United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Social Policy and Development

Commission for Social Development
Fifty-sixth session

56TH COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Draft Concept Note

High-level panel discussion on emerging issues
"Towards sustainable and resilient societies: Innovation and inter-connectivity for social development"

Tuesday, 30 January 2018, 3:00 – 6:00pm
United Nations headquarters, New York
Conference Room 4

1. Background

Pursuant to Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) decision in 2006, the Commission for Social Development has included the agenda item 'Emerging issues' in its work programme since its 2007-2008 review and policy cycle. Under this agenda item, the Commission addresses current issues affecting social development requiring urgent consideration or new cross-cutting issues in the context of evolving global development challenges. In selecting the theme in recent years, the Bureau of the Commission also takes into full consideration the annual themes of the Economic and Social Council in order to better align its work with that of the Council, as called for in the General Assembly resolution 68/1.

The Bureau of the Commission decided on "**Towards sustainable and resilient societies: Innovation and inter-connectivity for social development**" as the topic of emerging issues of the 56th session of the Commission, which also echoes the theme of the high-level segment of ECOSOC in 2018. The selection of this topic acknowledges the irreversible role of innovation, technological advances, and interconnectivity in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 at the international, national and local levels, and examine the role of social policy to maximize opportunities and address challenges posed by them.

2. Context

Recent waves of innovation and technological advances have brought tremendous opportunities to advance social progress. They have improved access to education, healthcare and other public goods and services, increased productivity, created new jobs, and improved living standards. In particular, ICT technologies have become part of the daily lives of many people, linking them to global, regional and local knowledge resources and information. They also have facilitated the exchange of ideas, experiences and innovative solutions, which have contributed to transform societies more open, inclusive, participatory and resilient.

Similarly, the recent development of infrastructure networks has enhanced inter-connectivity among regions, countries, cities, communities and people, which has driven growth by aggregating demands, and enhancing the movement of people, the transfer of technology, and the diffusion of knowledge. As a result, it has facilitated physical, virtual, and social integration. Innovation and inter-connectivity have contributed to significant improvements in the quantity and quality of jobs being created, health and education outcomes, and food security and nutrition, lifting millions of people out of poverty.

However, innovation and inter-connectivity can act as a double-edged sword, as the rapid pace of technological innovation can potentially be a major force of disruption. For example, the accelerated pace of automation and robotization is expected to cause job losses in many areas. Exponential changes in artificial intelligence (AI) abilities may potentially replace not only blue-collar but also white-collar jobs. While some areas benefiting from interconnectivity become more productive and prosperous, others that lack access to technologies and infrastructure are left behind.

Social policy needs to be re-examined along with innovation policy, and further strengthened to ensure that benefits of technological advances and inter-connectivity are broadly shared to promote inclusive development. It will also safeguard the interests of those who might be negatively affected. Furthermore, social policy can play a proactive role to leverage innovation and inter-connectivity to promote the inclusion of disadvantaged social groups, including youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples, so as to enhance resilience.

3. Objectives

The panel discussion will facilitate open exchange of ideas that are strategically important for social development, and the Commission. Its overall objective at the fifty-sixth session is to discuss, with Note by the Secretariat on Emerging Issues and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development setting the background and drawing on insights of experts, how social policy can play a critical role to harness the opportunities brought by technology and innovation and mitigate potential risks that may undermine people's livelihoods and well-being.

Specifically, the panel aims to:

1) Identify opportunities and challenges that innovation and inter-connectivity can bring to societies, and examine the role of social policy to create conditions under which they can be useful tool for advancing social progress and achieving the 2030 Agenda and SDGs;
2) Exchange information, knowledge, and good policies and practices at the national, regional and international levels, where innovation, new technologies help advance social development, with particular attention to the most marginalized/vulnerable;
3) Explore how the international community/the Commission could play an important role to leverage technological advances for achieving sustainable development for all.

4. Structure and format of the panel discussion

The Chair of the Commission will open the meeting with brief remarks and introduce the moderator, who will conduct the interactive panel discussion.

The panel will be comprised of five panellists and a moderator. The moderator will set the stage and stimulate an interactive discussion between the panellists and participants of the Commission.

The outcomes of the discussions will be reflected in the Chair's summary, which will be one of the key inputs of the Commission for Social Development to the ECOSOC, in particular, its high-level segment under the theme "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies".

5. Composition of the Panel

Panellists will be member states government officials, academia, subject experts and representatives of civil society, taking into consideration of gender and geographical balance.

6. Guiding questions

The Commission for Social Development may wish to consider the following questions in its deliberations on the emerging issue at its fifty-sixth session:

a) How can the international community ensure that all people, in particular vulnerable social groups and communities, enjoy the benefits of innovation, technology and interconnectivity? What actions can be taken to address existing inequalities in access to technology and innovation?

b) What can be done to support international cooperation to promote innovation and interconnectivity for the achievement of SDGs in all countries for all people?

c) How can Member States and the international community address disruptive effects of technological innovation on work and the economy, such as the potential negative impact of technological advances on employment and job security? Are women and men affected differently by technological advances?

d) What can be done to ensure that technological advances serve to advance social progress and sustainable development for all? What guidance can the Commission provide to the private sector and the civil society so that the adoption and enhancement of technology contributes to the greater public good?

7. Time allocation

Speaker	Suggested speaking time
Chair: Opening remarks	2 minutes
Moderator: introduction/context-setting	5 minutes
Panellists (5): Presentations	5 - 10 minutes per panellist
Moderated interactive discussion	Interventions limited to 3 minutes, followed by responses from panellists.
Concluding remarks by moderator Closing by the Chair	5 minutes
	Total duration: 3 hours