



# General Assembly

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### Sustainable development

## Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

Submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/225](#), the present report provides an overview of the progress made towards ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all in the time of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Highlighted herein are actions taken by Member States to accelerate progress towards that objective. The report also provides an update on the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All (2014–2024), the preparations in connection with the high-level dialogue on energy to be held in 2021, and recent and planned efforts of UN-Energy in support of Sustainable Development Goal 7.

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\* [A/75/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/225](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit, at its seventy-fifth session, a report on the implementation of the resolution, including activities carried out to mark the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.

## II. Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all in the time of the coronavirus disease pandemic

2. Energy is central to the achievement of both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all is fundamental to human development and to many Sustainable Development Goals. A shift towards sustainable energy solutions is also essential to the achievement of the Paris Agreement.

3. In a report by an independent group of scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*, “energy decarbonization with universal access” was identified as one of the entry points that offered the most promise for achieving the transformations desired for sustainable development at the necessary scale and speed.

4. Energy services are essential for fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including for powering health-care facilities and keeping medicines cold, supplying clean water for hand-washing and providing communications services to connect people, share information and facilitate education during periods of physical distancing.

5. Expanding those services through increased investment in sustainable energy solutions will aid countries in responding to the pandemic, while also creating significant green jobs, empowering women, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and advancing progress towards other Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement should be used as a road map towards more resilient, equitable and sustainable societies.

6. The COVID-19 crisis will likely have serious effects on progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7. The year 2020 is set to see the largest decline in energy investment on record, a reduction of 20 per cent – or almost \$400 billion – in capital spending compared with 2019. The pandemic could either widen the existing gaps in access to sustainable energy or accelerate efforts towards achieving Goal 7, depending on the priorities of national recovery efforts.

7. A business-as-usual recovery based on the systems of the past would be an enormous missed opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic could become a disruptive triggering event that results in fundamental change towards a more sustainable energy future – if countries embrace the weak demand for fossil fuels and other positive lessons from the pandemic as an opportunity to dramatically expand sustainable energy solutions. Such action will allow them to build back better and stronger, while also advancing progress towards the Goals and putting the world on a 1.5°C pathway.

8. In order to reach that outcome, Governments could consider a range of measures, including: integrating sustainable energy solutions into COVID-19 responses and recovery strategies on the basis of the targets of Sustainable

Development Goal 7; using enhanced nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement as a framework for green and low-carbon investment through economic recovery packages; prioritizing modern energy services that save lives; investing in renewable energies and energy efficiency to create green jobs; phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies; carefully implementing carbon pricing to incentivize clean energy transitions; adopting just transition strategies to support the phase-out of coal through clean energy plans and targets; supporting vulnerable groups to leave no one behind; and encouraging a transition from energy-intensive lifestyles to more sustainable patterns.

9. Energy should play a central role in countries' efforts to recover from the COVID-19 crisis in ways that make them better and stronger. Many Member States are taking such actions, as reflected in their voluntary national reviews, to assess progress with regard to the 2030 Agenda, including Sustainable Development Goal 7. The multi-stakeholder technical advisory group on Goal 7, which was convened by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, provided technical input for the review of Goal 7 at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, including on the implications of COVID-19 for energy. Meanwhile, UN-Energy has been revitalized as the coordination mechanism to ensure coherence within the United Nations system in the implementation of Goal 7 in the time of the pandemic.

### **III. Progress towards ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all<sup>1</sup>**

#### **A. Global overview**

10. The achievement of Goal 7 is within reach, but the global energy transformation must be accelerated to achieve both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The world is not on track to meet the Goals or to keep the rise in the global temperature in the twenty-first century at no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels, let alone to limit the temperature increase to below 1.5°C.

11. Significant progress has been recorded with regard to several targets of Goal 7, but overall efforts are falling well short of the scale required to reach those targets by 2030.

12. Accelerated action on Goal 7 to harness cross-sectoral interlinkages and maximize shared benefits and synergies will significantly contribute to closing the gap in efforts to achieve the climate goals and help to enable a just and equitable transition to a climate-safe future by advancing progress towards the other Goals.

13. Governments should invest in sustainable energy solutions to expand energy access, create jobs, improve health, make economies more competitive and resilient and advance progress towards the Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to historically low oil, gas and coal prices, presenting a unique opportunity for reform, including the removal of fossil fuel subsidies while protecting vulnerable populations.

<sup>1</sup> This section and subsequent sections of the report draw on the following documents: the special edition of the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2020/57); the policy briefs on accelerating the achievement of Goal 7 in the times of COVID-19, compiled by the technical advisory group on Goal 7 in support of the high-level political forum on sustainable development held in 2020; and *Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report 2020*, a joint report of the International Energy Agency, the International Renewable Energy Agency, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Bank Group and the World Health Organization.

**Access to electricity**

14. Thanks to significant efforts across the developing world, more than 1 billion people have gained access to electricity since 2010. As a result, 90 per cent of the planet's population was connected in 2018. However, 789 million people still live without electricity, and despite accelerated progress in recent years, the Sustainable Development Goal target of universal access by 2030 appears unlikely to be met, especially if the COVID-19 pandemic seriously disrupts electrification efforts.

