

2021 ECOSOC Integration Dialogues

Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development:

Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

As part of the preparatory process of the 2021 Integration Segment, the ECOSOC Vice-President from Mexico, Ambassador Juan Sandoval, organized three informal virtual conversations or “Integration Dialogues” on 27 May, 3 June and 10 June. These dialogues provided an opportunity to identify the key policy options to inform the deliberations at the Segment, and critical guidance on integration issues that need to be addressed and generate momentum towards the Integration Segment in July. They focused on the creative ideas emanating from the work of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and the UN system to break new ground in the reflection on how to recover better from COVID-19.

They also provided a platform for further discussion between Member States and the ECOSOC system on the policies and programmes that best reflect the national and international priorities for an equal, resilient, and sustainable recovery. In view of the SDGs reviewed at the 2021 HLPF and the ECOSOC’s main theme, the dialogues were convened under the following themes:

1. Institutional strengthening, governance, inclusion and the rule of law
2. Building back better towards inclusive, sustainable, and just economies for recovery: Re-designing the contract between people and planet.
3. Human well-being and capabilities: Building back more resilient, healthy, equitable and sustainable societies.

Dialogue 1

Key takeaways from the first dialogue include the emergence of a new credibility bar for institutions and governments, which requires the delivery of tangible outcomes in a transparent and inclusive manner in order to restore credibility and trust. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic provided the opportunity to focus on the game changing principle of leaving no one behind and looking at disaggregated welfare instead of aggregate. Also discussed was the role of government, and government reform in critical sectors, in accelerating action and progress. Participants discussed learning from the COVID-19 experience in terms of measuring risk and building resilience going forward, with the understanding that we cannot continue to approach challenges the same way, because addressing current crises requires structural transformations.

The dialogue also underscored the issue of the balance between national and international governance and action, including the role of the national social contract in restoring trust. Participants recognized the importance of the support from international community, including in promoting vaccine equity, access to financing for development and budget flexibility. In this regard, the role of ECOSOC was emphasized, in particular on coherence of actions and policy integration as well as looking at new norms and standards coming out of the crisis.

Below are some more key points and integrated solutions emphasized during the discussion.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges and prospects for the SDGs globally. This crisis is an opportunity to reset, restore trust in institutions and build back better for a sustainable future. Rebuilding trust between state institutions and citizens, including through a new social contract, is essential for effective governance. Leaving no one behind requires a focus on disaggregated welfare. There is an urgent need for accelerated actions on a huge scale, institutional efforts and the involvement of all actors in society, including academia and the scientific community, parliaments, local authorities and governments, private sector and civil society, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, migrants and minorities.
- Delivering on SDGs is a governance challenge for all countries and requires coordination, consultation and collaboration across policy and sectoral areas, and from the global to the community levels. The integrated

whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches that will ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes require accountable, inclusive, and effective governance systems as recognized in SDG 16.

