2020 Regional Forum

Peer Learning Segment:
Learning and Exchange on SDG Acceleration

The year 2020 marks the beginning of the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development, which was launched by world leaders at the UN Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2019. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has triggered progress in many areas. However, with only 10 years to go, the speed and scale of implementation is not sufficient yet to achieve the required sustainability transformation. Decisive action is needed to accelerate progress, including in the UNECE region with its mostly high- and middle-income countries.

The 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region, in particular the peer learning segment, will therefore adopt an action-oriented and forward-looking approach. It will focus on ambitious and impactful actions, commitments and multi-partner initiatives that will help speed up SDG implementation and deliver the necessary transformations across different areas.

The identification of the themes for the round tables has drawn on the entry points presented in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, which has also informed the possible range of issues that could be considered in each round table.

The description of the themes and some potential questions presented below aims to broadly characterize the potential space for discussion. In practice, the contribution of specific acceleration actions by governments and other actors will determine the actual content of each round table.

Round Table 4

Achieving carbon neutrality CO2
in the UNECE region

Friday, 20 March 2020, 10:00-12:30
Room 18, International Conference Centre of Geneva (CICG)

Economic prosperity depends on continued access to energy. However, the continued reliance on fossil fuels in a context of growing energy demand undermines climate change mitigation efforts. It is therefore necessary to explore the implications of and opportunities for moving to carbon neutrality by 2050. "Carbon neutrality" refers to achieving net zero carbon emissions by balancing carbon emissions with carbon removal.

Changes in lifestyles, new transport solutions and efficiency gains can curb down the expansion of energy demand. But this is insufficient: carbon neutrality would require a growing share of renewables in meeting energy needs and the fundamental

restructuring of many economic sectors. Technological change and nature-based solutions can contribute to accelerate the shift to carbon neutrality and widen policy options, including by making possible carbon removal.

Accelerating the achievement of carbon neutrality and the achievement of SDG 7 and other SDGs and SDG targets related to carbon neutrality may involve, among others:

- Targets and other initiatives in sectoral policies to create clear pathways for change.
- Use of economic incentives and regulations to encourage the transformation towards carbon neutrality.
- Initiatives to change lifestyle choices and consumption patterns.
- Development and uptake of technological solutions to speed up the transition.

Objectives and organization of the round table
Acceleration actions

The discussion of acceleration actions at the different round tables of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development would serve three purposes:

1. Facilitate mutual learning to enhance knowledge and improve decision-making and policy formulation.
2. Encourage further engagement from different actors to deliver concrete change.
3. Promote partnerships that may result in further actions or the enhanced impact of existing ones.

Acceleration actions discussed at the round tables can either be ongoing; they can scale up or complement existing actions; or they can be actions that are new or in the planning stage.

The actions, commitments and initiatives should contribute to SDG acceleration through their impact, scale or level of ambition. Acceleration actions should reflect interlinkages among SDGs and SDG targets. They can be presented for discussion at the round table primarily by governments, but also other stakeholders (international organizations, private sector, civil society, academia etc.). Actions can refer to national, local or international levels. Multi-partner initiatives are also welcome as they are likely to generate additional momentum. The round table could also serve to identify potential or additional partners.

Reflecting the mandate of the Regional Forum to create a space for UNECE member States for peer-learning and the exchange of policy experiences, the main focus of the discussions would be on drawing actionable lessons for policy-makers concerning, for example:

- Why are the selected actions expected to work as accelerators of SDG implementation?

- How will these actions be implemented? Which concrete problems are anticipated and how will they be addressed? What input can other participants provide to address challenges?
- How are other partners being engaged in the implementation?

Structure of round table

Following an initial thematic input, the discussions will be spearheaded by the presentation of about 3-5 acceleration actions introduced by different countries and other relevant stakeholders.

Member States are encouraged to contact the secretariat and indicate their willingness to introduce such actions. The presented acceleration actions will then be discussed, supported by a moderator/facilitator. Government representatives and participants with an interest in a specific acceleration action could act as discussants. There will also be space for a free-floating interactive discussion. The round table will finish with take-aways and follow-up actions that may have been identified in the discussion as reflected in the tentative scenario below.

Organizers

This round table is organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).