

ECOSOC High-level Segment 2022

“Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

**United Nations Headquarters in New York
Monday, 18 July 2022**

Concept note

Introduction

The world continues to face serious challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the climate crisis to growing inequality and divisions. The lasting effects of the pandemic continue to impact the world in various devastating ways, threatening lives, livelihoods, health systems and economies everywhere.

The [Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#) indicates that the multiple and interlinked global crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and the impacts of the conflict in Ukraine and elsewhere – will lead to an additional 75 million to 95 million people living in extreme poverty in 2022. While almost all countries have introduced new short-term social protection measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis to protect people’s health, jobs and income, more than 4 billion people did not have social protection in 2020, a gap that must be closed in a structural and sustainable way after the pandemic. In some areas, the pandemic has reversed the efforts towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and there is a real risk that the Sustainable Development Goals will not be met by 2030.

In July 2022, the high-level segment (HLS) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the high-level political forum for sustainable development (HLPF) will address the theme *“Building back better from the COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*. The Council will focus on lessons learned from the multilateral responses to COVID-19 and on future trends and scenarios and the long-term impacts of current trends for building back better and realizing the SDGs.

The past two years have highlighted that international solidarity is the way to keep the promise and commitment to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Achieving the 2030 Agenda will depend on stronger international solidarity and more inclusive multilateralism and collective global action. It will call for working together on risk reduction to ensure a sustainable response to future global crises. Now is a time for imagining a better future

and preparing for it together. The choices made today will determine whether the world can achieve a breakthrough to a fairer and more sustainable future.

The [Report of the Secretary-General on “Our Common Agenda”](#) offers important recommendations for the consideration of Member States. It calls for a renewed solidarity between peoples and future generations, a new social contract anchored in human rights, better management of critical issues of global concern like peace, the economy, health and our planet, and a United Nations fit for purpose to meet the challenges of a new era. It also proposes to hold a Summit of the Future in 2023 “to forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like, and what we can do today to secure it”, a proposal Member States are now pursuing in the General Assembly.

Objective

The High-level Segment will bring together ministers from different portfolios, as well as experts and key development actors, to share lessons learned in pandemic recovery efforts and shape ideas for the future. Through two separate panels, the Segment will present different perspectives and experiences as well as engage participants in discussion and dialogue to develop forward-looking policy approaches and recommendations for working towards a better future and advancing a more inclusive and networked multilateralism. It will also address long-term thinking, analysis and planning for the future while engaging a broad range of stakeholders.

Supporting documentation

In addition to the Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, the High-level Segment is supported by two complementary Secretary-General reports. The first is on the 2022 ECOSOC and HLPF annual theme, which is its title: [Building back better from the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). The report contains strategies and recommendations that countries could consider with a view to building back better and strengthening multilateralism.

The second is entitled [Long-term future trends and scenarios: impacts on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals](#). This report is aimed at supporting policymakers in looking beyond today’s crises and emergencies and reflecting on scenarios on how the world can reach the SDGs Goals and its climate change objectives.

Panel I: “Future proofing multilateralism for a resilient and inclusive recovery” (Monday, 18 July, 09:30 to 13:00)

Multilateralism is being tested with the ongoing crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution, as well as the increasing conflicts. The response to COVID-19, especially in its early phases, showed grave shortcomings in multilateralism and international solidarity.

The war in Ukraine and on-going global challenges are putting at risk the already fragile uneven economic recovery around the world. The food, energy and financial crises call for our immediate attention, which led the Secretary-General to create a Global Crisis Response Group. Rising global

inflation, driven by higher energy and food prices as well as persistent supply chain disruptions and tighter labor markets in developed countries, are sending alarming waves in developing countries and are creating additional challenges to policymakers.¹ This could worsen poverty and inequality, fueling social unrest and political instability. Many central banks are facing a major policy dilemma in trying to contain the rise of inflation while supporting a fragile economic recovery. Increase in interest rates in richer countries risk worsening the debt burden of the poorest countries.

Many of the needed transformations to recover and build back better and respond to other crises require strong multilateral cooperation, collaboration, solidarity and dialogue among multiple stakeholders.

