

Hungary's laws on helping vulnerable foreigners are 'blatantly xenophobic': UN rights chief

Hungarian legislation that criminalizes anyone who supports asylum seekers and other vulnerable individuals is "blatantly xenophobic", "shameful" and "disgraceful", the UN human rights chief said on Thursday.

Commenting on the Hungarian Parliament's decision to vote in Government proposals on Wednesday, [Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein](#) described it as "an attack on fundamental human rights and freedoms", as it "makes illegal the act of helping those who may be in dire need".

The new legislation could enter into force by the beginning of July, soon after a European Union Heads of State summit, in which discussions on finding solutions to migration pressures on the 28-Member bloc are expected to feature prominently.

This Sunday, the European Commission President is convening an "informal working meeting" of government ministers, according to reports, on migration and asylum, aimed at finding solutions to growing concerns over the issue across the continent.

Under the Hungarian legislation, it will be possible to jail "any lawyer, adviser, volunteer or legally resident family member" who helps vulnerable foreigners and to ban organizations that do the same, the High Commissioner noted in a statement.

He added that the authorities also announced this week that they would introduce a 25 per cent tax on funding for non-governmental organizations which "support immigration".

While stressing that there was no question that Hungary's border management was its own responsibility, Zeid said that the new law nonetheless "strikes at the heart of the European Union's values of pluralism, tolerance and solidarity".

The development "continues and deepens the Hungarian Government's assault on civic space", Zeid contended, saying that it threatened those "who work on behalf of the most vulnerable, and in defence of our highest human rights values".

According to UN refugee agency, [UNHCR](#), since January, Hungary has effectively closed its borders to almost all people wishing to seek international protection.

On average, only two asylum seekers per day are allowed to enter the country through the two "transit zones" at the border with Serbia, it said in a

recent statement.

Any asylum seeker who attempts to cross the razor-wire border fence “is automatically removed”.

Prior to the new Hungarian legislation becoming law, UNHCR called on the Hungarian Government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban to withdraw its proposals.

“Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right, it is not a crime,” Pascale Moreau, Director of UNHCR’s Europe Bureau, said at the time of the UNHCR appeal.

She added that there was particular concern that the Government “is targeting those who, in a purely humanitarian role, help people who are seeking asylum”, before urging the authorities “to halt any measures that would further increase the vulnerability of people who are simply looking for a safe haven”.

[UNHCR](#) estimates that among the millions of stateless people worldwide, around 570,000 now live in Europe.

[UN chief welcomes ‘positive steps’ towards peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia](#)

The United Nations has announced its readiness to support Eritrea and Ethiopia following recent peace overtures between the two neighbouring States in the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopia this month announced its readiness to accept and implement a 2002 border agreement that ended two years of bloody conflict, in which thousands died. Without a deal, skirmishes continued at the border, with Eritrea reportedly remaining on a war-footing.

In a speech delivered this week, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki announced plans to send a delegation to Addis Ababa “to gauge current developments directly and in depth, as well as to chart out a plan for continuous future action”, according to media reports.

In a statement released by his Spokesperson on Thursday, the UN Secretary-General welcomed the “[positive steps](#)” taken to resolve outstanding issues regarding the normalization of relations between the two countries.

António Guterres also commended efforts by their leaders “to achieve

sustainable peace and good-neighbourly relations which, in turn, will have positive repercussions in the entire Horn of Africa region”.

The UN chief also underlined his readiness to provide “all support that may contribute to advancing and consolidating” engagement between the two countries, the statement continued.

Tens of thousands of people were killed in the two years of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which began in 1998 over a border dispute.

The UN deployed a peacekeeping mission to the region, [UNMEE](#), whose mandate included monitoring the cessation of hostilities, providing mine action assistance and coordinating humanitarian and human rights activities.

The operation was established in 2000 and was terminated by the Security Council eight years later following “[obstructions](#)” by Eritrea that undermined the mission’s mandate.

