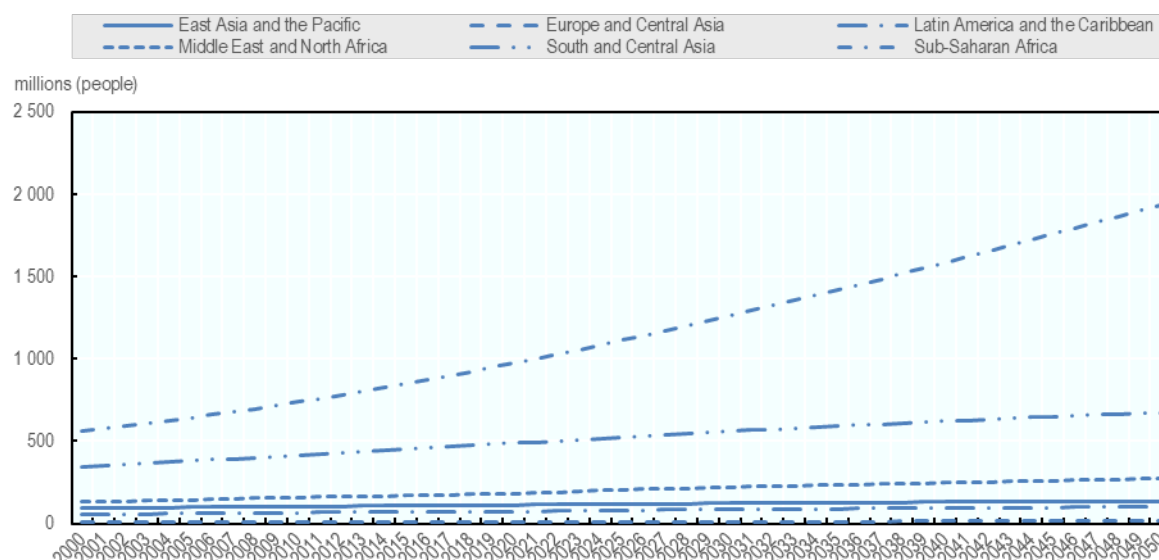


Note: Non-fragile, developing contexts refer to contexts that are ODA-eligible, according to the DAC List of ODA recipients for reporting on aid in 2018 and 2019, but are not considered fragile in the 2020 version of the OECD fragility framework. Values after 2019 are projections from the source data, using the medium variant.

Source: UN DESA (2020<sup>[57]</sup>), *World Population Prospects 2019* (database), <https://population.un.org/wpp/>; DAC list of ODA recipients for reporting on aid in 2018 and 2019, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC-List-of-ODA-Recipients-for-reporting-2018-and-2019-flows.pdf>.

Figure 3.2 shows the expected population growth in the 57 fragile contexts grouped by region. The total population of the 36 fragile contexts in sub-Saharan Africa is forecast to grow by 29% between 2020 and 2030 and by 98% between 2020 and 2050 (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>).<sup>1</sup> These contexts experienced a 75% increase in population over 2000-20. In comparison, population in the 8 fragile contexts in South and Central Asia and in Far East Asia is projected to grow by 14% over 2020-30, following a 40% increase from 2000-19. Four fragile contexts will account for almost half of the total population growth in sub-Saharan Africa over the current decade up to 2030: DRC, which is extremely fragile, and Ethiopia, Nigeria and Tanzania. Nigeria's population is expected to almost double over the next 30 years; now the seventh most populous country in the world, it will overtake the United States by 2050 to become the third most populous, behind India and China.

Figure 3.2. Population growth in fragile contexts by region

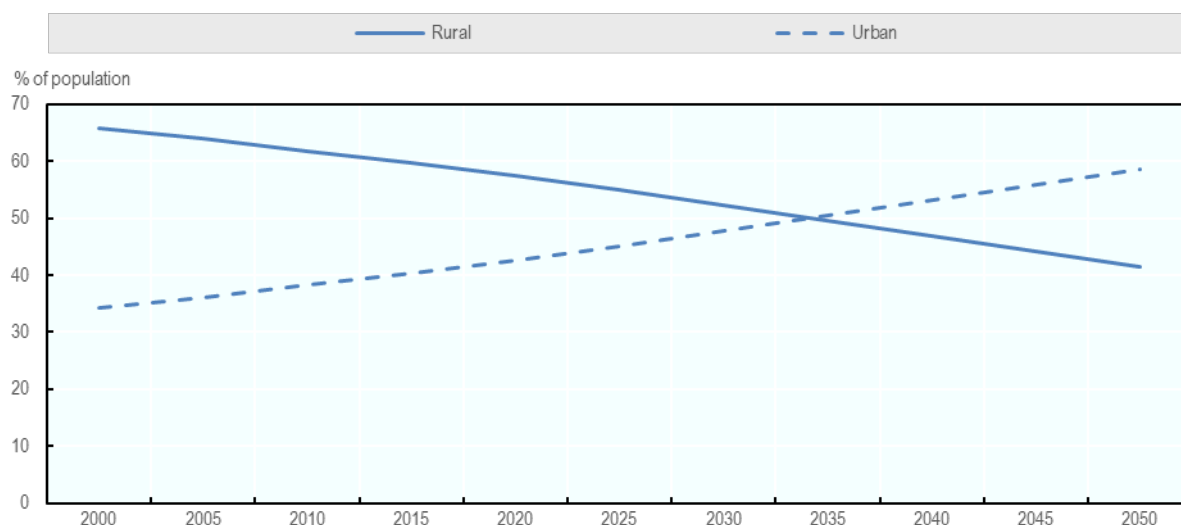


Note: Values after 2019 are projections from the source data, using the medium variant.

Source: (UN DESA, 2020<sup>[57]</sup>), *World Population Prospects 2019* (database), <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

Population growth is concentrating fragility in urban areas of fragile contexts. As discussed briefly in Chapter 2, the growing working age populations in some fragile contexts in sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean represent a potential demographic dividend. To realise this potential in these and other regions with high population growth, fragility must be successfully mitigated across all dimensions (Cilliers, 2020<sup>[90]</sup>). This is increasingly an urban challenge. Much of the population growth in fragile contexts in the medium term will be in urban areas, which are projected to become more populous overall than rural areas by 2030-35 (Figure 3.3). The urban aspect of multidimensional fragility – poverty, housing issues associated with informal settlements and social inclusion – is becoming clearer in many contexts. Papua New Guinea and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) have among the highest urban poverty rates in the Asia Pacific region (Baker and Gadgil, 2017<sup>[91]</sup>). In recognition of the risks associated with the simultaneous rapid growth of both populations and cities in fragile contexts, humanitarian, development and peace actors are moving to urban-minded approaches. For example, established approaches to conflict prevention regarding local agency and trust are being successfully adapted for urban diplomacy (Wennmann, 2019<sup>[92]</sup>).

**Figure 3.3. Projected urban vs. rural population in fragile contexts, 2000-50**



Note: Values after 2019 are projections from the source data, using the medium variant.

Source: UN DESA (2018<sup>[93]</sup>), *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects (database)*, <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>.

## Poverty

### ***Despite global progress, persistent extreme poverty in fragile contexts, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, may increase further***

Progress towards meeting the poverty targets of Agenda 2030 is slowing, with poverty concentrated in contexts that are facing several challenges to sustainable development. In 2015, 413 million of the 736 million people living in extreme poverty were in sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2019<sup>[5]</sup>). Absent significant policy shifts, the poverty headcount in sub-Saharan Africa will still be in double digits by 2030 (UN, 2019, p. 24<sup>[5]</sup>). Increases in extreme poverty over the next ten years are expected in 37 of the 57 fragile contexts, although these projections (from the Pardee Center for International Futures (2020<sup>[63]</sup>) predate the pandemic and thus do not take into account the potential impact of COVID-19. Only 8 of the 48 fragile contexts for which data are available are on track to meet SDG 1 on poverty (Sachs et al., 2020<sup>[33]</sup>).

The latest reference year available in the World Bank's PovCalNet is 2015, meaning that any estimates in subsequent years represent projections. Author calculations based on the World Bank's projections from Lakner et al. (2020<sup>[3]</sup>) suggest that fragile contexts are home to 460 million people living in extreme poverty in 2020, or 76.5% of the global total. The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to lead to 26 million additional people falling into extreme poverty in fragile contexts by the end of 2020. This figure represents 43% of the total number of people expected to fall into extreme poverty (60 million) according to Lakner et al.'s (2020<sup>[3]</sup>) projections.

The projected increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty in fragile contexts follows 25 years of significant progress in reducing extreme poverty overall, down to just 10% of the world's population in 2015 (World Bank, 2018<sup>[94]</sup>). Progress varied across regions, ranging from the biggest global decrease in people living in extreme poverty in East Asia and the Pacific to an increase in the number of extreme poor in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2018<sup>[94]</sup>).

