**55th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Panel discussion on challenges and good practices to realize the right to social security   
and to provide quality public services**

*Concept note (as of 7 March 2024)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date and venue:** | **Friday, 8 March 2024, 4 to 6 p.m. (UTC+2) Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva** *(broadcast live and archived on* [*https://webtv.un.org*](https://webtv.un.org)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | The panel discussion provides a platform:   * To discuss key elements for realizing the right to social security and strengthening social security systems; * To discuss the challenges faced by countries in fulfilling their obligations to realize the right to social security, with a specific focus on the financing of social security systems, and the coverage and adequacy of social security benefits, and the ways to overcome such challenges; * To explore the options to secure sufficient funding for universal social security systems and quality public services; * To discuss the ways to enhance the impact of social security systems through providing and embedding quality public services. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Marcelo Eliseo Scappini Ricciardi**, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statement:** | **Ms. Peggy Hicks**,Director of Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **Panellists:** | * **Ms. Preeti Saran**,Vice-Chair of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights * **Ms.** **Shahra Razavi**, Director of the Universal Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization * **Ms. Lim Lin Lean**, Economist and Senior Visiting Fellow of the Khazanah Research Institute *(video message)* * **Ms. Magdalena Sepúlveda**, Executive Director of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| **Outcome:** | A summary note of the discussion will be prepared by OHCHR, which will inform a report on the question of the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights to be submitted to the fifty-eighth session of the Council (March 2025). |
| **Mandate:** | In its resolution [52/11](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/52/11), the Human Rights Council decided to hold a panel discussion, accessible to persons with disabilities and open to the participation of States, local authorities, relevant treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, academia, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, on challenges and good practices to strengthen the fulfilment of the right to social security and for building, financing and implementing public policies and quality public services as key tools for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion and by conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statement, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 14 States or observers, 2 national human rights institutions and 4 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have 1.5 minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates who could not take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). |
| **Accessibility:** | In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel will be webcast and made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided. Participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>). Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the *Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/accessibility>). |
| **Background:** | In the wake of multiple and intersecting global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, cost-of-living and economic crisis, and emerging and protracted conflicts, poverty and economic inequality at the national and global levels have been wider and deeper. This context has disproportionally affected women and individuals in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, older persons and children. With an estimated additional 75 million to 95 million people having plunged into extreme poverty, we are witnessing the reversal of the progress made before the pandemic to reduce poverty and inequality (Sustainable Development targets 1.3, 3.8 and 8.b and Goal 17). The crises call for inclusive, comprehensive and transformative actions based on international solidarity to break through the current dire situation.  The introduction of gender-responsive social protection floors and universal social security systems has been recognized as a key to facilitating the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to social security, and to eradicating poverty and reducing inequality. The impact of social security systems, when public/social services, including housing, healthcare and services, care and support services and education for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, are embedded in the systems, is even greater to ensure that the most disadvantaged and marginalized individuals have access to the support they need. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of social protection in responding to the economic and health fallouts of the pandemic, as countries around the world and at all development levels significantly invested in the right to social security. It has also demonstrated the importance of implementing robust and efficient public policies and of providing adequately resourced and fully functioning quality public services for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.  Despite the increasing needs for social protection and the efforts made by States to expand the coverage of social security benefits to those left behind, the right to social security is far beyond reach for many people. More than half of the global population are not covered by any social security benefits, almost three quarters of people who are in need of support have no access to social assistance, about 78 per cent of persons with severe disabilities do not receive disability benefits, and 65 per cent of children do not have effective access to social protection. Even when social security benefits are available, benefits are not sufficient to meet the basic needs of recipients and many people cannot access the available benefits due to legal and practical barriers and the lack of information and access to digital technologies.  While States intend to strengthen their social security systems, many of them, especially developing and least developed countries, are struggling to create and sustain adequate and coherent social security systems due to immediate and long-term fiscal constraints. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), countries spend on average 12.9 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on social protection (excluding health) with wide disparities among countries of different income levels (ranging from 16.4 per cent in high-income countries to 2.5 per cent in lower-middle-income and 1.1 per cent in low-income countries). However, the financing gap for building social protection floors has widened by approximately 30 per cent since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, owing to the increased need for healthcare services, income security measures and reductions in GDP caused by the crisis.  Since the pandemic, there have been 15 sovereign default events and around 3.3 billion people now live in countries that spend more on debt servicing than on education or health. An estimated 85 per cent of global population is living in austerity conditions. Even before the pandemic, low-income countries were spending more on debt servicing and repayments than on social protection, health and education combined. The recent rise in interest rates raises debt servicing costs for governments, businesses and households, and risks triggering capital outflows from developing countries, compromising their recovery and medium-term growth prospects. Keeping existing social protection systems afloat and ensuring wider and more adequate coverage where gaps exist will be an even greater challenge with rising debt burdens.  The panel discussion aims to discuss the key elements that strengthen social security systems; the challenges faced by States in fulfilling their obligations to realize the right to social security, with a specific focus on the financing of social security systems and the coverage and adequacy of benefits; and the ways to enhance the impact of social security systems through providing and embedding quality public services in the systems. |
|  |
| **Background documents:** | * Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General comment No. 19 (2008) on the right to social security (art. 9), [E/C.12/GC/19](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=E%2FC.12%2FGC%2F19&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False) * CESCR, Statement on Social protection floors: an essential element of the right to social security and of the sustainable development goals ([E/C.12/2015/1](https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slQ6QSmlBEDzFEovLCuW1AVC1NkPsgUedPlF1vfPMJvHEXEU4Khj3y6yINSyq8u5n%2Ba%2BgVU%2FQRd1%2BntxmQe%2BeWynffCas%2FNSBp%2Bf2U0tNs0CiwKxDPx8dBbFO50SIXs)) * Report of the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty ([A/HRC/14/31](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F14%2F31&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False)), 2010 * Policy briefs on universal social protection * [Financing universal social protection](https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/Media.action;jsessionid=UhbucQjc5Ym-_JPqouIlT1pshbV8pUWZ1zhQu4C7Xt5U359_jxDO!1945465934?id=15661) * [Developmental impacts of expanding social protection](https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/Media.action?id=15658) * [World Social Protection Report 2020–2022](https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/Media.action?id=7368): Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future * International Labour Organization and the World Bank Group, A Shared Mission for Universal Social Protection: [Concept note](https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/Media.action?id=15692) and [country cases](https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/Media.action?id=16491) * International Labour Organization, United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Children’s Fund, [Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions: Financing Social Protection](https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Roadmap_Financing%20Social%20Protection.pdf) |