[Use space technology to build a better world for all, urges UN chief](#)

Not only has space exploration captured the world’s imagination, it can also help humankind address existential challenges back on earth, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday, in his message to the UN’s key forum on space affairs.

In a video message to the opening of the high-level session of [UNISPACE+50](#), the UN’s main forum to discuss the peaceful uses of outer space, Mr. Guterres highlighted that despite major political differences on the ground, “countries have worked together for progress in outer space.”

The collaboration has led to “great scientific and technological achievements,” he continued.

“We must ensure that everyone can access and benefit” from advanced space technologies, added the UN chief.

Taking place in the Austrian capital, Vienna, UNISPACE+50 commemorates the [50th anniversary](#) of the 1968 UN Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which was also held in the same city.

Also addressing the opening segment, Alexander Van der Bellen, the President of Austria, underscored that space will become a crucial driver for sustainable development, and the collective mission to reach the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Space technology can play a “crucial role” in addressing the complex and diverse challenges which confront us all, he said, ranging from natural disasters to devastating impacts of climate change.

In addition, with many new actors entering the space field and breaking new ground in uses of space, humankind needs “to ensure that space resources are used for peaceful purposes only, and in a sustainable manner compatible with international law”, urged the Austrian President.

Yury Fedotov, the Director General of the UN Office at Vienna, also highlighted the importance of global space cooperation and governance, to the SDGs.

“The benefits of space encompass every aspect of our lives, from agriculture and health, to disaster mitigation and humanitarian assistance,” he said, noting that deliberations at the forum would strengthen the role of space as an “inclusive tool” to promote global development.

Simoneta Di Pippo, the Director of the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), which is organizing UNISPACE+50, highlighted a draft resolution concerning use of space in sustainable development that will be presented to the General Assembly for adoption in October.

“The vision and actions contained in the agreed text of the draft resolution to continue to develop the ‘Space2030’ agenda and its implementation plan will set the course for strengthening the contribution of space activities and space tools to achieving internationally agreed development goals,” she said.

The draft resolution was endorsed later in the day by the UN [Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space](#), which began its 61st session the same day.



UN News/Vibhu Mishra

UN Champion for Space Scott Kelly presents the UNISPACE+50 commemorative stamps to the President of Austria, Alexander Van der Bellen.

UN Champion for Space unveils commemorative UNISPACE+50 stamps

Also on Wednesday, the UN Champion for Space Scott Kelly, who as a NASA astronaut spent more than a year in space, unveiled a set of special commemorative stamps, marking UNISPACE+50.

