


COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York

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United
Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



Sixty-first Session of the Commission for Social Development

Interactive dialogue with senior officials of the UN System on the priority theme:

“Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Thursday, 09 February 2023 (10:00am – 13:00pm), Conference Room 4 & Virtual

Chair’s Summary

The Commission for Social Development held an interactive dialogue with senior officials of the UN System on the priority theme, under sub-agenda item 3 (a) Emerging Issues on 09 February 2023.

The panelists were **Ms. Olga Algayerova**, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (joining via pre-recorded video); **Mr. Simone Cecchini**, Director, Population and Development Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC), speaking on behalf of Mr. José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, UN ECLAC Executive Secretary; **Mr. Srinivas Tata**, Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), speaking on behalf of Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN ESCAP Executive Secretary; **Mr. Jalal Abdel-Latif**, Senior Social Policy Advisor, Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (joining via virtual connection), speaking on behalf of Mr. Antonio Pedro, UN ECA Acting Executive Secretary; **Mr. Gilbert Hougbo**, Director-General, International Labour Organization (ILO) joining via pre-recorded video and **Ms. Beate Andres**,

Special Representative to the UN and Director, ILO Office for the United Nations to participate in the interactive dialogue on his behalf .

The moderator was **Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano**, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

The context of overlapping crises

Panelists from all regions highlighted that the vast socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the food and energy crises stemming from the war in Ukraine, had reversed decades of development gains. Impacts from the crises were disproportionately worse for young people, migrants, low-paid and low-skilled workers, informal workers, as well as women who carry the burden of both paid and unpaid work. In some countries, racial and ethnic minorities also faced disproportionately higher rates of economic insecurity, while having fewer options to respond to the crisis.

In all regions, progress in reducing inequality had stalled. It was concluded that reducing inequality was, however, not inevitable, but a political choice. **Cuba, Senegal and Zimbabwe** noted that the global concentration of income and wealth was hurting everyone and would make it harder to fund universal social protection schemes.

Impacts of population ageing, migration and informal employment

The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed that shortcomings of health and long-term care systems were ill-equipped to deal with ageing societies. Older persons were often forced to remain in informal jobs as a result of inadequate pensions and limited access to decent work. Governments would need to bring population ageing to the heart of sustainable development by, for example, protecting the rights of older workers and combating ageist attitudes in labour markets. They also needed to invest more in decent work opportunities and universal health care. Such measures would ultimately benefit all population groups, especially women.

High working poverty was faced by a too large share of informal workers, especially in agriculture; where low wages, no labour rights and poor working conditions were common. These workers were highly exposed to crises and individual shocks. Their limited access to universal health care also meant high out-of-pocket expenditures.

Several other challenging trends were observed, including social unrest, political polarization and violence, climate change, environmental degradation and mixed and irregular migration. **Senegal**, for instance, noted the paradox of ageing populations in Europe combined with big youth population in Africa, leading to a migration flow to Europe. In this respect, countries needed to make migration safer and more orderly and beneficial for both sending and receiving countries.

Policies to reduce inequalities and protect the furthest behind

Social policies, including social protection measures, had played a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of recent overlapping crisis, while the fragmented nature of these policies had deepened disparities across and within countries. While many countries were able to deploy significant financial resources to crisis mitigation and recovery, many were not. As a result, population groups in vulnerable situations were often not adequately protected by policy responses.

Among the policies available to countries during the crisis, social protection had been a key tool. While many countries deployed new social protection measures to counteract the impact of COVID-19 on loss of livelihoods, countries with existing systems in place were better placed to rapidly scale up coverage and benefits. Where existing systems were weak, countries struggled to respond adequately. Moreover, systems that already utilized digital technologies, for example electronic registries of beneficiaries and payments, had more effective emergency responses.

However, even in countries where social protection systems were more developed, coverage gaps were exposed by the crisis. This was particularly the case for informal workers and migrants, self-employed workers and employees of small, medium, and micro enterprises, who often had limited or no access to social insurance, while being ineligible for social assistance. Women, who were overrepresented in the informal sector, bore a significant burden in the light of these policy shortcomings.

It would therefore be important that future policies ensured coverage of informal workers and people in vulnerable situations, increase benefit levels, harmonize emergency and regular social protection schemes, anchor social protection in legal frameworks, digitize social protection delivery and establish more effective institutions for the management of social protection systems. It would also be important to avoid austerity measures that could erode the gains made in social protection coverage and delivery. While international financial institutions were key partners in this regard, it was showed how the cost of a basic social protection system would be well within reach for most countries.

Throughout the discussion, the need to close the digital divide and strengthen digital technologies to leave no-one offline was also stressed.

Governments were encouraged to make the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions a priority. This could be through devoting funding in national budgets, expressing political support in discussions with development banks, as well as through providing Official Development Assistance in a new window of the joint SDG fund.

The moderator closed and highlighted those discussions provided excellent food for thought for the UN and Member States as they worked towards a World Social Summit in 2025.