



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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Focus on ECOSOC

Last week, as part of ECOSOC's three-week annual meeting, the Executive Secretaries of the five UN regional commissions convened for a high-level interactive dialogue titled: "The Regional Dimension of Creating an Environment Conducive to Generating Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All and its Impact on Sustainable Development."

Dialogue at the conference touched on a range of topics including tackling the difficult issue of jobless growth, responding to the challenges of globalization, the need for universal social protections, enhancing statistical and record keeping ability, future organizational and structural

roles of the regional commissions, and improving cooperation between regional actors.



A recurring theme alluded to in many of the presentations and revisited in delegates' statements was the complicated symbiotic relationship between job creation and fairness. As Marek Belka,

UNECE Executive Secretary, pointed out in his response, a decent job is more than one that pays wages; it is a job that lifts a person out of poverty permanently. There seemed to be widespread acknowledgement of the importance of promoting these two themes and a shared belief among delegates that the two ideas did not have to be mutually exclusive. Abdoulie Janneh, ECA Executive Secretary, succinctly expressed this saying, "growth must be based on the tenants of fairness". This commitment will be important in future meetings as countries, especially developing countries, continue the difficult task of stimulating growth while upholding fairness. *

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)



The ECA Executive Secretary, Abdoulie Janneh, spoke on "Growth and Employment for Inclusive Development in Africa." Mr. Janneh noted that in Africa, despite unprecedented economic growth (5.3% over the last few years), "growth has not been able to impact poverty levels and the missing link is employment." He summed up the far-reaching negative consequences of the ECA region's high unemployment saying, "high unemployment means a less productive

society and affects peace and stability." Providing decent jobs, he explained, is crucial in alleviating poverty and restoring the dignity of being part of society, as well as in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Because poverty is so widespread in Africa, Mr. Janneh agreed that economic growth is an undeniable need, but stressed that this growth must be achieved in a fair way that includes opportunities for all. While acknowledging the severity of the region's unemployment problems, calling the current situation a time-bomb, Mr. Janneh also highlighted encouraging developments in his region, including the 2004 Ouagadougou Declaration and the 2006 Conference of African Ministers of Finance, which have moved the region towards a consensus on the important role of employment in reducing poverty. *

Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)



Marek Belka, UNECE Executive Secretary, presented on the topic, "How unique were the labour market changes during the transition". Mr. Belka stated that, compared to the countries of Western Europe, not only is unemployment higher in the transition countries but the causes of unemployment are different. For example, the transition countries have a higher long-term unemployment rate, more jobless growth, and greater geographical variation.

Despite these differences, Mr. Belka also spoke about some of the similarities in the labour markets of the two areas. In both the West European countries and the transition countries, unemployment is much higher for the unskilled and ethnic minorities. Other issues over which these two areas share concern are the significant gender gap in the salaries and opportunities open to females, and high rates of youth unemployment. Mr. Belka concluded by offering some key questions for consideration in addressing unemployment across the UNECE region. Citing the unique circumstances of the transition countries and their resistance to traditional economic prescription to bolster employment, he asked if the transition countries require some innovative approaches tailored to their circumstances. He offered a few examples of these approaches including an increased role for improved governance and more emphasis on diversification toward labour-intensive sectors in the CIS. *

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Jose Luis Machinea, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, focused on the sub-topic, "Labour markets and social protection".



Mr. Machinea told delegates that his region's employment woes were not a result of jobless growth, but rather a lack of growth.

During the 1990s, this sluggish economic growth led to high unemployment and an increasing informality in the labour market. Consequently, while some social protections existed for workers in the traditional labour market, the same protection was not extended to workers in the burgeoning informal sector, and therefore only four out of ten workers in the ECLAC region receive

pensions or contribute to social security.

The Executive Secretary called for a new social covenant that would think more universally about social protection because "with high unemployment, it is an illusion to think employment provides adequate social protection." This covenant would define social protection as an explicit, guaranteed, and enforceable right and would also develop a framework of social institutions. In the short-term, Mr. Machinea offered a number of suggestions for addressing his region's employment challenges, including: improving labour productivity, productive job creation, creating new forms of labour protection (flexicurity), and integrating traditionally marginalized groups, such as women and minorities, into the labour market. ✨

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

In his presentation "Jobless growth: the Asia Pacific perspective," UNESCAP Executive Secretary Kim Hak-Su explained that the UNESCAP region faces



a key challenge in managing the complicated relationship between economic growth and job creation. Mr. Kim noted, however, that despite a

growth rate of 5.7% in the region over the last 10 years, employment levels have not significantly increased.

A primary cause of this phenomenon, known as jobless growth, is globalization, which along with technological advances leads industries to a shift towards capital-intensive production. Other factors responsible for the UNESCAP region's jobless growth are rigidities in the labour market, governments' capital-friendly incentive structure, and a lack of appropriate policy environment. Mr. Kim suggested four areas of focus that are critical to revitalizing the employment situation in the region: strong macroeconomic fundamentals; smoothly functioning labour markets, skill development; and labour intensive informal and agricultural sectors. He also emphasized the importance of regional communication in addressing the employment situation, pointing out that in the near future UNESCAP would be hosting its 10th annual meeting with the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ✨

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)

Mervat Tallawy, UNESCWA Executive Secretary, gave a report on, "Youth unemployment in the UNESCWA region and the Arab world: challenges and prospects".



Ms. Tallawy pointed out that high population growth over the past two decades has exacerbated the youth employment problem in the region.

The UNESCWA region has one of the largest populations of persons under age 15 in the world and 15-24 year olds constitute one fifth (20.4%) of the population of the entire UNESCWA region. Youth unemployment accounts for 53% of

all unemployment in the region and 59% of the unemployed are first time job seekers.

Her presentation listed a number of causes for these alarming figures, such as: a failure to generate a sustained job creating economy, internal and external conflicts, a mismatch between the outputs of the educational system and labour market needs, and the influx of immigrants. Looking forward, Ms. Tallawy mentioned three future initiatives to improve the Commission's efficacy: partnering with relevant regional bodies to create a regional observatory for devising policies and sharing best practices; establishing a database for employment and unemployment statistics; and developing a regional fund to finance pilot initiatives to employ youth. ✨

The meeting between the Executive Secretaries and Member States was part of the five-day-Coordination segment of the ECOSOC annual session, and followed a High-Level segment designed as a series of roundtable discussions on themes of employment and decent work for all. There will also be an Operational Activities segment including a full review of trends and perspectives in funding for development cooperation, a Humanitarian Affairs segment, focusing on strengthening the coordination of UN humanitarian assistance and implementing improved humanitarian response at all levels, and a General segment which will receive reports from its subsidiary bodies and discuss implementation and follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.



A brochure has been issued jointly by the five UN regional commissions, entitled "Full employment and decent work for all", giving some quick facts about each region and setting out the major challenges facing them in this sphere.

For more information contact the Regional Commissions New York Office, New York, NY 10017, or consult the Web pages of each regional commission:

UNECA — <http://www.uneca.org>

UNECE — <http://www.unece.org>

UNECLAC — <http://www.eclac.cl>

UNESCAP — <http://www.unescap.org>

UNESCWA — <http://www.escwa.org.lb>

Coming up ...

3-12 July

ECOSOC Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods



12-14 July

ECOSOC Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals

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