

*ECOSOC Contribution to the
75th Anniversary Commemoration of the United Nations*

Where are we heading? Visions and scenarios for the future of the SDGs following the COVID-19 crisis

17 July 2020 from 9:00 to 9:45 am

BACKGROUND NOTE¹

The General Assembly, in resolution 72/305, decided that the ECOSOC High-level Segment would focus on “*future trends and scenarios related to the Council theme, the long-term impact of current trends, such as contribution of new technologies, in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the SDGs based on the work of the UN and other regional and international organizations and bodies as well as other stakeholders.*”

This year, as part of this discussion, the High-level Segment will address the current COVID-19 pandemic and its economic, social and environmental effects on the SDGs. The COVID-19 outbreak has mobilized emergency action at local and national level. It has reaffirmed the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation and governance to deal with global emergencies in areas, such as health or climate change. The fast spreading character of COVID-19 and similar pandemics requires strong political will and capacity at the global level to effectively and efficiently coordinate the actions of States. In this context it is important to reflect on the changes required for the United Nations to play such a coordinating role. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlights the need for stronger and more resilient public health and emergency response systems, particularly in developing countries.

This high-level policy dialogue will address scenarios and projections around food security and sustainable food systems, climate change, biodiversity, energy, water, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, as well as poverty and inequality, including the widening digital divide.

¹ This background note has been prepared by the UN Secretariat.

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The discussion will be informed by two complementary reports of the Secretary-General: one on the ECOSOC theme of “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: Realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development” (E/HLS/2020/59) and another on “Long-term future trends and scenarios—impacts in the economic, social and environmental areas on the realization of the SDGs” (E/HLS/2020/60).

To advance the thinking around transformative pathways that can advance the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, the first report discusses particular accelerated actions required during and beyond the response to COVID-19 along pathways for reducing income inequality and eradicating extreme poverty, as well as reducing CO₂ emissions to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Looking beyond the current COVID-19 crisis, governments need to focus on continuing efforts to make healthcare, social protection and governance systems more responsive to acute shocks, with a view to enabling countries to recover better.

The second report presents a set of best-case, aspirational long-term scenarios in line with the SDGs and contrasts them with business-as-usual and worst-case scenario outcomes for 2030 and 2050. It also explores the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as new Internet technologies and artificial intelligence. Current and near-term decisions in these two areas are expected to strongly influence our capacity and available options to deal with other great sustainability challenges that humanity is facing in the longer run.

The Davos-style roundtables will welcome speakers from Governments and international organizations that have produced long-term planning documents, scenarios or projections for the timeline of the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

Guiding questions

- What are the long-term implications of current and near-term decisions, such as those to address COVID-19 or the impacts of new Internet and artificial intelligence technologies? How will they influence our capacity and available options to deal with other great sustainability challenges that humanity is facing in the longer run?
- How can governments turn the COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity to “build back better”? What are the most important policies and actions to overcome the current global economic crisis and put the world on a pathway towards the SDGs, eradicating extreme poverty, saving the environment, and “leaving no one behind”? What could be achieved with much higher water, energy and materials efficiencies?
- How can governments better shockproof healthcare, social protection and other key systems



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and institutions for unexpected events like COVID-19?

- What role can governments and the United Nations play in the coming decade to strengthen solutions-oriented international cooperation on sustainable development?



Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development