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In addition to the impact on public health, the tangible impact of the Zika outbreak, such as on gross domestic product (GDP), could cost the Latin American and the Caribbean region as much as \$18 billion between 2015 and 2017, a new United Nations report has revealed.

The report [*Socio-economic impact assessment of Zika virus in Latin America and the Caribbean*](#), prepared by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has a particular focus on Brazil, Colombia and Suriname – countries that first reported the outbreak in October-November 2015.

Highlighting the far-reaching impact of [Zika virus](#) would go beyond tangible losses such as to the GDP and could potentially impact the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, Jessica Faieta, the UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of its Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, said:

“The consequences of the virus can undermine decades of social development, hard-earned health gains and slow progress towards [achieving] the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).”

The assessment also clearly showed that the impact of the virus was felt the most in poorer countries.

While larger economies such as Brazil could bear the greatest “absolute” burden, but the most “severe” impacts are likely be felt in the poorest countries such as Haiti.

“Zika reminds us that all countries and peoples remain vulnerable to emerging infectious diseases, and that a disease that primarily affects poorer populations has wide-ranging social and economic implications for entire communities,” added Magdy Martínez-Solimán, the UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of its Bureau for Policy and Programme Support.

SEE RELATED: [Vigilance against Zika virus should 'remain high,' UN health agency's new guidance](#)

The impact assessment also highlighted the need to strengthen regional and national preparedness and response strategies which also involve communities and have particular focus on the needs of vulnerable group such as girls, women and persons with disabilities.

The Zika virus has highlighted, once again, the critical role that communities and local health workers play during health emergencies, said IFRC Regional Director for the Americas Walter Cotte highlighting that community engagement strengthens local partnerships, resilience and reduces stigma.

We must continue to promote coordination at all levels and strengthen the Red Cross' role as an auxiliary to public authorities.

Cost of renewables fell in 2016, lowering global investment in clean energy – UN

6 April 2017 – The world added record levels of renewable energy capacity in 2016, even as investment in clean energy fell, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) today reported.

[Ever-cheaper clean tech](#) provides a real opportunity for investors to get more for less, said UNEP executive Director Erik Solheim. This is exactly the kind of situation, where the needs of profit and people meet, that will drive the shift to a better world for all.

The report, [Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2017](#), found that wind, solar, biomass and waste-to-energy, geothermal, small hydro and marine sources added 138.5 gigawatts to global power capacity in 2016, up from 127.5 gigawatts added the year before. According to the press release, this difference is roughly equals to the energy created from the world's 16 largest existing power producing facilities combined.

Another key finding is the decreasing cost of clean energy, as compared with traditional fuels. For example, the average dollar capital expenditure per megawatt for solar photovoltaics and wind dropped by over 10 per cent.

This meant that investors got more bang for their buck, according to UN Environment, which published today's report along with the Frankfurt School-UNEP Collaborating Centre and the Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

Investment in renewables capacity was roughly double that in fossil fuel generation, the UN programme said.

While the capacity from renewables was equivalent to 55 per cent of all new power, the highest to date, total investment was \$241.6 billion, the lowest since 2013.



Global new investment in renewable energy. Volume adjusts for re-invested equity. Total values include estimates for undisclosed deals. Developed country volumes are based on OECD countries excluding Mexico, Chile, and Turkey. Source: UN Environment, Bloomberg New Energy Finance

The authors noted drops in investment among developing countries, including in China where investment had been rising the past 11 years. Investment in offshore windmills in China, however, peaked at \$4.1 billion.

Meanwhile, in Europe, investment rose, led by the United Kingdom and Germany. The continent's investment in renewables overall rose three per cent to \$59.8 billion.

The most hopeful sign last year for the future greening of the global electricity system was a succession of winning bids for solar and wind, in auctions around the world, according to the report. Records were set for solar power in Chile and onshore wind in Morocco.

[At Security Council, new UN peacekeeping chief urges faster implementation of Mali peace deal](#)

6 April 2017 – The new United Nations peacekeeping chief today stressed the need for the parties to the conflict in Mali to redouble their efforts to accelerate the implementation of their 2015 peace agreement while expressing a concern about the volatile security situation in the landlocked West African country.

“In recent months, there has been positive progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement,” Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix told the Security Council in his first briefing since succeeding Hervé Ladsous, earlier this month.

The briefing followed a joint visit to Mali about two weeks ago by Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Ladsous. They met with authorities, including President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, who has been seeking to unify the country after a rebellion, a coup and an insurgency.

The installation of the interim authorities in Taoudenni and Timbuktu by 13 April was announced yesterday.

“These developments illustrate the gradual return of State authority to northern Mali under the interim arrangements,” the new peacekeeping chief said, noting that the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission ([MINUSMA](#)) is making every effort to assist the achievement of

concrete results on the ground.

