

# Chapter 12

## A Review of Sustainable Development Goal 3 Indicators in European Countries Before the COVID–19 Pandemic

**Nuray Tezcan**

*Haliç University, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In recent years, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been one of the most important issues for countries throughout the world. In the SDG framework, Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3) is devoted to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.” However, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has been experienced since the beginning of 2020, has deeply affected countries in all respects. Accordingly, the health systems of countries have come to the point of collapsing. This situation has been bringing about setback to meet the targets of SDG3. The purpose of this study is to determine the status of SDG3 indicators in European countries before the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, firstly, countries are clustered based on their health indicators given in the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2020 using cluster analysis. Having classified similar countries, each cluster has been examined by considering the effects of COVID-19 pandemic.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was declared by United Nations (UN) in 2015 and this agenda includes 17 goals and 169 targets to be fulfilled until 2030. Depending on this, countries have tracked their progress regularly using various assessment tools. Thus, they both realize their status and, if it is needed, catch the opportunity to take corrective actions. Among SDGs, Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3) is devoted to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” and it has a total of 13 targets and their 27 corresponding indicators. Targets included in SDG3 are provided in Appendix 1.

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## ***A Review of Sustainable Development Goal 3 Indicators in European Countries Before the Pandemic***

On the other hand, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which started in Wuhan, China in December 2019 has affected all areas in countries throughout the world and the devastating effect of this outbreak has been deeply felt all over the world. Especially, health systems of countries were suffered due to the burden of the outbreak. In many countries, inadequacies or shortcomings regarding the density of healthcare workers, medical equipment and immunization were revealed. Moreover, people avoided going to hospitals or healthcare facilities even to get basic health care services (UN, 2020a). According to World Health Organization (WHO), as of May 2021, more than 4.5 million people died due to coronavirus disease and also there have been almost 222 million confirmed cases related to the pandemic (WHO, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to determine the status of SDG3 indicators in European Countries before the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that there have been some advantages to be aware of the pre-COVID-19 situation. Thus, countries can understand the cause of the difficulties, deficiencies, and inadequacies experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, knowing the situation regarding the health indicators in the SDG3 framework may ensure long-term recovery after COVID-19 (SDSN and IEEP, 2020:2).

The rest of the study is organized as follows: In the second section, besides main health indicators such as life expectancy at birth, health expenditure as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and health expenditure per capita, literature review including negative effects of the pandemic are presented. In the following section, the current status of European Countries in terms of SDG3 indicators are provided, and also data set, variables, methods used and results obtained from analyses are given as research design. The last section is dedicated to solutions and recommendations.

## **BACKGROUND**

From the beginning to the present, COVID-19 pandemic negatively affects the lives of the people. With respect to maternal and child health, childhood immunization programs have been disrupted in many countries, almost 380 million children were deprived of school meals because of lockdowns and child labour has increased during the pandemic. Thousands of women postponed doctor's checkups or could not access contraceptive services due to the fear of being exposed to the pandemic. This situation caused thousands of unintended pregnancies. Also, it is expected that deaths from communicable diseases will increase in the world, and deaths from malaria will rise by 100% due to the lack of health services in sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 2020a).

In the literature, there have been several studies regarding the negative effects of the pandemic on health. During lockdown periods, many people have some mental health problems such as depression, anxiety symptoms, acute stress, or sleep disorders. Santini and Koyanagi (2021) found that about 30% of the European population who are older than 50 years experienced a mental health problem during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sommerlad et al. (2021) investigated whether a relationship between social relationships and depressive symptoms based on a sample from the United Kingdom and they found that there is a negative relationship between these variables. Another study related to mental health is conducted by Sonderskov et al. (2020). They determined that the COVID-19 pandemic has negative effects on Danish people and moreover females have been affected more than males from the outbreak. McCracken et al. (2020) conducted a similar study for another Nordic country, Sweden. They revealed that COVID-19 symptoms, general health status, history of mental health problems, worries about family

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