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Athens Declaration on the role of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions in combating inequalities in the world of work

We, representatives of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (ESC-SIs) participating in the ILO-AICESIS joint international conference on “The Role of Social Dialogue and its Institutions in Combating Inequalities in the World of Work”, 23-24 November 2023, hosted by the Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE);

Recalling the ILO Constitution which states that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice;

Considering that Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions provide advice and recommendations to governments and/or the legislature on matters of economic and social policy;

Convinced that high and persistent inequalities within and between countries are incompatible with the pursuit of social justice, and represent a threat to the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that comprise the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda;

Convinced also that inequalities in the world of work derive from a multiplicity of interrelated and mutually reinforcing structural and systemic causes and from the interaction of macroeconomic, trade, investment, social, labour and employment, and education and training policies and practices;

Recognizing that contributing factors to inequalities vary and can include income gaps, poverty, informality, structural unemployment, absence of fiscal space for socio-economic development, development gaps, governance and accountability issues at the global and domestic levels, failure to protect labour rights, lack of an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises and inadequate universal social protection;

Acknowledging that some inequalities arise well before individuals enter the world of work, while others can result from not being in employment, education or training for long periods of time, and that addressing them, including through targeted social interventions, is key to reducing inequalities in the labour market and beyond; and

Recalling the adoption by the International Labour Conference in 2021 of conclusions concerning inequalities and the world of work, and the endorsement by the ILO Governing Body in 2022 of a comprehensive and integrated ILO strategy to reduce and prevent inequalities in the world of work.

In light of the foregoing, we, representatives of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, commit to further enhancing our contributions. We aim to do this through inclusive and effective social dialogue at the institutional level, focusing on the development and implementation of policies. These policies are intended to reduce and prevent inequalities in

the world of work, ensuring they are fully responsive to national circumstances, needs and priorities, and are founded on tripartite consensus.

We propose to enhance our action to combat inequalities by:

- Identifying and pursuing opportunities to raise awareness of the challenge and consequences of inequalities in the world of work, to promote equal opportunities for all and to mobilize partnerships at national, regional and multilateral levels for joint and effective action to reduce and prevent inequalities;
- Mainstreaming the question of inequalities, and how to reduce and prevent them in our national contexts, taking into account the impact of broader factors such as climate change or conflict on inequalities, in the work of our institutions;
- Undertaking to develop and implement a workplan on tackling inequalities; this workplan may include, but not be limited to, activities such as: (i.) undertaking or contributing to research on inequalities; (ii.) organizing hearings, events or exchanges on inequalities such as seminars, discussion panels, knowledge/practice sharing events, inviting the participation of independent experts and representatives of groups in vulnerable situations; (iii.) issuing opinions, reports or joint statements; (iv.) establishing ad hoc or permanent working group(s)/sub-committee(s) on specific aspects of inequalities in the world of work; and (v.) contributing actively to national policymaking and implementation for the reduction and prevention of inequalities; and
- Encouraging the effective participation of social partner organizations in all deliberations regarding the fight against inequalities in the world of work, and engaging, as appropriate, with other organizations representing specific population groups affected by inequalities (such as women, youth, persons with a disability, religious or ethnic minorities, people from rural and disadvantaged regions, informal workers and migrant workers, and persons suffering discrimination on the basis of any other grounds protected by international labour standards and human rights instruments) or working with or for such groups.

We request the AICESIS, as the global association of ESC-SIs, to:

- Facilitate and promote the exchange of information, experiences and good practices among ESC-SIs in their contributions to national policymaking. Specifically, focus on the implementation of strategies to combat inequalities in the world of work;
- Pursue additional actions following the Athens Conference. This includes initiating specific measures to enhance the engagement of ESC-SIs in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of comprehensive national policies. These policies should aim to reduce and prevent inequalities in the world of work, aligning with the recommendations outlined in the AICESIS roadmap on 'Broad and Inclusive Growth'. Additionally, provide updates on these actions at the annual AICESIS General Assembly;
- Document and highlight the achievements of ESC-SIs in reducing inequalities. Offer guidance for further actions by ESC-SIs and share the experiences and accomplishments of ESC-SIs with the International Labour Organization (ILO), other

relevant organizations in the multilateral system, and additional regional and global partners. This should include, as appropriate, entities representing, or working with or for, groups impacted by inequalities.

We request the ILO, as a strategic partner, to consider the following actions:

- Provide guidance to national data producers to generate inequality-related data, disaggregated as appropriate, and evidence to support policymaking and monitoring;
- Develop policy and capacity-building tools and programmes to support national social dialogue institutions, governments and social partners in their work to combat inequalities in the world of work, including consideration of the most effective institutional arrangements for social dialogue in the national context;
- Support ILO Constituents and ESC-SIs in the development of integrated, country-specific strategies to reduce and prevent inequalities in the world of work. Support may include technical advice and sharing of good practices on the seven components of such strategies: employment creation, quality education and lifelong learning, adequate protection of all workers and a fair share of the fruits of growth, transition to the formal economy, gender equality and non-discrimination, trade and development and universal social protection;
- Continue to engage with the multilateral system on the issue of inequality, including with international financial institutions and other relevant organizations;
- Support the integration of work to combat inequalities in the world of work, through social dialogue, in Decent Work Country Programmes and in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks; and
- Continue to support social dialogue institutions to improve their inclusiveness and effectiveness, and to promote the full realization of the right to freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, along with other fundamental principles and rights at work in all ILO Member States.

Athens, 24 November 2023