Poverty is measured in ways other than by observing the extreme poverty line of USD 1.90 per day. For example, the World Bank uses two additional income thresholds, below USD 3.20 and USD 5.50 per day, to measure other degrees of poverty. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in its annual



global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), measures deprivations in health, education and standard of living in more than 100 countries. The 2019 MPI found that in 2017, 770 million people were living in multidimensional poverty in the 48 fragile contexts for which data were available, representing 58% of the multidimensionally poor worldwide (UNDP, 2019<sup>[95]</sup>). Of that figure, 161 million people were living in multidimensional poverty in the 13 extremely fragile contexts. COVID-19 is having an impact on the standard of living of many people around the world, for instance because lockdowns and associated displacement make it more difficult to access basic services like nutrition. Before the onset of the pandemic, there was progress in addressing multidimensional poverty worldwide: 65 of 75 countries studied had significantly reduced their multidimensional poverty from 2000 to 2019 (UNDP, 2020<sup>[96]</sup>). However, the pandemic threatens that progress, with simulations suggesting that it may set back poverty levels by nine years and lead to 490 million additional people falling into multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2020<sup>[96]</sup>).

### ***Poverty dynamics within fragile contexts leave some people, especially women and children, vulnerable to shocks***

Poverty varies within contexts and countries, both demographically and geographically. It is concentrated among women and children (Christensen, 2019<sup>[97]</sup>), particularly in fragile contexts where women have less access than men to educational, economic and societal opportunities. More than half of the people living in extreme poverty are estimated to be children (UNICEF, 2016<sup>[98]</sup>). Watkins and Quattri (2019<sup>[99]</sup>) estimate that by 2030, 308 million children in Africa will be living in extreme poverty and will account for 55% of world poverty. Understanding the dynamics of poverty for women and children and identifying unique stressors that contribute to higher rates of poverty can help ensure that sustainable development progress does not leave these vulnerable groups behind by. This will be especially important in light of COVID-19, as the shocks resulting from the pandemic are expected to affect women and children disproportionately.

Additionally, poverty is not geographically uniform within countries. Due to a range of factors, poverty can be concentrated in certain subnational pockets of fragility and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the people living there (Manuel et al., 2019<sup>[87]</sup>). While systematic data on subnational poverty in fragile contexts are not available, initiatives such as the MPI, the World Poverty Lab's World Poverty Clock and the World Bank's subnational poverty maps are beginning to track these data across countries and over time. Investing in these sources of data and this type of analysis can help donor governments and partner governments reach the furthest behind first within contexts and countries.

## **Inequality**

Perceptions of inequality in non-fragile countries and contexts matter and can have negative consequences for fragile contexts when inequality becomes politicised. Income inequality has increased in three-quarters of the OECD countries over the past three decades (OECD, 2019, p. 17<sup>[100]</sup>), but fragile contexts are among the most unequal globally. Large segments of the population in non-fragile contexts perceive themselves to be on the losing end of modernisation and globalisation and cite issues such as homelessness and socio-economic isolation, trends that the COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate (OECD, 2019<sup>[101]</sup>). This inward-looking tendency regarding inequality puts pressure on governments in non-fragile contexts to concentrate resources on domestic priorities at the expense of support for fragile contexts. ODA to fragile contexts has not yet been affected, but the pronounced rhetoric on the scale of recovery in non-fragile contexts highlights the potential risk of diverting already limited resources away from the estimated 460 million people living in extreme poverty in fragile contexts. This also undermines the sense of global community required to propel Agenda 2030.



### ***The impact of income inequality is felt at multiple levels and compounds other inequalities in fragile contexts***

In fragile contexts, inequality is most prevalent in measures of income, gender, health and education. The focus of analysis is often on the extremes of inequality – that is, the disparity of 1% of the world’s population having accumulated twice as much wealth as the other 6.9 billion people (Lawson et al., 2020<sup>[102]</sup>). However, recent research using narrower parameters of comparison finds that in places where gross domestic product per capita is less than USD 1 000 and the majority of people live in extreme poverty, even the average incomes of rich countries are unattainable (Roser, 2019<sup>[103]</sup>).

Income inequality affects national and local governments’ ability to generate tax revenue for public services and it affects families’ capacity to access health and education. Data on mean years of total schooling across all education levels for the population aged 25+ show the extent to which some fragile contexts are behind. In 2017, the average was 4.8 years of schooling in South Sudan, 4.3 years in Central African Republic, 5.1 years in Syria, 5.3 years in Haiti and 4.6 years in Papua New Guinea; by way of comparison, the average in Germany was 14.1 years of total schooling (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina, 2020<sup>[104]</sup>). A gender lens shows further layers of inequality and fragility. According to UNESCO (2018<sup>[105]</sup>), for every 100 boys of primary school age who are out of school, 121 girls are denied the right to education.

On an individual level, where and when a person is born is a determinant of the inequality that person is likely to experience over the life cycle. In the healthiest countries of the world, in Europe and East Asia, only 1 in 250 children will die before the age of 5; in several African countries, more than 1 in 10 children born in 2019 will die before the age of 5 (Roser, 2019<sup>[103]</sup>). These statistics reflect how inequality and poverty connect to issues like malnutrition and affect human capital. In 2019, for instance, 64% of all stunted children and 75% of all wasted children were living in lower middle-income countries (UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Group, 2020<sup>[106]</sup>).

Youth unemployment is a major issue in fragile contexts. The gap between people’s expectations and the reality of their lives can exacerbate grievances, especially when people become aware or perceive that others elsewhere are faring better, and these grievances can then deepen social divisions and worsen fragility (UN/World Bank, 2018, p. 51<sup>[107]</sup>). In the 43 fragile contexts for which data are available, 66.1 million youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are not in employment, education or training. Almost three quarters of these youth, or 47.9 million people, are women (ILO, 2020<sup>[108]</sup>).<sup>2</sup>

### ***How can we analyse inequality in fragile contexts better?***

Given the influence of perceptions on different levels of decision making in fragile contexts, recent innovations such as the OECD’s Better Life Index demonstrate the potential to develop a better understanding of how and why people respond to fragility in different ways. Focused on OECD member states, the Better Life Index blends quantitative and qualitative indicators on topics such as life satisfaction and community to gain a deeper appreciation of the quality of life in the contexts and countries analysed. Extending and adapting this methodology to the specific dynamics of fragile contexts could add valuable detail to the information gained from Gini and Palma analyses, thereby driving more inclusive and effective policy and programming support (OECD, 2020<sup>[109]</sup>). Box 3.1 describes the Gini coefficient and Palma ratio and how they capture inequality in fragile contexts.

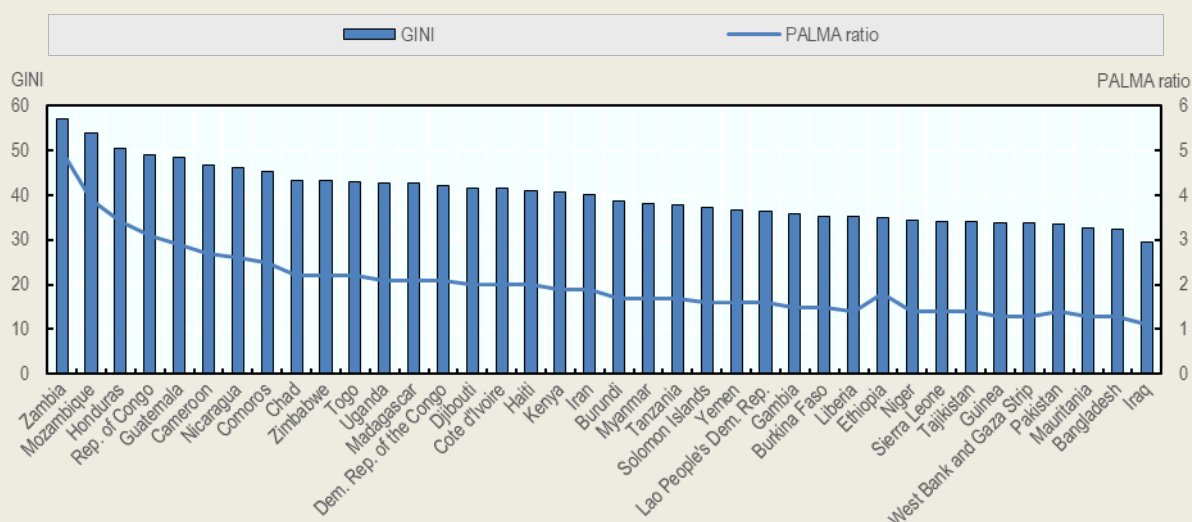
### Box 3.1. Gini and Palma for fragile contexts

The Gini coefficient and Palma ratio offer different perspectives on inequality. Gini is of the traditional measures of inequality, specifically, the distribution of income in a country's population. It is important to note that income is not the only indicator of inequality; for example, lack of access to services or social disparities can also contribute to inequalities in society (UNDP, 2019<sup>[110]</sup>).

A frequently cited criticism of the Gini is that it is sensitive to changes in the middle of the distribution – the so-called middle 50% – rather than changes in the top or bottom distribution, which is a problem when income in countries is concentrated at the ends of the distribution and the middle is relatively stable (UNDP, 2019, p. 97<sup>[110]</sup>). This is especially the case in fragile contexts, given their high levels of deprivation and forms of inequality. Specifically, Cobham, Schlögl and Sumner (2016<sup>[111]</sup>) contend that the Gini explicitly does not capture changes in the top 10% and the bottom 40%. They present the Palma ratio as an alternative measure to address this issue.