On the security front, the situation remains worrying, he said, citing the creation of a new alliance that brings together the most active terrorist groups in Mali, including Al Qaeda. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) slowly made its appearance in the Sahelian band.



Jean-Pierre Lacroix (left), Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, with Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop of Mali, at the Security Council meeting on the situation in Mali. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

This convergence of threats is particularly worrying in a context where often the presence of the State is weak or sometimes non-existent and where the implementation of the Peace Agreement still has to translate into tangible results on the ground, he said.

Mr. Lacroix also underscored the need to address the scourge of transnational organised crime and its impact on the peace efforts. On this particular aspect, he added, the Security Council has already expressed its intention to consider targeted sanctions against spoilers of peace.

We believe it is time to consider establishing such a sanctions regime, he said.

Given these political and security circumstances, MINUSMA continues to adjust its priorities and posture to provide the best support within its current mandate, he said, adding that his department will revert to the Council, before the Mission's mandate expires on 30 June 2017, if any mandate adjustments are required.

[Strengthening the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#)

6 April 2017 – Following his analysis of the report of the High-Level External Independent Review Panel on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by International Peacekeeping Forces in the Central African Republic, former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Jane Holl Lute of the United States as Special Coordinator on improving the Organization's response to sexual exploitation and abuse, in February 2016.

Almost a year later, on 6 January 2017, the current Secretary-General, António Guterres, asked Ms. Lute to lead a [high-level task force](#) to improve United Nations approach for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

“The Secretary-General – even before formally taking office – made it very clear that he intends to be associated personally and continuously with all efforts to rid this Organization of this scourge,” said Ms. Lute, in an interview with UN News a few days before the publication of the Secretary-General’s [report](#), *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach*.

In the interview, Ms. Lute, echoes Secretary-General Guterres’ concern that “deep gender inequality is at the heart of what sexual exploitation and abuse is.”

VIDEO: Jane Holl Lute, Special Coordinator on improving the Organization’s response to Sexual exploitation and abuse, on improving United Nations response to sexual exploitation. *Credit: UN News*

A new UN strategy

“We have to do better and we have to do more”, stresses Ms. Lute, as she describes a new, four-fold UN strategy to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse.

Four-fold UN strategy:

- Focusing on the rights and dignity of victims
- Ending impunity for those guilty of crimes and abuses
- Reaching broadly to external experts and those affected
- Raising awareness and sharing best practices

In an effort to put victims first, Secretary-General Guterres announced that he intends to appoint a victims’ rights advocate at UN Headquarters, while calling on each of the four UN field missions that account for the highest numbers of incidents to appoint one on the ground as well.

The four peacekeeping missions are located in the Central African Republic, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan.

‘Protectors should not become predators’ – Atul Khare, Head of UN Field Support

Atul Khare, head of the UN Department of Field Support – which deals with tackling sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peace operations – explains in a separate interview that measures are being taken in close cooperation with Member States to address this scourge in the field and provide essential assistance to victims. For example, immediate and urgent needs are covered by each mission’s budget, while the Department is working closely with Member States to conduct DNA tests to establish paternity and ensure recognition of the rights of mother and child.

Also, a trust fund to assist victims has been established in which Member States voluntarily contribute to improve the medical and psychosocial

assistance provided to victims in coordination with UN humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

VIDEO: Atul Khare pledges to eliminate the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse, including acts committed by peacekeeping forces under the UN mandate.
Credit: UN News

Preventive measures include mandatory training, sensitization, risk management and enhanced screening of all incoming personnel – be it military, police or civilian – for prior misconduct while serving with the UN. Response measures include deployment of immediate response teams to gather and preserve evidence, rapid investigations, immediate disciplinary measures such as repatriation of uniformed personnel when the perpetrator is known and suspension of payments, and pursuing criminal accountability with Member States, including imprisonment.

Protectors cannot be predators. Protectors cannot be somebody who is exploiting the people Atul Khare, head of the UN Department of Field Support

For Mr. Khare, the wrongdoings of some people should not tarnish the sacrifice of the more than 100,000 peacekeeping personnel, and their respective countries. “Protectors cannot be predators. Protectors cannot be somebody who is exploiting the people,” he says.

While greater collaboration has been provided by Member States, collective work is also undertaken in the sensitization of communities living close to UN bases, including through messages broadcast by UN radio stations on the ground.

More data on victims, allegations, investigations and accountability measures is also being provided through the recently redesigned Conduct and Discipline [website](#).

As a part of educational efforts, *No Excuse Cards* have been produced for UN system-wide use, which are to be carried by all UN personnel, including humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel, in the field.

An issue to be addressed across the Organization

Relating to the methodology of the response to sexual exploitation and abuse, Ms. Lute underlines the system-wide approach of the UN: “This is a problem that all of us have to address, system-wide. And we need to begin by thinking through: how can we become a global example of a standards-based organisation of best practice?” she notes. Related to this, she adds that the Secretary-General has revised the policy protecting whistle-blowers.

