
COMMISSION for SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York



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



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Concept Note

Ministerial Forum on Social Protection

Tuesday, 12 February 2019, 10:00am – 1:00pm
Conference Room 4

1. Background

The Commission for Social Development will convene its fifty-seventh session from 11 to 21 February 2019, under the priority theme of “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies”, which was decided by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution E/RES/2018/3. During the Commission, a Ministerial Forum on Social Protection will be held on 12 February in the morning. The Forum will provide an opportunity for Ministers and/or senior Government officials to share their experience in building/strengthening national social protection systems and measures, including good policies and practices, innovative approaches and lessons learned at the national and regional levels, and engage in an interactive dialogue with a wider audience, including the members of the Commission and relevant stakeholders working on inclusive social development.

This Forum is organized for the first time in accordance with resolution E/CN.5/2018/L.5 on the methods of work, which “*Encourages* the Bureau of the Commission to continue to propose interactive dialogues, such as high-level events and ministerial and expert workshops that engage Member States and relevant stakeholders, so as to encourage dialogue and enhance the impact of its work, including by addressing the implementation of, follow-up to and review of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;”

2. Context

Social protection has emerged as one of the key policy instruments to reduce inequality and poverty simultaneously, while also promoting inclusive growth. Member States are committed to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable (SDG 1, Target 1.3).

Currently, 187 countries have committed to establishing social protection floors to provide a nationally defined set of basic social security guarantees and build progressively comprehensive social protection systems. The social protection floors are to ensure, at a

minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care, including maternity care, without risk of hardship and an increased risk of poverty, and basic income security throughout the life course, including in case of maternity, sickness, disability, employment injury and old age.

Once such floors are established, further efforts should be made to close coverage gaps, enhance the adequacy of benefits, extend social protection floors to vulnerable populations, and streamline existing fragmented social protection programmes into nationally appropriate social protection systems, which include: 1) contributory social protection (pension schemes, unemployment benefits); 2) social services (health, education, water and sanitation, child, old age, and disability care); 3) social assistance (conditional cash transfers, public works, social pensions); and 4) productive inclusion (financial and saving groups, income generation activities, minimum wage, and asset building).

Challenges and opportunities to strengthening/investing in social protection

While much progress has been made in the last decade, significant coverage gaps remain. Only 45.2 percent of the global population is covered by at least one social protection cash benefit¹. At least half of the world's population do not have full coverage of essential health services², and about 56 percent of rural population lacks health coverage, compared to 22 percent in urban areas³. While cash transfers for families with children have expanded in low and middle-income countries over the past decades, coverage and benefit levels remain insufficient in many countries.

Social protection coverage for persons of working age is still limited. Globally, only 21.8 percent of unemployed workers are covered by unemployment benefits⁴. This is partly because a great number of people (about 2 billion globally) work in the informal economy, many of whom lack access to adequate social protection, although they are exposed to greater risks of job loss, illness, injury, or disability. Globally, only 28 per cent of persons with severe disabilities received disability benefits, while an estimated 15 per cent of the world's population experience moderate or severe disability⁵.

While 68 per cent of people above retirement age receive an old-age pension, there are significant regional disparities with most developing countries facing major coverage deficits⁶. A current challenge for high-and upper middle-income countries is the adequacy of pensions and their financial sustainability and maintenance of systems. Especially for those facing "population ageing", striking a balance between adequacy and sustainability is a major challenge.

In recent years, cash transfers, targeted social safety nets and financial protection schemes have been increasingly used to assist people affected by natural and human-made disasters recover/rebuild their livelihoods more quickly. These measures have proven to be more cost efficient and effective than in-kind food transfers and have positive economic multiplier effects on local economy over the short and long term.

¹ Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018.

² WHO and the World Bank (2017) *Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2017 Global Monitoring Report*.

³ ILO (2015). *Global evidence on inequities in rural health protection: New data on rural deficits in health coverage for 174 countries*.

⁴ ILO (2017). *World Social Protection Report 2017-19*.

⁵ UNDESA (2018). *RWSS 2018*.

⁶ *Ibid*.

One of the key challenges to expanding social protection, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, is adequate financing. To fund social protection, in particular floors, tax-based financing is necessary. Governments often need to strengthen national tax systems, including improving the efficiency in tax collection and administration and addressing tax evasion and fraud. International coordination is critical to reduce tax evasion and provide technical assistance to help countries design adequate systems to tackle tax avoidance schemes.

3. Objectives

The objective of the Ministerial Forum on Social Protection is to facilitate the exchange of national and regional experience to learn from good practices, innovative approaches, and lessons learned, and identify common challenges and explore effective policies and measures for building/strengthening nationally appropriate social protection systems, including floors.

This will support national governments to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in particular to achieve the SDG-10, target 10.4, but also SDG-1, SDG-2, SDG-3, SDG-4, SDG-5, SDG-8, and SDG-16. The discussions will also build upon national efforts towards the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, which were agreed upon at the World Summit for Social Development.

4. Structure and format of the panel discussion

The Ministerial Forum will be moderated by the Chair of the 57th session of the Commission for Social Development. The Chair will open the session with brief remarks and introduce the panellists (Ministers and high-level policymakers). The Chair will then invite the panellists (7-10 minutes presentations, addressing the guiding questions). Following their presentations, the Chair will open the discussion and invite questions and comments from the floor.

Panellists are expected to structure their presentations around concrete policies and strategies that have proven to be successful in building/strengthening social protection systems and programmes, and to highlight innovative approaches and lessons learned at the national and regional levels. The Chair/panellists will identify common challenges and effective policies and strategies to address them.

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, in particular, its high-level segment, and the 2019 High-Level Political Forum to be convened under the theme: 'Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality'.

4. Guiding questions

The Commission for Social Development may wish to consider the following questions in its deliberations on the Ministerial Forum on social protection at its fifty-seventh session:

- i. What are the opportunities and challenges to building social protection systems or floors?
- ii. How did your country effectively expand the reach of social protection system to include those who are left behind? Please share successful strategies as well the challenges you have encountered.
- iii. How to balance competing priorities, for example, between extending coverage and providing adequate benefits to make real impacts?

- iv. What are innovative strategies to finance social protection? How to secure social spending during economic slowdown?

The time allocation for the panel discussion is as follows:

Speaker	Suggested speaking time
Chair: Opening remarks and the introduction of panellists	7 minutes
Panellists (4-6): Presentations	7 -10 minutes per panellist
Moderated interactive discussion	Lead discussants (3 – 5 minutes per lead discussant)
	Q & A directly related to the presentations for clarification, if any (10 minutes)
	Open discussion with questions and comments from participants of the Commission (Interventions limited to 3 minutes, followed by responses from panellists)
Concluding remarks by panellists and Closing by the Chair	10 minutes
	Total duration: 3 hours