The Palma ratio captures the ratio of the richest 10% of the population's share of gross national income (GNI) of the divided by share of GNI of the poorest 40%. Thus, the Palma can be seen to provide a ratio of income concentration. Figure 3.4 shows the Gini coefficient and Palma ratio for the 38 fragile contexts for which data are available on both measures at any time in the past decade. The order of fragile contexts is relatively similar across both ratios, although Ethiopia is more unequal relative to other contexts on the Palma ratio than it is with the Gini coefficient. On both measures, Zambia is the most unequal of these fragile contexts: its Palma ratio suggests that the richest 10% capture five times more of the wealth than the poorest 40% in the context. The top ten on both measures include three contexts in Central America (in descending order, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua). The Palma ratio provides additional perspective on the concentration of wealth in fragile contexts. Of the 48 fragile contexts for which there was a reported ratio, the wealthiest 10% captured twice or more of the wealth in 25 of the contexts than the poorest 40%.

Figure 3.4. Gini coefficient and Palma ratio for fragile contexts



Source: (UNDP, 2019<sup>[110]</sup>), *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today - Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-report>.

## Governance

Governance is now widely understood as the process through which state and non-state actors reach and sustain agreements over the distribution of rights, resources and responsibilities (World Bank, 2017<sup>[112]</sup>). These processes interact or occur within a given set of formal and informal rules that shape and are shaped by power, and they are intended to free societies from the constant threat of violence (security); enable economic growth and prosperity; and mitigate inequalities, social exclusion and injustice by ensuring access to services and equally shared prosperity (justice and equity) (World Bank, 2017<sup>[112]</sup>). In 2018, members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) disbursed USD 15.9 billion towards strengthening governance, of which 40%, or USD 6.9 billion, went to fragile contexts (a 14% share to the 13 most fragile contexts and 26% share to other fragile contexts).

### ***Governance quality is deteriorating in fragile contexts, as measured across indices and policy domains***

The OECD fragility framework tracks multiple dimensions of governance across several policy domains (security, growth, justice and equality) and through several additional indices and resources. These indices show that quality of governance ranks poorly across fragile states and in each of the domains. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) indices on three major dimensions of governance further show a significant decline both in government effectiveness and in voice and accountability in the extremely fragile contexts between 2008 and 2018 (Table 3.1). Similar declines in the main dimensions of governance are seen in other contexts, although to a more modest degree. V-Dem indices show a slight improvement in the rule of law dimension across fragile contexts as well as notable differences among individual contexts. Counter to the overall trend, for example, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Mauritania improved in government effectiveness and voice and accountability but deteriorated in the rule of law dimension.

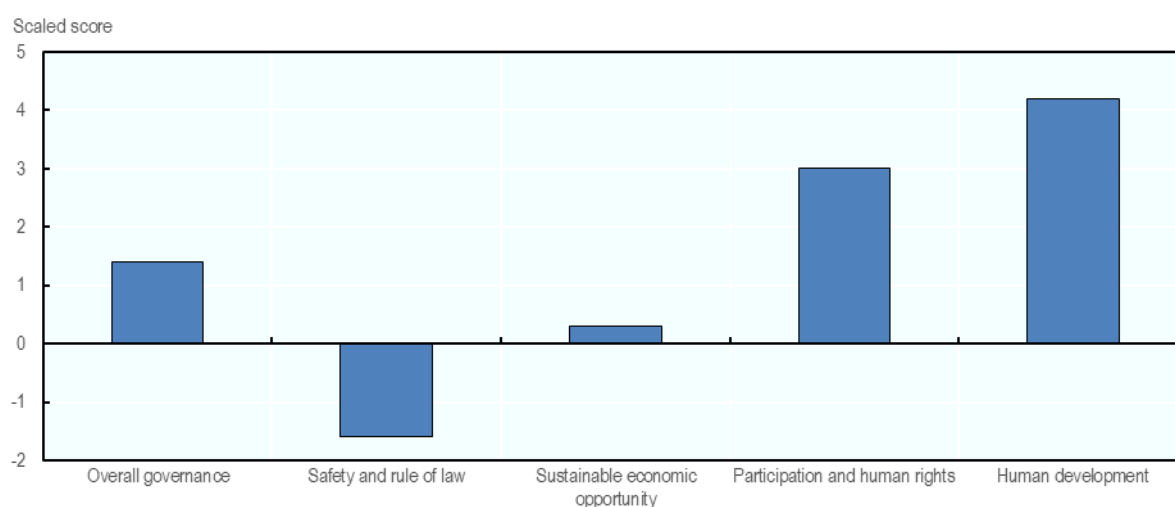
**Table 3.1. V-Dem indices, dimensions of governance 2008-18**

	Government effectiveness		Voice and accountability		Rule of law	
	2008	2018	2008	2018	2008	2018
Average extremely fragile	-1.35	-1.72	-1.25	-1.45	0.15	0.17
Average, other fragile	-0.96	-0.94	-0.84	-0.78	0.31	0.34
Average, all fragile	-1.04	-1.11	-0.93	-0.94	0.27	0.3
Least developed countries	-0.92	-1.04	-0.71	-0.69	0.38	0.41
World	-0.09	-0.09	-0.16	-0.13	0.54	0.57

Source: Coppedge et al. (2019<sup>[113]</sup>), *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project*, <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemcy19>; Pemstein (2019<sup>[114]</sup>), *The V-Dem Measurement Model: Latent Variable Analysis for Cross-National and Cross-Temporal Expert-Coded Data*, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3167764](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3167764).

Another index, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), finds modest overall improvement in governance in fragile contexts in Africa (Figure 3.5). When results are disaggregated by different dimensions of governance – safety and rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development – a notable deviance of trends become apparent (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019, p. 17<sup>[115]</sup>). According to these metrics, the principal governance challenge for African contexts is safety and rule of law (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2019, p. 43<sup>[115]</sup>). The IIAG also differs from the V-Dem indices in that it shows a decline in the governance dimension of rule of law over 2008-17.

**Figure 3.5. Change over time in various indicators on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance for fragile contexts, 2008-17**



Note: The figure only shows the 36 fragile contexts in sub-Saharan Africa

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019<sup>[115]</sup>), "Agendas 2063 & 2030: Is Africa on Track?", [https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-02/African\\_Governance\\_Report\\_2019\\_0.pdf](https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-02/African_Governance_Report_2019_0.pdf).

These indicators are useful to show overall trends, but they obscure variations among contexts. For example, Côte d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe substantially improved their IAG scores across the four governance dimensions of safety and rule of law, sustainable economic opportunity, participation and human rights, and human development. Despite these variations, governance challenges are expected to increase due to the impact of COVID-19 in 2020.

The vast majority of fragile states exhibit varying types and degrees of autocracy. The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index classifies 35 of the 57 fragile contexts as authoritarian regimes in 2019. V-Dem classifies 48 of 57 fragile contexts, including all 13 extremely fragile contexts, as autocracies. Many extremely fragile contexts also are classified as closed autocracies and exhibit extreme weakness across all indicators of the V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index. Other extremely fragile contexts are classified as electoral autocracies and score comparatively better; among these are Iraq and Haiti, which rank at 120<sup>th</sup> and 121<sup>st</sup> respectively and so just outside the third quartile (Lührmann et al., 2020, pp. 31-32<sup>[116]</sup>). Trends related to authoritarian practices vary across fragile contexts. Nicaragua, for example, is experiencing a rapid deterioration as an electoral autocracy (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020<sup>[74]</sup>), while Gambia is taking notable strides to transition away from the autocratic regime of Yahya Jammeh and towards electoral democracy (Lührmann et al., 2020, p. 26<sup>[116]</sup>).

### ***Corruption adds layers of complexity and vulnerability to fragile contexts***

Corruption undermines government performance and can erode citizens' trust in and the legitimacy of fragile governments. Domestic tensions can escalate when public institutions do not adequately protect citizens, guard against corruption, or respond to real and perceived inequity and injustice and when communities lose confidence in the government or one another. These persistent issues increase the risk of violent conflict.

While a causal link between corruption and fragility is difficult to establish, the correlation is evident. With the exception of Burkina Faso and the Solomon Islands, all fragile contexts covered in the 2020 OECD Fragility Framework rank in the bottom half in terms of perceived corruption scores on Transparency

International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index of 180 countries and territories. Corruption is perceived to be endemic in extremely fragile contexts. Four of the bottom five contexts on the Index are extremely fragile, with Venezuela being the exception (Transparency International, 2020<sup>[117]</sup>). The character and substance of perceived corruption also vary widely across fragile contexts, ranging from large-scale state capture involving resource capture, embezzlement, kickbacks and money-laundering to administrative gatekeeping, bribery and collusion in public service delivery. For example, recent research highlights how Al-Shabaab has exploited corrupt practices in the Kenyan security sector to further undermine and destabilise executive authority and credibility (Gilchrist and Eisen, 2019<sup>[118]</sup>).

It is difficult to address corruption in stable country contexts, and even more so in fragile ones. International interventions that are not informed by robust analysis and designed with corresponding safeguards can inadvertently create social divisions and worsen corruption and abuse. Yet the evidence from across fragile contexts such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Mozambique, Nicaragua and elsewhere also shows that neglecting problems of corruption is a dangerous strategy. Corrupt elites use the opportunity to politically entrench themselves by setting up predatory schemes and patrimonial networks, which makes trust building difficult.