15. The world has witnessed a slight acceleration in the global advance of electrification, from an average of 0.77 percentage points annually between 2010 and 2016 to 0.82 percentage points between 2016 and 2018.

16. Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia are approaching universal access, as they had exceeded 98 per cent access to electricity by 2018. In Central Asia and Southern Asia, more than 92 per cent of the population had gained access to electricity by 2018.

17. The world's access deficit is increasingly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, where the access rate climbed from 34 per cent in 2010 to 47 per cent in 2018. After 2010, advances in access in sub-Saharan Africa outpaced population growth, but the trend has reversed recently. Between 2016 and 2018, the number of people in the region lacking access remained almost stable.

18. Major disparities in access to electricity are also seen between urban and rural areas. In 2018, the unserved rural population of 668 million made up 85 per cent of the global access deficit. Between 2010 and 2018, access to electricity in rural areas grew from 70 to 80 per cent. In urban areas, access is already close to universal (97 per cent in 2018), but growth in access has barely kept pace with population growth.

19. In several countries, expanded off-grid solutions have brought improved access to rural areas. By 2018, renewable off-grid technologies were providing below tier 1 electricity services (that is, a basic service level for less than four hours a day) to 136 million people around the world, compared with about 1 million people in 2010. Those services were provided primarily through stand-alone home systems and solar lighting, with mini grids having grown from a niche solution to being widely deployed in off-grid areas where there is sufficient demand.

20. Closing the access gap, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, will require concerted efforts. Policy frameworks will require consistent updates and enforcement to support innovation, such as off-grid solutions and newer business models. Geospatial analysis undertaken to determine how universal access can be achieved at the least cost shows the need for integrated policies embracing both centralized and decentralized solutions. With significant potential to advance progress towards other Goals – such as those pertaining to gender, health and education – access strategies will succeed only if the technical elements outlined above take an inclusive approach that leaves no one behind and maximizes the socioeconomic benefits of electricity. While the world is coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to ensure that past gains in electrification are safeguarded. It might require collective support for utility, mini grid and off-grid service providers to continue to serve their current clients and allow for future expansion.

**Access to clean cooking solutions**

21. The share of the global population with access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking increased from 56 per cent in 2010 to 63 per cent in 2018, leaving approximately 2.8 billion people without access. That number has been largely

unchanged over the past two decades owing to population growth outpacing the number of people gaining access to clean cooking solutions.

22. To achieve the goal of universal access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking, increases of at least 3 percentage points annually would have been needed between 2010 and 2030. Between 2010 and 2018, however, access expanded at an annualized average rate of just 0.8 percentage points and has steadily slowed since 2012 (to 0.7 percentage points in 2017 and 2018) – far from the numbers needed to reach the target.

23. The stagnation in the number of people lacking access to clean cooking globally masks regional trends. Promising improvements were made in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia and in Central Asia and Southern Asia, but sub-Saharan Africa moved in the opposite direction, as population growth between 2014 and 2018 outstripped growth in access by an average of 18 million people per year.

24. Significant variations in access to clean cooking also exist between urban and rural areas owing to disparities in infrastructure and in the availability of clean fuels and technologies. In 2018, access to clean cooking solutions stood at 83 per cent (76–87 per cent) in urban areas and at 37 per cent (30–45 per cent) in rural areas. A slight convergence has been observed, with the disparity falling from 52 percentage points in 2010 to 46 percentage points in 2018. This can be attributed to accelerated progress in access in rural areas (in particular in Asia), in conjunction with population growth outpacing access growth in urban areas (in particular in Africa).

25. In low- and middle-income countries, gas (liquified petroleum gas, natural gas and biogas) has overtaken unprocessed biomass as the dominant fuel since 2010, reflecting its predominance in urban areas. In urban areas, the use of electricity for cooking has also risen. In rural areas, unprocessed biomass remains dominant, although its share is falling.

26. Under current and planned policies, 2.3 billion people would still be deprived of access to clean cooking fuels and technologies in 2030, relying instead on traditional uses of biomass, kerosene or coal as their primary cooking fuel. That means that nearly a third of the world's population will continue to be exposed to harmful household air pollution, and many will still be spending many hours gathering fuel. As cooks and fuel gatherers, women and children are disproportionately susceptible to those negative effects.

27. Acceleration of access to clean cooking solutions will require high-level political commitment, ambitious national and subnational strategies and an urgent mobilization of investment. Designing and implementing successful commitments and strategies in turn require a detailed understanding of the current state and patterns of household energy use. To achieve that, household surveys must become more comprehensive. In addition to gathering data on grid connectivity, they should cover off-grid options, impacts on children and women and all the household fuels and technologies in use for cooking, space heating and lighting.

