

2021 High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF)

Concept Note

“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development:

building an inclusive and effective Path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”

Introduction:

The high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) will take place from Tuesday, 6 July to Thursday, 15 July 2021 (including the 3 ministerial days of the forum to be held from 13 – 15 July).

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the worst economic recession since 1930 and inflicted unprecedented human suffering. The combined social, economic, and health impact of the pandemic has outpaced any other major crisis in recent history. At the HLPF, we will take stock of the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs. The HLPF will also provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on how to ensure that the recovery from the pandemic is sustainable and resilient and puts the world on track to realize the 2030 Agenda during the Decade of Action and Delivery.

The HLPF will also review in-depth some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are most closely related to the pandemic, while maintaining a balance between economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The present note outlines key aspects of the programme of the HLPF and its preparations. The programme of the 2021 HLPF and the High-level Segment of ECOSOC is available on the HLPF 2021 website: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>.

Background:

As of April 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had killed more than 3 million people around the world. The pandemic is a human tragedy, and a public health, humanitarian and development emergency, in the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. As a result of the pandemic extreme poverty, hunger, unemployment, inequality and violence are rising; education has been disrupted; men, women and children are confined to their home in many parts of the world, while new phases of the pandemic are unfolding. The poorest and most vulnerable people and countries have been hit the most. The pandemic has set back years of progress made on the global Goals and disrupted development activities for the implementation of the SDGs across the world.

The HLPF will review SDG 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action and 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. As done every year, SDG 17 on the global partnership for development will also be in focus. In addition, the SDG targets that have 2020 as an end date will be discussed.

Countries are still struggling to find the appropriate health response in contexts where adequate treatments, medical supplies and strong health systems are often lacking. Life-saving vaccines have been developed with unprecedented speed. But the inequalities in access to the vaccines is worsening the gap between the have and have not. Governments of developed countries have been quick to implement stimulus packages, of a large scale whereas many developing countries under unbearable debt burden and unprecedented strain on their development resources finding it difficult to provide relief to their people. Clearly the measures taken so far full short of response required to fight the pandemic as they have not boosted long-term investments in the SDGs, including in physical and human capital, nor have they created new jobs or sufficiently supported transitions to carbon neutrality and environmental sustainability. In the absence of such investments, a slow recovery risks pushing back realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Economic resilience with new fiscal and debt sustainability frameworks, societal resilience with universal social protection schemes and climate resilience with greater investments in the sustainable infrastructure must be the building blocks of a resilient recovery. Such efforts need to be bolstered by international solidarity so that the world can move to the trajectory of sustainable development.

Key issues to be addressed in the programme:

The programme of the 2021 HLPF will assess the global situation regarding the pandemic and its impacts on the SDGs. It will support discussions and peer learning to identify promising responses that allow to overcome the pandemic and its impacts while triggering the deep changes and transition we need to realize the SDGs. It will reflect on ways to strengthen and deliver international solidarity and multilateral cooperation.

The various sessions will thus focus on:

- **Taking a bird's eye view of the world situation regarding the SDGs and the impact of COVID-19.** This session will build on the Secretary-General's SDG progress report as well as on the GA and ECOSOC meetings on COVID-19. It will allow an exchange of experience on policies and integrated approaches that are being implemented to address the impacts of COVID-19 and achieve the kind of recovery that puts us on track to realize the SDGs. This session will also be informed by the findings of the Voluntary National Reviews and the experiences of countries at various development levels, including middle-income countries, experts and different actors. There will be discussions on resilience of health systems, equitable access to vaccine; social protection; challenges with learning and education; impacts on gender equality as well as economic dimensions.
- **Ensuring that no one is left behind.** This session will identify action and measures to protect the poorest and most vulnerable from COVID-19 and other crises and empower them to realize the SDGs.
- **Building resilience against future shocks through rethinking and restructuring our social and economic systems and investing in sustainable infrastructure for advancing the SDGs.** This will include investment in sustainable infrastructure in the areas of transport, water and sanitation, energy, ICT, urban systems and social infrastructure. It will also explore the role of the UN in promoting these investments and facilitating in preparation of bankable projects.
- **Reviewing the nine SDGs in focus in 2021** through meetings on:

- o Ending poverty and hunger and transforming towards inclusive and sustainable economies (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 17)
- o Transforming consumption and production and addressing and mitigating climate change (SDGs 12, 13, 17)
- o Building more peaceful, equal, and inclusive societies (SDGs 3, 10, 16, 17)

A review of the situation on each SDG will be conducted during the first part of each meeting. The second part will focus on the interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs among these SDGs and with the rest of the 2030 Agenda and practical ways to leverage these to accelerate progress.

