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Social and human rights questions: social development

Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 8 June 2021

[on the recommendation of the Commission for Social Development ([E/2021/26](#))]

2021/10. Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all

The Economic and Social Council,

Recalling its decision 2020/212 of 18 June 2020, in which it decided that the priority theme of the 2021 session of the Commission for Social Development would be “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all”,

Recalling also the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly,

Reaffirming that the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development¹ and the further initiatives for social development adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session² constitute the basic framework for the promotion of social development for all at the national and international levels, and encouraging the continued global dialogue on social development issues,

Welcoming the progress made towards the full implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action through concerted action at the national, regional and global levels, and expressing deep concern that, more than 20 years after the convening of the World Summit for Social Development, progress has been slow and uneven, and major gaps remain, and further welcoming the convening of the joint informal high-level meeting of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development, on 1 December 2020,

¹ *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6–12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

² General Assembly resolution [S-24/2](#), annex.



Recalling General Assembly resolution [70/1](#) of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which the Assembly adopted a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Sustainable Development Goals and targets and affirmed its commitment to working tirelessly for the full implementation of the Agenda by 2030 with a view to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first, and its recognition that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development,

Welcoming the adoption of General Assembly resolutions [74/270](#) of 2 April 2020 on global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), [74/274](#) of 20 April 2020 on international cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19, [74/306](#) of 11 September 2020, entitled “Comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic”, and [74/307](#) of 11 September 2020, entitled “United response against global health threats: combating COVID-19”,

Recalling General Assembly resolution [69/313](#) of 27 July 2015 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Recalling also General Assembly resolution [74/4](#) of 15 October 2019, entitled “Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly”,

Recalling further the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,³ which, inter alia, recognizes the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself or herself and his or her family, the right to work, the right to social security and the right to education, and noting the relevance of these provisions to the formulation of social policies, including family-oriented social protection policies and measures,

Noting the important work undertaken by the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which has led to the formulation of global indicators, including on social protection,

Recognizing the particular relevance of the International Labour Organization Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work⁴ for a socially just transition towards sustainable development, and recalling General Assembly resolution [73/327](#) of 25 July 2019, by which the Assembly decided to declare 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour,

Reaffirming that the spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas,

Reaffirming also the importance of supporting Agenda 2063 of the African Union, as well as its first 10-year implementation plan, as a strategic framework for ensuring a positive socioeconomic transformation in Africa within the next 50 years, and its continental programme embedded in the resolutions of the General Assembly

³ See General Assembly resolution [2200 A \(XXI\)](#), annex.

⁴ [A/73/918](#), annex.

on the New Partnership for Africa's Development⁵ and regional initiatives, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme,

Recalling the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights⁶ adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 21/11,⁷ as a useful tool for States in the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction and eradication policies, as appropriate, and encouraging States to implement the guiding principles,

Recognizing that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is one of the greatest global challenges in the history of the United Nations, and noting with deep concern its impact on physical and mental health and the loss of life and well-being, as well as the negative impact on global humanitarian needs, the enjoyment of human rights and across all spheres of society, including on livelihoods, food security and nutrition, and education, the exacerbation of poverty and hunger, disruption to economies, trade, societies and environments, and the exacerbation of economic and social inequalities within and among countries, which is reversing hard-won development gains and hampering progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all its Goals and targets, and recognizing also that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a global response based on unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation,

Stressing that at this critical moment in the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 the visions, principles and commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development remain valid and are central to addressing emerging global challenges, and recalling that social policies have a key role to play in addressing the immediate effects of socioeconomic crises and in the design of recovery strategies,

Taking note of the report of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, entitled "The age of digital interdependence", submitted to the Secretary-General on 10 June 2019, and further taking note of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Road map for digital cooperation", presented on 11 June 2020,

Recognizing that information and communications technologies present new opportunities and challenges and that there is a pressing need to address the major impediments that developing countries face in accessing new technologies, stressing the need to address prevailing challenges to bridge the digital divides, including both between and within countries, the rural-urban digital divide, the gender digital divide, and between youth and older persons, and to harness information and communications technologies for development, and recalling the need to emphasize quality of access to bridge digital and knowledge divides, using a multidimensional approach that includes speed, stability, affordability, language, training, capacity-building, local content and accessibility for all, including for persons with disabilities,

Stressing the urgent need to close digital divides, including with regard to such issues as the affordability of information and communications technologies and the Internet, and to ensure that the benefits of information and communications technologies, including new technologies, are available to all,

Recalling the commitment to significantly increasing access to information and communications technologies and striving to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries, and noting the many efforts to help to bridge digital divides and expand access, including the Connect 2030 Agenda for

⁵ A/57/304, annex.

