



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

2015 INTEGRATION SEGMENT

30 March-1 April 2015

[Version: 30 October 2014]

Achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work for all

Concept Note

The Economic and Social Council decided that the theme for the Integration Segment of the 2015 session of the Council would be “achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work for all”.

At almost the same time the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development Goals concluded its work and declared that “people are at the centre of sustainable development”. A focus on how the creation of good quality jobs could be a tool for promoting the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development will provide an opportunity for Member States, civil society, the private sector, academics and other key actors to discuss and elaborate upon the many ways in which people are at the centre of sustainable development. At the same time, the meeting will serve as a platform to identify policy choices and possible trade-offs that could arise from an integrated approach. Tackling these issues together in an integrated manner makes sense. We currently face massive environmental, social, economic and employment challenges.

Escalating natural resource use and pollution is compounding the existing scarcity of fresh water and fertile land and accelerating the loss of biodiversity and climate change beyond tolerable - perhaps even manageable - levels. Not only is the situation environmentally unsustainable, it has substantial economic and social costs.

While progress has been made in reducing absolute poverty, there are still 839 million workers in developing countries (or 27% of global employment) who are unable to earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US 2 dollar a day poverty threshold. Moreover, the pace at which we are reducing extreme poverty has slowed in recent years and environmental degradation has the potential to reverse the hard won gains in development and poverty reduction.

Thanks in part to rising commodity prices, significant parts of the developing world and many emerging economies recorded robust economic growth during the last decade. But in most cases the benefits of this growth were not fairly distributed. The gap between the incomes of the rich and the poor is becoming a gulf in the vast majority of countries around the world, exacerbating social tensions in all societies.

Social cohesion is threatened by on-going discrimination against women, ethnic groups, indigenous people and various other minority groups. Economic and environmental problems encourage labour mobility and in some parts of the world migrant workers face exploitation. All people deserve equal treatment and equal opportunity in the world of work.

Today’s challenges must be tackled in an integrated and cohesive manner. For example, a labour market recovery that generates sufficient decent work will definitely require substantially stronger economic growth than the world has recorded in recent years. But this faster growth needs to be more balanced if we are to achieve sustainable development. This means that the benefits of growth

must be distributed more fairly between countries and within countries to reverse widening income inequality and promote social cohesion.

Simultaneously we need to alter the composition of growth, and in particular our consumption and investment patterns must become more balanced and environmentally sustainable. The latter can be facilitated by a stronger focus on the creation of decent green jobs. Major investments in infrastructure that will make our societies more resilient and energy efficient plus the development of new renewable energy sources can contribute substantially to job creation and offset any job losses in industries that need to reduce their carbon footprint. Failure to act urgently will result in further job loss in sectors most threatened by climate change such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries, which employ well over a billion people.

Sustainable development requires that we upgrade parts of the informal and rural economies. These sectors provide the vast bulk of jobs in the developing world and they can be made more productive and better paid without adverse consequences for the environment. This will require a combination of efficient public investment and encouragement of private initiative through access to affordable credit and a conducive business environment. For developing countries, industry and trade policies that support economic diversification and higher value-added production in an environmentally sustainable manner are also essential.

To achieve the social dimension of sustainable development will require implementation of promises that have been made about a social floor in many international forums in recent years and progress towards a living wage. It will also require the establishment and support of labour market institutions that help promote fairness at the workplace.

All three aspects of sustainable development can be facilitated by the right education, training and skills policies plus increased investment in other active labour market policies. Economic growth in some economies is hindered by inadequate investment in basic education and skill shortages. Social cohesion will be promoted if workers have the opportunity throughout their working life to improve their skills and the quality of their jobs. And the promotion of environmental sustainability will require the development of new skills and the expansion of many occupations that have been neglected in the past.

Focus

Based on the above, the Integrated Segment in 2015 will focus on the following priority areas:

1. National and international economic policies to facilitate sustainable development and decent work.
2. Transforming the informal economy and upgrading rural economies to enhance productivity and promote better jobs in an environmentally sustainable manner.
3. Reducing poverty and addressing rising income inequality with a neutral environmental impact.
4. Expanding green jobs, building resilient societies and promoting more sustainable patterns of consumption and investment.
5. The social floor, living wages, labour market institutions and sustainable development.
6. Training, skills and active labour market policies for sustainable development.

Key Questions

- What are the potential short-term policy choices and longer-term gains inherent in an integrated approach to promoting full employment and decent work for all?

- How can policy coherence in economic, social and environmental dimensions be achieved in the promotion of full employment and decent work for all?
- How can labour policies help reduce economic and social inequalities?
- Why is youth unemployment a major issue in many countries regardless of their level of development?
- Can agricultural sector development help generate youth employment in African countries?
- What measures are needed to link entrepreneurs to global supply chains?
- What role do Governments, the UN system, the ILO tripartite constituents and civil society play in ensuring rights at work?
- What is the future of work? How are countries preparing their education systems to respond to this change? What are the investments required?
- What kinds of jobs are needed to provide solutions to climate change? What are the policies required and how can the trade-offs between the environmental, economic and social pillars be mitigated?
- What kinds of investments are needed to generate the greatest job potential while maintaining environmental sustainability?
- What kind of institutional framework and governance arrangements are needed for the successful integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development to facilitate decent work?
- What specific steps are needed for the ECOSOC system to help countries boost economic growth in a sustainable way that creates decent jobs ?

Format and participants

The meeting will be a three-day event, chaired by H.E. Ambassador Vladimir Drobnjak, Vice-President of ECOSOC. It will feature an opening session with eminent personalities and a number of roundtable sessions, TED-style presentations and a General Debate. Each roundtable session will be moderated and followed by open floor discussion. Participants will be asked to focus on ways to promote policy convergence based on country experiences, good practices and lessons learned. A background note with key questions will be prepared by ILO to guide the deliberations overall. DESA, in collaboration with ILO, will prepare guidance notes for speakers for each individual session. The moderator will summarize the major points of discussion and recommendations arising from each session.

Participants will include ILO's tripartite constituency (Member States, Employers and Trade Unions) alongside Major Groups representatives, UN system organizations, Academia, Parliamentarians, Local Governments, Foundations and NGOs. Eminent speakers will include Heads of State or Government with best practices to share in achieving sustainable development through employment creation and decent work.

Outcome

The outcome of the event will be a summary by the ECOSOC Vice-President highlighting the main policy recommendations and providing guidance on integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development. The summary will be available for consideration at the upcoming High-Level Political Forum and the Annual Ministerial Review.