

REGIONAL FORUM

ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE UNECE REGION

Thursday, 19 March 2020, 10:00-18:00

Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room XIX



[Advisory] Due to the outbreak of the **coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19)**, physical participation in the 2020 Regional Forum will be limited to delegations, speakers and experts based in the Geneva area. For participants as well as selected speakers based outside of Geneva, web-based participation ([UN Web TV](#)) will be possible.

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 Regional Forum, in its rescaled format due to the coronavirus crisis, will address SDG action and acceleration in four main plenary sessions. The sessions will be organized as moderated, interactive panel discussions focusing on the themes and guiding questions set out below.

Opening

Room XIX, 10:00-10:30



Chair of the Regional Forum

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to UN Office in Geneva



Ms. Amina J. Mohammed

Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations



Ms. Olga Algayerova

UNECE Executive Secretary and Under-Secretary-General

Session 1

Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the UNECE region

Room XIX, 10:30-11:30



Chair of the Regional Forum / Moderator

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to UN Office in Geneva

In session 1, participants will hear two substantive inputs that will help frame the discussions across the different sessions of the Regional Forum:



Keynote address through remote connection by **Professor Katherine Richardson (Denmark)** , member of the Independent Group of Scientists that drafted the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and Leader of the Sustainability Science Center at the University of Copenhagen, introducing the key messages from the GSDR and their implications for the UNECE region.

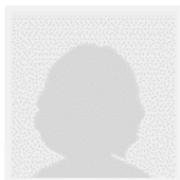


Introduction of the Regional SDG Progress Report by the Director of the UNECE Statistical Division, **Ms. Lidia Bratanova**.

The substantive inputs will be followed by Questions and Answers (Q&A) on the preceding presentations. The presentations and the Regional SDG Progress Report will be shared with delegations in advance of the meeting to enable them to prepare questions and comments.

In addition to the two presentations, key messages from three groups of stakeholders will be presented:


Civil society



Speaker *(TBC)*

Youth



Ms. Tina Hočevár 
Vice President,
European Youth Forum

Business sector



Mr. Crispin Conroy
Representative Director of the
International Chamber of
Commerce (ICC) in Geneva

The timing of the reformatted session does not allow for prepared general statements by delegations and participants to be read out. Written statements should be sent to the secretariat (regionalforumunece@un.org) for posting on the website of the Regional Forum

(<http://www.unece.org/rfsd.html>) and for considering them in the preparation of the meeting report.

Session 2

Accelerating SDG progress through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

Room XIX, 11:30 – 13:00



Chair of the Regional Forum / Moderator

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to UN Office in Geneva

Speakers



Mr. László Borbély 

State Counsellor to the Prime Minister, Government of Romania



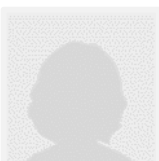
Mr. Anton Tsvetov 

Deputy Director, Department of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects, Ministry of Economic Development, Russian Federation



Mr. Jacques Ducrest 

Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda of Switzerland



Representative, **Civil Society** (TBC)

The **objective of the session on VNRs** is:

- To provide a space for discussion and exchange of experiences for participants of the Regional Forum on the **contribution of VNRs to the implementation of the SDGs** in UNECE member States.
- To **identify main lessons learnt** and compile a set of recommendations that can be shared at the global level on how to improve VNRs in the next HLPF cycle with a view to ensuring that they contribute more effectively to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The session will consider the **following issues**:

- Has the VNR process allowed you to **identify specific challenges** in implementing the SDGs and possible solutions to address them? Are there any initiatives that were triggered or strengthened by the preparation of the VNR? Have all sectors and levels of government been engaged in the VNR process? How have other stakeholders been involved?
- How can future VNRs **focus more on showing progress and the impact** of measures taken? To what extent should they become more analytical and include the use of data and effective monitoring of implementation? Should there be complementary reports by other stakeholders?
- Should there be a **feedback loop** showing progress achieved between two VNRs? What role could the Regional Forum play in this regard?

Background

The VNRs aim to accelerate implementation by leading to an exchange of experiences, lessons learned and launch of partnerships, based on an evidence-based and inclusive national review process.

In the UNECE region, 54 out of the 56 UNECE member States will have undertaken a VNR by 2020, which accounts for more than 95% of its membership. At the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), 13 member States (5 for the second time) from the UNECE region will be presenting their voluntary national reviews.

In the on-going HLPF review a number of ideas have been advanced how to improve the VNRs and ensure that they contribute better to accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

These relate to

- The frequency of VNRs
- The preparation and content: ensuring the use of data and effective monitoring and evaluation of implementation and making VNRs conducive to peer learning and the sharing of lessons learned and advice at the HLPF
- The link of VNRs with the decade of action by showcasing concrete actions to be taken
- The role of the Regional Forums in strengthening presentation of the VNRs at the HLPF
- Time allocated and feedback on VNRs including possible recommendations at the HLPF
- The connection between VNRs, including a feedback loop from one to the next VNR
- The follow up to VNRs.