⁶ A/HRC/21/39.

⁷ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 53A (A/67/53/Add.1)*, chap. II.

Global Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology, including Broadband, for Sustainable Development,

Noting with grave concern that almost half of the world's population, especially women and girls and people in vulnerable situations, as well as more than four in five people in the least developed countries, do not have access to the Internet, and noting that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates inequalities caused by the digital divides, since the poorest and the most vulnerable who are the hardest hit are also those who lag behind the most in access to information and communications technologies,

Recognizing that digital technologies have profoundly transformed society, promote innovation and offer unprecedented opportunities and that they have the potential to accelerate the realization of the 2030 Agenda and advancing social development by ensuring access to lifelong quality education, health-care services, decent work, affordable housing, social protection, especially for those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations, as well as fostering gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and recognizing also the potential of digital technologies in the practice of sport and physical activity,

Noting with concern that the people left behind in accessing technologies are typically those who can least afford it, and recognizing that a rural-urban digital divide is present across all regions, with approximately 60 per cent of the world's population without access to the Internet living in rural areas, and that already those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations are overrepresented in this population,

Recognizing the importance of digital technologies in designing, implementing and monitoring social policies, including family-oriented policies, especially in the areas of poverty eradication, full employment, decent work, work-family balance, social integration and intergenerational solidarity,

Noting with great concern the fact that a gender digital divide persists in women's and girls' access to and use of information and communications technologies, including in education, employment for women and other areas of economic and social development, and in this regard taking note of the many initiatives that focus on access, skills and leadership to promote the equal participation of women and girls in the digital age,

Recognizing that new technologies increase the demand for digital skills and competencies and that is why investment in lifelong education, digital literacy and digital skills is required, including for boosting the employability of young people and fostering the social inclusion of older persons in our societies,

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General;⁸
2. *Acknowledges* the urgent need to accelerate action on all levels and by all stakeholders to fulfil the vision and Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁹ and emphasizes that the international community, through the outcome documents of the major United Nations conferences and summits adopted by the General Assembly, has reinforced, inter alia, the urgency of eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, protecting the environment, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion within the United Nations development agenda, including the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for

⁸ E/CN.5/2021/3.

⁹ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

Development,¹⁰ the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030¹¹ and the New Urban Agenda;¹²

3. *Reaffirms* the commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for all by ensuring that no one would be left behind and reaching the furthest behind first, and by recognizing human rights and that the dignity of the human person is fundamental;

4. *Calls upon* Member States to ensure the promotion and protection of all human rights, in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law;

5. *Recognizes* that the current trajectory of economic development has led not to shared prosperity for all, but to high and rising inequalities within and among countries, in particular in least developed and developing countries, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as environmental degradation, adverse effects of climate change, extreme weather events, including natural disasters, drought, desertification, biodiversity loss, food shortages, water scarcity, wildfires, sea level rise and depletion of the oceans, and unsustainable consumption and production patterns;

6. *Also recognizes* that those consequences have taken a toll on social development and on people's well-being, especially those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations, such as all children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants;

7. *Encourages* Member States to promote affordable and equitable access to basic services, in particular quality formal and non-formal education, at all levels, including programmes that promote equality and inclusion through the affirmation of the fundamental dignity of the human person, and health-care services, including through the acceleration of the transition towards equitable access to universal health coverage, as well as access to affordable housing, nutrition and food, and access to employment and decent work, information and communications technology and infrastructure, through advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls;

8. *Stresses* the importance of developing policies to expand work opportunities and productivity in both rural and urban sectors by achieving and recovering economic growth, investing in human resource development, promoting technologies that generate productive employment, and encouraging self-employment, entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized enterprises;

9. *Invites* Member States to consider adopting labour market policies that strengthen institutions and provide adequate labour protection to all workers, including through social dialogue, especially the most disadvantaged, including through minimum wage policies, while taking into account the role of workers' and employers' organizations, as applicable, as part of policies to boost income growth for the vast majority of workers, taking into consideration the specific circumstances of each country;

10. *Stresses* the need to address challenges faced by those working in informal or vulnerable jobs, by investing in the creation of more decent work opportunities, including providing access to decent jobs in the formal sector;

11. *Encourages* Member States to implement policies that ensure women's economic empowerment by supporting the full and productive participation of women

¹⁰ General Assembly resolution 69/313, annex.

