

What is Human Security?



United Nations Trust Fund
for Human Security

For many people, today's world is an insecure place, full of threats on many fronts. Natural disasters, violent conflicts, persistent poverty, epidemics and economic downturns impose hardships and undercut prospects for peace and stability as well as sustainable development. Such crises are complex, entailing multiple forms of human insecurity. When they overlap, they can grow exponentially, spilling into all aspects of people's lives, destroying entire communities and crossing national borders.

Through the eyes of a person...

trapped in extreme poverty and marginalization

the world is one of risk at every turn. He or she will likely have few or no assets such as land to grow food. Available work will offer little in the way of pay and nothing in terms of security. Hunger may shadow many days. Shelter, especially in cities, is likely to be situated in areas most prone to disasters such as floods, with no clean water or modern sanitation. The struggle for survival can bring people together, but also destroy the social fabric, leaving individuals to sell their bodies or accept ever-lower wages, just to live. Feelings of voicelessness and exclusion, finding no avenues for redress, may ignite what seems to be the only remaining option: violent protest.

caught in conflict

the threats only begin with armed violence. Harm in many forms ripples out from there—even long after the fighting ceases. Jobs are lost and economies destroyed—at times for decades. The collapse of public services pushes children out of school, limiting prospects for the next generation, and diminishes health care, raising rates of disease and death. Fractured social ties and weak judicial systems permit crimes to flourish, including those perpetrating some of the most extreme violations of human rights, such as trafficking women and children for sexual slavery. Sooner or later, a society-wide lack of trust and hope can propel new rounds of violence and force desperate people to leave, facing new risks as they search for safe havens.

struggling to survive a natural disaster

the road to recovery is beset with obstacles. The poorest countries and communities, in particular, are vulnerable to the ravages of floods, droughts and storms, which are escalating in number and severity through climate change. Besides stealing many lives, disasters destroy the foundations of life for those who remain. Land, livelihoods, shelter and services may be gone in an instant, on a massive scale. Full recovery may take years, leaving people to plunge into worsening poverty, and forcing some to flee. Entire communities can unravel as competition over depleted resources intensifies. Violence may become the main route to resolving who gets the remaining crops, fish or forests.

A LANDMARK UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

UN Member States affirmed the universal value of human security in General Assembly resolution 66/290, adopted in 2012. In it, they agree "that human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people." The resolution, a seminal achievement, marked the first time that a common understanding on human security received global consensus.

A powerful approach

For people in crisis and extreme poverty, acting on single issues is not enough. Insecurities must be tackled together, comprehensively. Only then will people begin to feel safe in all aspects of their lives, have the income and opportunities to attain well-being, and know that their rights and dignity are fully respected. Only then will they enjoy human security—a more powerful, lasting approach to the most difficult deficits in peace and development.

Achieving human security starts with people—their needs, their hopes, their challenges. These can vary considerably across communities and people themselves, so they must be carefully understood, including in how they interact. Solutions to assist people can then aim at eliminating different drivers of insecurity and building resilience to remaining risks. They can allow actions in diverse areas to reinforce each other, accelerating and sustaining human progress.

Human security depends on empowering people to participate in making choices about how they can be most secure, now and over the longer term. It also requires norms and institutions that guarantee basic protections of human progress and safety, such as through good governance, rule of law, early warning mechanisms and social protection schemes.

A proven value

Programmes applying the human security approach and funded by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security have a well-established track record and a proven value. They help strengthen societies, building social cohesion by breaking down threats that otherwise pit people against each other to survive. With food, decent work, quality services and a sense of dignity, interest in restoring communities and planning for a better future reemerges.

With its focus on managing and minimizing risks, the human security approach prevents what may initially be small challenges from escalating. It helps governments and people solve problems in ways that are proactive and inclusive.

Since human security covers multiple issues, it requires people to work together. This includes people in governmental and non-governmental entities, communities and international institutions. A combination of their expertise and abilities improves coordination, magnifies impacts and makes the best use of resources. Systematic engagement instills a deep determination to sustain and build on gains that are made.

Human security is achieved through protection and empowerment strategies built on four principles:



Learn more: www.un.org/humansecurity/
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