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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2016 - Regional Press Release for Europe and Central Asia

Safety nets vital to counter rise of exclusion in Europe and Central Asia

Tackling discrimination, joblessness, and unequal political participation key to region's continued progress, UNDP's latest global Human Development Report finds.

Stockholm, 21 March 2017 – Having enjoyed relatively high levels of well-being, the developing countries in the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region could see inequalities and exclusion rise sharply if measures are not taken to protect vulnerable groups from unemployment, discrimination and shocks.

These are among the findings of the [Human Development Report 2016, entitled 'Human Development for Everyone'](#), released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

"We cannot let our guard down," said Cihan Sultanoğlu, Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS. *"Even in a region of relatively high human development, we need to redouble efforts to empower those who have been left behind or are at risk of falling back into poverty."*

The Europe and CIS region has the highest Human Development Index (HDI) among developing regions and has enjoyed consistent progress in human development levels, despite a recent slowdown. It is also the least unequal among the developing regions, with only a 13 percent loss in its HDI score due to inequality.

Vulnerable groups face human development barriers in the region

However, the report shows that in almost every country, certain groups face disadvantages that often overlap and reinforce one another, increasing vulnerability, widening the generational gap, and making it harder to catch up with others who enjoy higher standards of living.

Women and girls, rural dwellers, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and the LGBTI community are among those systematically excluded by economic, political, social and cultural barriers.

In the region, women's labour force participation rates, at 45 percent, remain significantly below those of men, at 70 percent. Youth unemployment is very high at 19 percent, while general unemployment is 10.4 percent.

Women are also underrepresented in positions of leadership. Women's share of seats in parliament, despite increasing to 19 percent over the past 20 years, still lags Latin America and the Caribbean (28.1 percent), sub-Saharan Africa (23.3 percent), and East Asia and the Pacific (19.6 percent).

The report also finds that people fleeing from distant conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere are among the region's most disadvantaged. Migrants and refugees in particular often face barriers to work, education and political participation in the region and beyond.

It is time to eliminate development obstacles

“Transforming the deep, persistent barriers, such as discriminatory social norms and laws, and addressing unequal access to political participation is imperative to close the gaps and secure just and sustainable development for all,” said Selim Jahan, Director of the Human Development Report Office and lead author of the report.

The report calls for the provision of decent jobs and access to basic services, and recognizes the importance of giving vulnerable groups in particular greater participation, autonomy and a voice in decision-making processes. Key data, disaggregated for characteristics such as place, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, is also vital to knowing who is being left behind, the authors add.

Human development for everyone is attainable

“Universal human development is attainable,” said Selim Jahan. *“Over the last decades, we have witnessed achievements in human development that were once thought impossible.”*

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development holds the promise of sharing the benefits of development more evenly among different groups and generations. The report offers recommendations to reorient policies to ensure progress reaches those furthest behind, and points to several positive examples from the region.

Noting that two billion people worldwide are unbanked, the report argues that financial inclusion of the poor is critical to inclusive growth. It cites the greatly expanded access to financial services in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and other countries in the region, thanks to technological advances and other measures.

The report highlights public legal aid services in Georgia as an important tool to help empower the most vulnerable. Established to provide legal advice to vulnerable groups, the system has provided free legal assistance to more than 75,000 people since 2007.

The report also urges reforms of global markets and institutions to make them more equitable and representative. In particular, to tackle corruption and illicit financial flows that severely compromise the region's fiscal health, the report recommends greater global cooperation against tax evasion through better exchange of information and other efforts to monitor global finance.

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