A strengthened multilateralism is critical to foster solutions at the scale required to respond to today's major cross-border challenges. It is critical to ensure international solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people, and with those most affected by crises such as COVID-19, debt sustainability or refugees. It can help leverage the impact of individual and collective action to ensure no one is left behind, particularly the most vulnerable among us.

The Secretary-General, in his report on Our Common Agenda, made proposals to improve multilateralism and make it more inclusive, networked and effective. The [High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism](#) that he established, led by 12 eminent global leaders, is developing proposals to identify global public goods and other areas of common interest where governance improvements are most needed, and to propose options for how this could be achieved.

The Committee for Development Policy has proposed the design of a new multilateralism, in which “global rules are calibrated towards the overarching goals of social and economic stability, shared prosperity and environmental sustainability”². It identified four critical areas where action is urgently needed for a resilient recovery: the public health response to the pandemic; finance and debt relief; climate change and social protection, including labor rights and education.

Response to the pandemic:

The key messages and recommendations from the ECOSOC special Ministerial meeting “A Vaccine for All” held in April 2021 are still as valid and unanswered today as they were a year ago. The meeting aimed to push for a global commitment to equitable and timely distribution of COVID-19 vaccines through accelerated international cooperation and assistance. The [high-level thematic debate](#) convened by the President of the General Assembly in February 2022 aimed to galvanize momentum for universal vaccination and identified gaps and challenges, as well as innovations and solutions to bridge the vaccine gap. Two years into the pandemic, further collective efforts are needed to reach testing, vaccines and treatments' equity and to ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind, including by improving availability and delivery of

¹ [DESA Monthly briefing on the World Economic Situation and Prospects](#). No 160. 3 May 2022

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-Covid-19-and-Multilateralism.pdf>

vaccines. Discussions have started on ways to ensure multilateral responses to potential future pandemics such as the process launched by the WHO's World Health Assembly in December 2021³ to develop a historic global accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Obstacles in the international trading and intellectual property rights systems have hindered vaccine availability in the developing countries. The member countries of the World Trade Organization reached, on 17 June 2022, a [limited agreement](#) to ease intellectual property protections on coronavirus vaccines. The measure would make it easier for manufacturers in developing countries to override patents on the vaccines and export them for sale in other lower-income countries. The provisions of the decision are for five years with the possibility of being extended taking into consideration the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finance and debt relief:

The pandemic has reinforced and exacerbated inequalities within and among countries. For an inclusive recovery, SDG investments are required to achieve universal social protection by 2030, and to prepare people for the rapid changes in labor markets through life-long learning, re-skilling and up-skilling programmes as well as education-enabling technologies.

Yet many developing countries are being crushed by debt service costs and global public debt that are severely affecting the needed resources at their disposal for internal recovery measures.

The Secretary-General has called for deeply reforming the international financial system as the pandemic has put more countries at risk of debt distress, constrained their fiscal space and hampered economic growth. The war in Ukraine is exacerbating these challenges. A “great finance divide” – the inability of poorer countries to raise sufficient resources and borrow affordably for investment - was identified by the [2022 Financing for Sustainable Development Report](#). This finance divide would leave developing countries unable to respond to crises and invest in sustainable development. The 2022 FSDR recommends actions that can help to make progress in bridging the finance divide, including urgent measures to address financing gaps, rising costs of borrowing and heightened debt risks; the need to increase public financing for investment in public policy priorities and effectively spend mobilized resources on the SDGs and productive investment; and reduction of borrowing costs and volatility from commercial sources as well as address debt overhangs to reduce debt burdens.

Climate change:

Improvements in multilateralism are also needed for tackling the impacts of climate change. A significant increase in financial assistance and support for investments in climate adaptation and mitigation as well as resilience-building measures are urgently needed. A coordinated approach to address the climate crisis and implement climate agreements by governments, businesses and banks will be crucial as the impact of this global challenge is eminent and is too big to be tackled alone.

³ [World Health Assembly agrees to launch a process to develop a historic global accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response \(who.int\)](#)

Multilateral cooperation also needs to be intensified in the area of social protection, including labor rights, and education. The proposal of the Secretary-General to convene a World Social Summit in 2025 would be an important opportunity to discuss issues related to universal social protection floors, including universal health coverage, adequate housing, education for all and decent work, and give momentum towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The multilateralism of the future is one that engages all actors, along with national governments in order to produce impactful outcomes. There is need to consider how UN intergovernmental bodies can more effectively engage civil society and the private sector in their work. Also important is to identify or create the kind of platforms that can ensure cooperation and collective equitable governance in areas where the role of the private sector for example is critical.

