



2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Background note for Regional UN System Meeting, Vienna, 10—11 December 2019

A. Introduction

1. The next **Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region** will be convened in Geneva on 19-20 March 2020. It will be held again in the **International Conference Center Geneva (CICG)**. The Regional Forum will be organized in **close consultation with member States**, and in close cooperation with the entities of the **regional UN system** and with the active engagement of other **relevant stakeholders**, as decided by member States. The concept of the next Regional Forum will also take into account the **feedback received and lessons learned** from previous sessions.

B. Preparations for the Regional Forum 2020

2. The **following elements** related to the organization of the next Regional Forum have been considered and **agreed by UNECE member States** at a first round of **informal consultations** on 2 December 2019:

- **Chairing arrangement:** Member States may wish to express their interest in **chairing the 2020 Regional Forum**, following France (2017), Switzerland (2018) and Albania (2019).
- **Alignment with HLPF theme:** The 2020 Regional Forum will continue to be aligned with the **theme** (“*Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*”) of the **High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) convened under the auspices of ECOSOC** (New York, 7-16 July 2020). The theme was determined in follow-up to the **High-level Political Forum convened under the auspices of the General Assembly** (SDG Summit, New York, 24-25 September 2019), which called for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. The following **regionally adjusted theme** is therefore proposed for the 2020 Regional Forum: “**Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the UNECE region**”. Under this theme, the Regional Forum would aim at identifying, exchanging on and scaling up concrete policies, actions and incentives that **accelerate progress** across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region. **New and concrete commitments** by participants to acceleration actions and innovative coalitions for SDG delivery at national or international levels would be a **valuable outcome** throughout the session of the Regional Forum.
- **Substantive focus:** The substantive discussions at the Regional Forum, in particular the peer learning sessions, could be underpinned by **two analytical inputs**:

1) Global Sustainable Development Report¹

The **2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)** was prepared by a group of 15 independent scientists under the auspices of the UN. It was launched at the **SDG Summit** in September 2019 and is currently considered as a major input to **inform the discussions at the 2020 HLPF**. The GSDR highlights **central entry points to accelerate progress and leverage interlinkages** across all 17 SDGs, based on available scientific assessments. The report finds that despite many positive developments since the adoption of the SDGs, success remains limited and **actions with more cross-cutting impact** are needed to balance economic development with critical social and environmental considerations. It identifies **six entry points** that are underlying SDG progress and that offer the most promise for achieving the desired transformations:

- **Human well-being and capabilities**, including material well-being, health, education, access to a clean and safe environment and resilience to natural disasters.
- **Sustainable and just economies**, related to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption that deplete natural resources, generate inequalities and threaten irreversible damage is needed.
- **Food systems and nutrition patterns** that are currently unsustainable because of their climate and environmental impacts and the shortcomings in healthy, safe nutrition for all.
- **Energy decarbonization with universal access** is needed as access to sustainable energy remains limited in many parts of the world, while the provision of electricity, heat and transport continues to rely heavily on fossil fuels.
- **Urban and peri-urban development** are crucial with cities playing a major and growing role in global economic output, while also having a significant adverse human and environmental impact.
- **Global environmental commons** such as the atmosphere, oceans, forests, land, water and biodiversity are vital for human survival and well-being, but are rapidly depleted and degraded by current human action.

The GSDR emphasizes that throughout each entry point it is the **combination of actions** by individual actors and entities in **four areas (or levers)** that will bring about transformative change at the necessary scale and speed: **governance; economy and finance; individual and collective action; and science and technology** (see graph in annex 1).

The entry points and levers identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report **resonate well** with the **sustainable development challenges in the UNECE region** and could therefore be used to **structure the discussions and peer learning sessions** at the Regional Forum.

2) Regional SDG Progress Report

A **Regional SDG Progress Report** will be prepared, in accordance with **Decision B (68) of the Commission** to request a **yearly report** on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region to support the discussions at the Regional Forum. The regional progress report will use **existing data sets and statistics**. Its preparation is led by the UNECE Statistical Division and draws on the ongoing work on a **UNECE regional platform on statistics for SDGs**. The report will identify **trends of selected**

¹ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/gsdr2019>.

SDG indicators in UNECE countries and draw conclusions on **SDG implementation in selected areas**. It will also highlight challenges in **measuring and monitoring SDGs** in the region. The regional progress report and its advance findings will help **identify and formulate region-specific topics and inform the discussions** at the Regional Forum.

