

## 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 5

# Pathways to sustainable cities in the UNECE region



**Friday, 20 March 2020, 10:00-12:30**

Room 3, International Conference Centre of Geneva (CICG)

Sustainable development requires a significant transformation of the way we plan and manage our urban spaces and urban infrastructure. The UNECE region is among the **most highly urbanized regions in the world** – with the rising share of the population living in cities already at over 75 per cent in Europe and 80 per cent in North America, and close to 50 per cent in Central Asia. This share is projected to continue to rise, making the issue of **sustainable urban development a critical dimension** for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region.

Cities are leading engines of **economic growth**, generating more than 80% of global GDP and serving as dynamic hubs for innovation, trade, connectivity, learning and

exchange. But to be sustainable, cities need **cleaner and greener practices**, and enhanced **responses and resilience to climate change**, **air pollution and natural and technological hazards**. They need to be **physically accessible, safe and socially inclusive** to leave no one behind. Sustainable urbanization has clear impacts on a wide range of issues within the 2030 Agenda, such as sustainable consumption and production, affordable and clean energy, sustainable transportation, clean water and sanitation, and life on land and others.

To accelerate progress towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE region, the **positive effects generated by sectoral policies and collaborative actions** need to be recognized and promoted. For instance, access to decent quality, affordable housing is not only a human right, but a factor that prevents social exclusion of the most vulnerable groups of society and induces economic stability of households. Improving energy efficiency of buildings mitigates Climate Change by reducing environmental footprint of cities. Designing transport systems that are efficient and well-integrated into urban environments does not only decrease the cost of transport, but also contributes to improvement of quality of life and well-being.

Therefore, the round table will focus on discussing policy initiatives, instruments and cross-sectoral partnerships that accelerate progress **towards sustainable cities** and the achievement of **SDG 11** and other SDGs and SDG targets related to sustainable cities:

- Policy initiatives that seek to promote **access to affordable and decent housing and basic services**.
- Instruments to **reduce the environmental foot print** of cities, increase **climate resilience**, improve **air quality**, manage waste and promote energy-efficiency measures in residential buildings.
- Investments in improving **sustainable transport and mobility** and creating **green public spaces**.
- Initiatives that seek to improve urban planning and management in **participatory and inclusive ways**.

## **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 International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and World Health Organization (WHO).

