Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific — the world’s first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals

Bangkok, February 2016, (UN ESCAP announcement) - The UN Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has released “Disability at a Glance 2015”, a report that focuses on barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities (PwDs) in Asia and the Pacific region, and offers solutions to strengthen their employment prospects.

In Asia and the Pacific, efforts to implement the rights of persons with disabilities have been strengthened by the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific — the world’s first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals.

This fifth edition in the Disability at a Glance series offers a regional overview of disability legislation, policies and practices, as well as relevant country-specific information. The information draws on both a targeted disability survey carried out by the ESCAP secretariat, and research undertaken by other organizations and scholars.

Disability at a Glance 2015 is particularly timely, arriving as it does shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. This groundbreaking agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that guide governments towards its implementation, are crafted to be universal, people-centered and inclusive, and take a holistic, rigorous and integrated approach to global development over the next 15 years. As such, the SDGs call directly on the international community to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all persons, including those with disabilities. It also clearly states that it will "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first".

The publication will be useful to policymakers, researchers, civil society and persons with disabilities as they work to ensure that the Asia and Pacific region is at the forefront of this historic movement to transform our world.

Background to the Report

Employment is not only the primary means of livelihood generation; it also provides individuals with the purpose and meaning of playing a productive role in society. Equal access to employment is therefore vital, and barriers to work faced by persons with disabilities must be removed.

There are 650 million persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. Policymakers have a responsibility to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy all human rights and freedoms on an equal basis with others. With 160 ratifications since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, the CRPD is the most rapidly approved United Nations human rights convention in history — a feat that demonstrates the global commitment to disability.

Despite the fact that the majority of jobs can be performed by individuals with disabilities, the pathways to their employment are often strewn with barriers. An OECD study of its members showed that persons without disabilities were nearly three times more likely than persons with disabilities to participate in the labour market. Evidence suggests the same is true for countries in the Asia and Pacific region, although data to illustrate the full extent of this trend is scarce.
The employment gaps suggested above are likely to understate the divergent work experiences of persons with and without disabilities, since they do not factor in differences in type of employment. Persons with disabilities are more likely to be own-account workers and occupy jobs in the informal sector, often without the security offered by work contracts, salaries, pension schemes, health insurance and other benefits. Even when persons with disabilities are formally employed, they are more likely to be in low-paid, low-level positions with poor prospects for career development. Simple comparisons of the employment rates for persons with and without disabilities can therefore be misleading.

The recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on governments around the world to promote full employment and decent work for all, including persons with disabilities. Besides directly targeting employment, the 2030 Agenda and the accompanying SDGs also emphasize the need to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities to equal and accessible education; social, economic and political inclusion, and access to cities, transport systems and public space. This holistic approach to disability-inclusive development is also taken by the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

Disability at a Glance 2015 echoes these interconnected perspectives by acknowledging the collective impact of a wide range of factors on the employment of persons with disabilities — from attitudes to education and from accessibility to poverty.

The 2030 Agenda and the Incheon Strategy both strongly emphasize the value of reliable, disability-disaggregated data. Information is the bedrock on which effective policies can be made. Disability at a Glance 2015 collates the available data on disability in the region, with a particular emphasis on the employment of persons with disabilities.

Key points of the report

- Discusses key employment trends shaping the experiences of persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific;
- Considers the major barriers that persons with disabilities face as they seek to find decent work in the open labour market;
- Explores a number of strategies used by governments and in the private sector to promote greater access to employment for persons with disabilities; and
- Lays out a series of action points governments should consider in their efforts to remove the numerous employment barriers faced by many millions of women and men with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region.

Country snapshots provide the latest demographic, socioeconomic and employment-specific data for ESCAP members. The data is drawn from the 2015 ESCAP Disability Survey, national government sources and other international organizations and United Nations agencies.

The full report can be downloaded at http://goo.gl/Zvr7YL

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

People with Disabilities (PwDs) are both an important source of potential business as well as potential employees in the tourism sector. This report is a great source of excellent research to help the advancement of both causes. As travellers, PwDs are a sizable niche-market, with very specific travel, transportation and accommodation requirements. As potential employees, they can play a valuable role in promoting a better understanding of this niche-market, and catering to it.

