

Towards a Renewed Social Contract NGO CSocD Civil Society Declaration

For the 61st session of the UN Commission for Social Development

“Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

The human capacity for hope is at the foundation of the international community’s ongoing endeavor to work towards a better future. This hope for the future has been central to past advances in thinking and shaping the social contract, such as the aims and objectives articulated at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development or Agenda 2030. It is also crucial to the continued refinement of the social contract needed in the years to come, as called for in the Secretary-General’s *Our Common Agenda* (OCA) report¹.

Work, employment, and livelihood have always been central to the social contract. Societies benefit when more people are productive and contribute to their country’s growth. Productive employment and decent work are key elements to achieving poverty eradication and for ensuring that each individual contributes to and is able to benefit from a world that is ever more interdependent.

So, too, are humane working conditions, equitable access to employment regardless of background, wages sufficient to meet basic needs, and basic social protections recognized as inextricable aspects of decent and dignified lives. This moral claim has long been recognized in the international rights regime, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights², which upholds the right to just and favorable conditions of work, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights³, which maintains the right to work and the right to an adequate standard of living.

The NGO Committee on Social Development is pleased that the vital linkages between employment and the social contract are reflected in the priority theme of the 61st Session of the Commission for Social Development. It notes the particular relevance—and obligations—of SDG 8, on full and productive employment and decent work for all, and SDG 10, on reducing inequality within and among countries. Advancement along these lines will be a central component of any consideration of what the Secretary-General has described as the essential building blocks of the social contract upon foundations of “trust; inclusion, protection, and participation; and what matters to people and planet”⁴.

Recurring shocks and challenges, ranging from COVID-19 recovery and supply chain disruptions, to severe global inflation and widespread food insecurity, demonstrate one unavoidable reality: current global economic structures, regardless of the income level of a country, are not providing for the wellbeing of all. These are concerns that require global financial cooperation at far deeper and more meaningful levels, including around labor policies and structures. It is toward this end that the following suggestions are offered.

¹ OCA: <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

² Article 23.1, UDHR: <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>

³ 16 December 1966 GA Resolution 2200A (XXI) entered into force 3 January 1976

⁴ OCA: <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

Cross Cutting Policy Approaches to Promote Decent Work and Full Employment

To promote decent work⁵, there needs to be a comprehensive and integrated strategy cutting across a range of policy areas and involving a variety of stakeholders.

Formalization of employment will be vital. Today, informal workers account for 60% of the global workforce. Globally, 58% of women who work do so in the informal economy. Policies should promote the protection and incorporation of workers, regardless of their household configuration, in the informal economy into the mainstream economy. Many migrant workers face hardship and abuse in the form of low wages, undignified working conditions, absence of social protection, denial of freedom of association and workers' rights, discrimination and xenophobia.

Social protection systems including floors are essential to reduce inequalities. Along with establishing a non-discriminatory livable wage, they are a direct way of addressing inequalities and the gender pay gap, as well as protecting working families during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Universal social protection⁶ and universal access to healthcare, education, and essential services provide material means that allow people to be able to escape persistent poverty. However, it is only through lifelong educational processes and systems that foster intellectual, social and moral capacities that social exclusion can be eliminated. A global social protection fund is one tool that could achieve universal social protection systems and floors for the four billion plus people who are still excluded⁷.

Access to *quality education* is central to empowering marginalized and vulnerable people, especially those living in extreme poverty, raising earning potential, and creating a productive workforce. Beyond impact on the labor market directly, education and training programs can prepare young people and adults to become builders of sustainable societies living in harmony with the natural world. The commitment to quality education involves duties toward teachers, including decent working conditions, labor rights, sufficient pay, and opportunities to input into education policy decisions.

Digital education and skills training programs, including technical vocational education and training, are increasingly central to productive employment in the 21st century, and governments must ensure access to digital technology for all, including women and girls, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and people living in extreme poverty. Gender parity in the trades and alternatives to formal school should be recognized and used to transform education systems.

A Call to Action

The goals enshrined in the SDGs and other global agendas are ambitious; achieving them at the pace needed will require entirely new patterns of relationships, interactions, and cooperation among Member States, civil society, local communities, the private sector, and many other stakeholders. Movement toward goals of equality, health, knowledge, and cohesion—and not simply the pursuit of macroeconomic growth—will require, at minimum, a human-centered recovery shaped by economic models that protect the natural world while promoting human prosperity. Systematic evaluation of a full, genuine, and rights-based participation is in order to

⁵ ILO defines decent work as “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity”.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---normes/documents/publication/wcms_088023.pdf

⁶ Social protection systems include, inter alia, pensions for older adults, cash transfers and benefits for vulnerable groups, especially women and children, and provides support for working women on maternity leave, and for all workers through disability or job loss periods.

⁷ World Social Protection Report 2020-22:

https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_817653/lang--en/index.htm

share knowledge, experiences and innovative approaches to public policy and governance. This is a basis upon which each nation can reduce inequality, in its different manifestations, and promote the principle of opportunity for all.

It is with the above considerations in mind that we provide the following calls to action for Member States:

- Invest in social protection floors for all members of society, without discrimination on any basis, and regardless of nationality or employment status.
- Encourage sustained holistic economic progress through sustainable technological innovation that seeks to balance societal harmony and protection of the natural world.
- Commit to forward looking financing and job creation policies. State institutions should create incentives for the private sector (companies, industry) to commit to an essential duty: invest in fostering and releasing the talents of young people.
- Ensure young people have a path to employment. Programming around the transition to decent work calls for investment in education and high quality training for all. Access to quality education and training for the most disadvantaged members of a nation's population should be prioritized. Skills training in both technical and soft skills have to be provided.
- Build dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centered economies, promoting youth and women's economic empowerment, access to decent work for all and opportunities to increase digital literacy.

Moving Towards Shared Prosperity: A World Social Summit and Beyond

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development and its landmark Copenhagen Declaration⁸, marked a watershed moment, in which development thinking focused with unprecedented clarity on the central objectives of eradicating poverty, providing full employment, and fostering social integration. These values and commitments remain vital today and, indeed, are woven throughout the fabric of the SDGs. At the same time, numerous challenges have evolved over the past three decades.

For this reason, the time is right for a second World Social Summit, as the Secretary-General has called for in 2025. The preparatory process moving toward such a Summit would provide needed opportunities to gain perspective, take stock, identify lessons learned, and regenerate momentum, forging a renewed vision and commitment 'to achieve a higher quality of life for all people.'⁹

In 1995, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, world leaders committed their countries to the construction of a world in which all men and women could "exercise the rights, utilize the resources and share the responsibilities that enable them to lead satisfying lives and to contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind."¹⁰ This vision of shared endeavor, common responsibility, and universal participation is needed today more than ever; indeed, achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Paris Climate agreement is all but impossible without it. Let us then rise to its demands and not delay in taking the practical steps needed to translate that vision into social, economic, and political reality.

⁸ A/CONF.166/9

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid