

Twelfth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development

Hybrid (Geneva, Bangkok, other locations and online)

September - November 2022

Concept Note

Following adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, the world continues to explore how to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. Meeting them will require countries to pursue concerted and accelerated actions. This becomes even more critical in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic and social crisis and in the current geopolitical situation. Energy is crucial here, from its role in the eradication of poverty through enabling development related to education, water supply and industrialization, to combating climate change. Delivering the energy needed for sustainable development will require implementation of transformational strategies and policies in all countries.

International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development (IFESD) was initiated by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in 2010 and became a major global annual event in sustainable energy. Since then, all five UN Regional Commissions became co-organizers of the Forum. Information about previous Fora is available at: <https://unece.org/annual-fora>. Various countries in the UNECE, UNESCAP, UNESCWA, and UNECA regions hosted the Forum. IFESD was held in Kazakhstan (twice – in 2010 and 2017), Tajikistan (2011), Kyrgyzstan (2012), Georgia (2013), Tunisia (2014), Armenia (2015), Azerbaijan (2016), Ukraine (2018), and Thailand (2019). IFESD in 2020 was planned to be hosted by Georgia for the second time but had to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the same reason, in 2021 the Eleventh International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development had to be organized in a virtual format (with some sessions held in Geneva, Switzerland in a hybrid format). This year the Forum will be held in the same format as in 2021.

In the current geopolitical situation, with rapidly growing energy prices, issues of energy security coming to the fore, challenges of energy affordability becoming ever more pronounced, and climate change solutions losing priority, a global momentum to accelerate a shift towards decarbonised, climate resilient energy systems and universal energy access must be maintained. The world has been undergoing a transformation of energy systems at an unprecedented scale, accelerated by innovations, rapid cost declines for clean technologies, and related policy shifts. New off-grid solutions and business models have been expanding electricity access, while also creating jobs, empowering women and making communities more resilient. These gains for clean, affordable, and modern energy services must not be lost. To decide on specific courses of action for the sustainable energy to pursue, the countries should reflect on the strategic approach on energy. Short-term problems, however important and acute, must not overshadow long-term goals. The Twelfth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development (IFESD-12) is an opportunity to reflect on the implications of the current status of energy systems globally and ways to pursue energy resilience and energy sustainability.

The COVID-19 crisis already had serious effects on SDG 7 progress. Although the world has made important gains towards SDG 7, even before the pandemic overall progress was not on track to reach its targets by 2030. Close to 800 million people still lack access to electricity globally, while 2.8 billion people remain without clean cooking solutions. Renewables are lagging in important end-use sectors, such as transport, industry, heating and cooling, and global energy efficiency improvements need to increase significantly. The geopolitical crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, which affected all economic sectors on a global scale, but energy and food most significantly, made attaining SDG 7 targets and in fact all Sustainable Development Goals much more challenging. Security of energy supplies often takes priority over climate change goals, which leads to increasing share of fossil fuels, including coal, in the energy mix of many countries.

The objective of the Twelfth Forum is to explore how to improve access to affordable and clean energy for all and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the carbon footprint of the energy sector in the current extremely difficult and volatile conditions. The Forum will look into ways for countries to reconcile the reality of fossil fuels' share of the energy mix and the need to ensure their energy security with the need to address climate change while supporting sustainable development, enhance integration of the energy markets, and facilitate the transition to a sustainable energy system.

The International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development is a platform that provides context and enables clear-sighted action. The Twelfth Forum is organized jointly by the United Nations Regional Commissions in partnership with other international organizations. IFESD-12 will provide an opportunity for collaboration among the organizations of the United Nations system, governments, civil society, financial institutions, the private sector, and academia needed to integrate the responses to immediate challenges with meeting the objectives on sustainable energy. Partnerships and multi-stakeholder collaboration at scale at all levels are essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda. IFESD-12 will attract international energy experts, government officials, and representatives from the business community, financial sector, academia, and civil society to share their perspectives and views.

The strong political commitments by governments and multilateral cooperation will be more crucial than ever in maintaining the momentum for SDG 7. Multi-stakeholder initiatives play a central role in accelerating action. All stakeholders should step up and strengthen their efforts to support the implementation of the SDGs. Recognizing the importance of accelerating the commitment of stakeholders for such support and taking into account the different ways to approach this, the Twelfth Forum provides an opportunity to build upon the achievements of previous fora and develop a roadmap for future strategic orientations.

The following topics will be looked at and discussed at the Forum: Technology interplay under the carbon neutrality concept; Deep electrification of the energy system; Financing clean energy technologies; Digitalizing electricity system; Enhancing sustainable management and financing for the critical raw materials (CRMs) required for low-carbon transitions; Building resilient energy systems and achieving greater energy security; Enabling a hydrogen economy; Achieving high performance in buildings; Addressing methane management; and Role of blockchain in sustainable energy transition.