Apart from its economic and social bearings it also raises moral issues which have been duly recognized in the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics (GCET): http://ethics.unwto.org/en/content/accessible-tourism

UNWTO’s actions on this sensitive but at the same time appropriate theme that has implications to the tourism sector are available at the following sources (these include press releases and publications): http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2013-09-10/unwto-approves-accessible-tourism-recommendations http://ethics.unwto.org/publication/manual-accessible-tourism-all-public-private-partnerships-and-good-practices
State of Asia-Pacific Economies: Report Calls for More Focus on Domestic Demand to Promote Growth & Sustainability

Bangkok (UN ESCAP media release) - Economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region is neither robust nor inclusive enough to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and countries should take a more proactive stance on fiscal policy and strengthen productivity rather than rely excessively on debt to sustain growth, according to a UN report.

While the 2030 Agenda promotes a broader concept of human welfare, robust growth is important for creating jobs and improving overall development outcomes, according to the Year-end Update of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2015. The report suggests that the slowdown in the region’s economic growth is raising doubts about Asia and Pacific’s continued ability to lead the way forward to global economic recovery.

Key Messages

- Economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region is markedly less robust compared to the years before and immediately after the global financial and economic crisis that started in 2008. Developing economies in the Asia-Pacific region grew by an estimated 4.5% in 2015, the lowest rate since 2010, and only a modest rebound to 5% growth is forecast for 2016 – marginally lower than the previous ESCAP forecast reported in the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2015, published in May 2015. Although deceleration in international trade coupled with decline in demand from China are the main factors behind economic slowdown in developing economies in the region, total factor productivity growth has also weakened;

- This slowdown, which comes at a time when advanced economies are undergoing mild recovery, highlights the need for reinvigorating domestic and regional sources of demand. Countries are taking positive steps – with China rebalancing towards consumption and India and Indonesia building their capital stock through greater investment – but many obstacles remain, including infrastructure bottlenecks and slow progress on regulatory reform initiatives. Moreover, the international community has just adopted a historic, universal and transformative development agenda for the next 15 years. Reviving economic growth will be critical to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- The projected improvement in 2016 compared with estimates for 2015 is based on China’s continued slowdown being offset by smaller contraction in the Russian Federation as oil prices stabilize, albeit at a low level, stronger consumer spending in South Asia supported by moderate inflation and increased public social and infrastructure spending in South-East Asia. Growth in the Pacific island developing economies, some of which are recovering from the impact of natural disasters, is expected to remain moderate;

- Headline inflation has declined significantly in most commodity-importing economies owing to lower international commodity prices, particularly oil prices, and slower economic activity. For some commodity-exporting economies, however, there have been upticks in inflation due to exchange rate depreciation. Nevertheless, in taking advantage of low inflation many economies have lowered their interest rates to support economic growth. However, just as with concurrent exchange rate depreciations in many export-oriented economies, this measure has had only a limited impact so far;
While slower economic growth and lower inflation favour further interest rate reductions, capital outflow and exchange rate considerations, together with financial stability concerns in some countries, call for prudence. The recent increase in the interest rate in the United States of America is likely to create external pressure for capital outflows and may lead to a rise in domestic financing costs, a situation which poses a particular challenge for countries with weak external positions and those that have accumulated significant household and corporate debt through external financing;

Given smaller manoeuvering room for monetary policy, a more proactive fiscal stance is recommended to provide countercyclical support and strengthen the foundations for robust and inclusive growth. In this vein, an important consideration, beyond stabilization, is the potential impact of fiscal policy on the distribution of income and opportunities and on long-term economic growth;

While there may be some country-specific economic reasons to consider pursuing fiscal austerity, it is important to highlight that there are no mechanical and universally accepted thresholds. A constant assessment, which incorporates country-specific features, is needed for fiscal policy to optimally respond to short- and long-term needs. National budgets for 2016 indicate that many countries are moving in this direction. Although most economies have adequate fiscal space, considerations to balance national development priorities and fiscal/ debt sustainability remain important and should be accompanied by tax reforms;

Rapid increases in household and corporate debt in some economies pose risks for financial stability and economic growth prospects. Thailand's household debt is on a par with OECD levels and China now holds more corporate debt than the United States. Given the likely increases in domestic financing costs at a time when income growth is slowing, comprehensive measures are needed, with attention paid to debt service ratios and exposure to such sectors as real estate and energy;

Overarching medium-term priorities include making economic growth more inclusive and strengthening productivity. Despite much progress having been achieved in poverty reduction, significant inequalities of incomes and opportunities remain in many economies of the region, hampering the achievement of broader development goals. A low or declining share of wages in total income and slowdown in total factor productivity call for greater attention to small and medium-sized enterprises and the agricultural sector, the contribution of which to total value added is disproportionately small compared with their total employment share; and

In the context of economic growth in developing economies in the region plateauing at about 5%, it is critical that productivity growth is accelerated and that its benefits are passed on to the labour force. Rather than relying excessively on debt to support growth, such steps will foster more sustainable growth by strengthening domestic demand and assisting countries in pursuing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The full report can be downloaded at http://goo.gl/rpktaH

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

The report acknowledges the importance of the tourism sector to regional social and economic growth. In spite of the economic problems, people are still travelling for short holidays, during school-breaks and over long weekends. Due to the sheer size of the Asia-Pacific population, all forms of travel contribute to jobs, income distribution and poverty alleviation. Although economic situations may appear unstable, they are still stable enough to facilitate travel & tourism, and indeed make it part of the solution.

One of the sectors that can sustain and contribute to the economic and social revival is domestic tourism. This has been recognized by China and should be a policy decision of other countries in Asia and the Pacific. The biggest hurdle to gauging the domestic tourism market is the lack of reliable data. NTAs and NTOs in the region should pay particular attention to the domestic tourism sector and at the same time refine their methodology in collecting statistics where household surveys should play a significant role. In this respect reference is made to the UNWTO study “Domestic Tourism in Asia and the Pacific (http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284414833)".
This must be ‘Year of Traction’ to propel 2030 Development Agenda, says UN chief

United Nations, 8 February 2016 (UN News Centre) – “Just as 2015 was a year of ‘global action’ with the adoption of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, so 2016 must be a year of ‘global traction’ to ensure that 3.1 billion people worldwide are not left behind in the race to end poverty” said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the 54th Session of the Commission for Social Development, New York.

“The work of the Commission affects the lives of 1.2 billion young people, more than 900 million older persons and 1 billion persons with disabilities around the globe, among many others. Your work will be crucial in ensuring that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs truly leave no one behind,” he added.

“Experience has shown that thriving economy is not enough to eradicate poverty and promote shared prosperity. Economies must be put at the service of people, through effective integrated social policies,” Mr. Ban said.

“The leaders of the world have adopted Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals and they also, after many years of negotiations, adopted the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Before that, they have taken many important initiatives and frameworks like Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Addis Ababa Action Agenda for Financing for all this development” continued Mr. Ban

“Therefore, we have mechanisms, we have visions and we have to deliver; then this delivery of our crucial mandate starts from this year. That’s why I talk to you and all the ambassadors particularly here, that your tenure as ambassadorship will be the most important one. Because many ambassadors, thousands of ambassadors have come and gone and many more thousands ambassadors more will have come and gone, but the timing when you will be serving is crucially important. So please bear that kind of sense of moral and political responsibility. That’s what I’m asking you, that should be supported by all leaders of civil society, a billions’ community, and of course government leaders, this we need to establish a stronger partnership. This is what I’m going to emphasize” added the UN Secretary General.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon elaborated on the importance and the responsibilities of the Members to propel the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

These lofty but very frank words from the UN Secretary General should trigger some soul-searching in the tourism sector about how tourism can become part of this “traction” process. A lot more brainstorming and follow-up work needs to be done to make this part of the solutions in this first year of the new Sustainable Development Goals.

While the tourism sector has been recognized and included in the SGDs, the fact that the UN declared 2017 as the Year of Sustainable Tourism Development indicates the importance of the sector to the world economy [http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2015-12-07/united-nations-declares-2017-international-year-sustainable-tourism-develop].

The increase of tourism in Asia and the Pacific that is higher than the global trends places a greater onus of responsibility on the tourism stakeholders in the region to see that this growth is in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN.
UN report reveals devastating human toll of disasters in ‘the hottest year on record’

United Nations, 11 February 2016 (UN News Centre) – A new analysis issued by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) shows that 2015 – the hottest year on record – confirmed that weather and climate-related disasters now dominate disaster trends linked to natural hazards.

