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Agenda item 15

## Regional cooperation

### 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 \(XVII\)](#), Council resolution [1817 \(LV\)](#) and annex III to Council resolution 1998/46. Regions continue to experience the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is exacerbating inequalities and threatening to wipe out decades of development gains, including by delaying urgent efforts towards greener and more inclusive economies. The recovery of many developing countries is also being affected by the climate crisis, vaccine inequity and lack of financial solidarity. The socioeconomic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are being further exacerbated by the crisis in Ukraine, which is causing food, fuel and fertilizer prices to skyrocket, leading to supply disruptions, and increased financial market volatility in a context of high debt and limited fiscal space. In this context, the present report is focused on demonstrating the value added of action at the country and regional levels to support the post-COVID-19 recovery and fast-track implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The report provides an overview of work undertaken and progress made in three broad priority areas, as well as other regional and interregional initiatives with the potential to support inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery pathways that will contribute to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda. The report also provides updates on other policy matters addressed by the regional commissions, including through the regional forums on sustainable development, as well as on steps taken to advance the roll-out of the repositioning of the United Nations development system.



## **I. Policy and analysis**

### **A. Advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and supporting an inclusive, resilient and green recovery from the coronavirus disease pandemic**

#### **1. State of the journey to 2030**

1. The impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic threatens to reverse decades of development gains across all regions, further delaying the urgent transition to greener and more inclusive economies around the world. In most developing nations, vaccine inequity and lack of financial limited solidarity continue to hamper recovery efforts. Recently, the war in Ukraine is further disrupting supply chains, causing food, fuel, and fertilizer prices to skyrocket, increasing volatility in financial markets and leading to debt distress and limited fiscal space. The sum of the above is a slow and fragile economic recovery.

2. In response, the regional commissions are working to address the five-alarm global fire identified by the Secretary-General at the beginning of 2022, namely, the COVID-19 pandemic, global financing inequalities, the climate crisis, lawlessness in cyberspace, and peace and security. The recommendations contained in Our Common Agenda will be leveraged in this context to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals and inspire an inclusive, networked multilateralism to advance regional priorities on sustainable development.

#### **Economic Commission for Africa region**

3. Since 2000, Africa has recorded progress on many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals; however, the current pace is insufficient to achieve the Goals by 2030. There has been significant progress in terms of data availability, with 19 countries monitoring progress for more than 160 indicators, and the number of indicators with no data for measuring progress having fallen from 79 to 52. Notwithstanding the advances, data availability remains critically low in the African region. Substantial progress has been experienced with regard to Goal 10 (reduced inequalities), and there has been moderate progress on Goals 2 (zero hunger), 3 (health), 4 (education) and 6 (water and sanitation), with limited progress on Goals 1 (no poverty), 7 (energy) and 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) remains a major challenge (see figure I). The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe socioeconomic and humanitarian implications, affecting millions of African citizens in ways that range from a drop in global demand for African commodities to disruptions to global trade and tourism, further compounded by the negative domestic economic impact of lockdowns on small businesses and the informal sector.

Figure I  
Economic Commission for Africa region: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, 2021



Source: *The Africa Regional Collaborative Platform: Annual Results Report 2021* (2022).

### Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

4. Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Arab countries are recovering at different paces and the rate of progress is insufficient to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The limited data available indicate that the region is on track to achieve only 33 of 169 Goal targets,<sup>1</sup> mostly concentrated under Goals 3 and 9 (see figure II). The region is furthest behind on targets related to Goals 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 11 (sustainable cities), while Goal 16 remains a serious challenge. Overall data availability is slowly improving, except with regard to the environmental goals and disaggregated data across the goals.

