

2024 Civil Society Forum

Structural barriers and transformative policies to social progress

Thematic Session 1 | Friday, Feb 9, 2024

UNHQ, Conference Room 4 | 10:00am - 11:30pm EST

Concept note

At a time of great inequality in the world, the Civil Society Forum is a space where stakeholders are invited to discuss how to accelerate action for a more equitable, just, and sustainable future. The thematic session 1 of the Forum will provide a platform for a multi-level dialogue addressing the root causes of social injustice and identifying transformative solutions that contribute to achieving sustainable progress.

In the post-COVID-19 era, at the midpoint of our way to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals, multiple and intersecting crises and structural challenges still persist and threaten any progress achieved so far by people, communities and governments around the world.

Worldwide, people and entire communities in both developing and developed nations - 1.1 billion out of 6.1 billion people - live in acute multidimensional poverty.¹ The world is back at hunger levels not seen since 2005. Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide lack adequate housing.² Furthermore, strong inequalities persist in access to education. In September 2022, UNESCO data showed that 244 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 18 worldwide are still out of school.³ Today, inequitable access to employment, unlivable wages, inhumane working conditions including sexual harassment within workplace, are some of the aspects of peoples' indecent and undignified lives. Informal workers account for 60 percent of the global workforce.⁴ Globally, 58 percent of women who work do so in the informal economy⁵

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¹ ["Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023 - Unstacking global poverty: Data for high impact action"](#), United Nations Development Programme-Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 11 July 2023, accessed on August 3, 2023

² ["Global Homelessness Statistics"](#) Homeless World Cup, accessed on July 20, 2023

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³ ["244M children won't start the new school year"](#), UNESCO Press Release, September 1, 2022, accessed on August 1, 2023

⁴ ["Five Things to Know about the Informal Economy"](#), IMF, July 28, 2021, accessed on August 4, 2023

⁵ ["Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Brief"](#), Florence Bonnet, Joann Vanek and Martha Chen, WIEGO, January 2019, accessed on August 4, 2023

. Unpaid care work benefits the whole society and economy, yet it is a major obstacle to women's access to decent work.

Currently, only 45 percent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit.⁶ Universal social protection floors are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees that should ensure, as a minimum, that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security which together secure effective access to goods and services defined as necessary to survival. Persistent inequalities between and within countries continue to be a fundamental challenge for universal health coverage. According to the World Health Organization, half of the world's population - up to 3.5 billion people – lack access to the health services they need.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated the use of digital technologies for work, commerce, education and connection, but at the same time has created new inequalities. The “digital divide” refers not only to the distinction between those with access to the internet or mobile devices and those excluded from it, but also to the additional gaps, among others, in digital skills and training, digital use, and quality of infrastructure. In 2022, a third of the world, i.e. 2.7 billion people, did not have access to the internet and 53 percent of the world did not have access to high-speed broadband, demonstrating profoundly economic and social exclusion and inequality.⁸

The conversation within session 1 of the Civil Society Forum will feature Member State, United Nations, Academia and Civil Society representatives sharing their views and recommendations on tackling the above structural barriers and reimagining transformative policies to social justice. This panel discussion will further establish a solid basis for the next thematic session where good practices' experiences will be exchanged highlighting approaches that place people, rights and justice at the center of social development.

⁶ “Financing gaps in social protection: Global estimates and strategies for developing countries in light of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond”, Social Protection Spotlight, ILO Brief, September 17, 2020, accessed on July 12, 2023

⁷ “Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2017 Global Monitoring Report”, World Bank, WHO, 2017, accessed on August 1, 2023

⁸ “Fixing the global digital divide and digital access gap”, Landry Signé, Brookings, July 5, 2023, accessed on August 2, 2023

2024 Civil Society Forum

Placing people, rights and justice at the center of social development: A Needs-Based Approach for People-Centered Decisions

Thematic Session 2 | Friday, Feb 9, 2024

UNHQ, Conference Room 4 | 1:30pm - 2:30pm EST

Concept note

The Civil Society Forum, organized by the NGO Committee on Social Development in collaboration with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the UN Department of Economic Social Affairs, is considered a unique platform for the voice of NGO Committee on Social Development and its members to be heard. This Forum has been a space for members of civil society to gather, learn, discuss, and strategize on the themes and deliberations of the UN Commission for Social Development. The purpose of this space is to create an inclusive dialogue behind a common vision of furthering the Sustainable Development Goals, the principles of the Copenhagen Declaration, and the movement to renew the social contract.

The thematic session 2 of the Civil Society Forum seeks to focus on the best practices that can serve as models to achieving true social justice: addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality by including people with direct experience, to participate in the design, implementation, and assessment of policies and programs that affect them, in order to achieve effective and impactful outcomes. The voices of people from the grassroots, those who are made poor or kept poor, marginalized or oppressed, must be heard and considered first by all stakeholders. Non-participation in decision-making prevents progress in respecting and ensuring human rights for all and allows inequality, the root of all social ills, to expand. Indigenous communities, women and girls, older persons, homeless persons, persons with disabilities, youth and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ persons, among others, must be included in all policy-making processes. Systematic evaluation of genuine rights-based participation is essential in order to share knowledge, experience, skills and innovative approaches to public policy and governance at national, regional and global levels.

In the introductory paragraph of Commitment 2 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action (1995), poverty eradication is referred to as “*an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind*”.⁹ The Copenhagen Declaration

identifies the need for policies that ensure those living in poverty “have access to productive resources, including credit, land, education and training, technology, knowledge and information, as well as to public services, and participation in decision-making”; policies for the creation of “a regulatory environment that would enable [people living in poverty] to benefit from expanding employment and economic opportunities”; policies aimed at ensuring that “all people have adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, ill health, maternity, child-rearing, widowhood, disability and old age”; and policies to ensure that “national budgets are oriented, as necessary, to meeting basic needs, reducing inequalities and targeting poverty, as a strategic objective”. Building on the Copenhagen Declaration, SDG 1 aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. The SDGs framework emphasizes three equally important moral imperatives – satisfying human needs, ensuring social justice, and respecting environmental limits.

The conversation within session 2 will highlight good practices and approaches that place people, rights and justice at the center of social development. The good practices projects that will be shared here demonstrate positive impact, an innovative approach, sustainability and efficiency in various areas at the global and local levels.

⁹ [“Social Justice in An Open World: The Role of the UN”](#), The International Forum for Social Development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2006, accessed on Nov.25, 2023, p.61