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Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV). It is structured in two parts: the first part provides regional perspectives on two issues active on the current global agenda. The first issue is efforts to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality, which is related directly to the main theme of the 2017 session of the Council, namely, eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions through promoting sustainable development, expanding opportunities and addressing related challenges. The second issue is regional perspectives on global migration as a contribution to the intergovernmental process towards forging a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration.

The second part covers developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, including additional policy matters addressed during the sessions of the regional commissions; an update on the regional commissions' support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the regional level, namely, through the organization of regional forums for sustainable development; efforts to promote coherence at the regional level, including through the respective Regional Coordination Mechanisms; and enhanced cooperation among the regional commissions.



I. Regional perspectives on the global agenda

A. Eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities: regional initiatives and perspectives

1. Although income poverty globally has fallen sharply in the past 20 years, considerable challenges remain owing to recent economic and financial crises and a resurgence of poverty across conflict-affected countries.

2. Poverty is distributed unevenly between and across regions, with 50.7 per cent of the world's poor in sub-Saharan Africa, 33.4 percent in South Asia, 9.3 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, 4.4 in Latin America, 1.4 percent in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and 0.8 percent in the rest of the world.¹ Poverty in Africa has declined very slowly in the past 25 years, with the absolute number having been almost constant since 2002.² This represents a notable geographical shift from 1990, when half of the world's poor resided in East Asia and the Pacific.

3. Latin America remains the region with the highest overall level of socioeconomic inequality, although income inequality was reduced considerably in the region over the past decade. Africa is the world's second most inequitable region.

4. Understanding and addressing inequality is integral to reducing global poverty. Historically, an analysis of inequality has focused on income disparities. Today, there is a growing recognition that inequality is a multidimensional phenomenon and extends to health, education, civic participation and human rights.³ A rights-based approach seeks to ensure that all citizens enjoy a baseline level of well-being, namely, access to education, health, work, social protection and other rights. All these dimensions are interconnected and, accordingly, require an integrated approach.

Africa

5. Africa's strong growth performance during the past decade, with an annual growth rate averaging nearly 5 per cent, resulted in a lower level of poverty and led to steady progress in education, health and living standards. Nevertheless, the pace of progress has been slow and hampered by high levels of income inequality within countries. Inequality trends across the five subregions of Africa vary considerably. Between 1993 and 2011, West Africa recorded a steady decline, while the decline was more modest in East Africa. By contrast, Southern and Central Africa showed a rise in inequality. In Northern Africa, inequalities have persisted or worsened.⁴

6. Inequality in Africa remained high owing to the reliance of African economies on the extraction industry, namely, mining and oil, agriculture and the export of primary commodities, which have generated few formal jobs and redistributed economic gains unequally, resulting in a growing informal sector in Africa with rising vulnerable employment.

¹ See World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2016: Taking on Inequality* (Washington, D.C., 2016).

² See Economic Commission for Africa, *The Demographic Profile of African Countries* (Addis Ababa, 2016).

³ See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Compacts for Equality: Towards a Sustainable Future* (Santiago, 2014).

⁴ Abdesslam Boutayeb and Uwe Helmert, "Social inequalities, regional disparities and health inequity in North African countries", *International Journal for Equity in Health*, vol. 10 (23) (May 2011).

7. Inequality in Africa is a gendered phenomenon. In 2016, women had an unemployment rate of 9.4, compared with 6.9 per cent for men. African women continue to face discrimination in gaining access to economic assets and constraints in participating in economic activities. Substantial disparities in land and asset ownership persist between men and women, with women in some countries having no legal rights to own land and property or conduct business independently.⁵

8. The low involvement of girls in secondary and tertiary education, especially in rural communities, is one of the root causes of gender inequality. Poverty, the high cost of education, early marriages, adolescent pregnancies, the lack of gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, gender-based violence and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on girls compound this inequality.

9. Access to education and health in Africa remains low overall. More than two in five adults are illiterate and the quality of education is substandard. Progress in health services is being made, but outcomes nevertheless remain the worst in the world. Nearly two in five children are malnourished and progress in immunization rates has waned.

10. While Africa remains predominantly rural, it is also the fastest urbanizing region in the world. There are large geographical differences in poverty and inequality within countries along the urban-rural divide. Urbanization simultaneously represents a challenge and an opportunity for decreasing poverty and inequality in Africa.

11. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has developed the African Social Development Index as a tool to support its member States in tracking progress made towards reducing human exclusion, including poverty. The Index can be used to measure the inclusiveness of growth and, therefore, contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It has also proved to be an innovative tool in aiding member States in taking a comprehensive look at social policy as it relates to human inclusion and poverty reduction.

Latin America and the Caribbean

12. High levels of inequality are a deeply entrenched historical and structural characteristic of Latin American societies. They are also determined heavily by the productive structure, in which 50 per cent of all jobs in the region are in low productivity sectors, owing usually to the constrained use of technologies and/or of low-skilled workers. While the region has succeeded in reducing income inequality over the past decade, thanks to better employment conditions, stronger social protection systems and improved tax systems, this reduction has slowed in recent years.

