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Closing gender gap at work can open doors to incredible benefits, UN report shows



A woman walks speaks on the phone as she walks to work in Singapore. Photo: ILO/Giorgio Taraschi

14 June – Reducing gender disparities at workplaces by 25 per cent by 2025 could inject nearly \$5.8 trillion into the global economy and boost tax revenues, a new report released today by the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) has revealed.

According to the UN agency, even though women are significantly less likely to participate in the labour market than men, once they manage to enter the labour market, finding work remains even more difficult for them their male counterparts.

“Helping women access the labour market is nevertheless an important first step,” said ILO in a news release, noting that in 2017, the global labour force participation rate for women – at just over 49 per cent – is nearly 27 percentage points lower than for men.

This figure is forecast to remain unchanged in 2018.

Further recalling the commitment expressed by G20 leaders, in 2014, to reduce the gap in participation rates between men and women by 25 per cent by the year 2025, the ILO report *World Employment and Social Outlook Trends for Women 2017*, estimates that some \$5.8 trillion could be added to the world economy.

This could also unlock large potential tax revenues, in particular in countries in the North Africa, Arab and Southern Asia regions.



In addition to the significant economic benefits, engaging more women in the world of work would have a positive impact on their well-being since most women would like to work.

“The fact that half of women worldwide are out of the labour force when 58 per cent of them would prefer to work at paid jobs is a strong indication that there are significant challenges restricting their capabilities and freedom to participate,” said Deborah Greenfield, the ILO Deputy Director-General for Policy.

“The most immediate concern for policy makers, therefore, should be to alleviate the constraints that women face in choosing to enter the labour market and address the barriers they are confronted with once they are in the workplace,” she added.

Attitudes on women and men 'roles' have to change

Furthermore, the ILO report also highlighted the need to “redefine the roles” of men and women at the workplace.

“We need to start by changing our attitudes towards the role of women in the world of work and in society. Far too often some members of society still fall back on the excuse that it is 'unacceptable' for a woman to have a paid job,” said Steven Tobin, the lead author of the report.

The report also emphasized the need to promote equal pay for work of equal value; tackle root causes of occupational and sectoral segregation; recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work; as well as transforming institutions to prevent and eliminate discrimination, violence and harassment against women and men in the world of work.

“Policies should also address the socio-economic factors that influence participation by introducing policies that improve work-family balance, create and protect quality jobs in the care economy and target the macroeconomic environment and informal economy,” added Mr. Tobin.

Political will, financial support needed to bolster new approach to cholera in Haiti – UN deputy chief

14 June – The United Nations deputy chief today called on Member States to fund the Organization's new strategy to counter cholera in Haiti, stressing that the initiative is facing a critical shortage of resources.

“Without additional resources, the intensified cholera response and control efforts cannot be sustained through 2017 and 2018,” said Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed during an informal briefing to the General Assembly on the Organization's latest report on the strategy. “Without your political will and financial support, we have only good intentions and words.”

Last December, then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon put forward a **New Approach to Cholera in Haiti** to demonstrate the Organization's commitment to the elimination of the disease. He also apologized to the Haitian people on behalf of the United Nations stating that the Organization simply had not done enough with regard to the cholera outbreak and its spread in Haiti and that it was profoundly sorry for its role.

The new approach has two tracks:

- Track 1 involves intensifying the Organization's efforts in order to reduce and ultimately end the transmission of cholera, improve access to care and treatment and address the longer-term issues of water, sanitation and health systems in Haiti.



The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has partnered with Haitian Agencies to combat cholera by providing clean water.
UN Photo/Logan Abassi

- Track 2 is a package that will provide material assistance and support to those Haitians most directly affected by cholera.

“Secretary-General António Guterres is strongly committed to taking forward the New Approach,” she said.

