

UNECE



From Transition to Transformation Sustainable and Inclusive Development in Europe and Central Asia



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**From Transition
to Transformation
Sustainable and
Inclusive Development
in Europe and
Central Asia**



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Foreword



From the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment to the major landmark of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and now on the eve of the Rio+20 Conference, the United Nations has consistently called attention to the urgent need for global environmental action. It has also been a driving force in raising awareness that such environmental action cannot be isolated from social and economic development. We know now that all the countries of the world need sustainable development — an awareness that has progressed faster than the real change towards this development path.

Moving in such a direction is more than a green transition: it is a sustainable and inclusive transformation which demands a rethinking of economic, environmental and social policies and the way they relate to each other. This is why the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Development Programme, together with United Nations entities in the region, have joined their analytical and normative capacities to produce the present report.

The report is among the first attempts to take an integrated look at sustainable development in the pan-European region. It argues that a new growth model in this region is both necessary and possible — one which increases human development, advances equality and reduces the ecological footprint.

This highly diverse region warrants attention. It gathers together high-income economies of Western Europe, middle-income new European Union member States from Central Europe and lower middle-income countries of South-Eastern Europe, as well as the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which themselves span a range from increasingly prosperous energy-exporting economies to landlocked developing countries. Furthermore, the Eastern part of the region has a very particular history, having undergone 20 years of fundamental socio-economic reforms, which provide the ground for further policy change.

Despite progress in energy efficiency and the use of renewables, the pan-European region, together with North America, still has the highest carbon emissions per capita in the world — over five times the limit which would stabilize global warming by 2050. Some countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia remain among the most carbon-intensive economies in the world. Fossil fuel subsidies are still high throughout the region, and artificially low prices of electricity and heat result in a wasteful use of energy in some transition economies. Moreover, despite ambitious commitments to reverse the loss of biodiversity, ecosystems are still under threat.

The record of the past decades is even weaker as regards poverty, which persists among vulnerable groups in many countries while social-protection systems have been eroded throughout the region. Inequalities have increased in all countries. In Eastern Europe the deterioration in income and access to social services was particularly marked during the 1990s and, while it may have improved with the overall high growth rates of the 2000s, it deteriorated again with the onset of the global economic crisis. Today, the number of people living in or on the edge of poverty remains very high. All too often it is the poor who are most affected by environmental degradation and pollution, which further aggravate their income and welfare situation.

Looking forward, policies designed to effect a green transformation will not automatically contribute to greater equity. On the contrary, inequities may even worsen. Some policies, such as the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies and the shift of production from brown to green sectors of activities can directly and disproportionately affect the poor. However, it is possible to design policies that lead to the mutual reinforcement of social equity, economic efficiency and environmental sustainability.

We are not starting from scratch. The report details actions that already produce co-benefits as part of the overall transformation: green investment can increase competitiveness; sustainable transport means less air pollution and improved health; more energy-efficient technologies create savings; and a knowledge-based economy combined with active labour market policies can both increase income levels and reduce inequality.

The report thus contains a wide range of policy directions illustrated by national initiatives under way throughout the region. Fundamental steps are:

- Remove subsidies on fossil fuel to send the right signal to both businesses and households. The right pricing of energy, internalizing the environmental cost, will encourage the development of energy-efficient technologies, make renewable energy more attractive and encourage change in consumption behaviour. Regulations and voluntary norms are equally important, as they expand green products and markets.
- Establish a social protection floor to compensate for higher costs of energy for poor households, create an income safety net, retrain people whose jobs are displaced by the green transition and provide universal access to health services. Such a scheme can be made affordable by removing harmful subsidies, creating efficiency savings in public administration and restructuring the tax system.

- Engage in active employment and industrial policies to create green and decent jobs in the sectors where there is greatest opportunity in the region: renewables, recycling, energy-efficient housing and sustainable transport.
- Adopt a governance approach considering sustainability in all major decisions at the national and local levels, and demonstrate public leadership in the sustainable transformation by greening public sector procurement and enabling the private sector to make investments in sustainable development.
- Raise awareness about sustainable consumption and production among all actors in society: producers, consumers, political parties and scientific and cultural communities. Women are critical contributors to this effort because they control household consumption. Through education, youth must be engaged because of their future responsibility in addressing the sustainability challenge. Media, non-governmental organizations and civil society also have a critical role in creating constituencies to call for Governments to adopt sustainable development policies, to resist industrial lobbies in resource-intensive sectors, to fulfil their obligations with regard to the public's rights to information (as protected by the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) and to comply with the other multilateral environmental agreements.

The more we postpone the transformation, the higher will be the cost. In the medium and long term, new lifestyles, production and consumption patterns will emerge by necessity. It is therefore wise to accelerate the transformation now by taking incremental policy measures or, for low-income countries, by by-passing outdated brown development altogether.

Rio+20 is an occasion for not only reaffirming all the past commitments, but also agreeing on a new path of transformation, combining national policy instruments with a set of international commitments to advance sustainable and inclusive development worldwide.

It is our hope and ambition that the present report will contribute to such an outcome and we, as the United Nations system in Europe and Central Asia, express our readiness and determination to support all our member countries as they move their sustainable transformation forward.

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