

## Somber economic forecast threatens progress on the global goals

“This is not the time for short-term thinking or knee-jerk fiscal austerity,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres, as the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2023* released its grim global economic outlook on 25 January 2023.

A series of severe and mutually reinforcing shocks — the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and resulting food and energy crises, surging inflation, debt distress, as well as the climate emergency — battered the world economy in 2022.

Against this backdrop, world output growth is projected to slow from an estimated 3.0 per cent in 2022 to 1.9 per cent in 2023, marking one of the lowest growth rates in recent decades.

While global growth is forecast to moderately pick up to 2.7 per cent in 2024, this is still highly dependent on the pace and sequence of further monetary tightening, the course and consequences of the war in Ukraine, and the possibility of further supply-chain disruptions.

“The current crises are hitting the most vulnerable the hardest — often through no fault of their own,” said Li Junhua, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. “The global community needs to step up joint efforts to avert human suffering and support an inclusive and sustainable future for all,” he added.

The World Economic Situation and Prospects 2023 calls on Governments to pursue a more finely calibrated monetary policy and reallocate public spending that will go towards creating jobs and reinvigorating growth.

International cooperation is fundamental to help turn around the world economy and accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The full report includes regional economic outlooks for developed economies, economies in transition, and the developing economies of Africa, East Asia, South Asia, Western Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. It is available at <https://desapublications.un.org/>



## EXPERT VOICES



### At UN ECOSOC – how the power of ideas is turned into action

The UN Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) is gearing up for a very busy 2023, culminating in the SDG Summit in September. Marion Barthélemy, Director of the Office for Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development in UN DESA, talks about

ECOSOC’s role in bringing sustainable development directly into people’s lives.

**1. The UN Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) plays a crucial role in bringing countries together to advance economic, social and sustainable development. Can you tell us more about this intergovernmental work and its impact for people on the ground?**

“ECOSOC examines key issues related to sustainable development and international solidarity—from the COVID-19 recovery to social protection and the impacts of the financial crisis. It addresses policy recommendations to governments and the international community. Those are not ‘mandatory commitments’ similar to conventions or treaties, but rather actionable obligations because they are based on countries’ experiences, analysis and contributions from NGOs and major groups, which have strong rights in ECOSOC.

187 countries have now conducted voluntary national reviews (VNRs) at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Through the VNRs, Governments explain how they are implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The VNRs push them to do more and better to improve people’s lives.

ECOSOC’s recommendations to the UN development system are implemented by UN country teams. They improve UN support to countries’ efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals for each individual. ECOSOC’s coordination of humanitarian assistance helps to better respond to the crying needs of the 339 million people who require such assistance today.

I could give many other examples of ECOSOC's impact on people. ECOSOC created UNAIDS when the pandemic was raging. In 2018, it adopted principles of effective governance. Those are now being implemented through the African Peer Review Mechanism. ECOSOC oversees the work of the Statistical Commission and the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management. Those provide indispensable information for improving governments' policies to transform into a better world."

**2. ECOSOC will be a major player for some of the key UN moments in 2023. What are some of the main events to look out for?**

"In 2023, the UN will be convening a number of major meetings, at a time when the world is facing a historical convergence of crises. Countries and communities are at a loss about how to respond to these combined emergencies and the backsliding on the SDGs. UN meetings are a moment for governments and others to take a step back, rise above the emergency mode and reconnect with our long-term goals. They will help countries to ramp up actions for people and planet, as an integral part of their crisis response.

The culminating event will be the SDG Summit in September. It will take stock of where we stand on the SDGs. But it must be, above all, a Summit of action, implementation and recommitment. It will revamp the energy and ideals of the SDGs. It should adopt transformative recommendations and launch new high-impact commitments and initiatives.

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2023 will serve as an informal 'pre-summit' event. It should mobilize the largest possible number of ministers from all SDG sectors to commit to an unprecedented unified effort to reach the SDGs. It will give space for the governments, the private sector, civil society organizations and others to announce bold initiatives.

In preparation for the SDG Summit, the ECOSOC President will lead the ECOSOC's Forums on Youth; Partnership; Financing for Sustainable Development; Development Cooperation; Science, Technology and Innovation to identify solutions to the crises. ECOSOC has also contributed to the LDC5 Conference to be held in March and to the preparations for the Sendai Framework review in May. The HLPF review of SDG 6 in July will follow-up on the March UN Water Conference. ECOSOC's contributions are important. ECOSOC has the power to rally a breath of actors, mobilize actions, and improve policies. It has the 'power of ideas'."

