



**UNITED NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT GROUP**
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



UNITED NATIONS
REGIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

BUILDING MORE INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETIES IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

From Vision to Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals
Call for Action from the Regional UN System



Regional Advocacy Paper
2017

Foreword

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its comprehensive and universal approach demands a transformation of national policies, development cooperation strategies and systems in all countries. It also requires the United Nations to adapt its approaches to meet the unprecedented multi-sectoral demands of the 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations System in the region of Europe and Central Asia has been working in an integrated manner to support Member States in sustaining the gains and achievements of the Millennium Development Goals and in addressing political, economic, social and environmental challenges. In anticipation of the 2030 Agenda, the regional UN system in Europe and Central Asia developed a joint Regional Advocacy Paper *“Building More Inclusive, Sustainable and Prosperous Societies in Europe and Central Asia: A common UN vision for the Post-2015 Development Agenda”*. It presented an analysis of the key inter-linked development issues commonly faced by the countries in the region, underpinning the work of the regional UN system.

Since the 2030 Agenda was adopted, the regional UN system moved ahead on many fronts to advocate for accelerated approaches to SDG implementation. To take the analysis of and responses to current development challenges further, the Regional Advocacy Paper has been updated and expanded. It now presents cutting-edge approaches to targeted and coherent policies and actions in 14 diverse but inter-linked areas, namely population dynamics, migration and resilience, gender equality, jobs, social protection, health and well-being, education, production and consumption patterns, energy, agriculture and rural development, ecosystems, governance and partnerships. The Regional Advocacy Paper *“Building More Inclusive, Sustainable and Prosperous Societies in Europe and Central Asia: From vision to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals – call for action from the regional UN system”* provides key policy recommendations that can help countries overcome the existing development bottlenecks and boost the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind.

The Regional Advocacy Paper is the first attempt to look at the whole region in all of its diversity. This diversity offers an untapped opportunity for the region to move towards more sustainable, inclusive and prosperous societies.

We hope that the Regional Advocacy Paper will contribute to the development dialogue in the region on the need for integrated and coherent policies based on the principles of national ownership, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, and will help accelerate SDG implementation in all countries of the region.

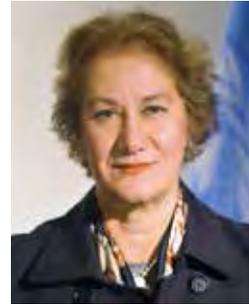
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Setting the Stage – the move from the MDGs to the SDGs

Introduction

The region of Europe and Central Asia includes 54 high and middle-income countries.¹ Highly diverse, it encompasses the advanced economies of Western Europe; high and middle-income countries from Central Europe which have joined the European Union (EU); middle-income countries of South-Eastern Europe, many of which are in the process of integration with the EU; and the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which themselves range from increasingly prosperous energy-exporting economies to landlocked developing countries. The region's diversity extends to its many different ethnicities, languages and religions. Furthermore, the eastern part of the region has a very particular history, having undergone 25 years of fundamental political and socioeconomic reforms in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the transition from centrally-planned to market economies. Given this heterogeneity and the universal character of the SDGs, the region has a significant contribution to make to the global debate on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.²

The region of Europe and Central Asia faces a number of challenges. Refugees and migrants are heading towards the region to seek safety from war, violence and human rights violations and as a result of economic deprivation. Political tensions have re-emerged and frozen conflicts persist. Despite a high general level of development, inequalities are on the rise in all parts of the region, manifested in youth unemployment, exclusion of marginalized groups and lack of access to social services. Discrimination and discriminatory practices, coupled with poor legal frameworks and/or weak implementation of laws persist. Barriers in access to services, economic opportunities and justice experienced by disadvantaged groups of the population, in particular, the biggest of them, rural women, remain key concerns. In addition, the region is struggling to reduce its large ecological footprint and greenhouse gas emissions and to move to sustainable production and consumption patterns.³ Every country in Europe and Central Asia is facing the challenge to reconcile economic and social progress with environmental sustainability. At this juncture, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals offer a powerful instrument to tackle the challenges at hand in an integrated manner.

The 2030 Agenda is of unprecedented scope and significance: it is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development. The 2030 Agenda was designed to build upon the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), while addressing the unfinished business of the MDGs.