### **Renewable energy**

28. The share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption reached 17.3 per cent in 2017, up from 17.2 per cent in 2016 and 16.3 per cent in 2010. That indicates that the global use of renewables has grown faster (at 2.5 per cent in 2017) than overall global energy consumption (1.8 per cent in 2017), continuing a trend seen since 2011. The growth of renewables is driven primarily by increased consumption of modern renewables (that is, renewables other than traditional uses of biomass). Modern renewables commanded a 10.5 per cent share of total final energy consumption in 2017, up from 10.3 per cent in 2016 and 8.6 per cent in 2010.

29. The largest increase in the use of renewables has come in the power sector, where their share of global electricity consumption reached 24.7 per cent in 2017, surpassing the share of renewables in the heating sector for the first time. The growth rate of almost 6 per cent year-on-year was driven primarily by solar photovoltaic and wind energy. Lower hydropower output (and other factors) slowed the growth rate in 2017, sending it below the record 8 per cent growth reached in 2016. The share of renewables in the heating sector reached 23.5 per cent of total final heat consumption in 2017. That growth can be primarily attributed to uses of modern renewable energy; traditional uses of biomass remained relatively unchanged in 2017, and they still accounted for around 14 per cent of global heat consumption. In the transport sector, the share of renewables remained at 3.3 per cent in 2017, the majority of which was consumed in the form of liquid biofuels, predominantly crop-based ethanol and biodiesel. In 2017, the consumption of renewable electricity in the transport sector represented only 0.3 per cent of the sector's total energy consumption worldwide.

30. Important regional differences should be noted. Sub-Saharan Africa had by far the highest share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption for 2017. However, reliance on traditional uses of biomass in the region accounts for almost 85 per cent of its renewable energy consumption and, as already observed, is associated with adverse health and environmental effects. Owing to the extensive use of modern bioenergy across the power, heat and transport sectors, in addition to the region's reliance on hydropower to generate electricity, Latin America and the Caribbean had the largest share of modern renewables among all regions.

31. To boost the share of renewables in energy consumption to a level sufficient to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 by 2030 and to meet global climate objectives, most long-term energy scenarios point towards the need to decarbonize all end uses, particularly through increased electrification of the heat and transport sectors.

### **Energy efficiency**

32. Rates of improvement in global primary energy intensity (total primary energy supply per unit of gross domestic product) have fallen in the past few years, following a period of relative steady growth. Global primary energy intensity in 2017 was 5.01 megajoules per United States dollar, equivalent to a 1.7 per cent rate of improvement since 2016 and the lowest rate since 2010.

33. Nevertheless, recent progress has been greater than historical trends, thanks in part to a range of energy efficiency policies adopted around the world. The average annual rate of improvement in global primary energy intensity between 2010 and 2017 was 2.2 per cent, more than the historical rate of 1.3 per cent between 1990 and 2010. To reach target 7.3, the annual improvement to 2030 would need to average 3 per cent in the years between 2017 and 2030, which would double the historic improvement trend.

34. Although energy intensity across all end-use sectors improved on aggregate over the period 2010–2017, improvement rates varied by sector. It is possible to examine the intensity of the sectors using other intensity metrics, which show that transport (freight and passenger) improved during 2010–2017, whereas the other sectors show a decrease in intensity improvement over the previous period (1990–2010). The decline in the rate of improvement is most noticeable in the services and agriculture sectors, where the rate of improvement in energy intensity more than halved. The industrial sector's rate of improvement dropped by about a third. Driving that pattern are the substantial improvements in energy intensity recorded in emerging economies between 1990 and 2010, which slipped between 2010 and 2017.

35. Significant geographical differences also exist in terms of energy intensity and recent improvements. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most energy-intensive region and Latin America and the Caribbean the least. Between 2010 and 2017, energy-intensity improvements continued to be highest in Asia; most countries in the region saw rates of improvement that were higher than during 1990–2010 and well above the global average (for example, 3.3 per cent in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia). The lowest rates of improvement were found in Latin America and the Caribbean (0.5 per cent), Northern Africa (0.4 per cent) and the Middle East (0.3 per cent).

36. By making energy efficiency measures a policy and investment priority, Governments can help the world to achieve the energy efficiency target under Goal 7. There are numerous examples around the world of successfully implemented policies, ranging from minimum energy efficiency standards, financial incentives, market-based mechanisms and capacity-building initiatives to regulatory instruments. They all encourage investment in efficiency measures and help to rebalance energy markets in favour of cleaner, more efficient operations. Analysis shows, however, that regulatory measures that mandate energy savings cover only about a third of global energy use.

37. Efforts will also be needed to harness new digital technologies so that they increase energy efficiency rather than just add to global energy demand.

#### **Finance and investment**

38. The overall financing requirement to meet Goal 7 in relation to renewable energy, energy efficiency and universal access is estimated at \$1.3 trillion to \$1.4 trillion per year until 2030. While progress is being made to scale up financing, current annual financing levels are significantly below that level.

39. Expanding access to electricity – especially for clean technologies such as renewable energy mini grids and off-grid electrification – remains underfunded, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Financing for off-grid electrification represented just 1.2 per cent of total funding for energy access in 2017.

