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Towards the achievement of sustainable development: implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through sustainable consumption and production, building on Agenda 21

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/213, provides an update on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on issues included in Agenda 21 and focusing on the state of play with regard to sustainable consumption and production. The report is based on recent studies, reports, analysis and inputs by the United Nations system, the outcomes of intergovernmental deliberations, including the online meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and the virtual multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. The present report should be read in conjunction with other reports on sustainable development mandated by the Assembly and the Council for 2021, including the Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2021,[1] the World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2021 report,[2] the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2021/58), the 2021 progress report of the High-level Political Forum on the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns[3] and the remarks of the Secretary-General to the 2021 Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development, on 12 April 2021.[4]

* A/76/150.

[1] See https://developmentfinance.un.org/fsdr2021.

[2] See www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-as-of-mid-2021/.

[3] Available from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=1444&menu=35.

[4] See www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2021-04-12/secretary-generals-remarks-the-2021-economic-and-social-council-forum-financing-for-development-delivered.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 75/213, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-sixth session, a report on the implementation of the resolution, with a particular focus on the state of play with regard to sustainable consumption and production and the application and promotion thereof, taking into account the impacts of, response to and recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and to recommend concrete actions to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in this regard.

II. Unfinished business of Agenda 21, and gaps in and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

2. One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, high uncertainty still surrounds the global economic outlook, as world gross product fell by an estimated 4.3 per cent in 2020, the sharpest contraction of global output since the Great Depression. According to *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021*,[5] output in developed economies is estimated to have shrunk by 5.6 per cent in 2020, with growth projected to recover to 4.0 per cent in 2021. A renewed outbreak, however, set off new lockdown measures in the third quarter of 2020 in many countries in Europe, making a quick recovery more unlikely. Developing countries experienced a relatively less severe contraction, with output shrinking by 2.5 per cent in 2020. Their economies are projected to grow by 5.7 per cent in 2021, while the least developed countries saw their gross domestic product (GDP) shrink by 1.3 per cent in 2020, with growth expected to reach 4.9 per cent in 2021. Future developments will depend on the path of the health crisis, including whether the new COVID-19 strains can be brought under control by existing vaccines or whether they prolong the pandemic.

3. The pandemic-related economic downturn had pushed between 119 and 124 million more people into extreme poverty in 2020 (E/2021/58), representing a sharp rise from the earlier projections presented in the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020* mid-year update,[6] released in June 2020. Current projections show around 600 million people still living in extreme poverty in 2030, representing a poverty headcount ratio of 7 per cent.[7] Against this background, an estimated 690 million people face hunger, another 83 million people, and possibly as many as 132 million, may go hungry in 2020 as a result of the economic recession triggered by COVID-19.[8]

4. The crisis had a devastating effect on livelihoods, enterprises and employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that, in 2020, an approximate 8.8 per cent of total working hours were lost – equivalent of hours worked in one year by 255 million full-time workers. Relative to 2019, total employment fell by 114 million owing to workers becoming unemployed or dropping out of the labour force.[9] In developing countries, by mid-2020, unemployment rates quickly escalated to

[5] Available from www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-2021/.

[6] Available from www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/document_gem/global-economic-monitoring-unit/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-wesp-report/.

[7] United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report* (New York, 2021), available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2021.pdf.

[8] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020* (Rome, 2020), available from http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/ca9692en.pdf.

[9] See www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf.

record highs: migrant workers also experienced an abrupt termination of their employment, along with non-payment or delayed wages, while often lacking access to social protection benefits. The informal sector accounts for more than 60 per cent of jobs in a number of large developing countries, and the livelihood and income impacts have been particularly harsh for about 2 billion informal workers with limited social protection, especially those self-employed in the informal economy.

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has also made starkly visible the fact that the world's formal economies and the maintenance of daily lives are built on the invisible and unpaid labour of women and girls.[10] Women have been at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic. They have also been hit the hardest in a number of ways, including bearing the brunt of unpaid domestic and care work. They remain underrepresented in pandemic-related decision-making and in economic policy responses to the crisis. While the pandemic has reduced labour force participation by 2 per cent worldwide, compared with only 0.2 per cent during the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, more women than men have been forced to leave the work force altogether, further widening gender gaps in employment and wages, the report highlighted. Women-owned businesses have also fared disproportionately worse.[11]

6. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc worldwide on children's learning and well-being. Before the pandemic, progress in education was already too slow to achieve Goal 4 by 2030. One year into the crisis, two in three students were still affected by full or partial school closures. One hundred million more children than before fail to demonstrate basic reading skills. The poorest and most vulnerable children are bearing the brunt of the crisis, exacerbating longstanding inequalities. Many risk never returning to school; some are forced into child marriage or child labour. Special efforts are required to recover learning losses caused by COVID-19. However, an estimated 65 per cent of Governments in low- and lower-middle-income countries, and 35 per cent in upper-middle- and high-income countries, have reduced funding for education since the onset of the pandemic.[12]