- Further efforts are needed to study interlinkages and levels of policy coherence in priority areas and invest in capacities to move towards greater coherence in the longer term, since the integrated nature of the crisis requires integrated solutions. Integrated national financing frameworks that can unlock new private and public financing towards the SDGs are key for a sustainable recovery. Uncertainties associated with COVID-19 vaccine programs require unusual degrees of budgetary flexibility, which must be accompanied by even greater levels of transparency and accountability.
- Recovery packages must be sustainable, without generating additional pressures on the loss of biodiversity and climate change. The protection of nature should remain as relevant criteria for the portfolio of loans and grants. There is a need to close the gap between expenditure in unsustainable productive activities and increase financing for nature-based solutions.
- The current approaches to environmental preservation and other major challenges are far short of the needed interventions. Technology and innovation can be harnessed to manage trade-offs and to respond to these challenges. Governments can direct recovery investments toward renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, nature-based solutions, and green jobs, as well as a renewed commitment to international cooperation.
- Pre-existing inequalities have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Collaboration and support within and across countries are essential to reduce inequalities and to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. Social protection measures must go beyond short-term cash payments and focus on expansion of care systems, legal registration, financial inclusion, access to digital assets, and access to health system and vaccines.
- Intersectoral work for vaccine equity is essential. The scientific, industrial and commercial health sectors must work jointly on comprehensive strategies to promote the local production of vaccines, medicines and tools. In terms of social protection and access to vaccines, it is necessary to coordinate and strengthen national, regional and global capacities, increase the production and supply of vaccines, strengthening supply chains. Nondiscriminatory delivery and administration of vaccines is a key issue in recovery plans and efforts.
- Gender equality must be at the core of inclusive and accountable governance, including through temporary special measures and quotas to amplify women's voices, participation and leadership. Furthermore, economic response to the pandemic, including poverty eradication measures, social assistance and protection and fiscal stimulus packages, should be equally accessible and address women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, particularly those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Women, national gender equality mechanisms and women organizations must be included in planning, decision making, and implementation of pandemic response and recovery measures, and such measures should be gender responsive.
- The pandemic also magnified the inequalities children face, including poverty, hunger and also violence both online and offline. Integrated services need to be part of the national social economic recovery plans, including education, health, mental health, justice, child protection, in order to reach the most vulnerable children. At the same time, children must be seen as drivers of change. Equitable digital connectivity is also crucial.
- The pandemic laid bare that in many countries, indigenous peoples' inadequate access to culturally appropriate health care, sanitation, digital infrastructure to access education, social protection and markets left them even more vulnerable during COVID-19. Indigenous peoples have relied on and revitalized traditional medicines and practices, established efficient alternative communication systems in their indigenous languages, shared food supplies and established procedures for lockdowns. The concept of building back better also implies opportunities to recognize and value the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples in safeguarding and conserving the environment, actions which can significantly advance

the achievement of the SDGs. Indigenous peoples' management of their lands, territories and resources is not only good for the environment and biological diversity but is also important for maintaining international peace and security.

- ECOSOC can provide a platform for dialogue and exchange of experiences among countries, as well as coherent policy guidance for the achievement of a sustainable and resilient recovery. The HLPF provides a unique opportunity to advance informed decision-making at a time of unprecedented challenges, based on the thematic and national reviews of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, offering key insights on priority areas for accelerated action. The Council could also foster deeper coordination between its subsidiary bodies to avoid duplication and promote synergies, as well as look into new norms and standards based on lessons learned from the pandemic, and advance global solidarity and multilateral cooperation efforts towards a resilient and sustainable recovery and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Dialogue 2

The dialogue highlighted the interdependence and holistic nature of the SDGs, which the COVID-19 pandemic amplified in various ways. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic requires an integrated and holistic analysis for informed gender-responsive policy responses. Vaccine equity and debt crises need to be urgently addressed. The issue of low productivity and increasing informality in developing countries was highlighted. The pandemic was considered an opportunity to address the planetary crisis that is climate change and build a new social contract that is both inclusive and responsible. The need to reframe the development paradigm towards equality, resilience and environmental sustainability was underscored.

Technological change, environmental sustainability, and demographic shifts are considered mega drivers of change for the world of work. A broad-based job rich recovery with integrated and coordinated national policy responses, social dialogue and adequate funding are key in the recovery. Circular economy strategies will be key for sustainability and prosperity, creating decent jobs. High quality data is essential for informed policymaking and innovation is essential for effective results.

Below are some more key points and integrated solutions emphasized during the discussion.

- The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs must remain the blueprint to implement integrated policies for a resilient and green recovery. Recovery packages should contemplate longer term investments to realize the SDGs for every part of society and ensure that growth is inclusive, sustainable and promotes decent work. Immediate global response must be stepped up to ensure everyone everywhere has access to vaccines, diagnostics and treatment; and to deliver on effective debt relief and financing for developing countries. Recovery efforts need to link with climate action and biodiversity.
- The expansive macroeconomic positions taken by governments around the world, with the strong encouragement of the international financial institutions, have had a crucial role in mitigating the economic and social damage wrought by the pandemic. However, countries have uneven fiscal space available to apply stimulus packages and face the immediate and post-pandemic impact. Many developing countries face balance of payments constraints, limited fiscal space and indebtedness, restricted market access, reduced input into international financial architecture, and low productivity and technology absorption with high informality. This meant significant reductions in their fiscal and monetary policy space to address their non-COVID-emergency priorities or unsustainable external debt obligations. Particular attention and priority must be given to LDCs in the international response to COVID-19, including in equitable access to vaccines and strengthening public health systems, providing debt relief and scaling-up financial support. Policy space and support to countries' endeavours to secure the kind of structural transformation that will enable them to meet the SDGs need to be at the core of multilateral priorities.
- Addressing the interconnected structural crises that many developing countries face requires policies that tackle them simultaneously and a new social contract that addresses systemic vulnerabilities and inequalities. This means giving due priority to social protection systems, health care and education as well as investment,

employment creation and productivity. It also means addressing asymmetries between countries by enabling policy space for sustainable industrialization in developing economies, including through investment and trade cooperation, the transfer of green technologies and capacity building as important priority areas for new types of international cooperation and partnerships.