¹ The term “region” in this document generally refers to the countries of Europe and Central Asia and Kosovo*. The 54 countries of the different sub-regions and subgroups of the region are:

- Advanced European Economies (25): Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
 - New European Union post-transition member countries (11): Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.
 - South-Eastern Europe (6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey.
 - Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (12): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.
- *All references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

² *Looking Back, Leaping Forward: Moving from MDGs to SDGs in Europe and Central Asia*, United Nations Development Group, Europe & Central Asia, United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism, Europe & Central Asia, 2016 (available at https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/MDG_SDG_Transition-Report_2016.pdf)

³ *Joint Positioning by the Regional UN System in Europe & Central Asia*, United Nations Development Group Europe & Central Asia, United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism, Europe & Central Asia, 2015 (available at https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Joint-Positioning-Paper-by-the-regional-UN-system_2030-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development-1.pdf)

Millennium Development Goals Progress in Europe and Central Asia

Overall, MDG progress in Europe and Central Asia over the period 2000-2015 was uneven. Extreme poverty was largely eradicated, while inequality and social exclusion increased. Undernourishment was substantially reduced. Education targets were achieved while the quality of education remained unsatisfactory in many countries. Gender inequality persisted even though women's political representation improved in some countries and public awareness of greater risks of poverty for women has risen. Child mortality fell unevenly as did maternal mortality. Significant advances have been made on infectious diseases but they remain a significant burden in some countries. Environmental sustainability remained elusive in spite of declining greenhouse gas emissions in the region. The MDG involvement of advanced economies in the region was mostly limited to the partnership for development. Only six out of 22 European donor countries have met the official development assistance target. MDG gains were also distributed inequitably. This resulted in persistent exclusion, material deprivation, inferior educational and health outcomes of various social groups such as rural populations, disadvantaged ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and migrants. The thematic areas covered by the MDGs – in particular poverty reduction and employment, education, health, gender equality and environmental sustainability – are still critically important. The MDG agenda therefore remains an unfinished business in the region. Following the MDGs, the SDGs reflect these areas in a much more comprehensive and interlinked manner. This provides an opportunity for policy-makers and other stakeholders to tackle the unfinished business with renewed momentum up to 2030.⁴

Lessons for the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals

In comparison to the MDGs, the SDG framework represents a much broader approach to sustainable development. It is relevant to all countries in the region, regardless of their level of development. The breadth and complexity of issues embedded in the SDGs seek to respond to the urgent social, environmental and economic challenges of our time. However, this complexity also increases the challenges of SDG implementation, follow-up and review. There are a number of lessons to be learned from the implementation of the MDGs that can support SDG progress.

■ Integrated policy-making

A key lesson is that multiple goals and targets cannot be achieved without coherent strategies and well-integrated policies. Uncoordinated sector-oriented approaches are bound to have unintended consequences that can undermine progress in other areas and weaken policy coherence. For instance, over the last quarter of a century economic growth reduced unemployment and poverty but increased environmental pressures in a number of countries of the region.⁵ There is a need to avoid the compartmentalization of goals and consider them as an integral part of a single development agenda. Such an approach significantly increases policy coherence amongst different sectoral interventions, the ability to mobilize and allocate the right resources at the right time, and, therefore, make significant progress in meeting development goals and targets.

■ Nationalization and disaggregation

The experience of the MDGs has important implications for the adaptation of global goals to diverse national situations. There are 169 SDG targets and 230 global indicators to monitor progress. Governments are expected to set their own national targets, guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances, and incorporate them in national planning, processes, policies and strategies. For all countries to implement the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs must find a better balance than was the case with the rigid target and indicator framework developed under the MDGs. The experience of the region shows that this is a challenging task.

A number of transition economies adapted some MDG targets and indicators to their national circumstances. This kind of nationalization (i.e. national adaptation) made the MDGs more appropriate to each country's development level and structural features. However, national indicators were rarely well documented or harmonized across borders. This limited their comparability and usefulness for the purpose of policy evaluation.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

A significant aspect of nationalization was the disaggregation of data by location, gender, age and social groups. This approach 'anticipated' the SDG ambition to leave no one behind, providing a closer look at hidden poverty and subpar education, differential implications of natural hazards, employment and health outcomes in rural areas and among disadvantaged population groups such as ethnic minorities and single-parent families. Disaggregated targets and indicators can inform government policy and help to more effectively address sub-national disparities whether this involves the needs of various vulnerable populations (such as ethnic minorities, the displaced, the disabled, or families with many children) or those living in disadvantaged geographic areas. Therefore, an important lesson from the implementation of the MDGs is that policies should provide a particular focus on geographic areas and populations that are at the highest risk of marginalization and social exclusion.

The SDGs' integrated nature, broader thematic scope, and greater emphasis on disaggregation by sub-national and socio-economic vulnerability criteria constitute a significant improvement on the MDGs. However, from a technical point of view, virtually all of the statistical and indicator challenges that were present with the MDGs are also present with the SDGs. Many of these will be magnified by the SDGs' greater complexity and data requirements. Significant capacity development investments will be needed for national statistical institutions in many countries in the region. At the same time, attention to indicators as a measure of progress should not obscure or replace a wider discussion on what are the systemic explanatory factors and how these can be influenced by policies.

■ **Human rights and gender dimension**

Despite major achievements, the MDGs were weak and inconsistent on human rights, inequality, and the use of human rights-based approaches. The pursuit of the MDGs in isolation from human rights in some parts of the region resulted in unsatisfactory outcomes that often left the most vulnerable population groups falling further behind in various dimensions of human development. Therefore, human rights and rights-based policy approaches based on the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, sustainability and respect for the rule of law must take centre stage in the implementation of the SDGs.⁶ The involvement of civil society and the willingness of governments to facilitate this involvement were also important factors in the implementation of the MDGs, and will be crucial for progress under the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that advances in gender equality have had a positive impact on other policy goals. For example, the promotion of women's entrepreneurship, including for rural women, was an important component of poverty reduction strategies, especially in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Efforts to accelerate progress in advancing the 2030 Agenda must harness the synergies between the promotion of gender equality and the achievement of all SDGs through systematic gender mainstreaming in the implementation of all goals.

■ **Government ownership and economic environment**

Strong government ownership of MDGs, in particular when leading to MDG integration in national development strategies and plans, was a major positive influence when present. In other cases, insufficient government involvement or leadership prevented faster progress.

Another lesson is the critical importance of the overall economic situation. The early and mid-2000s saw strong economic growth across the region. With macroeconomic stability and large capital inflows, there was rapid income convergence between advanced and less advanced countries. Regretfully, the global and Eurozone crises hit the emerging economies of Europe and Central Asia harder than any other region and slowed down the pace of development, with negative implications for the availability of public funding and social conditions. Political and economic fragilities are again emerging as significant threats to social well-being. This underlines the importance of efficient spending and successful revenue mobilisation strategies that support social cohesion and solidarity.

6 Ibid.

■ Wider stakeholder involvement and whole of society approaches

Wider stakeholder involvement was absent in the development of the MDGs as well as to a large extent in their implementation. This lesson was taken on board during the development of the SDGs, which sought the broad involvement of all stakeholders, from the public to the government in the conceptualization and development of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs are universal, meaning that everyone will have to play a role in their implementation. In this context, partnerships will be a key element in ensuring their effective implementation. Although the primary ownership of and responsibility for SDG implementation lies with the governments, the success of the SDGs requires wider stakeholder involvement and whole of society approaches, in particular the involvement of civil society and the private sector. Space should be provided for all stakeholders to contribute to SDG implementation through various initiatives and activities, such as capacity building, awareness raising and monitoring.

■ Funding and domestic resource mobilisation

Experience from the MDGs shows that three quarters of spending on the MDGs was from domestic public finance, which was more stable, more aligned with government priorities and easier to manage than donor funded spending.⁷ Thus, the majority of financing for sustainable development should be raised by domestic governments, albeit with global rules and systems that make that possible, including on trade and taxation. Strengthening domestic tax collection will be essential to provide governments with sustainable revenue sources to finance the Sustainable Development Goals and invest in development relieve poverty and deliver public services. The benefits of taxation extend beyond revenue generation as it can increase state capacity, accountability and responsiveness by providing a platform to governments to engage with their citizens. Thus, it strengthens the 'fiscal contract' between the state and its citizens.

Transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs

Transitioning from MDGs to SDGs brings in certain complexities, which need to be taken into account while countries embark on SDG implementation. Whereas the MDGs were fundamentally about poverty reduction in developing countries, the SDGs are about sustainable development in all countries. This has elevated the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, both in terms of universal country coverage (a particular issue for the region, which includes dozens of upper-income as well as middle-income countries) and in terms of the thematic/sectoral breadth of the sustainable development agenda, which must necessarily address environmental, governance, and peace-building issues as well as socio-economic questions.⁸

The 2030 Agenda covers seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, reflecting a significant broadening of the scope of the previous eight MDGs. Half of them address various aspects of environmental sustainability, indicating a shift to a more comprehensive development paradigm, while SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies and justice adds a new dimension to the 2030 Agenda. The references to human rights and non-discrimination, both in the preamble and declaration, and to the concepts of universality, substantive equality for women and girls define strong principles for implementation. "Leaving no one behind" means that no goal will be met unless it is met for everyone, which emphasizes the need to reach out to the most disadvantaged groups and to pay attention to inequalities in attainment and discriminatory laws and practices.⁹