13. Inequality is affected by cross-cutting factors such as gender, race, ethnicity and disabilities.⁶ Poverty levels in 2014 were significantly higher for Afrodescendent and indigenous populations, especially among women. In addition, people with one or more disabilities have fewer economic opportunities.

14. Women who dedicate their time to unpaid domestic work are highly vulnerable to poverty, given that they lack their own income, have less certifiable employment experience and generally lack social security protections. Their poverty is exacerbated in the event of separation or widowhood. Women without economic autonomy are also more likely to suffer gender-based violence.

⁵ See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *FAO Statistical Yearbook 2012: Africa Food and Agriculture* (Rome, 2013).

⁶ See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Horizons 2030: equality at the centre of sustainable development" (Santiago, 2016).

15. Territorial considerations are another determining factor of poverty: 23.2 per cent of poor people live in urban areas, compared with 47.9 per cent in rural areas. Furthermore, 7.7 per cent of the urban population faces conditions of extreme poverty, compared with 28.2 per cent of the rural population.⁷

16. Latin America and the Caribbean have made significant progress in expanding the coverage of and access to education. Between 1990 and 2013, the percentage of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 who completed primary education rose from 60.5 percent to 94.4.⁷ The region also achieved a two-thirds reduction in child mortality.

17. The Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has been making efforts for more than 30 years to promote the measurement of income poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its methodological recommendations for poverty measurement form the basis of national official poverty in most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Commission also provides countries with strategic advice on poverty reduction.

Arab region

18. In the 1990s, only 9 percent of the population in the Arab region lived under the global poverty line, and the region experienced comparatively low levels of poverty and inequality. Over the past 30 years, income inequalities have been on the rise owing to an uneven distribution of income gains. While poverty decreased in some Arab countries, inequality remained the same or increased. In Tunisia, for example, between 2000 and 2010, poverty rates were reduced from 35 to 10 per cent, while the drop in inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, was nominal (from 0.344 to 0.327).

19. Poverty increased in countries affected by conflict and political instability. In the Syrian Arab Republic, armed conflict resulted in an increase in poverty from 12.3 per cent in 2007 to an estimated 43 per cent in 2013. By 2015, the upper poverty rate increased to 83.4 per cent.⁸ In Yemen, poverty increased from a rate of 34 per cent in 2006 to more than 60 per cent in 2015.

20. There are striking subregional disparities in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in the region, with the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf at the top and Comoros, Djibouti, Somalia, Mauritania, the Sudan and Yemen at the bottom.⁹ This stark contrast in GDP does not always translate to patterns and dynamics of economic inequality: low income coincides with high inequality in Comoros, Djibouti and Mauritania; medium income with medium inequality in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic; medium income with high inequality in Morocco;⁹ and high income with high inequality in Qatar.

21. Inequalities in wealth and income also underpin social inequalities in healthcare, education, housing and political and social rights. Although remarkable progress has been achieved, gender inequality persists. In conflict and displacement settings, gender inequalities are even more profound, with a heightened impact on vulnerable groups.

⁷ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Inclusive social development: the next generation of policies for overcoming poverty and reducing inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean" (Santiago, 2016), p. 31.

⁸ See Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and University of St. Andrews, "Syria at war: five years on" (Beirut, 2015).

⁹ See Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, "Perspectives on inequality challenges in the Arab region", Issues brief (Beirut, 2015). Available from <http://css.escwa.org.lb/SDPD/3572/Goal10.pdf>.

22. The Arab region has experienced a significant reduction in gender gaps in health and educational achievements over the past two decades. Widespread economic and political inequalities between men and women, however, remain. Young people have, on average, employment rates two to four times lower than that of the adult population.¹⁰

23. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has developed a new multidimensional poverty measurement tool. The tool is applied to all countries in the Arab region to monitor progress on multidimensional poverty. In addition, ESCWA is rolling out two toolkits on social protection and social justice in the region.

Asia and the Pacific

24. In Asia and the Pacific, economic growth has significantly reduced the total number of people living in poverty. In 2013, 400 million people lived below the poverty line, down from 1 billion in 2000. However, economic gains were not shared equally and income inequality remained above the world average.¹¹ In eight countries, including China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and the Russian Federation, income inequalities have increased.¹¹

25. Vulnerable employment, comprised of self-employed workers and those working in low-productivity services, is pervasive across the region, constituting more than 80 per cent of all employment in Bangladesh, India and the Lao People's Democratic Republic.¹²

26. One of the most worrisome trends in the region is the low and even declining level of women's participation in the labour force. Currently, the average gender gap in labour force participation is 30 percentage points, reaching 50 percentage points in South and South-West Asia.

27. The unequal burden of unpaid care work is a critical barrier to achieving gender equality. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, time-use surveys indicated that the share of paid work of total time used was 11.8 per cent for women, compared with 78.3 per cent for men. Similarly, in Pakistan, women spent 21.4 per cent of their time in paid work, compared with the 91.2 per cent share for men. Persons with disabilities also face multidimensional exclusions in the region. As many as 650 million persons with some form of disability live in Asia and the Pacific.

