

HLPF 2025 Highlights: Wednesday, 16 July 2025

Following a brief report from the UN Environment Programme on activities to advance sustainable consumption and production, delegates reviewed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 on decent work and economic growth. Delegates described SDG 8 as one of the most “off-track” goals, with stagnation or regression regarding targets on youth employment, informality, labor rights, and child labor. The wide-ranging discussions explored proposals for reversing these trends through, *inter alia*, expanding employment in tandem with improving labor rights, social protections, productivity, and inclusion.

In the afternoon, delegates discussed progress on the SDGs in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The discussion focused on early efforts to implement the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), with many underscoring the need to move beyond conventional metrics to enhance SIDS’ access to finance.

Introduction of the report on the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

Chair Lok Bahadur Thapa, Vice-President, ECOSOC, opened the session.

Annika Lindblom, Co-Chair of the Board of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP), introduced the 2025 progress report (E/2025/64), noting it outlines four scalable and science-based solutions and three key policy messages aligned with the HLPF 2025 theme, and gives an overview of progress as reported by Member States.

SDGs in Focus

SDG 8 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Decent work and economic growth: Introducing the session, Chair Thapa noted regressions regarding targets on youth employment, informality, labor rights, and child labor.

Moderator Sangheon Lee, International Labour Organization (ILO), noted causes of regression include fiscal and environmental stresses, disruptive economic transitions, and geopolitical uncertainties.

Jason Judd, Executive Director, Global Labour Institute, Cornell University Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) School, noted a significant rise in heat stress in tropical countries with apparel industries. He urged governments to set clear standards on workplace heat and employers to listen to workers on meeting such standards for quick positive returns on investment.

Patrick Paul Walsh, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, said global supply chains promote a “race to the bottom” on environmental and social protections. He noted insurance companies can foster public-private partnerships and green, inclusive supply chains, adding that formal employment allows workers access to bank accounts and increases governments’ tax bases.

Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), urged governments to overcome fragmented policies on social protection through, among other measures, efficient government spending, better tax enforcement, alignment of bank loan-to-deposit ratios, and innovative international financial instruments such as debt swaps.

Siobhan Vipond, Vice-Chair, International Trade Union Confederation Women’s Committee, prioritized formal care work, living wages, decent digital platform work, and reforming the international financial architecture to protect labor rights.

Macarena Letelier, General Manager, Confederación de la Producción y del Comercio, Chile, highlighted decent job creation by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), noting the need to support social dialogue, minimum wages, and sustainable AI integration.

In a wide-ranging discussion, delegates underscored the centrality of SDG 8 for the health and wellbeing of future generations, gender equality, social stability, and leaving no one behind. Many suggested further discussions at the upcoming World Summit for Social Development, with the EU proposing to launch a new social contract for decent work.

Many speakers highlighted persistent challenges, including the need for reforms and policies to: transition from informal to formal employment; improve access to education and training; and promote inclusive employment, especially for women, youth, and people with disabilities. NEPAL noted threats to the wellbeing of migrant workers. The COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT STAKEHOLDER GROUP underscored impacts of systemic discrimination on 270 million workers.

SURINAME cited high unemployment, a growing informal jobs sector, and associated instability of income.

Diverse practical examples and proposals to address such challenges were also shared. Some speakers emphasized the importance of economic diversification, digital innovation, green initiatives, and labor protection as key components of their development strategies.

SWITZERLAND urged addressing challenges through sustainable and inclusive economic growth, including training, workers’ protections, jobs for youth, high quality, and affordable childcare, and strengthened multilateralism. COSTA RICA stressed the need to radically transform economic paradigms through policies internalizing environmental and social costs under new international financial partnerships.

Others highlighted the introduction of legal reforms and enabling policies to spur job creation, increase employment of youth and women, and strengthen educational systems. The importance of upskilling youth, engaging stakeholders on occupational safety, supporting incubators for innovation and entrepreneurship, and fostering a just and green digital transition was also stressed. There was shared recognition of the role of the private sector and strategic partnerships in achieving these goals.

Specific examples of country-level actions to advance SDG 8 included:

- GHANA's focus on creating jobs "beyond traditional areas," including the significance of having data to develop effective and customized public policies;
- national labor reforms in SPAIN that include legal enforcement of daily working hours, and anti-harassment policies focusing on LGBTQI individuals;
- tax law reforms in HONDURAS that incorporate tax justice and a progressive fiscal system to ensure transparency and distribution of wealth;
- innovative financing partnerships to support entrepreneurship training, especially for women, in SURINAME; and
- recognition of volunteering as "a powerful tool" for economic and social transformation in FRANCE.