As there may not be enough time for feedback discussion at HLPF, participants may wish to consider if some of these discussions could also take place at the regional level in the RFSDs.

Before presenting a VNR at the HLPF, countries could present their assessment of progress in specific areas since the previous VNR at the RFSD, for discussion among peers, and perhaps seeking new partnerships to assist with further acceleration measures. The results of these discussions could then become part of the VNR presentations at the HLPF.

Session 3

Actions for green and inclusive change

Room XIX, 15:00-16:30



Chair of the Regional Forum

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to UN Office in Geneva



Moderator

Mr. Nikhil Seth

Executive Director, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

Speakers



H.E. Ambassador Mr. Sadik Arslan

Permanent Representative of Turkey to UN Office in Geneva



Ms. Outi Honkatukia 

Chief Negotiator for Climate Change
Ministry of the Environment Finland

[Finland: carbon neutrality by 2035](#)



Ms. Monika Skadborg 

President, Danish Youth Council

[The Youth Climate Council as channel of youth engagement in Denmark](#)



Ms. Paola Deda

Director of UNECE Forests, Land and Housing Division

[The city of Helsingborg, Sweden: The Trees in Cities Challenge](#)

Reflecting the Regional Forum's focus on SDG acceleration and action, Session 3 will highlight a number of acceleration actions that were submitted for discussion by member States and other stakeholders.

The selected 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 refer to national, local or international levels.

The session also includes actions by new groups of actors that have triggered additional momentum and have been able to influence the policy agenda and spearhead change, such as youth and cities.

The session will highlight selected actions by governments and other stakeholders to accelerate SDG progress in key substantive areas, such as sustainable and circular economies, sustainable food, carbon neutrality and sustainable natural resources management.

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?
- What is the impact of new actors on change in societies and how can it be amplified?
- 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?

Session 4

Economic transformation, finance and technology for SDG acceleration

Room XIX, 16:30-17:45



Chair of the Regional Forum

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to UN Office in Geneva



Moderator

Mr. Bruno Pozzi

Regional Director for Europe
UN Environment

Speakers



Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)



Ms. Eva Zabey

Executive Director
[Business for Nature](#)



Ms. Marianne Haahr 

Director
[Sustainable Digital Finance Alliance](#)



Mr. Steven Stone

Chief, Resources and Markets Branch, Economy Division,
UN Environment

Re-directing procurement and financial flows away from nature-destructive activities towards greener products and **investments on sustainability**, including nature-based solutions, can restore biodiversity, boost livelihoods and health, and create climate resilience. Investment in low-carbon energy technologies, is a key element of the transition to sustainable societies, which is growing rapidly and **reshaping our economies**. However, overall financing for sustainable development remains insufficient. Digital **technologies offer new possibilities** for de-materialisation and greater transparency on product use and material flows, while creating new ways of operating and participating in the economy for producers and users. These opportunities should be exploited to support the transition to sustainability. The necessary large-scale transformation will create new jobs but also put pressure on some sectors and occupations, with social implications that need to be addressed. To respond to planetary, social and economic challenges, a rapid, integrated and just green transition is needed.

The objective of this session, co-organized by UN Environment and ITU, is:

- To provide a space for discussion and exchange of experiences for participants on how **economic transformation, finance and technology** can contribute to SDG acceleration.
- To increase understanding of the **role of impact-based business and finance in SDG acceleration**.
- To **encourage new commitments to align economic policies and financial systems** with SDGs and the 1.5-degree Celsius global targets.

Some of the issues considered may include:

- What are the underlying **drivers of the necessary transition** to sustainability? Where are the jobs, innovation and growth opportunities in “1.5 degree lifestyles”? What is the role of sustainable procurement in SDG acceleration?
- Who will finance this **structural transformation**? How can we ensure that potential negative impacts on employment in some sectors and inequality are addressed? How to make the SDGs our flight path to a just transition?
- What are the **key sectors that need to be transformed** to rapidly advance towards climate neutrality and rebalance impacts on nature?
- How can **innovative technologies** be used to facilitate the necessary transformation, including by providing new tools for environmental advocacy, awareness-raising and monitoring of SDG implementation?
- How can the emergence of new, **impact-based business** models be supported?

Closing

Room XIX, 17:45 – 18:00



Chair of the Regional Forum

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Vaqif Sadiqov

Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to UN Office in Geneva



Ms. Olga Algayerova

UNECE Executive Secretary and Under-Secretary-General



Ms. Tatiana Valovaya

Director- General of UN Geneva

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The Regional Forum is convened by UNECE in close cooperation with the Regional UN System.