The analysis found that 98.6 million people were affected by disasters in 2015, and that climate – often aided by a strong El Niño phenomenon – was a factor in 92% of those events. The disasters having the greatest impact were the 32 major droughts recorded throughout the year, which amounted to more than double the 10-year annual average and affected 50.5 million people.

“The main message from this trends analysis is that reducing greenhouse gases and adapting to climate change is vital for countries seeking to reduce disaster risk now and in the future, said Robert Glasser, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction and head of UNISDR, in a press statement.

The analysis also found that the five countries hit by the highest number of disasters in 2015 are China, with 26 disasters; USA, with 22; India, with 19; Philippines, with 15; and Indonesia, with 11.

UNISDR noted that following droughts, floods had the second-greatest impact in 2015, with 152 floods affecting 27.5 million people and claiming 3,310 lives. This compares with the 10-year average of 5,938 deaths and 85.1 million people affected.

In addition, Asia and the Pacific in particular bore the brunt of the 90 storms reported this past year, which included 48 cyclone-strength storms, attributable to rising sea levels and sea surface temperatures. Globally, storms resulted in 996 deaths and affected 10.6 million people in 2015, compared with a 10-year average of 17,778 deaths and 34.9 million people affected.

Click here to view full Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish.

http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/43291

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

Natural disasters, often referred to as “acts of God,” are one of the biggest challenges facing the tourism sector. They range from earthquakes in Nepal and Pakistan to typhoons in the Philippines, volcanic eruptions in Indonesia and tsunamis in many other countries. Local people are affected worst and the tourism sector becomes a corollary casualty with cancellations, evacuations and crisis-management. It is long overdue for the tourism sector to share experiences, learning curves and best practices on how to better manage the dynamics of these disasters in a comprehensive and holistic way.

UNWTO has been actively involved with UNISDR (Office for disaster risk reduction - http://www.unisdr.org/) and WHO (http://www.who.int/en/) on Ebola/Zika response (http://rcm.unwto.org/) in issues related to risk and crises management. It is also worth noting the UNWTO Tourism Response Network (TERN) that is of immense value both to the public and private sectors as it gives guidelines to respond effectively in a crisis and therefore of much value to the general public.
El Niño threatens at least 60 million people in high-risk developing countries

Geneva, 22 January 2016 (World Health Organization) - El Niño is a warming of the central to eastern tropical Pacific Ocean which affects rainfall patterns and temperatures in many parts of the world but most intensely in the tropical regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America which are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards. Typically, some places receive much more rain than normal while others receive much less.

“From Ethiopia to Haiti to Papua New Guinea, we are seeing the damage from El Niño, and we believe the impact on public health is likely to continue throughout 2016, even after El Niño winds down,” said Dr. Richard Brennan, Director of WHO’s Emergency Risk Management & Humanitarian Response Department. “To prevent unnecessary deaths and illnesses, governments must invest now in strengthening their preparedness and response efforts.”

According to a new report by WHO, severe drought, flooding, heavy rains and temperature rises are all known effects of El Niño that can lead to food insecurity and malnutrition, disease outbreaks, acute water shortages, and disruption of health services. The health implications are usually more intense in developing countries with fewer capacities to reduce the health consequences.

The current El Niño from 2015 to 2016 is predicted to be the worst in recent years, and comparable to the El Niño in 1997-1998 which had major health consequences worldwide. In Eastern Africa, as a result of the El Niño in 1997-1998, WHO found that rainfall patterns were unusually heavy and led to serious flooding and major outbreaks of malaria, cholera and Rift Valley Fever.

Based on the latest UN figures, the report estimates 60 million people will be impacted by El Niño this year with many suffering health consequences. Thus far, requests for financial support by seven high-risk countries (Ethiopia, Lesotho, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda) facing the health costs of El Niño have reached USD 76 million. WHO expects more countries will seek financial

support to respond to El Niño effectively. Part of the response will be to provide additional health services to those in need, such as increased surveillance and emergency vaccination. Immediate needs also require funds to provide treatments for severely malnourished children in many countries, such as Ethiopia.