In the weeks following Hurricane Matthew last October, the number of suspected cholera cases increased. However, the number of suspected cases has since declined significantly. As of 27 May of this year, the Haiti Ministry of Health had reported 6,762 suspected cases, compared to 16,822 at the same time last year, she said.

The vaccination campaign being carried out by the Pan American Health Organization and World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) is well advanced, and is expected to reach 85 per cent of the 700,000 target by the end of this month. The next campaign, scheduled for the last quarter of 2017, aims to vaccinate 2.6 million people in the country's most vulnerable areas.

As of 20 April, voluntary contributions to the UN Cholera Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund totalled about \$2.7 million from seven Member States, namely Chile, France, India, Liechtenstein, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom, against the envisaged expenditure of \$400 million over two years. Outside of the Trust Fund, Canada and Japan, committed nearly \$7 million. The Fund has also received approximately \$17,000 from UN staff members and private donors.

However, three projects, which together cost \$2.5 million, have nearly depleted the Trust Fund, which now has just \$183,000. No new contributions have been received.

The Secretary-General proposes to address the need for resources in several ways, including the soon-be-announced appointment of a high-level envoy to develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy to seek additional voluntary contributions from Member States and other sources.

The Secretary-General and she will continue to use their own interactions with world leaders to urge them to provide further voluntary financial and other appropriate support.

The Secretary-General has asked Member States to consider voluntarily waiving the return of the 2015-2016 unencumbered balances and credits from miscellaneous income and adjustments from the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, a peacekeeping mission known as MINUSTAH, and instead direct them to the Trust Fund.

Those balances total \$40.5 million, she said.

In his remarks, General Assembly President Peter Thomson said “much remains to be done to eliminate cholera in Haiti, and help move the country from fragility to sustainable development and economic growth.”

“If we are to live together as good neighbours and employ our international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, here is a prime opportunity for good action,” he said.



Security Council briefed on proposal to reduce number of AU-UN troops in Darfur



Members of the UNAMID contingent posted in Um Baro (North Darfur) go on patrol to Basma, village located 22 kilometers north. Photo: Albert Gonzalez Farran/UNAMID (file)

14 June – The African Union (AU) and the United Nations are proposing 44 per cent and 30 per cent reductions in their troop and police presence in Sudan's Darfur region as a step towards an eventual exit, a senior UN peacekeeping official told the Security Council.

“The reconfiguration of UNAMID is an important milestone towards the completion of its mandate,” said Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations El Ghassim Wane as he updated the 15-nation Council on the recommended changes to the Mission.

The AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur, referred to by its acronym UNAMID, was formally established by the Security Council on 31 July 2007 through the adoption of resolution 1769.

He stated that the level of armed hostilities remained significantly lower than in previous years, noting that a successful military campaign by the Government has reduced the rebellion to a small presence in Western Jebel Marra and that the number of inter-communal security incidents has decreased. Progress has been made also on the political front, he added.

Yet, given that 2.7 million people remain internally displaced, a number of crucial grievances at the origin of the conflict and key issues related to its aftermath still needed to be addressed, he said.

These circumstances require UNAMID to adjust to new realities, Mr. Wane said, explaining the proposal features a two-pronged approach combining peacebuilding and peacekeeping tasks. Most parts of Darfur require a more peacebuilding-oriented approach, while in and around the Jebel Marra, the Mission would focus on traditional peacekeeping tasks.

The reconfiguration would bring the troop ceiling down to 8 battalions from the current 16, or to 8,736 troops, and the police ceiling down to 2,360 from 3,403. It would also include the closure of 11 team sites, the opening of one temporary operating base in the Jebel Marra and the withdrawal of the military from another seven team sites.

Mr. Wane that the political process should have a strong focus on the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, which is now incorporated in the Constitution and contains useful provisions to address the underlying causes of conflict and to create “peace dividends” for the population in Darfur.

Protection of civilians activities in the greater Jebel Marra area would revolve around physical protection and emergency relief, whereas in the rest of the Darfur states it will focus on livelihood issues and rule of law capacities.