5. COVID-19 has exacerbated long-standing structural challenges. Poverty increased in 2021, with 26.9 per cent of people living below national poverty lines; inequality also increased, with the wealthiest 10 per cent now controlling 81 per cent of the region's net wealth, up from 75 per cent pre-pandemic. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate remains the highest in the world (11.8 per cent), notably among youth and women, while only 35.1 per cent of people are covered by at least one social protection benefit and women in the region have the lowest labour force participation rate in the world (20.3 per cent).<sup>2,3</sup> The combination of COVID-19 and decreases in oil revenues pushed the region's overall debt burden to a historic high of \$1.4 trillion, equivalent to 60 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP),<sup>4</sup> curtailing the ability of Governments to provide quality services for all. Conflicts continue to disrupt lives and development in a region that is home to an estimated 5.6 million refugees<sup>5</sup> and 58.5 million internally displaced persons.<sup>6</sup> The region also faces a

<sup>1</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Arab Sustainable Development Goal Monitor, available at <https://arabsgdmonitor.unescwa.org>.

<sup>2</sup> ILOSTAT database, "Labour force participation rate by sex and age: ILO modelled estimates, November 2020", available <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data> (accessed on 12/12/2021).

<sup>3</sup> ESCWA, *Realities and Prospects: Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region, 2020–2021* (2022).

<sup>4</sup> E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2021/POLICY BRIEF.3.

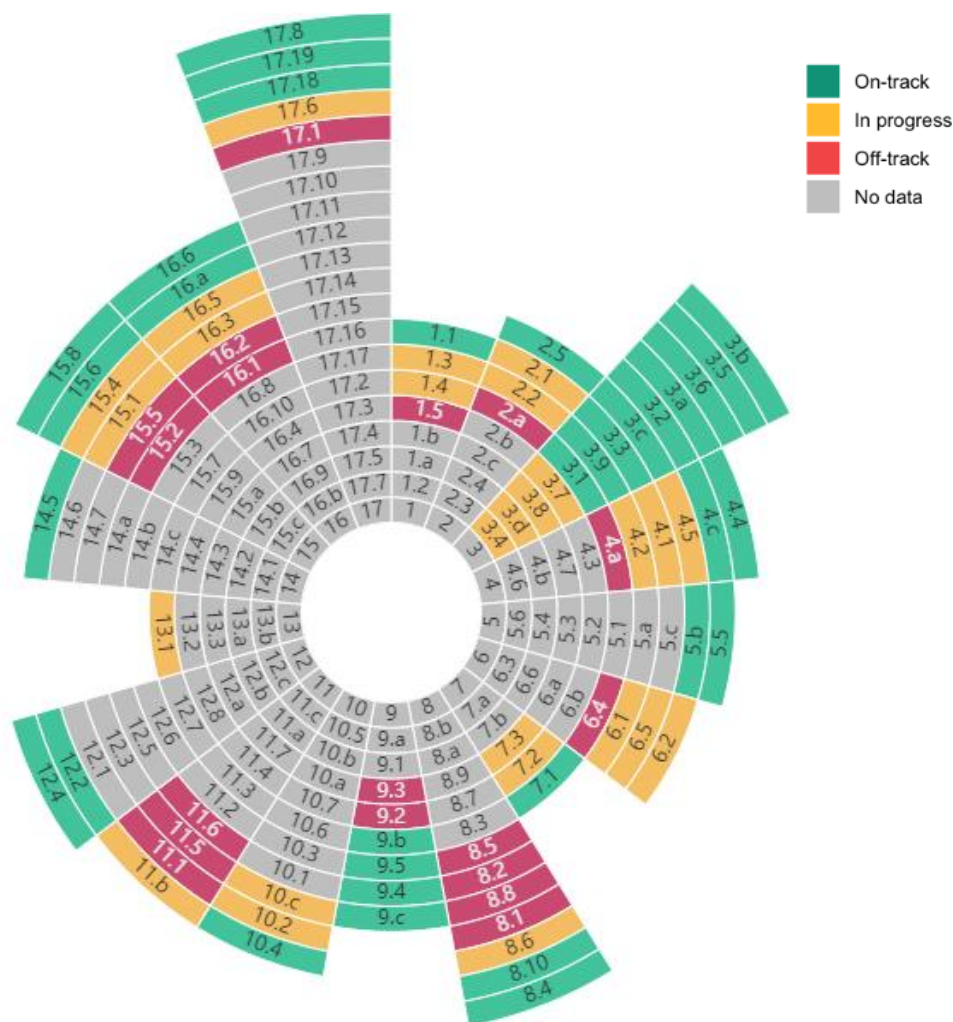
<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Refugee Data Finder, available at [www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=3HMho5](http://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=3HMho5).

