

Fourth North and Central Asian Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

“Human Well-being and the SDGs: Recovering after the COVID-19 crisis”

Virtual Meeting Format

Session #3: Leaving No One Behind: Human Well-Being and Health

CONCEPT NOTE

Date: 3 Sep 2020	Co-organizers: - ESCAP, UNESCO, UN Women, WHO
Time: 10:00-12:00 (Almaty time = UTC+6)	Session Focal Points: - Natalja Wehmer, ESCAP (main); Meirgul Alpysbayeva, UNESCO; Nargis Azizova, UN Women
Language: Russian - English (simultaneous interpretation)	Webpage Link: - https://unescap.un.org/events/2020NCA_SDG Participants Registration: - bit.ly/2020NCA_SDG

Context

Session 3: “Leaving No One Behind: Human Well-Being and Health” will focus on the impacts created by the immediate response to contain the spread of COVID-19, on the impacts of the “new normal”, as well as on trade-offs between good practices in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 while seeking to limit the social impacts of these measures. The COVID-19 crisis on the one hand has reduced governments’ fiscal space just when social support is most needed, but on the other hand also made societies keenly aware of the importance of functioning social services and inclusive, sustainable development.

The session will **discuss human well-being in terms of quality & access to basic services, such as health, education, & social protection**. It will look at direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 - especially on vulnerable groups. It will highlight the **importance of “leaving no one behind” - from COVID-19 recovery to long-term inclusive, resilient & sustainable development**. The Session will therefore particularly focus on SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10 and 16.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has taken a **toll on healthcare systems** across the world and the North and Central Asian subregion is no exception. The pandemic has highlighted and **magnified longstanding socio-economic inequalities, and vulnerabilities** by hitting the most vulnerable to unexpected shocks. Advancement in

human development in NCA countries is being challenged. It is therefore imperative to expand human capabilities across the NCA subregion when “building back better”, and to ensure sustainable development in the mid to long term. This includes but is not limited to intensifying efforts to combat multi-dimensional poverty, and strengthen gender equality and women’s empowerment, education, healthcare services, social protection and social services.

Inequalities have been on the rise in the Asia-Pacific region already before COVID-19, including in North and Central Asia. **Persons with disabilities, older persons** and **vulnerable women** are at higher risk of being left behind. COVID-19 is intensifying pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities in the Asia-Pacific region and may create new and additional vulnerabilities. The response to contain the pandemic leads to secondary effects of the disease, which can range from **job and income loss** to **social isolation; neglect and abuse; reduced access to social services** including health services; or other health impacts, such as mental health impacts.

Experience has also shown that **women are often disproportionately affected**, because they are more likely to be in **vulnerable employment** and are employed in sectors particularly hard-hit by the pandemic, such as services industry (retail, hospitality, tourism). Women are often expected to take on the **double burden of work as well as childcare (and care for the elderly and sick)** – during the COVID-19 crisis, unpaid care work increased significantly. Moreover, during the lockdowns violence against women has been reported to have substantially increased.

Older persons and persons with disabilities are considered as risk groups for COVID-19 infections with the highest COVID-19 death rates being among older persons. This higher risk also made them more vulnerable to secondary effects such as social isolation, neglect and abuse, and limited access to services.

Many secondary effects of COVID-19 can also be specific to different vulnerable groups. **Youth**, for example, are less likely to be affected by the direct health impacts of COVID-19 but face negative impacts of educational outcomes by **school closures**. Pre-existing inequalities in accessing quality education were intensified during lockdowns, when access to learning was available only through electronic devices, requiring a stable Internet signal. Youth also face **insecurity in the school-to-work transition** and may face mental health impacts of social isolation. Impacts are also different in every country and location, depending on Government responses, existing social protection system, as well as overall community.

While the percentage of people living in extreme **poverty** (defined by World Bank as earning less than \$1.90 USD per day), has been low in most NCA countries before the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic is pushing men and women, boys and girls into extreme poverty and places an even larger group into a situation of vulnerability (defined by World Bank as living on less than \$3.20 USD per day). Poverty, moreover, goes beyond income and expresses itself through lacking (sufficient or quality) access to core social services, such as health and education. Here inequalities of access and unmet needs have particularly been magnified by the COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased vulnerability to job loss and loss of livelihoods. Many working-age men and women across NCA countries are self-employed, work informally, or are labour migrants, they are poorly covered by social protection schemes, and are particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty.

However, while the COVID-19 crisis magnifies pre-existing structural conditions of inequality and vulnerability between and within countries, rising inequality is not inevitable¹. What governments, business and people decide to do in response matters greatly.

¹ FAO (18 Jun 2020), “Addressing inequality in times of COVID-19”, accessed 7 July: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8843en/CA8843EN.pdf>

Session Objectives

This session aims to highlight the socio-economic issues that are aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis in the NCA countries. The need for multi-faceted social protection and sustainable provision of healthcare and education will be stressed. It is expected that the session will produce a set of key messages on challenges and potential solutions regarding specific primary and secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic faced by vulnerable groups in NCA. Applying a gender lens throughout the discussions, the session seeks to propose sectors where subregional cooperation may play a key role and be an effective driver for achieving human well-being in the NCA region. The conclusions of the session will be further reported to APFSD in 2021.

Session Format

#	Time	Activity
1	10:00-10:10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housekeeping announcements, MC, ESCAP (3 min) Welcome and Setting the Stage, Mr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, ESCAP (7 min)
2	10:10-10:20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation, Ms. Melita Vujnovic, WHO Representative and Head of Country Office in the Russian Federation (10 min)
3	10:20-10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation on the Impact of COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Central Asia, Ms. Krista Pikkat, Director, UNESCO Almaty Cluster Office for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (10 min)
4	10:30-10:40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls - new challenges and solutions, Ms. Sagipa Djusaeva, National Programme Officer, UN Women in Kyrgyzstan and Ms. Diana Ismailova, Programme Coordinator, UN Women in Tajikistan (10 min)
5	10:40-11:55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel discussion (45 min): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Ketevan Goginashvili - Chief Specialist of Health Policy Division at Policy Department, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, Georgia Dr. Almaz Sharman, President, Academy of Preventive Medicine of Kazakhstan; Chairman of the Board, Asyl Miras Charity Foundation Ms. Gulmira Kazakunova, Chair, Public Association Union of People with Disabilities "Ravenstvo"; Executive Director, Association of People with Disabilities, Kyrgyz Republic Mrs. Saodat Kamalova, Director, Central Asian Gerontological Centre, Republic of Tajikistan Ms. Gulshan Dolonbaeva, Head, Kyrgyzstan Diaspora (Kyrgyzstan-Ural) in Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation Q&A Session (30 min)
6	11:55-12:00	Closing, Mr. Srinivas Tata , ESCAP (5 min)

Overall Guiding Questions for the Session

1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related crises on pre-existing inequalities and what does this mean for the mid- to long-term future of different vulnerable groups?
2. Looking at the existing systems of social protection and social services in NCA countries, how were they able to respond to the COVID-19 crisis? What are their strengths, what their challenges? What are key lessons learned and priorities going forward to deliver basic services to vulnerable groups?
3. COVID-19 has exposed and magnified the need to achieve the SDGs. What are innovative and workable approaches to put countries on a sustainable development path as we are responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic?