

Media Update

9 December 2021

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL -- MESSAGE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

New York, 10 December 2021

Our world is at a crossroads.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and the expansion of digital technology into all areas of our lives have created new threats to human rights.

Exclusion and discrimination are rampant.

Public space is shrinking.

Poverty and hunger are rising for the first time in decades.

Millions of children are missing out on their right to education.

Inequality is deepening.

But we can choose a different path.

Seventy-three years ago today, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The principles set out in this simple Declaration remain the key to realizing all human rights – civil, economic, cultural, social, and political – for all people, everywhere.

Recovery from the pandemic must be an opportunity to expand human rights and freedoms, and to rebuild trust.

Trust in the justice and impartiality of laws and institutions.

Confidence that a life of dignity is within reach.

Faith that people can get a fair hearing and resolve their grievances peacefully.

The United Nations stands for the rights of every member of our human family.

Today and every day, we will continue to work for justice, equality, dignity and human rights for all.

Happy Human Rights Day.

UNICEF

PRESS RELEASE

Urgent investment in South Asia's children vital to prevent devastating impacts of COVID-19 being felt for decades – UNICEF

Agency says action now can reignite opportunities for every child to contribute towards a better long-term future for the region

KATHMANDU, 9 December 2021: Governments across South Asia need to urgently expand investments in basic health, education, and protection services for the millions of children and their families whose lives have been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters, says a new UNICEF report released on the agency's 75th anniversary.

The report, “Reigniting Opportunities for Children in South Asia,” highlights the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on the most marginalized of the region’s 600 million children. The report says that unless rollbacks in critical health, immunization, nutrition, protection and education services are reversed, the worst consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will persist for decades. The report notes that humanitarian disasters and climate-related hazards such as droughts, floods and air pollution have furthered exacerbated the situation for children.

Prior to the pandemic, South Asia was one of the fastest-growing regions in the world, with a large youth population poised to further accelerate growth and significant progress being made for children. Child mortality rates more than halved in the past quarter century, while the number of children suffering from stunting fell by more than a third since 2000. Secondary school enrolment rose steadily, and the number of girls getting married before age 18 fell. Over 90 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water. “The remarkable achievements our region has made in advancing child rights over recent decades are now at risk,” said George Laryea-Adjei, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia. “If we fail to act, the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for decades to come. But by acting now, we can reignite opportunities and ensure every child in South Asia not only survives but thrives.”

The report identifies immediate priorities, such as fully restoring basic health and immunization services and helping students catch up on the learning they have missed. But it also outlines the lessons learned and the opportunities that have been opened up by the pandemic which can now be leveraged into gains for all children.

They include public health systems that have been strengthened through infrastructure introduced to better respond to COVID-19 – such as improved cold chain and oxygen infrastructure. Other opportunities include increased public conversations around mental health which are helping to spotlight needs and drive demand for more services, and increased recognition of the region’s deep digital divide and opportunities to bridge it.

While making urgent investments to reverse rollbacks in progress for children, the region also needs to be prepared for future waves of the pandemic, UNICEF said.

“Just 30 per cent of South Asia is fully vaccinated, leaving families dangerously unprotected as new variants continue to emerge,” George Laryea-Adjei said. “Governments around the world must ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. The pandemic will not be over for anyone until it is over for everyone.”

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children was reiterated in a youth statement entitled “Our Future, Our Rights, Our Voices,” the outcome of extensive virtual consultations involving nearly 500 young people from the 8 South Asian countries.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has made our situation much worse. Our schools have been closed, often for months at a time. Many of us may never return to school,” said the statement, which was shared with UNICEF, the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and senior government officials. “With your action, we can transform the lives of young people in South Asia.”

The report outlines the key actions needed to reverse the rollbacks in progress for children, and begin building a better future for every child in South Asia, among them:

1. Expanding investment in child-sensitive social protection programmes, especially for the most vulnerable children and their families.
2. Resuming in-person learning in schools while addressing learning losses, bridging the region’s digital divide and improving the quality of education for every child.
3. Stronger integrated national health and nutrition systems that protect children from deadly but treatable diseases and reverse the region’s child nutrition crisis.
4. Protecting children from neglect and abuse and the promotion of the mental health of all children and young people.
5. Urgent action to protect children from climate change through increased investment in climate adaptation and resilience in key services for children.