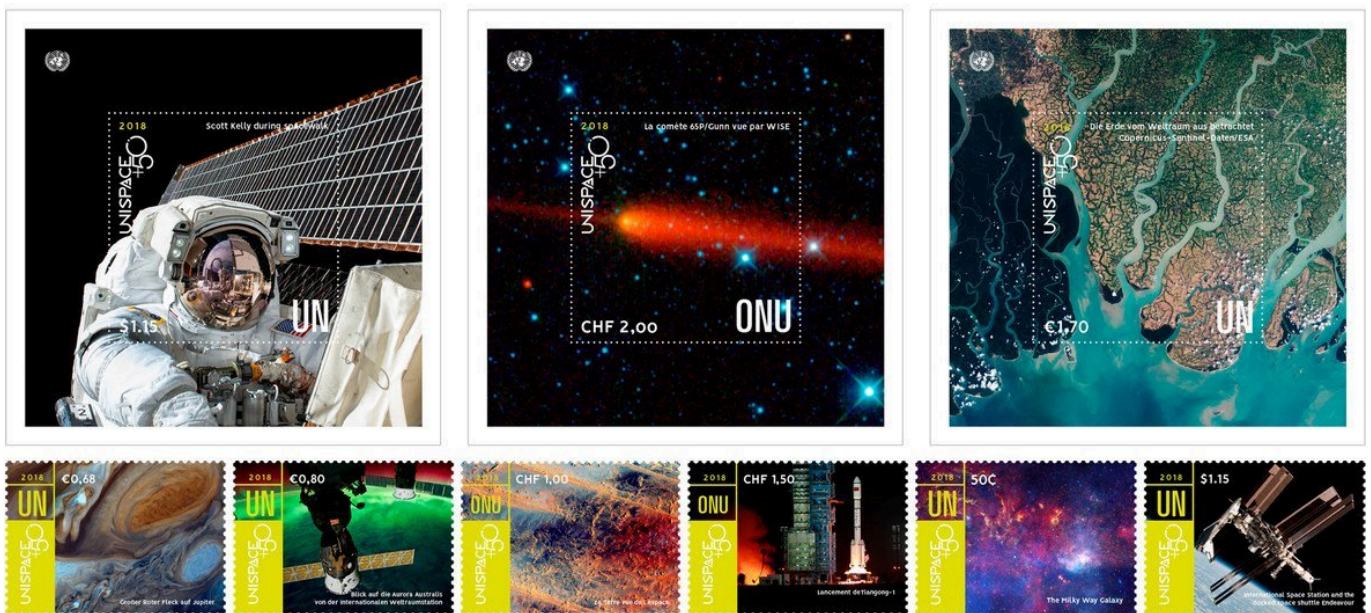
The stamps “represent humankind’s achievements in space,” said Mr. Kelly, noting the benefits that space brings to life below.

“As United Nations Champion for Space, I am also personally honoured to feature on one of these stamps, as a representative of all human space explorers, past, present and future,” he added.

The stamps have been officially released by the [UN Postal Administration](#) and can be used to mail letters or other postage from any UN post office to any address in the world.

UN News, currently in Vienna covering UNISPACE+50, had a whimsical question for one of the UNPA representatives attending the unveiling. Did they think the stamp could someday be used to mail letters to an address beyond the earth’s orbit?

“Definitely,” was the emphatic answer.



UNPA

Composite graphic showing the UNISPACE+50 commemorative stamps.

UN News is on location in Vienna covering UNISPACE+50 and its associated events. Follow us at [@UN_News_Centre](#) for news and highlights.

Conflict and climate change challenge sustainable development effort: UN report

Although more people are leading better lives than a decade ago, persistent poverty and hunger, as well as rapid urbanization, are challenging global efforts to create a more just and equitable world, according to a United Nations report launched on Wednesday.

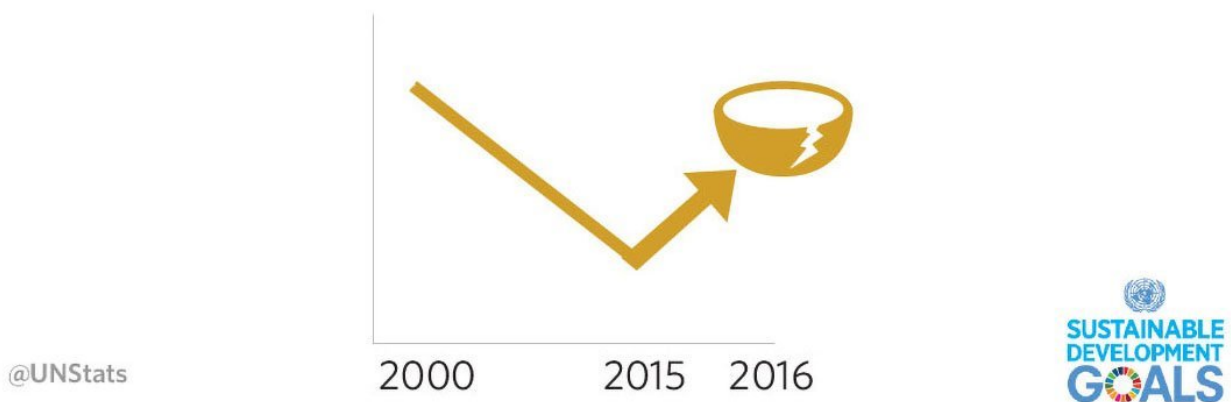
The study provides a snapshot of progress towards achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), adopted by world leaders three years ago.

