Media Update

1 December 2020

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United Nations

SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY
FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY
2 December 2020

This year's global protests against systemic racism have brought renewed attention to a legacy of injustices all over the world whose roots lie in the dark history of colonialism and slavery.

But slavery is not simply a matter of history.

Today, more than 40 million people are still victims of contemporary slavery.

Women and girls account for over 71 per cent.

Slavery manifests itself today through descent-based servitude, forced labour, child labour, domestic servitude, forced marriage, debt bondage, trafficking in persons for the purpose of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, and the forced recruitment of children in armed conflict.

Poor and marginalized groups, in particular racial and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and migrants, are disproportionally affected by contemporary forms of slavery.

Gender inequality further reinforces patterns of discrimination.

Today, I call on Member States, civil society and the private sector to strengthen their collective efforts to end these abhorrent practices.

I also call for support to identify, protect and empower victims and survivors, including by contributing to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

Next year is the 20th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination.

This milestone document defines slavery and slavery-like practices as flagrant violations of human rights.

We cannot accept these violations in the 21st century.

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UNICEF
PRESS RELEASE

Eighty eight percent of South Asia's school-age children have no internet access at home, new UNICEF-ITU report says

The International Telecommunication Union and UNICEF call for urgent investment to bridge a digital divide currently preventing children and young people from accessing quality digital learning and opportunities online

NEW YORK/GENEVA/ISLAMABAD, 1 December 2020 – Eighty eight percent of South Asia's school-age children do not have internet connection in their homes, according to a new joint report from UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The report *How Many Children and Youth Have Internet Access at Home?* notes that globally two-thirds of school-age children have no internet access at home. There is a similar lack of access among young people aged 15-24 years old, with 759 million or 63 per cent of young people unconnected at home.

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"That so many children and young people have no internet at home is more than a digital gap –it is a digital canyon," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. "Lack of connectivity doesn't just limit children and young people's ability to connect online. It prevents them from competing in the modern economy. It isolates them from the world. And in the event of school closures, such as those currently experienced by millions due to COVID-19, it causes them to lose out on education. Put bluntly: Lack of internet access is costing the next generation their futures."

In Pakistan, around 40 million children are affected by COVID-19 school closures forcing students to rely on virtual learning. For those with no internet access, education can be out of reach. Even before the pandemic, a growing cohort of young people needed to learn foundational, transferable, digital, job-specific and entrepreneurial skills to compete in the 21st century economy.

The digital divide is perpetuating inequalities that already divide countries and communities, the report notes. Children and young people from the poorest households, rural and lower income states are falling even further behind their peers and are left with very little opportunity to ever catch up.

Globally, among school-age children from richest households, 58 per cent have internet connection at home, compared with only 16 per cent from the poorest households. The same disparity exists across country income level as well. Less than 1 in 20 school-age children from low-income countries have internet connection at home, compared with nearly 9 in 10 from high-income countries.

There are also geographic disparities within countries and across regions. Globally, around 60 per cent of school-age children in urban areas do not have internet access at home, compared with around three-quarters of school-age children in rural households. School-age children in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the most affected, with around 9 in 10 children unconnected.

Region	School-age children 3-17 years old unconnected at home
West and Central Africa	95% - 194 million
East and Southern Africa	88% - 191 million
South Asia	88% - 449 million
Middle East and North Africa	75% - 89 million

Latin America and the Caribbean	49% - 74 million
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	42% - 36 million
East Asia and the Pacific	32% - 183 million
Global	**67% - 1.3 billion**

Last year, UNICEF and ITU launched Giga, a global initiative to connect every school and its surrounding community to the Internet. Working with governments, Giga has now mapped over 800,000 schools in 30 countries. With this data, Giga works with governments, industry, civil sector, and private sector partners to craft compelling investment cases for blended public-private funding to build the connectivity infrastructure needed to deploy digital learning solutions and other services.

The initiative is now collaborating under the Reimagine Education initiative and in coordination with Generation Unlimited. Through its Reimagine Education initiative, UNICEF aims to address the learning crisis and transform education by giving children and young people equal access to quality digital learning. A key to achieving this is universal internet connectivity.

Building on these efforts and on the importance of youth engagement, Generation Connect is an initiative launched by ITU to empower young people to engage and participate in the digital world.

Although the numbers in the UNICEF-ITU report present an alarming picture, the situation is likely worse due to compounding factors, such as affordability, safety and low levels of digital skills. According to the latest ITU data, low digital skills remain a barrier to meaningful participation in a digital society, while mobile telephony and internet access remain too expensive for many in the developing world as the result of vast disparities in purchasing power.

Even when children have a connection at home, they may not be able to access it because of the pressure to do chores or to work, lack of sufficient devices in the households, girls being permitted less or no internet access, or a lack of understanding of how to access opportunities online. There are also issues related to online safety since parents may be inadequately prepared to keep their children safe.

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Notes to editors:

The report uses a globally representative analysis on the availability of internet connection in households with children and young people aged between 0-25 years old, with data from more than 85 countries.

Download multimedia content here.

About UNICEF
UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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About ITU
The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), driving innovation in ICTs together with 193 Member States and a membership of over 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organizations. Established over 150 years ago in 1865, ITU is the intergovernmental body responsible for coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, improving communication infrastructure in the developing world, and establishing the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems. From broadband networks to cutting-edge wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, oceanographic and satellite-based earth monitoring as well as converging fixed-mobile phone, internet and broadcasting technologies, ITU is committed to connecting the world. For more information, visit **www.itu.int**.

About Generation Unlimited
Generation Unlimited (GenU) is a global multi-sector partnership to meet the urgent need for expanded education, training and employment opportunities for young people, aged 10 to 24, on an unprecedented scale.
www.generationunlimited.org

About Giga
Launched by ITU and UNICEF in 2019, Giga is a global initiative to connect every school to the internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice. It aims to ensure that every child is equipped with the digital public goods they need, and empowered to shape the future they want. For more information, visit www.gigaconnect.org.

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