



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

Expert Group Meeting on the Priority Theme of the 53<sup>rd</sup> & 54<sup>th</sup> Sessions of the  
Commission for Social Development:

### **“Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World”**

United Nations Headquarters, New York  
19 - 20 May 2015

#### **CONCEPT NOTE**

#### **Purpose of the meeting**

In its resolution 2014/3, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations decided that the priority theme for the 2015-2016 review and policy cycle of the Commission for Social Development would be “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”. The expert group meeting is convened in the context of this resolution and in preparation for the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, which will take place in February 2016 and which should agree on a policy outcome (that is, a resolution) on this priority theme.

The meeting will build on discussions on the review and rethinking of social development and social policy held during and in preparation for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission. The outcomes of the meeting will contribute to the work of the Commission by providing concrete, evidence-based recommendations for promoting and strengthening social development and for improving the formulation and implementation of policy frameworks that affect social progress. The outcomes of the meeting will contribute to the work of the Commission by providing concrete, evidence-based policy recommendations to promote and therefore strengthen social development. In particular, the meeting should provide guidance and key input for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme. The meeting will also be of use to suggest topics that the Commission may want to consider in the years ahead, within its mandate. Within the framework of the new post-2015 global development agenda, which will be adopted in September 2015, the outcomes of the meeting must also take into consideration how the agenda’s implementation can best promote social justice and inclusion.

#### **Background**

The year 2015 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. In its report on this priority theme to the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission for Social Development, in February 2015, the Secretary-General noted that the

commitments made at the Summit twenty years ago remain acutely relevant and are largely unfulfilled. The world has made great strides in reducing poverty but is far from eradicating it. A growing number of workers and families cannot rely on stable decent jobs as means to cope with risks or secure livelihoods and therefore remain vulnerable to poverty and exclusion. Accordingly, strengthening social development –or the social dimension of sustainable development- is not only a matter of making progress towards poverty or employment targets within a short time horizon, but also requires securing such progress and ensuring that it will be sustainable in the long term.

The imminent adoption of the post-2015 agenda opens an opportunity to consider ways to strengthen social development and, more importantly, to bring concrete proposals into effect. It calls for addressing broad questions, including ways to generate commitment to strengthen the social pillar and the challenges social policy faces in the contemporary world. It also calls for tackling concrete questions, reviewing how different countries have addressed vulnerability, created resilience and secured progress in social development, as well as making specific recommendations on how the international community and, in particular, the Commission for Social Development, can best contribute to achieving these objectives, including through the implementation of the post-2015 agenda.

This forward-looking policy exercise requires broad-based research and consultations. Contributions from experts within and outside the UN system as well as consultations with other stakeholders are essential.

The expert group meeting will provide a platform for interaction between a small group of experts from academia, national Governments, civil society, including think tank researchers, and the UN system with the Division for Social Policy and Development, including staff responsible for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme (due in the fall of 2015). The meeting should allow for pointed, in-depth discussions and analysis on the proposed policy themes. The policy recommendations that will emerge from the meeting will guide the recommendations provided by the Secretary-General in its report and should inform the Commission's policy outcome on rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world.

In addition to holding a meeting of key experts, the Division will consult electronically with a broader network of experts from all regions starting in March 2015 (list of experts attached). This broader network of experts should help fine-tune a limited number of key messages for the report of the Secretary-General should also assist in formulating relevant policy recommendations.

## **Objectives**

The expert group meeting aims to facilitate the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development on a policy outcome on rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world by undertaking a review of policies and strategies that have effectively strengthened social development. Experts at the meeting will highlight challenges to and opportunities for social policy and development, good practices and lessons learned. They

should also put forth concrete, evidence-based recommendations on how Governments, the international community and, in particular, the Commission for Social Development can best contribute to promoting social development.

The presentations and discussion to take place during the meeting as well as its conclusions and recommendations will directly contribute to the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General that will be submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its 54<sup>th</sup> session in February 2016 on the priority theme. This report will strive to provide the basis for the Commission's resolution.

The outcomes of the meeting must also take into consideration how the implementation of the post-2015 global development agenda can best promote social justice, inclusion and participation, and reflect on how the Commission for Social Development can best use its leadership to ensure that these principles will remain central in the agenda's implementation and monitoring processes. In this regard, the outcomes of the meeting will be used to suggest topics that the Commission, within its mandate, may wish to address in the years ahead.

The meeting will bring together experts from academia, national Governments, civil society organizations and the UN system and from all regions of the world. Experts will focus on answering the following broad questions:

1. What are the key goals of social policy today? Have they changed since 1995? What defines the “contemporary” context for social development and how should policy frameworks adapt to it?
2. What strategies have contributed the most to building “society for all” and/or reducing the vulnerability of individuals, households and communities to poverty and exclusion and to building resilience? Which have been detrimental to their pursuit?
3. What institutions have proven key to fostering social development? Where have these institutions worked best?
4. In preparation for the post-2015 global development agenda, there has been emphasis on the need for the agenda to be “transformative”. What will it take for the post-2015 global development agenda to be socially transformative? What are the binding social constraints to the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda?
5. How can the Commission for Social Development help strengthen the social dimension of sustainable development in the context of the post-2015 global development agenda? What concrete strategies and policies should the Commission focus its attention?

The expert group should conclude the meeting by reaching consensus on the main conclusions and recommendations that are relevant to the current and future work of the Commission for Social Development.

## **Outputs**

The expert group meeting will result in the following outputs:

- Substantive papers produced by expert participants on the core themes of the meeting.
- Key conclusions and action-oriented recommendations, including new initiatives.
- A report summarizing the expert deliberations and presenting the meeting outcomes.

## **Organizational aspects**

### *Date and venue of the meeting*

The expert group meeting is scheduled to take place on 19 and 20 May at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The meeting will be organized by the Social Perspective on Development Branch, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat.

### *Organizational set-up of the meeting*

About 12 experts, identified and invited by the Division for Social Policy and Development, are expected to attend the meeting.

The Secretariat will provide a preliminary list of substantive issues that will be described in an annotated agenda of the expert group meeting. Prior to the meeting, experts are required to submit short written papers (5-7 pages) in English, to the United Nations Secretariat. These short papers will be posted on the web page of the Meeting for information. Experts are expected to take part in all meeting sessions.

The working language of the meeting will be English. There will be no interpretation provided.