7. While the share of people with access to electricity reached 90 per cent in 2019, 759 million people still lack it, with half living in fragile and conflict-affected settings and 84 per cent in rural areas. The International Energy Agency's stated policies scenario projects that in 2030 approximately 660 million people will still lack access to electricity and about 940 million people will have to be connected by 2030 to reach universal access. The COVID-19 crisis threatens progress in some parts of the world: in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the number of people without access to electricity most likely grew in 2020. This means that in sub-Saharan Africa alone, the access rate will have to more than triple between now and 2030 by connecting around 85 million people each year through 2030.[13]

8. A growing global population combined with the unsustainable use of natural resources is having a devastating impact on our planet – propelling climate change, destroying nature and raising pollution levels. About 14 per cent of the world's food is lost along the supply chain prior to the retail level. Around the world, 1 million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute, and 5 trillion single-use plastic

[10] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), "The impact of COVID-19 on women" (New York, April 2020), available from www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women.

[11] United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report*.

[12] Ibid.

[13] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank, Tracking SDG7, The Energy Progress Report 2021 (Washington, D.C., 2021). Available from https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/downloads.

bags are thrown away each year. The global material footprint increased by 70 per cent between 2000 and 2017.[14]

9. Earth's global average surface temperature in 2020 tied with 2016 as the warmest year on record. Despite setbacks from COVID-19, global greenhouse gas emissions increased in 2020.[15] The food system underpinning the world's current dietary patterns is responsible for around 21 to 37 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions, which reveals it to be a major driver of climate change, even without considering other environmental effects.[16] The ongoing interventions by Governments foreshadow measures commensurate with the ambition of the Paris Agreement, suggesting the possibility of combining the solutions to both crises – COVID-19 and climate change – into a coherent response. The stimulus packages in response to the pandemic could be decisive for the world's low-carbon transition. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change also warns that sustainable development continues to be at risk from emerging and intensifying ocean and cryosphere changes. Despite efforts to protect key marine environments, ocean acidification and unsustainable fishing continue to pose major threats to the ocean and marine resources.

A. Follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda

10. The sections below highlight some of the key platforms that support the implementation the 2030 Agenda, including the High-level Political Forum for sustainable development. The Forum was held from 6 to 15 July 2021, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, on the theme "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

11. The High-level Political Forum discussed in-depth Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships. The Forum discussed various facets of the impacts of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals, and possible approaches to embark on a resilient recovery that leads to the achievement of the Goals. There was a shared concern about the state of the Goals six years in, including regarding poverty, hunger, health, jobs, gender equality, inequalities, trust in government and leaving no one behind. But there was also hope that, if measures are put in place through multilateralism and solidarity, especially access to vaccine for all, there can and will be a better and more sustainable recovery with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a blueprint. In total, 42 countries presented their voluntary national reviews, where they described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also measures they are putting in place from fiscal to social protection and preservation of environment. The High-level Political Forum adopted a ministerial declaration that sends a strong message of solidarity and unity to recover better from the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. Five regional commissions represent the regional platforms for assessing progress and exchanging knowledge, best practices and solutions in support of the

[14] United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report.*

[15] World Meteorological Organization, *The State of the Global Climate 2020* (Geneva, 2021), available at https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10618.

[16] FAO, *State of Food Security.*

implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in line with regional priorities and specificities and provide support to countries in preparation of their voluntary national reviews.

13. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organized its eighth forum from 23 to 26 March 2021 on the theme "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Asia and the Pacific" (ESCAP/RFSD/2021/4). The Forum conducted in-depth reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17. The profile of Goal 12 suggests that the region needs to urgently reverse the regressing trend in material consumption and footprint. The outcomes of the in-depth review of Goal 12 at the forum highlight a range of recommended actions, such as promoting green recovery in COVID-19 recovery, strengthening policy frameworks for sustainable consumption and production and adopting an integrated circular economic model. To raise the level of climate ambitions and assist national efforts, ESCAP is working to strengthen institutional capacity and develop policy options for resilient post-COVID-19 economies. In 2020, the Commission delivered a senior-level capacity-building exercise for policymakers to support the development of comprehensive recovery plans in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. A "build forward better" policy package was developed, focusing on enhancing access to health care and social protection, improving access to digital technologies and strengthening climate and clean energy actions. It is estimated that, if implemented, the package could cut carbon emissions by about 30 per cent in the long run while contributing to lifting 180 million people out of poverty and increasing potential output by 12 per cent. Addressing plastic pollution and promoting the circular economy were also identified as priorities for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 12.

14. The fifth Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region was held from 17 to 18 March 2021. It facilitated the exchange of policy experiences and good practices in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region and provided a prominent platform for peer learning. In 2021, ECE conducted for the second time a statistical report to assess progress in the implementation of the Goals in ECE countries, which was presented at the forum. Assessments show that faster progress is necessary in critical areas related to climate change and the environment, including the conservation of ecosystems, biodiversity, disaster resilience, waste generation and treatment and the sustainable use of natural resources. The forum determined that addressing the climate change and biodiversity crises demands a whole-of-society and inter-generational approach. Promoting the circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the ECE region was the main theme of the sixty-ninth session of ECE, held on 20 and 21 April 2021. ECE was called upon by its member States to consider in its normative work the regulatory gaps that currently prevent faster development of more circular and resource-efficient economies. Vehicle regulations, waste, forest certification, resource classification and traceability in supply chains are just a few of the areas where ECE is already contributing to countries' efforts (E/ECE/1496).

