
COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

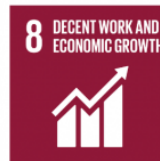
United Nations Headquarters, New York

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Social Affairs



Sixty-first Session of the Commission for Social Development

Panel discussion on “Emerging issues”

“Addressing the social impacts of multi-faceted crises to accelerate recovery from the lingering effects of the pandemic through the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

Wednesday, 8 February 2023, 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm, Conference Room 4

Chair’s Summary

The Commission held a panel discussion under agenda item 3 (c) Emerging Issues on 8 February 2023. The theme was **“Addressing the social impacts of multi-faceted crises to accelerate recovery from the lingering effects of the pandemic through the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”**. H.E. Ms. Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani, the Chair of the 61st session of the Commission, opened the panel discussion. The panelists were H.E. Ms. **Luciana Tito**, Head of the Advisory Cabinet Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, Argentina; **Ms. Eleni Nikolaidou**, Expert Minister Counselor, Director, Development Cooperation Policy, Hellenic Aid, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece; **Ms. Maha Hamad Alattiya**, International Projects Manager of the Ministry of Social Development and Family of the State of Qatar; **Dr. Anthony Mveyange**, Former Executive Director of Partnership for African Social and Governance Research, and **Ms. Lara Hicks**, Executive Assistant and Assistant UN Representative for UNANIMA International, as well as the Executive Assistant for the NGO Committee for Social Development. The panel discussion was moderated by H.E. Ms. **Hanna Sarkkinen**, Minister of Social Affairs and Health of Finland.

The multiple crises and countries' response

Panelists highlighted the ongoing and overlapping crises that the world was currently facing – the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, foreign debt and the war in Ukraine – and that no countries were immune to the social impacts of these simultaneous crises. Regions, countries and groups that were the most vulnerable prior to these crises were also the ones most affected now, resulting in widening inequalities between and within countries. Losing their livelihoods while basic living costs had risen rapidly, millions of people were pushed into poverty, while others had to rely on precarious sources of income.

Countries with well-functioning systems, including social protection floors, were better prepared and could more effectively strengthen resilience and mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as rising energy prices.

Argentina bolstered its health-care system, developed vaccines and launched effective vaccination campaigns. It also implemented policies to protect employment, prohibit dismissals and promote the creation of new decent jobs. By doing so, the country experienced its highest employment rate in 53 months. However, like the majority of other Middle-Income Countries, debt increased significantly. **Greece** regulated primary residency mortgage loans, by granting a state subsidy. It supported older persons, persons with disabilities and low-income households with services, ranging from at home medical treatment to the supply of food and other basic necessities. Young people were provided opportunities to enhance their employability as well as school meals programme. The country also invested in a sustainable and inclusive growth model based on four pillars: green transition, digital transition, employment and social cohesion, and economic and institutional transformation. **Qatar** provided free vaccines for all residents and used innovative technology to control and limit the spread of the pandemic. It provided subsidized electricity and water bills for a six-month period and provided financial incentives to help the private sector and banks to postpone or cancel debt repayments.

In, for example, **Ghana, Kenya and South Africa**, cash-transfer programmes were launched rapidly. Agricultural development programmes were implemented with the potential of employing young people in the agricultural sector. Food safety-net programmes, nutrition programmes and food-crisis stabilization mechanisms, were also put in place. **Senegal** launched an initiative to provide housing for domestic workers. Many other **African** countries stepped up the use of renewable energy, low-carbon development, sustainable land management and climate-change adaptation.

Indonesia designed a large-scale skills-development conditional cash transfer programme that enabled participants to buy online trainings and provided them with cash incentives to purchase essential goods. As a result, 16 million people were able to obtain, maintain or move closer to a decent job. The country also made efforts to reduce corruption and facilitated financial inclusion through fintech and an ecosystem of public-private partnerships.

Common global challenges and practical solutions

Soaring food prices, alongside the multiple impacts of conflicts, had exacerbated existing challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly for Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 7, 10 and 16. Peace and security were prerequisites for sustainable development and respect and adherence to international law is essential to the maintenance of international peace and security. The world therefore needed to invest in conflict prevention and peace building, putting women and girls at the centre of security policy.

Poverty eradication was another worsening global challenge. It was estimated that approximately 700 million people still lived on less than US\$1.9 a day. Interventions such as creating decent jobs, providing social protection, boosting political participation, and ensuring access to services like water, energy, healthcare and education, contributed to the eradication of poverty.

Financing for sustainable development had become a real challenge. Estimates showed that over 50 of the poorest developing countries were in danger of defaulting on their debt and becoming effectively bankrupt, unless high income countries offered urgent assistance, inject liquidity and consider debt restructuring. This called for a reform of the international financial architecture to tackle the worsening debt crisis.

The SDG financing gap in developing countries increased by 56 per cent in 2020, totaling nearly USD4 trillion. Actions needed to mobilize financing for sustainable development included well targeted fiscal policies that supported a resilient, inclusive and sustainable recovery; increased mobilization of private finance and investments to sustainable development; SDG bonds, that provided capital for those involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, external support specifically targeted to domestic revenue, and official development assistance (ODA).

Climate change was the biggest challenge that the global community faced, and while all regions were affected, developing countries were particularly vulnerable to its impact. The OECD has estimated that a total of USD2.5 trillion was required by developing countries to fight climate change and finance the energy transition. This large financing gap required leveraging private sector financing.

Global public health challenges also needed to be addressed. Longer term governance of global health should focus more on prevention and preparedness. Collective actions were required to strengthen the independence and financing of WHO, accelerate product development and improve access to health technologies in low- and middle-income countries, which required resilient manufacturing and supply chains, including at the regional level.

Demographic transformation, migration and rapid urbanization were growing concerns. In this respect, social protection would be of particular importance.

Human rights must be at the heart of all policies and gender equality should be integrated into every aspect of the work. Young people should be the centre of every discussion and should have strong participation in decision-making. It was also important to draw on the wisdom of older and

ageing persons through intergenerational exchanges. Civil societies could serve as watch dogs to enhance the voice of the voiceless.

Universal social protection could help people in times of normality and crisis and must be designed in collaboration with social partners, civil society organizations and other interested groups to ensure legitimacy, ownership and their proper functioning. Digital connectivity and a green transformation were critical for an inclusive recovery to be sustainable. There should also be fair, sustainable and adaptable social security system, established in line with national realities, to ensure the resilience of the recovery. The State and public policies played crucial roles for countries to recover from the crises. The private sector also played an important role and needed to be incentivized and more active.

Even though ODA would be important, it was not enough. Sustainable financing through progressive taxation and social security contributions was vital. There was also need for new and innovative solutions, including global cooperation on taxation and governing financial flows. States could facilitate private money and funding through incentives, regulations and taxation.

The crises had demonstrated the importance of cooperation at international level in tackling challenges, including supply chain disruptions. Solidarity and strong social contracts showed that multilateralism worked in times of severe crisis. Developing countries should find their own paths and adopt what suited them best, while the developed world, which had more resources, needed to focus on building the capacity of these countries.