

Cross-sectoral Cooperation for SDG Achievement in Europe and Central Asia

On 11 May, 2017, the Regional UN System in Europe and Central Asia held a briefing on “Cross-Sectoral Cooperation for SDG Achievement in Europe and Central Asia”. New ways of cooperation amongst regional UN-entities were outlined in order to tackle SDG-related challenges. Further, an updated Regional Advocacy Paper titled, “Building more inclusive, Sustainable and Prosperous Societies in Europe and Central Asia: From Vision to Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals” will be launched as a result of this cooperation.



[Map of UNECE region]

Opening Remarks

Mr. Christian Friis Bach, Chair of the Regional Coordination, the Under-Secretary-General, and the UNECE Executive Secretary set the stage with opening remarks, speaking on how to achieve and implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in close cooperation with the United Nations (UN).

In past years' initiatives were taken to strengthen cooperation that resulted in a Regional Advocacy Paper, which included 14 issue briefs to describe concrete steps to achieve the SDGs and is already off to a promising start. The Paper also includes the transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the SDGs, looking back at what still needs to be achieved; the Agenda 2030 is now relevant for all countries and sectors included.

Regarding developments, Mr. Bach noted that income disparities have widened in some countries, performance and GDP growth is still a concern, and the matter of ecology still needs to be addressed.

Air pollution and costs: a significant health and economic issue as there have been increased mortality rates in the region due to air pollution. Health costs and budget are affected due to the side-effects of air pollution.

Climate change mitigation: significant challenges persists despite declining emissions and the region is not close to the 2 degrees C° limit. Renewable energy remains far from where it needs to be regarding the Paris Agreement. These challenges need to be tackled with new financial developments.

Gender disparities persists: the region has not yet managed to close the gender gap and significant gender challenges such as economic empowerment of women and the gender wage gap have to be undertaken.

Economic challenges: “barriers to export” and barriers to companies, especially medium-sized companies need to be taken down and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Trade agreements have challenges that need to be addressed.

Infrastructure needs to be improved: infrastructure is declining, for example, regarding quality but there are have been some positive results. Hospitals, schools, roads and the like nonetheless require attention.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is necessary: in order to meet the SDGs together with forming a global partnership the ODA vital.

A survey was conducted on how far countries need to go: in terms of achieving the SDGs there is a need for extensive statistics in order to assess the “readiness” of countries. The Conference of European Statisticians is assisting with this aspect with indicators and road maps to ensure that countries can deliver. Additionally, transparency and openness are needed to disseminate the statistics in order to take action and politicians are urged to do more in their capacities.

Formal follow-up and review at the regional level: mechanisms to build platforms that bring together UN agencies such as joint-events and platforms to integrate everyone need to be established and/or utilized.

Also opening was, **Ms. Cihan Sultanoglu**, Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group (UNDG) for Europe and Central Asia, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Assistant Secretary-General, and the Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) who gave an overview of the key measures, findings, and main issues. She noted that information was gathered since 2013 through country and regional statistics and surveys.

The 2030 Agenda is transformative for development and is manifested in four dimensions:

1. Addressing inequalities as there is a 12.7% rise and cannot help achieve the Agenda.
2. MDGs did not exclusively include human rights, therefore, they have to be included in the Agenda.
3. Gender equality and women’s empowerment is imperative. For instance, rural women still face particular inequalities with regards to land, economics, political spheres, and violence against women.
4. Citizen engagement particularly with the youth is vital.

Ms. Sultanoglu also noted that cross-sectional linkages are valuable lessons to be learnt and needed to be built on. Some of the lessons learned were; demand for greater integration, at the regional level the UN is developing cross-sectional linkages and there is engagement with experts inside and outside of the UN, dialogue expansion is necessary and the UN serves as a convening platform for civil society and other relevant actors. Additionally, the Regional Paper highlights activities to assess what needs to be done next.

The 2030 Agenda includes the following themes to be presented:

- People – Advancing on Social Inclusion, Security and Protection
- Prosperity – Boosting Economic Development
- Planet – Protecting Earth for Future Generations
- Peace and Partnership – Securing People, Prosperity and Planet through Strong Governance.



Summary of Event

People – Advancing on Social Inclusion, Security and Protection

Ms. Alanna Armitage, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia presented on this issue beginning by re-establishing the fact that people are at the heart of the SDGs as it is by and for the people.

Regionally, in terms of *population dynamics* late child bearing and prosperity has led to an increase in the number of older persons; thus, fertility rates are crucial. Human capital needs to be strengthened and adjusting social institutions, education and health also need strengthening in order to adapt towards the SDGs. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region¹ has seen uneven progress regarding *gender equality*. Despite the labour force being high for women they still earn less than men and are the majority in low paying jobs even though this constitutes longer hours. Progress and participation remains slow and civil society

¹ The UNECE region covers more than 47 million square kilometres. Its member States include the countries of Europe, but also countries in North America (Canada and United States), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Western Asia (Israel). Today, UNECE has 56 member States.

space, despite being highly important is shrinking. In some countries, there is a re-traditional role of women coming into place, for example, regarding maternal care and being at home. As well, harmful practices that adversely affect women remain high.

Policy recommendations – there is a need to transform the distribution of opportunities. For enhanced social protection and to break the cycles of poverty pensions and social rights should be linked to informal employment and additional sources of revenue need to be identified. Attention should be paid to elderly women as they are at a particular risk.

Health and wellbeing for all – there have been substantial health improvements such as in life expectancy at birth, additionally, there has been progress with non-communicable diseases (NDCs). Most countries offer a near universal health care coverage but is still fragile. Maternal mortality is low but some groups are still at risk, for example, Roma communities. Finally, the ECE region is the only case where HIV continues to rise rapidly.

Education and life-long learning - has seen many advances but concerns remain regarding inclusion and quality especially for Roma communities and the poor where improvements are essential. Boys and girls segregation needs to be closed and more educational opportunities are needed especially for children and the elderly.

Refugees and migrants – the issue of territory and asylum are areas of concern as is violence against women, which persists; this is the case with regions such as Tajikistan. Regarding public health implications refugees and migrants are left behind and there is a strong need for region wide solutions.

Prosperity – Boosting Economic Development

Mr. Heinz Werner Koller, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia presented on the issue of Prosperity. On *sustainable agriculture and rural development*, he mentioned that *food security* has a direct impact on hunger and nutrition but women, migration, climate change and other factors needs to be taken into consideration. Additionally, obesity, diets and malnutrition are also areas of concern. Rural areas are more affected due to lack of opportunities and access to services amongst others and they remain areas of prevalent high risk inequality. Particular attention needs to be paid to the phenomenon of climate change, water availability, extreme weather events etc.

Policy recommendations – climate change adoption measures need to be applied. Investment needs to be promoted, agricultural innovations systems established, data and indicators introduced, and drafting of policies to improve the lives and conditions of small shareholders and farmers.

Changing production patterns – there needs to be better use of shifting consumption use and shifting to a green economy and structure production. Agriculture and transport remain energy inefficient and middle-income countries face challenges of lowering carbon footprints and minimising harmful production patterns. Women can make great advances but make up only 40% of production.

Policy recommendations – there is a need to move to a more circular economy and green industry that focuses on “recycle, reuse, reduce” philosophy. International partnerships need to be fostered and awareness about sustainable production among all actors must be raised. There also needs to be more support for the transition towards low-carbon emissions.

Changing consumption patterns – “Do more and better with less” attitude along with a producer to consumer systemic approach should be adopted. Inequalities in quantity and quality of food such as meats and sugar based products persist warranting a shift in life-style and behaviour patterns. This should also be applied to other sectors such as transport where car ownership and use of cars is too high; an increase in the use of cars leads to an increase in in-activity.

Policy recommendations – there is a need to strengthen coordinated government action and promote public procurement practices that are sustainable (green economy may be expensive but will pay off in the long-term). Public transport schemes should be put in place such as bolstering bicycle use and accessibility to green areas. Use of regulatory, progressive, economic, information-based instruments (for example, windows preventing heat escape) should be increased. It is essential to face policies such as subsidized road infrastructure and the use of productive services systems such as car-sharing. Gender sensitive interventions must be promoted.