<sup>6</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre data, available at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

complex environmental crisis, with current climate trends indicating a possible increase in temperature of 5°C in parts of the region by the end of this century.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, attention to these matters and to building resilience and adaptive capacities remains inadequate.

Figure II

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, 2021**



Source: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Arab Sustainable Development Goal Monitor.

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific region**

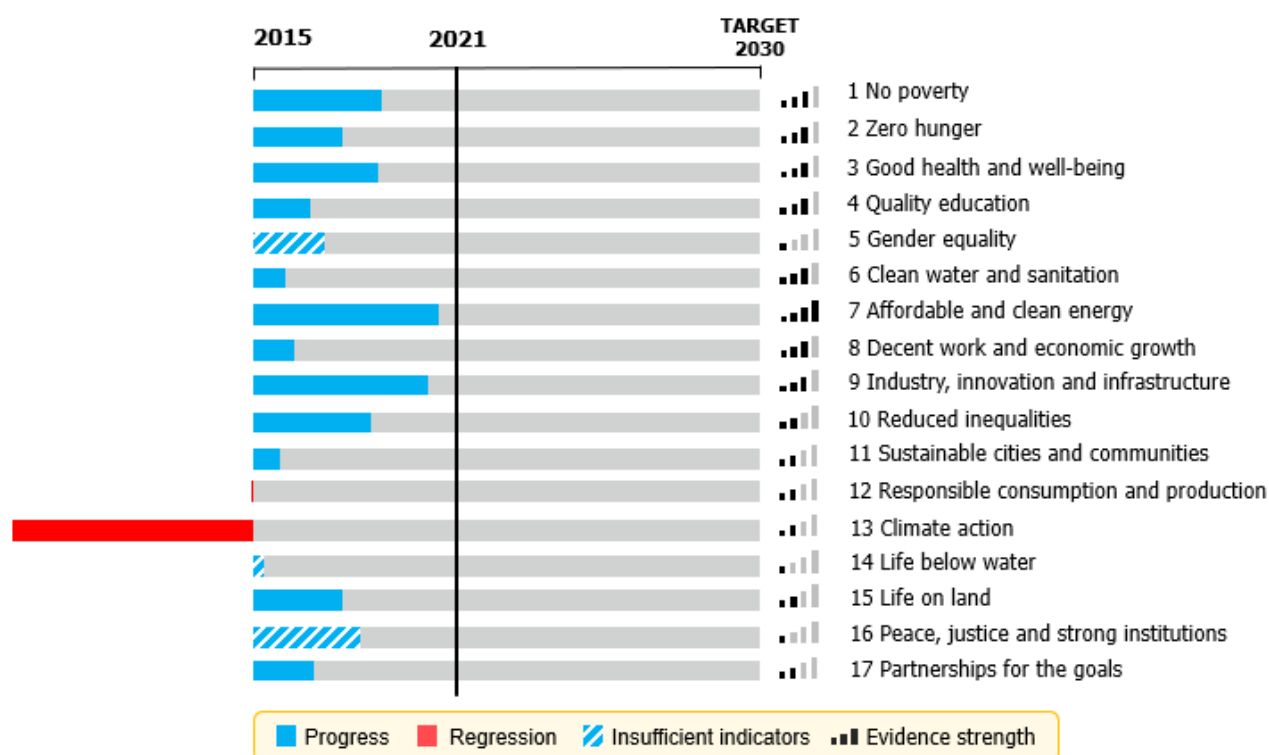
6. The latest Sustainable Development Goal progress assessment of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) shows that the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 Goals (see figure III). The COVID-19 pandemic has further hindered sustainable development, with the most vulnerable bearing disproportionate impacts. An additional 85 million people have been pushed into

<sup>7</sup> Regional Initiative for the Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region, *Arab Climate Change Assessment Report* (2017).

extreme poverty since the start of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Significant progress has been made on Goals 7 and 9, but the region has regressed on Goals 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 13 (climate action). Little or no progress has been made on Goals 4, 5 (gender equality), 6, 8, 11 and 14 (life below water). Less than 10 per cent of measurable targets are on track to be achieved by 2030. For the first time, there are sufficient data for more than half of the 231 indicators in the region; however, despite the sharp increase since 2017, 34 per cent of targets still cannot be measured.

