

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021
Accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID
Online, 29-31 March 2021

Information Note**I. Background**

The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (Arab Forum) is the primary regional mechanism for the follow up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region. The Arab Forum's outcome formally delivers the voice of the region to the global High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held annually in New York. The report of the Arab Forum sets out key messages emanating from the regional dialogue on the opportunities and challenges of implementing the 2030 Agenda, and reports progress on key sustainable development priorities.

The Arab Forum promotes a participatory approach to follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. It brings together high-level representatives of ministries, bodies concerned with planning and following up on the 2030 Agenda, parliamentarians, a wide range of regional and international institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, academic and research centres, and the media, among others.

The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021 (AFSD-2021) builds on the successes of six previous forums, held in Beirut in 2019 and 2018, in Rabat in 2017, in Amman in 2016 and 2014, and in Manama in 2015. Its role and membership are set out in the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which defines the Arab Forum as the annual meeting to bring together Arab Governments and sustainable development stakeholders to discuss progress, review national and regional experiences, and consider the latest developments and implementation mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels.¹

The organization of AFSD-2021 relies on strong partnership with the League of Arab States, a key partner in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. In line with the Secretary-General's call for greater coherence and enhanced synergies within the United Nations at the regional level, the Arab Forum is a joint effort of the United Nations development system. Similar to previous editions of the Arab Forum, a dedicated AFSD-2021 inter-agency task force has been setup to ensure collaboration and coordination, comprising representatives of United Nations agencies and the League of Arab States.

¹ ESCWA resolutions [327 \(XXIX\)](#) (Doha, 13-15 December 2016) on the working mechanisms of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; [314 \(XXVIII\)](#) (Tunis, 15-18 September 2014) on the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development; and 322 issued at the second meeting of the Executive Committee (Amman, 14-16 December 2015) on supporting member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021 on the theme “Accelerating Progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID”

A. Theme of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021

The AFSD-2021 is implemented within the framework of ESCWA resolution [327 \(XXIX\)](#) on the working mechanisms of the Arab Forum, and in line with the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), to be held from 6 to 15 July 2021. The 2021 HLPF will be convened under the theme “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”. It will review the following nine Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in detail: SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17. AFSD-2021 is organized under the theme “Accelerating progress on the 2030 Agenda post-COVID” and will also review the same SDGs in addition to SDG 5, a critical SDG for progress on sustainable development.

B. Objective and focus of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021

AFSD-2021 will be the first Arab Forum to be held in the Decade of Action² to deliver the SDGs by 2030, during a period where Governments and communities worldwide are trying to contain and recover from the COVID-19 crisis. The 2020 HLPF report reaffirmed the political declaration adopted at the SDG Summit held on 24 and 25 September 2019, and called for shared responsibility to safeguard development gains and to ensure that the global response to COVID-19 was guided by the principle of leaving no one behind. In September 2020, the Secretary-General announced that the 2030 Agenda “provides the guiding light we need to end the pandemic, to respond to its socio-economic impacts and to chart a course for a transformative recovery”.³

Based on a situation analysis of the SDGs in the Arab region, the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 (ASDR 2020) sounded the alarm that the region was not on track to achieving the SDGs, even before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. The report advised that transformative change across social, economic, political, cultural and environmental dimensions was necessary. In addition to the exacerbating effects of conflict and occupation, the report identified significant structural barriers to the achievement of the 17 SDGs in the Arab region.⁴

AFSD-2021 will be held as the region grapples with and tries to recover from a pandemic that has severely affected the lives and livelihoods of people from all social and economic backgrounds. The pandemic has further impeded already faltering progress towards achieving the SDGs in the Arab region. While some Arab countries have been hit harder by the pandemic than others, its impact will be felt in the region for years to come across the various dimensions of development. Consequently, the response should not only recognize the interlinkages between the economic, social and environmental development dimensions, but should also be fully aligned with the SDGs. Dismantling the structural barriers identified in ASDR 2020 is critical to the region’s efforts to lead a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

² General Assembly resolution [A/Res/74/4](#) entitled “Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly”, and its annex entitled “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development: political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit”.

³ Secretary-General’s opening remarks at Sustainable Development Goals Moment, 18 September 2020. Available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-09-18/secretary-generals-opening-remarks-sustainable-development-goals-moment-delivered.

⁴ ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020. Available at <https://asdr.unescwa.org/>.

