

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

111th meeting
Geneva, 5 October 2020

Item 5

Informal Document No. 2020/43

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Organization of the 2021 Regional Forum and renewal of the mandate

Note by the Secretariat

I. Background and global review of 2030 Agenda in 2021

1. In accordance with the current mandate provided by the Commission¹, UNECE will convene the next session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region in 2021. Pursuant to the mandate and in line with the established practice, the agenda of the session will be developed in close consultation with member States, and the session will be convened in close cooperation with the entities of the regional UN system and with the active engagement of other relevant stakeholders.

2. As further stipulated in the mandate, the 2021 Regional Forum will be aligned with the theme and the programme of work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of ECOSOC (HLPF). In particular, the following parameters that have been set for the global review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2021² will be taken into account:

- Thematic focus of ECOSOC for its 2021 session and the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of ECOSOC: “*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.*”
- Set of SDGs to be discussed in-depth at the 2021 HLPF: 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17.
- In addition, the 2021 review will cover the SDG targets with a 2020 timeline.

II. Format and content of the 2021 Regional Forum – considerations and proposal

3. In view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the next Regional Forum can most likely not be held as a full-fledged in-person meeting. Taking into account uncertainties regarding the continuation or re-introduction of public health measures and travel restrictions as well as the currently significantly reduced capacity of UNOG to service official meetings with interpretation, the secretariat is therefore considering a precautionary approach for the 2021 Regional Forum with a combination of hybrid and virtual formats.

4. In the hybrid meeting segments, most participants are expected to connect remotely, while a limited number of participants that are based in Geneva or that are in a position to travel to Geneva may attend in person, in line with the travel regulations that will be applied to meeting participants by the Swiss Confederation in March 2021 and the UNOG meeting guidelines that will be in place. The participants attending in-person will gather in a suitable conference room in the Palais des Nations. Hybrid meeting parts could be flexibly transformed into virtual formats

¹ As contained in [E/2019/37 E/ECE/1488](#), Commission decision B (68) (for reference also see annex to this note).

² GA resolution [A/RES/74/298](#).

depending on the COVID-19 status. Virtual meeting components are planned for to ensure contingency in case of a worsening COVID-19 situation.

5. Against this background, the following meeting components are proposed:

- **Hybrid high-level and plenary segments** under the theme “*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and delivery on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region*”. A high-level policy segment with cross-cutting discussions on policy lessons from addressing the COVID-19 pandemic while accelerating SDG progress could take place on Wednesday, 17 March 2021 (two-hour session with interpretation). In addition, plenary segments could be held on the socio-economic impact and response to COVID-19 and green and sustainable recovery (one two-hour session on Wednesday, 17 March 2021 and one two-hour session on Thursday, 18 March 2021, all with interpretation). The hybrid segments would serve as the point of culmination of the 2021 Regional Forum. Each hybrid session would relate to several of the SDGs under in-depth review. Remote participants could connect via an online platform that supports simultaneous interpretation (e.g. Interpretify).
- **Virtual peer learning sessions** for governments and other stakeholders covering a number of policy issues related to the 9 SDGs under in-depth review and the [targets with 2020 timeline](#). Subject to discussions with potential lead organizers, the sessions (about 2-3 hours each) could cover topics that are of particular relevance to member States and that are related to one or several of the SDGs under review. The review could also be structured into several thematic clusters under which member States and other lead organizers could suggest relevant peer learning sessions. The limited number of sessions could be held mainly in the period 8-16 March 2021 running up to the hybrid segments. The peer learning sessions could highlight policies and actions that address the COVID-19 impact while at the same time accelerating SDG progress.

Regarding the 21 targets with a 2020 deadline, about half of them are on biodiversity, which could also be clustered in a thematic session. Other 2020 targets that could be featured are on road safety, youth, access to information and communication technology, disaster risk management, and data.

Main actors in the virtual peer learning sessions should be government representatives, supported by the UN system, its Issue-based Coalitions and other relevant partners (e.g. ESDN, SDG Lab). A subregional angle could be useful to address some of the issues in a meaningful way and among a more homogenous constituency (involving subregional partners and UN Resident Coordinators). While most of the peer learning sessions would be without interpretation, efforts could be made to arrange interpretation for some sessions. Suitable online platforms would be used to conduct the sessions (such as Webex or Interpretify).

All thematic peer learning sessions should be relevant to the region, aligned with the overall theme and the relevant SDG(s), and not be too thematically narrow to enable a peer learning discussion among a number of governments and other stakeholders.

