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61st Session of the Commission for Social Development

High-level panel discussion 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”

Monday, 6 February 2023, 3:00 pm– 6:00 pm, Conference room 4

Draft Concept Note



1. Background

The Commission for Social Development will convene its sixty-first session from 6 to 15 February 2022 under the priority theme of “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”. The theme was decided by ECOSOC decision 2022/327.

In its decision, ECOSOC also affirmed that the Commission would contribute to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by supporting the thematic reviews of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The HLPF on sustainable development in 2023 will include a three-day ministerial segment with the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

The Council’s decision further reaffirmed that the Commission shall continue to review issues related to the follow-up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development and advise the Council thereon. As an integral part of the Commission’s deliberation to assess progress in the implementation of the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), a high-level panel discussion on the priority theme will be held on 6 February 2023 from 3 to 6pm, New York Time. Within its mandate, the Commission will provide policy guidance based on discussions and sharing of national experiences to create full and productive employment and decent work for all to overcome inequality. The outcome of this panel discussion, together with that of the general discussion and the

expected resolution on the priority theme will contribute to the work of the ECOSOC and the 2023 HLPF.

2. Context surrounding the priority theme

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened various forms of inequality. Uneven economic recovery is expected to further widen inequalities between countries unless effective policies are put in place. Chief among such policies are those that seek to create full and productive employment and decent work for all. Quality jobs are critical to tackling inequality through several pathways, notably, by increasing income and helping people escape poverty, promoting equality of opportunities, closing gaps between the rich and the poor, and empowering and improving the well-being of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, especially women.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite some progress, decent work deficits were already stubbornly persistent. Notwithstanding sustained economic growth over the past decades, informal employment has remained persistently high in emerging economies. Youth unemployment has continued to increase and gender gaps in paid work have persisted. In many countries, being in paid employment is insufficient for a person to escape poverty. In emerging and developing countries, as many as one in four workers live below the moderate poverty thresholds.

Workers in insecure forms of employment (particularly when involuntary), including those in temporary and part-time employment, self-employment, and workers facing irregular hours and interrupted working patterns, are at higher risk of informality and decent work deficits. Over 2 billion workers around the world (or 60 per cent) work in the informal economy. Informal workers do not have the legal guarantees safeguarding their fundamental rights at work, including their right to equality and non-discrimination, social protection, voice and representation, and decent working conditions. Workers in the informal economy earn, on average, about 19 percent less than workers in formal employment, putting them at higher risk of poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and dramatically exacerbated inequalities in the labour market, hitting hardest those groups who were already facing discrimination and marginalization in employment, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrant workers, as well as ethnic, religious, and other minorities in vulnerable situations.

Member States need to put in place **policies to create more inclusive, equitable, and adaptable labour market. This requires, among other things**, dedicated measures to address vulnerabilities and ensure adequate protection of all workers. Investment in education, lifelong learning and health services to equalize opportunities is a prerequisite for reduction of inequality and exclusion. Effective labour market institutions – including minimum wages, collective bargaining, employment protection legislation, and employment law – can support employment growth, enhance the quality of jobs, and reduce inequalities in the labour market. Countries can produce a change in labour demand and supply as well as support vulnerable workers and jobseekers through effective labour market policies and social protection benefits. Social protection benefits, including unemployment, maternity, disability, and sickness benefits, can ensure workers' income security, including in the case of shocks. At present, only a third of the working-age population is covered by sickness benefits, 35.5 per cent of the global labour force has access to employment protection injury protection, and only 18.6 per cent of unemployed workers receive unemployment benefits.

Informality is a major contributor to working poverty and inequality. A transition to formality is necessary if no one is to be left behind in the implementation of the 2030

Agenda. Because of the multiple factors of informality and the heterogeneity within informal economy workers and enterprises, the transition to formality necessarily requires integrated, as well as nuanced and differentiated strategies. Strategies and interventions to support formalization should cover different types of policies – including integrated economic, social, and labour policies - to establish a comprehensive approach to formalization.