- **Format:** The following meeting segments are proposed for the 2020 Regional Forum (for an overview, please see **outline of proposed programme** in annex 2):
 - **Opening session** (*Thursday, 19 March 2020, 10:00-11:00*):
Opening remarks by selected high-level officials (Chair Regional Forum, Deputy Secretary-General, UNECE Executive Secretary, Chair Regional UNSDG), preceded by a brief cultural performance.
 - **High-level Policy Segment on “Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the UNECE region”** (*Thursday, 19 March 2020, 11:00-13:00*):
Keynote address and brief introduction of **Regional SDG Progress Report**, followed by **interactive discussion** on SDG acceleration and delivery in the UNECE region and **statements from the floor**.
 - **Focus Events** (*Thursday, 19 March 2020, 15:00-18:00 and Friday, 20 March 2020, 10:00-13:00*):
Four focus events (90 minutes each) will be held in the plenary room on **cross-cutting issues related to SDG acceleration and delivery**. The format will be moderated, interactive **panel discussions**. The **following topics** for the focus events are proposed:
 - 1) *Accelerating SDG progress through Voluntary National Reviews*
 - 2) *New actors for green and inclusive change and innovation (e.g. youth, cities, start-ups)*
 - 3) *Behavioural change for sustainable development*
 - 4) *Economic transformation, finance and technology for SDG acceleration*
 - **Peer Learning Segment** (*Thursday, 19 March 2020, 15:00-18:00 and Friday, 20 March 2020, 10:00-13:00, in parallel to focus events*):
A total of **8 peer learning sessions** (7 round tables and 1 special session) in smaller groups is proposed, each lasting 3 hours (4 in parallel in the afternoon of the first day and another 4 in parallel in the morning of the second day, significantly increasing the time available for peer exchange compared to previous sessions). **Six peer learning round tables** will cover regional themes, based on the **six entry points** identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report and taking into account the findings of the regional SDG progress report. One round table will be on **SDG data and statistics**. The round tables will focus on discussing **best practices, success stories and innovative approaches**, as well as **challenges** to speeding up SDG progress. The discussion may emphasize specific **commitments and initiatives** by participants related to the round table themes.

In addition, a special peer learning session will be the **SDG Challenge**. In cooperation with the UNOG SDG Lab, a few volunteering countries will present a specific SDG challenge, which will

then be discussed in small, facilitated break-out groups. This will enable interactive peer learning in a dynamic and innovative format.

The **peer learning round tables** could be **entitled** as follows:

- 1) *Boosting human well-being and capabilities through health and education for all.*
- 2) *Accelerating progress towards sustainable and circular economies.*
- 3) *Delivering sustainable food and nutrition for people and planet.*
- 4) *Accelerating energy decarbonization in the UNECE region.*
- 5) *Pathways to sustainable cities in the UNECE region.*
- 6) *Scaling up action for the sustainable management of natural resources.*
- 7) *Leveraging data and statistics for SDG progress.*

- **Closing session** (Friday, 20 March 2020, 15:00-16:00)
Brief reporting back from focus events and peer learning sessions, followed by **closing remarks** by a few speakers.
- **Organization:** The main parts of the meeting, in particular the more thematic focus events and peer learning round tables, will be organized **in cooperation with the regional UN system**. Contributions by the regional UN system to **focus the discussions**, define specific and coherent **topics for the sessions**, select and **engage participants**, and prepare **concrete take-aways, actions and commitments** will be particularly useful.

At the same time, **governments as well as national SDG coordinators** are invited to **co-sponsor** specific sessions of their choice and to provide inputs to the preparations in accordance with their needs and preferences.