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II.

¹² General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.

in the labour market, including women with disabilities and those living in poverty and female heads of household, and to promote equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, the equal sharing of responsibilities between parents, access to childcare facilities, work-family balance, including, inter alia, while caring for children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and by promoting their meaningful participation in the economy and in decision-making processes at all levels;

12. *Invites* Member States to support the digital entrepreneurship of women, including in e-commerce, including for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, to develop local solutions and relevant content and promote innovation and decent job creation;

13. *Encourages* all Member States and other relevant stakeholders to promote inclusive economic transformation in rural areas that increases productivity while ensuring productive employment and decent work, access to quality public services, reliable and appropriate social protection systems, quality and resilient infrastructure, roads and telecommunications, as well as preparedness planning for crises, and reiterates that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of digital connectivity and access;

14. *Recognizes* that nationally appropriate social protection systems for all address multiple, often interrelated and complex causes of poverty and inequality by easing the burden of certain expenditure during periods of unemployment, contributing to health-related goals, gender equality and decent work, and facilitating the full inclusion of persons with disabilities;

15. *Also recognizes* that nationally appropriate social protection systems make a critical contribution to the realization of human rights for all, in particular for those who are trapped in poverty and homelessness, and that promoting universal access to social services and providing nationally appropriate social protection floors can contribute to reducing inequality and poverty, addressing social exclusion and promoting inclusive economic growth, and in this regard takes note of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), of the International Labour Organization;

16. *Encourages* States, when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating social protection programmes for social development, to ensure gender mainstreaming throughout this process;

17. *Recognizes* the important role that families can play in combating social exclusion, and highlights the importance of investing in inclusive and responsive family-oriented policies and programmes in areas such as education, training, decent work, work-family balance, health-care services, social services, intergenerational relationships and solidarity and targeted cash transfers for vulnerable families, in order to reduce inequality and promote the well-being of all persons of all ages, as well as to contribute to better outcomes for children and other vulnerable family members in vulnerable situations and help to break the intergenerational transfer of poverty;

18. *Encourages* Member States to provide universal age-, disability-, gender-responsive and family-oriented social protection systems, which are key to ensuring poverty reduction, including, as appropriate, targeted cash transfers for people and families in vulnerable situations, such as when headed by a single parent, in particular those headed by women, and which are most effective in reducing poverty when accompanied by other measures, such as providing access to essential services, high-quality education and health-care services;

19. *Stresses* the need to better coordinate social protection policies and measures with poverty reduction programmes and other social policies to avoid excluding people in informal or precarious jobs;

20. *Invites* Member States, in the context of their national sustainable development frameworks and the associated integrated financing frameworks, to formulate and implement national strategies to extend social security and essential social services to all, that are responsive to shocks, sustainable in the long run and with a focus on those furthest below the poverty line and negatively affected by climate change and natural and human-made disasters, within their economic and fiscal capacities;

21. *Recognizes* that information and communications technologies have the potential to provide new solutions to development challenges, particularly in the context of globalization and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and can foster sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development, competitiveness, access to information and knowledge, trade and development, poverty eradication and social inclusion, accordingly reaffirms its commitment to bridging the digital divide, and calls upon Member States to implement policies and to accelerate their efforts to close the digital divide, as a measure to attain the social inclusion of all, with a focus on children, youth, women, persons with disabilities and older persons, without any discrimination;

22. *Urges* Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to close the digital divides and promote digital inclusion, by taking into account national and regional contexts and addressing the challenges associated with access, affordability, digital literacy and digital skills, and awareness and by ensuring that the benefits of new technologies are available to all, taking into account the needs of those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations;

23. *Also urges* Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to promote digital inclusion, by implementing inclusive policies and measures that aim to tackle the challenges associated with equal access, in particular, the lack of affordability, including by, where appropriate, considering providing targeted subsidies, proportionate taxation or the provision of a basic digital basket, as well as engage in multi-stakeholder cooperation, national and regional broadband strategies, and facilitate public-private partnerships in order to significantly increase access to information and communications technology, address specific barriers to inclusion by promoting the availability and supply of information and communications technology, and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet, and also notes the potential of relevant regional and international initiatives to achieve this goal;

