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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region
UN House, Beirut, Lebanon, 10-11 October 2019

Information note

I. BACKGROUND

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States committed to engage in follow-up and review (FUR) of the 2030 Agenda through a robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated framework. Among the various FUR mechanisms that Member States have put in place such as national reports on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are key national-level mechanisms that fulfill several functions. They provide an opportunity to assess and report progress achieved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They are also a catalyst for operationalizing key principles such as the integrated approach to development and leaving no one behind, and for addressing national priorities, and mobilizing the needed resources, capacities and partnerships.

VNRs are closely linked to FUR mechanisms at the regional and global levels. They provide an entry point for learning, knowledge sharing and highlighting achievements and challenges as well as areas where they need more support during the annual regional forums on sustainable development and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

The year 2019 marks the end of the first four-year cycle of the thematic review of all 17 SDGs. Since 2016, 142 States have submitted their VNRs to the HLPF, and 53 countries have expressed their wish to prepare a VNR in 2020, many for the second or third time. To date, 16 countries from the Arab region prepared and submitted their VNRs, including two which have carried out VNRs twice. Five Arab countries are expected to prepare a VNR in 2020¹.

In addition to monitoring progress at the national level and informing the international community of achievements and challenges, VNRs and their related reports have accumulated a wealth of knowledge, practices, and lessons learned. Their increasing number over the years confirms the continued commitment of member States to the global agenda; yet, the impact of this process on implementation and the achievement of SDGs needs to be maximized. The post-review phase should indeed provide an opportunity to use the reports as a baseline for follow-up and as a tool to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In view of the importance of the regional dimension, and at the request of Arab States for a space for dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer learning, a series of VNR-focused activities will be implemented in complement to the support and capacity building efforts of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the UN agencies operating in the Arab region, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and the League of Arab States (LAS).

In this framework, this first regional workshop will be organized jointly by ESCWA, DESA and LAS at the UN House in Beirut, Lebanon, on 10 and 11 October 2019.

¹ Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Qatar and the Syrian Arab Republic.

II. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

A. OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP

The Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region (Beirut, 10-11 October 2019) aims to provide a space for knowledge exchange and peer learning on experiences and success stories during and after the VNR process. It will also identify challenges and corresponding solutions that would make the VNR process and the content of its reports a rigorous, participatory and transparent process set within a robust, voluntary and effective framework.

More specifically, the workshop aims to:

- (1) Maximize the benefit from the experience and knowledge both for countries that have not prepared a VNR yet and those that have submitted a VNR once or more times;
- (2) Provide an opportunity for self-assessment and learning about best practices in engaging in the VNR process in a participatory manner and in line with development circumstances at the national and local levels;
- (3) Discuss the post-VNR phase and means to translate its findings and outcomes into workplans to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and outline policies/solutions to address the challenges and obstacles identified throughout the VNR process.

B. DISCUSSION TOPICS

The following topics are proposed for discussion during the two-day workshop:

- (1) Analysis of the VNR process, the why, the how, and main trends from the first cycle (2016-2019);
- (2) In-depth discussion of key enablers of VNRs:
 - a. National development plans including the whole-of-government approach and implications in terms of integrated policies and institutional set-up, integrated financing frameworks and linkages with budget processes, alignment of national priorities with SDGs and leveraging interlinkages;
 - b. Applying key principles of the 2030 Agenda such as the gender dimension, leaving no one behind, good-quality disaggregated data;
 - c. Partnerships, whole-of-society approach, multi-stakeholder engagement, accountability, national/local ownership;
 - d. Accelerating implementation, monitoring progress, evaluating policies, assessing delivery against commitments, identifying capacity and resources gaps costing of priorities, and financing strategies;

In addressing all these key issues, the workshop will pay attention to the regional context and circumstances in fragile situations and their impact on the 2030 Agenda implementation and FUR, as applicable.

- (3) Reflection on the HLPF and ways to improve the global process of VNR presentation and FUR
- (4) Gathering countries preparing a VNR for the first time in 2020 or have yet to prepare one and allow them to engage with DESA and the organizers on the process.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL AND LOGISTICAL DETAILS

A. DATE AND VENUE

The regional workshop will be held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 10 and 11 October 2019. Details about the workshop and logistics will be posted online at: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/vnr-arab-workshop-2019>

B. WORKING LANGUAGES

Arabic and English are the working languages of the regional workshop. Simultaneous interpretation for both languages will be provided.

C. DOCUMENTATION

The following is a list of reference documents:

- [General Assembly resolution 70/1](#) – Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- [A/70/684](#) – Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level.
- [Voluntary National Reviews Handbook](#), 2019.
- Voluntary National Reviews [global website](#).
- High-level Political Forum (HLPF) [website](#).
- Arab Forum for Sustainable Development [links to 2016-2019](#)

D. PARTICIPANTS AND REGISTRATION

The regional workshop targets government stakeholders members of the team in charge of preparing VNRs in Arab countries as well as those in charge of national development strategies, visions and plans. Participants will also include experts from regional and international organizations as well as the United Nations. To confirm attendance, please complete the online registration form before **15 September 2019** through the following link: <https://reg.unog.ch/event/31778/registration/>

E. TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

All participants are expected to inquire about their visa requirements to Lebanon and secure visas ahead of their anticipated travel date. ESCWA can provide assistance in exceptional cases upon request. Travel details will be communicated to participants upon confirmation of attendance.

F. CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence regarding the logistical arrangements of the regional workshop should be addressed as follows:

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