

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty – 17 October

‘Growth as usual’ COVID-19 recovery plans would harm planet and human rights, UN poverty expert warns

BRUSSELS / GENEVA (16 October 2020) – Achieving social and environmental justice for all requires that governments adopt economic recovery plans that tackle both poverty and the environmental crisis, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights urged on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

“This pandemic is a once in a lifetime opportunity,” said the UN expert, Olivier De Schutter. “Countries have injected at least US\$11 trillion into economic recovery plans, and yet an estimated [176 million people](#) will fall into poverty while biodiversity continues to decline and investments in fossil fuels increase.”

“The adoption of economic recovery plans provides a unique chance to place social inclusion and ecological sustainability at the heart of public policies. This is what the ‘just transition’ should mean: it goes far beyond compensating the sectors or the regions affected by the energy transition,” explains Olivier De Schutter in a [report](#) that he will present on October 21 at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly.

“Eradicating poverty and protecting the environment have been assumed as antithetical for far too long, but there is no dilemma: it is only by combining the two that we can achieve both,” said De Schutter. To deliver on the promise of a ‘just transition’ to a low-carbon and biodiverse economy, the report calls for investments in four key areas: energy, buildings, food, and mobility.

“‘Triple-dividend’ actions can be taken in these sectors,” De Schutter said, “which reduce the ecological footprint, while at the same time creating employment opportunities for people with low levels of qualification and ensuring affordable access to goods and services essential for the enjoyment of human rights.”

“A transition towards a green economy consistent with the Paris Agreement would create 18 million net jobs and provide other key gains that must not be underestimated,” the UN expert said. Investing in renewable energy would create an additional 24 million jobs by 2030, compensating by far for the 6 million jobs that would disappear in the fossil energy sector. These jobs are of better quality than those in the oil and coal industries, and they provide women with better opportunities. Investments in this area would return 3 to 7 times the costs, the report says.

Doubling investments in public transport is estimated to create at least 5 million jobs worldwide, while moving away from the model of planned obsolescence of

appliances could create an additional 6 million by 2030. If well designed, these investments could directly benefit people in poverty and prevent the environmental injustices to which they are subjected, the report finds.

“People in poverty are the main victims of environmental change, but they are the least to blame,” said De Schutter. “Faced with an unprecedented economic and environmental crisis, ‘growth as usual’ is not an option – the poor would pay the highest price several times over, socially, economically, and environmentally.”

“This is not a price we can afford. For people living in poverty, the search for an alternative development model is not a luxury but often a matter of life and death. Governments have a historic opportunity to eradicate poverty while remaining within planetary boundaries, and they must seize it now.”

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[The report is available here.](#)

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The **report’s presentation** will be live streamed on October 21 during the Third Committee session in the morning segment (New York time) at <http://webtv.un.org/>

Mr. Olivier De Schutter was appointed as the [UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights](#) by the UN Human Rights Council on 1st May 2020. Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.

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