WHO’s report notes that important steps can be taken to prevent and reduce the health effects of El Niño, including: disease surveillance; controlling the transmission of diseases (e.g. vaccinations) and the vectors that spread diseases; mobilizing communities to promote health and hygiene practices; improving water and sanitation services; strengthening logistics and medical supply chains; providing emergency medical care and maintaining access to health services; and effective coordination of preparedness and response measures.

WHO and partners are working closely to support governments and the health sector in their preparedness and response for El Niño. To support national emergency measures in many countries, WHO has deployed specialized health emergency and technical personnel to Ethiopia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Tanzania and several Pacific Islands. WHO and health sector partners have provided inputs to government and UN interagency planning and coordination for El Niño at national level, including in Ecuador, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

In addition, WHO has actively worked with countries and donors in other ways, including, information management and health risk assessments, as well as engagement with national meteorological agencies for detailed updates on rainfall observed as well as more localized predictions.

Download the full report:
http://www.who.int/entity/hac/crises/el-nino/who_el_nino_and_health_global_report_21jan2016.pdf?ua=1

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

This is an adjunct to the previous item on the impact of natural disasters, which are likely to be worsened by El Niño. Countries in the danger zone will need to be better prepared and set in place contingency plans. Other issues will also emerge, such as drought and water shortages.

It must be noted that water is critical component for the tourism sector, and is highly dependent on it for infrastructure, development and management of related services and value chain, e.g. production of food, sanitation, transport, and the accommodation sector. Stakeholders from the tourism sector globally and not confined just to the Asia and the Pacific region will do well to take cognizance of the seriousness of the impending threat of El Niño and also refer to the UNWTO disaster risk measures mentioned in the earlier article.
Amsterdam, 10 February, 2016, (Food and Agriculture Organization) -- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an emerging public health threat requiring a globally coordinated effort to counter the risks it poses to food security, FAO Deputy Director-General Helena Semedo said Wednesday.

Overuse and misuse of antibiotics and other antimicrobial agents foster increasing resistance among the very microbes that cause the infections and disease they were designed to quell, threatening to reverse a century of progress in human and animal health, she said.

“We have to help save life-saving drugs,” she told European ministers of health and agriculture at a conference on antimicrobial resistance in Amsterdam.

Aside from the human health considerations, the emergence of microbes resistant to antibiotics and other pharmaceutical agents puts animal health at risk and consequently has an impact on rural livelihoods and food security. “AMR is a global threat that in this inter-connected world cannot be solved in Europe alone,” Semedo said.

FAO’s governing Conference in 2015 called for urgent action at both the national and international levels to respond to the growing threat of drug-resistant pathogens in the world’s food producing systems - terrestrial and aquatic.

While resistance develops as part of natural adaptation, it is exacerbated by inappropriate use of pharmaceuticals, and the prevalence of resistance in the agricultural sector is generally higher in animal species reared under intensive production systems.

Disease management is one of the tough challenges, along with climate change and urbanization, the world faces as it must increase food production to feed an expanding global population expected to reach 10 billion by 2050 the needs of the future global population, Semedo said.

AMR is a tendency organisms - often bacteria, but also fungi and parasites - have to adapt to drugs designed to eliminate them. Use of such agents extends beyond humans and other animal species; for example, oxytetracycline, a common antibiotic - is currently used in orange trees as the use of pesticides wanes.

Solutions for AMR must be found, Semedo said. “How can we eliminate hunger or improve sustainability when we cannot cure sick animals?” she asked. “How can we reduce rural poverty when the drugs given to ill farm workers and their families no longer have effect?”

To help combat AMR and deliver on its core strategic objectives - eradication of hunger and rural poverty, sustainable agriculture and more resilient livelihoods - FAO is engaged on multiple fronts. It works closely with the World Health Organization and the World Organisation for Animal Health as well as on the global level through the food safety guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius and through targeted field programs in dozens of countries on all continents.

While applauding Europe’s interest in the cause and hailing the Netherlands in particular for its slashing the amount of drugs used in its prosperous livestock sector by almost 60% in recent years, “the real challenge for us is to translate such efforts to countries in need with poor resources,” Semedo noted. “The risk of AMR appears to be particularly high in countries where legislation, surveillance, prevention and monitoring of AMR are weak or inadequate.”

Given today’s fast travel, a AMR organism in one country could in a few hours be within another, underscoring the benefits to be had from all countries investing in increasing awareness on AMR, strengthening their veterinary and public health systems, and improving hygiene along the food production chain to assure safe markets.