**3. In a world facing multiple crises, we have the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our blueprint towards a better world. What inspires you most about these goals and what brings you hope that we can turn things around for the benefit of people and planet?**

"The 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are the plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. I still marvel that all Member States of the United Nations, with their deep diversity, could agree on such a detailed vision of what a happy, healthy, and sustainable world would look like. Of course, today, the picture is very grim. Years, even decades, of progress on the SDGs, have been wiped out by COVID-19 and now a myriad of crises.

Still, I am hopeful because there is a clear shared sense of urgency in most countries. The July 2022 High-Level Political Forum showed that many countries are trying to gear their crisis response and recovery efforts towards achieving the transformations we need to achieve the SDGs. I also expect an ambitious Political Declaration and game-changing actions and initiatives by world leaders at the SDG Summit.

I am also hopeful because of the continuing huge buy-in into the SDGs by the private sector, civil society and governments in many countries. The SDG "rainbow" is everywhere – even on the jacket of YoYo Ma in a movie like "Glass Onions" with Daniel Craig! YoYo Ma, speaking of a fugue, says: 'It starts to change and turns into a beautiful new structure'. I think the same will happen to the world. The values of the UN Charter and the 2030 Agenda will ultimately prevail. They are powerful because they reflect the aspirations of all people. But for this, we need to work very hard – we need political will, an unprecedented mobilization across countries, innovation, technologies, financing, science- and evidence-

based policies and a deep sense of international solidarity. In all this, we must make the best use of ECOSOC and the HLPF.”

Follow the work of UN ECOSOC [here](#).



## THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



### 5 things you should know about decent jobs and reducing inequality

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The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the goals aimed at boosting economic growth and creating decent

jobs (SDG 8) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). At the upcoming Commission for Social Development on 6-15 February 2023, these two goals will take centre stage as efforts continue to make sure no one is left behind. Here are five things you should know:

#### 1. The world is experiencing deepening inequalities and uneven recovery from the COVID-19 crisis

The pandemic had a big impact on jobs and income, with marginalized and disadvantaged social groups being affected the most. It also presented a window of opportunity to take stock of these challenges, put effective policies in place, and build a more inclusive, equitable, and adaptable labour market for all, including the two billion people working in the informal economy.

#### 2. Creating full and productive employment and decent work helps overcome inequality

Evidence from national experiences shows that rising inequality is not inevitable. Policies matter, and inequality can be overcome in a sustained manner by creating full and productive employment and decent work for all. This can not only empower and improve the well-being of marginalized and disadvantaged social groups, but also foster a sense of dignity and purpose and create social connections, while leaving no one behind.

#### 3. Digital divides persist, with wider socioeconomic inequalities

COVID-19 has accelerated the pace of digital transformation, changing the way we work and live. This increased pace of digital transformation has amplified the urgency of closing the digital divide. The spread of global technologies and increased reliance on ICTs have created even greater disparities during the pandemic. Unequal capacities on the use of technology will continue to affect well-being across the life cycle, particularly for young people, in the areas of education, employment, and health. Thoughtful and forward-thinking measures are needed to promote the inclusion of vulnerable populations in the digital revolution and leverage technology as a public good.

#### 4. Africa is facing multidimensional challenges

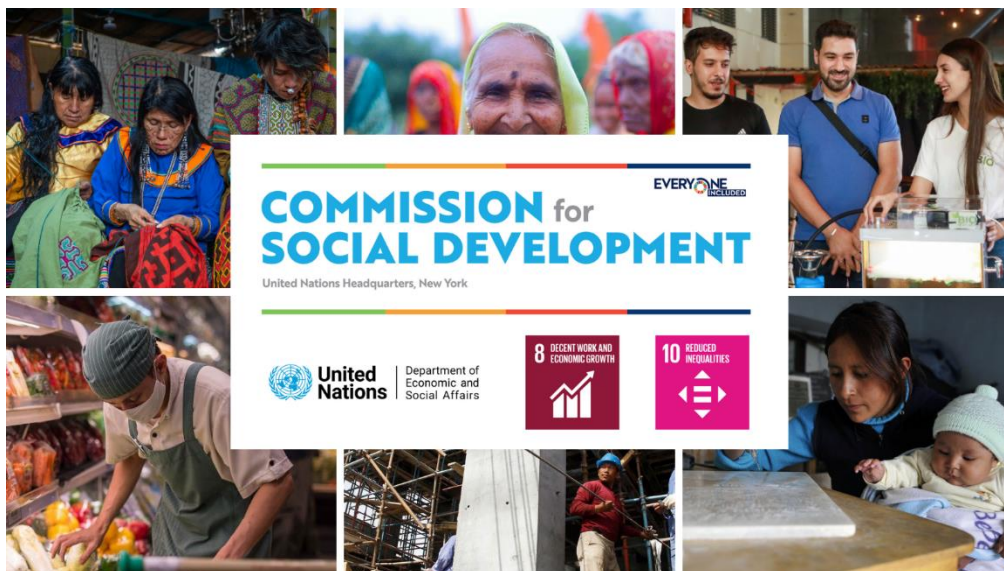
Facing three major crises – the lingering COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, and climate change – Africa continues to face multidimensional challenges, which are keeping the continent fragile and vulnerable in key aspects of human development. Lack of access to decent jobs and social protection can prevent people from actively participating in and