“With just 12 years left to the 2030 deadline, we must inject a sense of urgency,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a forward to the report.

[The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018](#) reveals that conflict and climate change were major contributing factors to increased hunger and forced displacement, among other challenges.

For the first time in more than a decade, the number who are not getting enough to eat is trending upwards, and there are now approximately 38 million more hungry people in the world: rising from 777 million in 2015, to 815 million a year later.

**World hunger is on the rise again:
815 million people were undernourished
in 2016, up from 777 million in 2015**



United Nations

Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018: World Hunger infographic.

Meanwhile, conflict is now one of the main drivers of food insecurity in nearly 20 countries.

The report also points out some good news, such as the significant decline in the number of people living on less than two dollars a day.

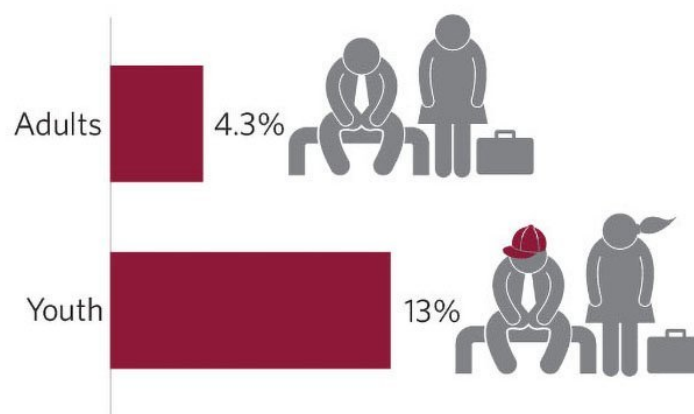
That number fell from 26.9 per cent in 2000, to 9.2 per cent in 2017.

The mortality rate for children under-five also has dropped, by almost 50 per cent in the world's least developed countries.

However, dark spots remain, such as the 2.3 billion people who still lack basic sanitation, while more than 890 million worldwide continue to practice open defecation: that is, using the bathroom outdoors.

And whereas there were 210 million cases of malaria in 2013, the number jumped to 216 million just three years later.

Youth were **three times more likely** to be unemployed than adults in 2017



@UNStats



United Nations

Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018: Youth Unemployment infographic.

Francesca Perucci, Assistant Director of the UN's Statistics Division, with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), also pointed to the importance of timely data collection and analysis to monitor progress.

"The report highlights the need for political leadership, adequate resources and commitment to further expand on tools available for data collection, production and dissemination, to ensure that all countries have rigorous evidence and comprehensive data to guide programmes and efforts towards 2030," she said.

From low-earth orbit, 'envoys' of humanity join UN space forum

Floating in near zero-gravity, 400 kilometres above the Pacific Ocean and flying at over 28,000 kilometres per hour, the six crew members onboard the International Space Station (ISS) joined the key United Nations forum on outer space affairs via video link on Wednesday, to discuss the importance of working together.

NASA astronauts Drew Feustel, Ricky Arnold and Serena Auñón-Chancellor; Russian cosmonauts Oleg Artemyev and Sergey Prokopyev; together with European Space Agency astronaut Alexander Gerst, hovered in front of their national flags, as an ecstatic audience cheered and took "selfies" with them on screens in the main hall where the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space was meeting in Vienna, as part of the [UNISPACE+50](#) forum.

Cosmonaut Oleg Artemyev delivered a very simple yet powerful message to the UN forum.

"Peace for our planet," he declared, as the audience erupted in applause.

