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Repositioning of the United Nations development system

Information update

Note by the Secretariat

Repositioning of the UN Development System at the Regional Level - Update on Implementation and Next Steps in Europe and Central Asia -

A. Status of regional UNDS repositioning

1. The Secretary-General issued an advance unedited version of his report on “Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR)” (A/75/x-E/2020/7) on 24 April 2020 to update Member States, inter alia, on the reforms of the UN Development System. Optimizing policy assets at the regional level is referred to as one of three outstanding components of UNDS repositioning for which the report offers a way forward for consideration of Member States at the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment (19 – 21 May 2020), following up on briefings and consultations with Member States and country groupings held in New York.

2. In the regional section of the report (paragraphs 171-201), the Secretary-General (SG) reaffirms his earlier recommendations for action in five key areas of transformation:

- Creation of UN Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) as unified mechanism for coordination in each region (Recommendation 1)
- Establishment of regional knowledge management hubs (Recommendation 2)
- Enhancing transparency and results-based management at the regional level (Recommendation 3)
- Consolidation of data and statistical capacities at the regional level (Recommendation 4)
- Provision of administrative services to regional offices through common back offices (Recommendation 5)

3. While the modalities of the Regional Collaborative Platforms (Recommendation 1) are defined at the global level, the regional UN system has been working to adapt the region-specific SG recommendations 2-5 to the specific context and institutional landscape in Europe and Central Asia. To this end, a Regional Task Team for Europe and Central Asia was established in September 2019, co-chaired by the UNECE Executive Secretary and Chair of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, and the UNDP Regional Director and Chair of the Regional UN Sustainable Development Group, with strong support from the Regional UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) for Europe and Central Asia. The entities of the regional UN system have nominated a total of about 60 focal points to engage in the task team or have participated in the discussions related to UNDS reform, reflecting a high level of engagement and inclusion.

4. The general preference of the task team across the recommendations was to develop solutions that build on existing structures, in particular the Issue-based Coalitions, which is in line with the SG report (paragraph 182). Also, the approach taken should be based on a sound understanding of the users and their needs, and thus avoid heavy mechanisms and additional layers of coordination and reporting. Linkages and synergies between the different recommendations should also be sought. Moreover, best practices, standards and guidance from further global and interregional

coordination of implementation efforts are also taken into account, for example the integration of a strong data and statistical component in the regional knowledge management hub.

5. Following the discussions in the Regional Task Team, an initial regional plan for the implementation of the SG proposals was developed and submitted to the Internal Review Team (IRT) in November 2019. Subsequently, the work on the various recommendations has further evolved. Some elements are affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and may experience delays in implementation. The current status of implementation and the next steps to be taken are summarized below.

6. To respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, regular conference calls of Regional Directors have been held to coordinate and target regional-level support offers, for example by the Issue-based Coalitions and with focus on Central Asia.

B. Implementation of SG recommendations 1-5

Recommendation 1: Transition to the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia (RCP-ECA)

7. Pending final intergovernmental agreement on the regional architecture, the regional UN system in Europe and Central Asia with its already existing and well-functioning integrated platform for UN cooperation is transitioning to the RCP-ECA in 2020. A shortened Special Session of the Regional UN System Meeting, anticipating the ambition and modalities of the RCP-ECA, was held virtually on 20 March 2020 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. The Special Session discussed an inaugural joint work plan for 2020-21.

8. In the future, as per the latest SG report (paragraph 180), the RCP will be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with the USG of the respective regional commissions and the UNDP regional directors – at the ASG level – as vice chairs. The RCP will meet under several configurations, including once a year under the Deputy Secretary-General, back-to-back with the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, which remains the intergovernmental platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level. The secretariat of the RCP will be provided by the regional offices of DCO, the regional commissions and UNDP, under the overall direction of the RCP chair and the two vice-chairs.

Recommendation 2: Regional knowledge management hubs

9. A consolidated entry point to expertise and knowledge products across all regional UNDS entities will be developed through a phased approach involving the following elements:

10. A web-based guide, located on the website of regional UN cooperation in Europe and Central Asia^a, will be created in 2020 providing main entry points, contact information and flagship products of the regional UN system by major policy area. The regional Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) will

^a Available at: www.unece.org/runcwelcome/un-cooperation-in-the-unece-region.html

initially be used as the backbone for the web-based guide. Other priority issues could be added as the guide is gradually expanded towards a more elaborate knowledge hub.

11. A review of all IBCs is currently ongoing, led by UN Women and UNDP, although the timeline has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of the review is to determine, inter alia, how to provide access to the knowledge products of the IBCs and their members and how to guide users to IBC expertise/experts for policy advice and support in SDG acceleration.

12. In certain cases, experts (UN staff as well as external experts) may be required to help absorb, interpret and apply the knowledge that is available at the regional level. The availability of UN staff for different kinds of cooperation (e.g., remote advice, research, support for a conference, involvement in a capacity-building measure, country mission or temporary deployment) will depend on the consent of the respective UN entity.

13. The hub should be based on the existing digital repositories and libraries of the regional UN system entities. A system that requires double entry of information should be avoided. An initial mapping of existing digital repositories has been carried out.^b Technical analysis regarding the underlying document management systems and their compatibility is ongoing. Eventually, a digital interface that harvests information from existing regional platforms (a networked knowledge management function with a search engine) could be considered. The Digital Coordination Group of the regional UN system, led by ITU, will provide advice and support to the identification of technological options.