On the issue of inter-communal conflict, the Mission should prioritize those that have the potential to cause the highest number of casualties and derail national political processes.

Mr. Wane said that the successful reconfiguration of the Mission requires the full support and cooperation of the Government of Sudan and its institutions, including to ensure that there is no “security vacuum” in areas vacated by UNAMID.

Children hardest hit as cholera spreads in war-torn Yemen – UNICEF



A child with severe diarrhoea or cholera receives treatment at the Sab'een Hospital in Sana'a, Yemen, on 12 May 2017. © UNICEF/UN065873/Alzekri

14 June – As the outbreak of cholera in Yemen continues to spread at an alarming rate – with terrible impact on children – the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called for immediate support to enable the country's health workers respond or risk even more deaths from the deadly disease.

In a statement yesterday, Meritxell Relaño, the UNICEF Representative in Yemen, said that despite massive challenges, health workers “have spared no effort in responding to the emergency – even when their salaries have not been paid for nearly nine months.”

“Without an urgent solution to pay health workers, more children will die – no matter how much humanitarian aid is delivered to the country,” she added.

According to the UN agency, more than 124,000 cholera cases have been recorded over the past month – more than half of them children, and many who were already suffering from malnutrition.

Children, also account for nearly a quarter of the 923 deaths due to the disease, which is overwhelming what remains of a health system and sanitation system already at the verge of collapse due to the conflict, now into its third year.

Now, this outbreak has left hospitals and treatment centres are struggling to cope with the large number of patients coming in from across the country and medical supplies, including vital medicines and intravenous fluids also running out.

UN and humanitarian partners are trying to respond and have airlifted some 67 tons medicinal supplies. However, the need far outpaces the supply, underscoring the need to ensure relief and health workers have safe and unrestricted access as well as resumption of imports of critical commodities, including urgently needed medicines.

“With no end in sight to the conflict, the cholera outbreak – and potentially other disease will continue to stalk the lives of children,” warned Ms. Relaño.

In Kabul, UN chief calls for peace and compassion

14 June – Expressing solidarity with Afghan people, in the wake of recent violence in the country, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today underscored the Organization's full commitment to work with the Government and people of the country to build a sustainable and prosperous future for them.

“Peace is the solution [...] the international community, the neighbouring countries [and] all those related to the Afghan crisis need to come together and understand that this is a war that has no military solution,” said the Secretary-General, at a press conference in Kabul, where he arrived earlier today.

“We need to have peace,” he added, underscoring that at the same time, the level of humanitarian assistance to the country had to be increased and conditions needed to be created for Afghans to be able to live in dignity.



Secretary-General António Guterres is visiting Afghanistan to show solidarity with the Afghan people. Photo: UNAMA/Fardin Waezi

Since his time as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2005-2015), Mr. Guterres has been paying a solidarity visit to Muslim communities during the holy month of Ramadan, and his visit to Afghanistan was a continuation of his expression of solidarity with them.

While in Kabul, the UN chief met with displaced men and women from the Kapisa province, now living in a settlement on the outskirts of Kabul.

In their interaction, the displaced persons underscored that security remained the prerequisite for their return to their homes and that education, including for women and girls was critical for supporting themselves and their families. They also stressed their need for medical care.

“I have an enormous admiration for the courage and the resilience of the Afghan people, and they were very eloquently demonstrated in my meeting this morning,” noted the UN chief.

The Secretary-General also held bilateral meetings with Ashraf Ghani, the President of Afghanistan, as well as the country's Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah, where they discussed cooperation between the Organization and the Government of Afghanistan as well as the security situation in the country and the need to better mobilize the international community to counter terrorism.