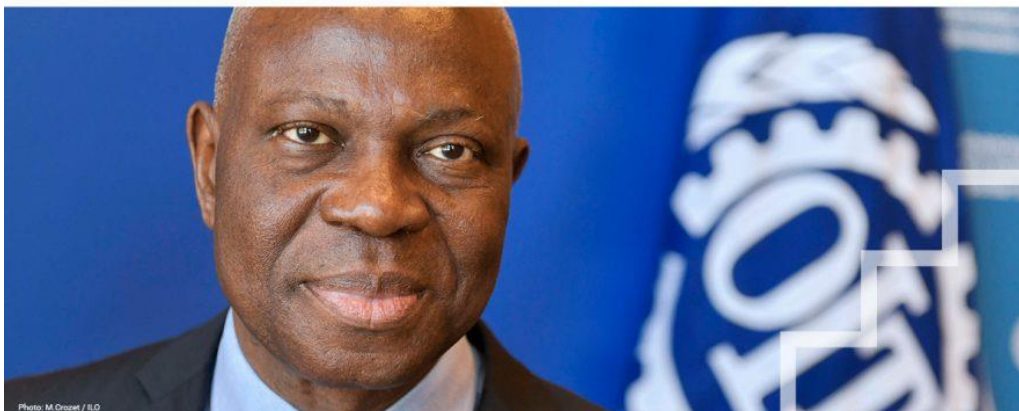
contributing to society, thereby undermining their economic security and trust in public institutions and raising resentment and social tensions.

## 5. Governments can do more to create inclusive, equitable and adaptable labour markets

Countries can foster an enabling business environment for the creation of decent jobs for all and intervene in the labor market to enhance its inclusiveness and adaptability, as well as to support vulnerable workers. They can support vulnerable workers and job seekers through specific labor market policies and universal social protection benefits. These include unemployment, maternity, disability, and sickness benefits, which can ensure workers' income security, even in the case of shocks. Governments can also invest more in lifelong learning, long-term care, and care work. Promoting digital inclusion among vulnerable populations that are adapted to the realities of aging, changing family structures, new forms of work, and ways of organizing work is crucial in this endeavor.

Learn more and follow the work of the 61th Session of the Commission for Social Development [here](#).





## Amid crisis there is reason to hope – if we come together to pursue social justice

*By Gilbert F. Hougbo, Director-General, International Labour Organization*

Coming out of the recent World Economic Forum at Davos, I reflected on what the current state of affairs means for the world of work and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The WEF rightly observed that we are at an inflection point. The world is facing several overlapping global crises – conflict, a global economic downturn, and the devastating effects of climate change among others. We had hopes, coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, that we could build forward better, that we could focus on climate change action and on rescuing the Sustainable Development Goals, as called for by the UN Secretary-General. But these hopes have been upended by a fresh crisis in food and energy, caused by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

In the world of work, our recent report: [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023](#) also paints a troubling picture. Global employment growth will be only 1.0 per cent in 2023, less than half the level of 2022. Global unemployment is slated to rise slightly in 2023, by around 3 million, to 208 million. This would mark a reversal of the decline in global unemployment seen between 2020-2022. The current slowdown means that many workers will have to accept lower quality jobs, often at very low pay, sometimes with insufficient hours. Furthermore, as prices rise faster than nominal labour incomes, the cost-of-living crisis risks pushing more people into poverty, including millions who are being pushed below the poverty line. This trend comes on top of significant declines in income seen during the COVID-19 crisis, which affected low-income groups worst in many countries. As a result, we see a rise in inequality in many parts of the globe, raising the spectre of increasing social tensions.

