



**UNESCAP/UN-OHRLS/UNECE Euro-Asian Regional Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme
of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024
11-12 February 2019, Bangkok**

Concept Note

Background

Lack of territorial access to the sea, isolation and remoteness from world markets impose constraints on trade competitiveness of the 32 landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and their overall socio-economic development. In addition to the geographical impediments, LLDCs face challenges linked to high trade and transport costs, limited or low-quality infrastructure, delays at borders, bottlenecks related to customs procedures and border crossing regulations, and productivity constraints. They are also not able to fully tap into the benefits of trade such as investment, finance, technology and services needed to further improve productive capacity in the sectors (agriculture, industry and services) that are needed for structural transformation of their economies.

To address the challenges of the LLDCs, the international community adopted in 2014 the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024. The VPoA, which is also an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Development, offers a holistic approach to improving the integration of LLDCs into the global economy through the following priority areas: Fundamental Transit Policy Issues; Infrastructure Development and Maintenance; International Trade and Trade Facilitation; Regional Integration and Cooperation, Structural Economic Transformation, and Means of Implementation.

Nearing the halfway in the implementation of the VPoA, the LLDCs exhibit mixed results in their progress in achieving the priorities of the Vienna Programme. The real growth in gross domestic product for the LLDCs declined to 2.8% in 2016, down from 5.6% in 2014. The LLDCs continue to account for less than one percent of the global merchandise trade and the exports remain undiversified and comprise mainly of primary commodities. Despite the continued efforts to expand and upgrade the transport infrastructure, inadequate quality and deficiencies in the physical infrastructure remain. Access to electricity in the LLDCs has increased but remains below the world average and costs of ICT services in the LLDCs remain high. Whilst most LLDCs have ratified the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, their implementation of the Agreement lags behind.

The LLDCs have become more active participants in regional trade agreements and economic blocks, bringing positive prospects for their further integration into regional trade. On structural economic transformation, there has been limited progress as demonstrated by the relatively low value-added contribution of the manufacturing sector in the LLDCs. Means of implementation, in particular ODA

and FDI flows to LLDCs remain important sources of financing for the LLDCs, however, remain concentrated in just a handful of LLDCs and are insufficient to fully address the needs of the LLDCs.

Comprehensive high-level midterm review of the Vienna Programme of Action

The General Assembly of the United Nations decided, in its resolution 72/232, to convene a comprehensive high-level midterm review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Decade 2014–2024, to be held no later than December 2019. The comprehensive high-level midterm review will review progress made in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and will be a forum to share best practices and lessons learned, identify obstacles and constraints encountered and actions and initiatives needed to overcome them, as well as new challenges and emerging issues, in order to further accelerate the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. The high-level midterm review shall adopt an inter-governmentally negotiated and agreed outcome in the form of a political declaration.

The General Assembly also decided that the high-level midterm review shall be preceded by regional preparatory meetings. The outcome of the Euro-Asian regional review meeting will therefore feed into the global preparations and the outcome of the high-level midterm review. The regional commissions, as well as relevant United Nations system organizations and other relevant organizations were invited to provide support to the review process.

At the global level, substantive preparations for the midterm review have already commenced and several high-level and pre-conference meetings that have been organized already came out with important recommendations. The Ministerial Meeting of LLDCs on Trade and Transport that was held in Astana, Kazakhstan in May 2018 kicked off the preparatory process and adopted the Astana Ministerial Declaration. The inaugural meeting of the International Think Tank for the LLDCs that was held in June 2018 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration. Thematic events were organized by UN-OHRLS, in collaboration with partners, on climate change and migration in LLDCs in New York in May 2018; on connecting LLDCs' cities through sustainable aviation and accelerating energy transition in LLDCs, both in New York in July; on transit and on promoting investment in LLDCs, both in Geneva in October 2018.

For the region, an expert group meeting on the Midterm Review of the VPoA was organized by UNESCAP, UNECE and UNCTAD and held in Almaty, Kazakhstan in September 2018. A sub-regional workshop on Fostering Structural Transformation and Export Diversification in Selected Asian LLDCs was organized by UNCTAD and the International Think Tank for LLDCs in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in October 2018. In autumn 2018, UNECE launched the implementation of a UNDA-funded project entitled "Sustainable transport connectivity and implementation of transport related SDGs in selected landlocked and transit/bridging countries" that will focus on the development of a set of quantifiable and measurable Sustainable Inland Transport Connectivity Indicators (SITCIN). On the basis of these indicators Governments will be able to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their respective transport and logistics systems and the level of compliance of national administrative and legal frameworks with UN conventions in the field of transport. Following-up on these past and ongoing initiatives, the Euro-Asian Regional Midterm Review of the implementation of the VPoA is being organized by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Office of the High Representative for Least

Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS). A series of regional technical papers on the implementation of the priority areas of the VPoA is being prepared to facilitate the discussion at the regional review meeting. The regional review meeting is being held as part of implementation of the project “Strengthening the capacity of LLDCs under the Belt and Road Initiative to design and implement policies that promote transport connectivity for the achievement of the SDGs” by UN-OHRLLS and the UN Regional Commissions that is supported by the 2030 Agenda Sub-Fund of the UN Peace and Development.

Objectives

The objectives of the Euro-Asian regional review of the VPoA are to:

- Comprehensively review and take stock of the implementation of the VPoA in Euro-Asia, including identification of the major achievements, constraints experienced, emerging challenges and the opportunities presented;
- Identify and share best practices, experiences and innovative approaches to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA and the achievement of the SDGs in the region, and
- Formulate appropriate policy measures and action-oriented recommendations aimed at sustaining achievements in overcoming the special problems of LLDCs and accelerating the implementation of the VPoA and achievement of the SDGs.

The outcome of the Euro-Asian regional midterm review and its recommendations are expected to form substantive input that will feed into deliberations at the global midterm review of the VPoA.

Participation

The meeting will bring together senior government officials, especially from Ministries dealing directly with the implementation of the VPoA and related issues of transit, trade, transport, structural economic transformation and finance, from the 14 Euro-Asian LLDCs¹, as well as representatives of transit countries from the region and development partners. The UN system, relevant regional and sub-regional organizations, other international organizations, international financial institutions and the private sector will also be invited to attend.

Format

The meeting will take place over the period of two days, consisting of an opening session, interactive thematic sessions and a closing session. At its conclusion, the meeting will adopt an outcome document that will form input to the midterm review of the VPoA.

¹ Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, the Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Uzbekistan.