Inter-linkages among the Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda introduces inter-linkages between the goals to the extent never experienced before. This requires full and genuine governments' ownership of the global agenda.¹⁰ No one goal can be attained in isolation of at least two others. Balance and inter-linkages among the three dimensions of sustainable development is reflected not only at the level of the goals but also at the level of the targets. The goals themselves are linked through the

⁷ *Financing the Sustainable Development Goals, Lessons from government spending on the MDGs*, Government Spending Watch, 2015 Report, (available at <http://eurodad.org/files/pdf/1546383-financing-the-sustainable-development-goals-lessons-from-government-spending-on-the-mdgs.pdf>)

⁸ *Joint Positioning by the Regional UN System in Europe & Central Asia*

⁹ *Looking Back, Leaping Forward: Moving from MDGs to SDGs in Europe and Central Asia*

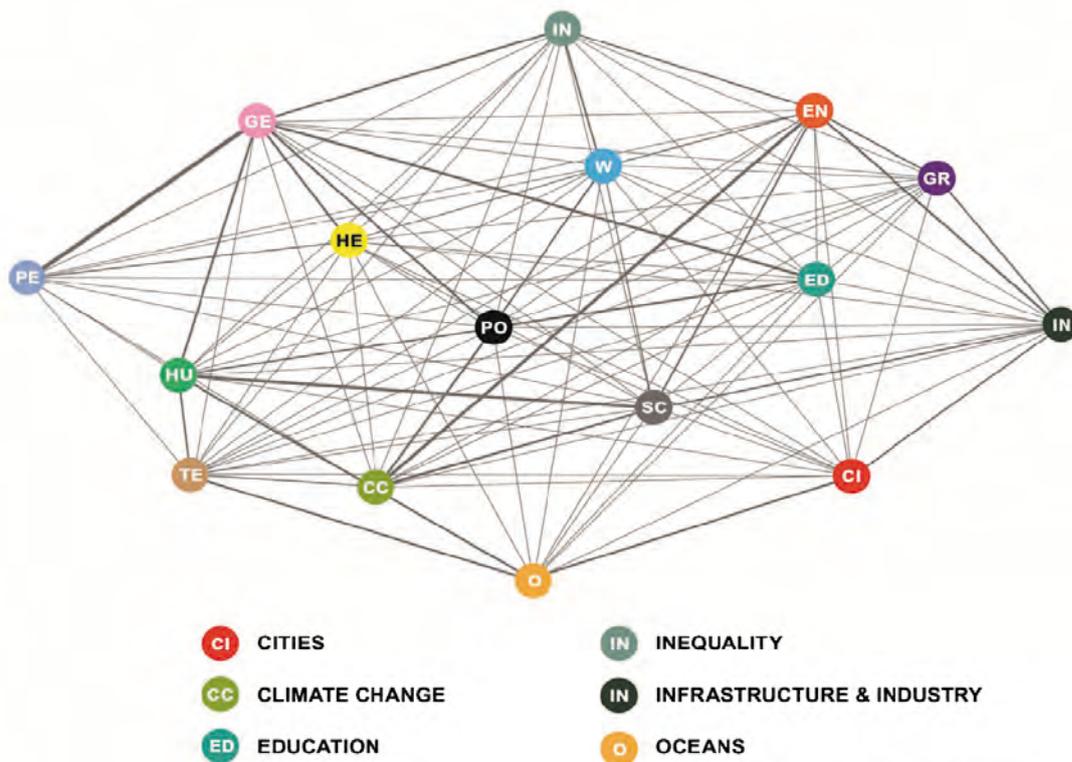
¹⁰ *Joint Positioning by the Regional UN System in Europe & Central Asia*

proposed targets. Thus, action to achieve one goal and its targets clearly has a bearing on other goals' attainment. In this sense the Goals function as an interconnected system, and the approach to their implementation therefore needs to be holistic, multi-sectoral and multidimensional.¹¹ Some interconnections between goals are denser than others, as measured by the number of targets linking any particular goal to other goals.

Poverty eradication is multidimensional and as such its progress is linked to all other goals. Goals on sustainable consumption and production, inequality and growth and employment are each linked to 10 or more other goals. Based on how many targets are linking two goals, there are particularly strong connections between gender and education; poverty and inequality; and inequality and inclusive societies. Two of the proposed goals, on sustainable consumption and production and on inequality, provide critical connections among other goals and make the SDGs more tightly linked as a network.¹²

Figure 1 below illustrates a scientific view of the SDG system showing the links between the SDG system based on scientists' assessment. The thickness of the lines is an adjusted measure of the strength of inter-linkages between goals. It denotes the number of links between two goals divided by the sum of targets under the two goals. The Goal on means of implementation, which links to all other goals, was excluded from the analysis.

Figure 1: A Diagram of the SDG System



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