40. Investment is not spread equally; developed countries and some middle-income countries have access to finance, while many developing countries are left out. In 2017, power sector investments in China and the United States of America were above \$100 billion, while investments in sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia and the Middle East and North Africa were well below \$50 billion.

41. As public financing will likely remain limited over the next few years, universal access will not be achieved by 2030 without unlocking private financing. Available public resources are best spent on measures likely to attract private sector finance and on extending access to populations living in areas unlikely to attract private financing, as well as on subsidizing energy services for those who simply cannot afford it. Public resources in the form of credit lines, guarantees and working capital facilities should be used to leverage the needed private capital and mitigate risk.

#### **Capacity-building**

42. Strengthened capacity-building is necessary to ensure the effective implementation of Goal 7. Across countries, a wide variety of capacity-building strategies and activities have been used to promote access to clean energy and the wider deployment of energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies and services. Such lessons need to be synthesized to provide a solid basis for scaling up capacity-building efforts, including on enabling frameworks, technology cooperation, investment measures, the transfer of technical know-how and staff training activities.

**Technology and innovation**

43. Digitalization could fundamentally transform the global energy system by breaking down sectoral boundaries, increasing flexibility and enabling integration across systems. Well-designed policies are crucial to unlocking the full benefits of digitalization in achieving Goal 7, while also managing potential risks relating to security, privacy and rebound effects.

**Data and monitoring**

44. Innovative tracking instruments, such as the multi-tier framework for measuring energy access, can enhance decision-making. Its analysis of data on the reliability and affordability of access to electricity and clean cooking solutions offers useful input for policy formulation, investment strategies, project design, utility performance accountability and evaluations of project impacts.

**B. Regional overview**

45. Strengthening cooperation at the regional and subregional levels is critical to effectively addressing specific challenges and to promoting innovation, investment, enhanced cross-border connectivity, capacity-building, South-South cooperation and synergetic actions towards the Goals on energy, climate change and the environment and other Goals simultaneously.

**Africa**

46. Energy demand in Africa continues to grow owing to various factors, including population growth, economic development, industrialization, climate change and trade. That growth presents challenges in mobilizing the substantive and transformative investments needed. It also offers an opportunity for Africa to close its vast energy deficit with transformative business models that make the continent a leader in green growth and the global energy transformation.

47. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought more urgency to addressing the continent's energy access deficit. Without secure, reliable and high-quality access to power, the region's health systems and related infrastructure cannot function, especially in a pandemic situation. African countries have the opportunity, especially under the financial challenges and reduced fiscal space caused by the pandemic, to build back better with resilient energy systems that not only address access and climate change but also spur economic growth and employment.

48. Many African countries continue to make progress with increasing access to electricity. The number of people without access has been reduced from over 600 million in 2015 to about 540 million in 2019. However, at current levels of ambition, investment and policies, about 500 million people will still lack access in 2030. Urgent investments are needed in off-grid and transboundary power systems to rapidly close the access gap.

49. Lack of access to clean cooking solutions remains a chronic challenge in Africa, with over 900 million people still in need of improved cooking facilities. Transformative innovations in technologies and business models are needed, with targeted interventions for maximum impact for both rural and urban populations.

50. Africa remains the last global frontier for transformative clean energy investments. A few countries, including Kenya, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Zambia, have demonstrated leadership in promoting investments in clean energy development through policy and regulatory reforms. Those countries are capitalizing



on the global decline in the cost of renewable energy technologies, which has resulted in some of the lowest solar power tariffs globally.

### **Arab region**

51. Achieving Goal 7 in the Arab region requires significantly scaled-up progress in renewable energy and in decoupling regional growth from energy consumption through improved energy efficiency and increased productivity of energy use, while protecting the climate and ensuring a healthy planet for future generations, which constitute one of the most fundamental challenges across all Arab countries in the coming decades. Conflict and instability have posed further long-term challenges to progress towards the achievement of Goal 7 in a number of Arab countries in recent years.

52. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis highlights the multifaceted vulnerabilities of the region associated with the sustainability of its energy systems and their ability to support socioeconomic growth and development even in a challenging and uncertain environment. The pandemic touched each of the energy supply chains at a moment when the region's energy transition was beginning to build steam. Indeed, low oil and gas prices may place pressure on the economics of renewable energy sources and could limit the capital available for the renewable energy industry and related projects without policy support.

53. The Arab region's electrification rate rose from 88.4 per cent in 2010 to 92.5 per cent in 2018, making it the most electrified regional group of countries in the developing world. Overall, access to electricity is close to universal in cities across the region, but stood at only 84 per cent in rural areas in 2018. However, unplanned service disruptions remain challenging for all electricity users, irrespective of urban-rural or income level divisions.

54. Access to clean cooking fuels and technologies remained high in the Arab region, with 12 countries having almost full access in 2018, whereas the least developed countries accounted for most of the access deficit in the region in terms of clean fuels and electricity.

