

HLPF session “Looking at the 2020 targets: implementation and review”

Wednesday, 7 July 2021, 12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m. NY time / 18:15 – 19:15 Geneva time

Intervention UNECE Executive Secretary, Ms. Olga Algayerova, on the regional perspective

(5 min - 650 words)

Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished participants,

Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts on the **2020 targets from a regional perspective**.

Despite some progress, we have not been able to respond to the urgency of the 2020 targets. Moreover, measuring progress has been difficult due to data scarcities.

At the regional level, there is tremendous potential to speed up SDG progress through cooperation among countries that are facing similar circumstances as well as transboundary challenges.

Within my five-minute statement, allow me to focus on a few of the 2020 targets, starting with **forests**:

While the world lost 178 million hectares of forest since 1990, the forest area in the UNECE region increased by about 33.5 million hectares in the last 30 years. The competition for other land use, however, has caused a significant drop in the growth rate in the last decade - a stark reminder of the interconnectivity of the SDGs.

UNECE actively supports forest restoration through initiatives such as ECCA30, which seeks to restore 30 million hectares of degraded and deforested land in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia by 2030, or the Trees in Cities Challenge.

Africa had the highest annual rate of net forest loss from 2010–2020, and the African region needs ambitious initiatives on sustainable forest management. Operationalizing the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin is crucial - a major initiative designed to preserve the world’s second largest rain forest.

Another issue of great concern is **road safety**. I am pleased that Mr. Jean Todt, the UN Special Envoy for Road Safety, will be speaking later in this session on what is needed to improve road safety worldwide. UNECE is supporting these efforts by hosting the global UN Road Safety Fund and by promoting sustainable transport.

Europe has the lowest rate of road traffic deaths per population worldwide, and road fatalities in the UNECE region declined by 14 per cent between 2010 and 2019. This is real progress but still far short of the 50 per cent reduction target.

Examples of successful policies adopted in the UNECE region are infrastructure updates in Greece, or a higher level of regulatory compliance in Montenegro.

Youth is one of the population groups that has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training has become an even more urgent priority across all regions, especially in regions with large youth populations, such as Africa and the Arab States. ESCWA therefore supports empowering the Arab youth in technology and entrepreneurship. In Latin America and the Caribbean, working for digital platforms is attractive for youth to leave unemployment behind. These jobs, however, are very often unregulated and informal.

On **water and oceans**, much remains to be done in the Arab region to protect oceans and marine resources. The majority of Arab countries is facing a loss in the spatial extent of open water bodies. ESCWA is therefore supporting member countries to pursue integrated approaches for water management.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, target 14.5 to conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas by 2020 was reached.

This shows that effective approaches to implement the 2020 targets are available.

A practical mechanism to accelerate delivery is to strengthen the use of existing instruments, for example FAO's Agreement on Port State Measures, which addresses illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Another strategy is to develop policies that address more than one target simultaneously. Tools such as the SDG 14 accelerator methodology developed by ESCAP are highly relevant in this regard.

In **conclusion**, the Regional Commissions and the broader UN system in the regions are supporting the acceleration of progress in these crucial areas. Updating the 2020 targets and keeping them within the 2030 framework may facilitate action around these targets in the future, but we are also ready to collaborate on alternative approaches should Member States so decide.