### ***Voice, accountability and inclusion are important constitutive elements for building just and peaceful societies***

Measures to support voice, accountability and inclusion are vital to achieve SDG 16, especially 16.3, 16.6 and 16.7.<sup>3</sup> However, progress on SDG 16 has stagnated or is in reverse in 12 of 13 extremely fragile contexts (Sachs et al., 2020<sup>[33]</sup>). In contexts where grievances are pronounced and access to effective and responsive political process is limited, support for voice and accountability can open avenues for citizens to be able to participate in selecting their government and advance freedom of expression, freedom of association and free media. Countries and contexts with higher rates of women's participation in the labour force are less likely to experience conflict, and women's active participation in peace processes contributes effective implementation and sustainability of a resulting peace agreement. Evidence also shows that political power sharing among elites (horizontal inclusion) is important to avoid a relapse into conflict, but that maximum inclusion can be detrimental. In fragile contexts, governance arrangements that are inclusive enough – i.e. comprising those individuals or groups that are required to restore confidence, transform institutions and create momentum for positive change – may be more conducive than pluralism to sustaining a peaceful transition (OECD, 2020<sup>[119]</sup>). Efforts to address group-based social and economic exclusion (vertical inclusion) are often most important for maintaining social cohesion and stability in the long term.

## **Education**

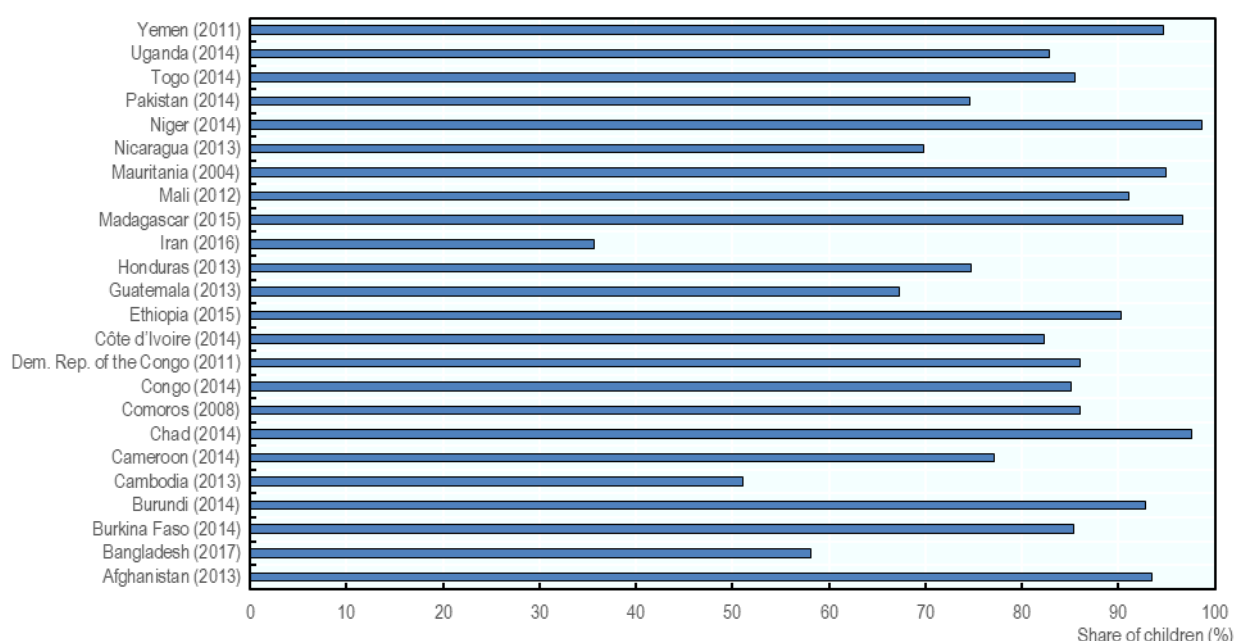
Education is a driver of growth and poverty alleviation, but standards vary significantly across fragile contexts both in terms of access and quality. Progress on education is also complicated by rapid population growth and multidimensional fragility in these contexts. Initiatives such as the Education Progress website of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report contribute to a better understanding of trends in education, globally and for fragile contexts. Nevertheless – and even acknowledging the difficulties of data gathering in conflict-affected contexts – the significant gaps in education data for fragile contexts must be addressed to develop effective policy to achieve the 2030 Agenda goals. SDG 4 (quality education) calls for all young people to be in a position to complete secondary school by 2030. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report, "The world is not even on track to achieve universal primary completion by 2030, let alone secondary completion" (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[120]</sup>). Available data indicate widespread learning poverty in fragile contexts (Figure 3.6).

There is a lack of systematic, comparable data on education inputs and outcomes outside of OECD economies (Sachs et al., 2019<sup>[34]</sup>). This is particularly true for data about education progress in fragile

contexts, where data systems are especially underdeveloped. One example is data coverage on pupil to teacher ratios, with only half of the 57 fragile contexts having available data to measure progress on this indicator. Among the 25 fragile contexts for which data are available, the pupil to teacher ratio is twice that of non-fragile contexts in 2018, suggesting that children in fragile contexts have relatively lower levels of access to teachers. Access to data is even more challenging in conflict-affected contexts, but the evidence available suggests that conflict is a key reason for stagnating progress on education (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[120]</sup>).

Recent initiatives are beginning to fill the global gap in education data including the partnership between the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the World Bank to develop a new measure of learning poverty (World Bank, 2019<sup>[121]</sup>). This is defined as the share of children who are unable to read and understand a simple text by age ten, adjusted for children who are out of school children (World Bank, 2019<sup>[122]</sup>). For this indicator, data are available for only 24 of the 57 fragile contexts. Figure 3.6 compares their rates of learning poverty to the global average, using the latest reported data for each context ranging from 2004 (Mauritania) to 2017 (Bangladesh). Among fragile contexts, only Iran has a lower rate of learning poverty than the global average. Highlighting the extent of the learning crisis in fragile contexts, Niger, Chad and Madagascar are at the other extreme, with more than 95% of children below minimum reading proficiency.

**Figure 3.6. Learning poverty in fragile contexts**



Note: Year in parentheses corresponds to the latest year of available data.

Source: World Bank (2019<sup>[123]</sup>), *Learning Poverty: Historical Data and Sub-Components (database)*,

<https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/learning-poverty>.

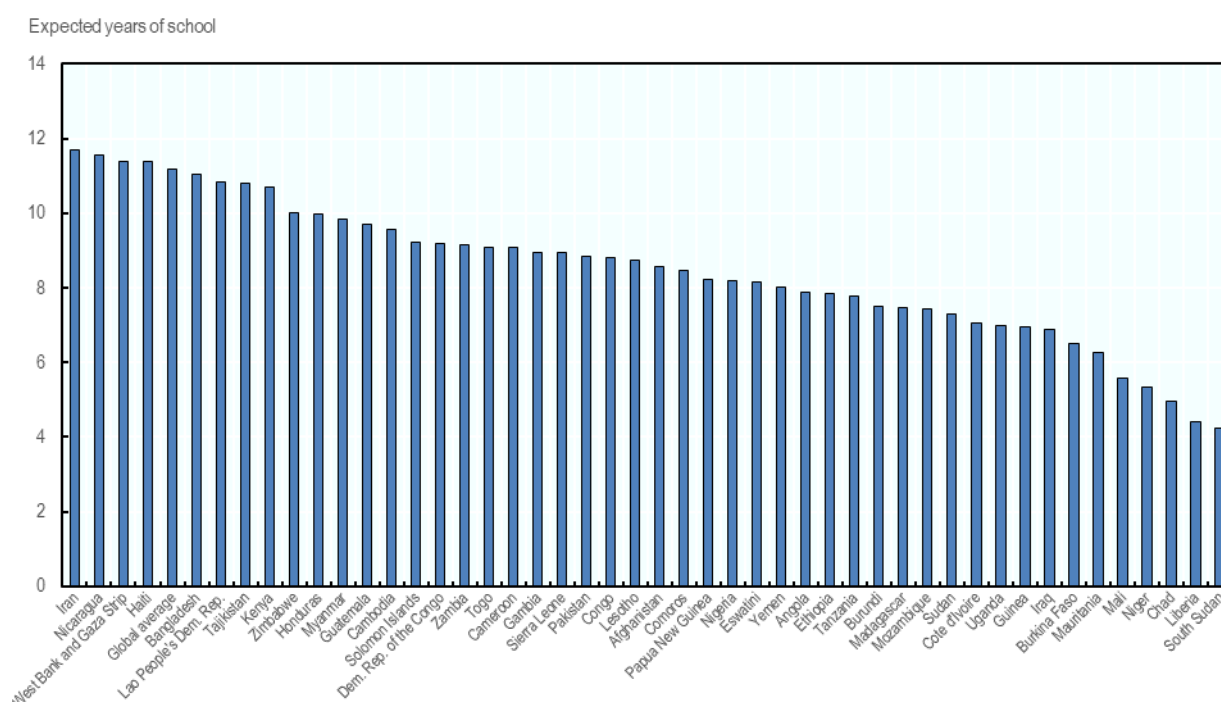
### **Rapid population growth and multidimensional fragility affect education progress in fragile contexts**

The rate of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa declined by more than 50% between 1990 and 2017, but an increase in the school-going population over the same period resulted in barely any change in the overall number of children out of school. This was the case in fragile contexts including Chad and Niger. Globally, progress on the number of children out of school has stagnated since 2007 for primary education and since 2012 for secondary education. Conflict is a key reason for this stagnation. For

example, in Syria, the out-of-school rate at primary level jumped from 1.2% to 27.6% between 2011 and 2013 (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[124]</sup>). Analysis of primary-level out-of-school rates in extremely fragile contexts on the 2020 OECD fragility framework reveals a differentiated picture. There is no data coverage for Afghanistan, Haiti and Somalia, and DRC has not recorded data since 1999. Burundi and Republic of the Congo have shown notable progress: the out-of-school rate in Burundi reached a record low of 4.3% in 2017 and in Congo, the rate declined by 37.5% between 2005 and 2012, the last year it reported data (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[120]</sup>).