55. The Arab region is not on track with global energy efficiency targets. While it has the second lowest regional energy intensity rate in a global comparison, the decline is not enough to help the region to maximize the productive use of its energy resources. Agriculture and services have seen the deepest reduction in energy intensity in the region since 2010, while the transport sector remains the most energy intensive of the world's regions.

56. Renewable energy continues to be used far below its potential in the Arab region. As of 2017, it accounted for almost 11 per cent of the region's energy mix, the lowest share in any region. Only a handful of countries account for virtually all the region's renewable energy consumption, which leaves substantial scope for further uptake, given the region's plentiful renewable energy resources.

### **Asia and the Pacific**

57. The availability of modern and affordable energy has transformed the Asia and the Pacific region, helping countries to develop their economies and lifting millions out of poverty. However, there is continued reliance on polluting and carbon-intensive sources of energy. The region accounts for almost 60 per cent of global total carbon dioxide emissions, nearly two thirds of which are from the energy sector. The region accounted for 80 per cent of the world's coal consumption in 2018, with demand mainly concentrated in China (50 per cent), India (12 per cent), Japan (3 per cent) and the Republic of Korea (2.5 per cent).

58. Governments in Asia will need to reverse their current trend of expanding coal-fired generation capacity and instead urgently implement policies to enable a fast decarbonization of the electricity mix. Strengthening Governments' commitments to climate policy with plans that include a clear commitment to phasing out coal, removing subsidies for fossil fuels and building support for renewables and energy efficiency will offer new opportunities for both developed and developing countries to build low-carbon economies, with significant benefits for sustainable development.

59. In response to the pandemic, the focus of many Governments has been diverted away from clean energy. Demand for energy is down, which has boosted the renewable energy share in many countries. However, some renewable energy projects are stalled owing to the disruption of component supply chains. As poor air quality appears to be associated with increased risk of dying from the virus, the provision of clean cooking for rural populations takes on extra importance.

60. Based on existing and planned policies, the Asia and the Pacific region is set to achieve universal electricity access by 2030. However, in 2018 over 200 million people (around 5 per cent of the region's population) still had no access to electricity. Urban populations approached universal access (99.7 per cent) in 2018, but people in rural areas lagged behind (92.2 per cent). Off-grid renewable energy technologies represent a viable electrification solution in rural areas, with an emphasis on support for modern lifestyles and productive uses.

61. The region has demonstrated slow progress in terms of access to clean cooking. In 2018, around 1.8 billion people, or nearly 40 per cent of the population, relied on polluting and unhealthy cooking fuels and technologies. The region is far from being on track to achieve universal access to clean cooking by 2030. Clean cooking targets must be integrated into national energy plans. New investments and additional resources are also needed to support the development of options that meet consumer needs and overcome barriers, such as costs and cultural preferences, while limiting government spending on subsidies.

62. The share of modern renewables in total final energy consumption has been growing since the early 2000s, reaching more than 8 per cent in 2017. This marked the first year that modern renewable energy exceeded traditional biomass in the energy mix, accounting for 52 per cent of renewable energy in the total final energy consumption in the region. Use of modern renewables has been highly concentrated in the power sector, with hydropower accounting for three quarters of the region's renewable electricity output. More attention is needed to increase the use of renewables in transport and heating.

63. The region has demonstrated a steep decline in energy intensity, registering an annual average decline of 2.6 per cent from 2010 to 2017. That decrease is on track with the global annual reduction required in the lead-up to 2030. If the region could sustain reduction rates at that level, the Asia and the Pacific region would be on track to meet target 7.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, this would require continued government commitment to enhancing energy efficiency.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

64. The region continues to make progress in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 7. Access to electricity has improved, and the region's energy intensity has maintained a downward trend, particularly in the Caribbean. However, despite the positive advances, greater efforts will be needed to achieve the objectives set for 2030, particularly in the countries with the greatest backlogs.

65. As of 2018, about 18 million people still lacked access to electricity. Overall coverage was about 99 per cent, but rural areas remained disadvantaged, with coverage in 2018 of around 95 per cent.

66. In many countries, including Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Dominica, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru, more than 10 per cent of the population does not have access to clean technologies for cooking. As around 83 million people within the region still lack access to such sources, the region is unlikely to achieve universal access to clean cooking solutions by 2030 without replacing traditional biomass in cooking and heating by modern sources and a long-term focus on electrification for cooking needs.

67. The region has continued to make significant progress in incorporating renewable energy. The installed capacity of hydropower increased from 154 GW to 191.2 GW between 2010 and 2018. However, its share of the energy mix has decreased owing to increases in the use of wind and solar energy. Wind energy has become the largest source of variable renewable generation, with 25 GW installed in 2018. Solar energy sources are also registering significant progress, reaching 8.7 GW in 2018. Non-renewable thermal sources grew approximately half as much as renewable energies between 2010 and 2018, and that trend will continue as government policies promote the participation of renewable energies.

68. The region has historically had the lowest energy intensity in the world. However, there has been no reduction in the intensity level since 2014, and additional efforts will be required to reach the target set for 2030.

