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UN Commission for Social Development kicks off with focus on poverty and youth



Ambassador Miloš Koterec of the Slovak Republic. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

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Poverty eradication, youth unemployment and socially inclusive policies will be the main focus of the 50th session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development, which kicked off today at UN Headquarters in New York.

For the next 10 days, the Commission will hold a series of panels and discussions on how to shape effective policies for the most pressing social development issues taking into account today's challenges such as the global economic crisis and climate change.

The Commission will pay particular attention to the challenges young people face finding jobs as recent UN figures show that they are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Last year alone, 75 million youth found themselves without a job.

“With almost one in four young workers unemployed in developed countries and the majority of young people from developing countries working in the informal economy, the world is experiencing a youth unemployment crisis, which further propagates social instability,” said Milos Koterec, Permanent Representative of Slovakia and President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

“Hence, the youth will play a central role in the various social movements calling for democracy, equal opportunities and better employment.”

Eradicating poverty and ending inequality within countries will also be a priority for the Commission. A discussion on the Social Protection Floor initiative which aims to examine strategies for poverty reduction and empowerment of vulnerable parts of society was held yesterday as a way to reflect on key issues relevant for the session ahead.

“The Social Protection Floor is an important initiative. UN agencies and our partners are using this to integrate our strategies so that we can help protect people from falling or being trapped into poverty,” Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro [told](#) the Commission.

“The poor want to lift themselves out of poverty. That is why we have to invest in social protection. That means food, education and basic services – especially for the poorest.”

The session also seeks to build political momentum ahead of the UN Sustainable Development Conference (Rio+20) in June. Ms. Migiro stressed that participants need to seize the opportunity to make an impact on the Rio+20 debate through their work in the session as it is intricately linked to poverty reduction, inequality and access to resources.

“In five months, we will have a chance to chart a path to a more sustainable world at the Rio+20 Conference,” she said. “This Commission knows that the future we want to chart in Rio is people-centred, inclusive, equitable and sustainable. It is a future where a healthy, resilient environment can support present and future generations. These goals must be one and the same.”

For his part, Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary-General of Rio+20, underlined the importance of the social pillar of sustainable development.

“Why should the social pillar matter to sustainable development?” he asked. “Because it addresses issues of access to resources and opportunities, social justice and equity, participation and empowerment.

“A strong social pillar means all development sectors are stronger, whether it is agriculture and infrastructure development, the management of natural resources, or rural and urban development. A weak social pillar means weakness in other sectors as well.”

Other panels during the session will focus on mobilizing domestic and international resources for social development, incorporating persons with disabilities to the development agenda, and the social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a programme intended to accelerate Africans' efforts to extricate the continent from underdevelopment and exclusion from the global economy. More than 16 side events will also take place.

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