- **Addressing SDG 17** throughout the programme in each SDGs session together with the SDGs to be reviewed, and through dedicated meetings on investing in SDGs and on mobilizing science, technology and innovation and strengthening the science-policy-society interface. The discussions will build on the outcomes of 2021 ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up, the Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs, and the ECOSOC Partnership Forum. They will address urgent measures to respond to the debt crisis, implement effective stimulus packages and mobilize investment for a sustainable recovery, including investment in sustainable infrastructure. The debate will also focus on longer term measures to mobilize means of implementation for the SDGs and strengthen international cooperation and solidarity.
- **Reviewing the SDG targets with 2020 as a completion date.** This session will discuss the on-going intergovernmental processes for updating these targets and the linkages with the work of the HLPF. It will reflect on next step for keeping the level of ambition of those targets.
- **Assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on the realization of the SDGs in countries in special situations** (LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and African countries) and how to support the response and recovery in the special context of those countries. The special challenges faced by middle-income countries will also receive special attention.
- **Analyzing the regional dimension of the recovery from COVID-19 and the situation regarding the SDGs**, building on the work of the United Nations regional commissions and the outcomes of the regional sustainable development forums.
- **Exploring subnational and local dimensions.** Cities and regions have a major role in implementing the SDGs. Many have been conducting voluntary local reviews of their implementation of the SDGs and the HLPF could learn from those reviews and reflect on their link with national reviews.
- As in the past, **major groups and other stakeholders** (MGoS) will organize a meeting on the theme of the HLPF.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs):

Forty-four countries will be presenting VNRs at the 2021 HLPF: 10 first timers, 24 second timers and 10 third timers. As in previous years, the first timers will have 15 minutes for presentation and 15 minutes for Q&A. The second and third timers will have 10 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for Q&A. The first timers will choose whether to present in an individual format or in a panel with other countries. The second and third timers will present in a panel format. More information on VNRs is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

General debate:

The general debate of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment, which also serves as the general debate for the HLPF, will be conducted through pre-recorded videos and the submission of written statements that will be posted on the websites of ECOSOC (<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en>) and HLPF (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>).

Preparations for the HLPF:

A number of meetings and events are being convened by participating States and the UN system and other international and regional organizations to prepare for the thematic reviews of the goals and targets, including notably the regional forums for sustainable development. The thematic reviews will also be prepared through several virtual two-three days expert group meetings supported by DESA bringing together governments, the UN system, experts and stakeholders.

Global and regional workshops are also being organized by DESA and the UN regional commissions to support countries preparing their VNRs. More information is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

Ministerial Declaration and other outcomes:

The HLPF will adopt a Ministerial Declaration at the end of its ministerial days. The information on the intergovernmental negotiation of the Ministerial Declaration is available on the HLPF 2021 website: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>.

The President of ECOSOC will also produce an informal summary of the HLPF after the meeting.

The 2021 HLPF will also be used as an opportunity to share information about new and ambitiousSDG actions and initiatives by participating States, including the VNR countries, the UN system and other stakeholders as was done at the 2019 SDG Summit and the 2020 HLPF. New Acceleration Actions can be submitted on DESA's online [SDG Acceleration Actions platform](#) which collects and shares information about such new initiatives.

Format:

All meetings of HLPF and High-level segment of ECOSOC will be virtual except the opening of the High-level segment of ECOSOC and the Ministerial Segment of HLPF on 13 July, the closing of the HLPF on 15 July and the closing of the High-level segment of ECOSOC on 16 July, which will be in- person meetings. The adoption of the Ministerial declaration will also be done in an in-person meeting.

The moderated thematic panels during the first week will open with short presentations by not more than three panelists and two lead discussants in order to leave enough time for interactive discussion among participants.

As in previous years, ministerial participation is encouraged throughout the HLPF. Countries are encouraged to present their VNRs at a ministerial level, as usually done. Participating States are encouraged to include representatives of various ministries and sectors in their delegations, which will be facilitated by the virtual format.

The meetings on the VNRs will include comments and questions by the friends of VNRs, but also other countries wishing to take the floor, and coordinated interventions by the major groups and other stakeholders, as in the past.

Last day of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment:

The last day of the ECOSOC high-level segment, will be held on Friday, 16 July following the conclusion of the HLPF. It will include a session on strengthening ECOSOC at its 75th Anniversary for sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 and advancing the 2030 Agenda. There will also be a panel on possible scenarios and future trends related to the SDGs and the recovery from COVID-19 and its impact on world economies and societies.

Special events, side events, VNR Labs and exhibitions:

As in previous years, DESA is planning to organize a number of high-profile Special Events in collaboration with key UN partners and other actors, to galvanize the engagement of key sectors of society around SDG implementation and build their ownership and engagement with the 2030 Agenda. The Special Events planned for 2021 include: the SDG Learning, Training and Practice workshop series; an event with higher education institutions and universities; a Local and Regional Governments Forum; an event with Chief Sustainability Officers and other private sector champions; and the SDGs in Action Film Festival. The Special Events expected to be conducted mainly virtually, however, some in-person engagement might be considered conditions permitting.

DESA will also coordinate a programme of side events, VNR Labs and exhibitions. Deadline for submission of proposals is 31 May 2021. All side events, VNR Labs and exhibitions will be held in a virtual format. The guidelines for the side events and exhibitions including registration link and form are available on the HLPF 2021 website: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>.