28. Income and wealth inequality are driven and reinforced by gaps in opportunities,¹² namely, unequal access to services, including healthcare, education, employment, water and sanitation, and energy services and/or electricity. For example, in Pakistan, girls in the highest quintile attend school for 7.7 more years than girls in the lowest income quintile. This difference is 5.8 years in Nepal and 5 years in Cambodia and Viet Nam.¹²

29. Sex, ethnicity, religion, caste and residence in urban or rural areas or even the province in which one is born determine the quality of access to services that people have throughout their lives. In India, the prevalence of malnutrition is higher in rural areas and among scheduled tribes and castes.¹³ Teenage pregnancy is more

¹⁰ See World Bank, *Inequality, Uprisings, and Conflict in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C., 2015).

¹¹ See Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Time for equality: the role of social protection in reducing inequalities in Asia and the Pacific" (Bangkok, 2015) and World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2016: Taking on Inequality* (Washington, D.C., 2016).

¹² See Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Time for equality: the role of social protection in reducing inequalities in Asia and the Pacific" (Bangkok, 2015).

¹³ See India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) 2005-06* (Mumbai, 2006).

frequent among rural populations. Rural poverty is also strongly associated with indigenous populations.

30. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in cooperation with ECA, ECLAC and ESCWA, launched an online interactive platform, the Social Protection Toolbox, which highlights good practices in establishing the foundations of a social protection floor. Using multimedia and data visualization techniques, the Toolbox presents policymakers and stakeholders with the argument for strengthening and broadening social protection in a user-friendly and interactive fashion.

Economic Commission for Europe region

31. In the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, levels of equality vary greatly. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 resulted in increased poverty and inequality across the region, especially in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, inequality increased as the broad access to social services that the population had enjoyed under socialist systems diminished.¹⁴

32. In addition, in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, low commodity prices and slowing growth in the European Union and the Russian Federation during the past decade have made it difficult for many to find safe and stable employment. As a result, inequality has increased.¹⁴ This situation is especially stark in “pockets of poverty”, including isolated rural and mountainous areas and mono-company towns.¹⁵

33. The ECE region experiences notable territorial inequalities, with the majority of wealth concentrated in urban areas. The economic and financial crisis in the region has resulted in a decrease in the affordability of housing and utilities. Poor owners or those who could not afford to pay for utilities emerged across the region. More than 100 million people in the region today have to spend more than 40 per cent of their disposable income on housing. The social housing waiting lists in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are at 1.8 million, 1.7 million in France and 1.17 million in Ukraine. The United States of America has a shortage of 5.3 million social housing homes.¹⁶

34. ECE developed a guide on poverty measurement to raise awareness of the importance of poverty statistics, provide guidance to countries in applying various measurement approaches and improve international comparability. The Geneva United Nations Charter on Sustainable Housing was endorsed by ECE to promote access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all.

Policy areas to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality

35. The regional commissions implemented a joint United Nations Development Account project¹⁷ for the period 2014-2017 that supports countries in conceptualizing, designing and implementing multidisciplinary public policies oriented towards greater socioeconomic equality. In line with the vision of the 2030 Agenda, the project demonstrated that addressing poverty and inequality requires an

¹⁴ See United Nations Development Programme, *Progress at Risk: Inequalities and Human Development in Eastern Europe, Turkey and Central Asia* (Istanbul, 2016).

¹⁵ See Economic Commission for Europe, “Looking back, leaping forward: moving from MDGs to SDGs in Europe and Central Asia” (Geneva, 2016).

¹⁶ See Economic Commission for Europe, “Social housing in the UNECE region: models, trends and challenges” (Geneva, 2015).

¹⁷ See United Nations Development Account, “Promoting equality: strengthening the capacity of selected developing countries to design and implement equality oriented public policies and programmes”, Ninth tranche project document (2014).

integrated vision that takes into account the three dimensions, namely, social, economic and environmental, of sustainable development. While the project has focused on areas of national policy, it is recognized that an enabling international and regional environment and enlisting multi-stakeholder partnerships are critical contributors to the efforts to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality.

Promoting structural change and diversifying economies

36. To overcome poverty and inequality, it is necessary to raise economic productivity through structural change to diversify economies at the national and local levels, promote technological and social innovations, improve infrastructure and enhance business environments.

37. In Africa, where nearly half the workforce is still dependent on agriculture, promoting investments in innovative technologies and approaches has already helped to reduce poverty. The experience of Ethiopia has demonstrated that the application of fertilizers, along with regulating prices of agricultural products, has given poor farmers opportunities to generate higher incomes. Ethiopia has reduced poverty considerably over the past decade, with a reduction of 4 per cent annually.

Establishing effective tax systems

38. Tax systems are an important vehicle for redistributing wealth and reducing inequality. To enhance their capacity to finance social protections, countries need to expand their relatively narrow tax base, including by tackling high labour market informality and weak tax administration and collection.

39. Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka have developed tax-financed social protection programmes for children with specific nutritional, health and educational objectives. Many countries, including Maldives, Nepal, Samoa and Viet Nam, are also providing tax-financed, non-contributory pensions that are aimed at covering all older persons.