15. The 2021 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States and was held online from 29 to 31 March 2021. The pandemic has further impeded already faltering progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region. The forum reviewed Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 while seeking available opportunities for the Arab region to "build back better" within COVID-19. Late in 2020 and in 2021, ESCWA, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), facilitated

various regional consultations[17] and discussions related to the implementation of sustainable consumption and production within COVID-19 on the basis of assessments of progress towards achieving Goal 12. The regional discussions provided opportunities to share experiences in enhancing resource efficiency and monitor achievements relating to sustainable consumption and production in the Arab States and actions towards a green economic recovery from COVID-19 while also identifying what was needed for the region to accelerate progress for the achievement of Goal 12 within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The regional meetings identified key challenges slowing the progress towards achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns. These challenges include the following: the lack of a clear vision for transitioning into such patterns, leading to diverse strategies that often overlap and waste resources; the lack of financial resources and enabling environment needed for the sustainable consumption and production transformation; a slow technology transfer into the Arab region; and limited regional cooperation and experience-sharing.

16. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), together with the Government of the Congo, the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank, convened the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Brazzaville with in-person and online participation, from 1 to 4 March 2021. The forum was held against the backdrop of the new challenge to global development posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing severe vulnerabilities and structural inequalities in Africa. Even before the pandemic, Africa was already not on track, and in some cases regressing, with respect to the attainment of the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. The Forum agreed on key messages, including that State and non-State entities should put in place measures to ensure the sustainable extraction and use of natural resources and promote investments in digitalization and modern technologies to increase productivity, bridge the digital divide, spur innovation and accelerate growth.

17. The Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) convened the fourth session of its regional forum on sustainable development in a virtual format from 15 to 18 March 2021. The forum adopted 94 conclusions and recommendations and called on the international community to reinforce measures aimed at addressing specific challenges that hindered achievement of some Sustainable Development Goals targets by the year 2020. In 2021, ECLAC presented exercises in scenario simulations and trend projections to 2030 for a selection of Sustainable Development Goals indicators. The results showed that, although there are still gaps in the data that preclude an exhaustive analysis of all the targets of the 2030 Agenda, the efforts made by the international and regional statistical communities, and more specifically by member States' national statistical systems, have increased the availability of data for producing the Sustainable Development Goals indicators allowing for better and impactful analysis extended over a larger number of targets than were covered by previous exercises. To support the follow-up and monitoring of progress in the medium and long term, ECLAC launched a COVID-19 observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean[18] that compiles and presents information on the public policies that the 33 countries of the region have implemented to limit the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and analyses the economic and social effects that the pandemic will have at the national and sectoral levels.

[17] See https://bit.ly/2H5ZlwH, www.unescwa.org/Regional-Consultation-Environmental-Dimension-SDG12-ArabRegion and www.unescwa.org/egm-resource-effiency-arab-region.

[18] See www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19.

B. Sustainable consumption and production

18. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted the need to reshape policies, business practices, investments and consumer choices that are driving production and consumption patterns, so as to create more resilient economies that ensure human well-being and conserve the natural environment. There is a need to "build back better" from the COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring a just transition to sustainable and resilient economies with environmental and social benefits, including job creation and shared prosperity.

United Nations development system support for the implementation of sustainable consumption and production

19. The United Nations Environment Programme serves as the Secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, mandated by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to support this shift. The 10-Year Framework involves 140 national focal points in national Governments and more than 600 other partners in Governments, local authorities, civil society, international organizations, scientific and technical organizations and businesses. The programmes of the 10-Year Framework offer a range of advisory and technical support, including guidance, tools and solutions, to Governments and other stakeholders in the implementation of Goal 12, and key targets in other Goals.

20. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is implementing a joint programme with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to develop global tools and approaches for facilitating a cross-sectorial and whole-of-government approach for collaborative and integrated food systems development. The joint programme is funded by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Goal 12[19] in recognition of the fact that reaching the scale required to truly mainstream sustainable consumption and production requires concerted action across the United Nations and financial resources to catalyse and accelerate its delivery. The FAO COVID-19 response and recovery programme supports member States in facilitating innovations for increased efficiency, inclusiveness and resilience of food supply chains. Since 2020, the European Union, FAO and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development have entered into a partnership with Governments and stakeholders to initiate a large-scale assessment and consultation on food systems in more than 50 countries. FAO and UNEP have made significant progress by obtaining estimates of the global food loss index and the global food waste index.

