



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

United Nations Secretariat  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Division for Inclusive Social Development

Expert Group Meeting on  
“**Navigating an insecure future**”

Virtual meeting via Zoom  
3 and 4 December 2020

**Concept note**



**I. Background and purpose of the meeting**

Over the last decades, changes in the world of work, globalization and technological breakthroughs have benefitted many people but have also created disruption and put many others at a disadvantage. These long-standing trends are compounded by evolving threats, including those brought about by climate change and pandemics. These threats expose the precarity of many people’s lives and reveal the large degree of risk and uncertainty embedded in today’s society. With inequalities high or on the rise, growing job insecurity and stagnant social mobility, many people have come to fear that progress has bypassed them and that the future is increasingly uncertain.

While concerns over economic and other forms of insecurity have been high in the public discourse since the 2008 crisis, fear and uncertainty have taken over the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures adopted to contain the pandemic have caused unprecedented disruptions in economies and labour markets.

All the while public institutions, services and social protection systems, if available, are struggling to adapt to rapidly changing needs. In addition, demographic trends—population ageing, in particular—and changes in the size and structure of families puts their role as informal providers of social protection and care into question. Societal changes beyond one’s control may be increasing exposure to shocks while the ability to cope and recover has not improved accordingly.

Economic insecurity intersects with poverty and inequality to form a “critical triangle” of today’s social challenges. Its analysis can offer new insights into income dynamics, including how people move in and out of poverty, and how past experiences influence current wellbeing. To date, insecurity has received less policy and academic attention than these other two major challenges. While the fundamental importance of economic security is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>1</sup> the issue is not addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Yet insecurity and the mistrust in institutions it may generate are major obstacles to collective efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

As the UN think tank on social and economic issues, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) generates data and analysis on emerging issues. This expert meeting will serve to gather inputs from experts on an emerging and very current challenge: insecurity and its drivers. Experts will present recent research on insecurity and will discuss its drivers and impacts, with a focus on helping DESA define the fundamental issues that its normative and analytical work should cover and promote. The experts will also make policy recommendations.

## **II. Objectives and Key Questions**

The expert group meeting aims to review recent research on economic insecurity, its drivers and implications. To accomplish these objectives, the meeting will bring together experts from the research community, civil society and the UN system. To tap into recent research, presentations by the invited experts will focus on several key questions that include the following:

- What is economic insecurity? How is it related to poverty and inequality? Why is it that insecurity concerns have increased in the last decade/s and where? Do trends and concerns differ between developed and in developing countries?
- How has the COVID-19 crisis affected insecurity so far? How will it affect it in the long term?
- How has the role of work in providing security changed? How might we expect COVID to affect these changes?
- Why should we care about economic insecurity? What are its political and social implications?
- What policies have been the most harmful to security? In the context of the current crisis, what countries have done better at maintaining economic security? What would a policy “compact” for economic security amidst growing uncertainty look like?
- What can the UN do to increase (objective and perceived) security around the world? What issues should DESA’s analytical work on economic insecurity cover?

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<sup>1</sup> Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

The meeting should allow for a robust exchange of ideas and lessons learned.

### **III. Expected outputs**

The Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) will prepare a short report of the outcomes of the meeting, based on substantive presentations by invited experts and interactive discussions. More importantly, the outcomes of the meeting should feed into DISD's research programme for 2021.

### **IV. Organizational and administrative matters**

The Expert Group Meeting will be held online over two days: 3 and 4 December 2020.

A number of experts have been identified and are being invited by DISD/DESA, taking into consideration gender and geographical balance.

An agenda of the expert group meeting is available. All presentations should be sent to **Ms. Maren Jiménez (jimenezm@un.org)** with a copy to **Ms. Julie Pewitt (pewitt@un.org)** by 1 December 2020.

In addition to the invited experts, staff members of DESA and of various United Nations entities will also participate in the meeting.

Presentations by invited experts to each session will be followed by interactive discussions.

### **V. Documentation and language of the meeting**

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