

'Stigma and discrimination still persists' against people living with HIV – UN labour agency

Although progress in treating people living with HIV has enabled them to work, they continue to face career discrimination, says a new study launched on Thursday by the United Nations labour agency.

Based on 13 country team surveys throughout the world, the [International Labour Organization's \(ILO\) HIV Stigma and Discrimination in the World of Work: Findings from the People Living with HIV Stigma Index](#), draws on interviews with more than 100,000 people living with the virus.

"It is sad to see that despite years of work, stigma and discrimination still persist," said Shauna Olney, Chief of the ILO branch which deals with gender, equality, diversity and AIDS, speaking in Amsterdam at the launch.

"But treatment alone is not sufficient. We must work harder to reduce stigma and discrimination for people living with HIV at workplaces. They have a right to work and no one should deny them that," she added.

Co-written with the Global Network of People Living with HIV, the report was introduced during the biennial [International AIDS Conference "AIDS 2018"](#), which has been taking place this week; the largest conference on any global health or development issue in the world.

The data highlights a number of findings, such as that 10 out of 13 countries recorded a 30 per cent or higher unemployment rate for people living with HIV, with a greater rate among HIV-positive youth.

And women living with HIV are less likely to be employed than their male counterparts because of unpaid care responsibilities, and a lack of independent income.

Moreover, unemployment among HIV-positive transgender people in all countries remains high.

What this report shows is that we still have a long way to go – *ILO's Shauna Olney*

Hiding their HIV status

Another key finding reveals that their HIV status costs many people their jobs – often because of employer or co-worker discrimination.

"When information about my [HIV] status reached my manager, he called me to

his office,” said an anonymous individual facing discrimination, in the report. “First he told me I was working badly – doing too little work. Then he asked me to submit my resignation, without any serious explanation – as if I were resigning voluntarily.”

As a result, many people are hesitant to disclose their HIV status to employers or even co-workers. Testimony from Cameroon, in West Africa, shows the extent of the problem of accessing employment:

“I went to pick up my appointment letter only to be told that I had to undergo a medical examination. I already knew my sero-status, which I told the human resource officer about. She said I had to do the examination which confirmed my HIV-positive status. That marked the end of getting the job as they could not recruit me even though I had passed the interview,” said one anonymous interviewee.

Similarly, HIV-related discrimination remains a major cause for not receiving job promotions.

“What this report shows is that we still have a long way to go in our efforts to combat workplace related stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV,” said Sasha Volgina, GNP+ Programme Manager. “Access to healthcare and access to employment are inextricably linked and as such a meaningful commitment towards stemming the epidemic and securing the wellbeing of all people living with HIV, cannot be met without prioritizing ending HIV stigma in the workplace.”

[DR Congo: UN envoy calls for ‘a level playing field’ in key upcoming elections](#)

Major progress has been made on preparations for the upcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but “conditions for a level playing field are not yet in place”, said the most senior United Nations official based in the country.

“While significant progress has been made to respect the stages of the calendar process, the electoral process continues to suffer from suspicion and mistrust between the majority and the opposition, and, between the opposition and the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI),” Leila Zerrougui, the UN [Special Representative](#) for the country and head of the Stabilization Mission, [MONUSCO](#), told the Security Council on Thursday.

She noted that preparations have reached an important turning point with the opening, on Wednesday, of candidate reception offices for presidential and legislative elections, due to take place on December 23.

However, the opposition has expressed multiple grievances, she added, including over voting machinery and electoral records.

“I am however encouraged to note that, in the face of disagreements highlighted above, and against the backdrop of immense logistical and financial challenges, all major political parties were able to successfully enrol candidates for provincial legislative elections,” she said.

After a slow start, more than 18,000 candidates for office registered, in order to contest 715 seats.

Conditions for a level playing field are not yet in place, and without progress on these fronts, the credibility and inclusivity of upcoming elections may be at risk – *Leila Zerrougui, head of MONUSCO*

Although the final tally is yet to be published, initial indications suggest that women make up less than 12 per cent of all registered candidates, she said, urging political parties to ensure greater female representation and participation in forthcoming elections.

Ms. Zerrougui said she remains concerned by violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms that continue to impact negatively on democratic space as some peaceful demonstrations are suppressed.

She also said that civil society actors and political opponents continue to be arbitrarily arrested and media workers threatened.

“Thus, conditions for a level playing field are not yet in place, and without progress on these fronts, the credibility and inclusivity of upcoming elections may be at risk,” she warned.

