

ECOSOC Special Meeting on Inequality
30 March 2016
Concept note

BACKGROUND

Inequality has been recognized as a universal social, economic and political challenge. It is a multidimensional phenomenon with broad income and non-income aspects and profound economic, social and environmental impacts.

SCOPE

Inequality and the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals pledge to reduce inequality and provides a vision of a shared future with equality and opportunities for all. The objective of reducing inequality is both a stand-alone and crosscutting issue in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Goal 10 (SDG-10) seeks to reduce inequality within and among countries, while other SDGs address several different aspects.

Policy Actions to address inequality at the national and regional level

Within country inequality is not attributable to a specific stage of development or geography. Rather, it is a challenge faced by least developed, middle-income and developed countries alike and hence is universal in scope. Research on inequality at the national level has shown that in developed and developing countries alike, the poorest half of the population often controls less than 10% of wealth.

Inequality trends are affected strongly by national and global policymaking. Some countries have reduced trends of inequality amidst an opposite trend of rising global inequality. They have shown that universal social policies, including social protection, universal access to essential services, effective employment policies and robust institutions are critical for reducing inequality.

Policy approaches need to recognize inequality as a crosscutting issue, as sustained inequality reduction requires integrated policy-making that combines the economic, social and environmental dimensions at all levels. At the regional level, countries can benefit from cooperation, particularly the exchange of lessons learned with regards to addressing the drivers of inequality, including physical barriers, such as infrastructure and geographic location, as well as intangible barriers, such as cultural norms.

Policy Priorities at the global level to address inequalities

Inequalities between countries remain a formidable challenge. Between-country inequality has not improved for large parts of the developing world outside of Asia. Among the several drivers of these gaps is the globalization of finance and trade, including phenomena such as illicit financial flows and tax evasion.

In view of the variety of experiences in inequality, there is a need to analyse policy approaches to address inequalities and find pathways towards inclusive growth that could be universally applied. The failure to address this phenomenon at a global level could endanger the success of the 2030 Development Agenda and would represent a major roadblock on the path to shared prosperity for all.

OBJECTIVES

The ECOSOC Special Meeting will emphasize the need for addressing inequality through the provisions of SDG-10 on reducing inequality within and among countries. This Goal and its related targets will provide the foundation for the discussions. The discussions will also build upon the United Nations fundamental values of equality and the right to development.

With this in view, key objectives of the Meeting include:

- ❖ considering actions to effectively address the systemic causes of inequality within countries, especially in developing countries, as well as among countries, recognizing inequality's broad, cross-cutting and multi-dimensional nature;
- ❖ addressing horizontal inequalities as significant sources of conflict;
- ❖ strengthening institutions at all levels to support the reduction of inequality and the review of progress, including through the use of disaggregated data.
- ❖ addressing additional issues related to inequality, including illicit financial flows and humanitarian aspects.

The Special Meeting aims to engage high-level participation and be informed by quality substantive inputs; be action-oriented and impactful and; address national and international drivers of inequality, together with the necessary institutional requirements for reducing inequality. The Meeting will also highlight the strong interconnectedness between the national, regional and international levels. The interrelated nature of inequality will be addressed as a cross-cutting issue affecting all the SDGs, in addition to recognizing their reduction as a stand-alone goal.

FORMAT

The meeting will be chaired by the President of ECOSOC. The Chair will open each session by inviting a keynote speaker to deliver an address on the topic of the session. After the keynote address, presentations offering policy insights will be given by expert panelists and high-level policymakers, followed by an open discussion.

OUTCOME

The outcome of the Special Meeting will be an informal President's Summary, which could be used to inform the work of the High-level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC in July 2016. The Meeting could also recommend that an analytical study or other follow-up action be initiated to identify policy options and approaches for reducing inequality.