Figure III

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific region: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, 2021**



Source: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022*.

**Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean region**

7. The Latin America and Caribbean region has been one of the regions hardest hit by the pandemic and one of the most indebted, with average gross debt exceeding three quarters of regional GDP and a 6.8 per cent plunge in GDP in 2020 alone. It has suffered much higher rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths than any other region. The 6.2 per cent recovery of regional GDP in 2021 is insufficient to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Poverty and hunger are at their highest levels since the turn of the century, with extreme poverty reaching 13.8 per cent, a setback of 27 years, while three out of five children lost a year of school during the pandemic. Caribbean small island developing States remain highly vulnerable to external shocks, including intensifying climate change impacts.

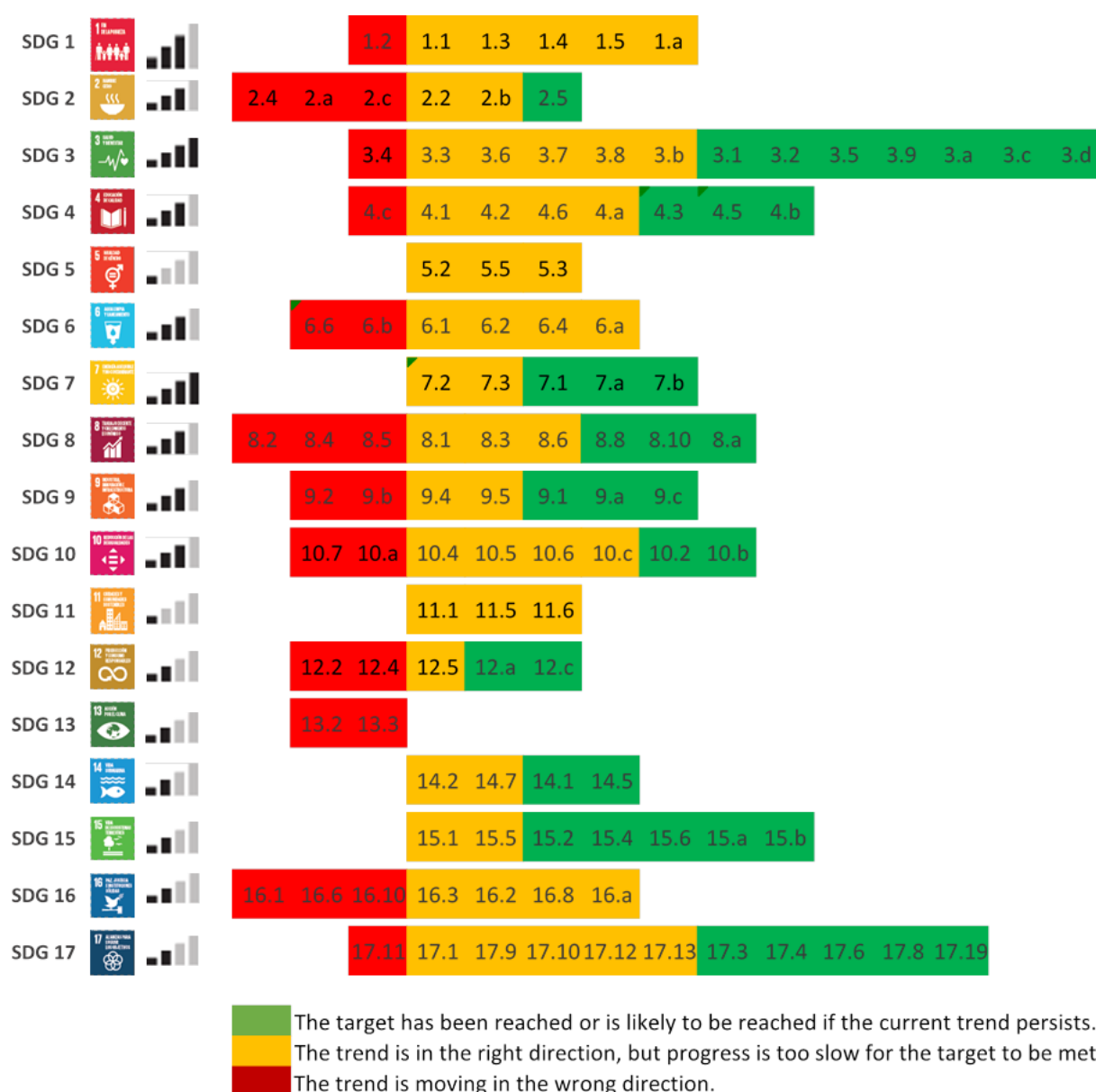
8. An analysis of data corresponding to 111 Sustainable Development Goal targets by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

