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GREEN ECONOMY UNECE WALKS THE TALK AND PREPARES FOR RIO

The spotlight will be on the green economy at Rio+20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. Much has been published and discussed about this new concept and how it might shape the future of humanity and its development paths. As the discussions leading to Rio emphasize, it is now time for action. UNECE is ready and already working to make this concept operational.

Ways in which the UNECE is supporting member States on the pathway towards a greener future include

UNECE provides policy solutions - Through instruments like the [UNECE Multilateral Environmental Conventions](#), UNECE provides legal frameworks and policy solutions in areas such as resource efficiency, emissions, green governance, health and environmental democracy.

UNECE fosters action - Two **action** plans have identified steps for countries to make the green economy concept operational in the forestry and [housing sectors](#). Both plans will be followed by examples of initiatives already undertaken at the national level to build knowledge and facilitate action.

UNECE assesses and advises - UNECE [Environmental Performance Reviews](#), [Country Profiles of the Housing Sector](#) and the [programme on environmental monitoring](#) and assessment observe how the green economy is mainstreamed into relevant policies and then recommendations follow.

UNECE develops standards - Though the work of its committees and expert groups, UNECE develops green standards. One example is the standards for cleaner and smarter vehicles developed by the [World Forum for the Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations](#).

UNECE builds networks - For instance, UNECE connects actors and shares knowledge on eco-innovations. This is done in cooperation with the private sector, to better identify business opportunities and address financial gaps.

UNECE encourages green investment - For example, by establishing dedicated [energy efficiency investment funds](#) and assisting project developers.

UNECE measures progress - In areas such as air pollution ceilings, energy efficiency performance bench-marking.

UNECE builds capacity - For example, UNECE helps countries to implement energy efficiency policies; to develop methods for environmental monitoring; and to produce data and indicators to assess environmental sustainability.

UNECE connects dots. UNECE understands that the green economy is a cross-sectoral challenge, and cannot be addressed without synergies. Integrated programmes like the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme ([THE PEP](#)) connect sectors and encourage them to work and plan together in support of sustainable development.

UNECE raises awareness. UNECE's [Education for Sustainable Development](#) programme, and its tool kit on sustainable forest management for youth are examples of how UNECE contributes to changing behavioral patterns towards sustainable consumption and production.

UNECE develops expertise. Experts and specialists meet in UNECE to develop understanding and elaborate policies in areas such as climate change adaptation, transport, paperless trade, sustainable housing, green real estate markets, and sustainable forest products.

UNECE publishes - UNECE works with experts to increase the knowledge of a wider audience through its publications, such as [Green Homes](#) or [Transport for Sustainable Development](#). □



LIBERALIZATION OF NATURAL GAS MARKETS AT VARIOUS STAGES THROUGHOUT UNECE REGION



The Working Party on Gas, at its 22nd Session held in Geneva, 24-25 January, noted that the liberalization of natural gas markets is at various stages throughout the UNECE region. Most countries that have liberalized have done so formally but rarely claim to have reached a satisfactory end state. Liberalization takes time and continuous adjustment of means and goals, but customers, especially wholesale, benefit on prices where liberalization is most advanced. The downside is that gas prices tend to be more volatile and there are fewer possibilities for governmental control. Liberalization leads to more integration and interconnection, as companies start carrying out business in neighboring markets.

The experts attending the Session were presented with the results of the study "The impact of liberalization of natural gas markets in the UNECE region: efficiency and security". The study, which will be issued shortly as an e-publication, concluded that whilst liberalization does work, much still needs to be done. Liberalization over the past decades has been based on a strong vision of a market that will bring its citizens more choice, more freedom and more efficiency. In a competitive setting companies have economic incentives to perform at their best. However, the process is neither simple nor fast. Historic and vested interests and the structure of the supply side represent obstacles that take time and perseverance to overcome. A certain amount of market oversight and regulation is necessary, but should be kept to a minimum when markets function properly. Liberalization can lead to a gas market that is affordable, sustainable and secure but it is difficult to balance these objectives.

The Working Party on Gas meeting also focused on the role of natural gas and gas infrastructure as an enabler of the renewable and low carbon economy. Natural gas will help deliver on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's new initiative, Sustainable Energy for All, which seeks to engage national governments, the private sector, and civil society partners to reach three global objectives by 2030:

- ensure universal access to modern energy services;
- double the rate of improvement in energy efficiency; and
- double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

Other issues discussed during the two-day expert meeting included: current status and prospects for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the UNECE region; the future of underground gas storage in view of the changes to natural gas supply and demand; and use of natural gas in transport in the UNECE region. □

For further information on the meeting, please visit:
<http://www.unece.org/energy/se/docs/wpgasx.html>.

OFF THE PRESS

UNECE REPORT ON ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA, 2011



THE UNECE REPORT
ON ACHIEVING THE
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The UNECE 2011 report on the Millennium Development Goals finds that despite having achieved relatively low levels of extreme poverty and nearly universal access to primary education, the emerging economies of the region are still faced with the challenge of improving outcomes in the following areas: gender equality, child and maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and environmental sustainability. The advanced industrial economies of the region need to intensify their efforts to contribute to a global partnership for development. Key obstacles to a more rapid MDG progress in the region include slow economic growth, uneven distribution of income, and social exclusion of vulnerable population groups.

The report includes two special chapters that review the availability and reliability of official MDG indicators and describe the situation of the Romani minority in transition economies of Central and South-Eastern Europe based upon data from the UNECE Generations and Gender Surveys. The report provides a comprehensive statistical annex. □

The report is available at:
[http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/UNECE MDG Report 2011.5Dec.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/publications/oes/UNECE_MDG_Report_2011.5Dec.pdf).

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