“The Democratic Republic of Congo is at the crossroads. That’s the reason for which I appeal to all stakeholders to seize this opportunity to allow for inclusive, transparent and credible elections on 23 December to provide a more stable future for the DRC, Congolese women and Congolese,” she concluded.

[UN human rights experts urge Egypt to release jailed poet who penned hit protest song](#)

Galal El Behairy has been held in detention since February after penning a song critical of Egypt’s policies, prompting United Nations human rights

experts on Thursday to urge the government to release him immediately.

The song 'Balaha', performed by Ramy Essam, went online on 26 February, with the music video quickly going viral and drawing over 3.7 million social media views.

Just five days later, Mr. El Behairy was arrested by National Security Police and detained for a week at an undisclosed location, before being charged with affiliating with terrorists, "disseminating false news, abusing social-media networks, blasphemy, contempt of religion and insulting the military" according to a statement released by six rights experts.

At the time of that first court appearance he showed signs of torture and beating. His first trial in Military Court began on 6 May, and after being delayed three times, sentencing is due to take place this coming Saturday. He remains in Tora Prison, in the capital Cairo.

"We are very worried at the reported criminalisation of the legitimate exercise of artistic expression through the imposition of a range of dubious charges," said the experts.

"We are alarmed at the arrest and alleged ill-treatment of Mr. El Behairy which appears to be related solely to the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity," they added.

We have received allegations that it is increasingly common for artists, activists and journalists to be arrested and detained on charges, such as 'publishing false news' – *UN rights experts*

The poet's detention takes place against a backdrop of restrictions to artistic and other forms of expression as well as to the right to participate in the country's cultural life.

"We have received allegations that it is increasingly common for artists, activists and journalists to be arrested and detained on charges, such as 'publishing false news'," said the experts.

In a separate case on similar charges, still under investigation by the High State-Security, Mr. El Behairy can be further detained for up to two years without trial.

"We urge the relevant authorities to investigate the alleged ill-treatment of Mr. El Behairy, and to acquit him of all charges related to the creative expression of his political views," stated the rights experts.

"We recall that all individuals have the right to participate in varied information exchanges, to contribute to artistic expression, and to take part in cultural life and in the development of their society, including through political debate and expression of opinion and dissent, without fear of sanction or reprisals," they concluded.

The rights experts are Karima Bennouna, [Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights](#); David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the [right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on [freedom of religion or belief](#); Seong Phil Hong, Chair-Rapporteur of the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#); Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on [torture](#) and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and Bernard Duhaime, Chair-Rapporteur of the [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#).

[UN chief strongly condemns terrorist attacks in south-west Syria](#)

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, has [strongly condemned](#) multiple suicide bombings on Wednesday in the government-held town of Sweida, in Syria's south-west, which killed and injured scores of civilians.

According to news reports, the attacks were claimed by the terrorist group ISIL, or Da'esh, which has been defending territory in the region from a major government offensive.

"He is appalled by the utter disregard for human life displayed by ISIL," said UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, stressing that "those responsible for the attacks must be held accountable".

The Secretary-General extended his condolences to the families of the deceased and wishes the injured a speedy recovery.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the region, Ali al-Za'tari [called](#) for better "protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and sparing them the brunt of violence and conflict wherever they are" in the war-torn country.

Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria who is attempting to bring the warring parties to the negotiation table, briefed the Security Council on Wednesday behind closed doors from Geneva, on the latest political and humanitarian situation.

[UNESCO gives sustainable development a](#)