VIDEO: Jane Holl Lute, Special Coordinator, tells UN News about the

Secretary-General's new UN whistleblower protection policy. *Credit: UN News*

"The Secretary-General intends to re-connect each of us to the values and principles of this Organization: [to understand] why we signed up to begin with; what it means to work under a blue helmet or the blue flag or in association with the United Nations perhaps under a UN mandate, in every dimension," Ms. Lute concludes.

It is a response that the Secretary-General wishes to consolidate with all stakeholders, including Member States, civil society, and international NGOs. Notably, he has called for a high-level meeting on the subject this fall, on the margins of the next General Assembly.

[Donors pledge \\$6 billion to help support future of war-torn Syria at UN-backed conference](#)

5 April 2017 – Forty-one donors today pledged a combined \$6 billion for critical humanitarian programmes in 2017 and another \$3.7 billion for 2018 for the people of Syria reeling under a devastating conflict since 2011 at a United Nations-supported conference in the Belgian capital, Brussels.

Earlier in the day, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres drew attention the [plight of those suffering](#) as a result of the conflict in the war-ravaged country and urged the international community to increase support for both people within Syria as well as for the millions seeking refuge beyond its borders and for the communities hosting them.

"The need for humanitarian aid and the protection of Syrian civilians has never been greater [and] the humanitarian appeal for a single crisis has never been higher," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said at the opening session of the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region.

"UN agencies and our partners are determined to reach everyone in need, through all possible means," he emphasized.

The [pledges made today](#) will support humanitarian relief, protection and resilience-building for people in need. It will also help the war-torn country's neighbours shoulder the heavy burden from the spill-over effects of the crisis.

In its seventh year now, the conflict in [Syria](#) is the largest humanitarian challenge in the world – 13.5 million men, women and children inside the

country are in need of urgent assistance and there are now more than five million Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Many more have made dangerous journey to Europe and farther afield.

UN-coordinated response plans for Syria and the region require a total of \$8 billion for 2017 alone, and the funding will contribute to UN and its partners efforts to reach some 12.8 million people this year.

The conference – co-chaired by UN, the European Union (EU), Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom – started yesterday with thematic sessions on the humanitarian needs and challenges within the country and on ways to [strengthen resilience](#) of refugees and host communities in the context of the crisis.

VIDEO: Speaking to reporters in Brussels, UN chief Guterres underscored the importance of the conference.

No one is winning, everybody is losing – UN chief Guterres

In his [opening remarks](#), UN Secretary-General Ant3nio Guterres highlighted that as the conflict in Syria grinded on, it continued to extract a harrowing toll on civilians.

“Nobody is winning this war. Everybody is losing,” he said.

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children remain in siege-like conditions, beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance and “persistent” violations of international humanitarian law remains a reality in the country, added Mr. Guterres, noting: “as yesterday's reports of use of chemical weapons reminded us again”.

Hailing the countries hosting Syrian refugees, the UN chief also underlined the importance of building the resilience of host communities and to provide them with the support they need.

“But we also must step up international budget,” he added, noting that funding remains “utterly insufficient”.

He also urged developed countries, in particular, not to close borders or reduce resettlement and relocation opportunities and called on the international community to protect the integrity of the international refugee protection regime and emphasized that the world must share responsibility for Syrian refugees more equitably.

“This conference must represent a moment of truth, when the international community takes decisive steps to increase its support for the victims of the Syria conflict, and for the neighbouring countries that are providing a safe haven for millions of refugees,” underscored the Secretary-General.



A UN convoy drives past destroyed buildings in the old city of Homs, Syria. March 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Ebo

As soon as possible, pledges must be turned into action – UN aid chief

[Welcoming the pledges](#) received today, Stephen O'Brien, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that the international solidarity could not have come sooner.

“Today has been a momentous opportunity for much of the world to come together to commit more support and solidarity for Syrians and those affected across the region,” he said.

UN and partners have already been providing live-saving and life-sustaining food, water, medical care and shelter across the country. However, lack of humanitarian access, particularly to over 4.7 million people in besieged and hard to reach areas within the country remains a major obstacle for aid delivery.

“We have today heard commitments from a wide range of countries to continue to resource principled humanitarian action through regular programmes, across conflict lines, across borders, and via air operations,” added Mr. O'Brien, calling on countries to translate the pledges into actual funds.

“We now need, as soon as possible, to see these pledges turned into cash for action.”

We must send a message to the Syrian people that they are not forgotten – UN envoy

Also today, Staffan De Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria and the mediator for [intra-Syrian talks](#), who was also at the Brussels Conference, stressed the importance to sustain the momentum on Syria.

“Bottom line: we need to send a constant, strong message, not to ourselves but to the Syrian people that they will not become a forgotten war,” he stated.

“They need to hear that [...] they can still count on us and hope is not given up. And I think this event, this important conference, is in this direction.”