



Global Online Dialogue Series
‘Technological and Science-based Solutions to the COVID-19 Challenge’
29 October 2020, 10:00-11:30 a.m. EDT

Concept Note

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call for better cooperation between scientists and policymakers within and across countries. Also, as spelled out in the UN Secretary-General’s report ‘UN Comprehensive Response to the COVID-19’, trust in science and institutions are the necessary vaccines against misinformation that impedes the fight against the virus.

Guidance issued by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) earlier in the pandemic presented a set of recommendations for how the world can improve the way in which science and technology are harnessed to resolve global challenges, while leaving no one behind. It drew upon the emerging response to the crisis as well as ongoing multi-stakeholder conversations in the context of the UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM). Each recommendation, from increased knowledge-sharing to combatting misinformation—is critical to recovery from the pandemic and strengthening the contributions of science towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹

Six months after issuing that guidance, UN DESA is holding an online dialogue on “Technological and Science-based Solutions to the COVID-19 Challenge” to assess the science-based policies and innovations that have developed during the pandemic, identifying good practices as well as areas where work is still needed. Recognizing that regional cooperation is essential in the sharing and implementation of these solutions, the event will feature a broad panel discussion with experts, followed by region-specific breakout sessions led by the UN Regional Commissions, in their working languages.²

The discussions will draw from the work of the UN Inter-agency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (IATT), including the 10-Member Group to support the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. Online participants will be invited to submit questions at the

¹ [UN DESA Policy Brief #62](#), ‘The COVID-19 pandemic: a wake-up call for better cooperation at the science–policy–society interface.’ 22 April 2020.

² For regional commissions that cannot participate in this event, efforts will be made by UN DESA to co-host a separate event on social media focused on that region.

time of registration and in the Zoom chat during the event. The results of the discussion will be shared with UN leadership and will inform future UN DESA policy briefs on the economic and social effects of the pandemic.

Date and time

The dialogue will take place on Thursday, 29 October 2020, from 10:00-11:30 a.m. EDT (11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Santiago/ 5:00-6:30 p.m. Beirut)

Location

The event will be held on Zoom and streamed to UN DESA's [Facebook channel](#).

Moderator

A journalist will moderate the event, handing off to the Regional Commissions for the language-specific breakout sessions.

Event format

I. Welcome:
(2 minutes)
Moderator

II. Introductory remarks
(5 minutes)

Mr. Munir Akram (Pakistan), President of the UN Economic and Social Council.

III. Discussion 1: Using science-based decision-making to counter COVID-19
(40 minutes: 30 minute discussion + 10 minute Q&A)

In the first session, the moderator will drive a conversation with experts about how well science-based solutions to the COVID-19 challenge have been adopted by decision makers and translated into effective policies.

Guiding questions:

- What is determining how effectively science is influencing decision-making related to COVID-19 across the world?
- What lessons can countries learn from their experience to reinforce or build national capacities for science-based decision-making?

- How can the international community – including the UN – help to ensure that scientific research and innovations related to COVID-19 are accessible to all?
- What needs to be done to better engage society, counter misinformation and overcome apathy towards science in policy-making?

Speakers (tbc):

- **Mr. Dani Rodrik** (Turkey), Economist and Ford Foundation Professor of International Political Economy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University
- **Ms. Elizabeth Sidiropoulos** (South Africa), Chief Executive, South African Institute of International Affairs
- **Mr. Vaughan Turekian** (USA), Executive Director of the Policy and Global Affairs Division, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine; member of the 10-Member Group of the UN Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs
- **Representative of participating Regional Commission**
- **Representative of WHO Department of Essential Health Technologies**

IV. Discussion 2: Regional perspectives on harnessing technology to limit the worst effects of COVID-19
(30 minutes)

The audience will be separated into breakout sessions based on region and language. These breakout sessions will be organized by UN DESA and the UN Regional Commissions. For instance, ECLAC can host one in Spanish about Latin America and the Caribbean, and ESCWA can host one in Arabic for Western Asia.

The UN DESA-led global session (held in English) will highlight specific, non-medical technological innovations that are already helping to relieve the worst effects of COVID-19. It will also present a deeper dive into the new *Compendium on Digital Governance Initiatives in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, featuring speakers representing solutions already in play.

Guiding questions for regional sessions:

- How can regional organizations help strengthen national capacities for science-based decision-making?
- How can regional leaders in science, technology and innovation better connect to share data and good practices?
- What tools are necessary for successful innovations be replicated and/or scaled up within and across countries?

Guiding questions for the global session:

- What are concrete examples of successful innovations that have helped people or institutions deal with the effects of COVID-19?
- How can successful innovations be replicated and/or scaled up within and across countries? What are some barriers to doing so?
- What can the UN do to support countries with their innovation efforts and digital governance?

Speakers for the global session (tbc):

- **Ms. Susan Athey** (USA), Economics of Technology Professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business
- **Mr. Nebojsa Nakicenovic** (Austria), former Deputy Director General and CEO of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and former member of the 10-Member Group of the UN Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs
- **Representative 1 from *Compendium on Digital Governance Initiatives in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*** (Recommendation to come from DPIDG)
- **Representative 2 from *Compendium on Digital Governance Initiatives in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*** (Recommendation to come from DPIDG)

V. **Concluding remarks**
(5 minutes)

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs