

## **Seventy-fourth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: High-level Ministerial Segment**

**Date:** Monday to Wednesday 14 to 16 May 2018  
**Time:** 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon and 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
**Venue:** ESCAP Hall, United Nations Conference Centre

### **Summary**

The seventy-fourth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific comes at a critical juncture, with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in full swing. The theme topic selected by member States, "Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," will be the primary focus of the deliberations. Progress in reducing inequality is critically interlinked with the advances Governments make in strengthening redistributive policies alongside the emerging role of Asia and the Pacific in shaping the regional and global architecture through its growing multilateral approach to governance mechanisms.

The high-level segment will provide a unique platform for leaders and top officials from member States to deliberate on the theme topic, keeping in perspective the debates around and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). It will also serve as a universal forum to exchange experiences, learn from one another and promote cross-fertilization of ideas through interaction between countries but also with thought leaders and leading international and regional experts representing academia, the private sector, subregional organizations and other key stakeholders.

### **Overview**

The interlinked global agreements comprising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement offer the most ambitious and far-reaching development agenda of our time. Since their adoption in 2015, the international community has been confronted with the complex task of implementing this plan for equitable growth and shared prosperity, reinforced by enhanced social equality and the preservation of the natural environment. In its pursuit of the vision and pledge to "leave no one behind" - the cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda - the Asia-Pacific region needs to collectively catalyze policies and actions that address inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda, which is the theme topic of the seventy-fourth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The session will be a timely opportunity for leaders and high-level officials to debate and exchange knowledge and experiences on the key trends and emerging drivers and consequences of inequality, as well as the measures being taken to reduce inequalities both at the national and regional levels through collective endeavours that reinforce a multilateral approach to shared challenges, given the growing distrust in liberal and market-friendly

policies. The following is a brief synopsis of the theme topic and the related issues to be covered during the high-level segment:

### **Inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Asia and the Pacific has emerged as the world's fastest growing region over the past decades, and has had impressive success in reducing poverty and sharply increasing life expectancy, among other achievements. However, this dynamism has been accompanied by a rising concentration of income and wealth among the top deciles of the population, further widening the gap. Compared with all other regions in the world, over the past 25 years Asia and the Pacific has seen the largest increase in the average Gini coefficient, a common measure of inequality.

This discussion would introduce the theme study prepared for the 74th session by the secretariat and, guided by the findings of emerging new global and regional research, contribute to an enhanced understanding of the key trends and emerging drivers of inequalities in Asia and the Pacific, and what policy reforms may help build more inclusive, resilient and equitable societies in the region. Member States will gain an understanding of national approaches and good-practices in addressing inequality of outcome, opportunity and impact, and harnessing the potential of technology to foster equitable development. Countries may also wish to examine how cooperation at the regional and global levels could be strengthened to address these issues.

Underpinning this discussion is the framework provided by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, which provide a commitment to a sustainable and resilient path to economic and social development. In Asia and the Pacific, countries have already begun translating this agenda into action and many have already set up the national architecture for coordinating and promoting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Countries may wish to build on the deliberations and outcomes of the Fifth Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development to share concrete examples of innovative policy changes that put them on a path to implementing the 2030 Agenda and how the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals can help to address inequalities within their countries and across the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Multilateralism in Asia and the Pacific to promote inclusive economic and social development in the region and its contributions to global economic governance**

The success of the 2030 Agenda will depend on how effectively States can address national inequalities and position themselves to advance international co-operative efforts, while continuing to play a role in promoting global economic and financial stability. To this end, Asia and the Pacific has increasingly shaped its contributions and distinctive approach to multilateralism and global economic governance to advance trade, capital and factor mobility within and across the region. An inclusive approach to regional and global economic governance, underpinned by a system of multilateralism, has the potential to allow for the benefits to be shared more widely and leave no one behind.

The session will examine the leadership of the Asia-Pacific region and its contributions to promoting inclusive global and regional economic governance in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda

to address inequalities, particularly in light of targets contained in Sustainable Development Goals 10, 16 and 17, and debate what the region can do to reinvigorate regional and global multilateral approaches to promote economic and financial stability for the prosperity of its people.

### **Frontier technological innovation: policies to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs**

Concerns regarding the economic implications of emerging technologies are nothing new. However, as the global economy enters the fourth industrial revolution, a revolution defined by frontier technological breakthroughs, there is a prevailing narrative that, this time, the changes could have a much more profound impact, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities within and between countries of the region. In considering only 15 major developed and emerging economies, the World Economic Forum predicts that emerging technological trends will lead to a net loss of over 5 million jobs by 2020. However, frontier technologies could also enhance productivity and have significant positive impact for society and the environment. For example, data suggest that improved application of information and communication technologies to smart grids and transportation will reduce carbon emissions by an estimated 4.5 billion tons by 2020. This prominent position means governments in the region need to think carefully about the role and scope of frontier technologies.

Countries will have the opportunity to examine the size of the opportunity/threat posed by frontier technologies through highlighting the impact they are having in countries in the region; increase understanding of the measures that could be implemented to maximize the positives, while minimizing the negatives, of frontier technologies; and produce lessons that may help member States to develop or share next generation technology and innovation policies to harness the fourth industrial revolution.

### **Meeting format**

The high-level ministerial general debate among the member States will aim to address inequality and its interrelated dimensions as described above. The debate will begin in the afternoon of Monday 14 May with consideration of the theme topic in the context of the 2030 Agenda, and continue through the morning of Tuesday 15 May. In the afternoon of 15 May, countries will examine the role of multilateralism in Asia and the Pacific to address inequalities and promote inclusiveness and sustainable development, and its contributions to global economic governance. The debate will conclude the morning of Wednesday 16 May with a focus on frontier technologies as a key mean of implementation, and both the positive and negative effects they may have on inequalities.

Each session will be structured to begin with presentations by a mix of eminent policy makers, representatives from government, academia and the private sector who will present actionable ideas and approaches to addressing these issues, followed by statements by member States.

Guidance notes for each session will further lay out the objectives and format of the discussions, as well as provide a framework for the recommended focus of country statements and expected outcomes of the deliberations.

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