Significant gaps in social protection coverage, comprehensiveness and adequacy across all countries are leaving billions of people vulnerable to poverty, hunger, and ill-health. Countries need to invest in building universal, risk-informed, gender-responsive national social protection systems to ensure that everyone has access to comprehensive, adequate, and sustainable protection over the life course.

The sectoral composition of growth is being transformed due to rapid digital, demographic, and climate changes. Effective policies can help support the creation of decent jobs in new, sustainable, and growing sectors, including the green economy, platform economy, care economy, and social and solidarity economy. Such policies include appropriate investments in flexible and accessible skills development policies designed with social partners that are tailored to the needs of these new sectors, policies that ensure a just digital and green transition that is fair and inclusive, and legislative changes that clarify the employment status and rights of platform workers, amongst other things.

3. Objectives

Drawing on research and national experiences, the high-level panel discussion will seek to identify effective policies to create 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. Discussions will focus on policies and strategies that have proven to be successful in creating more inclusive, equitable, and adaptable labour markets, at the global, regional, and national levels, as well as policies that seek to create employment and decent work in new, sustainable, and growing sectors to overcome inequality.

The key objective of the high-level panel discussion include:

- a) Take stock of current trends in income and non-income inequalities in the labour market and the barriers faced by some groups in accessing decent work, including, informal workers, workers in insecure forms of employment (including those in - particularly involuntary - temporary and part-time employment, self-employment, and workers facing irregular hours and interrupted working patterns), women, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants, minorities and indigenous peoples and others vulnerable to discrimination and stigma.
- b) Draw lessons from the institutions, policies, regulations put in place to create more inclusive, equitable and adaptable labour markets; and how universal, risk-informed, gender-response national social protection systems can ensure that everyone has access to comprehensive, adequate, and sustainable protection over the life course, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as informal workers.
- c) Share examples of active labour market policies and social protection measures directed at specific disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in the labour market and good practice in supporting full and productive employment and decent work in new, sustainable, and growing sectors, including the green economy, the care economy, the platform economy, and social and solidarity economy.

- d) Share knowledge and experiences on how countries can design and implement nuanced, differentiated, and integrated approaches to the transition from the informal to the formal economy.

4. Guiding questions

The high-level panel discussion on the priority theme will be chaired by the Chair of the Commission. The Chair will open the session with brief remarks and introduce the keynote speaker. The keynote speaker will deliver an address. After the keynote address, the Chair will introduce the panelists and invite them to make presentations, followed by questions directly related to the presentations from the audience/participants. After this short question and answer session, the Chair will open the floor for interactive dialogue.

The tentative time allocation for the panel discussion is as follows:

Speaker	Suggested speaking time
Chair: Opening remarks and the introduction of the keynote speaker.	5 minutes
Keynote speaker	15 minutes
Moderator/Chair: introduction/context-setting	7 minutes
Panellists (5): Presentations	10 minutes per panelist
Moderated interactive discussion	Q&A and open dialogue with participants of the Commission (60 minutes)
Concluding remarks and Closing by the Chair	3 minutes
	Total: 3 hours

Panellists are expected to structure their presentations around concrete policies and strategies in Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities. They are invited to highlight innovative approaches and lessons learned.

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 and the 2023 HLPF.

5. Guiding questions

- What policies and measures are necessary to support employment growth, enhance the quality of jobs, foster equal opportunities, and reduce inequalities?
- How can countries achieve universal, comprehensive, and sustainable social protection systems, which cover all types of workers and are adapted to socio-economic transformations within societies?
- What policies and measures are needed to facilitate and support labour market inclusion of disadvantaged and excluded groups including, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants, minorities and indigenous people, and others vulnerable to

discrimination and stigma? What can be done to support women's equality access to the labour market and decent work, including measures to tackle stereotypes, discriminatory practices, the unfair division of unpaid care work, and close the gender pay and pension gaps?

- What type of integrated strategies can be taken to accelerate the transition to formality?
- What policies and measures can support the creation of decent jobs in new, sustainable, and growing sectors, notably the green economy, platform economy, care economy, and social and solidarity economy?