Sharp increase in money migrants send home lifts millions out of poverty – UN report



Migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa sit by the sea in Benghazi, eastern Libya

14 June – A dramatic up tick in the amount of money migrants send home to their families in developing countries is helping to lift millions out of poverty, according to a new report out today from the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The first-ever study, *Sending Money Home: Contributing to the SDGs, One Family at a Time*, highlights the role these funds – more than \$445 million in 2016 – play in helping development countries attain the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“About 40 per cent of remittances – \$200 billion – are sent to rural areas where the majority of poor people live,” said Pedro de Vasconcelos, manager of IFAD's Financing Facility for Remittances

and lead author of the report, which notes that over the past decade, remittances have risen by 51 per cent – far greater than the 28 per cent increase in migration from these countries.

“This money is spent on food, health care, better educational opportunities and improved housing and sanitation. Remittances are therefore critical to help developing countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” underscored Mr. de Vasconcelos.

Sending Money Home covers a 10-year trend in migration and remittance flows from 2007-2016. While the report shows that there have been increases in sending patterns most regions of the world, the sharp rise over the past decade is in large part due to Asia which has witnessed an 87 per cent increase in remittances.

Despite the decade-long trend, IFAD President Gilbert F. Houngbo noted the impact of remittances must first be viewed one family at a time.

“It is not about the money being sent home, it is about the impact on people's lives. The small amounts of \$200 or \$300 that each migrant sends home make up about 60 per cent of the family's household income, and this makes an enormous

difference in their lives and the communities in which they live,” said Mr. Hougbo.

Currently, about 200 million migrant workers support some 800 million family members globally. This year, and expected one-in-seven people globally will be involved in either sending or receiving more than \$450 billion in remittances, according to the report.

Migration flows and remittances are having large-scale impacts on the global economy and political landscape. Total migrant earnings are estimated at \$3 trillion annually, approximately 85 per cent of which remains in the host countries. The money sent home averages less than one per cent of their host's GDP.

Taken together, these individual remittances account for more than three times the combined official development assistance (ODA) from all sources, and more than the total foreign direct investment to almost every low- and middle-income country.

Transaction costs to send remittances currently exceed \$30 billion annually, with fees particularly high to the poorest countries and remote rural areas. The report makes several recommendations for improving public policies and outlines proposals for partnerships with the private sector to reduce costs and create opportunities for migrants and their families to use their money more productively.

“As populations in developed countries continue to age, the demand for migrant labour is expected to keep growing in the coming years,” pointed out Mr. de Vasconcelos. “However, remittances can help the families of migrants build a more secure future, making migration for young people more of a choice than a necessity,” he added.

UN rights chief urges dialogue among Qatar and countries involved in diplomatic dispute

14 June – Voicing alarm over the possible impact on the rights of people in the wake of decision by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Bahrain to cut diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar, the top United Nations human rights official called on all States involved to urgently resolve the dispute.

“It is becoming clear that the measures being adopted are overly broad in scope and implementation, and have the potential to seriously disrupt the lives of thousands of women, children and men, simply because they belong to one of the nationalities involved in the dispute,” said Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a statement issued by his Office (OHCHR).



View of the city of Doha, Qatar. (file) UN Photo/Milton Grant

“I urge all States involved to solve this dispute as quickly as possible through dialogue, to refrain from any actions that could affect the well-being, health, employment and integrity of their inhabitants, and to respect their obligations under international human rights law.”

The High Commissioner noted that Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain have issued directives to address the humanitarian needs of families with joint nationalities, but added that such measures appear not to be sufficiently effective to address all cases.

He added that OHCHR has been receiving reports that specific individuals have already been summarily instructed to leave the country they are residing in, or have been ordered to return home by their own Government.

“Among those likely to be badly affected are couples in mixed marriages, and their children; people with jobs or businesses based in States other than that of their nationality; and students studying in another country,” he pointed out.

He also expressed concern over reports that that the UAE and Bahrain are threatening to jail and fine people who express

sympathy for Qatar or opposition to actions of their own governments, noting that such actions “would appear to be a clear violation of the right to freedom of expression or opinion.”