Although the Organization favors prudent regulations and measures to control the influx of medicines and reduce their use, it also notes that many rural smallholders and pastoralists often face difficult economic choices and that counterfeit drugs are rampant. Broad improvements in hygiene, disease prevention, veterinary oversight and accurate and affordable diagnostics, as well as ensuring quality nutrition to improve the overall health of livestock and fish through safe feed and suitable breeds are critical in reducing overuse of antibiotics.

Considering that seven out of every 10 newly discovered human diseases are of animal origin, Semedo underscored the centrality of farming practices and food systems in the effort to contain AMR, bolstering FAO's commitment to the “One-Health” approach that comprises human, animal and environmental wellness.

“FAO is uniquely placed to contribute to international efforts in addressing AMR,” she said.
Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

Usage of antibiotics has become a standard operating procedure for many virus-related sicknesses. But the fact that a counter-reaction is gaining ground is yet another warning sign for the tourism sector, especially the medical tourism and health & wellness sectors. A potential preventive opportunity lies in the tourism sector becoming a major purchaser of organic products, which will help bring their price down and make them more widely available. Cutting back on red meat-based diets, normally one of the first advice in health & wellness, will also help. The tourism sector could also invest more in promoting and capacitating local production and sales of agrofoods – very important component of tourism value chain.

See the joint publication with UNWTO, OECD and WTO: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/global_review13prog_e/tourism_28june.pdf
New report on global migrant trends highlights rising numbers

New York, 12 January 2016 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs) – Presenting the key finding of the latest United Nations survey on international migrant trends, the UN Deputy Secretary-General stressed that the issue of migration is one of the most challenging and important that the Organization is taking on in the new global landscape.

“When we get into a period of dealing with the migration and refugee issues, it’s important that we have the facts,” Jan Eliasson told reporters at a press briefing, at UN Headquarters, thanking the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) for producing the latest international migration report.

The senior UN official was speaking alongside Karen AbuZayd, the new Special Adviser on a meeting scheduled next September called the Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, as well as Bela Hovy, from DESA’s Population Division.

“The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow,” noted the Deputy Secretary-General. “Back in 2000, there were 173 million international migrants, in 2010 there were 222 million, and this past year in 2015, 244 million migrants.”

According to the Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision, nearly two thirds of international migrants live in Europe (76 million) or Asia (75 million). North America has the third largest number of international migrants (54 million), and globally, women comprise half of all of them.

Meanwhile, two thirds of all international migrants were reported to be living in only 20 countries, with the largest number in the United States of America – about a fifth of the world’s total migrants. The next in line is Germany, followed by Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

Turning to refugees, they are mainly in Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Jordan – and come mainly from three countries – Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia.

“What I found particularly interesting is how important migration has been for population growth, which is sorely needed in certain parts of the world,” Mr. Eliasson stated.

“In Europe, the size of the population would have fallen between 2000 to 2015, in the absence of positive net
migration, so here is something related to what I would call the positive narrative about migration and refugees – the contribution to the demographics [...] and of course what they do in terms of remittances.”

The Deputy Secretary-General highlighted that remittances to international migrants’ countries of origin is about two or three times bigger than the official development assistance in the world, which supports many health and education efforts worldwide.

“We have a series of very important meetings and events which relate to the political significance of migration and refugees,” noted Mr. Eliasson, recalling that in November, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented a road map for the work on migration and refugees.

One of the most important global events on refugee and migrant flows will take place on 19 September in New York, led by Ms. AbuZayd, who will begin meeting with Member States starting next month and work closely with DESA and other UN partners in the lead up to it.

Governments must act to reverse alarming rise in childhood obesity, UN report warns

Geneva, 25 January 2016, (World Health Organization) - The Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (ECHO) presented its final report to the WHO Director-General, culminating a two-year process to address the alarming levels of childhood obesity and overweight globally.

The ECHO report proposes a range of recommendations for governments aimed at reversing the rising trend of children aged under 5 years becoming overweight and obese. At least 41 million children in this age group are obese or overweight, with the greatest rise in the number of children being obese or overweight coming from low- and middle-income countries.

“Increased political commitment is needed to tackle the global challenge of childhood overweight and obesity,” says Sir Peter Gluckman, Commission co-chair. “WHO needs to work with governments to implement a wide range of measures that address the environmental causes of obesity and overweight, and help give children the healthy start to life they deserve.”