Improving labour markets

40. Establishing an effective regulatory framework to support decent jobs, harmonize national labour laws and regulations with international labour standards and monitor and enforce compliance with national labour laws to ensure decent jobs are key steps to overcome inequality.

Strengthening social protection systems

41. The adoption of a social protection floor is a key social protection measure. Social protection measures should be implemented as an integrated social protection system and in tandem with other measures to increase economic productivity and improve education.

42. The political commitment to social development has increased in many countries. Twenty-one countries in the Asia and Pacific region have increased social protection spending as a share of total government expenditure over the past two decades.¹² In Africa, Ethiopia's productive safety net programme, which includes food and/or cash transfers, has supported more than 1.5 million people.

Promoting environmentally sustainable and resilient economic development

43. The combination of poverty and inequality makes the poor more vulnerable than the non-poor to the effects of environmental damage and climate change owing to their enhanced exposure, limited access to resources and diminished coping capacity to address negative impacts. Public institutions and policies must be

coordinated around a big environmental push geared towards transforming the production structure to be economically, socially and environmentally sound.

Promoting access to high-quality education

44. Countries need to improve education completion rates for vulnerable population groups, especially for girls, and increase or leverage public resources to enhance access, affordability and quality of education at various levels.

Promoting gender equality

45. Governments need to actively champion the integration of gender concerns into national planning, including institutional development, and legislative and budgetary processes.

46. Greater investments are needed in time-saving and labour-saving infrastructure, including water supply, electricity and transportation, to alleviate the burden on girls and women from unpaid domestic work and enable their participation in education and remunerative economic activities. Targeted awareness campaigns to effect attitudinal change and encourage women and girls to claim their legal rights need to be organized.

47. In 2005, the Government of Burkina Faso instituted the response to improve girls' chances to succeed programme. The programme increased overall enrolment by 19 per cent and increased girls' enrolment by almost 5 per cent more than that of boys.¹⁸

48. Fostering female entrepreneurship is a key strategy to facilitate women's economic empowerment. Doing so requires Governments to support an increase in women's access to financial services, markets and information and communication technology (ICT).

Promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities

49. Countries need to harmonize national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure enforceable anti-discrimination provisions and stronger social protection schemes to support persons with disabilities.

Decreasing territorial inequalities

50. Policies and strategies for poverty eradication need to harness the potential of urbanization to drive inclusive growth, while effectively managing related externalities. There is a need to promote territorial cohesion through more effective vertical and horizontal coordination of various branches of Governments. Territorial consideration should be included in national strategies for poverty reduction.

Mainstreaming poverty reduction measures into national development plans

51. Fiscal and sectoral policies need to be aligned towards toward poverty eradication through mainstreaming poverty and inequality reduction measures into national development plans.

¹⁸ Harounan Kazianga, Dan Levy, Leigh L. Linden and Matt Sloan, "The effects of 'girl-friendly' schools: evidence from the BRIGHT school construction program in Burkina Faso", *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, vol. 5 (2), pp. 41-62.

Raising capacity of Governments in data collection on poverty and inequality

52. Household-level data on income, as well as access to education, health, employment, financial services, ICT, water and sanitation and electricity, are scarce worldwide, especially in developing countries. An analysis of inequality across population groups is therefore incomplete. There is a need to develop the skills of policymakers at the national and local levels for collecting, aggregating, analysing and presenting information on key socioeconomic indicators. Civil society should also be empowered to participate in data-collection efforts. New data-collection tools, which use new media technologies, should be integrated into national data-collection processes.

53. To overcome the paucity of sex-disaggregated data and data on persons with disabilities, a concerted effort is required from Governments, including critical actors such as national statistical offices and ministries of finance, to devote sufficient human and financial resources to the development of solid statistical capacities.

B. Regional perspectives on migration

54. While international migration is a global phenomenon, migration has strong intraregional dimensions, with most movements limited to the same region. This trend towards intraregional migration is frequently driven by labour policies and practices. Factors such as shared histories, linguistic and cultural similarities, uneven development between neighbouring countries, preferential legal migration options and ease of travel often lead to migrants moving to countries near their own. There is significant regional diversity in terms of the relevant roles and impacts on the regions as places of origin, transit and destination for migrants.

55. Following the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016 and with the inception of a multi-stakeholder consultative process towards forging a global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration, culminating in an intergovernmental conference in 2018, the present report highlights key regional, subregional and intraregional migration trends in support of the knowledge base for the global compact on migration process and ahead of the planned regional consultations.

Identifying regional and intraregional migration trends

56. A comparative analysis of statistics from across the five regions covered by the regional commissions illustrates the strong tendency towards regional and intraregional migration. In Africa, 52 per cent of migrants from African countries migrated to other African countries, with most of this migration occurring between neighbouring countries. For example, 70 per cent of West African migrants moved to other West African countries. In Asia and the Pacific, 75 per cent of migrants come from other countries within the region. In Latin America and the Caribbean, that figure is almost two thirds.