UN and partners in Sri Lanka appeal for resources as receding floods reveal extent of damage



In the wake of Cyclone Mora, flood waters flattened many homes in this village in Kalutara, Sri Lanka. Photo: IOM

14 June – Following last month's severe flooding and landslides in Sri Lanka that impacted some 630,000 people, the United Nations and humanitarian partners today launched an urgent appeal for more resources to reach those in the worst-hit parts of the country with urgent assistance.

On 25 and 26 May, heavy rains triggered floods and landslides in 15 out of the island nation's 25 districts, sweeping away homes, clinics, schools, roads and water systems. Some 212 people perished and another 79 are still missing.

Immediately after the disaster, UN agencies and relief partners responded with assistance in priority sectors identified by the Government. However, access to the most remote communities was cut off due to destroyed roads and bridges.

As flood waters recede and more areas become accessible, the extent of damage and the response needed is revealed: emergency shelter, sanitation and hygiene, and health services are high on the list. On top of this, damaged infrastructure, particularly related to water and hygiene, has increased the risk of waterborne diseases.

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Emergency Response Plan – amounting to \$22.7 million – launched by the Humanitarian Country Team (UN as well as non-UN humanitarian actors in the country), focuses on providing immediate life-saving and protection assistance, emergency livelihood support, and access to basic services to people worst hit.

The Plan also aims to strengthen resilience of affected communities to cope with and recover from the disaster.

It targets about 374,000 people in seven districts, including the four most affected districts – Galle, Rathnapura, Kalutara and Matara.

“The Humanitarian Country Team, with the support of the international community, will continue responding to the needs of those affected by the floods through the implementation of the Emergency Response Plan, paying particular attention to supporting the most vulnerable people in the affected communities,” highlighted Una McCauley, UN Resident Coordinator for Sri Lanka and the Chair of the Team.

OCHA also reported that an allocation of \$4 million was made by the UN Central Emergency Response Fund to assist rapid delivery of life-saving shelter, health and food assistance, as well as provide essential non-food items.

Cash assistance will also be provided to affected people to meet their shelter and food needs, in addition to the provision temporary shelters, shelter repair kits, and emergency healthcare and reproductive healthcare support.

The recent disasters hit Sri Lanka when the country was reeling under bad drought which had affected about a million people, leaving them vulnerable to food insecurity.

The floods and landslides have washed away the crops that managed to survive the drought and further increased the urgency of more resources to ensure assistance for people who have already suffered much hardship.

Vanuatu, UN to test drones for vaccines delivery to inaccessible areas



Aerial shot of the island of Efate in the Pacific nation of Vanuatu. Photo: Vanuatu Helicopters/2017/Andy Martin

14 June – The Government of Vanuatu and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are partnering to launch what may be the Pacific's first-ever trial of drones to deliver life-saving vaccines to inaccessible remote communities in the island nation.

“UNICEF is excited to work with the Government of Vanuatu to support this initiative,” said the UN agency's Pacific Representative, Sheldon Yett, in a news release. “Ensuring vaccines are consistently available in isolated and remote communities is one of the keys to sustaining high rates of immunisation. We welcome innovative measures to ensure that every child is reached.”

The Government is inviting applications from companies to test their Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS) technology for transportation of cargo in the Pacific. Successful applicants will be assessed for a long-term engagement with the Government.

Increasing availability, performance and declining cost of drones offer innovative opportunities in challenging environments such as Vanuatu.

An archipelago of 83 islands that run 1,600 kilometres north to south, 65 of which are inhabited and around 20 of which have airfields and established roads, Vanuatu faces considerable logistical challenges to reach, engage with and support remote communities.

This initiative explores options that allow the Government to enhance service delivery and significantly reduce costs as it does not require massive investment in infrastructure and transport.

