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 polices, 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 Report

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

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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/UNCE 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.

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Annex 1
Entry points and levers for transformative action identified in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Thursday, 19 March 2020</th>
<th>Friday, 20 March 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30-9:45</td>
<td><strong>Plenary Room</strong> &lt;br&gt; <strong>Peer Learning Segment</strong> &lt;br&gt; <strong>SIDE EVENTS</strong></td>
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<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td><strong>OPENING</strong> &lt;br&gt; <strong>High-level Policy Segment</strong> &lt;br&gt; Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the UNECE region</td>
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<td>11:00-13:00</td>
<td><strong>LUNCH BREAK / SIDE EVENTS</strong></td>
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<td>13:00-15:00</td>
<td><strong>Focus Event 1</strong> &lt;br&gt; Accelerating SDG progress through Voluntary National Reviews &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 1</strong> &lt;br&gt; Boosting human well-being and capabilities through health and education for all &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 2</strong> &lt;br&gt; Accelerating progress towards sustainable and circular economies &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 3</strong> &lt;br&gt; Delivering sustainable food and nutrition for people and planet</td>
<td><strong>Focus Event 2</strong> &lt;br&gt; New actors for green and inclusive change and innovation &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 4</strong> &lt;br&gt; Accelerating energy de-carbonization in the UNECE region &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 5</strong> &lt;br&gt; Pathways to sustainable cities in the UNECE region &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 6</strong> &lt;br&gt; Scaling up action for the sustainable management of natural resources &lt;br&gt; <strong>Round table 7</strong> &lt;br&gt; Leveraging data and statistics for SDG progress</td>
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<td>18:00</td>
<td><strong>RECEPTION</strong></td>
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<td>10:00-13:00</td>
<td><strong>Focus Event 3</strong> &lt;br&gt; Behavioural change for sustainable development &lt;br&gt; <strong>Focus Event 4</strong> &lt;br&gt; Economic transformation, finance and technology for SDG acceleration</td>
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<td>13:00-15:00</td>
<td><strong>LUNCH BREAK / SIDE EVENTS</strong></td>
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<td>15:00-16:00</td>
<td><strong>CLOSING</strong></td>
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