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WorldViews

# Leaders pledged to greatly reduce poverty by 2030. In some places, deprivation may only get worse.



A member of the "Boa Mistura" collective works on a mural that reads, "We are what we do to change what we are," a quote from Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, at the National Drama Center building in Madrid, on Sept. 14, 2018. (Santi Donaire/EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock)

By **Siobhán O'Grady**  
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When world leaders adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, 193 countries [committed to achieving 17 objectives](#) by 2030. They included greatly reducing poverty, improving sustainability and gender equality and enhancing global health.

But a new report from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has found that “actors have woefully ignored” a crucial part of the agreement: to leave no state behind.

The report said that at this point, on average, only 35 percent of low- and middle-income countries are on track to achieve certain goals on time. Fragile states are falling even further behind, with only 18 percent on track. And those most at risk of further suffering are displaced people, who are already the most vulnerable. Many of them may have fled their homes only to end up in another state facing conflict.

“Without the concerted efforts of the international community to address the needs of people caught in crisis and to measure the impact of this support, we will not achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals] for all, and the gap between this marginalized group and the rest of the world will grow,” said the report.

By 2030, deprivation in some places could get much worse, the report predicted. It forecast that in certain states, “the number of undernourished people will rise by 84.4 million, the number lacking improved sanitation by 45 million, and the number living in slums by at least 106 million.”

In a call with The Washington Post, IRC President and CEO David Miliband said that “the world’s extreme poor are going to be caught in a vicious circle of conflict, violence and displacement in fragile and failing states.”

“We’ve got a situation in conflict states where extreme poverty is rising,” he said.

The United Nations General Assembly is meeting this week, and Miliband said this report should serve as a “wake-up call” that the international community has to do more to help struggling states achieve the goals. As [The Post’s Carol Morello reported on Monday](#), leaders of countries accepting the vast majority of refugees have expressed grievances at the General Assembly that wealthy countries have let them down by failing to provide enough resources to manage the influxes.

“Commitments have not been fulfilled,” said Turkish Foreign Minister Mehmet Cavusoglu. “Our calls for more burden and responsibility sharing fell on deaf ears.”

President Trump’s “America First” policy has alarmed other international donors and recipients, prompting fears that U.S. funding reviews for humanitarian support will leave some places even deeper in limbo. The White House recently announced that it is reducing its maximum refugee allotment significantly.

And Miliband said the United States has typically acted as “sort of a bellwether for the international system.”

“When the U.S. increases aid, other countries see the need to step up, so the danger is when the U.S. is sending a signal that it’s stepping back, that could set off a chain reaction,” he said.

Sarah Charles, the IRC’s senior director for humanitarian aid policy, said that some conflict-affected states are “not only not seeing the gains we’ve seen in rest of world but in some cases are even falling further behind, and having negative progress against the goals.” A key aspect of this set of goals was ensuring that all those who signed on achieved significant progress, prompting concern that so many states are drastically lagging behind. In some cases, Charles said, necessary information is not even being collected about displaced populations, essentially ensuring that they will be left out of any progress related to the goals.

Experts are particularly concerned by the situation in places such as Yemen, where protracted conflict has pushed civilians to the brink. There, disease and armed conflict have led to [many thousands of deaths](#). The conflict has also derailed the economy and interrupted social services.

“Yemen is actually the classic case of a poor country that’s getting poorer because the infrastructure is being smashed by fighting, people are being displaced from their homes ... [millions] are out of school, there’s no access to drinking water,” Miliband said. “There’s a crisis of diplomacy, which explains the growing number of civil wars.”

Conflicts are raging in a number of already poor countries, including in the Lake Chad basin and South Sudan. In some places, famine has recently exacerbated the effects of the conflict.

Many of those fleeing from long civil wars are finding refuge in countries that do not necessarily have the resources to host them, such as Lebanon or Bangladesh. Elizabeth Stuart, head of the Growth, Poverty and Inequality Program at ODI, said host countries for refugees are so often already struggling before a refugee population arrives. This, she said, ultimately leads to an “increasing and doubling down on this deprivation.”

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