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Item 7

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Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region

Organization of the 2022 Regional Forum

(for information)

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Organization of the 2022 Regional Forum

Note by the secretariat

I. Background and global review of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2022

1. At its sixty-ninth session in April 2021, the Commission decided to continue to convene annual sessions of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region in the years 2022 and 2023, in close cooperation with the entities of the regional United Nations system and with the active engagement of other relevant stakeholders.¹

2. Pursuant to the mandate and in line with the established practice, the agenda of the sixth session of the Regional Forum, to be held in 2022, will be developed in close consultation with member States. Furthermore, the agenda will be aligned with the theme and the programme of work of the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (HLPF), for which the following parameters have been set²:

- Theme for the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of ECOSOC: “*Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.*”
- Set of five SDGs to be discussed in-depth at the 2022 HLPF:
 - 4 (quality education);
 - 5 (gender equality);
 - 14 (life below water – oceans, seas and marine resources);
 - 15 (life on land – terrestrial ecosystems, forests, desertification, land degradation, biodiversity);
 - 17 (partnerships for the goals).

II. Format and content of the 2022 Regional Forum – considerations and options

3. Despite the progress in COVID-19 vaccine roll-outs across the region as well as in Switzerland, the COVID-19 pandemic remains ongoing. Consequently, there are uncertainties regarding the continuation or re-introduction of public health measures and travel restrictions and the readiness of participants to travel to Geneva.

4. In addition, the continuously reduced capacity of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) to service official meetings with interpretation as well as the restricted availability of meeting rooms due to the renovation of the Palais des Nations will need to be taken into account in the preparatory process.

5. Against this background, the secretariat has secured a room reservation for the 2022 Regional Forum in the Palais as follows:

- **Plenary room XX** (Human Rights room): Wednesday, 6 April 2022, 10:00-13:00 and Thursday, 7 April 2022, 15:00-18:00 (with E/F/R interpretation);

¹ Decision C (69), [E/2021/37-E/ECE/1494](#).

² General Assembly resolution [A/RES/75/290 B](#).

- **Tempus rooms 1, 2 and 3** for three parallel round tables: Wednesday, 6 April 2022, 15:00-18:00 and Thursday, 7 April 2022, 10:00-13:00 (with E/F/R interpretation for two out of three parallel sessions).

6. It has been communicated by UNOG that reservations for 2022 are for physical meeting formats. The UNOG Director-General has informed Member States that in 2021, the additional costs associated with hybrid/virtual meetings have been covered through exceptional funding arrangements. Provisions for these additional costs, however, have not been included in the 2022 budget proposal.³ Therefore, the funding of hybrid/virtual meeting components serviced by UNOG currently remains open and may have to be (fully or partially) provided by meeting organizers.

7. Given these circumstances, the organization of the 2022 Regional Forum will be based on the following scenarios and elements:

- **Basic scenario: In-person plenary and peer learning sessions.** In this setting, the aim would be to attract the physical participation of high-level representatives, experts and other participants for all sessions of the Regional Forum, within the framework of the travel regulations to be applied by the Swiss Confederation in April 2022 and the UNOG meeting guidelines that will be in place.

The following costs for the basic scenario are covered by the Regular Budget:

- Meeting rooms as per above reservation;
- E/F/R interpretation for the plenary sessions and 4 out of 6 peer learning sessions.

To ensure physical participation, inclusiveness, outreach and quality of the meeting in the basic scenario, the following elements would need to be funded by extra-budgetary contributions:

- Financial support for travel for eligible government delegates and other participants;
 - Additional interpretation for 2 peer learning sessions;
 - Short-term consultancy (3 months) to support logistics and communication to partially offset the loss of a full-time Junior Professional Officer (JPO) in the ECE Sustainable Development and Gender Unit (SDGU);
 - Webcast, captioning and sign language interpretation.
- **Scenarios with additional hybrid or virtual meeting components:** To provide participants with a choice regarding their mode of participation, hybrid or virtual meeting components could be added to the above basic scenario. Depending on the organizational and technical complexity of the format, this may lead to significant XB funding needs. Three possible scenarios could be envisaged, which are presented as follows in order of increasing costs and complexity:

a) Hybrid plenary sessions and virtual peer learning sessions. In this setting, hybrid plenary sessions would be combined with fully virtual peer learning sessions.

Additional costs associated with this option to be covered by extra budgetary (XB) funding:

- The use and servicing of a virtual platform offered by UNOG for hybrid plenary sessions;

³ See Note Verbale of the UNOG Director-General to Permanent Missions dated 14 June 2021.