“This is a milestone for Vanuatu,” said Director General of the Ministry of Health, George Taleo. “If the trial shows that vaccine delivery using drones can work, and that it can be integrated into our existing national and provincial systems, then it will change the way we operate forever. If it works, we will allow us to better ensure availability of health supplies to our people even at community aid post levels.”

UN aid official warns of 'disastrous consequences' of power cut in Gaza

14 June – A senior United Nations humanitarian official in the occupied Palestinian Territory warned today about the disastrous consequences of a further reduction in electricity supply to the Gaza Strip on the living conditions of two million Palestinians.

“A further increase in the length of blackouts is likely to lead to a total collapse of basic services, including critical functions in the health, water and sanitation sectors,” said UN Humanitarian Coordinator Robert Piper in a statement.

“The people in Gaza should not be held hostage to this longstanding internal Palestinian dispute,” he added, calling on the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and Israel to put the welfare of Gaza's residents first.



Electrical power transmission lines in Gaza City. Photo: World Bank/Natalia Cieslik (file)

This year marks 50 years since the start of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territory.

Early this week, the Israeli cabinet agreed to a reduction in the supply of electricity to the Gaza Strip, following a decision by the Palestinian Authority to reduce its monthly payments for that supply by 30 per cent.

The reduction will bring most households and service-providers down to 2 hours or so of power per day, he said.

Hospitals, water supply, waste water treatment and sanitation services have already been dramatically curtailed since mid-April and depend almost exclusively on a UN emergency fuel operation.

An additional reduction in electricity will require the delivery of one million litres of fuel monthly, under the UN operation, to keep minimum functions operating at 186 essential facilities across the Strip.

“The UN has already appealed to the international community to support its limited humanitarian efforts to prevent the collapse of vital life-saving, health, water, sanitation and municipal services,” Mr. Piper said.

Put peace first, UN chief says, kicking off 100-day countdown to International Day of Peace



Cheerful young students in their traditional dress proudly waive their national flags during the Peace Bell ceremony of the observance of the International Day of Peace at UN Headquarters in New York. UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras (file photo)

14 June – True peace requires building bridges, combating discrimination and standing up for the human rights of the world's people United Nations Secretary-General said, kicking off the 100-day countdown to the International Day of Peace, with a strong appeal to citizens, governments and leaders everywhere to “put peace first.”

Recalling that his very first act as he took up his duties as Secretary-General in January was to issue an appeal for peace, Mr. Guterres said the International Day, marked annually on 21 September, “embodies our shared aspiration to end the needless suffering caused by armed conflict.”

Moreover, the Day offers a moment for the peoples of the world to acknowledge the ties that bind them together, irrespective of their countries of origin, the Secretary-General said, adding: “It is a day on which the United Nations calls for a 24-hour global ceasefire, with the

hope that one day of peace can lead to another, and another, and ultimately to a stilling of the guns.”

The UN chief explained that there is more to achieving peace than laying down weapons, “True peace requires building bridges, combating discrimination and standing up for the human rights of all the world's people.”

As such, the theme for this year's International Day of Peace is, 'Together for Peace: Respect, Safety and Dignity for All' – with a particular focus on the plight of refugees and migrants throughout the world.

“Our obligation as an international community is to ensure that everyone forced to flee their homes receives the protection to which they are entitled under international law. Our duty as a human family is to replace fear with kindness,” he continued.

Mr. Guterres urged everyone – over the next 100 days – to remember that millions of vulnerable members of our society, many of whom have lost everything, need our understanding and assistance.

He encouraged people to strategize together about what “we can do to help them.”

“Let us recognize the many ways in which they contribute to and strengthen their host countries and communities. And let us redouble our efforts to address the root causes of conflict, advance our work for the Sustainable Development Goals, and heighten our emphasis on preventing violence in the first place,” stressed Mr. Guterres.

“By opening our hearts, joining hands and reaching out to refugees and migrants, we can move closer to attaining peace, prosperity and protection for all,” concluded the Secretary-General.