

**OHCHR workshop on promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights
within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the COVID-19
pandemic**

6-8 February 2023

10:00–12:00 and 15:00-17:00

Tempus, Palais des Nations, Geneva and online platform (Zoom)

Concept Note

Objective: As mandated by the HRC resolution 49/19, this three-day workshop will bring together key stakeholders for a discussion on practical ways to further enhance and strengthen the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution recognizes the unprecedented threat posed to societies worldwide by the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on a wide range of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, water and sanitation, social security, education and work, which has shone a light on the structural consequences of decades of underfunded or dismantled public services and policies related to economic, social and cultural rights, as well as on systemic discrimination. As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General, shortcomings in the realization of economic, social and cultural rights have deepened inequalities, increased social protests, eroded trust in institutions and weakened the social contract between governments and people.

The meeting will consist of a high-level opening session followed by six panel discussions and a closing session. In sessions 2-6, initial presentations by the panelists will be followed by interventions by participants and concluding remarks from the panelists.

The objective of the workshop is to identify recommendations and proposals for OHCHR and the Human Rights Council to further reinforce their work on promoting and protecting economic, social, and cultural rights.

Background: In its resolution 49/19, the Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner to convene, a three-day workshop in a hybrid format, on further enhancing and strengthening the work of the Human Rights Council and the Office of High Commissioner in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including through focused advocacy on easing economic burdens, vaccine equity, the removal of structural impediments and the development of technical assistance programmes aimed at enhancing the capacity-building of States, especially developing and least-developed States.

Pursuant to the same resolution, OHCHR presented its report on promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (A/HRC/51/20) at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council. The report contains an overview of the current research activities and projects carried out by the Office on economic, social and cultural rights, its efforts, progress to improve its capacity in this field, and the remaining gaps. The report notes that in the context of the socioeconomic crisis generated by the pandemic, the Office has stepped up, within the limited resources available, its engagement to combat economic and other inequalities. It highlights a growing demand for the engagement of the Office, particularly on economic, social, and cultural rights. However, the limited resources available to OHCHR result in considerable challenges in delivering on the increased work. Therefore, the report calls for additional human and financial resources that would help OHCHR to provide purpose-specific and operationally relevant support to enable States to meet their obligations to progressively realize economic, social, and cultural rights and the right to development.

Modalities: The workshop will be fully accessible to persons with disabilities and held with the participation of representatives of Member States, the treaty bodies and the special procedures, the United Nations system, academia, national human rights institutions and civil society. It will be chaired by an expert appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, in consultation with regional groups.

6 February

10:00 – 11:15 High-level opening session

11:15– 12:00 Session 1: Global prospects on economic, social and cultural rights

In the context of multiple global challenges, including climate change, conflicts, and the socio-economic crisis generated by COVID-19, this session will discuss the current state and the future of economic, social and cultural rights worldwide. In light of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it will reflect on the success factors that have made possible significant advances in the realization of economic, social and cultural rights since the adoption of the UDHR in 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966 and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993 and ponder on how to overcome remaining obstacles.

15:00 – 17:00 Session 2: Critical reflection on progress, challenges and the future of economic, social and cultural rights

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the realization of the rights to health, social security and other economic, social and cultural rights even more pressing and urgent. The pandemic has exposed inadequate investments in public services such as social protection and health care, unveiling gaps in coverage, the inadequacy of social protection benefits and exacerbating deep-seated inequalities. Despite progress in the extension of social protection in many parts of the world, the human right to social security is not yet a reality for the majority of the world's population. This session will identify good practices and new approaches to the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights. It will also include a discussion on the role of international financial institutions and international cooperation in promoting the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. Discussions will be framed in the context of a new social contract and enhanced trust between governments and people, as called for by the UN Secretary-General in his report entitled "Our Common Agenda" and "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights".

7 February

10:00 – 12:00 Session 3: Measurement and elimination of global poverty and inequalities

The aim of this session is to discuss the measurement and elimination of global poverty through a more human rights-based international poverty line, aligned with the right to an adequate standard of living and other human rights and which captures poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. As noted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights in his report (A/HRC/44/40), the international community largely relies on the measurement of \$1.90 a day, which is not in line with the costs of essential needs and does not capture the scale of poverty accurately. The international poverty line is significantly below the national poverty lines in most countries, and the prevailing method obscures gender differences as it does not reflect intra-household inequalities. This session seeks to provide conceptual clarity on measuring poverty and what it would take to achieve greater progress for everyone everywhere to have access to essential services, resources and social protection, as part of the global response, pandemic recovery efforts and the principle of leaving no one behind.

15:00 – 17:00 Session 4: Investing in social spending, tackling inequalities and promoting economic policies that advance greater realization of economic, social and cultural rights

The objective of this session is to review and question the current economic policies and the chronic underfunding of public services that are essential for people's daily lives. It will highlight impactful measures, initiatives good practices and recommendations for States to mobilize resources and invest in social spending. Progressive taxation is a key tool in tackling inequality and for generating the resources necessary for progressively achieving the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights. The principles of non-discrimination and equality are essential for guiding public resources. This session will critically analyse the situation of debt, fiscal space and the role of governments in ring-fencing investments to ensure the realisation of economic social and cultural rights. In addition, it will discuss the impact of corruption and illicit financial flows on the ability of States to use maximum available resources on public services.

8 February

10:00 – 12:00 Session 5: Strengthening the capacity of OHCHR to operationalize economic, social and cultural rights

The mandate of OHCHR ([General Assembly Resolution 48/141](#)) to promote and protect all human rights for all people can only be carried out with the commitment, support and constructive engagement of all actors. The exchange in this session will be dedicated to hearing from States, those primary responsible for the protection of human rights of people living within their countries, of their expectations from OHCHR in promoting economic, social and cultural rights, their experiences of engagement with the Office and opportunities for the future. It will discuss practical ways to further strengthen OHCHR's capacity and financial resources for it to be fully equipped to better operationalize the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights throughout its work.

15:00 – 16:45 Session 6: Promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights by the Human Rights Council

Recognizing the indivisibility, interconnectedness and interdependence of all human rights, this session will assess the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights by the Human Rights Council, including the gaps and challenges of the Council in this regard. In the context of COVID-19 recovery, the Human Rights Council has, for example, held seminars and consultations on access to vaccines and medicines, mental health and social security, thus facilitating the sharing of good practices and lessons learned. In addition, many of the special procedure mandates of the Human Rights Council relate to economic, social and cultural rights, such as food, water and sanitation, health, education, adequate housing, foreign debt and extreme poverty. The recommendations emanating from mandate holders are a problem-solving tool for risk analysis, prevention and resolution of conflicts. However, only 21 per cent of the recommendations by member States within the Universal Periodic Review relate to economic, social and cultural rights. The objective of this session is to identify opportunities for the Council to further strengthen its work for the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

16:45 – 17:00 Closing session