21. ILO has been continuously engaging with the Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy as part of its efforts to facilitate a just transition towards a circular economy. ILO contributes to the aims of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, specifically to the Basel Convention Partnership on Plastic Waste, whose aim is to improve and promote the environmentally sound management of plastic waste and to prevent and minimize its generation. ILO participates in the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and coordinates policies and activities with other United Nations agencies around the sound management of chemicals, including their sustainable production and consumption. Through the active participation of ILO in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, the labour

[19] A pooled fund that was established by six United Nations partner agencies: FAO, UNDP, UNEP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Office for Project Services and UNWTO.

sector and world of work stakeholders have been able to increase the visibility of workplace exposures to chemicals, as well as principles for the promotion of green jobs and sustainable production and consumption.

22. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) launched the "Connect2Recover" global initiative, which aims to reinforce the digital infrastructure and ecosystems of beneficiary countries for affordable and reliable connectivity as part of COVID-19 recovery efforts and preparedness. ITU continues to actively engage in the E-waste coalition. ITU has also joined forces with 16 other United Nations agencies and bodies to facilitate a sustainable digital transformation and foster global collaboration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals under the framework of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities initiative. The key performance indicators for smart sustainable cities developed by the initiative have already supported over 100 cities worldwide in measuring the contribution of information and communications technology to sustainable development and the progress towards the Goals.

23. United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UNEP and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) jointly launched the "SDG12 Resource Efficient Housing" programme, a global initiative that supports countries in integrating resource efficiency in the building and construction sector, which is responsible for nearly 40 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, with a focus on large-scale national housing programmes.

24. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in collaboration with the Graduate Institute of Geneva, recently released its plastic life-cycle trade database, a first attempt to measure and track global trade in plastic across its entire lifecycle. The database makes an important contribution to wider efforts to reduce plastics pollution and carbon dioxide emissions.

25. Lasting change in sustainable consumption and production patterns will not be possible without education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continues to coordinate the implementation of the framework "Education for Sustainable Development: towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Education for Sustainable Development for 2030)" for the period 2020–2030, with a focus on five priority action areas of policy, education and training, educators, young people and communities. The UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, held in May 2021, discussed the "Education for Sustainable Development for 2030" road map for implementation, with a strong focus on strategies and optimal ways to harness education to address interconnected global challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss and green and circular economies. Other partnerships and initiatives include the UNESCO inter-agency platform on culture for sustainable development, the UNESCO cities platform and the UNESCO task force on COVID-19 and tourism. In the water sector, UNECSO co-published, with its International Centre on Water Security and Sustainable Management, the second volume of the Global Water Security Series on the theme "Water Reuse Within a Circular Economy Context".[20]

26. At the regional level, unsustainable consumption and production patterns continue to contribute to the current environmental and climate challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. The region's dependence on coal is the main driver behind its 56 per cent share of global high greenhouse gas emission in 2018.[21] The surge in

[20] UNESCO, *Water Reuse Within a Circular Economy Context* (Paris, 2020), available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374715.locale=en.

[21] ESCAP, *Shaping a Sustainable Energy Future in Asia and the Pacific: A Greener, More Resilient and Inclusive Energy System* (New York, 2021), available from www.unescap.org/kp/2021/regional-trends-report-2021-shaping-sustainable-energy-future-asia-and-pacific.

plastic waste as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has stretched the capabilities of already weak waste management systems in many Asian countries,[22] thus making Asia home to the most polluted waterways in the world. Against that background, within the current second phase of its "Closing the loop" initiative, ESCAP is working with cities in South-East Asia to measure, monitor and prevent plastic pollution. Besides supporting cities in achieving Goal 12, the initiative contributes directly to implementing the United Nations Decade of Ocean Data for Sustainable Development, which calls for cooperation to collect and digitize data about the ocean. The recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic presents the region with the opportunity to reset its path. In that regard, some countries in the region have introduced green measures in response to and for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. An example is the "Korean New Deal", which among others aims to transition the Republic of Korea to a low-carbon economy through investment in green infrastructure, energy and innovation.

27. While efficiency in the use of resources in the ECE region has increased, the overall material footprint, which takes into account the raw materials used in imported goods, has continued to grow, rising by an estimated 18 per cent between 2000 and 2017. ECE countries are pursuing national policies that promote a shift towards a more circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources. Waste management is a major focus of attention, as this is a particularly serious challenge in many countries in South-East Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, where arrangements for waste collection reach only between 40 to 80 per cent of the population. ECE environmental performance reviews include analysis and recommendations on waste management and related issues in the countries under review.

28. To mainstream sustainable consumption and production as a cross-cutting goal in the Arab region, ESCWA has led several initiatives highlighting the interlinkages and synergies among the different goals. Yet, for mainstreaming to be complete, data on sustainable consumption and production at the regional and national levels need to be available. A regional assessment of sustainable consumption and production was conducted in 2020 using a cross-sectoral approach to assess priority issues in the region, assessing 14 indicators covering Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9 and 11 on sustainable consumption and production, health, water, energy, infrastructure and cities, respectively.[23] Special attention was given to the conflict-affected Arab countries subregion. Given its additional challenges, the subregion was relatively lagging behind in terms of renewable energy, treatment of wastewater, hazardous chemicals reporting, fine particulate air pollution, installed renewable capacity and waste management. The region identified priorities for a faster track to achieve sustainable consumption and production while recovering from the pandemic, including the following: a focus on solid waste management; financial and legislative incentives to promote waste reduction; enhanced regional cooperation on sustainable consumption and production, including exploring the establishment of a regional mechanism to support the required investments for sustainable consumption and production; support for green technology investments, including in research and development at the national and regional levels; capacity-building of member countries in monitoring and data gathering on sustainable consumption and production; harmonization of national strategies on sustainable consumption and production by supporting horizontal integration; and integration of nature-based solutions to address climate change and conserve biodiversity.