#### **States members of the Economic Commission for Europe**

69. In many countries of the region, energy poverty needs to be tackled, yet a badly managed energy transition could exacerbate the challenge. Older persons are vulnerable, as energy bills can amount to 30 per cent of their monthly pensions, in part on account of poorly built or maintained buildings. Countries with tighter building regulations and a higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita have lower levels of energy poverty.

70. Accelerating improvements in energy efficiency – notably improving the overall performance of buildings – is another priority for the region. The productivity of industry is also central to meeting the sustainability challenge. The commercialization of new technology is expected to drive the decarbonization of the transport sector, and urban mobility can be addressed with proper planning of city infrastructure and transport efficiency.

71. Despite the overall increase in renewable energy capacity and its increasing share of energy supply in the region, in some subregions the potential of renewable energy remains untapped. More effective institutional investment and transaction frameworks are needed.

#### **Least developed countries**

72. Without urgent and enhanced action, the 47 least developed countries will not be able to reach the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 7 by 2030. Despite the extraordinary growth potential for the energy sector in those countries, they rarely benefit from larger financing schemes to the same extent as other, more prosperous, developing countries. Sustainable energy should therefore be one of the central thematic topics of the new 10-year programme of action to be adopted at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, in 2021.

73. Only 52 per cent of the overall population in the least developed countries had access to electricity in 2018. There are also significant disparities between countries,

and between rural and urban areas. In some countries, rural access rates are well below 10 per cent.

74. With non-renewable energy capacity growing faster than renewables, many least developed countries have not been able to benefit significantly from recent trends in technology development and the falling costs of renewables. Solar, wind and geothermal technology can now be expanded rapidly and relatively inexpensively, and the least developed countries could seize the opportunity to leapfrog directly to renewable technologies.

75. In 2018, only 16 per cent of the people in the least developed countries had access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking. In 22 of those countries, mostly in Africa, the figure was less than 5 per cent. Despite the substantial benefits for health, gender inequality and environmental degradation, the clean cooking sector has not been able to attract much-needed financing.

76. Improving energy efficiency is also a priority for the least developed countries and plays a significant role in accelerating the energy transition. A positive trend in the average energy intensity of those countries can be observed over the past decades with a rate of 7.97 megajoules per United States dollar in 2000, followed by 5.77 megajoules per United States dollar in 2010 and 5.34 megajoules per United States dollar in 2017.

77. The COVID-19 crisis has brought the importance of investments in reliable energy access to the fore, especially in terms of health services and the use of information and communications technology. Promoting decentralized renewable energy solutions can help the least developed countries in responding to the immediate health crisis by providing cost-effective electricity to rural health centres. In the post-pandemic recovery phase, such solutions can further provide job opportunities and boost economic activity, thus supporting social and economic recovery.

78. The funding allocated to sustainable energy in least developed countries should be increased. Support should also be given to entrepreneurship in scaling-up decentralized energy solutions through innovative business models, training and education, and enhanced opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Innovative stakeholder partnerships should be launched and supported by the international community to assist the least developed countries in their energy transition and in tapping into their renewable energy sources.

### **C. Best practices of Member States**

79. For the annual high-level political forum on sustainable development, 49 countries in 2020 undertook voluntary national reviews of their progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The national reviews were aimed at facilitating the sharing of experiences, including success, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Based on the reviews submitted to the high-level political forum, and for illustrative purposes only, some examples of country-level best practices related to Goal 7 are highlighted below.

#### **Austria**

80. Austria launched a national climate and energy strategy and is determined to increase the use of renewable energy on a massive scale. As of 2018, renewable energy accounted for one third of total energy consumption.

**Bangladesh**

81. Bangladesh has made progress in energy access, increasing the proportion of the population with access to electricity to 75.92 per cent in 2016 and to 90 per cent in 2018.

**Bulgaria**

82. The priorities of Bulgarian energy policy are to achieve the targets for energy from renewable sources, improve energy efficiency, reduce energy intensity and improve energy security. With a targeted policy and funding mechanism, to date, 100 per cent of the population has access to electricity, 91 per cent has access to cooking with clean energy and 18 per cent has access to renewable energy.

**Finland**

83. Finland has succeeded in increasing its renewable energy production significantly over the past decades. Both technological advancement and policy measures have contributed to that progress. In 2018, renewable energy sources covered nearly 37 per cent of total energy consumption and 41 per cent of end-use energy consumption in Finland.

**Georgia**

84. With the aim of ensuring energy access and utilizing the country's abundant renewable energy resources, Parliament adopted a new law on energy and water supply in 2019, which defined the concept of "vulnerable customers" and created a framework to ensure their access to energy. Moreover, the Government adopted an energy efficiency action plan for 2019–2020 and adapted the laws on energy efficiency and on the energy performance of buildings as the first steps in creating the national legal framework for energy efficiency.