Proposed questions

Panelists will be asked to address some of the following key questions:

- *What are some lessons learned about multilateralism from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- *How can multilateral collaboration be reimagined to be more effective in the future?*
- *How can we make multilateralism more inclusive and engaging to deliver a sustainable recovery for people most left behind?*
- *What are the urgent measures that the multilateral system could undertake to tackle the impact of debt, rising inflation pressures and other financial developments in developing countries?*

Panel II: “Future trends and scenarios and the long-term impacts of current trends for building back better” (Monday, 18 July, 15:00-17:00 pm)

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact the world through health, social, economic and environmental repercussions. After a brief respite, the environmental trends in climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, deforestation, and pollution continue to be on the rise. Recent developments have also contributed to uncertainty about inflation, food security and international stability.

Since the onset of the pandemic, various policy and societal responses have been implemented to recover and build back better. While much of the focus has been on recovering from the immediate impacts of COVID-19, building back better from the pandemic also provides an opportunity to look to the long-term future. The policies, reforms and investments implemented today to restructure and strengthen our economies and societies will impact economic, social, and environmental trajectories for years to come.

For example, fiscal stimulus packages related to COVID-19 were more focused on a sustainable recovery in 2021 compared to 2020. Recent data on public spending policies in the world’s 50 largest economies shows that only \$3.1 trillion was directed to longer-term recovery measures, of

a total of \$18.2. Of the \$18.2 trillion, 31% was for “green” or environmentally compatible spending.⁴

Many countries and regions are implementing ambitious plans to invest in sustainable development. These plans are based on forward-looking, long-term visions for the future. Formulating and analyzing different scenarios for fulfilling these visions can serve to highlight opportunities for more sustainable and resilient trajectories that address existing and potential crises, reduce inequalities and achieve the SDGs.

Scenarios are critical tools for making sound policy decisions to advance the SDGs. They aim to support policy makers in looking beyond today's crises and emergencies and reflecting on new public policies that could better support government's objectives. They are consistent and plausible paths describing developments in the future. They coherently bring together scientific and technical knowledge from relevant disciplines and sources in order to improve understanding of possible future developments and support decision-making.⁵

Using scenarios in a structured and systematic way for looking toward the future and anticipating and preparing for change and the effects of long-term trends can be grouped under the term strategic foresight. Long used for demographic or economic growth projections and policies, and now in energy and new technologies, strategic foresight remains a niche tool mainly used by some countries, mainly in Europe, East Asia and North America. However, because strategic foresight and scenarios focus on identifying solutions that are grounded in the best available science and evidence, they can be significant tools for making sound policy decisions to advance the recovery and building back from COVID-19, the SDGs and long-term visions for sustainable development beyond 2030.

This session of the High-level Segment will apply a future and forward-looking lens to the continued multidimensional risks of the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound impacts and to the multilateral pursuit of building back better. It will focus on future trends and scenarios and their long-term impact on the realization of the SDGs. It will also serve to reflect on how analysis of long-term trends and scenarios, as well as policy measures formulated and implemented today based on current and projected trends, can shape and secure a better future.

A focus on the future will thus allow for a forward-looking analysis of the multilateral collaboration and long-term policies needed to promote inclusive sustainable development and resilience for advancing the SDGs. It will apply a forward-looking lens to analyze the long-term policies and multilateral collaboration needed to build back better, achieve the 2030 Agenda, and give a vision of what the world may look like, and what will be needed, to maintain sustainable development well beyond the year 2030. It also provides a foundation and opportunity to prepare for further discussions on the Secretary-General's proposed Summit of the Future.

The session will present different perspectives and experiences and engage participants in a dialogue on forward-looking policy approaches to building back better and investing in

⁴ [Long-term future trends and scenarios - impacts on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), Report of the Secretary-General, paragraphs 38-39.

⁵ [Long-term future trends and scenarios - impacts on the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), Report of the Secretary-General, paragraph 3.

sustainable development at the national, regional and global levels. Countries will share their experiences in elaborating long-term visions for their sustainable development paths and scenarios and how these are being impacted by ongoing crisis.

The session can also draw from, and connect with, existing long-term visions, such as Africa's Agenda 2063, Europe 2050, the ASEAN Economic Community's Blueprint 2025, as well as Member States national long-term national plans and recent Voluntary National Reviews. The High-level Segment can also consider some of the proposals and ideas from Our Common Agenda, including the proposal to forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like and what we can do today to secure it.

Inspiration can also be taken from the Secretary-General's report on long-term trends and scenarios. The report stresses that because the policies we put in place today can have long-term impacts, it is imperative to ensure that countries build back better by pursuing a strategy of a more inclusive, sustainable and greener recovery from the pandemic. To get the SDGs back on track and to tackle the climate crisis, the opportunity could be seized to adopt low-carbon, resilient and inclusive development pathways that will reduce harmful emissions, restore and conserve natural resources, transform our food systems, create decent work and bridge the digital gap.

Building back better will particularly require major transitions in the energy sector to ensure energy access and reduce carbon emissions. Cities and other urban areas, where more than half of the global population lives, also offer significant opportunities for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, the digital revolution offers developing countries an extraordinary opportunity to create jobs and move towards a less polluting service sector. These structural trends must be accompanied by inclusive measures to ensure that no one is left behind.

Proposed questions

Panelists could be asked to address some of the following key questions:

- What significant trends are currently being observed that could greatly impact the future? What trends need to be changed or adapted? What current trends carry the greatest risk and opportunities towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda?
- What are different scenarios for a successful recovery and building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic? What steps need to be taken to achieve these scenarios?
- How can plans for building back better incorporate innovations for reducing inequalities and bridging the digital divide over the long-term?
- What strategies need to be adopted to ensure that financial stimulus packages are applied toward sustainable solutions for future resilience?
- What are examples of near-term decisions that can be made to ensure long-term positive outcomes, such as in the areas of food security and climate change?
- How can we achieve the best-case scenario whereby mobilization of technologies and other policies allows the world to realize the 2030 Agenda?

- What are the opportunities to be realized, and pitfalls to be avoided, in the immediate and medium terms towards these ends? How can international cooperation best provide support?

Participants

The High-level Segment will engage ministers, distinguished experts and key actors to present their views and policy recommendations. The involvement of panelists from government, academia, civil society and the private sector will provide an opportunity to draw from different perspectives and experiences in recovery and building back better to identify the opportunities and challenges in multilateralism and planning for the future.

Participants will be encouraged to provide examples of country experiences and successful policies and to engage in a discussion with each other and with the audience. The discussions will be led by expert moderators. The audience will be comprised of Member States and representatives of the UN system and of civil society. Space will be provided for opportunities for Member States' interventions.

Outcome

The HLS will enhance knowledge-sharing as well as regional and international cooperation for “*Building back better from the Covid-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”.

The outcome of the panels will be a summary by the President of ECOSOC. The formal outcome of the 2022 ECOSOC HLS and high-level political forum will be a negotiated ministerial declaration.

Programme

The ECOSOC High-level Segment will bring together expert panellists, eminent personalities, and keynote speakers from Governments, the UN system, think tanks, regional organizations and other stakeholders.

The ECOSOC High-level Segment programme on 18 July can be accessed at: <https://hlpf.un.org/2022/programme#Mon-18-Jul>

The programme for the 2022 High-level Political Forum and the 2022 ECOSOC High-level Segment can be accessed at: <https://hlpf.un.org/2022/programme>

Monday, 18 July 2022, New York

09:00 to 09:30

[Introduction of SG reports on the theme of HLPF and ECOSOC and on Scenarios and long-term impact of current trends on the SDGs](#)

[Introduction of the Report of the Committee on Development Policy](#)

09:30 to 13:00

[Panel I: Future proofing multilateralism for a resilient and inclusive recovery](#)

15:00 to 17:00

[Panel II: Looking ahead: Acting today to secure a better future](#)

17:00 to 18:00

[Conclusion of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC with the adoption by ECOSOC of the Ministerial Declaration, adopted by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 16 July 2021](#)

[Closing remarks](#)