<sup>8</sup> *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2022: Building Forward Fairer* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.II.F.5).

demonstrates that despite the improvement in some indicators, progress towards 68 per cent of the targets is insufficient to achieve the Goals by 2030, and progress has gone into reverse on almost a third of these targets (22 per cent) (see figure IV). Regarding the Goals linked to education, gender equality and marine and terrestrial biodiversity, the effects of the pandemic have further impeded progress. Three often invisible “silent crises” are still at play: the loss of more than a year of classroom schooling for an entire generation; the increase in gender-based violence and the unequal gender distribution of care burdens; and the exacerbation of environmental destruction and biodiversity loss, often combined with illegal activities and killings of environmental defenders.

Figure IV

**Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean region: likelihood that the Sustainable Development Goal targets will be met by 2030**



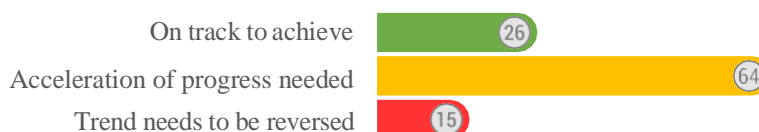
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Economic Commission for Europe region

9. Based on available data, which do not yet take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region will achieve only 26 Sustainable Development Goal targets by 2030, a quarter of all the targets for which there are sufficient data. Acceleration of progress is needed for 64 targets (see figure V), and for 15 targets there is a need to reverse existing trends. The region has made good progress in some areas related to access to services such as drinking water and energy, increased reliance on renewable energy and improvements in energy efficiency. However, income inequality is worsening in many countries, the digital divide is increasing and advances with regard to nutrition and sustainable food supply have been insufficient. Regarding gender equality, progress is well behind what is required. The conflict in Ukraine is radically changing the outlook for sustainable development in the region. This is particularly the case for progress towards Goal 16 and Goal 17 (global partnerships for sustainable development). Development assistance from the region to developing countries as a proportion of gross national income was decreasing before the pandemic; it may now be difficult for the region to reverse this trend, as countries deal with the economic impacts of the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine.

Figure V

### Economic Commission for Europe region: progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, 2021



## 2. Policies advanced and results delivered through regional cooperation

10. The present section highlights the work of the regional commissions during the reporting period and results achieved in three broad priority areas of focus in 2021, central to supporting Sustainable Development Goal acceleration in the regions: supporting global financial reforms and innovative development finance; people-centred and gender-responsive initiatives for health, social protection, and economic empowerment, and data, statistics and digitalization in support of the Goals.

### Global financial reforms and innovative development finance: towards a green, resilient and inclusive recovery

11. Against the backdrop of a substantial Sustainable Development Goal financing gap, widening inequalities and vaccine inequity, the regional commissions contributed to supporting advances the financing for development agenda, including through leading multi-stakeholder engagements to root out illicit financial flows and by developing knowledge products with innovative policy recommendations, tailored capacity support and catalytic partnerships. In support of countries working towards a green, resilient and inclusive recovery, the commissions also developed innovative tools to support integrated national financing frameworks and the climate/Sustainable Development Goal debt swap initiatives.