**India**

85. With clean cooking fuel reaching over 80 million of the poorest households since 2015, the percentage of households using clean cooking fuel has risen from 63.11 in 2015–2016 to 96.22 in 2018–2019. A road map has been developed to guide deliberations among stakeholders and to better coordinate and bring together strategies to achieve universal access to clean cooking energy by 2030. Several programmes are being implemented to facilitate access, including a national biogas and manure management programme.

**Kenya**

86. Kenya has adopted ongoing strategies to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, including the Kenya Off-Grid Solar Access Project aimed at providing electricity to areas that are not served by the national grid and hence accelerating universal connectivity; the Last Mile Connectivity Project aimed at ensuring increased electricity access; the Mwananchi Gas Project aimed at increasing the affordability of liquefied petroleum gas cylinders for poor households; and a project to provide street lighting in major towns to improve road and personal safety.

**Mozambique**

87. To accelerate development and access to electricity for the population that cannot afford to pay market prices, the country has adopted a policy of social tariffs under the National Energy for All Programme. The trend in access to electricity was

positive between 2007 and 2018, rising from around 10 per cent in 2007 to 31 per cent in 2018.

### **Papua New Guinea**

88. The Government has committed itself to developing its energy sector, with great emphasis on the renewable energy subsector. That development priority is embedded in cascading national policies, strategies and development plans. The third medium-term development plan (2018–2022) calls for 33 per cent of households to have access to electricity by 2022, an increase from 17 per cent in 2017.

### **Seychelles**

89. The Seychelles energy policy for the period 2010–2030 focuses on increasing energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy. According to the policy, the aim is to produce 5 per cent of the country's electricity from renewable sources by 2020 and 15 per cent by 2030. A comprehensive electricity master plan has been formulated in alignment with the national energy policy to achieve nationwide goals for the electricity sector over the next 10 to 15 years. In that context, a road map to achieve 100 per cent renewable energy is being developed, which further strengthens and supports the country's national climate change strategy and its nationally determined contribution.

### **Slovenia**

90. In the sector of clean and available energy, the Government adopted a national energy and climate plan to pave the way towards climate neutrality by 2050. A set of carefully planned measures ensures a balance between the three pillars of the energy policy: sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness.

### **Uganda**

91. The Government has sought to accelerate the achievement of Goal 7, including through plans to reduce the cost of electricity to \$0.05 per unit to encourage electricity consumption, once all major generation, transmission and distribution projects are completed. The Government has also leveraged partnerships with civil society and private sector partners to attract investment in the manufacture and use of improved stoves, such as the rocket stoves, for households and institutions.

### **Ukraine**

92. Ukraine adopted in 2017 and is currently implementing an updated energy strategy for the period up to 2035 on security, energy efficiency and competitiveness. The implementation of the activities under the strategy has made it possible to reduce the share of one supplier in the nuclear fuel market from 91.6 per cent in 2015 to 55.4 per cent in 2019, increase the share of energy produced from renewable sources in total final energy consumption from 4.9 per cent in 2015 to 7 per cent in 2018 and reduce the energy intensity of GDP at constant 2011 purchasing power parity from 0.282 kg of oil equivalent per international dollar in 2015 to 0.269 kg of oil equivalent per international dollar in 2018.

### **Zambia**

93. Zambia is promoting sustainable initiatives for renewable energy that have seen the country diversify its energy mix from 99 per cent reliance on hydropower production in 2011 to 80.6 per cent in 2019.

## IV. High-level dialogue on energy in 2021

94. The General Assembly, through its resolution [74/225](#), invited the Secretary-General, with the support of the relevant United Nations system entities, to convene a high-level dialogue in 2021 to promote the implementation of the energy-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda in support of the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All (2014–2024), including the global plan of action for the Decade, and the high-level political forum.

95. The Secretary-General will convene the summit-level dialogue during the seventh-sixth session of the General Assembly, in September 2021. As the first global gathering on energy under the auspices of the Assembly since the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy, held in Nairobi in 1981, the dialogue presents a historic opportunity to catalyse transformational action in the first years of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and support the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

96. The Secretary-General has designated senior leadership to deliver the dialogue. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs has been designated as the Secretary-General of the dialogue to facilitate the preparations. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs serves as the substantive secretariat.

97. The UN-Energy Co-Chairs, namely, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, have been designated as Co-Chairs to facilitate substantive content development, multi-stakeholder mobilization and inter-agency support.

98. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General has also been designated as the high-level champion to drive global advocacy for the event.

99. The overarching objective of the dialogue is to accelerate the implementation of Goal 7 in support of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The dialogue will promote universal energy access, clean cooking solutions, renewable energy and energy efficiency, by catalysing solutions, investments and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

100. The outcome will be a forward-looking statement presenting a 10-year global plan of action to further accelerate the achievement of Goal 7 in support of the decade of action to deliver the Goals. It will be complemented by a comprehensive report on the dialogue and a compendium of voluntary commitments and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Transformative voluntary actions will be mobilized in the form of “energy compacts”, with measurable milestones towards 2030.