Fellow Commission co-chair, Dr Sania Nishtar, adds: “Overweight and obesity impact on a child’s quality of life, as they face a wide range of barriers, including physical, psychological and health consequences. We know that obesity can impact on educational attainment too and this, combined with the likelihood that they will remain obese into adulthood, poses major health and economic consequences for them, their families and society as a whole.”

According to the report, many children are growing up today in environments encouraging weight gain and obesity. Driven by globalization and urbanization, exposure to unhealthy (obesogenic) environments is increasing in high-, middle- and low-income countries and across all socioeconomic groups. The marketing of unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages was identified as a major factor in the increase in numbers of children being overweight and obese, particularly in the developing world.

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

As pointed out in the report 75 million migrants live in Asia and this poses an enormous pressure on integration with issues of jobs, travel facilitation (visas) and cultural tensions that have a bearing on society. On the other hand of those migrants living in Europe and the United States of America there is a sizeable proportion of Asians. The refugee crisis is without a doubt a major international concern either directly or indirectly impacting the tourism sector.

As far as Europe is concerned the migration crisis is having an impact on freedom of movement with reported plans to revise the Schengen agreement, one of the world’s most exemplary single-visa arrangements. It also has implications for efforts to establish that elusive balance between safety/security and freedom to travel for work, leisure, business or VFR. It is clearly an issue that needs far more scrutiny in travel & tourism industry forums than it is currently getting.
Overweight prevalence among children aged under 5 years has risen between 1990 and 2014, from 4.8% to 6.1%, with numbers of affected children rising from 31 million to 41 million during that time. The number of overweight children in lower middle-income countries has more than doubled over that period, from 7.5 million to 15.5 million and one-quarter (25%) in Africa. The number of overweight children aged under 5 in Africa has nearly doubled since 1990 (5.4 million to 10.3 million).

Download the full report:
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/204176/1/9789241510066_eng.pdf?ua=1

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

Health and wellbeing are indispensable for a stable society and traditional food and food habits are gradually giving way to new trends in the food industry. That in 2014, almost half (48%) of all overweight and obese children aged under 5 lived in Asia should be a cause for concern among parents, educationalists and environmentalists. The tourism sector though not directly concerned will have to pay more attention since the future generation of travellers is affected by this phenomenon. Avoidable health problems such as obesity become a drain on public funds and this will eventually impact on the tourism industry, which like all sectors, is dependent on a robust economy for its future success.
62 people own the same as half the world, reveals Oxfam Davos report

London, 18 January 2016 (Oxfam media release) – An Oxfam report An Economy for the 1%, shows that the wealth of the poorest half of the world’s population has fallen by a trillion dollars since 2010, a drop of 38%. This has occurred despite the global population increasing by around 400 million people during that period. Meanwhile, the wealth of the richest 62 has increased by more than half a trillion dollars to USD 1.76tr. The report also shows how women are disproportionately affected by inequality – of the current 62, 53 are men and just 9 are women.

Although world leaders have increasingly talked about the need to tackle inequality, and in September agreed a global goal to reduce it, the gap between the richest and the rest has widened dramatically in the past 12 months. Oxfam’s prediction, made ahead of last year’s Davos, that the 1% would soon own more than the rest of us, actually came true in 2015 - a year earlier than expected.

Oxfam is calling for urgent action to tackle the extreme inequality crisis which threatens to undermine the progress made in tackling poverty during the last quarter of a century. As a priority, it is calling for an end to the era of tax havens which has seen the increasing use of offshore centers by rich individuals and companies to avoid paying their fair share to society. This has denied governments valuable resources needed to tackle poverty and inequality.

Winnie Byanyima, Oxfam International Executive Director, who will again attend Davos having co-chaired last year’s event, said: “It is simply unacceptable that the poorest half of the world’s population owns no more than a few dozen super-rich people who could fit onto one bus. World leaders’ concern about the escalating inequality crisis has so far not translated into concrete action – the world has become a much more unequal place and the trend is accelerating. We cannot continue to allow hundreds of millions of people to go hungry while resources that could be used to help them are sucked up by those at the top. I challenge the governments, companies and elites at Davos to play their part in ending the era of tax havens, which is fuelling economic inequality and preventing hundreds of millions of people lifting themselves
out of poverty. Multinational companies and wealthy elites are playing by different rules to everyone else, refusing to pay the taxes that society needs to function. The fact that 188 of 201 leading companies have a presence in at least one tax haven shows it is time to act.”

