



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Expert Group Meeting
on
“Rethinking social development policies and frameworks”

UNDESA, Division for Inclusive Social Development

24 – 25 August 2023

Concept Note

I. Purpose of the meeting

In its resolution E/RES/2023/14, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations decided that the priority theme for the 62nd session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) “*Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication*”.

The Commission, a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, serves as the main United Nations forum for an ongoing global dialogue on social development issues. It continues to have the primary responsibility for the periodic review of issues related to the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD). Furthermore, the Commission makes a vital contribution to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by supporting the thematic reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) on progress being made towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This expert group meeting is being convened in preparation for the 62nd session of the Commission for Social Development, which is expected to adopt a resolution on the priority theme and whose conclusions will feed into the 2024 HLPF. The meeting will provide inputs to the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme, which offers an analytical backdrop for the Commission’s deliberations.

II. Background

Social development and the international development agenda

In 1995, at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), world leaders recognized the significance of social development and human well-being for all and gave these broad goals the highest priority. The Summit established a new consensus on the need to put people at the center of development and highlighted the centrality of poverty eradication for the global development agenda. Member States pledged to eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment, and foster social integration/inclusion to achieve stable, safe and just societies for all.

At the UN Sustainable Development Summit held in 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledged that no one would be left behind in its implementation and committed to reaching the furthest behind first. With seven years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the world is not on track to meet them by 2030.

In his report entitled “Our Common Agenda”, the Secretary-General called on Member States to consider holding a World Social Summit in 2025. The outcome of the Summit would not replace the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration but rather advance it by addressing unresolved and emerging social development issues, generating momentum to drive further progress towards the SDGs and strengthening the values, including trust, that underpin the social contract.

This expert group meeting can lay the groundwork for future deliberations by taking stock of progress since 1995 in the many facets of social development and by considering the types of policies and institutions that might be needed to create a world in which people enjoy equal rights and equitable opportunities to realize their full potential.

Current challenges to social development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The world has seen major progress in important dimensions of social development since the WSSD in 1995. Global extreme poverty, measured by the international poverty line, fell from one in three persons in 1995 to less than one in 10 persons by 2019.¹ Likewise, between 2000 and 2015, the share of people facing hunger fell from 13 to 8 per cent. In 2018, 83 per cent of all children, adolescents and youth were in school compared to only 72 per cent in 1995.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the fragile and uneven nature of such progress and set back many hard-won gains. Even before the pandemic, progress across many aspects of social development was stalling. In 2020, extreme poverty rates increased for the first time in over two decades, and hunger and food insecurity are also on the rise. Disadvantage and inequality have become more concentrated in rural areas and in particular regions. Despite the commitment by governments to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind first, population groups in disadvantaged situations continue to face far greater obstacles to improving their well-being. As a backdrop to these reversals, trust in governments and institutions and between people is falling, creating an obstacle to collective action at the national and international levels.

Rethinking social development policies and frameworks

The failure to build peoples’ resilience, provide equal opportunities, close gaps in access to basic services and tackle inequalities raises important questions about the nature and effectiveness of social development policies and frameworks. Are social policies, including social protection systems, fit for purpose? Are countries doing enough? Is domestic resource mobilization failing to match the scale and ambition of the WSSD and the 2030 Agenda? Is there a need to re-think and re-design social development frameworks, strategies and policies to ensure a level playing field that leaves no one behind?

III. Meeting Objectives

The expert meeting will contribute to the work of the 62nd session of the Commission for Social Development by identifying obstacles to social progress, discussing whether current policies (including social policies) were designed and are being implemented to serve their purpose, proposing policy

¹ <https://pip.worldbank.org/#profile>

frameworks and offering evidence-based policy recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond. To accomplish these objectives, the meeting will bring together selected experts from academia, national governments, civil society and the UN system. Contributions by experts will focus on the following questions:

- What are the most salient challenges to and shortcomings of social, labour market and redistribution policies?
- How have governments' political priorities for social development changed over time?
- Where do the financing gaps lie and what can be done to close them?
- How can governments and other actors rebuild trust and strengthen solidarity to achieve social development objectives?
- How can social policies, including social protection systems, be better designed to adjust to new trends and societal changes?
- How can social policies be better designed and implemented to deliver high-quality services and support to all?
- Does the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) need to be updated?
- What social development framework and new policies are needed for the future?
- How should governments and international organizations integrate social policies into a renewed development framework?

IV. Expected outcomes

The meeting is expected to provide substantive inputs for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme of the 62nd session of the Commission for Social Development. The meeting and its preparation will generate the following outputs:

- i. Substantive papers on the theme and key questions of the meeting, with concrete policy recommendations prepared by experts;
- ii. A meeting report, prepared by UN DESA, summarizing the deliberations of the experts and their key recommendations, which will serve as inputs to the Secretary-General's report.

V. Organizational and administrative matters

The expert group meeting will be held in person and is scheduled to take place 24-25 August 2023. About 8-10 experts will be identified and invited by the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UN DESA), taking into consideration gender balance and geographical representation.

Prior to the meeting, the invited experts will be requested to submit short written papers (5-10 pages in length, in English) to the United Nations Secretariat **by 14 August 2023**. All papers and presentations should be sent to Mr. Patrik Andersson (anderssonp@un.org) and Ms. Isabelle Deganis (isabelle.deganis@un.org), with a copy to Ms. Maria Guran (guran@un.org).

The meeting will take place at the UN Headquarters in New York in room S-25MM4 (on the 25th floor of the Secretariat building). It is expected that the invited experts will actively contribute to the discussion during the two-day meeting. A final report will be prepared after the meeting.

VI. Documentation and the language of the meeting

The documentation for the meeting will consist of relevant publications, documents and other materials related to the meeting. Everything will be made available on a dedicated webpage, including the expert papers.

The working language of the meeting will be English. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in English only.

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