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Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda*

Parallel sessions**Promoting inclusive and resilient youth employment
in Africa, now and beyond coronavirus disease 2019****Aide-memoire****I. Context**

1. The fourth session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender will be held online on 17 and 18 November 2021 under the theme “Building forward better towards an inclusive and resilient future in the context of COVID-19”.
2. Within this context, the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will convene a number of parallel sessions, including a parallel session on “Promoting inclusive and resilient youth employment in Africa, now and beyond COVID-19”.

II. Background

3. Africa is the region of the world with the youngest population, with a median age of 20. The region will continue to have the highest proportion of young people for the next few decades. Nearly 20 per cent of the total population is in the 15–24 age bracket, a trend referred to as a youth bulge.
4. The issues that the continent faces include rapid population growth, natural disasters and environmental degradation, conflict and growing radical insurgency, regional economic integration, organized smuggling and trafficking in persons, global labour demand, and domestic socioeconomic transformation that is reflected in rapid urbanization and a growing middle class.
5. If suitable policies and the right economic development context are in place, Africa will have opportunities for growth, innovation and transformational change. Without them, the region will face enormous socioeconomic constraints. For African countries to achieve their aspirations

* E/ECA/CSPPG/4/1.



and targets for sustainable and inclusive growth, job creation must remain a high priority, as highlighted in several national development plans and internationally agreed developmental targets.

6. The onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has added an extra international public health dimension to the already complex stakes and has had a mainly negative impact on youth employment on the continent and around the world. The pandemic has exacerbated the shortage of jobs for the growing youth population. It has also exposed existing vulnerabilities and has significantly interrupted young peoples' lives.

7. So far, the pandemic has had a lower mortality rate in Africa than in other world regions. However, the decision by African Governments to implement containment policies has come at a heavy cost. Part of that cost has been direct (e.g., slower economic growth), while another part has been reflected in the opportunity lost through underemployment and the indirect effects of dwindling remittances and assistance from the rest of the world.

8. With companies no longer hiring because of the pandemic, young people and other new entrants into the labour market are bearing the brunt of the economic hardship. Keeping young people out of the labour market hurts Africa's prospects for harnessing a demographic dividend. It also increases the risk of insecurity and social unrest, especially in countries that are already beset by high levels of inequality and latent political conflict.

9. Africa's ongoing demographic transition and the related fall in dependency ratios could make it easier for Governments to save and invest, ultimately boosting prospects for socioeconomic development. History has shown that such demographic dividends can be quite large. South Korea, for instance, grew its economy tenfold between 1970 and 2000, with its demographic dividend reportedly accounting for between a quarter and a third of the growth. There are reasons to believe that this benchmark could be met in some African countries¹.

10. In the light of the above, it is essential that progress be accelerated during the present "decade of transformation" to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and to address the current mix of opportunities and challenges, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the absence of social protection for young people. There is broad-based support for efforts to employ young people, harness a demographic dividend, and build resilience to COVID-19 and other pandemics. Action must be taken by African countries to provide decent and meaningful employment to all young people; to harness and share a large demographic dividend in each country, given its unique circumstances; and to increase resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises.

III. Objectives

11. The parallel session will address the key policy question of what should be done to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on young people in order to strengthen their resilience against future shocks and aid the economic recovery. The deliberations will be of interest to technical experts, national policymakers and civil society.

¹ Recent scholarship indicates that the first dividend - reaped when the first "dividend generation" is in its adult years - can be followed by a second and even a third dividend. It also indicates that the dividend extends beyond gross domestic product by bringing improvements to education, health care and security and reducing inequality. In short, the ripple effects from the first dividend can endure for a long period of time and span multiple socioeconomic sectors.

12. The overall objective of the parallel session is to provide member States with an opportunity to present and propose practical policy options for promoting youth job creation in ways that build resilience and help the region to harness a demographic dividend. Specifically, during the parallel session, participants will:

- (a) Present a framework for analysing the prospects of youth employment;
- (b) Discuss and review related challenges, especially in the context of urbanization, crises and rapid social change, with particular attention paid to gender dimensions;
- (c) Present the results of analytical work on youth employment and the demographic dividend in 10 African countries that are expected to contribute the bulk of the absolute increase in Africa's youth population in the next decade: Algeria, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania;
- (d) Discuss strategies for building collective resilience against future shocks and for promoting youth employment in Africa in the context of COVID-19.

IV. Expected outputs and outcomes

13. It is expected that the parallel session will contribute substantially to the final report of the Committee, specifically in respect of the work of the Social Policy Section. The report will synthesize feedback from member States on the work that the Division has carried out to support their youth employment policies through the following:

- (a) Synergy with the Urbanization Section's work on productive jobs in urban areas;
- (b) Work related to demographic dividends and gender, carried out with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Section;
- (c) The Committee's substantive contribution, alongside the International Labour Organization, to the background paper on Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth) that was presented at the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

14. The actionable recommendations proposed during the parallel session will form the basis for the Division's work on youth employment during the period 2022–2023.

15. The following specific outcomes are also expected:

- (a) A deeper understanding and stronger endorsement of the Commission's perspectives on and approaches to youth employment, which have taken COVID-19 into account and are informed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union;
- (b) A deeper understanding of the linkages among youth employment and economic, demographic and political components, which will help to unlock the continent's youth potential to build forward better towards inclusive and resilient growth;
- (c) ECA work on social policy, gender equality, women's empowerment and urbanization will become better aligned with, and more relevant to, member States' needs, priorities and development contexts;

(d) An increased commitment to respond in a timely manner to the Commission's requests for information and data and to implement policy recommendations.

V. Format

16. The parallel session will be structured in such a way that invited experts will actively participate in thematic discussions that serve as feedback on the work of the Division. A presentation on the theme of the parallel session will be made in the plenary session so that further feedback can be elicited from delegates.

VI. Documentation

17. The parallel session will be informed by several reports on the Division's work on youth employment. Web links to relevant publications, technical materials and knowledge products will be shared online with participants during the parallel session.

VII. Participation

18. The Committee comprises experts from ECA member States drawn from ministries responsible for gender, social development, urbanization and economic planning. Representatives from African regional economic communities, the African Union Commission, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and academia will attend as observers.

VIII. Language

19. The parallel session will be conducted in English and French, with simultaneous interpretation.