57. In the Arab region, labour and forced migration trends coalesce to ensure that most migrants from Arab countries remain within the region, either immigrating to the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf as migrant workers or being forced to move to neighbouring countries as a result of conflict. With regard to Europe, while the region faces very different labour migration conditions, the freedom of movement within the European Union for citizens of its member States means that most European migrants similarly remain within Europe.

Economic Commission for Europe region

58. The ECE region has experienced increased displacement and migration dynamics, with important implications in terms of sustainable development. It is a region of origin, transit and destination that hosts sizable refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant populations. Both 2015 and early 2016 were characterized by continuing large-scale arrivals across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, driven in large measure by conflicts in the Middle East and other regions. Irregular movement is a longstanding challenge, with human trafficking, smuggling exploitation and abuse becoming more frequent phenomena in the region.

59. However, socioeconomic forces are among the key drivers of migration, causing increasing levels of migration of young people. According to the World Bank, three of the seven countries receiving the largest amount of remittance inflows, relative to GDP, in the world in 2015 were in the region, namely, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan.

Latin America and the Caribbean

60. Current migratory patterns in Latin America and the Caribbean reflect both recent change and long-term continuity. Some 30 million natives of the region live outside their country of birth. The foreign-born population residing in Latin American and Caribbean countries accounts for approximately one quarter of the number of emigrants and only 1.1 per cent of the total population of the region. Immigrants coming from the region of Latin America and the Caribbean account for 62.8 per cent. Emigration, however, varies markedly by subregion, with the Caribbean and Central America standing out owing to the high proportion of emigrants in relation to the volume of the native population (11.1 per cent and 10.2 per cent, respectively). Mexico represents 40 per cent of the regional emigration, with some 12 million of its citizens living abroad. It is followed by Colombia and El Salvador. The main recipients in absolute numbers are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil and Mexico.

61. Regional migration to the United States continues to comprise the bulk of emigration. Although flows from Latin America and the Caribbean to the United States have declined recently, the long-term trend shows that it still amounts to more than 20 million people. After the United States, Spain is the second most important non-regional destination, bringing together 8 per cent of the region's total emigrants in 2010 (2.4 million people).

Arab region

62. International migration in the Arab region is a growing phenomenon. In 2015, there were almost 35 million migrants in 22 Arab countries. The number of international migrants as a share of the total population of the region is increasing (8.9 per cent in 2015, compared with 6.5 per cent in 1990), making international migration one of the main factors driving economic and social change. It is estimated that there were more than 26 million migrants from the Arab region in 2015.¹⁹

63. Migration takes three primary forms: regular and irregular labour migration, forced migration and mixed migration flows. The Gulf countries are the primary destination for migrant labour from both within and beyond the region. In 2015, the six countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf alone hosted more than 25 million migrants, most of whom were labour migrants. Forced

¹⁹ See Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Trends in international migrant stock: the 2015 revision" (New York, 2015).

migration to, from and through the Arab region is largely the result of people fleeing conflict, wars, severe breakdowns in the public order, generalized violence or persecution. The Arab region also bears witness to large-scale, cross-border and irregular mixed flows of migrants. Displacement is affecting more than 30 million people, resulting in more than 18 million internally displaced persons, more than 5 million Palestinian refugees and more than 7 million refugees.²⁰

Asia and the Pacific

64. The majority of migrants to and from countries of Asia and the Pacific are temporary labour migrants participating in low-skilled labour. There are more than 98 million migrants from ESCAP member States, with the largest numbers coming from Bangladesh, China, India and the Russian Federation. Overall, 46 per cent of migrants from ESCAP member States are women, although this obfuscates significant subregional differences: migrants from Central, East, North and North-East Asia and from the Pacific are predominantly women, while those from South and South-West Asia are overwhelmingly men.

65. Of the more than 60 million migrants in the ESCAP region, nearly 45 million migrate from other countries within the region. Major countries of destination for intraregional migrants include India, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and Thailand. Further analysis shows that most migration movements take place within the same subregion. For example, 97 per cent of migrants from ESCAP member States in Central and North Asia are from other countries in the subregion, whereas the figure for South and South-West Asia is 91 per cent.

66. These trends reflect factors such as historical and cultural linkages and, in some cases, favourable legal regimes for citizens of neighbouring countries. They also reflect differences between countries in the same subregion in demographic and development trends that drive labour migration. For example, in South-East Asia, countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand represent highly desirable migration destinations for people from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar owing to their relatively high levels of development and rapid ageing.

67. Forced migration is also an important factor in the context of intraregional migration. Almost 4 million of the 4.8 million Afghan citizens abroad reside in the neighbouring countries of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, reflecting the important role of neighbouring countries as countries of asylum.

Africa

68. Some 31 million Africans, or a little more than 3 per cent of the continent's population, have migrated, including both voluntary and involuntary migrants. Of these, nearly 28 per cent have come from North Africa.

69. Migration flows within Africa are much larger than those out of Africa, with more than half of migrants staying within the continent. Excluding North Africa, some two thirds of migrants, especially poor migrants, go to other countries within Africa, with the bulk of migrants remaining within their subregions. Of those emigrating, more than 70 per cent in West Africa, 65 per cent in Southern Africa, 50 per cent in Central Africa and 47 per cent in East Africa migrate within the subregion.