Decent jobs for all – decent jobs are core elements for achieving the SDGs, for instance, it improves mental well-being and is integral to reducing inequalities. Unfortunately, there has been sluggish growth in the labour market and employment, which affects wages that in-turn adversely affects vulnerable groups such as young people. Women in the workforce remains a concern especially regarding unpaid care work. The decline in remittances in Central Asia is becoming a major concern.

Policy recommendations – create and improve investments, particularly small and - sized enterprises (SMEs) and comprehensive gender-sensitive employment policies. Enhance labour market data, implement a combination of labour market policies and create incentives for a green economy. Revisit budgeters and fiscal policies, improve social dialogue mechanisms and revise migration policies.

Conclusion – Mr. Koller concluded by remarking that the SDGs function as an interconnected system. The approach to implementation, therefore, needs to be holistic and comprehensive.



Figure 1 Circular Economy

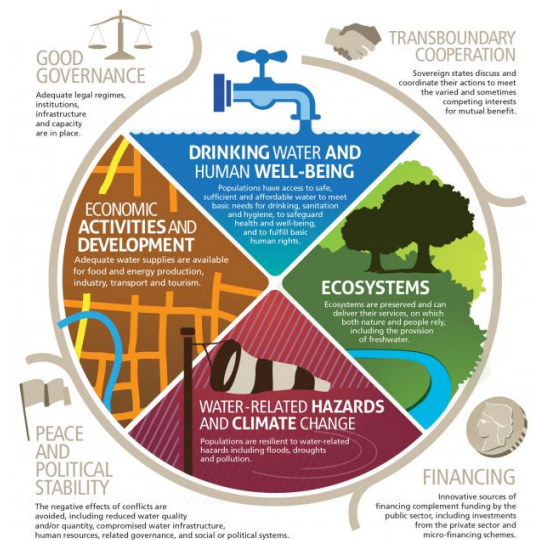


Planet – Protecting Earth for Future Generations

Mr. Jan Dusik, Director of United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Regional Office for Europe began his presentation by mentioning that *access to affordable and reliable energy* is very prevalent in the SDGs. In this regard, emphasis must be on services and strong links with the Paris Agreement and climate change.

Energy in the region takes up approximately 60% and consumption of fossil fuels whereas in Central Asia 94% of energy is fossil (10% of households in some regions is used on energy). There have been positive developments on renewable energy that continues to grow. However, there is a need to address the full costs of energy considering social impacts and taxation, for example. Energy performance standards also need to be developed in all sectors and a need to quickly move to better energy efficiency. Long-term design of renewable energy policies is important as is the use of new technology.

Managing of economic systems – current land use systems are unsustainable towards the earth and ecosystems are crucial to take into consideration. Biodiversity is now a major issue as is access to safe drinking water, over-fishing, and habitat fragmentation. Overall nature is not well reflected in the past and current planning. Fish stock along with mountain and forest ecosystems are a huge concern.



What needs to happen – highest importance must be given to the wise use and management of natural resources. Valuation of natural capital and ecosystem services into national accountability systems needs to be introduced and synergies of existing ecosystems and its related connections, policy instruments, and programmes need to be strengthened.

Conclusion – Mr. Dusik concluded by accentuating that this field is of critical importance for humanity and the planet. Moreover, we need to balance economic, social, and environmental strategies.

Peace and Partnership – Securing people, prosperity and planet through strong governance

Mr. Rastislav Vrbensky, UNDP Deputy Regional Director for Europe and the CIS began his presentation by providing *key highlights*. These were that the inclusion of governance goal is unprecedented as is justice governance and peace. Previously there was no goal on governance in the Agenda and only present in the declaration. There is a need to increase effectiveness and responsiveness of institutions. Important progress has been made but we increasingly see worrying trends such as the situation of refugees and migrants from Syria and the Middle East region. In this respect, we need to ensure protection. Moreover, certain countries are restricting freedom of press/media and peaceful assembly.

SDG 16 provides good space for improvement – with respect to SDG 16 there is a need to increase the effectiveness and responsiveness of institutions. Additionally, there is also a need to concentrate and place emphasis on governance considering corruption and business elites, for instance. Countries must increase public service distribution and concentrate on vibrant and diverse media to enhance civil society participation. Further, civic participation must be strengthened and youth energy must be harnessed together with the power of new technology, for example through policy.