Only 10 of the 48 fragile contexts that reported primary completion rates at least once in the past 10 years have a rate that is higher than the global average; with Kenya, Iran and Lao PDR having the highest rates among fragile contexts (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[120]</sup>). Similarly, only 4 of 47 fragile contexts for which data are available on expected years of schooling (as a sub-component of the World Bank's Human Capital Index) have a value that is higher than the global average (Figure 3.7).

**Figure 3.7. Expected years of school in fragile contexts, 2017**



Note: Data are only available for 47 fragile contexts

Source: World Bank (2020<sup>[125]</sup>), *Human Capital Index (database)*, <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/human-capital-index>.

Fragile contexts face challenges related to both quality and finance to achieve education targets. In low-income contexts, government spending on education is far lower and household spending on education is higher than elsewhere in the world (UNESCO, 2020<sup>[126]</sup>). Data gaps limit certainty, but available information suggests that large numbers of children around the world attend schools that do not adhere to any recognised standard and that in many cases, the children learn very little (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina, 2020<sup>[104]</sup>). The Global Education Monitoring Report cites several variables in education progress, among them the quantity of sufficiently trained teachers, the quality of infrastructure and the opportunity to learn in a safe, non-violent environment. The number of sufficiently trained teachers is difficult to ascertain for the 57 fragile contexts, as fewer than 30% have returned sufficient data.<sup>4</sup> For sub-Saharan Africa, however,



it is estimated that the number of trained teachers fell from 84% in 2000 to 69% in 2018 (UNESCO, 2020<sub>[120]</sub>).

The quality of infrastructure also affects progress on education. For instance, as of 2018, basic water facilities were available in just 44% of primary schools in sub-Saharan Africa. Outside Africa, challenges are similarly acute. Fewer than half of primary schools in Bangladesh and Cambodia and only 31% of primary schools in Afghanistan have single-sex sanitation facilities (UNICEF and WHO, 2020<sub>[127]</sub>). Incidents of violence within schools are another challenge and in the Solomon Islands, for example, more than 50% of children between the ages of 13 to 15 have been involved in physical fights at school (UNESCO, 2020<sub>[120]</sub>). These issues can be attributed to lopsided pupil teacher ratios, unequal power dynamics and wider societal issues.

## Gender equality and women's empowerment

It has been 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and 20 years since the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Progress has been achieved on issues associated with gender, but significant inequalities remain. The world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030, and progress on gender issues is slowing, also in fragile contexts.

### ***More than 320 million women live in fragile contexts that lack legislation on domestic violence, a sign of the uneven progress on gender issues***

On gender issues, the furthest behind are falling further behind. This is evident from the wide differences between extremely fragile, other fragile and non-fragile contexts on such issues. For example, in 2019, 38% of women and girls in fragile contexts (328 million) did not have legal protections against domestic violence, and half (425 million) did not have legal protections against gender-based discrimination in employment (World Bank, 2020<sub>[128]</sub>). In non-fragile developing contexts, only about 3% of women lack such protections. Only two extremely fragile contexts (Burundi and Central African Republic) report having such laws against domestic violence. At the same time, there has been improvement over time: the number of fragile contexts that have laws against domestic violence doubled between 2009 and 2019 (World Bank, 2020<sub>[128]</sub>). Protecting women's well-being, providing women legal redress and advancing gender equality will require the more systematic adoption of gender-related laws.

### ***On women's participation in parliaments and several economic, educational and health indicators, most fragile contexts are lagging***

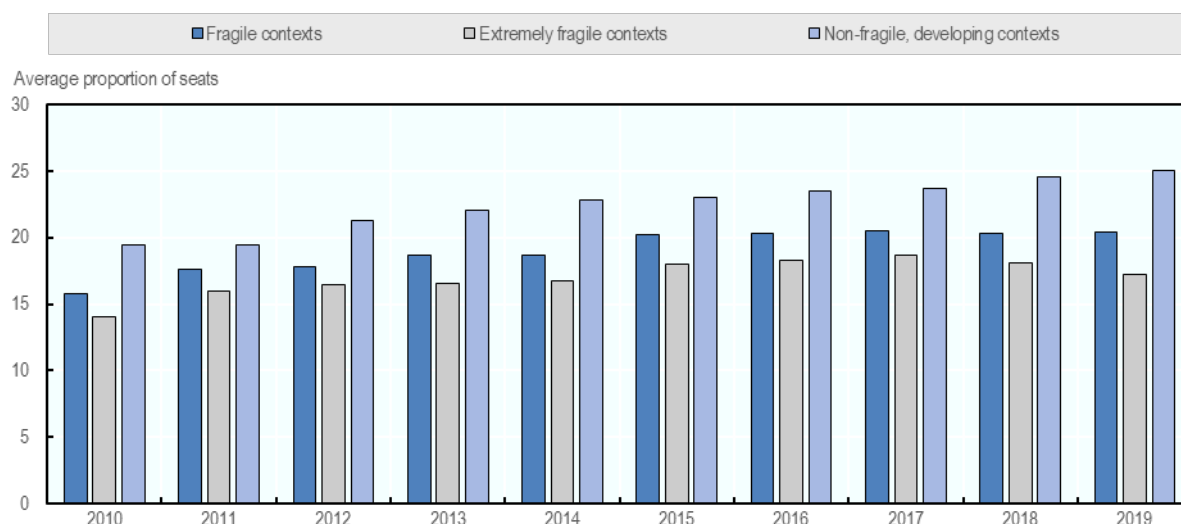
The Global Gender Gap Index considers indicators relating to economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The bottom seven in the ranking are fragile contexts. On educational attainment, eight of these contexts have yet to close more than 20% of their gap: Togo (closed 77.8% of this gender gap), Angola (75.9%), Mali (75.7%), Benin (73.3%), Yemen (71.7%), Guinea (68.0%), DRC (65.8%) and Chad (58.9%) (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 11<sub>[129]</sub>). Economic opportunities for women also are severely limited in fragile contexts, including Pakistan (32.7% of this gender gap), Yemen (27.3%), Syria (24.9%) and Iraq (22.7%) (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 11<sub>[129]</sub>). Nicaragua, also a fragile context, is an outlier, ranking as fifth best in the world on the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index. However, when placed alongside its deteriorating performance in the 2020 OECD Fragility Framework, Nicaragua's gains in the gender equality area are at risk.

Progress by fragile contexts on some gender indicators is stalled and appears to be trending downwards. This is cause for concern. As Figure 3.8 shows, initial progress in many fragile contexts on women's participation in parliament has either stalled or started to decline since 2016. In general, the global progress



observed by the World Economic Forum on women's participation in parliaments is not being replicated in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

**Figure 3.8. Women's participation in parliaments, 2010-19**



Source: World Bank (2019<sub>[130]</sub>), *WDI - Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>.

ODA and support for women's health are having a positive impact in fragile contexts. Analysis of mortality rates for the female population and maternal mortality rates since 2000 finds a broadly positive picture in both other fragile and extremely fragile contexts. This is discussed at greater length in the section on health in this chapter.

The 2019 Human Development Report, published prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted “troubling signs of difficulties and reversals on the path towards gender equality” in spite of “a buoyant global economy” (UNDP, 2019, p. 148<sub>[110]</sub>). The report also pointed to risks of regression on the gender inequality agenda because it is being conflated in some places with “gender ideology” (UNDP, 2019<sub>[110]</sub>). Against this background, the issues highlighted in *Gender equality and women's empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected situations* (OECD, 2017<sub>[131]</sub>), are even more pertinent as the world responds to the impact of systemic shocks. The paper raised concern that “weak institutions and services, ineffective or uneven rule of law, insecurity and restrictions of movement, and the dominance of informal institutions such as patronage networks” all risk being compounded in contexts struggling to come to terms with systemic shocks (OECD, 2017, p. 21<sub>[131]</sub>).

Pandemic-associated risks in fragile contexts affect men and women in different ways and exacerbate existing gender inequalities for women and girls. Men are proportionally more likely to die from COVID-19, but due to the nature of most health systems, including in fragile contexts, women health workers and caregivers were and are disproportionately on the frontline of the effort to combat the disease and therefore at heightened risk (UN Secretary-General, 2020, p. 2<sub>[132]</sub>). The risks associated with pregnancy increase as already scarce personnel and equipment resources are diverted to counter the spread of the pandemic. Among the lessons identified from the Zika outbreak in South America is that women were under-represented in pandemic planning and response. Similarly, research found that the economic impact of the 2013-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa put women and children at greater risk of exploitation and sexual violence (Wenham, Smith and Morgan, 2020<sub>[133]</sub>). For those in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, the risks associated with COVID-19 are further magnified. The need to address the

connections between gender, conflict and fragility during a period of global stress is intensifying. The experience of uneven progress on gender issues in fragile contexts over the past 25 years, coupled with the unfolding impact of global systemic shocks, may provide a window to review and revitalise the way gender equality is supported (UNDP, 2019<sup>[110]</sup>).

