

Media Update

15 October 2021

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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WRITTEN MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY 17 October 2021

Poverty is a moral indictment of our times.

For the first time in two decades, extreme poverty is on the rise.

Last year, around 120 million people fell into poverty as the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on economies and societies.

A lopsided recovery is further deepening inequalities between the Global North and South. Solidarity is missing in action – just when we need it most.

For example, vaccine inequality is allowing variants to develop and run wild, condemning the world to millions more deaths, and prolonging an economic slowdown that could cost trillions of dollars. We must end this outrage, tackle debt distress and ensure recovery investment in countries with the greatest need.

On this International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we commit to ‘Building Forward Better’. This requires a three-pronged approach to global recovery:

First, the recovery must be transformative – because we cannot go back to the endemic structural disadvantages and inequalities that perpetuated poverty even before the pandemic. We need stronger political

will and partnerships to achieve universal social protection by 2030 and invest in job re-skilling for the growing green economy. And we must invest in quality jobs in the care economy, which will promote greater equality and ensure everyone receives the dignified care they deserve.

Second, the recovery must be inclusive – because an uneven recovery is leaving much of humanity behind, increasing the vulnerability of already marginalized groups, and pushing the Sustainable Development Goals ever further out of reach.

The number of women in extreme poverty far outpaces that of men. Even before the pandemic, the 22 richest men in the world had more wealth than all the women in Africa – and that gap has only grown. We cannot recover with only half our potential. Economic investments must target women entrepreneurs, provide greater formalization of the informal sector, focus on education, social protection, universal childcare, health care and decent work, as well as bridge the digital divide including its deep gender dimension.

Third, the recovery must be sustainable – because we need to build a resilient, decarbonized and net-zero world.

Through it all, we need to listen far more to the views and guidance of people living in poverty, address indignities and dismantle barriers to inclusion in every society.

Today and every day, let us join hands to end poverty and create a world of justice, dignity and opportunity for all.

UNICEF

PRESS RELEASE

FACT SHEET: On Global Handwashing Day, UNICEF warns that 3 in 10 people do not have basic handwashing facilities at home to fight off infectious diseases

NEW YORK, 15 October 2021 – Although handwashing with soap is critical in the fight against infectious diseases, including COVID-19, globally, around 3 in 10 people – or 2.3 billion – do not have handwashing facilities with water and soap available at home. The situation is worst in the least developed countries, with over 6 in 10 people without access to basic hand hygiene, UNICEF warned on Global Handwashing Day.

“Global response efforts to the pandemic have created an unprecedented time for hand hygiene. Yet progress remains far too slow for the most vulnerable, underserved communities,” said UNICEF WASH Director Kelly Ann Naylor. “Hand hygiene cannot be viewed as a temporary provision to manage COVID-19. Further long-term investment in water, sanitation and hygiene can help prevent the next health crisis from coming. It also means fewer people falling ill with respiratory infections, fewer children dying from diarrheal diseases, and more pregnant mothers and newborns protected from preventable conditions like sepsis.”

The latest data show that some progress has been achieved since 2015. For example, the global population with access to basic hand hygiene at home has increased from 5 billion to 5.5 billion, or from 67 per cent to 71 per cent. However, if current trends persist, 1.9 billion people will still not have access to basic hand hygiene by the end of the decade.

According to the latest estimates:

- Globally, 3 in 10 people – or 2.3 billion – do not have access to basic handwashing facilities with water and soap at home, including 670 million people without any facility at all. In the least developed countries, more than 6 in 10 people lack basic hand hygiene facilities at home.
- 2 in 5 schools worldwide do not have basic hygiene services with water and soap, affecting 818 million students, of which 462 million attend schools with no facility at all. In the least developed countries, 7 out of 10 schools have no place for children to wash their hands.
- 1 in 3 healthcare facilities worldwide does not have hand hygiene facilities at points of care where the patient, healthcare worker, and treatment involve contact with the patient.

- The cost to provide hand hygiene in all homes in 46 of the world's least-developed countries by 2030 is an estimated US\$11 billion*. The cost to governments for hygiene promotion are estimated to be equal to 25 cents per capita per year.

Deep inequalities exist across and within countries regarding access and progress, with the most vulnerable children and families suffering the most. Moreover, in fragile, conflict-affected, and refugee settings, progress is especially slow:

- In fragile contexts, 1 in 5 people do not have any hand hygiene facility at home.
- In 8 out of 20 countries for which UNHCR has data, more than 30 per cent of refugee households do not have access to soap.
- Globally, current progress rates must quadruple to reach universal hygiene by 2030. In the least developed countries, the rate of progress would need to increase ten-fold, and in fragile contexts, it would need to accelerate by a factor of 23.

UNICEF urges governments to commit to providing hand hygiene, not as a temporary response to the pandemic, but as an investment in public health and economic resilience. The latest joint [UNICEF and WHO report](#) identifies five accelerators that can enable governments to rapidly scale up access to hand hygiene, including good governance, smart public finance, capacity building, consistent data, and innovation.

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Notes to Editors:

** This estimate assumes that households would bear the cost of installing handwashing facilities and the cost associated with purchasing water and soap. Governments would bear the cost of hygiene promotion, both initial and 'top-up'.*

Least Developed Countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe,

Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen, Zambia

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Read the latest report on handwashing [here](#).

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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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