- **Virtual preparatory consultations** could be held by civil society, youth, parliamentarians (through IPU), business organizations (UN Global Compact, ICC), and/or academia.

Representatives of the different stakeholder groups would have the opportunity to feed their key messages into the hybrid meeting segments (17-18 March 2021).

- **Virtual side events** could be held around and in the run-up to the RFSD on more specific topics and initiatives related to the overall theme and the SDGs under review.
6. To support the discussions at the 2021 Regional Forum, the yearly report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region will be prepared as mandated, focusing on the set of SDGs under in-depth review and using exiting data sets and statistics.
7. The outcome of the 2021 Regional Forum – a report with a Chair’s summary of the discussions – will be submitted to the global level as the official input from the UNECE region to the 2021 HLPF. As it has been the practice, participants will be able to provide comments on the draft report.
8. Extrabudgetary contributions were received for the 2020 and 2021 Regional Forums from the Russian Federation and the Swiss Confederation under extrabudgetary project E348 “*Towards 2030: Strengthening mechanisms for peer learning, policy exchange and progress assessment on sustainable development in the UNECE region*”. Due to very limited expenditures for the reformatted virtual Regional Forum in 2020, XB funding of about \$62,000 after deduction of support costs currently remains available to support the organization of the 2021 session. As requested by EXCOM, an updated extrabudgetary project document reflecting the pledges and contributions received will be submitted for information to the 111th meeting of EXCOM on 5 October 2020.

III. Renewal of the mandate for the Regional Forum and evaluation

9. In its decision B (68), the Commission decided to continue to convene annual sessions of the Regional Forum in 2020 and 2021, and to review this decision at its 69th session (20-21 April 2021). Therefore, in order to continue the Regional Forum beyond 2021, member States may wish to consider renewing the current mandate. To this end, a draft decision would need to be developed and submitted to the 69th Commission session for adoption.
10. Additionally, the current mandate requests the secretariat “... *to prepare in 2021 an evaluation of the added value of the Regional Forum for ECE member States so far and identify possible improvements*”.
11. Individual evaluation surveys were conducted for the Regional Forums in 2018, 2019 and 2020.³ The evaluation surveys were sent to all participants of the respective sessions and aimed at receiving feedback on the usefulness of various substantive and organizational aspects of the Regional Forums as well as to generate suggestions for future improvements. As the approach of these surveys corresponds with the request of member States to conduct an overall evaluation of the Regional Forum so far, the secretariat could prepare a draft evaluation based on the outcomes of the participants’ surveys for submission to the 69th Commission.

³ The results of the evaluation surveys of the Regional Forums 2018-2020 are available at the respective hyperlinks: [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2020](#).

III. Next steps

EXCOM may wish to request the secretariat to launch a process of informal consultations with the aim to:

- (i) develop the provisional agenda of the 2021 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;**
- (ii) consider the draft evaluation of the Regional Forum for submission to the 69th session of the Commission;**
- (iii) consider the renewal of the mandate for the Regional Forum and submit a draft decision for consideration at the 69th session of the Commission.**

Annex

Commission Decision B (68):

Extension of the mandate of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

The Commission:

1. Recalling its decision B (67) to establish the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the region of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE),
2. Reaffirming the provisions contained therein on the role, objectives and format of the Regional Forum,
3. Noting with appreciation the successful organization of the previous sessions of the Regional Forum as a platform for peer learning and the exchange of policy experiences and good practices in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals,
4. Decides to continue to convene annual sessions of the Regional Forum in the years 2020 and 2021, in close cooperation with the entities of the regional United Nations system and with the active engagement of other relevant stakeholders;
5. Requests the secretariat to develop the agenda of each session of the Regional Forum in close consultation with member States, and to align it with the respective themes and programme of work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, with a focus on those aspects that are particularly relevant to the ECE region, and taking into account lessons learned from previous meetings;
6. Also requests the secretariat to publish a yearly report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE region to support the discussions at the sessions of the Regional Forum, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum for sustainable development that year, using existing data sets and statistics;
7. Decides to keep the Regional Forum aligned with the overall follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level, taking into account the outcomes of the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly on 24 and 25 September 2019;
8. Also decides to submit the outcome of the sessions of the Regional Forum to the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, as part of the regional contributions to the global follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda;
9. Requests the secretariat to prepare in 2021 an evaluation of the added value of the Regional Forum for ECE member States so far and identify possible improvements;
10. Further decides to review the present decision at its sixty-ninth session.