



Eastern Europe, Central Asia compare well on development indicators, but face environmental risks, says 2011 Human Development Report

Copenhagen, 2 November 2011—Industrial pollution and other environmental challenges could undermine development progress in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, according to the 2011 Human Development Report, released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The Report—‘Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All’—argues that the urgent global challenges of sustainability and equity must be addressed together—and identifies mutually reinforcing policies on the national and global level that can spur progress towards these goals. It finds that societies with more equal human development achievement are better positioned to promote transitions to cleaner energy technologies, or to protect populations facing environmental threats like water pollution and acute climate shifts.

Throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, human development levels continue to raise, with greater equality than other areas of the developing world, the 2011 Report shows. This is particularly the case for public health and education. But the Report also warns that internal income gaps are widening in much of the region, and that environmental degradation could undermine hard-won progress. Many countries remain highly dependent on fossil fuels, and report high levels of energy efficiency (despite notable improvements during the past two decades). Relatively high levels of air pollution, including greenhouse gas emissions, therefore result.

The overall human development perspective in the region is encouraging, the Report shows:

- The region’s European Union member countries all rank in the “very high human development” category in the Human Development Index (HDI)—the report’s composite measure of income, health and education—including Slovenia (#21), the Czech Republic (#27), Estonia (#34), Slovakia (#35), Hungary (#38), Poland (#39), Lithuania (#40) and Latvia (#43), along with EU candidate Croatia (#46). Most other countries in the region rank in the index’s second “high human development” quadrille, including the Russian Federation (#66), Ukraine (#72), and Turkey (#92).
- With many countries marking their 20th year of independence from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the Report shows the region is a pacesetter in providing the poorest communities with basic household services—safe water and cooking fuels, and

sanitation. Central Asia, however, still has significant numbers of people classified as “multi-dimensionally poor.” Tajikistan has the highest percent in the region, at 17 percent of the total population. However, even Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (the region’s poorest countries) rank in the human development index’s “medium human development” quadrille.

- Despite high achievements in education and health care, the Report finds that progress in Eastern Europe has not spread equally to the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Groups such as the Roma are relatively more deprived than national poverty estimates would suggest, the Report notes.

The Report shows how the world’s most disadvantaged people disproportionately lack political power and suffer the most from environmental degradation, including in their immediate living environment. This is particularly relevant in a region still heavily reliant on fossil fuels and coping with the harsh environmental legacy of the Soviet era, the Report finds. It underscores the urgent need for more investments in clean fuels, renewables, and energy efficiency.

Armenia, Romania and Bulgaria lead the world in deaths from outdoor air pollution, according to Report calculations based on recent UN data. “Long-term exposure to outdoor air pollution causes respiratory disorders, immune system damage and carbon monoxide poisoning, among other deleterious effects,” the Report points out, citing industrial pollution in parts of the region as a serious health risk.

If change is to occur, the Report contends, governments must be more transparent, with strong independent watchdogs—news media, civil society and the courts—helping to encourage greater public involvement in environmental policymaking. “Stronger accountability and democratic processes, in part through support for an active civil society and media, can also improve outcomes,” says UNDP Administrator Helen Clark in the Report’s foreword.

Urban air pollution and rising carbon emissions are cited in the Report—and in accompanying surveys of public opinion—as some of the area’s leading threats to sustainable progress.

Water pollution poses another serious health threat, and with better treatment and industrial safeguards, deaths could be avoided. The Report’s findings show that Tajikistan’s death rate from unsafe drinking water (751 per million people annually) is the region’s highest, placing it between South Asia (443) and sub-Saharan Africa (1,286 deaths per million), which has the world’s most acute contamination problems. Other former Soviet republics also report high death rates from polluted water, including Turkmenistan (532 per million), Uzbekistan (335), and Kyrgyzstan (259). Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also lead the region in deaths from indoor air pollution (516 and 418 per million a year, respectively), reflecting relatively large numbers of people without access to safe cooking and heating fuels.

Energy poses another challenge to sustainable growth. The Report shows fossil fuels account for 88 percent of primary energy supply, and the regional average for renewable energy use is the world’s lowest. Even in Poland and the Czech Republic, which are bound by the European Union’s 2020 targets to diversify energy sources and slash greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent from 1990 levels, coal remains the leading fuel for electrical power with strong political and public support.

The Report urges countries to reconsider fossil fuel subsidies—estimated at \$312 billion worldwide in 2009—and to instead promote conservation and investment in renewable energy. The publication also calls for a groundbreaking “Universal Energy Access Initiative” and backs

an international tax on foreign exchange trading to help finance development aid, estimating a levy of just 0.005 percent on foreign currency trading could raise \$40 billion yearly in additional development resources.

In Europe and Central Asia—home to big energy exporters like Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—domestic subsidies can be costly. Uzbekistan, for example, spends over 10 times more on fossil fuel consumption subsidies than on health (32 percent of GDP, compared with 2.5 percent), the Report notes.

The Report shows that there is a great room for improvement in conservation of the region's natural resources, but great potential for a more sustainable future. "UNDP is actively supporting countries of the region in the Rio+20 processes, for which the report will provide very useful input," said Kori Udovicki, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

ABOUT THIS REPORT: The annual Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme. The 2011 Report is available in ten languages for free downloading as PDFs or e-Books at <http://hdr.undp.org/>

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