



The United Nations Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD),
the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,
cordially invites you to attend a high-level panel discussion:

**“Social protection to reduce inequalities and enhance social
inclusion in countries affected by conflict”**

**13 February 2019, from 1.15 to 2.30 p.m.
Conference Room 12, United Nations Headquarters**

Concept note



The World Inequality Report 2018 is stressing “In recent decades, income inequality has increased in nearly all countries, but at different speeds, suggesting that institutions and policies matter in shaping inequality”, - which can be applied to all forms of inequalities, social cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledgebased. As also stressed in the Report of United Nations’ Secretary-General on the priority theme of the 57th session of the Commission for Social Development (E/CB.5/2019/3) “Income inequality is but one of several dimensions of inequality, including inequalities of access and opportunity in relation to education and health services, productive assets, financial services and political representation. These inequalities are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, resulting in significant differences in various outcomes such as overall well-being and lifetime earnings across different groups.” Social protection is a direct response to this, in conjuncture with other measures.

SDG 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries has a specific target 4 focusing on to “Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality”. Thus, when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, Member States recognized that social protection is one of the key policy tools to reduce inequalities. Target 2 reads, “By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. As the overarching objective of Agenda 2030 is to leave no one behind, social protection policies need to cover all in need over the life cycle, including those who are the most vulnerable.

The UN-DESA 2018 Report on the World Social Situation shows the potential of social protection systems “to prevent poverty, reduce inequality and promote social inclusion”, Furthermore, the WSSR 2016 on “Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World” co-published with UNESCO emphasizes “Social protection is a suite of policy instruments that explicitly aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability and has the potential to be redistributive. While narrow ‘residual’ definitions focus on its safety net and social welfare functions, expanded ‘rights-based’ conceptualizations emphasize its ability to address social injustices, by reducing material and non-material inequalities and promoting social inclusion and universal access to essential social services. Social protection can be a powerful tool for reducing inequality and social injustice, particularly when it is designed and delivered in conjunction with complementary initiatives”.

Because of the importance of social protection as a contributor to human and social development as exemplified by the successful social protection initiatives, there are also several other Sustainable Development Goals in addition to Goal 10 having social protection-related targets, such as SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (health), SDG 5 (women empowerment), SDG 8 (employment). Social Protection is also a core contributor to the achievement of many other SDGs, including SDG 4 (education) and SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies).



All the SDGs focusing directly or indirectly on social protection as a policy response were at the core of the presentations and discussions during the MOST Forum on “Multi-dimensional Social Protection Policies in Conflict and Conflict-Affected Arab States” co-organized by the League of Arab States and UNESCO in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt on 4 December 2018. The importance of investing in social protection to achieve human development, reduction of inequalities and social inclusion was stressed during the Forum. Attention was also drawn to the challenges countries are facing, such as interruptions in service delivery due to financial constraints, (lack of, or the destruction of infrastructure because of conflicts, and an increase in refugees and internally displaced people who need jobs, access to health services and education, and social protection. It was emphasized the importance of achieving universal coverage of social protection, including floors, and the importance of policies supported by social science evidence and data were underscored. Many speakers underlined the importance of setting conditionalities to receive e.g. cash transfer as a stimulator to e.g. send children to school. Social protection should be a right.

ESCWA stressed that the conflicts in the region are having devastating impacts on human development. Children especially will carry the effects of the crisis and lack of social protection throughout their lives. It was emphasized that there is a need to register the refugees and Internally Displaced People in order to deliver social protection to them. As also pointed out by the Report of the Secretary-General for the Commission in the chapter on “Social protection for social inclusion and reduction of inequality”, social protection provides protection against risks and in case of shocks, and social protection strategies should provide effective protection for all and extend protection to those who are currently not covered, including the “missing middle”, referring to those who are currently not covered by social transfers targeted at the poorest, nor social insurance.

UNESCO had commissioned a research paper for the Ministerial Forum to inform the meeting which identifies the key challenges facing social protection systems in conflict and conflict-affected Arab countries, and propose a set of recommendations for action which will be presented in the side-event.

As stressed in the paper, there is a deficit in social science research and data in the Arab region, hampering measurement of the impact of conflicts on poverty, social exclusion etc, and the impact of social protection policies. To invest in social protection can also mitigate the conflicts in the region given that social problems often can be the trigger for political and civil unrest. Social protection delivery and policies are often too fragmented and do not account adequately for the risk of disaster/conflict.

The Forum concluded with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration with recommendations for social protection initiatives at national, regional and international level, especially highlighting the need for evidence-based policymaking. Ministers agreed, among several initiatives to that data



should be disaggregated based on gender, age, disability, geographic location and relevant socio-economic conditions

As indicated in the World Social Science Report, 2016,: “investing in and closing the knowledge gap in social science research into inequalities will be vital to achieve the cross-cutting ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme is focusing on bridging the gap between social science and policymaking, including through the MOST Regional Forums of Ministers of Social Development.

OBJECTIVES AND THEMATIC FOCUS:

The objective of the side event is to present the importance of policymaking based on knowledge, including social science, in the area of social protection and its role in reducing inequalities, promoting social inclusion and enhancing social cohesion in countries in conflict and affected by conflict. Several of the recommendations in the Report of the Secretary-General for the Commission (Doc.E/CN.5/2019/3) are also in line with the discussions at the MOST Ministerial Forum co-organized by the League of Arab States and UNESCO in December 2019, such as that “Policymakers must address the disadvantages that women, youth, older workers, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and temporary and part-time workers face in employment”; “ Countries should build national social protection systems, including floors that cover all people throughout the life cycle, guarantee access to essential goods and services and reduce unequal opportunities for people living in poverty and socially excluded groups” and “Countries should better coordinate social protection policies and measures with poverty reduction programmes and universal social protection to avoid excluding people in informal or precarious jobs”.

Thematic focus:

As a contribution to the priority theme of the 57th session of the Commission, “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies”, the outcome of the MOST Ministerial Forum co-organized by the League of Arab States and UNESCO in December 2018, under the theme of “Social Protection Policies in Conflict and Conflict Affected Arab States”, as well as research findings and civil society actions in this area will be shared. .

The side event will focus its discussion on: 1) the critical role of social protection in reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion; 2) additional challenges faced by in-conflict and conflict affected countries in the Arab region in delivering social protection; and 3) the importance of knowledge-based policymaking, and the need for involving social science community in policymaking process so that they could contribute to achieving social protection for all.