14. The regional knowledge management hub needs to be closely aligned with the needs of clients, in particular the Resident Coordinators, their offices and the UN Country Teams. A face-to-face dialogue with all Resident Coordinators in the region regarding their needs in accessing and using expertise and knowledge at the regional level, initially planned for 18 March 2020, had to be postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak. A brief interaction of the UNECE Executive Secretary with Resident Coordinators through remote connection took place on 17 March 2020, including on the knowledge management hub. This interaction is to be followed up by a more in-depth assessment of clients' needs, e.g. through selected interviews and a survey. The outcome of the needs assessment is a crucial input that will help shape the further design of the knowledge management hub.

^b Selected examples are:

- FAO Regional Office Resources: <http://www.fao.org/europe/resources/en/>
- UNEP Knowledge Repository (Search Term Europe): http://apps.unep.org/repository/publications-search?search_api_views_fulltext=Europe&=Apply
- UNESCO Digital Library (Global): <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/>
- UN Habitat: <https://unhabitat.org/>, tab Knowledge
- UNICEF : <https://www.unicef.org/eca/research-and-reports>
- UN Women: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications>
- WHO: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications>

15. In addition to knowledge products and expertise/experts, the regional knowledge management hub will include a data and statistics dimension. UNECE is setting up a regional platform on statistics for SDGs, which consists of three components^c: a knowledge hub focusing on statistics for SDGs, launched in December 2019, a dashboard of SDG Indicators, launched in March 2020, and a database of SDG Indicators.

16. The purpose of the statistical platform is to communicate developments on measuring SDGs in the UNECE region, provide easy and quick access to up-to-date indicators on implementing SDGs, and to disseminate data and metadata. The knowledge hub on statistics and the database would primarily appeal to statisticians and other professionals interested in methodologies, comparability of indicators, and analyses. The dashboard would be of interest to the public and to policymakers who would have an easy way to see where their country stands among other countries of the region with respect to the implementation of SDGs. The dashboard and the database rely on data from the global SDG database.

17. Based on the above initial steps, the regional knowledge management hub is being created and has to be maintained within existing regular and extra-budgetary resources (cost neutrality). Some pooling of existing human and financial resources within the regional UN system may be considered to ensure swift progress.

Recommendation 3: Transparency and results-based management at the regional level

18. The first results-based report of the UN system at the regional level will be prepared for the year 2020 for submission to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in 2021.

19. The results-based report will be closely aligned with the annual regional SDG progress report, which will be prepared in accordance with the request of the Economic Commission for Europe to the secretariat “*to publish a yearly report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the ECE region to support the discussions at the sessions of the Regional Forum, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum for sustainable development that year, using existing data sets and statistics*”^d.

20. The system-wide regional report will focus exclusively on the results of joint initiatives and actions at the regional level and avoid duplication with reporting by UNCTs at country level and reporting by individual agencies at different levels.

21. The regional system-wide report will be anchored around the regional Issue-based Coalitions. Their reports on results and support modalities should be at the core of the results-based report. The ToRs of the existing IBCs are currently being reviewed in response to the regional UNDS review.

22. Other inputs and data sources that will be integrated in the report are the regional, subregional and transboundary aspects of Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and

^c Knowledge Hub on Statistics for SDGs: <https://w3.unece.org/sdghub/>

Dashboard of SDG indicators: <https://w3.unece.org/sdg>

^d Economic Commission for Europe, 68th session, 9-10 April 2019, E/2019/37-E/ECE/1488, Decision B (68), paragraph 6.

collaboration on regional intergovernmental processes, such as the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region and the follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Recommendation 4: Consolidation of statistical capacities at the regional level

23. Following extensive consultations, the various regional UN entities active in the field of data and statistics proposed to respond to Recommendation 4 by re-configuring the existing IBC on SDG Data and Monitoring, led by UNICEF, into a Regional UN Coordination Group on Data and Statistics, which would take the form of a regional version of the global Committee of Chief Statisticians of the UN System (CCS-UN).

24. The new Regional Coordination Group met for the first time in January 2020, where, amongst other things, it agreed on its Terms of Reference. The group will be co-chaired by UNECE and UNEP. It will meet quarterly and report annually to the UNECE intergovernmental body on statistics, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).

25. The work of the group will be demand-driven at the request of member States, through RCs and UNCTs. It will support improving the national collection, analysis, and dissemination of accurate, reliable and comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age, migration status and other characteristics towards better monitoring of national policies and priorities, including those related to the SDGs.

Recommendation 5: Common back offices

26. The implementation of common back offices (CBO) and co-location of regional offices, where feasible, aim to lower management cost and enhance the harmonization of processes and the quality of services provided in support of programme implementation at the regional level.

27. The CBO concept at the country-level has just been finalized by the Business Innovation Group (BIG) with a target to implement CBO in all countries by 2022. Currently, under DCO coordination, a number of projects under the Secretary General's efficiency agenda are being scaled up globally, including the work on regional efficiencies under recommendation 5 of the regional UNDP reform and the Common Back Office (CBO) project.

28. Even though evidence gathered initially by the BIG did not support a business case for consolidating the location of independent back office functions at the regional level in Europe and Central Asia, a Regional Operations Management Team is currently being established by the regional DCO Office to engage in further assessments and the roll out of recommendation 5 of the regional review and the CBO project.