[22] ESCAP, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021* (New York, 2021), available from www.unescap.org/kp/2021/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2021.

[23] See www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/technical_paper_assessment_of_sustainable_consumption_and_production_in_the_arab_region_2020.pdf.

29. Sustainable development in Africa has been severely impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, ECA reports that, according to the 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Goal Index and Dashboard, published by the Sustainable Development Goals Centre for Africa, African countries perform comparatively well in terms of ensuring sustainable production and consumption patterns.[24] However, more needs to be done to collect and give access to relevant data and track progress. Sustainable consumption and production-related plans have been formulated by many countries in Africa, including Algeria, Burkina Faso, the Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Mauritius, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

30. ECLAC reports that Latin America and the Caribbean have not yet succeeded in decoupling economic growth from natural resource use. In a scenario of the adoption of circular economy principles, job creation in sectors such as the reprocessing of metals and wood would more than offset the losses associated with the extraction of minerals and other raw materials. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is to generate net welfare gains from economic activities by reducing resource use, degradation and pollution, while increasing quality of life.[25] Several countries in the region have or are enacting extended producer responsibility laws and are regulating or banning the use of plastic bags, in particular single-use ones. These are notable advances in the right direction. There are also two initiatives with a broader outlook, namely, the Compact for the Circular Economy (Ecuador) and the National Strategy for the Circular Economy (Colombia), which aim to increase the use of resources and the efficiency of production processes.

Challenges and opportunities

31. The unsustainable practices of consumption and production continue to prevail today and are key drivers of the three major environmental crises currently facing the world: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. While actions to implement many of the Sustainable Development Goals are not in line with their targets, it is clear that Goal 12, on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, is on a long-term trend in the wrong direction. Several solutions and opportunities are, however, having a positive impact. The following paragraphs highlight a few of them.

32. Trade policy instruments play an important role in national and international efforts to achieve Goal 12. Non-tariff measures regulate production and trade for environment and consumer protection. From hazardous chemical bans to import restrictions on used cars and efficiency requirements for lighting, such measures directly shape production processes and influence market opportunities, and availability for consumers, of goods associated with Goal 12 and its specific targets. According to a recent study by ESCAP and UNCTAD on the linkages between non-tariff measures and the Sustainable Development Goals, more than 10 per cent of all such measures directly address sustainable consumption and production, making Goal 12 the third most frequently targeted Goal by non-tariff measures.[26] With the current focus on curbing plastic pollution, an increasing number of countries are adopting such measures to restrict trade in non-recyclable and hazardous plastics and ensure the sustainable management of plastic waste domestically. Voluntary sustainability standards are also widely used today to govern environmental, social and ethical issues in global supply chains.

[24] The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, *Africa SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2020* (July 2020), available from www.sdgindex.org/reports/2020-africa-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report/.

[25] See https://agenda2030lac.org/en/sdg/12-responsible-consumption-and-production.

[26] UNESCAP UNCTAD 2019: Asia and Pacific Trade and Development Report 2019. Navigating Non-Tariff Measures towards Sustainable Development.

33. The International Resource Panel "Towards sustainability" scenario demonstrates that the resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production policies (Sustainable Development Goal 12) can reduce growth in global resource use by 25 per cent and increase global GDP by 8 per cent by 2050.[27] Strengthening the science-policy interface is essential to identify high-impact sectors and intervention areas with a potential to trigger systemic transformation, develop common strategies and accelerate implementation. This is the purpose of the value-chain approach developed by the International Resource Panel and the One Planet network Task Group, established in response to United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 4/1.

34. Adopting a value chain approach,[28] which fosters creativity, engagement and cooperation among all value chain actors, is critical for avoiding siloed interventions and to create more impactful and transformative opportunities for sustainable consumption and production. The value chain approach drives policymakers, private sector, academia, consumers and citizens towards a common objective, and underpins relevant partnerships to transform current sustainable consumption and production patterns towards sustainability and circularity. It can be applied to multiple sectors and has proven effective in driving coordinated action across the plastics value chain to tackle plastic-associated pollution and plastic waste.[29]

35. Digital solutions and other data applications provide tools needed to improve operational and resource efficiency, reduce waste generation and create an overall sustainable pattern of consumption and production. New technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain can assist policymakers in their administrative duties and explore ways that can benefit society at large.[30] As a recent trend in municipalities, blockchain technology can allow certain aspects of city management to be distributed among stakeholders, decentralizing governance and making it possible for complex transactions to be managed by multiple parties in areas such as power production, distribution and consumption.

