



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
Priority Theme: Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

### **Statement submitted by International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a manifestation of global vulnerability and a truly global challenge affecting all countries, and without exaggeration, almost everyone in society. According to the report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 produced jointly by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, compared to the figures of 2019, in 2020, an additional 46 million people in Africa, almost 57 million more in Asia, and about 14 million more in Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by hunger. According to the estimates of the WFP acute food insecurity is estimated to have nearly doubled from 149 million in 2019 to 272 million in 2020. Many gains made on the road towards achieving SDGs have been wiped out in the shadow of the pandemic. Pushing millions more people into food insecurity, this crisis has had a wide-ranging negative global impact, making the quest for appropriate policy responses at the national and international levels urgent and indispensable.

The International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), one of the oldest international non-governmental organizations dealing with social welfare and social development issues strongly supports efforts of the Commission for Social Development to promote the integrated treatment of social development issues, focusing intergovernmental process at better policy analysis and policy coordination, as well as effectively contributing to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. This experience is particularly valuable given the devastating impact of COVID-19 on people's life and livelihoods world over, including such vital issue as food security.

ICSW, in cooperation with IFAD, ILO, UNICEF and other partners, has contributed to the ongoing quest for more effective policy solutions by organizing an international online conference in September 2021 "Addressing food insecurity in Africa: strategies for ensuring child-sensitive social protection". The conference has brought together prominent scholars and practitioners and addressed a range of specific issues in the above context, providing a perspective on areas of particular importance, such as the role of key stakeholders and their interaction at all levels. Two major sets of issues were explored. First, conceptual and general issues pertinent to food insecurity in Africa which included analysis of vulnerabilities, measures aimed at promoting inclusive growth, efforts aimed at strengthening cooperation with various stakeholders and strategies to improve capacity development. Second, national case studies illustrating changing approaches to the above issues, various dimensions of the existing situation and national best practices. Empowering vulnerable communities to improve their access to food, income, and markets has been recognized as a viable strategy. According to the existing evidence several factors, such as rising food prices, disruption of livelihoods through conflicts, climate change, economic policies, declining agriculture, growth of informal economies, extreme poverty, gender inequality, inadequate opportunities for education and employment and the absence of affordable healthcare, all contribute to the generation and deepening of food insecurity.

The COVID-19 crisis provided a reminder that food security goes much beyond agriculture. Poverty and inequality, and, subsequently, higher vulnerability to crisis and lower response capacities are closely connected to food insecurity. Inequality affects people in vulnerable situations at a much higher scale, accentuating a connection between the poor health and economic conditions of marginalized groups. Millions of low-income smallholder farming families in rural Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who largely depend on wheat, maize, rice, cassava and other staple crops they grow themselves, are facing so called 'hidden hunger'. This is linked to poor diet and lack of essential vitamins and minerals, causing high rates of physical and cognitive impairments. Recent research demonstrates that malnutrition continues to

be a major determinant of child health and survival in low and middle-income countries and is strongly associated with household income and education. While many countries – even before the pandemic – were already off track for SDG 2: Zero Hunger by 2030, the crisis made the situation with food security much worse, particularly with regard to accessibility to food, highlighting structural weaknesses in the food supply chains and food systems at large.

There are many lessons that could be learned in the aftermath of this global calamity. One is obvious: countries that have a well-functioning social protection system were able to withstand the impact of Covid-19 better compared to countries where such system were non-existent or inadequate. In the face of the crisis many countries strengthened their food and nutrition assistance, protecting food access for the most vulnerable by increasing their purchasing power, and often directly providing food relief through public or community-based programmes. Critical humanitarian food and livelihood assistance to groups in vulnerable situations helped to mitigate some of the worse aspects of the COVID-19 impacts. Unfortunately, the emergency responses in many cases were not enough to deal with numerous adverse impacts brought by the pandemic. The health sector at the national levels was unable to withstand the shock caused by the global health crisis of such proportions as the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in huge human toll.

Overcoming vaccine hesitancy and enhancing vaccine deployment among its population remains one of the immediate priorities for countries fighting the pandemic, but apart from the above, vaccine inequity, particularly in the less developed countries, continued to be a global concern. Efforts by the international community in reducing the vaccine inequity through vaccine deployment among developing countries has not been satisfactory.