Many businesses are also struggling with the impact of these multiple crises, with small and micro-enterprises being particularly vulnerable.

### Cooperation

Yet, thinking back to the discussion in Davos, where the focus was on cooperation, I also came away with the impression and conviction that there is hope: there is a willingness and determination in the international world to work together. There is also an emerging understanding that we must collaborate to address economic, social and environmental concerns on an equal basis. In this endeavour, the 2030 Agenda must remain our guiding framework for multilateral action.

SDG 8 on Decent Work and Sustainable Economic Growth sits at the heart of the 17 SDGs – and rightly so. Labour standards, employment policies, social protection and social dialogue are more important than ever. Indeed, decent work is central to all of our lives and goes far beyond the workplace. It is the pathway out of poverty and a core element of

sustainable development. This is why aspects of the ILO's decent work agenda are also included in many other SDGs: from poverty reduction, food security, health, and inequality, to the range of environmental goals which need just transitions, and the quest for peace, justice and strong institutions.

We therefore have the elements in place to accelerate the action needed on the social dimension of sustainable development. The world of work, centred around SDG 8 and related goals, is a good entry point in this regard. Combined actions, global and national, are crucial in countries which confront massive decent work deficits and excessive inequalities while their financial resources and institutional capacities are limited.

## Social justice

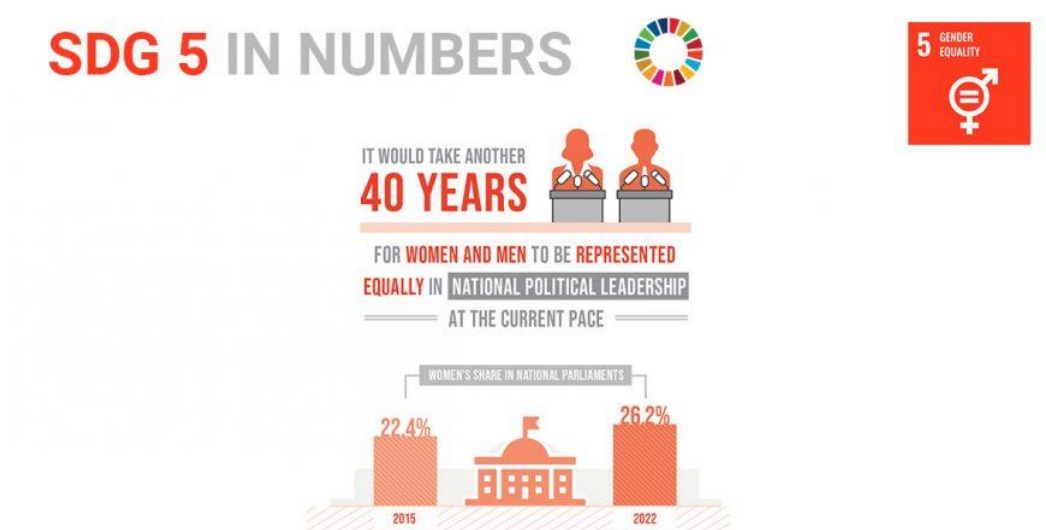
When we think of social justice, we think of fairness, of equality, of having the means – and the right – to a dignified life. Decent work is key to social justice, opening up a world of possibilities on food, health, education and a safe and clean environment.

However, social justice is more than an aspiration. It is doable. We learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that it is possible for countries to work together.

That is why I have hope that together, we can work towards social justice in a broad coalition, enabling societies and economies to function better and to reduce poverty, inequalities and social tensions, and put in motion a just transition to greener, sustainable, and fairer economies.

We should heed the call from Davos and cooperate in this fragmented world to move ahead on the path towards sustainable development via the SDGs. This year the International Labour Organization will be bringing together a Global Coalition for Social Justice. Achieving SDG 8 on decent work will help turn aspiration for an equal, just world into a reality.

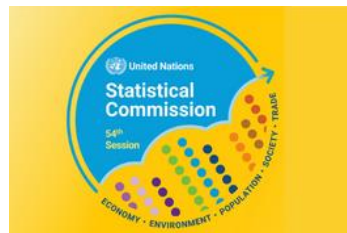
*\* The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



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