Commander Feustel highlighted the importance of everyone having access to space:

"I hope that as we continue forward as an international group, that we will all put our common thoughts and rational thoughts" in how space is used, together, he said, recognizing "that the goal should not necessarily be to dominate space, but to help facilitate access so that we as a species – not just as individual nations or individual people – can continue on into the future."

With their feet planted firmly on the ground in the Austrian capital, [UN Office for Outer Space Affairs](#) (UNOOSA) Director Simonetta Di Pippo, together with UN Champion for Space, Scott Kelly (himself a former NASA astronaut), and NASA Chief Scientist Jim Green, led the discussion.



UN News/Runa A

Astronaut Serena Auñón-Chancellor (arms raised) acknowledges the audience ovation.

'Don't be afraid – ask questions'

Explore ... discover and that is the best way for young girls and women to get interested in STEM fields – *Astronaut Serena Auñón-Chancellor*

Astronaut Serena Auñón-Chancellor had some advice for young women and girls wishing to pursue careers in the STEM fields – science, technology, engineer and mathematics – who are feeling ambivalent about promoting themselves, and a career in space science.

"I tell them...bother people" she said. "Bother them if you are interested in their work and research, get them to tell you about it, ask questions ... explore, discover and that is the best way for young girls and women to get interested in STEM fields."

International cooperation in space

In response a question on the importance of international cooperation in space exploration, Commander Feustel, explained that such partnership not only helps keep costs down, but also helps develop technologies and innovations which are vital for space exploration.

"All of our partners have a great experience in space and they are all very different experiences. What we are doing right now requires all these different assets come together," he said.

New equipment and technologies

Cosmonaut Sergey Prokopyev told the awe-struck audience – jaws dropping in disbelief – about some of the new technologies being used or tested in space.

He spoke about the urine processor onboard the ISS; a vital piece of equipment that turns urine and body fluids like sweat, into potable water.

The Russian Cosmonaut also highlighted the ICARUS initiative.

“This is a very interesting experiment and equipment ... this will help people understand habitation patterns of wild animals,” he said.

ICARUS stands for [International Cooperation for Animal Research Using Space](#).



UN News/Vibhu Mishra

Astronaut Ricky Arnold grabs the mic before it drifts too far away.

Preparing the ground-work for traveling into the Solar System

Answering a question on how the work onboard the ISS improves live back home on earth, Astronaut Ricky Arnold cited examples ranging from gaining a better understanding on how the planet functions, and developing new medicines, to preparing the ground work on how the human body reacts to conditions in space.

“Our bodies change and if we are going to go out into the Solar System and be a multiplanetary species ... we have to understand how these changes occur and how we can protect the people we send out to explore the Solar System,” he said.

Future in space depends on partnerships

German astronaut Alexander Gerst took a question on how countries that are

new to space, could engage in exploration that would benefit the world.

We built the International Space Station with modules from different countries ... more than 100,000 people built this – *German astronaut Alexander Gerst*

The “key” to answering that, he said, was to look at the International Space Station.

“We built the International Space Station with modules from different countries ... more than 100,000 people built this.”

Future success in space depends on partnerships, he said, suggesting that new countries can partner with experienced ones to build new modules, for example, and continue to develop the International Space Station for more advanced undertakings.



UN News/Runa A

Astronauts wave bye before signing off from the video conference call.

UNISPACE+50

The live video conference was a part of the high-level segment of UNISPACE+50, a forum commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the groundbreaking 1968 UN Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, or UNISPACE for short.

The call, routed through NASA’s Johnson Space Center, was the first time since 1995 that space travelers had been part of a UN event. That year, as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, then-Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, talked via video to the crew of the second Shuttle-Mir Docking mission.

In 1962, the General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on all Member States to regard astronauts as envoys of all humankind in outer space, and give them all the help and support that that entails.

UN News is on location in Vienna covering UNISPACE+50 and its associated events. Follow us at [@UN_News_Centre](#) for news and highlights.