

Expert Group Meeting on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in North and Central Asia

Hybrid Meeting Format

7-8 June 2023 | Almaty, Kazakhstan and online

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

The Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024 (VPoA) is a holistic development plan centered on addressing the challenges faced by landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) through the implementation of specific actions related to six priority areas: (i) fundamental transit policy issues, (ii) infrastructure development and maintenance, (iii) international trade and trade facilitation, (iv) regional integration and cooperation, (v) structural economic transformation, (vi) means of implementation.

Following the **Midterm Review** of the VPoA in 2019 and the formulation of a Roadmap for Accelerated Implementation of the VPoA (the “**Roadmap**”) in 2020, most LLDCs in North and Central Asia developed long-term national development plans with priorities congruous to the Roadmap. Recent assessments in the subregion suggested both success and room for improvement since 2014: most countries have achieved progress in fundamental transit policies, infrastructure modernization, trade facilitation, and regional cooperation. However, the subregion continues to face challenges in transport and energy connectivity, digital divide, reliance on commodities, untapped renewable energy potentials, and a large financing gap¹.

The impact of multiple interlinked crises from **climate change, COVID-19, geopolitical uncertainties, global economic slowdown, and increasing financial instability** imposed further difficulties for North and Central Asia to meet VPoA objectives. Increased frequencies of extreme weather events and long-term climate change trends in North and Central Asia can contribute to temporarily shut down, degrade, and damage physical infrastructure and create system-wide

¹ Assessment of the progress in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action in NCA Landlocked Developing Countries, <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/assessment-progress-implementing-vienna-programme-action-nca-landlocked-developing>; Sustainable and Clean Energy in North and Central Asia, <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/sustainable-and-clean-energy-north-and-central-asia>



disruptions. Meanwhile, disruptions caused by multiple crises dislodged inter- and intra-regional supply chains, causing significant delays and inflating prices, especially for food and energy.

The **2022 Expert Group Meeting** on Implementing the VPoA in North and Central Asia organized by the Subregional Office for North and Central Asia of the **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**, highlighted the need for LLDCs in the subregion to strengthen collaboration and cooperation in developing transport and transit corridors, facilitating energy transit, digitalization, and sustainable finance².

Building on the substantive discussions and outcomes of the previous year, the **2023 Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the VPoA Review in North and Central Asia** will review progress, gaps, challenges and opportunities across the VPoA priority areas. Particular focus will be placed on transport and energy connectivity and trade facilitation. The EGM shall facilitate the exchange of expert opinions, best practices, and lessons learned to accelerate progress towards long-term transformation for LLDCs. The outcome of this subregional review will provide inputs to the Euro-Asian Final Review of the Vienna Programme of Action in Bangkok, Thailand, in August 2023 and, in turn, to the Third UN Conference on LLDCs in 2024.

Objective and Expected Outcome

The Expert Group Meeting aims to:

- Review progress and gaps in achieving specific objectives of the VPoA in North and Central Asia;
- Address the impacts of multiple crises on LLDC progress on VPoA and their National Development Strategies;
- Provide expert opinions on national and subregional development needs and gaps in implementing key action areas of the Roadmap pertaining to transport and energy connectivity, clean energy, trade facilitation and digital trade.

The Expert Group Meeting is expected to enhance awareness and understanding of the key challenges and opportunities for LLDCs in North and Central Asia to accelerate progress on the implementation of the Roadmap and identify cross-border solutions to strengthen cooperation in the subregion.

Participants

Target participants of the EGM include:

- Governments and public institutions in North and Central Asia responsible for various aspects of implementing the VPoA in North and Central Asia;
- Civil society organizations, private sector organizations, technical experts from think tanks and academia, and other experts on the six priority areas of the VPoA;
- Various UN entities, financial institutions and development banks, regional and subregional organizations that support the implementation of the VPoA.

² EGM VPoA in NCA Final Report, <https://www.unescap.org/events/2022/expert-group-meeting-implementing-vienna-programme-action-north-and-central-asia>

Programme & Session Overview

Time	Sessions
Day 1: 7 June 2023	
Morning	<p>Opening session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening remarks • Purpose of the EGM and Guidance <hr/> <p>Session 1: “Progress and challenges in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and emerging risks and priorities”</p> <p><i>The session will discuss, among other things:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress and gaps in achieving specific objectives of the VPoA in North and Central Asia; • Climate change impacts to LLDC progress on VPoA and their national development objectives, with focus on water security, food security, agricultural changes, energy connectivity and infrastructure, and their interlinkages; • Accelerating green transformation in North and Central Asia for sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 and recent global economic developments.
Afternoon	<p>Session 2: “Enhancing transport connectivity for sustainable recovery and green growth in North and Central Asia”</p> <p><i>The session will discuss, among other things:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting transit corridors, regional connectivity, integrated multimodal transport systems and seamless connectivity between transport and trade networks; • Role of regional transport networks to mitigate the Energy and Climate Crises through more effective trade; • Promoting environmentally sustainable and resilient transport systems at regional level; • Strengthening partnerships for capacity-building, sustainable transport, data sharing and regional initiatives; • Mobilizing additional financial resources and reducing financing costs for transport investment; • Accelerating technology, innovation and digitalization to enhance transit and trade facilitation, facilitate regional transport and transit procedures through harmonization and simplification of standards and procedures.

Day 2: 8 June 2023	
Morning	<p>Session 3: “Strengthening energy connectivity to facilitate the development of clean, sustainable, and renewable energy in North and Central Asia”</p> <p><i>The session will discuss, among other things:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greening the energy sector and infrastructure by attracting investment in renewables and facilitating the transition to clean energy; • Potential areas for cross-border collaboration and multi-stakeholder participation for the development of sustainable energy sector; • Conditions and frameworks required to facilitate cross border collaboration and investment on energy connectivity; • Modernizing cross-border power connectivity infrastructure as a cornerstone for regionally integrated, digitized energy system, especially for renewables such as hydropower, wind, and solar; • Enhancing sustainable management of critical minerals for clean energy transition and digitization in North and Central Asia.
Afternoon	<p>Session 4: “Accelerating trade facilitation and digital trade in North and Central Asia”</p> <p><i>The session will discuss, among other things:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the state of readiness for cross-border paperless trade in the subregion; • Status, trends, emerging issues and opportunities to accelerate trade facilitation in the subregion, including through the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA); • Identifying bottlenecks in trade procedures and explore innovative digital solutions; • Promoting inclusive trade with focus on small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs) and women’s participation; • Long-term strategy to adapt trade facilitation in times of multiple crises.
	Closing Remarks

Further Information and Registration

The EGM will take place in hybrid modality from 7 to 8 June 2023. It will be conducted in English and Russian with simultaneous interpretation.

Detailed information will be available on ESCAP event page. For further information, please contact escap-sonca@un.org.