AFSD-2021 provides a unique opportunity for review and appraisal of Arab countries' status, the practical approaches that have been developed, and the extent to which development planning and policies are in line with the SDGs. This year's Arab Forum will focus on what policies and actions are required to accelerate the recovery process and effectively progress towards the SDGs, in particular those under review this year. It is a timely opportunity for Arab countries and sustainable development stakeholders to focus on future work priorities, so as to build on key regional development opportunities and address the many structural barriers to the achievement of all 17 SDGs in the Arab region. AFSD-2021 is the main platform to advocate for the 2030 Agenda as a roadmap for recovering from the impact of the pandemic and achieving sustainable development.

C. Programme of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021

Over three days, AFSD-2021 will feature a variety of plenaries, special sessions and workshop-style special events. Background notes on the listed SDGs will provide analytical input for plenary discussions. The following are the main components of AFSD-2021.

Component 1 – Accelerating action on the SDGs in the context of the COVID-19 recovery

This component takes stock of regional progress on the 2030 Agenda and includes reviews of specific SDGs, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through plenary sessions, this component will build on the findings of the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 and of background notes on the SDGs under review this year. The plenary sessions will also consider the integrated and interlinked nature of the SDGs.

Component 2 – Specialized and priority areas

The Arab Forum will focus on exploring various aspects of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic through specialized areas, priority topics, specific sectors, or by engaging with certain stakeholder groups. Through special sessions, participants will explore solutions to recover better, build resilience to future crises, and accelerate efforts to put the region back on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Component 3 – National and regional follow-up and review, including voluntary national reviews

In addition to a high-level discussion on the way forward to 2030 and recovery from the pandemic, this component will highlight national and regional follow-up and review processes. At an interactive special event, voluntary national reviews (VNRs) will be discussed as a key national follow-up and review process, with due consideration to regional trends, lessons learned, and the way forward. In 2020, the Comoros, Libya, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic submitted their VNRs. The VNRs of Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia are confirmed for 2021.

D. Outcomes of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021

Similar to previous editions of the Arab Forum, the outcomes of AFSD-2021 will set out the topics discussed to highlight key messages for participating member States and other stakeholders. The Forum will also take stock of relevant preparatory meetings.

The final report of AFSD-2021 will be presented by the Chair of AFSD-2021 as the main input of the Arab region to the 2021 HLPF.

III. Organizational and logistical details

A. Date and Modality of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2021

AFSD-2021 will be held online from 29 to 31 March 2021. A link to attend AFSD-2021 will be emailed to all registered participants. Additional details will be made available on the AFSD-2021 web page, available at www.unescwa.org/event/arab-forum-sustainable-development-2021.

B. Organization of work

ESCWA is leading the preparation of the AFSD-2021 programme of work through consultations with member States, United Nations agencies, the League of Arab States, and a broad range of resource persons and experts. The draft programme will be available on the AFSD-2021 web page and updated regularly.

C. Participants and registration

Participants comprise high-level representatives of Arab Governments, including ministers and senior officials responsible for planning and implementing the 2030 Agenda. In line with the theme of AFSD-2021 and 2021 HLPF, member States' delegations may also include representatives of government institutions involved in COVID-19 response and recovery plans, poverty alleviation, economic development, employment, environment and natural resources, data and statistics, financing and technology. Regional intergovernmental organizations, civil society networks and organizations, parliamentarians, academic institutions and United Nations agencies working in the Arab region will also take part in this annual multi-stakeholder event. AFSD-2021 is expected to allow for wider participation through online conferencing platforms.

All participants are requested to register no later than **15 March 2021** by [clicking here](#).

D. Documentation

In addition to background papers on the theme of AFSD-2021, proceedings will be informed by information and data from the following documents:

- [General Assembly resolution 70/1](#) – Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- [General Assembly resolution 74/4](#) – Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly;
- Global indicator framework adopted by the General Assembly ([A/RES/71/313](#)) and annual refinements contained in [E/CN.3/2018/2](#) (annex II);
- [Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators](#) to the fifty-first session of the United Nations Statistical Commission;
- [A/70/684](#) – Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level;
- [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Available in English from;
- [Paris Agreement](#);
- [Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab States](#) (in Arabic only);
- [Voluntary National Reviews Handbook](#), 2021;

- [UNRISD, Policy Innovations for Transformative Change, 2016;](#)
- [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2016;](#)
- [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2017;](#)
- [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2018;](#)
- [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development-2019;](#)
- [Global Sustainable Development Report 2019;](#)
- [Sustainable Development Dialogues in the Arab Region – an ASDR 2020 series;](#)
- [Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020.](#)

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