36. Support for small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in developing countries, should also be a priority while redirecting investment flows to shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns. small and medium-sized enterprises are overrepresented in the sectors most affected by the crisis, particularly in wholesale and retail trade, air transport, accommodation and food services, real estate, professional services and other personal services. At the same time, small and medium-sized enterprises will be crucial to, and the biggest beneficiaries of, the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns as part of the economic recovery. Most businesses in the world are small and medium-sized enterprises; most formal jobs are generated by small and medium-sized enterprises, which create 7 out of 10 jobs. Given their strong roots in local communities, small and medium-sized enterprises can be influential agents of change and innovation.

37. There is opportunity to foster employment creation through sustainable transport systems. A joint ECE-ILO analysis[31] was carried out to examine the employment implications of a "green transport" and recovery scenario across 56 countries and world regions. Some 10 million additional jobs could be created worldwide if 50 per cent of all vehicles manufactured were electric. The overall positive net job effect masks considerable reallocations, with jobs moving away from

[27] See International Resource Panel *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want* (Paris, 2019); "Building resilient societies after the Covid-19 pandemic", factsheet. Available at https://resourcepanel.org/reports/building-resilient-societies-after-covid-19-pandemic.

[28] See UNEP, *Catalysing Science-based Policy Action on Sustainable Consumption and Production: The Value-chain Approach and its Application to Food, Construction and Textiles* (Nairobi, 2021).

[29] UNEP, *Addressing Marine Plastics: a Systemic Approach – Recommendations for Action* (2019).

[30] United Nations E-Government Survey 2020.

[31] ECE, ILO, *Jobs in Green and Healthy Transport: Making the Green Shift* (Geneva, 2020).

the manufacture of motor vehicles and the petroleum industry towards the service sector, battery and electric equipment and clean transport sector.

38. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are vital to achieving sustainable consumption and production. Recent empirical evidence reveals that progress towards intra-household equality and women's empowerment, through education and enhanced access to and control over financial and other important resources, can enable women and girls to adopt more sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through their adoption of cleaner cooking technologies and a reduction in their use of solid fossil fuels. Moreover, women have already been playing an important role in the transition to a green economy and can drive responsible consumption and production behaviours, as well as pioneer a culture of circularity at many levels.

C. Strengthening the science-policy interface

39. Science and technology are essential to humanity's collective response to sustainable development challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, while a human tragedy, is also an opportunity to recognize and address the deeper shortcomings of current science-policy advisory systems, and their interface with society at all levels. Much of the action will need to come from countries themselves, but international cooperation, supported by the United Nations system, can facilitate progress in all these areas. Many such initiatives are in place but need to be scaled up.

40. The United Nations has dedicated significant effort and resources to building up the science, technology and innovation ecosystem for sustainable development more broadly, including by building capacity, to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has brought together hundreds of experts and stakeholders and synthesized a wide range of research, science-policy briefs, United Nations publications and assessments. DESA organized the sixth annual multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals on 4 and 5 May 2021 under the theme "Science, technology and innovation for a sustainable and resilient COVID-19 recovery, and effective pathways of inclusive action towards the Sustainable Development Goals". The forum deliberated on lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of a better science-policy-society interface, a resilient recovery and rapid responses to global challenges. It identified science, technology and innovation solutions for "building back better" and accelerating progress towards the Goals and for ensuring inclusion and innovation.

41. The development and implementation of transdisciplinary science frameworks constitute an essential driver of knowledge in order to achieve inclusive and environmentally sustainable development. In this regard, UNESCO will submit at its next General Conference a draft recommendation on open science. The aim is to provide an international framework for open science policy and practice that recognizes regional differences in open science perspectives and takes into account, in particular, the specific challenges of scientists and other open science actors in developing countries.

42. The strategic deployment of science, technology and innovation is also a central and significant enabling factor for agri-food system transformation and acts as an engine to ensure inclusive, resilient and sustainable rural development. Biotechnologies and digital technologies and other technological innovations can support the shift from a linear food chain to circular models that incorporate holistic system approaches to ensure long-term sustainability. In this context, FAO launched

the AgrIntel initiative with the European Union in 2018 to support efforts to crowd in private investment for small and medium-sized enterprises.[32]

43. At the regional level, ECA indicates that, on average, African countries currently allocate about 0.42 per cent of GDP to research and development: far below the target of 1 per cent of GDP established by the African Union. Besides the need for substantial investment in research and development, African Governments need to strengthen their national science, technology and innovation policies with a view to accelerating the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns, including by promoting the implementation of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024. North-South and South-South partnerships in research and development, innovation and policy development can also complement national and regional efforts.

44. The Arab region is challenged by the evident broken cycle between science and policy. To help address the challenges, the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region[33] provides science-based knowledge (climate change projections) to feed the decision-making process in sustainable consumption and production-related spheres, including the impact of climate change on natural resource (water availability and soil/agricultural productivity).

45. To translate the priorities of sustainable consumption and production into policies and actions, robust evidence and analysis of resource use are critical. To this end, ESCAP is working with the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and member States to establish the ASEAN Resources Panel, modelled after the International Resource Panel. The ASEAN Resources Panel is envisioned to be a body of international, regional and national experts and Governments that would advance cooperation and action towards sustainable resource management (Sustainable Development Goal target 12.2) in the context of ASEAN member States.