While the pandemic is not yet over, and the full range of its long-lasting impacts is still unclear, full time job loss of more than 250 million and other shocks to income clearly signifies one of the most visible effects in this regard. Quite often the persons with the lower levels of educational attainment were affected the most, facing diminished employment prospects. Social protection schemes including unemployment benefits helped many people to deal with the effects of the pandemic but in case of people in vulnerable situations such assistance was really vital, helping them to make future less tenuous.

The globalization of the economies and increasingly flexible labour markets have also worsened employment security, widening inequality between high- and low-skill workers. Around the world the pandemic heightened concerns about the instability of employment, low pay and lack of social protection. Many of those who are classified as “working poor” do not have access to decent jobs and are living on the edge, but for workers in informal status or chronically unemployed the pandemic made the situation even more desperate, and sometimes catastrophic. ICSW, therefore, calls for strengthening social protection systems, including floors, as well as dignified working conditions. Additionally, it is the time to further explore different and innovative new models of social support. As a response to the pandemic many countries introduced direct cash payments to citizens while some others introduced subsidized workers’ incomes. Given ongoing and long-lasting changes in the world of work including rapid advances in technology, many forward-looking thinkers are calling for a closer look at such daring options as an unconditional basic income (UBI). The UBI option – however contentious it may look – should not be brushed aside as simply utopian but rather be considered and discussed. The existing evidence, previous experiences, and pilot schemes implemented in this regard at the national levels should be professionally analyzed.

ICSW experience on the ground convinces us that expanding social assistance schemes, including new transfers in cash or in-kind helped to improve food security, especially in the regions with wide-spread informal work and self-employment. Access to health care and other health benefits also provided highly valuable cushion, particularly for poorer and marginalized segments of society whom the pandemic strikes hardest. Social protections schemes promoted social inclusion and were an important factor preventing non-poor families and households falling into poverty. At the same time focusing on the worst off has been ICSW strategic approach reflecting equity concerns deeply ingrained in our activities.

Overcoming food insecurity is impossible without the active engagement and a concerted action of all key stakeholders such as the state, the international community, the private sector and the civil society. Enacting the public policies necessary to end food insecurity may require new sources of financing and some innovative cross-sectoral approaches. Coming forward with new strategies to use agricultural resources of the countries to ensure food security for its population and to decrease the perils of monoculture farming highly dependent on the narrow segments of the international food market remains a challenge.

Civil-society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in moving forward the fight against poverty and food insecurity. As an international non-governmental organizations the ICSW has a special interest in analysis of their role and potential. The CSOs focus on specific communities and issues gives them in-depth knowledge and expertise needed to devise practical interventions. It raises the voices of those who are often unheard at the national and international levels and cannot participate in multilateral endeavors. The CSOs role in agenda-setting and advocacy is also critical for changing existing approaches. One of the most important synergies between CSOs and other stakeholders is the centrality of social protection provided to the most vulnerable population groups and identification of the potential benefits of different social protection schemes (e.g. cash or in-kind modalities) as well as public food distribution systems. Use of evidence is essential in agenda-setting as well as when advocacy strategies are conceptualized and implemented.

When the engagement of non-public stakeholders such as civil society and communities results in better cooperation and coordination of activities aimed at reduction of food insecurity, the results are beneficial for society as a whole. Acknowledging the right to food as a human right – which is one of the established principles in international human rights law – and realizing this right in practice is long overdue. This involvement might be particularly effective to address the needs of socially excluded groups, but it goes much beyond that in promoting improved service delivery by government agencies. Moving towards universal social protection becomes imperative for the immediate phase of COVID-19 emergency assistance and fully-fledged subsequent recovery.

In this regard, identifying ways and means of cooperation between the ICSW members and other civil society actors, which are aimed at strengthening collective capacities to address poverty and hunger in a post-pandemic situation remains one of the organization's top priorities. Taking the notions of citizenship and people's well-being as a departure points the ICSW strives to help with finding shared solutions and analysis of good practices in the context of the 2030 Agenda, through various global and local initiatives that are in unison with the objectives of the 60th session of the Commission for Social Development.