In 2020, disruptions linked to COVID-19 led to an estimated 228,000 additional child deaths, while an estimated 5.3 million children missed out on vital vaccinations, nearly 1.9 million more than the previous year. An additional 3.85 million children are thought to have suffered from wasting in 2020.

School closures lasted longer than in almost any other region. Over 400 million children and their teachers were forced to transition to remote learning in a region with low connectivity and device affordability, leading to alarming inequities in learning opportunities. Poorer children in remote areas, girls and students with disabilities were disproportionately affected.

“Today’s crises present a unique opportunity to build strong and adaptable health, education and protection systems that meet the needs of all children,” said George Laryea-Adjei. “UNICEF will continue to work closely with governments in South Asia, as well as businesses, civil society, and children themselves, to make sure that no child is left behind.”

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Notes to editors:

- Download multimedia content [here](#).
- Download the report [here](#). (Will go live on 9 December)
- For additional information, visit UNICEF in South Asia [webpage](#). (Will go live on 9 December)

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. UNICEF’s [Regional Office for South Asia](#) (ROSA) works with UNICEF Country Offices in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to help to save children’s lives, defend their rights, and help them fulfil their potential. For more information about UNICEF’s work for children in South Asia, visit www.unicef.org/rosa and follow UNICEF ROSA on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). For more information about COVID-19, click [here](#).

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UN Women

PRESS RELEASE

President of Pakistan inaugurates the National Gender Portal, a flagship initiative by NCSW and UN Women to collect data on gender statistics

Islamabad: The President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, inaugurated the landmark digital tool 'National Gender Data Portal' developed by UN Women and the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) to collect data on gender statistics, today in the Presidency. This is the first digital platform that will serve as a one-stop-shop repository for high-quality data and evidence from across the country on more than 400 qualitative and quantitative indicators under ten themes including demographics, education, health, economic empowerment, violence against women, access to justice, elections and political participation, disabilities, poverty, and social protection and response to emergencies.

Pakistan has made significant strides towards amplifying its social safety networks and reaching marginalized groups particularly women and girls through programmes such as Ehsaas and Benazir Income Support Programme. However, this progress has not been captured in data used by global indices, and thus, Globally Pakistan seems to be performing dismally on gender related indicators. The NGDP will provide a counter-narrative to such portrayals, through reliable and comprehensive data as well as highlighting areas of excellence, that will paint a more accurate picture of the situation on the ground. Such data collection and analysis will also enable government institutions and other stakeholders to make the best possible evidence-based policy decisions that can target the areas where the need is greatest. Lastly, the NGDP will make it easier to report on Pakistan's international commitments relating to gender, like CEDAW and SDGs. Altogether, the NDP will accelerate commitments towards gender equality

initiatives, strengthen collaboration to ensure that no one is left behind, and promote a counter-narrative to improve Pakistan's image globally.

The President of Pakistan applauded the efforts and shared hope that filling data gaps at a national level will inform stakeholders of the challenges on the ground in advancing the gender equality agenda as well as highlight success stories for Pakistan. "Data is of paramount importance as it guides on the kind of interventions that need to be done. I thank the presence of the international community and other parliamentarians at this pivotal event."

Dating back to an idea envisioned at the 14th Inter-Provincial Ministerial Group Meeting held in October 2019, followed by two years of unrelenting efforts and productive consultations with provincial, national and international stakeholders and experts, this dynamic digital platform for collecting gender statistics and compiling a knowledge hub of global, national, and regional resources on gender equality and women's empowerment has now been developed.

Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar said during address mentioned the importance of having consolidated gender data on one platform. She also raised awareness on the number of initiatives that were done during 16 days of activism this year. Mr. Julien Harneis, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations of Pakistan, shared that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a historic global compact to achieve gender equality by 2030 and that is only possible through relevant, gender-sensitive data. "The availability of data is important to drive social change which will be trickled down to the provinces to make improvements on the ground."

Additional Secretary (UN & ED), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nabeel Munir, added, "With so many parallel reporting international structures and overlapping obligations, it is important to develop a reporting mechanism amongst various federal and provincial stakeholders, based on data collection and correlation. NGDP would help in better coordination in this regard."

As of November 2021, the NGDP has been finalized and beta-tested after the initial data entry from existing sources. Focal persons in the Women Development Departments of each province have been appointed and oriented to check and enter provincial data which will be collated nationally through the NGDP. A National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan is being developed by NCSW and UN Women, based on the initial data entry in the NGDP, which will be finalized in early 2022.