## Health

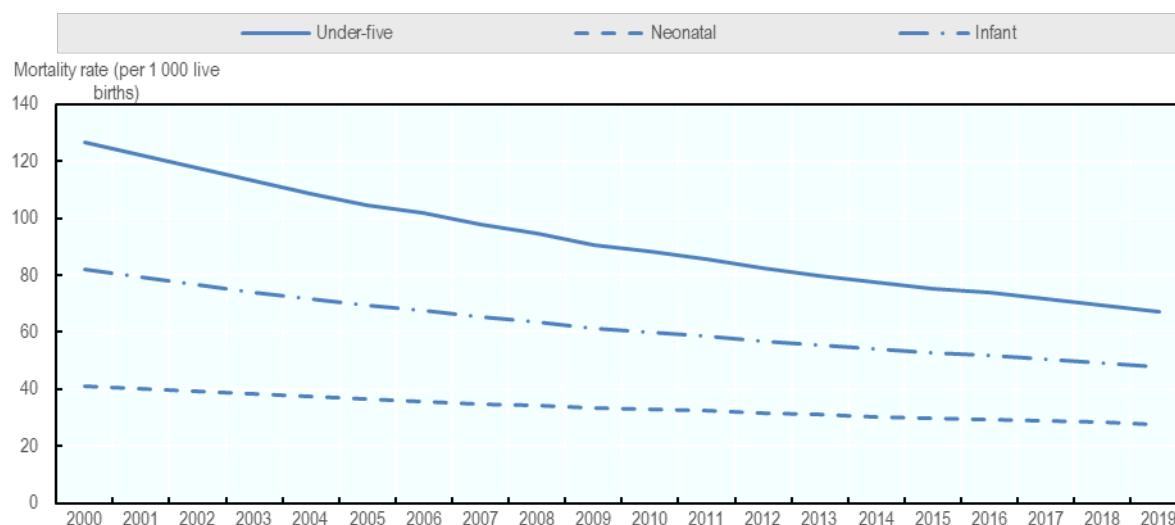
Up to 2020, the overall picture concerning health in fragile contexts was one of modest improvement in general and noticeable improvement on under five, neonatal and infant mortality specifically (Figure 3.9). Despite improvements, resilience measured on indicators of health pointed to fundamentally weak – and in some cases, critically weak – health systems in fragile contexts. This affects the development of human capital in fragile contexts (Forichon, 2020<sup>[68]</sup>). The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's Healthcare Access and Quality Index assesses countries' quality of healthcare based on mortality rates from 32 avoidable causes of death. According to this index, the typical fragile context in 2016 performs more than 25 points worse than the typical non-fragile developing context (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2020<sup>[134]</sup>). Performance in health access and quality is better than the global average in only 6 of the 57 fragile contexts in the 2020 OECD fragility framework.

The capacity of fragile contexts to withstand disasters and shocks such as epidemics has been tested over the past two years in contexts affected by Ebola. In March 2020, the most recent outbreak of Ebola ended with the discharge of the last affected patient (WHO, 2020<sup>[135]</sup>). The response to the Ebola outbreak provided valuable lessons both for governments in fragile contexts and for donors. In addition to building healthcare capacity, particular emphasis was placed on preparation, transparency and effective communications with affected communities (Moore and Nyenswah, 2020<sup>[136]</sup>). However, there has not been enough time to apply more than a few of these lessons in fragile contexts to inform new policies and practices to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Fragile contexts made significant progress on health indicators, but progress is uneven and slower than in non-fragile contexts***

Maternal, under-five and neonatal mortality are commonly used measures of health system capacity. While many fragile contexts made progress on these indicators, data point to systematic gaps in healthcare in the most fragile contexts, particularly those contexts with a weak central state that cannot deliver on basic services such as the Central African Republic, Somalia and Guinea-Bissau (OECD, 2020<sup>[137]</sup>). In 2018, Somalia had the highest rate of under-five mortality among all fragile contexts, at 121.5 per 1 000 live births (UN, 2019<sup>[138]</sup>). Sachs et al. (2019<sup>[34]</sup>) note also that only 9.4% of births in Somalia were attended by skilled health personnel in 2018. This lack of access to quality and affordable primary healthcare makes these contexts especially vulnerable to COVID-19. The International Rescue Committee (2020<sup>[139]</sup>) estimates that South Sudan, for instance, has only four ventilators in the country and that 90% of hospitals in Venezuela lack critical supplies for COVID-19 patients. Beyond its immediate effects on health and well-being, this crisis will stretch the coping capacity of health systems in fragile contexts and thus increase vulnerability to other deaths. Figure 3.9 shows progress in addressing under-five, neonatal, and infant mortality in fragile contexts from 2000 through 2019. While there was a 47% decline in the average under-five mortality rate in that period, the decline in neonatal mortality was comparatively lower at 33%.

**Figure 3.9. Progress on under-five, neonatal and infant mortality in fragile contexts, 2000-2019**



Note: This figure is calculated using a weighted average of the rate in each fragile context, weighted by the number of live births.

Source: World Bank (2020<sub>[140]</sub>), *Mortality Rate, Under-5 (per 1,000 live births)* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT>; World Bank (2020<sub>[141]</sub>), *Mortality rate, neonatal (per 1,000 live births)* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.NMRT>; World Bank (2020<sub>[142]</sub>), *Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)* (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN>; UN DESA (2019<sub>[143]</sub>), *Number of births, both sexes combined (thousands)* (database), <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

### *Under-five mortality*

Globally, the rate of under-five mortality (per 1 000 live births) fell by 50% from 2000 to 2019. At first glance, fragile contexts appear to have shared in this progress, as their under-five mortality declined in this period at almost the same rate (47%). However, the under-five mortality rate in 2019 in fragile contexts is almost twice the global average. These ratios are particularly high for lower middle-income fragile contexts (48.6 per 1 000 live births); fragile contexts in sub-Saharan Africa (75.6 per 1 000 live births); and fragile contexts experiencing severe environmental fragility (77.9 per 1 000 live births). Moreover, 5 of the 57 fragile contexts – Central African Republic, Chad, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Somalia – all recorded under-five mortality rates of 100 or more per 1 000 live births in 2019<sup>5</sup> (World Bank, 2020<sub>[140]</sub>; UN DESA, 2020<sub>[57]</sub>).

### *Infant and neonatal mortality*

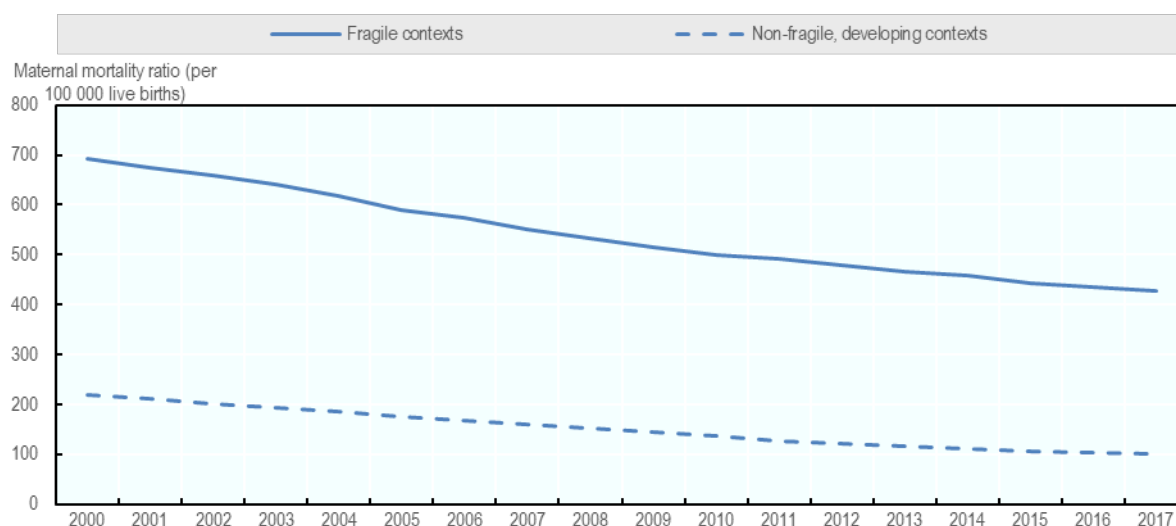
Progress has been slower on reducing infant and neonatal mortality in fragile contexts, though it is still substantial. The average rate of infant mortality declined by 42% in fragile contexts between 2000 and 2019, compared to declines of 47% globally and 59% in non-fragile contexts. Rates vary widely across fragile contexts in 2019. Libya, for example, reports an infant mortality rate of 9.9 per 1 000 live births while the Central African Republic infant mortality rate was 81 per 1 000 live births. Neonatal mortality declined by 32% in fragile contexts from 2000 to 2019 but by 56% in non-fragile contexts.

