



United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2023

“Decent Work and Social Protection: Putting Dignity in Practice for All”

Concept Note

“Before I accepted all mistreatment, inadequate payment, and many hours of enslaving work. I suffered a lot and had nightmares.” Ana Isabel, Peru

*“We used to do small jobs to survive and earn daily bread, but not to move forward or to do the big projects of life.”
Barclay, Central Africa*

“My husband must accept any abuse because the unemployed are waiting in line. People are deprived of basic elements and have no other choice.” Georgette, Lebanon

*“In Belgium, people living in poverty are victims of many prejudices. People who have social assistance are called “lazy”. Others think that we “choose” not to work, but they don’t have any idea about the barriers we face in getting work.”
Nicolas, Belgium*

People living in extreme poverty, many of whom work in the informal economy – unregistered, unrecognised and unprotected under labour legislation - face difficult and dangerous conditions. The most excluded have no choice but to accept unacceptable situations and are often seen and treated as ‘disposable’. Despite working long hours, they are unable to earn enough to support themselves and their families. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that almost two thirds of the world’s working population, over two billion people, are informal workers with Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa having the highest levels of informality. In 2020, only 46.9 percent of the global population were effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, leaving more than half of the world’s population wholly unprotected. Informal work is also present in high income countries especially among the marginalised and undocumented workers. And even those who have access to social protection often suffer from the stigma and control that come with it. For the people experiencing persistent poverty, their lack of decent working conditions and respectful social protection creates insecurity that denies them to take charge of their lives and exposes them to exploitation, humiliation and feelings of futility preventing them from participating fully in their communities.

Over the next decade, the World Bank estimates that one billion young people will try to enter the job market, but less than half of them will actually find formal jobs.

People directly impacted by extreme poverty will face discrimination, unable to obtain decent work because of their socioeconomic status, lower levels of education and training received as well as the stigma attached to being poor. UNICEF estimates that in the least developed countries, slightly more than one in four children (ages 5 to 17) are engaged in labour that is detrimental to their health and development, jeopardising the possibility to ever lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Discrimination is also felt by women, who according to the ILO form 58% of the informal labour force. Women are likely to be the lowest paid, most marginalised and more susceptible to sexual harassment at work. Despite women’s work contributing to the economy, well-being of individuals, families and societies, the care and household work is unpaid, undervalued and left out of policy agendas. Similarly, the most excluded among us also perform useful jobs, often under precarious conditions. They have, for example, been on the forefront of environment protection and trendsetters in repair, reuse and recycle long before the ‘circular economy’ concept became popular. Despite their economic, social and environmental contribution, their work is not recognised or dismissed by society.

“In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, many workers do not depend on employers, but on their own means: people recover what others reject, they tinker, repair or recover parts, resell or sell the unusable by weight. People who manage to support their families with what others reject.” Thérèse, Lebanon

Dignity of the human person is inherent and yet the lived experience of people in poverty, the reality of their situation, access to decent work and social protection are a far cry from the promise of the right to work and a life in dignity enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in Agenda 2030 to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. The reality check is all the more shocking in view of the tremendous wealth, knowhow and technological advances that could have ended poverty already many decades ago. Yet the discriminatory social institutions, unjust systems, laws, policies and actions cause poverty to persist and inequalities to increase. For the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2023, we highlight these

intimately linked 'decent work' and 'social protection' as drivers in ending poverty and achieving dignity in practice.

To achieve our goals, choices have to be made between racing to the bottom or racing to the top. Let us choose the latter and aspire to attain the highest standards for every human being giving a chance for everyone to shine and offer their best to family, community and the world. As required by international human rights law, we urge the States to use maximum available resources to progressively fulfil their human rights obligations. In aspiring for the highest attainable standards, we call for:

Decent work for all - The ILO defines [decent work](#) as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity." Ensuring that jobs enable women and men to work in conditions of dignity is key to ending poverty. Decent work must be understood in the context of a dignified life and address the hidden dimensions of poverty, the social and institutional maltreatment, the unrecognised contributions that disempowers people living in poverty and causes suffering of the body, mind and the heart. In addressing the hidden dimensions, decent work combats social exclusion and promotes cohesion by inviting excluded individuals, those who have been left behind back into public life. It provides an environment supportive of non-judgement context assisting and most wider excluded individuals to access decent jobs in locations close to where they live. Decent work transforms unequal power relations by recognising the worker as a rights holder who needs to be supported and provided with the necessary education and training to do their work, who has the right to a fair wage, social security and safe working conditions. Decent work is work that empowers and enables their control over income earned. The income security that comes with social protection provides agency for people to confidently plan their future. Moreover, the dignity of work gives respect to the worker without discrimination, thereby regarding work as 'bearer of humanity'.

Universal social protection (USP) - Life's journey is full of uncertainties and everyone, including those outside the labour force (eg. children, elderly and people not able to work), have a right to income security, to be 'protected against poverty and risks to livelihoods and well-being'. States are required to deploy their maximum available resources to make social protection a reality for all. Anyone who needs social protection should be able to access it and barriers to accessing social protection rights should be addressed. In doing so, special attention must

be paid to the most excluded and people trapped in extreme poverty, some of whom do not take up their rights due to lack of legal identity or shame associated with being poor. In designing and operationalising universal social protection schemes, states must involve the rights holders to ensure effective take up by those in need.

In our efforts to move forward, let us use dignity as our compass, so the attainment of fundamental human rights and social justice is at the heart of national and global decision making. Using dignity as our compass will also help shape a global economy that prioritises the wellbeing of the people and planet over maximisation of corporate profits and ensure social justice, peace and prosperity. In moving forward, strong partnerships are needed. In this regard, Global Partnership for Universal Social Protection, and Global Coalition for Social Justice to reduce and prevent inequalities should be supported.

October 17 shines as a ray of hope, a day to honour the millions of people enduring the silent and sustained violence of poverty. It's our chance to live up to the promise of putting the furthest behind first, to stand together with them and pledge our commitment to ensure that dignity in practice for all becomes a reality.

Celebrated since 1987 as the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and recognized by the United Nations in 1992, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty promotes dialogue and understanding between people living in poverty and their communities, and society at large. "It represents an opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty, a chance for them to make their concerns heard, and a moment to recognize that poor people are in the forefront in the fight against poverty." (United Nations, Report of the Secretary General, A/61/308, para. 58)

More information about initiatives, events and activities to mark October 17 around the world can be found at [UNDESA website](#) and [overcomingpoverty.org](#).

International Committee October 17

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— Note: This concept paper draws inspiration from the global consultation on the October 17 th theme with people experiencing poverty and organisations working closely with them, conducted by the Forum for Overcoming Extreme Poverty. The views in this document do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations or its Member States.