



## **ASEM FORUM ON SOCIAL SAFETY NETS: ENHANCED COOPERATION TO ADDRESS POST – CRISIS CHALLENGES**

Ha Noi, Viet Nam, 18 – 19 April 2011

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

1. The recent global financial crisis and economic slowdown, with its severe social impacts, have been negatively affecting all countries, particularly the developing countries, threatening the livelihoods, well-being and development opportunities of millions of people, imposing new pressures on social cohesion and eroding the ability of many countries to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals. At the 8th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM 8) in Brussels in October 2010, Heads of State and Government recognized the significance of social safety nets and social protection as an economic stabilizer in times of crisis, and called for common strategies to promote social cohesion as contribution to sustainable development. The ASEM Forum on Social Safety Nets, initiated by Viet Nam and co-sponsored by Finland, was approved at the said Meeting. This initiative would also contribute to the ASEM dialogue of Labor and Employment Ministers in view of the 4<sup>th</sup> Labor and Employment Ministers Meeting in 2012.

2. On 18 – 19 April 2011 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, the ASEM Forum on Social Safety Nets: Enhanced Cooperation to Address Post-Crisis Challenges was organized by Viet Nam in coordination with Finland. The Forum gathered approximately 150 Participants, including ASEM government officials, the European Commission, the ASEAN Secretariat, researchers as well as representatives from ASEM social partners and international organizations such as the World Bank, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, to share their views on social impacts of the global financial crisis and other global challenges, and work out recommendations for the consolidation of social protection policies and social safety nets in particular, in order to contribute to sustained post-crisis recovery.

H.E. Madame Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, Minister of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs of Viet Nam delivered her Keynote Speech, and joined by H.E. Madame Eeva Kuuskoski, State Secretary of Social Affairs and Health of Finland at the Opening Session. Mr. Michael Cichon, Director of the Social Security Department of the ILO was invited as Guest Speaker of the Forum.

3. The Participants noted that the recent global financial crisis and economic slowdown resulted in a long period of abnormally high unemployment and severe pressure on government expenditures, which could impede people's access to basic and essential services. In addition to social impacts of the crisis, many economies were further exposed to such global challenges as natural disasters, food crisis, aging population, youth unemployment, etc. Consequently, the coverage and quality of basic services, namely unemployment insurance, education, health care and social security, could suffer. As a result of these problems, existing social safety nets and social protection systems could become stressed.

The Participants shared the experiences of their respective countries in developing and implementing public works policy, in providing access to basic services for the vulnerable, in providing social insurance to informal workers, etc. Global efforts, such as the 3P framework of the World Bank and the Social Protection Floor (SPF) initiative of the UN, were also introduced at the Forum. All agreed that social protection cannot only effectively contribute to mitigating the negative social impacts of the global financial crisis and other global challenges, but also facilitate the post-crisis sustainable recovery. However, there would be no one-size-fits-all solution to social protection and it would be necessary to take into account specific conditions of each Member while international cooperation was to be enhanced. The following policy groups were essentially recognized:

- a. To enhance the people's ability, particularly that of women and youth, to effectively participate in the labor market;
  - b. To improve social protection policies and access to basic services, such as health care, education and training, especially for the poor and vulnerable;
  - c. To facilitate poverty alleviation activities;
  - d. To improve and consolidate the government's administration in social protection; and
  - e. To strengthen the links between social protection and employment.
4. Recognizing the efforts made at national level as well as by various global and regional fora to establish and strengthen social safety nets and to promote social protection, the Participants emphasized that ASEM has a lot of potentials to offer for Members to shape sustainable development, and proposed the following recommendations for ASEM's future collaboration:
- a. Promotion of common understanding of concepts and approaches regarding social protection for all;
  - b. Development of roadmaps to achieve social protection for all, in particular regarding basic social protection for prevention of risks, protection from shocks and promotion of people;
  - c. Investigation of further evidence on global risks and challenges such as climate change and demographic trends, and on the ideas and concepts on how to design sustainable social protection systems - nationally as well as internationally;
  - d. Dissemination and replication of good practices by means of technical workshops, mutual exchange of information and consultations on various levels;
  - e. Enhancement of cooperation within ASEM, in particular in formulating and implementing social protection policies, in terms of technical support, capacity building, and piloting new policies and programs; and
  - f. Strengthening of policy coherence at national and international level.
5. The outcome and recommendations of the Forum will be submitted to the 10th Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Hungary on 6 - 7 June 2011 and the 4<sup>th</sup> Asia – Europe Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting in 2012.

*Hanoi, 19 April 2011*