

“Decent work: building a sustainable future”

Side Event at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Friday 14 July 2023 (8 – 9.30 am)

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Good morning everyone and a very warm welcome to all the participants. Our aim today is to look at the progress towards achieving decent work for all as part of the international community’s efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Decent work – SDG8 – is widely seen as central to achieving both sustainable development and building a resilient, just society. This noble aspiration has been challenged by repeated setbacks in development, such as with the Covid-19 pandemic. We are still struggling with the aftermath. Yet, as the OECD puts it, we “can build back better”.

The compounding effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, global conflicts, the climate crisis, and rising inequalities have reversed global progress on poverty reduction. The number of people living in extreme poverty, which had markedly fallen for almost 25 years, is now on the rise. In 2020, 700 million people were living in extreme poverty and nearly half of the world was living with less than \$6.85 a day. The Human Development Index value is declining for the first time on record, with 9 out of 10 countries globally registering a backslide in health, education, and standard of living. Given current trends, a projected 574 million people will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030, pushing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 1 to ‘end poverty in all its forms everywhere’ out of reach.

As Low- or Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) simultaneously face growing financing needs, spiralling debt and declining available financing for sustainable development, notably in terms of government revenues, their SDG financing gap reached \$3.9 trillion in 2020, a 56% jump from 2019.

Inflation has had strong distributional effects. Low-income households and rural households are typically hit the hardest by higher food and energy prices given the composition of their spending. Nominal wages have not kept up with inflation and real wages have declined in virtually every OECD country and by 5% on average year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2022.

There are other strategic and structural challenges to which politicians and experts worldwide are trying to find appropriate policy answers. Our panellists will present their views on policy choices as a way forward in several areas: the future of work organisation, artificial intelligence and labour markets, socio-economic measures to overcome legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic and efforts to eliminate hazardous child labour. Our guest speakers from the International Labour Organisation and the Human Rights Watch will present their assessment on how well – or how bad – we are doing as a global community towards building a more sustainable future through decent work.