

Sustainable Development Outlook 2019: *Gathering Storms and Silver Linings*

Expert Group Meeting on the sustainable development impacts of conflicts, climate change, disasters, and population displacement

20-21 February 2019

Concept Note

The macroeconomic, political and environmental contexts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have generally shifted since the goals were adopted in 2015. Rising trade disputes and growing debt burdens are examples of such shifts. The shifts are also evident in: (i) increasing number of conflicts; (ii) greater frequency and intensity of climate change induced “natural” disasters, and (iii) large-scale population displacement.

Aggravated climate change has precipitated extreme weather events in greater number, scope and intensity. Extreme weather events and natural disasters, along with violent conflicts, are displacing people – both within and across countries – in unprecedented numbers. The growing migration pressure – alongside rapid technological change and rising income inequality – is provoking extreme and disruptive nationalism and weakening commitment to multilateral processes that address international trade, climate change and migration. Several recent studies and reports analyze these trends and their broad impacts. The IPCC Special Report (2018) – for example – provides an update on the growing and irreversible risks of climate change. Similarly, the International Migration Report (2017) of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) explains migration patterns and trends. Many academic publications and papers analyze specific aspects of these phenomena, without necessarily explaining the inter-interlinkages and the implications for the SDGs. These are clearly not isolated trends – they are inter-connected and mutually reinforcing, affecting all three dimensions of sustainable development. Unfortunately, weakening multilateral commitments to solving global challenges – including climate change and conflicts – is worsening the very conditions that are compelling people to migrate, thus creating a vicious cycle and potentially impeding progress on SDGs.

There is a clear need for policy-makers to understand the scope and magnitude of the vicious cycle and the risks it poses to the SDGs. To sustain and accelerate progress on SDGs, policy-makers need a robust understanding of the:

- Trends, inter-linkages and likely scenarios in conflicts, natural disasters and displacement;
- The direct cost of conflicts, natural disasters and displacement for the SDGs;
- The impact of these trends on nationalism and commitment to multilateralism;
- The indirect costs of weakening multilateralism for the SDGs

The proposed Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will bring together inter and multi-disciplinary experts and practitioners to delve into these issues. The deliberations of the EGM will inform the research and analyses for part III of the upcoming Sustainable Development Outlook (SDO) report, addressing Conflicts, climate change, natural disasters and displacement. The SDO 2019 is

intended to promote greater understanding of the sustainable development challenges and facilitate inter-governmental deliberations on the SDGs at the two High Level Political Forums (HLPF) in 2019. The EGM will consider not only the interconnection among conflicts, natural disasters and displacement but also explain how these processes are undermining commitment to multilateralism and sustainable development outcomes.

The proposed two-day EGM will address the following key questions:

1. What are the recent trends and likely future scenarios in conflicts, natural disasters and displacement, compare to what the world witnessed in the years leading up to the adoption of the SDGs in 2015?
2. How have conflicts and natural disasters increased migration pressures and displacement?
3. What are the direct costs of conflicts, natural disasters and displacement for the SDGs and how will these emerging trends impact SDG implementation?
4. What has been the impact of migration on the achievement of SDGs in both countries of origin and countries of destination and why the positive benefits of migration do not feature adequately in national and international policy discourses?
5. What are the drivers of rising nationalism in a large number of developed and developing countries and what role growing migration pressures play in fomenting nationalist backlash?
6. What has been the most effective antidote – and what are good success stories – in taming and reversing extreme and disruptive nationalism?
7. What have been the recent trends in commitment to various multilateral processes, including multilateral commitments to climate change? What risks loom large?
8. What can the international community, and the United Nations in particular, do to combat rising nationalism and restore confidence in multilateralism?