



CONCEPT NOTE

16th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

30 November – 1 December, 2023

Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation

1. The 16th session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues (UN Forum) will be convened on 30 November and 1 December 2023 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 6/15 of 28 September 2007 and resolution 19/23 of 23 March 2012. This year, the theme of the UN Forum is 'Minorities and Cohesive Societies: Equality, Social Inclusion, and Socio-economic Participation.'

A. Background

2. The 16th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues **aims to tackle the multiple challenges faced by minority communities worldwide, focusing on strengthening their socio-economic participation and ensuring equality and social inclusion.**
3. Aligned with the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, the Forum intends to work toward a future with no poverty and reduced inequality, and where peace, justice, and strong institutions prevail within cohesive societies. While the SDGs **do not specifically mention minorities**, who are often among the world's most marginalized and vulnerable groups, **their protection needs to be included explicitly in the 'no one left behind' pledge.**
4. The Forum looks at the **ground reality of contemporary societies in which minorities often grapple with the persistent challenges of systemic inequities and discrimination**, hinder their

access to vital resources and equal opportunities in various spheres such as education, employment, and healthcare.

5. The Forum at the same time recognizes **the integrative role played by those genuinely cohesive and inclusive societies that succeed to create conducive environments** where dignity and potential of every individual, regardless of their ethnic, religious or linguistic identity, is empowered and valued, where minority communities do more than survive – they thrive, and where they become essential contributors to our shared and sustainable socio-economic and cultural future.
6. The **16th Forum** embarks on **exploring solutions** and identifying national, regional and international practices in place to safeguarding and enhancing the rights of minority communities more effectively, particularly in the areas of participation in social and economic life.
7. **The Forum will build on and update the recommendations** prepared at earlier forum sessions, more particularly at the third session regarding “Minorities and effective participation in economic life” (see A/HRC/16/46) and at the 10th session on “Minority youth: towards Diverse and Inclusive Societies” (see A/HRC/37/73), as well as the report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues to the General Assembly in 2022 on the Protection of the rights of minorities in the institutions, structures and initiatives of the United Nations (A/77/246).

B. General Objectives

8. The UN Forum on Minority Issues provides a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues.
9. The 16th UN Forum on Minority Issues aims:
 - to raise awareness of the main challenges faced by persons belonging to minorities in the context of their socio-economic participation and their equitable access to the employment market, health services, education and technology;
 - to identify and analyze opportunities, practices, and initiatives to strengthen the inclusion of minorities in line with the principles and rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and other relevant international instruments;
 - to contribute to efforts to integrate minority rights into the institutions, structures and initiatives of the United Nations system at the global, regional and country levels, including through coordination among United Nations mechanisms, bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes;
 - to produce thematic recommendations to be reported to the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur.
10. The Forum shall, inter alia, examine effective State legislation, policies and programmes and civil society initiatives. It shall highlight the critical role of other relevant stakeholders, such as international and regional organizations and other forms of cooperation, in reaching the above-mentioned objectives and in eliminating obstacles to the inclusion of people belonging to minority groups in cohesive societies.

C. Participants

11. The UN Forum shall be open to the participation of States, United Nations mechanisms, treaty bodies and specialized agencies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental organizations, international and regional organizations and mechanisms in the field of human rights, national human rights institutions and other relevant national bodies and other stakeholders, including internet companies and social media platforms, civil society representatives, academics and experts on minority issues, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The Forum shall also be open to other NGOs and organizations representing minorities whose aims and purposes are in conformity with the spirit, purposes, and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

D. Areas of Discussion

12. The focus of discussion will address the following overarching themes:

Session 1 - Challenges to Inclusion and Equality: barriers to the social and economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups

Discussion areas:

- addressing the systemic and structural challenges and discrimination that minority groups may face, including the unique obstacles for women and girls belonging to minority groups;
- looking at factors placing them at a disadvantage, such as language or other requirements or lack of educational opportunities or resources in regions where minority groups are concentrated;
- exploring policies and practices that result in or exacerbate minority exclusion or place them at a disadvantage.

Session 2 – Socio-Economic Empowerment

Discussion areas:

- looking at ways to amplify the economic participation of persons belonging to minority groups and emphasize equal opportunities in society, employment and entrepreneurship, with special attention given to the economic support of migrants and refugees belonging to minority groups;
- identifying strategies to engage and empower minority young people by tapping into educational and employment prospects, sharing examples of inclusive policies, including in the use of minority languages, in terms of promoting access to services and increased employment opportunities.

Session 3 – Legal and Structural Approaches to More Inclusive Societies

Discussion areas:

- exploring legislation, policies and the provision of public goods and services that respect the rights of persons belonging to minority groups to equality without discrimination. It will address access to health care and educational and economic inequalities, including through proportionate investment in infrastructure or development;
- examining how legislation can increase opportunities that honour and represent minority identities;

- discussing the importance of ensuring equal access without discrimination to technology and fostering digital literacy within minority communities.

Session 4: Protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minority groups towards cohesive societies

Discussion areas

- Positive Examples, Good Practices and Approaches – discussing legal and institutional frameworks and policies that effectively safeguard minority rights and promoting the inclusion of persons belonging to minority groups in society.
- Challenges relating to the inclusion of persons belonging to minority groups - given that the scope of discussions of the Forum cannot possibly be exhaustive, under this subitem, the Forum welcomes participants to share additional information on issues of importance, and challenges faced, with regard to the inclusion of persons belonging to minority groups in cohesive societies.

E. Inputs and outcome

13. The UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues encourages all participants to contribute to the discussion and dialogue by sharing experiences and views about the main areas of discussion of the UN Forum. Based on the dialogue and contributions of the participants a summary of the discussion of the Forum will be prepared by the Chairperson of the UN Forum, and the Special Rapporteur on minority issues will prepare a report on the recommendations of the UN Forum to the Human Rights Council.