²⁰ See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global trends: forced displacement in 2015" (Geneva, 2016) and International Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Annual report 2015" (Geneva, 2015).

70. Only in North Africa do 90 per cent of emigrants go to destinations outside of Africa, predominantly to Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Only about 28 per cent of migrants from Africa go to Europe. Of the total migrants residing in Europe, less than 12 per cent are from Africa.

Tapping into regional cooperation to address migration-related challenges

71. At regional and frequently subregional levels, there are many existing processes and mechanisms that are already quite advanced and that will be leveraged to facilitate cooperation and knowledge-sharing with regard to the global compact on migration. Informal regional dialogues, such as the Colombo Process in Asia or the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration, serves to build confidence, networks and shared understanding and facilitate practical cooperation. More formal processes, such as the Mercosur agreement on free movement and residence and the treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, establish forms of free movement of migrants between the member States of their memberships, giving greater options for legal and safe migration, and serving to bring member States of these organizations closer together.

72. Within Latin America and the Caribbean, the primary engagement of ECLAC on migration focuses on the monitoring and implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development. Approved in 2013 by the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, a regional body for which ECLAC serves as the technical secretariat, it contains one chapter that concerns international migration and the protection of the human rights of all migrants. Countries within the region are working to support the development of a rights-based institutional framework, legislation and public policies to address the lack of protection for many migrants in their crossings, insertion and return. Through leveraging the 2030 Agenda and the establishment of the Forum the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, the Montevideo Consensus and the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean are in the midst of having actions and indicators defined. It is expected that the Forum on Sustainable Development will explicitly associate the Montevideo Consensus and the Sustainable Development Goals.

73. ESCWA, together with the League of Arab States and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), serves as Co-Chair of a working group on international migration in the Arab region that brings together 16 participating United Nations agencies. This forum strengthens regional coordination on migration issues and the implementation of the migration-related Sustainable Development Goals and will be leveraged to support preparations for the regional consultative process for the global compact on migration. Under the aegis of the working group, it was emphasized in the 2015 situation report on international migration that there was a need for peace, stability and the rule of law, finding immediate political solutions to ongoing conflicts that have resulted in large movements of refugees and addressing the root causes of these conflicts, such as poverty.

74. The Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration, facilitated by the League of Arab States, is a key intergovernmental platform for addressing migration and displacement issues at the regional level. It promotes the principle of international solidarity with host countries and the importance of joint efforts across the international community to deal with large movements of refugees and increasing irregular migration. In doing so, it focuses on protecting the security and stability of its member States, while also defending the human dignity of refugees and migrants.

75. The most formal means of fostering cooperation on international migration in Asia and the Pacific takes place through regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Eurasian Economic Union, which are working to address labour mobility issues and labour market integration within the region. Member States in the region are also addressing migration challenges through regional consultative processes on migration, such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, which, among other things, addresses reducing migrant exploitation by expanding safe, legal and affordable migration pathways; the Colombo Process, which brings together countries of origin of labour migrants from South and South-East Asia to promote dialogue; and the Abu Dhabi dialogue, which promotes discussions between Colombo Process countries and the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. Such processes facilitate dialogue and practical cooperation on areas of shared interest between countries of origin, destination and transit in the region.

76. ESCAP supports its member States in these formal processes and also convenes meetings to provide an intergovernmental forum for regional dialogue and consensus, building on international migration, such as the Asia-Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the Global Forum on Migration and Development in 2010; the Asia-Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2013; and the Asia-Pacific population conferences. Moreover, ESCAP leverages its role as convenor of the Regional Coordination Mechanism to enlist the expertise of partner agencies, notably IOM, to support member States on migration issues and produce collaborative knowledge products.

77. Among the knowledge products that will support the knowledge base for the global compact on migration, in the “Asia-Pacific migration report 2015: migrants’ contributions to development”, the positive development impacts of international migration and the need to protect migrant workers to ensure positive development outcomes were highlighted. The Pacific Climate Change Migration Project also supported the evidence base on the impacts of climate change on migration in this region and identified concrete policy options.

78. Within the Africa region, the comprehensive programme on migration of ECA seeks to identify relevant policies, practices and tools to assist its member States in the implementation and measurement of the migration-related Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union migration policy framework. In addition, the Joint Labour Migration Programme, an existing partnership of ECA, the African Union Commission, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and IOM, is aimed at addressing the challenges of labour migration and mobility through achieving wider formulation, adoption and implementation of harmonized free movement regimes and coherent national labour migration policies.

79. Two African Union-driven processes are also tackling migration. The high-level panel on migration, chaired by the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was constituted pursuant to a resolution passed at the Joint Annual Meetings of the ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance in Addis Ababa in March and April 2016. In the resolution, it was mandated that ECA and the African Union Commission provide the technical backstopping necessary to the panel. Separately, and stemming from recognition of the central role of migration as an important enabler for inclusive and sustainable development premised on African-owned and African-driven initiatives, the theme of the 2017 Africa Development Forum is “Migration and Africa’s transformation”. The Forum will offer unique opportunities

to meet and interact with key players in the field of migration, with the participation of heads of State, government ministers, eminent speakers and policy experts.

80. In the ECE region, the Budapest Process has evolved over the past 20 years from an information-sharing tool between European countries in a pre-European Union enlargement setting to a far-reaching European-Asian forum for improving migration management, with the participation of more than 50 Governments and numerous international organizations. While supporting the European Union's global approach to migration and mobility, the Prague Process, which was established in 2009, is aimed at strengthening cooperation in migration management, specifically exploring and developing agreed-upon principles and elements for close migration partnerships between the 50 participating countries. It focuses on issues relating to asylum, legal migration, irregular migration and migration and development. The Almaty Process, which was established in 2013, is aimed at addressing the challenges resulting from complex migration dynamics and mixed migratory movements in Central Asia and the wider region through promoting sustained dialogue and exchange of information on migration issues and on refugee protection challenges. In addition, there are a number of interregional forums on migration, linking Europe and other regions.

81. ECE is working with its member States to devise innovative ways to measure and monitor migratory flows, develop common definitions and explore the use of administrative data and non-traditional data sources for migration statistics. The Commission's steering group on migration statistics provides direction to the work of the Conference of European Statisticians on migration statistics, advances methodological development in migration statistics and provides a mechanism for following up on the implementation of methodological guidance on migration statistics. A number of these statistical workstreams on migration under way could support the knowledge base for the global compact.

Regional consultations in support of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration

82. In its resolution [71/280](#) on the modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, the General Assembly requested the regional economic commissions, in collaboration with other relevant entities of the United Nations system, in particular IOM, to organize discussions among States Members of the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to examine regional and subregional aspects of international migration.

83. Accordingly, the regional commissions have proceeded to plan their relevant regional consultations and support knowledge products, which will provide regional and subregional perspectives on the six identified themes, as relevant and applicable within each region, for integration into the preparatory process of the global compact ahead of the global stock-taking meeting, to be held in Mexico in 2017. The regional commissions are cooperating closely to share best practices and lessons learned that emerge from the planning of their regional consultations and cooperating substantively on issues requiring interregional collaboration.

84. In implementing these activities, the regional commissions are working closely with IOM and other United Nations partners on the ground and are leveraging existing structures, such as the Regional Coordination Mechanism thematic working groups, and partnerships with regional entities such as the African Union Commission and the League of Arab States. In order to reflect the subregional diversity within the regions, the regional commissions are spearheading a number of knowledge products that will feed into the regional consultations. From these

regional consultations, the regional commissions will produce summary reports of the Chairs, which will be considered as input to the global stock-taking meeting.

85. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, ECLAC plans to organize its regional consultation in Santiago on 30 and 31 August 2017, at which it will present and consider the findings of three studies commissioned on the subregional perspectives on migration in South America, Central America and Mexico and the Caribbean.

86. ESCWA aims to conduct its regional consultation in late September 2017 in collaboration with IOM, the League of Arab States and other United Nations partners. ESCWA will lead preparations of a thematic study on the policy implications of the global compact for countries of the region, focusing on national policy gaps that require alignment with international standards. The consultation will coincide with the publication of the 2017 situation report on international migration, which will constitute a key substantive input to the regional consultative process. A number of preparatory meetings will be held in the lead-up to the consultation, including an extraordinary meeting on the compacts of the Arab Regional Consultative Process and an expert group meeting organized by ILO.

87. In close cooperation with IOM and other United Nations partners, ESCAP will convene a regional consultation for its member States in Bangkok from 6 to 8 November 2017. Given the exigencies faced in the region, the focus of the meeting will be on issues relating to labour migration, climate change and migration and protection in the context of large movements of vulnerable irregular migrants. Background papers on these topics are being prepared to inform deliberations during the meeting.

88. In the Africa region, ECA has formed a migration steering committee, comprised of representatives of ECA, the African Union Commission, IOM, ILO and other relevant stakeholders, to support workplan preparations for its multipronged regional consultative process. To begin the process, an intergovernmental African regional preparatory meeting on the global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration was held in Kampala from 15 to 17 May 2017 with 54 member States, as part of the third Pan-African Forum on Migration organized by IOM.

89. ECA will convene an expert group meeting, comprising experts from all subregions, in Addis Ababa in mid-September 2017 to discuss the consolidated regional report. Following from this meeting and in partnership with the African Union Commission, ECA will organize a regional conference to consider the regional report in Addis Ababa from 18 to 20 October. A final session, to be held in tandem with the African Development Forum in November, will be devoted to the outcome document for the global compact on migration.

II. Developments in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation

A. Major policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings

90. Regional commissions support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level, including its follow-up and review process, and provide regional input to the high-level political forum. Regional forums for sustainable development, convened by the regional commissions, provide input to the high-level political forum and support implementation, peer learning on and review of the

2030 Agenda. In doing so, they provide a natural nexus between the national and global levels. The regional forums are broadly established around five blocks:

- (a) Peer learning through exchange of experiences among countries of the same region, notably those preparing for the high-level political forum voluntary national reviews;
- (b) Regional progress assessments of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals;
- (c) Regional perspectives on the global theme of the high-level political forum;
- (d) Addressing means of implementation from a cross-cutting regional perspective;
- (e) Partnerships within the United Nations system or with regional and subregional organizations or other stakeholders.

91. Ahead of the high-level political forum in July 2017, the regional commissions convened their relevant regional forum for sustainable development. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development was held in Bangkok from 29 to 31 March 2017; the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development was held in Mexico City from 26 to 28 April 2017; the Arab Regional Forum for Sustainable Development was held in Rabat from 3 to 5 May 2017; the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region was held in Geneva on 25 April 2017; and the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was held in Addis Ababa from 17 to 19 May 2017. The knowledge products prepared for the forums, including the regional assessment reports of the 2030 Agenda and their outcomes, can be accessed at www.regionalcommissions.org.

92. ECE marked its seventieth anniversary in 2017. The sixty-seventh session of the Commission, entitled “ECE at 70: economic integration and cooperation towards 2030”, was held on 26 and 27 April. At the session, the regional forum for sustainable development for the UNECE region was established, engagement by ECE with the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management was requested, the decision of the Inland Transport Committee to explore the possibility of establishing a road safety fund was welcomed and the question of mandating the Committee to report on an annual basis to both the Commission and, for information purposes, to the Economic and Social Council was considered favourably.

93. The seventy-third session of ESCAP was held in Bangkok from 15 to 19 May 2017. The session included a ministerial segment focused on the theme of regional cooperation for sustainable energy in Asia and the Pacific. The study that guided the deliberations contained a review of the challenges and barriers posed by energy for sustainable development in the region. Policy options, means of implementation and different strategies available for countries to transform their energy systems were examined. National actions and policy recommendations that could be enhanced by regional energy cooperation were identified.

B. Promoting coherence at the regional level through the Regional Coordination Mechanisms

94. As mandated by Economic and Social Council and convened by the regional commissions, the Regional Coordination Mechanisms continue to foster and enhance interagency coordination and collaboration.²¹

95. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa has evolved into an instrument for coordinating United Nations system support to Africa, including on the 10-year capacity-building programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and its successor programme, and the United Nations-African Union partnership on Africa's integration and development agenda for 2017-2027. Its 2017 meeting was held in Dakar on 26 March. It also hosted the first joint meeting between the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa and the regional United Nations Development Group. The meeting saw deliberations on Africa's challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and the support of the United Nations system for the alignment and implementation of both agendas.

96. In 2016, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism held 12 formal, informal and working-level meetings. Discussions focused on the realignment of the structure of the Mechanism to better address the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the formulation of the ASEAN-United Nations Plan of Action for 2016-2020.

97. The Latin America and Caribbean Regional Coordination Mechanism convened its 2016 meeting in Panama City to coordinate with the United Nations Development Group in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding its contribution to the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. That meeting resulted in the substantive contributions of many United Nations entities to the first regional progress report of ECLAC on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda presented during the first session of the regional forum for sustainable development.

98. The ESCWA Regional Coordination Mechanism convened its annual meeting in December 2016 at the margins of the twenty-ninth ministerial session on the theme of implementing the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. The group agreed on a set of collaborative initiatives clustered in four key areas, namely, research, regional consultations, capacity-building and advocacy. A new working group of the Mechanism on the 2030 Agenda was established to support the organization of the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. The working group also undertook an internal mapping exercise during the reporting period to identify the key regional activities of its members regarding the 2030 Agenda. A working group on Sustainable Development Goal data co-chaired by ESCWA and the United Nations Population Fund was established and an action plan on Goal data collection was produced.

99. The Europe and Central Asia Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional United Nations Development Group have further strengthened their cooperation in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They have merged their meetings into biannual regional United Nations system meetings. Issue-based coalitions have been set up to address key sustainable development issues in the region, namely, health, social protection, gender, large movements of people, displacement and resilience.

²¹ See Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46.

C. Enhanced interregional cooperation among the regional commissions

100. Since the previous report, the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions have met five times: in New York on 22 July at the margins of the high-level political forum; in New York on 19 September 2016 at the margins of the high-level general debate; in Quito on 18 October 2016 at the margins of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III); on 13 January 2017 through videoconference; and in New York on 22 and 23 February 2017 during a retreat of the Executive Secretaries. Those meetings resulted in coordinated positions and contributions by the regional commissions to regional responses in support of the 2030 Agenda, the Habitat III agenda and climate change challenges in the regions.

101. The reporting period was marked by the organization of a number of joint high-level events, including a side event on regionalism and the 2030 Agenda organized at the margins of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly in September 2016, with participation of heads of State and Government and a joint event on regional implementation of the New Urban Agenda in October 2016 at the margins of Habitat III. The annual dialogue of the Executive Secretaries with the Second Committee at the seventy-first session was held in October 2016 and presented an analysis of the regions' "preparedness" for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

102. Regional commissions also actively participated in the twenty-second Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, at the margins of which a joint side event was organized on the "Economics of climate change: regional perspectives". They will organize the joint eighth international forum and energy ministerial meeting in Astana in June 2017.