In 2015 G20 governments agreed steps to curb tax dodging by multinationals through the BEPS agreement, however these measures will do little for the poorest countries and largely ignore the problems posed by tax havens.

Globally, it is estimated that a total of USD 7.6tr of individuals’ wealth sits offshore. If tax were paid on the income that this wealth generates, an extra USD 190 billion would be available to governments every year.

As much as 30% of all African financial wealth is estimated to be held offshore, costing an estimated USD 14 billion in lost tax revenues every year. This is enough money to pay for healthcare for mothers and children in Africa that could save 4 million children’s lives a year, and employ enough teachers to get every African child into school.

Nine out of ten WEF corporate partners have a presence in at least one tax haven and it is estimated that tax dodging by multinational corporations costs developing countries at least USD 100 billion every year. Corporate investment in tax havens almost quadrupled between 2000 and 2014.

Allowing governments to collect the taxes they are owed from companies and rich individuals will be vital if world leaders are to meet their new goal, set last September, to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030.

Although the number of people living in extreme poverty halved between 1990 and 2010, the average annual income of the poorest 10% has risen by less than USD 3 a year in the past quarter of a century. That equates to an increase in individuals’ daily income of less than a single cent a year.

Had inequality within countries not grown between 1990 and 2010, an extra 200 million people would have escaped poverty.

One of the other key trends behind rising inequality set out in Oxfam’s report is the falling share of national income going to workers in almost all developed and most developing countries and a widening gap between pay at the top and the bottom of the income scale. The majority of low paid workers around the world are women.

By contrast, the already wealthy have benefited from a rate of return on capital via interest payments, dividends, etc., that has been consistently higher than the rate of economic growth. This advantage has been compounded by the use of tax havens which are perhaps the most glaring example set out in the Oxfam report of how the rules of the economic game have been rewritten in a manner that has supercharged the ability of the rich and powerful to entrench their wealth.

Oxfam is calling for action against tax havens to be part of a three-pronged attack on inequality. Action to recover the missing billions lost to tax havens needs to be accompanied by a commitment on the part of governments to invest in healthcare, schools and other vital public services that make such a big difference to the lives of the poorest people.

Byanyima added: “The richest can no longer pretend their wealth benefits everyone – their extreme wealth in fact shows an ailing global economy. The recent explosion in the wealth of the super-rich has come at the expense of the majority and particularly the poorest people.”

In addition to its inequality campaign, Oxfam will be attending Davos to press world and business leaders to tackle climate change and act to resolve humanitarian crises including that in Syria.
Background notes

The number of people whose wealth is equal to that of the poorest half of the world’s population since 2010:

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Wealth of 1%, 50%, and 99% taken from Credit Suisse Global Wealth Datebook (2013 and 2014)


The wealth of the richest 62 was calculated using Forbes’ billionaires list (http://www.forbes.com/) annual data taken from list published in March.

Calculations include negative wealth (i.e. debt). As a robustness check, Oxfam recalculated the wealth share of wealth held by the richest 1% once negative wealth is excluded. It did not change significantly (falling from 50.1% to 49.8%). Negative wealth as a share of total wealth has remained constant over time, such that wealth distribution trends over time are not affected.

Download the report: An Economy for the 1%.

Implications to the tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific

The overarching goal of the UN Millennium Development Goals (2000-15) was to alleviate poverty. While that goal may have been achieved to some extent, the Oxfam report proves that the rich have become richer far more rapidly and extensively than the poor have become less poor. A widening rich-poor income gap is as unsustainable as a deterioration of the natural environment. It leads ultimately to the same geopolitical and social unrest as environmental problems. The downstream impact on the tourism sector then becomes unavoidable. This is yet another critical issue that is nowhere on the tourism radar screen. Governments, particularly in Asia and the Pacific should also take action to ensure that work pays for those at the bottom as well as for those at the top – including moving minimum wage rates towards a living wage and tackling the pay gap between men and women. This will of course have a bearing on the tourism sector.

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