

As delivered 10 July 2017

Statement by UNECE Executive Secretary, Ms. Olga Algayerova

Session 2: Implementation at the regional and sub-regional levels
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TRENDS AND PROGRESS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL: UNECE region

Thank you, Mr. President. Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

SDGs are universal and therefore relevant for all countries in the UNECE region. The interest in SDGs and their translation into policy actions is shown by the strong participation of both advanced and middle income UNECE member States in Voluntary National Reviews.

These are still early days, so initial efforts have focused on revising, adapting and developing new policy frameworks for SDG implementation.

National implementation plans do not take place in a vacuum. There is a need to understand how SDGs relate to already existing initiatives – what needs to be revised, complemented or amended. Consultative processes have been used in many countries in the ECE region to carry out these initial assessments.

Policy coherence will be critical for SDG implementation. Given the cross-sectoral nature of SDGs, a particular emphasis has been made across the region in facilitating government coordination across multiple policy areas, which remains a challenging task. Policy coherence also concerns the alignment of domestic and international actions. In our region, many countries have already revised their development cooperation efforts to better support the implementation of SDGs.

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Overall, the process of incorporating the SDGs into national and legal policy frameworks seems well advanced in the region.

Despite ongoing progress, further efforts are required even in the most advanced countries. Existing challenges, namely continued environmental pressures, social polarisation, persistent gender inequalities, ageing.... need to be addressed for sustained, broad and synchronized economic recovery but the legacy effects of past economic downturns persist, resulting in still elevated levels of unemployment, increased inequality and constrained social spending in some countries.

Progress is often mixed. In health, for example, an overall positive picture, with increases in life expectancy, reduced maternal mortality and a downward trend in non-communicable diseases, masks significant differences within and between countries and population groups. One area that requires significant improvement and where UNECE is heavily involved is road safety: if progress on deaths from road injuries continues at the current rate, the UNECE region will fall short of the target of a 50 per cent reduction in fatalities related to road traffic by 2020. Past success in reducing air pollution has increased life expectancy in Europe, as shown in the latest scientific assessment of the UNECE Air Convention, but it remains the greatest environmental health risk in the region, with a large human and economic cost.

Gender equality is a goal in itself as well as a means to achieve all other goals, which cannot be met without an end to gender discrimination. However, much remains to be done and funding – both at the national and international levels- remains in many cases insufficient. Gender pay gaps are persistent and basic services– high-quality childcare and long-term care for the elderly- are underprovided.

The SDGs open a new role for international cooperation, creating new opportunities to work together.

A defining feature of many of the fragilities the region is facing – from the looming challenges posed by

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climate change to large migration movements- is that they are better addressed through international cooperation.

Numerous SDGs and targets have a transboundary dimension. For some, in particular, a transboundary approach is critical to frame policy issues and propose actions to address identified problems. These transboundary questions are often better tackled from a sub-regional perspective. This is an area where UNECE works actively, including in relation to questions such as transboundary waters and transboundary environmental impact assessments.

- Thank you very much for your attention.

1. DRIVERS OF CHANGE

- Thank you Mr. Chair, I see six drivers of change in the UNECE region:
- **The overall policy and regulatory framework should encourage changes in behaviours that advance SDG implementation.** UNECE is strongly involved in the production of norms and standards through an intergovernmental machinery that can adapt flexibly to the needs and demands of its members. These norms and standards shape the behaviour of economic agents – governments, consumers and the private sector- and effectively deliver change. Our normative outputs are already being aligned with SDGs.
- **Business opportunities have emerged in connection with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.** The private sector is increasingly aware that addressing sustainability is necessary and can be profitable. Engaging the private sector in SDG implementation will be critical for progress. This will require effective communication, using a language that the business sector

understands, but also the certainty that business craves and that can be provided by effective regulations.

- **Horizontal and vertical coordination across different policy areas and government levels is important because it involves multiple stakeholders.** A “whole of government” approach should be supplemented with a “whole of society” dimension in policy design and implementation.
- **Effective policy action requires attracting new allies and actors.** While it is true that the ultimate responsibility for SDG implementation lies with national governments, many required actions need to take place at the subnational and local levels. Some coalitions of support to advance SDGs are established at subnational levels.
- **Civil society and academia will play a strong role in the implementation of SDGs.** Some countries in our region are making the mobilization of civil society a defining feature of their plans for SDG implementation. But, in addition to the engagement of civil society through organized groups, individual citizens, through their own initiatives and personal commitments, can also make a meaningful contribution. Communication and awareness campaigns remain important to ensure broad mobilization of efforts. Civil society, for instance, played a very important role at our regional forum highlighting issues of particular groups like, for instance, people with disabilities.
- **Partnerships will be required to effectively deliver on the SDGs.** UNECE is working closely with other members of the UN family, namely with other regional commissions, to bring in expertise and different perspectives required for effective solutions. The multi-stakeholder Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region provides a platform for the exchange of experiences

and policy debate, including with civil society organizations and the private sector. Thank you for your attention.

2. LESSONS LEARNED AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL IN RELATION TO THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Thank you, Mr. Chair. **One of the most important means of implementation is the financial resources.** This will require the engagement of the private sector but also a strengthening of international cooperation.
- **Tapping into appropriate sources of financing is critical to mobilize the investment through which effective change will take place.** I will give an example. The rapid growth of green finance is an auspicious trend in this regard. For example, green bond issuance has increased rapidly, with around \$200 billion outstanding and projects for possibly \$ 130 billion to be issued in 2017, according to the Climate Bonds Initiative. There is a growing awareness that incentive structures in financial markets need to be changed in order to appropriately reflect sustainability issues.
- **Blended finance, i.e. the combination of private and public resources, can be an effective tool to raise the necessary financial means.**
- **The collaboration between the public and the private sectors can take the form of well-structured public-private partnerships (PPP).** UNECE is promoting “people-first” public-private partnerships and developing standards and best practice models in PPPs. One of the criteria used in these efforts is the degree to which projects engage with all stakeholders, including the citizens who are the main beneficiaries of infrastructure and public services.

- **ODA will continue to play a critical role in meeting development needs.** We cannot fail to recognize the critical character of international public funding. While some trends are positive, others give reasons for concern. Preliminary OECD figures for 2016 show that only six countries met the target of 0.7 per cent of GNI. This is little – but an improvement. ODA continues to increase but not to least developed countries.

- **Data is the essential for evidence-based policies and also a tool to ensure the political visibility of different groups and their problems.** However, disaggregated data – by income, gender, age, disability...- ensures that averages do not obscure the plight of particular groups and prompts devising policies that leave no one behind. This is why it is so important that we support our member States in building the necessary capacity at the national level. And there is much to do in this regard. There are numerous data gaps – including in developed countries- and the overall implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics is limited. However, it must be acknowledged that the requests for more resources for statistics compete with other development demands. Having the right priorities and putting in place efficient, cost-effective strategies remains therefore paramount. Thank you for your attention.