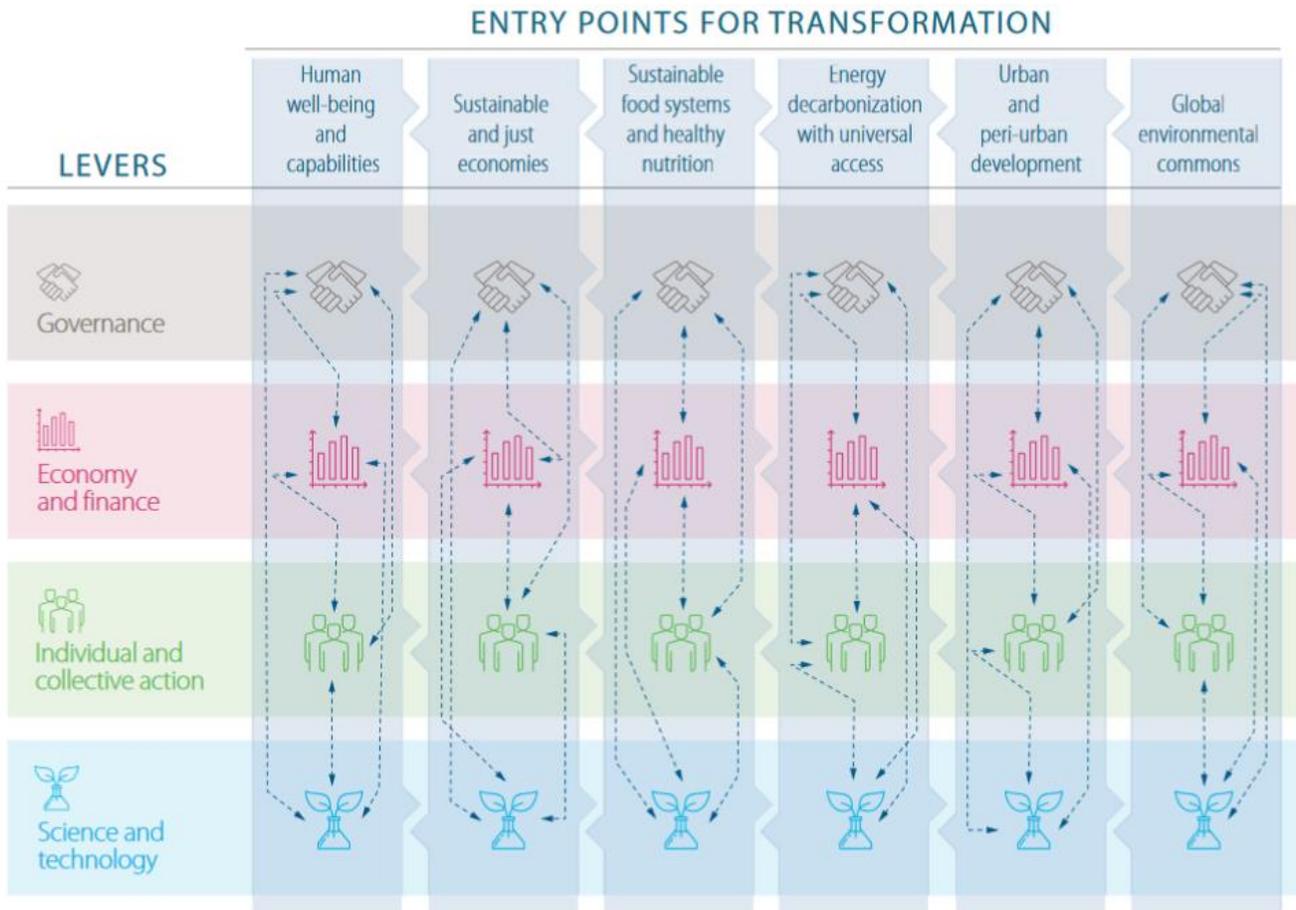
- **Associated meetings and side events:** The following meetings and events are **considered to be organized** in connection with the Regional Forum:
 - First high-level meeting of the interagency **UN Regional Consultative Platform** for Europe and Central Asia (RCP-ECA), chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, on 18 March 2020
 - Preparatory **civil society consultation** on 18 March 2020
 - Preparatory **business forum** on 18 March 2020
 - Preparatory **youth consultation**
 - DESA/UNECE expert **workshop for regional VNR countries** (*tbc*)
 - Thematic **side events** (morning/lunch time)
 - **SDG exhibition** with various booths

C. Next steps

3. In follow-up to the informal consultations with member States, the formal **draft provisional agenda** of the Regional Forum has been submitted for approval to the **meeting of the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 16 December 2020**. **Invitations** to governments will be sent out thereafter. **Organizing teams** for the different sessions will be set up in January 2020.

Annex 1

Entry points and levers for transformative action identified in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report



Annex 2

Outline of proposed programme Regional Forum 2020

Thursday, 19 March 2020

	Plenary Room	Peer Learning Segment			
8:30-9:45	SIDE EVENTS				
10:00-11:00	OPENING				
11:00-13:00	High-level Policy Segment <i>Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the UNECE region</i>				
13:00-15:00	LUNCH BREAK / SIDE EVENTS				
15:00-18:00	Focus Event 1 <i>Accelerating SDG progress through Voluntary National Reviews</i>	Round table 1 <i>Boosting human well-being and capabilities through health and education for all</i>	Round table 2 <i>Accelerating progress towards sustainable and circular economies</i>	Round table 3 <i>Delivering sustainable food and nutrition for people and planet</i>	SDG Challenge
	Focus Event 2 <i>New actors for green and inclusive change and innovation</i>				
18:00	RECEPTION				

Friday, 20 March 2020

	Plenary Room	Peer Learning Segment			
8:30-9:45	SIDE EVENTS				
10:00-13:00	Focus Event 3 <i>Behavioural change for sustainable development</i>	Round table 4 <i>Accelerating energy decarbonization in the UNECE region</i>	Round table 5 <i>Pathways to sustainable cities in the UNECE region</i>	Round table 6 <i>Scaling up action for the sustainable management of natural resources</i>	Round table 7 <i>Leveraging data and statistics for SDG progress</i>
	Focus Event 4 <i>Economic transformation, finance and technology for SDG acceleration</i>				
13:00-15:00	LUNCH BREAK / SIDE EVENTS				
15:00-16:00	CLOSING				