- Access to vaccines for everyone must be guaranteed by countries to the maximum of their available resources and according to the measures necessary for universal vaccination and without any discrimination, both within and between countries. The prioritization of access to vaccines must be supported by all and must be organized through transparent and participatory mechanisms that can guarantee a global distribution based on real medical needs and scientific considerations of public health. Vaccines and access to education-enabling technology show that the financial benefits of publicly funded research and development should not be restricted to the firm engaging in the innovation; where the financing and risks are shared with the public, so must be the rewards. Governments can steer public-private relations to produce a dynamic economic system where innovation and investment are geared towards meeting people's needs and the protection of the planet.
- The Economic and Social Council should take stock of lessons learned from the shortcomings of the multilateral and regional responses to COVID-19. Responding to the need for an inclusive and networked multilateralism, the Council should put in motion an open and transparent process to identify and implement the changes that will ensure that the UN system supports equitable, sustainable and resilient development through structural transformation.
- Just transition processes for all require effective social dialogue, careful planning, coordinated policies and adequate funding—to address gaps in social protection, to promote a broad-based, job-rich economic growth with decent work opportunities for all, support skills development that will be needed in the transition, and empower enterprises to fully take advantage of the real opportunities of the green economy. To advance decent work, the opportunities of just digital and ecological transitions need to be leveraged. Digital information and communication technologies (ICT) can enable up to a 20 percent reduction of global CO2 emissions by 2030 when applied to five sectors: mobility, manufacturing, agriculture, energy, and buildings. A transformative agenda for equality, diversity and inclusion across the public and private sectors is vital to eliminating discrimination, violence and harassment on all grounds.
- Behavioral science can serve as a tool to analyze and promote integrated policies. Integrated national policy responses for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery include supportive and stable macroeconomic, industrial, fiscal, financial and other policies as well as strengthened public and private investment toward sectors hit hardest by the crisis and those with strong potential to simultaneously produce a virtuous cycle of economic growth, decent work and income generation that reduce inequalities and poverty while lowering the environmental footprint. It also includes strengthening public and private investment in lifelong learning, including through more equitable and effective access to high-quality education and training and other active labour market policies and partnerships that reduce skills mismatches, gaps and shortages. Developing and implementing comprehensive and integrated approaches to curb the spread of informality and accelerate the transition to the formal economy is also essential, as is fostering supply chains that are more resilient and contribute to decent work and environmental sustainability.
- The global green recovery spending has been incommensurate with the scale of the planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss, and pollution. Investments in renewable energies, building efficiency and green transport could add 20.5 million jobs by 2030. A robust price on carbon is needed to send a critical market signal and advance climate-friendly investments. Green taxonomy and standardized reporting of climate-related financial risks can also help unlock private investments. Greening the public finance frameworks to ensure an integration of environment across fiscal policy and regulation design will be crucial in aligning national policymaking and growth trajectories with the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and post-2020 biodiversity targets.

- Applying circular economy strategies in just five key areas (cement, aluminium, steel, plastics, food) could eliminate almost half the emissions from the production of goods – 9.3 billion tonnes of CO₂e in 2050. This is equivalent to cutting current emissions from all transport to zero. Agricultural and food waste must also be reduced to cut emissions. A circular economy approach is moreover highly effective at creating new jobs.
- Achieving sustainable development and strengthening resilience require a long-term perspective in policy making together with institution-building at all levels, based on effective governance for sustainable development, and a steadfast commitment to promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Every country needs to do serious work to understand the connections among policy domains and invest in capacities. CEPA has identified (1) strategic planning and foresight, (2) regulatory impact analysis, (3) promotion of coherent policymaking, (4) strengthening of national statistical systems, (5) monitoring and evaluation systems, (6) the science-policy interface, (7) risk management frameworks, and (8) data sharing as key ingredients to move towards greater coherence in the longer-term.
- High-quality data and statistics are essential for making informed policy decisions. Without it, we would be making decisions in the dark. To obtain high-quality data everywhere, we must build capacity. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EA) adopted at the Statistical Commission’s 52nd session is a very important methodology because it attempts to address the interlinkages between these two different domains and break the silos between the economy and the environmental impact of policy decisions.

Dialogue 3

The dialogue highlighted key recommendations emanating from the work of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and the UN system, underscoring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased poverty, hunger, inequality, as well as the importance of vaccine equity for a sustainable recovery. The recovery requires a coordinated, holistic, multisectoral and a people-centered approach and concerted global action to ensure no one is left behind. In order to make this happen, recovery efforts need to address the unique needs of the most vulnerable people, people living in poverty, indigenous peoples, women, young people, migrants, people in emergency situations, especially those in rural areas. The human mobility dimensions of the pandemic also need to be addressed.

Science, technology, and innovation (STI), including connectivity, play a key role in the recovery from COVID-19 and closing the gap for SDG 3. More equitable access to scientific knowledge and technologies, including digital technologies, was considered a critical enabler for ensuring that health technologies are accessible. The power of geospatial information, or the critical value gained from combining and integrating ‘location-based’ data with many other data types, was highlighted. Geospatial data could help bridge the digital gap across many communities and sectors.

Below are some more key points and integrated solutions emphasized during the discussion.

- Over four billion people’s jobs and livelihood relate to food systems, and over 1.5 billion are considered at risk because of the pandemic, especially in rural areas. Even before COVID-19, estimates suggested that nearly 690 million people worldwide, almost 10% of the global population, were hungry. The pandemic might have pushed an additional 132 million people into chronic hunger in 2020. The current global food system is environmentally unsustainable, with major impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity and climate. Population growth and rising incomes will be important drivers of increased food consumption in many countries.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has also created significant labour market challenges in terms of increased underemployment and unemployment, with a disproportionately high impact on the most vulnerable workers, including youth, women, informal workers, migrants, and seasonal labour. A key priority for a resilient recovery is the informal sector, which employs significant proportions of the population with limited access to social protection programmes, including insurance and employment guarantees.

- Linking social protection to agricultural and rural-based livelihoods, placing human rights at the center of the food systems transformation and promoting policies that enhance employment and income-generating activities, including decent rural jobs for youth, and nutrition-sensitive social protection programs, are crucial policies to address the needs and rights of the poor and most marginalized. Digital technologies can also provide small-scale farmers access to a range of services that can keep them afloat in the short-term and provide long-term assistance to sustainably increase production, productivity and market access.
- Concerted efforts are needed to step up public and private sector investments in agri-food systems with significant policy coherence, including more nutrition-sensitive investments, as well as to keep international food trade open and to improve efficiency of internal trade and marketing mechanisms to reduce the cost of nutritious foods and determine the affordability of healthy diets for both urban and rural consumers. Such actions will contribute to agri-food systems that are more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, and enable access to safe, sufficient, affordable, nutritious and diverse food and healthy diets for all.
- Nuclear science and technology can offer a wide range of solutions to protect food chains, enhance food production, animal production, livestock health, control of animal diseases and enhanced agriculture, water and soil management and to adapt to climate change. IAEA, FAO, WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) launched the Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action (ZODIAC) initiative to strengthen countries' capacities in responding to possible future outbreaks and pandemics.
- Investing in green recovery of food systems will address both food security and climate risks, as well as all other SDGs in various degrees due to their integrated and interlinked nature. Building resilience of agricultural livelihoods through increased investments in ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions, including, importantly, through access to climate and environment finance, are important in this regard.
- A generation of students risks never achieving their full potential as close to 7 million students from primary or secondary education could be dropping out of school due to income shock, school closures and loss of family livelihoods. The pandemic also exacerbated situations of vulnerability experienced by women and girls, undermining their access to food and disrupting important antenatal and postnatal services. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is crucial to the full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda. Women's equal access to quality education at all school levels and lifelong learning must be a priority.
- Governments should ensure universal access to high quality social services that allow vulnerable populations to develop the human capital required to raise their lifetime earning potential. Access to safe and nutritious food should be provided for all people, including those enduring humanitarian crises, the adverse effects of climate change or economic shocks. Women, young people and older persons should be granted access to land, inheritance, capital, training, services and technologies.
- Human mobility dimensions of the pandemic need to be addressed. Lockdowns have not allowed social distancing or sufficient care for those in detention or migration centres. Seasonal migration, including for agricultural jobs, has been reduced and remittances have been negatively impacted. A more integrated approach to human mobility and care systems can help facilitate a safe, orderly and regular migration, as well as ensure migrants', refugees' and displaced people's access to social security networks and COVID-19 vaccines. There is a need to address the nexus between food security, disasters and conflict. A whole-of-government and society approach would be key to addressing discrimination, xenophobia and stigmatization.
- Geospatial information can bridge the digital data gap across many communities and sectors. There is critical value gained from combining and integrating this 'location-based' data with many other data types, including statistics. Due to its cross-cutting nature, geospatial information is integrative, innovative, and comprehensive. Comprising both data and enabling technologies, geospatial information touches many sectors and thematic areas across the entire development paradigm.

- The United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF) creates an enabling environment where national governments can coordinate, develop, strengthen, and promote the efficient and effective use and sharing of geospatial information for policy formulation, decision-making, and innovation. Being able to share integrated geospatial information in real-time means the ‘same information will be delivered to all agencies at the same time’.
- COVID-19 has highlighted the crucial role of science, technology and innovation (STI) in response to and recovery from the pandemic as well as improving people’s lives. This ranges from geo-mapping/geospatial dashboards to provide situational awareness to record and report the virus’ spread, to contact tracing apps, vaccine developing technology, as well as virtual collaboration and information sharing tools and communication infrastructure. STI has enabled continuity in education and remote work, while the application of big data and artificial intelligence are enabling complex decision-making and the identification and reporting of emergencies, reshaping sectors such as healthcare and education. The Global Network Resiliency Platform, launched during the pandemic, continues to provide a digital space where ICT regulators, policymakers and other interested stakeholders, share information, initiatives and measures that have been introduced across the world to help ensure communities remain connected during the crisis.
- More equitable access to scientific knowledge and technologies, including digital technologies, is crucial to close the gap on SDG 3, as well as to enable other SDGs. Reliable and resilient digital connectivity is essential for trusted and quality services across all sectors. Strengthening national innovation systems, including investing in education and data-related skills, promoting international cooperation and the commitment to global solidarity are critical enablers to ensure equitable access to technologies, including in healthcare. Areas where international cooperation is needed include intellectual property rights (IPRs), privacy and data protection, cyber security and ethical frameworks for frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence and gene-editing.
- Equal access to COVID-19 vaccines is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed. There is no recovery without vaccines for all. Attention must also be given to other critical diseases to develop affordable vaccines and treatments, and innovative delivery methods. International collaborative arrangements should seek to foster equitable partnerships among parties towards common goals, for example joint ownership of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) or issuance of licenses (paid or unpaid) for the equitable use of IPRs. A waiver of IPR barriers or enabling open access for scientific collaboration could be considered during global health emergencies.
- COVID-19 also created increasing challenges to drug-related prevention, treatment, care, recovery, rehabilitation, and social reintegration measures, as well as measures aimed at minimizing the adverse public health and social consequences of drug abuse. Addressing and countering the world drug problem requires coordinated multidisciplinary efforts, including through information-sharing.
- Ensuring that no one is left behind is particularly relevant in facilitating non-discriminatory access to drug-related prevention, treatment, education, care, sustained recovery, rehabilitation, social reintegration and support services for people who may face obstacles when accessing those services, including vulnerable members of society, those impacted by social marginalization and incarcerated people. Promoting alternative development programmes to support populations affected by or vulnerable to the illicit cultivation of drug crops may contribute to efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Economic and Social Council should take a leading role for a global and holistic approach to the COVID-19 response, including by bringing together its subsidiary bodies. One proposal included that following the current practice of the Commission on the Status of Women, other functional commissions could systematically add a secondary theme to their programme of work consisting of a review of progress in implementation of an earlier theme to promote accountability. Functional commissions and expert bodies are also encouraged to continue to identify synergies and promote joint actions among them.
- Global collaboration and global action is fundamental to address all of the mentioned challenges and ECOSOC can make a difference to improve people’s lives, developing the best integrated policies to that end.