### *Maternal mortality*

Maternal mortality rates are an indication of women's access to high-quality healthcare and their overall social and economic status in a particular country or context. Maternal deaths are preventable, as treatments for complications during pregnancy are well known (WHO, 2019<sub>[144]</sub>), but lack of access to skilled care during pregnancy can result in higher rates of maternal mortality. The rate of decline from 2000 to 2017 in fragile contexts is almost the same as the global average decline. However, the maternal mortality ratio in fragile contexts is 4 times greater than in non-fragile, developing contexts in 2017

(Figure 3.10). This corresponds to broader health trends that show fragile contexts are making progress on these sustainable development indicators but at a slower rate than their counterparts. More attention from the international donor community is needed.

**Figure 3.10. Progress on maternal mortality in fragile vs. non-fragile, developing contexts, 2000-17**



Note: This figure is calculated using a weighted average of the rate in each fragile context, weighted by the number of live births.

Source: World Bank (2020<sup>[140]</sup>), *Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births)*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT>; UN DESA (2019<sup>[143]</sup>), *Number of births, both sexes combined (thousands) (database)*, <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

### *Life expectancy*

Life expectancy in the average fragile context reached a historic high in 2017, the most recent year for which data are available. However, at 64 years, life expectancy is 10 years less than in the average, non-fragile developing context. Moreover, this disparity masks the significant variation across fragile contexts and dimensions of fragility. For example, the life expectancy of people living in contexts experiencing severe environmental fragility is 61 years on average. In 2017, life expectancy in the 57 fragile contexts ranged from a high of 76 years in Iran to 52 years in Central African Republic. Reported life expectancy was lower than 60 years in 14, or a quarter, of the 57 fragile contexts.

### *Universal health coverage*

The performance of fragile contexts on health indicators that are central to Agenda 2030 underscores the importance of removing barriers to healthcare in low and middle-income countries. The projected cost to these countries of the lack of high-quality healthcare is USD 11.2 trillion over 2015-30 (UNDP, 2019<sup>[145]</sup>). In 2019, UN member states adopted the Political Declaration for the UN High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, highlighting the importance of universal health coverage for meeting the SDGs. To make it a reality, the next step is to resource it appropriately through a range of financing sources.

## **Conflict and violence**

Target 16.1 of SDG 16 commits all states to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.” Violence exists in fragile contexts in “multiple forms, modalities and patterns” across all

dimensions of fragility as both a driver and outcome of fragility (OECD, 2016, p. 20<sup>[11]</sup>). The 2002 World Health Organization definition of violence remains pertinent: “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (WHO, 2002, p. 4<sup>[146]</sup>). In every instance of someone suffering from violence and conflict, there are by association individuals, communities and contexts who intentionally use force for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is important when considering data on violence to acknowledge both its impact, its means and utility. This approach enhances understanding of how human nature, society and systems overlap in fragile contexts and the extent to which they are driven by fear, honour and interest (Coker, 2018, pp. 24-28<sup>[147]</sup>).

### ***Deaths from violent conflict on and off the battlefield are concentrated in fragile contexts***

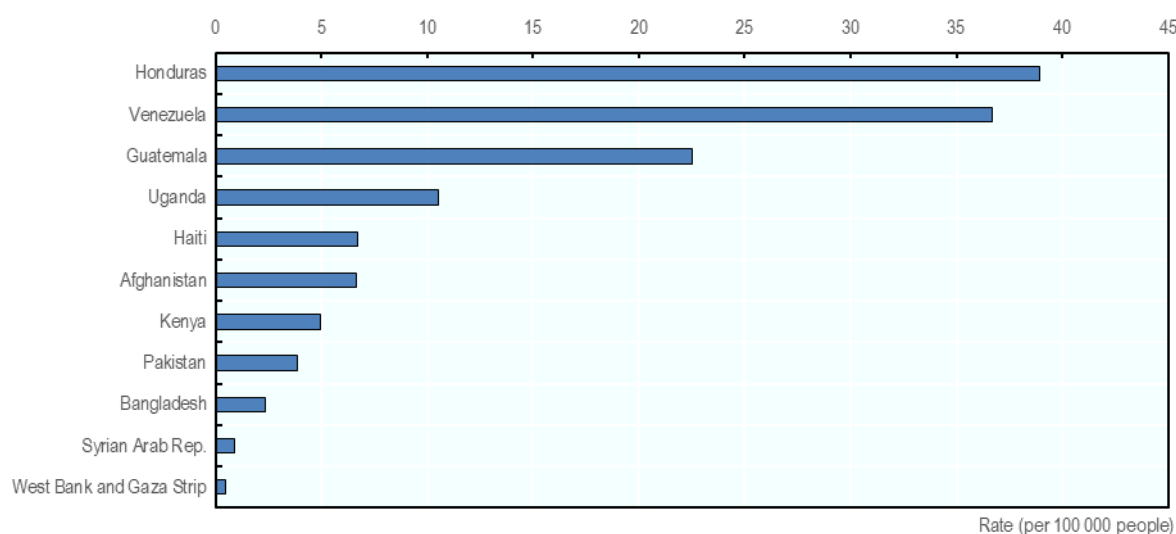
From January 2018 through December 2019, incidents of violence against civilians in fragile contexts increased by 56% from 1 693 to 2 639 (ACLED, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>). The character of violence as it is experienced in fragile contexts also is changing.

In 2017 and 2018, the latest two-year period for which data are available, the worldwide number of violent conflicts on average was the highest for any two-year interval since the end of the Second World War. Battle-related deaths declined from a peak of 85 600 in 2016 to just under more than 53 700 in 2018, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Pettersson, Högladh and Öberg, 2019<sup>[60]</sup>; Gleditsch et al., 2002<sup>[61]</sup>). However, in 2019, 96% of battle-related deaths from armed conflict occurred in the 57 fragile contexts. In 2019, the average probability of violent conflict was almost three times higher in fragile contexts than in non-fragile contexts and twice as high as the global average (Halkia et al., 2019<sup>[148]</sup>). While global deaths from terrorism are 52% below their peak in 2014, terrorism is still disproportionality affecting fragile contexts. In 2019, 15 of the top 20 countries most affected by terrorism were fragile contexts (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019, pp. 8-9<sup>[149]</sup>). Since 2013, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria and Nigeria have consistently been among the top five most affected contexts (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019<sup>[149]</sup>).

### *Homicides*

Data limitations make it difficult to estimate homicide rates globally and especially in fragile contexts, though initiatives such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s global registry on violent deaths will help better monitor violence worldwide, particularly for SDG 16 targets. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides the most recent official estimates in its global study on homicide in 2019 (UNODC, 2019<sup>[150]</sup>). But for 2018, the latest year for which data are available, only 11 of the 57 fragile contexts reported on homicides. As shown in Figure 3.11, Honduras had the highest homicide rate per 100 000 population among the fragile contexts with data available.

Figure 3.11. Homicide rates in fragile contexts, 2018



Source: UNODC (2020<sup>[151]</sup>), *Homicide rates (database)*, <https://dataunodc.un.org/content/data/homicide/homicide-rate>.

Disaggregating by gender, UNODC reports that 87 000 women were “intentionally killed” globally in 2017, accounting for 19% of the global homicide rate, and notes that “[a]lthough women and girls account for a far smaller share of total homicides than men, they bear by far the greatest burden of intimate partner/family-related homicide, and intimate partner homicide” (UNODC, 2019, p. 11<sup>[152]</sup>).

### ***Fast-growing youth populations and inequality compound the risk of violence for fragile contexts***

Global violent death rates (per 100 000 population) recorded since 2004 have fluctuated between a record low of 7.43 in 2010 to a high of 8.47 in 2014 (Small Arms Survey, 2020<sup>[153]</sup>). In 2018, the most recent year for which data are available, 596 000 people suffered violent deaths, the lowest violent death rate since 2012. The rise in global violent deaths in fragile contexts jeopardises targets associated with SDG 16.1 (reduce violence everywhere). South and Central America and the Caribbean are most affected (Hideg and Alvazzi del Frate, 2019<sup>[154]</sup>). For example, in 2018, Venezuela had the third highest rate of violent deaths globally at 87.3 and Honduras the fifth highest, with a rate of 66.6. The highest death rate was reported in Syria, at 187.9 deaths per 100 000 population (Small Arms Survey, 2020<sup>[155]</sup>). It is also worth noting that 6 of 20 contexts most affected by violent deaths are small island or micro states. UNODC findings relating to youth, particularly young men, are also concerning for fragile contexts. In the Americas, for instance, the homicide rate for 18-19 year-old males is estimated at 46 per 100 000, suggesting they are at far greater risk than their peers in other regions (UNODC, 2019, p. 1<sup>[152]</sup>). The factors driving this risk are frequently associated with issues of inequality and, according to Muggah and Raleigh (2019<sup>[156]</sup>), “the ascendance and dominance of political elites” who rationally apply violence as means to attain their political objectives. Noting that “elites frequently enlist ... armed gangs to do their bidding”, the authors also observe that with legitimate frustrations, “young men excluded from the formal labour force with little allegiance to any specific cause” can easily be drawn into highly destructive situations of organised violence. Examples of this dynamic can be found in Afghanistan, DRC and Libya (Muggah and Raleigh, 2019<sup>[156]</sup>).

## Systemic shocks and disasters

Disasters multiply threats in fragile contexts and can trigger systemic shocks that stress and compound existing fragility and coping capacity. They seriously disrupt the functioning of a community or society by interacting with vulnerabilities and weak capacities and can expose and deepen fault lines of fragility, potentially triggering one or more systemic shocks (UN, 2016<sup>[157]</sup>). In doing so, they can have impacts across multiple areas, from accelerating displacement and poverty to disrupting life on land and access to health and education.