The discussions also highlighted a broad range of additional measures needed to bridge existing gaps and accelerate SDG 8 implementation.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA called for fairer metrics, stressing GDP per capita does not reflect reality. BANGLADESH said 80% of its workers are employed in the informal sector, but the government is prioritizing formalization, with labor protections, youth employment and training, and sustainable enterprises, especially for women. SAUDI ARABIA stressed, *inter alia*: prioritizing initiatives with high impact; systematic reforms to continue diversifying income sources away from oil; reforming the labor market; and policies for women's empowerment. INDONESIA and MALAWI emphasized international collaboration and partnerships to scale successful approaches. THE GAMBIA said development cooperation should respond to labor market needs. IRELAND said building the trade and commercial capacity of countries will expand decent work benefits.

ETHIOPIA called for improved labor market information systems to encourage regular labor migration, while UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY underscored mobilizing demographic dividends through employing youth, women, and older workers.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH called for:

- a youth employment task force on decent jobs;
- data on youth employment and labor rights;
- a dedicated UN forum on discriminated communities;
- language on financing for youth employment particularly in green sectors;
- youth constituencies, Major Groups, and rights holders as accountability partners; and
- tax exemptions and subsidies to promote decent living and employment.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Strategies for SDG success

Chair Maritza Chan, Vice-President, ECOSOC, opened this session in the afternoon, noting the importance of the 2024 Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS).

Outlining challenges in accelerating SDG implementation in SIDS, Ilena Seid, Chair, Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), cited finance, technology, and capacity-building. She called for tailored policies to address the specific needs of SIDS, noting a need for expanded fiscal space, measurement tools beyond GDP, and strengthened data collection.

Sergio Fernandez de Cordova, Executive Chairman, PVBLC Foundation, mentioned the SIDS Global Data Hub as key to enhance SIDS' capacity by providing essential data for policy making. Navid Hanif, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, echoed the importance of moving beyond traditional measures, especially to manage SIDS' external debt, and mentioned the Multi-Dimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) as a vital tool to address SIDS' financial challenges.

On enhancing ABAS implementation, Seid highlighted the importance of South-South cooperation, private sector

participation, and strengthening data systems. Hanif cited data advances in the UN system, enabling more granular analyses responding to the specific needs of SIDS. He noted this also contributes to improved regional cooperation and peer learning.

Ruth Julie Kissam, Advancing PNG Women Leaders Network, noted Papua New Guinea's forests equal 70% of its land mass, constituting a global climate lifeline and biodiversity habitat, but they face illegal logging and unsustainable agriculture. She called for immediate scaled up finance, including debt-for-nature swaps and carbon markets.

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates underscored the international community's moral obligation to support SIDS as stewards of the ocean. Many called for more accessible finance and immediate debt relief to create fiscal space for investments in essential areas including infrastructure, health care, and adaptation. Many supported the SIDS Center of Excellence and the Global Data Hub.

CABO VERDE called for international long-term financial support to SIDS as innovation labs in digital health, climate smart agriculture for food security, and context-specific solutions. PALAU, for AOSIS, said the ABAS is a blueprint for sustainable development in SIDS' unique circumstances, but risks insufficiency of funding due to the outdated global financial architecture.

MICRONESIA, for PACIFIC SIDS, lamented escalating geopolitical tensions, noting that the recent Ocean and Financing for Development conferences produced no binding targets or accountability mechanisms. NAURU observed that their expected graduation to high income status in 2026 would exclude the country from international finance despite their vulnerability, with others noting it is a common cycle. PAPUA NEW GUINEA noted its proposal for Green Climate Fund financing took nine years to bear fruit. The EU highlighted their Global Gateway for smart, clean, and secure digital connections in health, transport, and other sectors, and stressed the importance of the private sector, reiterating commitment to ABAS implementation.

CUBA urged recapitalizing multilateral development banks and reforming their lending conditions, alongside capitalizing financial instruments under the Paris Agreement. The INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION called for stronger institutions, the rule of law, and the empowerment of women. SPAIN called for a debt pause mechanism for crises. CHINA urged developed countries to honor their financial commitments to SIDS. THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY called for equitable partnerships that treat SIDS as co-designers and for more predictable and long-term support. FRANCE called for tailoring research and statistical analysis to SIDS contexts.

FAO noted their support, including on geospatial modeling and climate-smart agriculture for transforming agrifood systems.

In the Corridors

Each year, the HLPF reviews four focal SDGs in addition to SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). At the same time, one of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda is treating all the SDGs as "integrated and indivisible," enabling discussions to take on board progress across the other goals. On Wednesday morning, for example, a report on SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production) was featured in plenary, while on the sidelines a report and policy briefs were launched on SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), and special events were held on local implementation (SDG 11). Additional special events focused on SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and SDG 13 (climate action), among others, are planned for the second week.

Although they were pleased with the energy and breadth of activity that the events outside the main meeting halls were bringing to the session, some lamented that the UN's liquidity crisis has limited side events to the noontime meeting slot only and wondered what would have been possible with a full slate of events.