24. *Encourages* Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to address the lack of efficient, affordable and accessible digital technology infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas, and engaging the private sector as a relevant partner to enhance infrastructure finance and network deployment;

25. *Also encourages* Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to seek to achieve universal connectivity to ensure that every person has affordable access to quality broadband Internet by 2030, including by catalysing essential partnerships, as well to apply an age-, disability-, gender-responsive and family-oriented approach to all interventions on digital technologies;

26. *Invites* Member States, in collaboration with the international community and United Nations entities, to develop, as appropriate, a holistic approach and targeted strategies and policies to address specific barriers to digital inclusion and close the digital divides, also in collaboration with other stakeholders, including the

private sector, academia, science and civil society organizations, including representatives of those who face barriers to digital inclusion;

27. *Encourages* Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to harness scientific research and expertise and realize the potential of technology and of rapid technological change to focus on, inter alia, the individual, social, educational and health implications of ageing, in particular in developing countries;

28. *Also encourages* Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to increase access of all women and girls to digital technologies to foster their education and training to enhance their digital skills and competences, as well as the productivity and mobility of women in the labour market; enhance efficiency, accountability and transparency of social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure through enhanced use of information and communications technologies for the benefit of all women and girls, including for those hardest to reach and who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and work towards closing the gender digital divide and promoting equal access to information and communications technologies and to the Internet for women and girls, explore appropriate ways to address any potential negative impact of new technologies on gender equality; and ensure that programmes, services and infrastructure are adaptable and suited to technological barriers, including literacy, and reaffirms the commitment to ensuring women's full participation in decision-making processes related to information and communications technologies;

29. *Further encourages* Member States to, by 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent, including through the use of digital technologies;

30. *Recognizes* that information and communications technologies present new opportunities and challenges and that there is a pressing need to address the major impediments that developing countries face in engaging with and accessing new technologies, such as an appropriate enabling environment, sufficient resources, infrastructure, education, capacity, investment and connectivity, as well as issues related to technology ownership, setting standards and technology flows, and in this regard urges all stakeholders to consider ensuring appropriate financing of digital development and adequate means of implementation, including strengthened capacity-building of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, towards a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy;

31. *Also recognizes* that domestic resources mobilization, underscored by the principle of national ownership and supplemented by international assistance, as appropriate, will be critical to realizing sustainable development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

32. *Reaffirms* the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and recognizes the need to take steps to significantly increase investment to close resource gaps, including through the mobilization of financial resources from all sources, including public, private, domestic and international resource mobilization and allocation;

33. *Also reaffirms* that international cooperation has an essential role in assisting developing countries, including highly indebted poor countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries, in strengthening their human, institutional and technological capacity;

34. *Encourages* developed countries to implement their official development assistance commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development

assistance to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance to the least developed countries;

35. *Welcomes* the contributions of South-South cooperation to poverty eradication and sustainable development, and reaffirms that South-South cooperation is an important element of international cooperation for development as a complement to, not a substitute for, North-South cooperation, and commits itself to strengthening South-South and triangular cooperation as a means of bringing relevant experience and expertise to bear in development cooperation;

36. *Stresses* the essential role that official development assistance plays in complementing, leveraging and sustaining financing for development efforts in developing countries and in facilitating the achievement of development objectives, including the internationally agreed development goals, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals, and welcomes steps to improve the effectiveness and quality of aid based on the fundamental principles of national ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability;

37. *Encourages* the international community to intensify development cooperation, including through South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation, as well as multi-stakeholder partnerships, to support countries, especially developing countries, upon their request, in building their national capacity for science, technology and innovation for social development, as well as to support research networks that reach across borders, institutions and disciplines;

38. *Invites* all relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations system and civil society organizations, to continue to promote the exchange of information and good practices on programmes, policies and measures that successfully reduce inequality in all its dimensions;

39. *Invites* the United Nations system to continue to support Member States in their pursuit of socially just transitions towards sustainable development and facilitate international cooperation in the field of digital technologies for developing countries, upon their request, with the aim of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for the common future of present and coming generations.

*8th plenary meeting
8 June 2021*