### ***The preponderance of deaths from disasters are occurring in fragile contexts***

In 2019, 52.1 million people were affected by natural disasters in fragile contexts, the highest yearly number since 2010 and accounting for 55% of the total number of people affected by natural disasters worldwide (EM-DAT, 2020<sup>[158]</sup>). On average, 6 800 people died from natural disasters in fragile contexts each year between 2011 and 2019. Data on mortality rates from COVID-19 in fragile contexts are not complete at this writing, but the 2019 data suggest these contexts are particularly susceptible to epidemics: three fourths (11 000) of the deaths from disasters in fragile contexts were due to epidemics. Further, all of the deaths globally from droughts (77 people) in 2019 occurred in fragile contexts (EM-DAT, 2020<sup>[158]</sup>). This highlights the intersection of climate change and fragility and points to vulnerabilities to food insecurity in these contexts. Since 2011, natural disasters have displaced four million people each year (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019<sup>[159]</sup>).

### ***Disasters can arrest and reverse progress on SDGs everywhere, but especially in fragile contexts due to their multidimensional fragility***

Climate change is increasing natural disasters events, with multidimensional implications for fragile contexts and their recovery. The severity and unusual congruence of the cyclones described in Box 3.2 are examples of how climate change is increasingly impacting global weather systems. Events such as cyclones, forest fires, droughts and flooding are expected to continue to grow in frequency and severity (World Meteorological Organization, 2020<sup>[160]</sup>).

The impact of cyclones on Mozambique and Zimbabwe, which suffered high mortality rates and depended heavily on international assistance, demonstrates the vulnerability of low-income fragile contexts (Box 3.2).



### Box 3.2. Lessons from the impact of Cyclone Idai on Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe

In the space of six weeks in March and April 2019, Mozambique was hit by two of the top five worst storms ever to hit the country, Cyclones Idai and Kenneth. The impact of the cyclones was immediate and lasting on Mozambique as well as Malawi and Zimbabwe: more than 1 000 people died and the flooding that followed affected approximately 2.6 million people through displacement, food insecurity and disease including cases of cholera, malaria and respiratory infections that increased as living conditions deteriorated (Oxfam, 2019<sup>[161]</sup>).

The disaster magnified risk and exposed coping capacities. Critical infrastructure – roads, schools and hospitals – were destroyed. Livelihoods, particularly those in agriculture, were decimated, leading to an associated risk relating to food security. Research conducted on the impact in Zimbabwe found that the disaster also exposed women and girls to gender-based violence (Chatiza, 2019, p. 13<sup>[162]</sup>). The same research found that in some regions, “councils, people and companies” displayed effective innovation and good practice at local levels. The economic impact was also significant. The World Bank’s Rapid Impact Needs Assessment estimated the financial impact at between USD 542-616 million in “damages or losses due to the cyclone” in the districts affected (World Bank, 2019<sup>[163]</sup>).

The incremental progression of climate change can compound fragility in a variety of ways. In 2019, the deteriorating food security situation in the Horn of Africa – including in the fragile contexts of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda – was linked to displacement, conflict, violence, crop failures, income insecurity and limited capacity to cope with events such as “the worst desert locust outbreak in 25 years” (World Meteorological Organization, 2020, pp. 33-34<sup>[160]</sup>). Though fragile contexts only account for 5% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, they disproportionately experience impacts of climate change. As the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction notes, “Disasters, many of which are exacerbated by climate change and which are increasing in frequency and intensity, significantly impede progress towards sustainable development” (UN, 2019<sup>[164]</sup>).

## Forced displacement and migration

Climate change will undoubtedly drive displacement (forced and economic), but the substance and scale of such migration are dependent on a wide range of variables. While displacement is often linked to conflict, it also is frequently driven by combinations of context-specific fragility. Creating trajectories on forced displacements out to ten years, then, is of limited value. While local correlations may be identifiable, macro-level projections are more difficult. However, as an indicator of the pressures that exist within and between fragile contexts, analysis of forced displacements can reveal much about progress towards Agenda 2030.

### ***Fragile contexts are most affected by forced displacement and multidimensional fragility is driving displacement***

An estimated 26.0 million people were refugees by the end of 2019, the highest number ever recorded. Fragile contexts are among the most affected by forced displacement, hosting half of the world’s refugees in 2019. Additionally, 18.4 million refugees originated from fragile contexts. In total, almost 80 million people globally were forcibly displaced as of 2019 as a result of conflict, violence or human rights violations, including internally displaced people (IDPs) and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2020<sup>[165]</sup>). One quarter of the world’s refugees are living in contexts experiencing severe environmental fragility.

Fragility also is driving displacement from and in countries of origin. More than two thirds (67%) of all refugees worldwide came from just five fragile contexts: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Somalia, all



of which are extremely fragile, and Myanmar. Three of the top five developing contexts globally that host the greatest number of refugees also are fragile: Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.4 million) and Sudan (1.1 million) (UNHCR, 2020<sup>[165]</sup>). In 2018, there were 10 million new displacements due to conflict in fragile contexts, second highest number after the peak of 10.5 million in 2017. Worldwide, 31.2 million people are internally displaced by conflict (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019<sup>[159]</sup>), and 3.6 million people are displaced due to disasters. There are 4.5 million displaced Venezuelans as of the end of 2019, with 3.6 million being displaced abroad (UNHCR, 2020<sup>[165]</sup>). Neighbouring countries severely affected by this displacement include Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

These shifts highlight the interplay of fragility and displacement. Not only is fragility driving displacement. Refugees and IDPs also are living in fragile contexts where they face particular vulnerabilities and deprivations, with many potential consequences. In light of these trends, it is important to examine the relationship between protracted displacements, unresolved conflicts and potential peace activities and to do so in parallel with humanitarian and development responses to displacement in the contexts where refugees are living.

***Forced displacements increase risk and undermine coping capacity in fragile contexts, and protracted displacements compound their development and humanitarian needs***

Monitoring forced displacements helps to understand how pressure builds and spreads across fragile systems and networks and affects progress on many SDGs. Identifying how many people are displaced as well as the causes and impact of forced displacement is critical to effective engagement across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. As noted in an OECD (2019<sup>[166]</sup>) Development Policy Paper, many “refugee situations begin in crisis, but they endure to become long-term phenomena, requiring a development response” (OECD, 2019, p. 18<sup>[166]</sup>). As a consequence, managing the impact of forced displacement has become a generational issue in some contexts. An example is Lebanon, which has hosted different waves of refugees for decades. In mid-2019, Lebanon was hosting an estimated 924 400 Syrian refugees as well as 475 075 Palestinian refugees spread across 12 camps, some of which date to 1948; in 2019, it was estimated that refugees make up 30% of the population of Lebanon (UNRWA, 2019<sup>[167]</sup>; European Commission, 2020<sup>[168]</sup>).

As of 2018, 78% of all refugees, or 15.9 million people, were living in protracted refugee situations of more than five years. (UNHCR, 2020<sup>[165]</sup>) Issues of fragility in the country of origin also need to be considered for people who remain in conflict zones as, “given their diminished resilience, those who stay behind are increasingly unable to cope with exogenous shocks, so that events unrelated to conflict may trigger waves of displacement” (World Bank, 2017<sup>[169]</sup>).

***The impact of COVID-19 adds to the challenge of addressing the needs of both refugees and host communities***

The initial impact of the pandemic demonstrates the extent to which displaced communities, including refugees, are among the most vulnerable people in the world. Kluge et al. (2020<sup>[170]</sup>) finds that refugees and migrants are at increased risk of contracting diseases, including COVID-19, because they typically live in overcrowded conditions without the means to follow basic public health measures and because they have limited access to healthcare services. Refugees and migrants also suffer socio-economic affects associated with loss of income and their difficulties accessing legal and other services (Kluge et al., 2020<sup>[170]</sup>). The UN Refugee Agency identified “a spike in domestic violence and psychological distress among people of concern” that suggests that the “secondary socio-economic and long-lasting impact[s] of COVID-19 are in turn deepening a poverty and protection crisis” (UNHCR, 2020<sup>[171]</sup>).

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, and the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-

Development-Peace Nexus together enhance global understanding of the nature of, and responses to forced displacement. These mechanisms must now adapt to a post-pandemic reality that will put stress on fragile and non-fragile contexts, potentially limiting the support available to alleviate the pressures and impact of forced displacement.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> These figures are author's calculations based on the UN DESA (2020<sup>[57]</sup>) *World Population Prospects 2019* database, available at <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

<sup>2</sup> This summation is an approximation as the latest year of available data varies by context, ranging from 2002 (Guinea) to 2019 (West Bank and Gaza Strip). There are notable gaps in data on this issue.

<sup>3</sup> The SDG targets are as follows: 16.3, promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all; 16.6, develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; 16.7, and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels.

<sup>4</sup> These factors are based on analysis of data from the Global Education Monitoring Report, available at the UNESCO (2020<sup>[120]</sup>) Education Progress website at <https://www.education-progress.org/en/articles/quality/>.

<sup>5</sup> To arrive at these figures, authors used 2020 population data from the UN (2020<sup>[57]</sup>), available at <https://population.un.org/wpp/>, and under-five mortality rate data from the World Bank (2020<sup>[140]</sup>), available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT>.



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