Partnership for achieving Agenda 2030 – a regional microcosm of global development cooperation landscape is necessary as is the role of traditional donors and non-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors (for example, Turkey and Russia). Significant trans-national integration processes have profound influences on partnership relations with the region, and therefore, should be addressed.

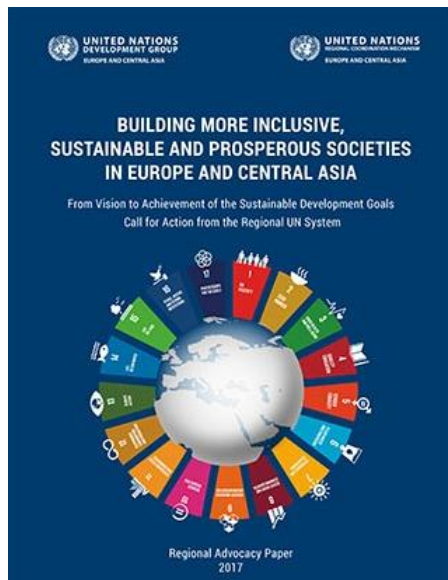
Need for a new approach: “Co-creative partnerships” – policy coherence, for example regarding migration, must be broadened. Partnerships in support of key global and regional public goods and partnerships between the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)-DAC and other donors for better quality and greater scale should be established while innovative forms of development finance, for example, crowd-funding need to be explored and utilized. Finally, there has to be a shift towards a new generation of philanthropic partnerships and a more effective use of domestic development and financing of resources.

Interactive Dialogue

From the floor, a couple of questions and comments were made by participants. It was noted that “ownership” did not come up in the presentations as there is a need to engage countries to take ownership and the question if it were possible to identify pilot countries on this issue was asked. Procurement as the best way to bring SDGs in countries was pointed out and considering the history and activities of Geneva, Switzerland, how to tap the potential of Geneva and the UN regarding SDGs was

brought up. Lastly, someone suggested that it would be useful for UNECE to analyse its own activities.

With final remarks and reference to some of the questions and comments the panel acknowledged that cross-sectional cooperation is crucial and even though their Review Papers consider this it needs to be strengthened within mandates as increased cooperation is essential (SDGs, however, is only one mandate).



The SDGs wants to support member states as UN countries work with joint collaborative entities to facilitate implementation of SDGs in order to contextualize and nationalize the SDGs. Countries, on the other hand, have to identify what is essential for their needs. Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) is the main instrument used to help countries identify what needs to be done for the mainstreaming of SDGs. Finally, there is a need to improve data.

With final remarks, **Mr. Vrbensky** mentioned that in regards to cross-sectional cooperation the SDG Agenda is much more inclusive and innovative, for example, it contains institutional arrangements and that smart investments need to be made to increase acceleration. **Ms. Armitage** acknowledged and supports that Geneva is unique in that it is an international humanitarian and health hub. **Mr. Koller** agreed that ownership is very important especially with employers and procurement is necessary for green laws for the environmental issue. **Mr. Dusik** added that procurement is part of the work to implement the goals and that UN Environment is housing sustainable UN networks for reducing the ecological footprint of the UN through public procurement. Finally, **Mr. Bach** accentuated that actions starts from home and that we have to do our own procurement.

Closing Remarks

In closing, Mr. Bach recognized and acknowledged that nearly all UN agencies were present in the room and that this is a very telling and good sign. **Ms. Sultanoglu** concluded the briefing with a few take-aways:

A need to generate more action - for the advancement of the 2030 Agenda as the clock is ticking (only 13.5 years left). There has been a lot of progress made by countries in terms of planning and budgeting but these need to turn into actual implementation and progress must be measured, hence data is crucial.

A need to identify accelerators – actions and government decisions will have impacts in various areas such as population, therefore, identifying accelerators is important. As well gender equality is a fundamental pre-condition for positive results.

2030 Agenda is not only a government agenda but also for the people – engaging with civil society, the private sector, academia etc. is paramount to ensure broader ownership of the Agenda and to ensure its success.

Do more, do better, do faster and inform UNECE on suggestions, questions and comments.