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

Leaving No One Behind –The Imperative of Inclusive Development:
Report on the World Social Situation 2016

Key Findings

- Virtually everywhere, some individuals and groups confront barriers that prevent them from fully participating in social, economic, political and cultural life. Against a backdrop of high inequalities and social exclusion, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has pledged that no one will be left behind.

- Determining who is being left behind and in what ways people are excluded is key to the 2030 Agenda's implementation. But doing so is a challenging endeavour, as social exclusion has many dimensions and the relevance of each dimension varies depending on country context.

- Despite data limitations, the existing data allow for a meaningful illustration of key aspects of exclusion.

- The evidence presented in the report shows, in particular, that ethnicity, age, disability and migrant status affect access to opportunities, including health and education services, jobs, income and participation in political and civic life. Children with disabilities and those belonging to ethnic minorities face unique barriers in the educational system, for instance, particularly in rural areas. In the labour market, youth, migrants and workers belonging to an indigenous group are more often under- or even unpaid and over-educated for the work they do than workers of other groups.

- These disadvantages reinforce one another. Namely, lower levels of health and education go hand in hand with higher levels of poverty and unemployment, and often also with less voice in political and civic life. Similarly, employment situation affects not only a person's income but also her or his participation in social and political life. Thus, progress in one domain, alone, will not be sufficient to end social exclusion.

- However, group-based inequalities are not uniform across countries. Whether development is leaving some people behind depends on the economic, social, political and environmental context, including national and local institutions, norms, attitudes as well as laws and policies in place.

- Discriminatory practices continue to be a key barrier to social inclusion. While many Governments have repealed discriminatory policies and laws, prejudice and discriminatory practices remain widespread in everyday life and continue to affect the opportunities people have, their sense of agency and their overall well-being.

- Societies cannot be considered inclusive if poverty remains widespread and decent work opportunities are lacking. While the world has made great progress in reducing income poverty, many people remain vulnerable to it and those living in the most extreme poverty are being left behind. In addition, productive employment and decent work are not available to everyone. Addressing decent work deficits will be crucial to promoting inclusive development paths.

- A universal approach to social policy is key to address the underlying causes of exclusion and social injustice. It helps level the playing field and expand people's capabilities. Basic, universal social protection and universal access to primary and secondary education, in particular, are affordable and necessary to maintain social cohesion and strengthen the social contract.

- Leaving no one behind also requires that universal social policies be complemented by special or targeted measures to address the distinct obstacles faced by individuals and groups at high risk of exclusion.

- Leaving no one behind calls for institutional change as well. Ensuring that institutions are inclusive can contribute to levelling the playing field and provide all citizens with opportunities to participate in public life on equal terms.

- Changing the social, cultural and political norms that underpin or perpetuate unequal power relations and the disadvantage experienced by some social groups is often a long-term process, dependent on national and local circumstances. However with political will, Governments can influence and help transform them.