



Concept Note for High-Level Round Table 2

Addressing progress and assessing gaps and challenges in the implementation of the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and its Programme of Action, and giving momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Background

Over the past three decades, the world has seen extraordinary economic and social progress. Reductions in extreme poverty, together with expanded access to healthcare, education, and social protection, have demonstrated the transformative power of collective action.

Yet, social and economic inequalities remain stubbornly high and, in many cases, have deepened. Transformations in the world of work, together with technological advances and globalization, have benefited many people but have left many others behind. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and escalating conflicts have heightened people's sense of insecurity. Rising insecurity, inequality, and frustration with the status quo are eroding people's trust in institutions and driving social polarization. While the wealthy have grown wealthier, entire nations and countless individuals are being left behind. Social exclusion and discrimination—whether based on age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, migrant or economic status—continue to shape people's opportunities and life chances. These trends stand in the way of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action set out a broad vision of social development, combining clear objectives (*the "what"*) with a roadmap for building more secure, resilient, inclusive and equitable societies (*the "how"*). In that sense, these accords are more than a set of goals: they provide concrete guidance, at the national and international levels, for achieving such goals; they offer direction to invest more, and better, in people—namely by expanding access to education, healthcare, and other services, as well as opportunities for decent work; they emphasize the need to integrate economic and social policies and provide guidance to promote participatory, inclusive and equitable institutions.

Thirty years later - as reaffirmed by the Doha Declaration - Copenhagen's commitments and roadmap remain more relevant than ever, for confronting today's mounting social challenges and the urgency of transformative change, and for giving momentum to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

But such normative frameworks are not end points. Their value will be measured by the sustained action and continued commitment of Member States to translate them into tangible results and build upon them in the years and decades ahead.

Objectives

This Round Table aims to stress the relevance of the social development agenda as foundational to the 2030 Agenda – as a moral imperative, as a roadmap, and as the engine of sustainable economic growth, effective climate action and peaceful and inclusive societies. In particular, the Round Table will take stock of persistent gaps and new challenges that undermine the implementation of the Copenhagen Commitments and slow progress towards the SDGs. The discussion will chart actionable pathways to translate the Copenhagen Commitments and Doha Declaration into tangible results in today’s global context. It will provide a high-level framing of the vision and priorities for social development in the coming decade, setting the stage for more detailed deliberations.

Format

The Round Table will begin with welcome remarks by the Co-Chairs, followed by a keynote speech by a high-profile speaker. These are followed by a moderated panel discussion composed of Heads of State and Government, selected NGO, private sector or intergovernmental organization representatives, each responding to specific aspects of the Round Table theme in the form of pre-assigned questions. In this interactive format the Moderator will pose one question per panellist, with each panellist given four minutes to respond. All panellists will be given the list of questions.

When the questions are exhausted the Moderator will invite contributions from two lead discussants who will speak from the floor (three minutes each). The panel segment concludes with a presentation of key takeaways by the Moderator. The Co-Chairs then open the floor for a predetermined number of interventions from participants in the audience. Interventions will be limited to three minutes, and a countdown timer will be activated, a chime will be heard when there is thirty seconds left and the microphone will be automatically deactivated at the three-minute mark¹. Interventions from the floor should be specific on the theme in keeping with the interactive format. At the conclusion of interventions from the floor the Co-Chairs will invite final comments from each panellist (one minute). The Round Table ends with one Co-Chair providing brief concluding remarks.

¹ Pursuant to resolution 72/313 (para. 35), the “all protocol observed” principle is recommended, whereby participants are encouraged to refrain from listing standard protocol expressions during their statements.

Composition

Chairs:

- Ms. Roxana Mînzatu, European Commission Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness, European Union
- H.E. Dr. Geoffrey Hanley, Deputy Prime Minister, St Kitts and Nevis

Keynote speaker:

- Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations

Moderator:

- Ms. Armida Alisjahbana, Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

Panellists:

- H.E. Mr. Guylain Nyembo Mbwezya, Minister of State, Minister of Planning and Coordination of Development Aid, Democratic Republic of Congo
- H.E. Ms. Sanni Grahn-Laasonen, Minister for Social Security, Finland
- H.E. Ms. Buthaina Bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi, Minister of Social Development and Family, Qatar
- Mr. Matthias Thorns, Vice-President to and Employers' Group spokesperson at the ILO, International Organisation of Employers (IOE)
- Prof. Sabina Alkire, Director, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and Professor of Poverty and Human Development
- Ms. Inger Ashing, Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children International

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Lead discussant:

- Prof. Kaushik Basu, Professor at Cornell University and co-chair of the UN Expert Group on beyond GDP
- Ms. Diene Keita, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Guiding questions

- What are the most persistent gaps and challenges that continue to undermine progress in the Copenhagen Commitments and the SDGs at all levels?
- How do inequality, insecurity and distrust in institutions affect progress on the Copenhagen Commitments and the SDGs?
- How have fiscal consolidation and sovereign debt hindered the implementation of social development commitments?
- What approaches are needed at the national level to address fiscal, institutional and capacity barriers?

- What concrete actions or coalitions can help accelerate progress towards the Copenhagen Commitments, the Doha Political Declaration and the SDGs over the next decade?
- What lessons from implementing the Copenhagen Commitments can improve how we measure social progress?