101. The dialogue is expected to be centred around overarching themes and substantive tracks, with an inclusive process for the engagement of Member States and other stakeholders to advance universal energy access, clean energy transitions and the associated positive impacts on other Sustainable Development Goals.

102. The inclusive preparatory process will include ministerial preparatory meetings designed to enable Member States and stakeholders to share experiences and spark action. A summary of the meetings will inform the dialogue.

103. The preparatory processes will be bolstered by robust technical consultations, supported by UN-Energy and other stakeholders. An inter-agency report on accelerating the achievement of Goal 7 will be prepared as substantive background material.

104. A multi-stakeholder advisory group will be convened to support the preparations. The Development Coordination Office will also be leveraged to involve United Nations resident coordinators for relevant country-level engagement, as needed.

105. A trust fund will be established at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to support the preparations to be financed by extrabudgetary resources from Member States and other partners in accordance with resolution 74/225.

## V. Implementation of the global plan of action for the Decade

106. The General Assembly called for the rapid implementation of the strategic objectives as defined in the global plan of action for the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All (2014–2024), most recently in its resolution 72/224. The midpoint review organized in 2019, as mandated in resolution 73/236, proved to be particularly useful in convening key stakeholders to discuss the implementation of Goal 7.

107. Building on the achievements to date and as a follow-up to the midpoint review of the Decade, a wide range of activities are being undertaken by members and partners of UN-Energy, international organizations and stakeholders to deliver on the global plan of action for the Decade.

108. To provide an overview of progress towards Goal 7, the report entitled *Tracking Sustainable Development Goal 7: The Energy Progress Report 2020* was prepared jointly by the International Energy Agency, the International Renewable Energy Agency, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the World Bank Group and the World Health Organization.

109. Policy briefs on accelerating the achievement of Goal 7 in the time of COVID-19<sup>2</sup> were prepared in support of the high-level political forum in 2020. They were compiled by the multi-stakeholder technical advisory group on Goal 7 convened by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, including contributions by over 30 United Nations entities and other organizations.

110. To promote synergetic actions on Goal 7 and other Goals through multi-stakeholder partnerships, the Health and Energy Platform of Action has been established jointly by the World Health Organization, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. The Platform is designed to advance progress towards the achievement of multiple Goals, including Goals 3, 5 and 7.

111. The energy sector must be decarbonized to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change, in order to achieve Goal 13. Current commitments to renewable energy and energy efficiency are insufficient to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. The Global Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, jointly organized on an annual basis by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, provides a useful platform for sharing experiences and best practices, including in the area of energy.

112. Moving forward, the implementation of the global plan of action for the Decade will be designed to support the preparations for the high-level dialogue on energy. The current global plan of action will also be substantially updated based on the outcomes of the dialogue, to provide the global platform for subsequent follow-up action in support of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26235UNFINALFINAL.pdf>.



Goals. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will continue to support the Secretary-General in coordinating the activities of the Decade, in close collaboration with UN-Energy and other stakeholders.

## **VI. Strengthening coherence and coordination through a revitalized UN-Energy**

113. The General Assembly, through its resolution [74/225](#), encouraged UN-Energy to support coherence and coordination across the energy-related activities of the entities of the United Nations development system, within their respective mandates.

114. Under the leadership of the UN-Energy Co-Chairs, UN-Energy has been revitalized and is implementing its plan of action to bring the United Nations system together for more integrated and coherent delivery of policy and normative support. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides the dedicated secretariat for UN-Energy.

115. UN-Energy played an instrumental role in the 2019 Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary-General by facilitating the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships, including those related to renewable energy, energy efficiency, clean cooking and sustainable energy services for health-care facilities.

116. Moving forward, UN-Energy is working to strengthen coherence and coordination in the following areas: (a) promoting a coherent response to achieve Goal 7 by sharing information, knowledge, experiences and good practices regarding policy development and implementation in the area of energy; (b) providing technical contributions and inter-agency support to the preparations for the high-level dialogue on energy to be held in 2021, through the organization of expert consultations, mobilization of actions and partnerships, and development of analytical materials on substantive themes and tracks for the dialogue; and (c) maintaining and communicating an overview of major ongoing initiatives based on the UN-Energy work programme.

## **VII. Conclusion**

117. In order to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including Goal 7, all stakeholders need to step up and scale up their actions.

118. The high-level dialogue on energy to be held in 2021 provides a unique opportunity to advance actions towards Goal 7 and consider options to strengthen international cooperation in the area of energy, given that there is still no fully inclusive global platform on energy, as pointed out previously (see [A/71/320](#)). Synergies with forthcoming intergovernmental processes and milestones, including on transport, ocean, biodiversity, gender equality, food systems, climate change and the least developed countries, should be enhanced. The United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, including its global plan of action, should be leveraged to support the preparations for the high-level dialogue on energy and its subsequent follow-up actions. UN-Energy should be strengthened to enhance coherence and coordination.

119. Such actions can help to build sustainable and resilient societies, ensuring that no one is left behind, while bringing the objectives of the Paris Agreement within reach.