46. In Latin America and the Caribbean, developing the circular economy requires a shift in public policy, regulations, management systems, public finances, investments, funding systems and capacities, for all stages, including production, consumption and final disposal of waste.

47. The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) (ECLAC, 2018), the first environmental treaty in the region, which entered into force on 22 April 2021, promotes the reinforcement of the science-policy-citizenship interface. Some of the provisions in this innovative Agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean seek to ensure that consumers and users have official, relevant and clear information on the environmental qualities of goods and services and their effects on health, favouring sustainable production and consumption patterns and encouraging companies to prepare sustainability reports that reflect their social and environmental performance.

[32] See www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1171495/icode/.

[33] (www.riccar.org/).

D. Financing for development

48. Before the pandemic, the unmet annual financing needs for the Sustainable Development Goals amounted to $2.5 trillion – now, those needs have increased to $3.5 trillion.[34] When adding the annual financing needs for the Paris Agreement, estimated at from $1.6 trillion to $3.8 trillion, the scale of financing needs for development reaches approximately $6 trillion annually to 2050.[35] COVID-19 has dramatically set back progress on the Goals and affected all aspects of financing for development. Unprecedented fiscal and monetary measures –$16 trillion in fiscal stimulus and emergency measures by central banks – have cushioned the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. However, despite this large-scale, if highly uneven, policy response, the global economy has experienced the worst recession in 90 years, with the most vulnerable segments of societies disproportionately affected. Per capita GDP growth has declined across all regions; almost a third of developing countries have experienced per capita income losses that reverse a decade or more of gains, with income losses highest in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

49. In its *Financing for Development report, 2021*, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development warns that COVID-19 could lead to a lost decade for development. The report highlights the risk of a sharply diverging world in the near term, where the gaps between rich and poor widen. Short-term risks are compounded by growing systemic risks such as climate change, which threatens to further derail progress. To prevent this scenario, the Task Force, in the report, recommends immediate actions and puts forward solutions to mobilize investments in people and in infrastructure to rebuild better. It also lays out reforms for the global financial and policy architecture to ensure that it is supportive of a sustainable and resilient recovery and aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The COVID-19 impacts and systemic risks, such as climate change, show the importance of risk management for national sustainable development and for the means of implementation. Development cooperation should support developing countries to strengthen their capacities at the national and local levels to manage and reduce those risks.[36]

50. Enhancing Member States' tax policies and administration plays a critical role in improving their mobilization of domestic resources for sustainable development. Particular attention should be paid to issues such as solidarity taxes (e.g., windfall and other taxes on high net-worth individuals in the context of pandemic response and recovery), taxation of the digitalized economy, carbon and other environmental taxation and improved tax data systems. In this regard, there is an urgent need for an integrated approach to the policy and capacity-building work on tax cooperation which paves the way for a coordinated and effective response – at the international and regional levels – to the needs of countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States.[37]

51. The United Nations development system also plays a key role in financing for development. For the past decade, ILO has been working with the financial sector to promote the development and implementation of sustainability management systems in financial institutions which enable financiers to purposefully direct capital to sustainable consumption and production across different sectors of the economy. Additionally, ILO worked closely with UNEP and a coalition of other stakeholders

[34] See www.oecd.org/development/global-outlook-on-financing-for-sustainable-development-2021-e3c30a9a-en.htm.

[35] See www.ccacoalition.org/en/news/bridging-gap-climate-finance-untapped-potential-investing-short-lived-climate-pollutant.

[36] See E/2021/70.

[37] Remarks of the Secretary-General to the 2021 Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development, 12 April 2021.

on the development of the International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure, published by UNEP in 2021. The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative, a partnership between UNEP and the global financial sector to mobilize private sector finance for sustainable development, has worked with more than 400 members to help create a financial sector that serves people and planet while delivering positive impacts.

52. At the regional level, a range of measures have been put in place, such as the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, recently launched by ECA as a vehicle for debt management and fiscal sustainability to lower Governments' borrowing costs by increasing the demand for their sovereign bonds. This allows existing sovereign bondholders to post such instruments as collateral for low-interest loans financed in part by a new issuance of special drawing rights. The resources mobilized through such repurchase agreements could then be used to finance investments in emerging market sovereigns. Such a stimulus can also be used to build the required institutional and human capacities to scale up debt swaps and green and blue bond issuances, which are important mechanisms to accrue at domestic and other levels, returns on investment, and refinance development, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Asia and the Pacific is becoming a major global market for green bonds, with a cumulative amount of $217 billion issued by countries in the region domestically and internationally between 2015 and 2020.[38] However, despite the emergence of green bonds in the region, countries with special needs still face mounting challenges in raising finance through debt capital markets such as low credit ratings, capacity gaps and underdeveloped local capital markets.

E. Partnership

53. The global COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the critical importance of partnerships in mobilizing concerted actions in key cross-cutting areas and the urgent need to find new ways for all actors to work together. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are considered powerful mechanisms to achieve such cross-sectoral, synergistic transformation, as they can bring together a whole range of different actors across sectors and enable the optimal use of resources, notably through digital technology.

54. A large number of Governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector partners, United Nations entities and international cooperation agencies have come together, offering multiple partnerships, coalitions and South-South cooperation, contributing to the shift to sustainable consumption and production. For example, the Global Opportunities for Sustainable Development Goals, is an accelerator for the Goal 12, bringing together strategic partners such as UNDP, ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation, SEED and the World Economic Forum. The 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns and its One Planet network have proven essential to strengthening multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation on sustainable consumption and production at the international and national levels since 2012.

55. The United Nations continues to promote effective multi-stakeholder partnerships. To this end, DESA organized the 2021 partnership forum of the Economic and Social Council, held in May 2021 under the theme "Partnerships as game changer for a sustainable recovery from COVID-19". The forum showcased concrete examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships and discussed the early insights on the strategic roles of and ways forward for multi-stakeholder partnerships in the context of the post-pandemic development landscape. In addition, the 2030 Agenda

[38] ESCAP Report on Financing for Development 2021 (forthcoming).

Partnership Accelerator, an initiative by DESA and the Partnering Initiative, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Partnerships, the United Nations Global Compact and the Development Coordination Office, is currently supporting partnership effectiveness in several countries, working closely with the United Nations Resident Coordinators in Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Samoa, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. Efforts are also under way to advance partnership effectiveness in the Caribbean region through collaboration with ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean and the Caribbean Public Health Agency.

56. The European Union, UNEP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization are supporting the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency to scale up sustainable consumption and production patterns. In 2020, UNEP and ILO supported the development and launch of the Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy Action Agenda[39] which is a rallying call for businesses, Governments, researchers, consumers and civil society to work together to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. The Action Agenda is made up of five publications: on plastics, textiles, electronics, food and capital equipment, and also includes a clear call to action for integrating and advancing decent work in the transition to a circular economy. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, the Platform conducted an assessment with a scenario whereby Governments focus investment on the economic recovery into renewable energies, efficiency renovations for buildings and green transport. The study finds that allocating the green spending to more than 60 countries and world regions would create some 20.5 million additional net jobs by 2030. This compares with approximately 3 million additional jobs in a conventional scenario of the same size, which provides a business-as-usual boost to growth across all sectors through a cut in value added taxes.

57. At the regional level, the newly established African Continental Free Trade Area is expected to drive sustainable production and consumption in the region. The African Continental Free Trade Area is also an opportunity for countries to cooperate and strengthen their national science, technology and innovation policy environments with a view to accelerating the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns and promote the implementation of the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024. Several initiatives and partnerships have been developed to accelerate the green economic development of the Latin America and the Caribbean region. For example, the ECLAC COVID-Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean tracks the public policies that the 33 countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean region are implementing to limit the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and offers analyses of the economic and social impacts that these policies will have at the national and sectoral levels.[40]

III. Conclusions

58. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the weaknesses of current development models, exacerbating existing challenges through an unprecedented disruption to societies, economies and essential value chains. Current unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are the major underlying cause of rapidly rising greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of environmental degradation and pollution, undermining development prospects and threatening human welfare.

59. Changing these patterns requires transforming our economies, in terms of how we produce, process, use and manage natural resources and adopting a value chain approach in our socioeconomic systems and how we design and implement our

[39] https://pacecircular.org/action-agenda.
[40] www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19.

national fiscal and economic policies. A systemic vision for change and an unprecedented engagement of the international community is required to transform these patterns and to ensure a resilient, inclusive and equitable recovery from the pandemic which ensures human well-being and preserves the natural environment. The renewed 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns could continue to support such efforts beyond 2022 and to be the foundation for an even broader and more inclusive strategy to scale up and accelerate action for the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns.

60. Although broad foundations have been laid for the transformative action required by the international community to shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns and transition to a circular economy, the challenge remains to enhance collaboration, coherence and complementarity among the existing partnerships and platforms, to more rapidly scale up these vital transitions for human health, prosperity and the planet. Moreover, while some specific policies, actions and investments have been made and taken to improve resource efficiency and accelerate the transition towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production, there has not been widespread adoption of these measures.

61. Furthermore, the majority of policy interventions are either sectoral or stand-alone plans for sustainable consumption and production, hindering the potential to overcome sectoral silos and align existing policies and regulations. The creation of synergies between State policies, the strategies of firms in the private or public sector and social and community initiatives must be at the heart of any change towards a development capable of bringing about progressive structural change likely to transform current consumption and production patterns. To this end, there is an urgent need for a combination of policy reform, redirected investment and wide deployment of clean and resource efficient technologies and business models, as well as more informed and responsible consumer choice to drive this transformation to the scale and at the speed required by the 2030 Agenda.

62. Response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from it offer a unique opportunity to incentivize the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production through coherent and integrated policies that foster innovative solutions and encourage sustainable consumption behaviours. It is time to seize upon this opportunity and build back better.