

**24th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Geneva, 28-29 October 2020**

Promotion of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international forums

***Stakeholder engagement in global and regional follow-up and review of
Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals***

Update by the secretariat (8 October 2020)

I. Global level: High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

1. In 2020, the global review of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF, 7-16 July 2020) took place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and was therefore held in virtual format. While this has prevented opportunities for in-person networking and consultations, overall engagement at the virtual HLPF remained very high. The traditionally broad involvement of stakeholders, through the Major Groups and other Stakeholders mechanism, was maintained and the modalities of providing contributions and participating and speaking in the different sessions were replicated, with the aim to safeguard the considerable participation rights granted to stakeholders by the General Assembly.¹

2. In coordination with the Major Groups and other Stakeholders HLPF Coordination Mechanism, a self-organized structure, 18 stakeholder groups² provided a significant number of lead discussants and speakers, position papers, reports on contributions to 2030 Agenda implementation (submitted in accordance with paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda), interventions and questions to the sessions of the 2020 HLPF (see annex). This included interactive dialogues during the thematic review sessions and Q&A sessions after presentations of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

3. In line with the standing practice, an official HLPF session was organized in collaboration with the Major Groups and other Stakeholders on “*Transformative pathways to realize the 2030 Agenda: a whole of society approach taking into account the impact of COVID-19*”. Overall, the involvement of stakeholders did not differ significantly from previous non-virtual HLPFs and remained at a high level, according to the HLPF secretariat.

4. At the same time, the virtual format posed some challenges to government delegations as well as to stakeholders. In the absence of physical meetings, opportunities for informal negotiations and advocacy for civil society messages were absent. Time differences between participants connecting from around the globe also had an impact, as the meeting was held in New York time.

5. The exact impact of COVID-19 on stakeholder engagement in SDG implementation and follow-up is the topic of surveys that are currently ongoing. The objective of these surveys is to better understand how COVID-19 is impacting the contributions of stakeholders from different sectors to the SDGs, and how COVID-19 is affecting the ability to engage stakeholders and promote effective partnerships around implementation and

¹ The participation rights of Major Groups and other Stakeholders are in particular enshrined in General Assembly resolution [A/RES/67/290](#) on the “*Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development*”, paragraph 15.

² For further information see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020#stakeholders>.

follow up of the 2030 Agenda, including in the preparation of VNRs. One survey on the broader impact of COVID-19 on stakeholder engagement is being conducted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)³, and one survey geared towards the effectiveness of the virtual HLPF format from a stakeholder perspective is conducted by the civil society platform *Action for Sustainable Development*. The results from these surveys and the lessons from the 2020 HLPF will inform the discussions on stakeholder participation in future virtual events as they remain necessary during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

II. Regional level: Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

1. Similar to the global level, the 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD)⁴ was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and took place on 19 March 2020 at the onset of the lockdown in parts of the region. The originally planned 1.5-days format had to be reshaped to a half-day virtual meeting that preserved the key elements of the RFSD as a key platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the UNECE region. In addition to its intergovernmental character, the RFSD has a well-established practice for non-governmental actors to widely contribute to and participate in the meeting, which is also enshrined in its mandate.⁵ Notwithstanding the resized format in 2020, opportunities for stakeholder participation were maintained in line with the previous practice.

2. The 2020 RFSD featured four thematic sessions: i) Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the UNECE region; ii) Accelerating SDG progress through Voluntary National Reviews; iii) Actions for green and inclusive change; and iv) Economic transformation, finance and technology for SDG acceleration. Representatives from civil society and youth as well as the private sector took part as speakers in all sessions.

3. Civil society organizations coordinated their inputs and participation in the 2020 Regional Forum through a dedicated Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (RCSEM).⁶ The Regional Forum was preceded by a one-day self-organized virtual civil society consultation on 18 March 2020⁷ with 170 registered participants from 29 countries. The key messages from the preparatory civil society consultation were shared by a civil society speaker at the RFSD's first session.

4. In addition, representatives from youth as well as from the private sector shared their perspectives in the 2020 RFSD. In coordination with the European Youth Forum, a speaker voiced the concerns of youth, including on the impact of COVID-19 on societies. A representative of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) stressed the important contribution that the private sector could make to progress on achieving the SDGs, including with regard to innovative finance and climate change. Plans to organize a preparatory youth consultation, similar to the one held prior to the 2019 RFSD, and the first-ever SDG Business Dialogue in cooperation with the UN Global Compact and ICC could not be followed through due to COVID-19. Modalities for stakeholder participation, including through digital means, will be revisited in the preparations of the 2021 RFSD.

³ UN DESA survey: <https://sdgs.un.org/survey-impact-covid-19-pandemic-preparations-voluntary-national-reviews-stakeholder>.

⁴ See www.unece.org/rfsd.html.

⁵ Commission decision B (68) as contained in [E/2019/37 E/ECE/1488](https://www.unece.org/press/2019/37/E/ECE/1488).

⁶ See <https://unece-rcem.eu/media/regional-forum-on-sustainable-development-2020/>

⁷ See http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/sustainable-development/RFSD_2020/Annotated_agenda_UNECE_RCEM_pre-meeting_18_March_2020.pdf

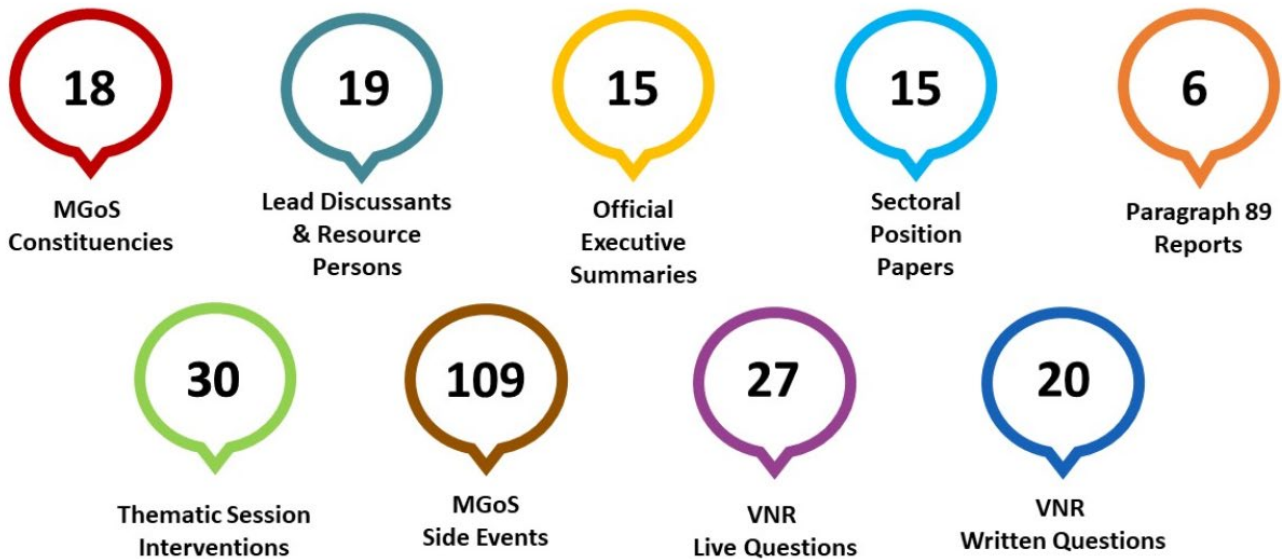
ANNEX

*Participation of Major Groups and other Stakeholders
in the 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*

Major Groups and other Stakeholders
HLPF 2020 in Numbers



**HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



Source: UN DESA