

Twenty-first Meeting of the
United Nations Economist Network (UNEN)

Tuesday, 9 November 2021
8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Chief Economist of the United Nations, introduced the agenda: i) Policy Briefs on Digital Economic Transformation, Innovative Finance, and New Economics for Sustainable Development; and ii) AOB.

Mr. Harris briefed participants on the meeting of the working group co-leads that had been held on 3 November. That meeting had discussed how best to move forward with the finalization of the policy briefs. Mr. Harris noted that some of the briefs were in good shape while others needed more work.

Mr. Harris reiterated that at the UNEN meeting in October it had been proposed to prepare an umbrella paper highlighting the core messages of the policy briefs. The respective briefs would be annexed to the umbrella paper. Mr. Harris suggested establishing a drafting group that would prepare a first draft of the umbrella paper and submit it to UNEN members for review.

Mr. Harris explained that Amritpal Singh Virdee had used the policy brief on the social and solidarity economy to propose a structure/format that could be used as a template for the other briefs. The following elements were included: clear definition, links to SDGs, link to other concepts and policy recommendations.

The briefs on digital economic transformation and on innovative finance are conceptually different from the NESD policy briefs. Mr. Harris asked for suggestions how these briefs could be presented. Updated versions of these two briefs would be circulated for comments.

The next steps for finalizing the briefs would include organizing consultations with actors beyond the UN, i.e. academia, civil society, private sector etc., as had already been done by the working group on the blue economy. Outreach activities for RCs and UN country teams will also be planned. The suggestion was made to have launch events for the respective policy briefs and engaging the experts through a webinar – e.g. two policy briefs per quarter accompanied by a webinar session.

With regard to the umbrella paper the need for a unifying narrative was mentioned. Sustainability and links to SDGs were mentioned as elements of the unifying narrative. The narrative would also explain why UNEN looked at these concepts that have been ignored in policy making so far. The idea is not to have a paper with an inventory of what is contained in the policy briefs, but how to tie in the economic concepts in a unifying narrative. The common thread for the concepts is the SDGs and how we can achieve them. A part of the narrative can be focusing on the shift from development to sustainable development – forward looking concepts

such as green economy, blue economy and circular economy. Another common thread to tie these concepts together is inclusivity of the economic concepts – leaving no-one behind.

Next Steps

Aim for finalizing policy brief drafts, including policy recommendations, by the end of November. Then we go into next phase, build on the work that has been done, and organize consultations with stakeholders beyond the UN.

A small drafting team will prepare the umbrella paper. The chapeau of the umbrella paper will include a definitional part and an explanation of how the concepts are linked. It will list selected policy recommendations and focus on messages of co-benefits. The executive summary will be 3 – 4 pages, and the overview paper about 15 pages.

Volunteers should please inform Mr. Harris of their interest in joining the drafting team.

Outreach activities, including a briefing series with RCs and UN country teams, will be organized early next year.