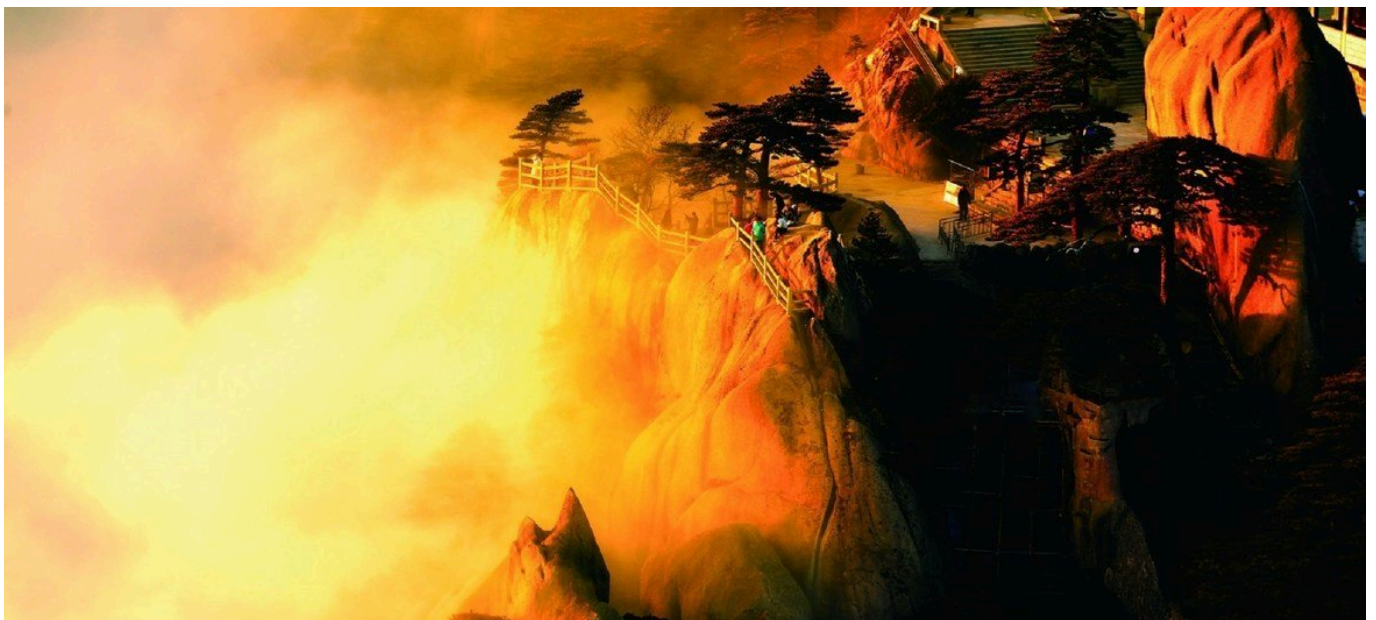
boost; designates 24 new biosphere reserves

Protecting mangroves, tropical rainforests and other biodiversity hotspots, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) bumped up its World Network of Biosphere Reserves by 24 new sites on Wednesday, which means that 686 unique natural sites in total are being preserved globally.

“Conserving the biodiversity and the management of natural resources in these ecosystems is a prerequisite for sustainable development,” declared UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay.

Among other things, [biosphere reserves](#) reconcile the conservation of biodiversity and human activity through the use of sustainable natural resources.

“These sites are laboratories of harmonious interaction between people and nature, allowing for advances in the sciences and in traditional knowledge,” continued Ms. Azoulay. “They facilitate the sharing of knowledge, promote the interaction between science and society and help bring concrete improvements to the lives of local populations.”



UNESCO/Guoyong Dong

Mount Huangshan Biosphere Reserve, China

Thanks to the new designations, a host of precious areas representing multiple different terrains – along with ecosystems that encompass marine, swamp, forest peat and freshwater environments – are now being conserved. The reserves are particularly important for biodiversity hotspots with vulnerable

ecosystems, such as coral reefs, dunes, sea marshes, mangroves and forests.

While the Republic of Moldova and Mozambique have received biosphere reserves for the very first time, other countries with newly designated sites are Burkina Faso, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – commonly known as North Korea; Ecuador; and India.

These sites are laboratories of harmonious interaction between people and nature, allowing for advances in the sciences and in traditional knowledge – *UNESCO chief Audrey Azoulay*

Three new sites lie within Indonesia, with two in Italy and Kazakhstan; and Iran, Madagascar, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, the United Arab Emirates and the United Republic of Tanzania are also represented.

Moldova's newly designated Lower Prut biosphere reserve covers a mosaic of water, meadow and forest ecosystems. Agriculture there provides 90 per cent of inhabitants' income.

Located in the north of Mozambique, the newly designated Quirimbas consists of 11 islands that support 3,000 floral species, of which 1,000 are endemic; 23 species of reptiles; 447 species of birds; 46 species of terrestrial mammals, including four of the "big five" – elephant, lion, buffalo and leopard – together with eight species of marine mammals, including whales and dolphins.

Ecosystems not only support a number of globally significant activities, including fishing, agriculture, animal breeding and tourism, but also provide habitats for migratory birds, rare animals and endangered species.



UNESCO/A. Yakovlev

Big Stone River, Mountainous Urals Biosphere Reserve, Russian Federation.

These natural resources allow for activities compatible with sustainable development and protecting ancestral traditions.

According to UNESCO, biosphere reserves in Germany and Italy, have been extended with name changes, while five in Australia, one in the Netherlands and another in the United States, have been withdrawn from the Network at the countries' request.

Every year the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, adds new sites.