- The use and servicing of an additional virtual platform for all peer learning sessions (which could be obtained via the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from a provider based in a programme country and including interpretation at rates much lower than standard prices charged by UNOG; this model was used for the peer learning roundtables in 2021);
- Short-term consultancy (3 months) to support logistics, technical preparations and communication.

b) Hybrid plenary sessions and mix of hybrid and virtual peer learning sessions. In this approach, the plenary sessions and some of the peer learning sessions could be held in hybrid mode, allowing for both physical and virtual participation. Additional peer learning sessions could be held in virtual format only, in line with demand and the preferences of the respective lead organizers (e.g. regional UN system partners).

Additional XB funding needs associated with the hybrid and virtual meeting components:

- The use and servicing of a virtual platform offered by UNOG for hybrid plenary and peer learning sessions;
- The use and servicing of an additional virtual platform for virtual peer learning sessions (which could be procured via UNDP at economical rates);
- Additional interpretation for virtual peer learning sessions;
- Short-term consultancy (4 months) to support logistics, technical preparations and communication.

c) Fully hybrid 2022 Regional Forum for all plenary and peer learning sessions. In this scenario, delegates would have the choice between physical and virtual participation for all plenary and peer learning sessions.

Additional costs to be covered by XB funding:

- The use and servicing of a virtual platform offered by UNOG for all sessions (e.g. Interprefy or Zoom), which may lead to significant funding needs;
- Short-term consultancy (4 months) to support logistics, technical preparations and communication.

8. Side events and preparatory consultations by civil society, youth, parliamentarians, business organizations, and academia would continue to be held in virtual format only, with virtual platforms provided by the organizers (unless the funding situation would allow using a uniform and coherent virtual platform for both peer learning and side events). The number of side events may need to be limited in view of staff constraints. Representatives of the different stakeholder groups would have the opportunity to feed their key messages into the Regional Forum.

9. Furthermore, it will be important to explore meaningful linkages between the Regional Forum and the second ECE Forum of Mayors, which will be held on 4 and 5 April 2022 back-to-back with the Regional Forum. The event will provide a platform for Mayors from the ECE region to exchange information on experiences and best practices on city-level policies and practices.

10. The 2022 Regional Forum could be held under the theme “*Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region*”. Plenary sessions could focus on a high-level policy debate and cross-cutting issues related to COVID-19 recovery and acceleration of Sustainable

Development Goals (SDG) progress as well as on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Peer learning sessions for governments and other stakeholders could cover policy issues related to the 5 SDGs under in-depth review, highlighting concrete policies and actions. Main actors in the peer learning sessions should be government representatives, supported by the regional UN system, its Issue-based Coalitions, UN Resident Coordinators and other relevant partners (e.g. the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN), UNOG SDG Lab). A subregional angle could be useful to address some of the issues in a meaningful way and among a more homogenous constituency (involving subregional partners and UN Resident Coordinators).

11. To support the discussions at the 2022 Regional Forum, the yearly report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the ECE region will be prepared as mandated, focusing on the set of SDGs under in-depth review and using existing data sets and statistics.

12. The outcome of the 2022 Regional Forum – a report with a Chair’s or Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions – will be submitted to the global level as the official input from the ECE region to the 2022 HLPF. As it has been the practice, participants will be able to provide comments on the draft report.

13. Following the expiry of the current extrabudgetary project E348 supporting the Regional Forum on 30 November 2021, a new project will be submitted to the Executive Committee (EXCOM) in December 2021. Within the current project, contributions by the Czech Republic, the Russian Federation and Switzerland have made it possible to cover costs for contractual services such as additional interpretation, virtual platforms, consultancy, webcast, captioning and sign language. In addition, Germany has funded a JPO to support preparations of the Regional Forum, who was placed in SDGU until May 2021. Contributions to the new project would be in particular needed to cover additional costs for meeting components as outlined above. The secretariat will aim at providing cost estimates for the different elements in the informal consultations. Pledges by delegations would need to be received in the course of November 2021 in order to submit a sufficiently funded project to EXCOM in December.

III. Next steps

14. EXCOM may wish to request the secretariat to launch a process of informal consultations with the aim to develop the format and the provisional agenda of the 2022 Regional Forum, to be submitted to the 119th EXCOM meeting in December 2021. The first round of informal consultations could be organized in hybrid format on Friday, 22 October 2021, 10:00 – 12:00, room XXIV.