12. In the Africa region, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) convened dialogues between ministers of finance and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in October 2021 to advance discussions on the reform of the global financial architecture to support economic recovery, including the on-lending of special drawing rights (SDRs) to low-income and vulnerable middle-income countries, and



to support African countries in issuing green and blue bonds. The outcome of the dialogues fed into the deliberations of the IMF Executive Board, which led to the decision in April 2022 to approve the creation of a new Resilience and Sustainability Trust to provide affordable, longer-maturity financing to countries in need. Further, ECA championed regional solutions, through negotiations on financial sustainability and the formulation of a strategy on “Building forward together: financing a sustainable recovery for the future of all”. To support access by African Governments to liquidity structures on par with international standards, ECA launched the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, with the first transaction expected in the third quarter of 2022 for \$200 million. The Facility is expected to raise \$3 billion by seeking the on-lending of SDRs from developed countries. In advance of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, ECA convened the ninth Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa to support preparations for global climate negotiations. On extractive industries, and as part of post-COVID green recovery efforts, ECA supported the organization of a multi-stakeholder business forum in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to foster the development of a robust electric vehicle battery and a renewable energy value chain and market in Africa, projected to be worth \$8.8 trillion by 2025. Stakeholders committed to developing a minerals industry for electric car batteries in the country within two years.

13. In the Arab region, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) developed an interactive tool that helps member States calculate the costs for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The tool enables policymakers to explore possible financing options, simulate growth scenarios and explore potential savings to be realized. The outcomes of simulations can feed into integrated national financing frameworks at the country level. In partnership with the Islamic Development Bank, ESCWA produced a toolkit to provide policymakers with options on financing instruments to build energy efficiency, using public, private and blended finance. Following the launch by ESCWA of the climate/Sustainable Development Goal debt swap mechanism, Jordan and Egypt are now engaged in attracting innovative financing for climate action.

14. Within the context of the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative, regional commissions under the leadership of ESCWA have been working within cluster 5 on illicit financial flows, including in the preparation of the upcoming policy brief on the Secretary-General’s vision to root out illicit financial flows.

15. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP collaborated with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to assess the feasibility of debt-for-climate swaps in Pacific small island developing States. Technical support contributed to the formulation of a road map for the development of Sustainable Development Goal bonds in Cambodia and a legal framework for the issuance of sovereign bonds in Bhutan. Joint work with the United Nations country team in Uzbekistan helped national authorities develop an integrated financing strategy for the Goals and issue the first-ever Sustainable Development Goal bond, mobilizing \$870 million in financial markets. On financing instruments, ESCAP partnered with investors to launch the Small Enterprise Assistance Funds Women’s Economic Empowerment Fund, a women’s livelihood bond and a multi-country credit guarantee fund across Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal and Samoa. To date, the funds have supported over 7,000 women in gaining access to financial services and unlocked over \$50 million in private capital for women entrepreneurs. To accelerate green recovery through energy transition, Sustainable Development Goal 7 road maps were completed, with the support of ESCAP, in Bhutan, Fiji, Georgia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nepal, Tonga and Viet Nam, as well as in cities such as Cauayan (Philippines), Jakarta and Iskandar (Malaysia).



National greenhouse gas emissions scenarios are under development by national stakeholders in Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore using the ESCAP carbon pricing simulation tool. ESCAP also provided technical assistance to policymakers to review nationally determined contributions, of which 37 were updated in 2021.

16. ECE has advanced work in its region on normative standards for the digitization of documents for improved transparency in international trade. In support of efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, in November 2021 ECE launched a new assessment platform that provides a set of benchmarks and indicators to score infrastructure projects against people-first criteria and the Sustainable Development Goals by incorporating resilience and sustainability at their core. The tool is being used for project selection in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. To support the conclusion of effective and sustainable agreements, ECE developed the *Practical Guide for the Development of Agreements or Other Arrangements for Transboundary Water Cooperation*. ECE also published a new handbook on transboundary water allocation, which benefited from the participation of more than 100 countries, 70 international organizations and 20 river basin organizations. In the framework of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and to advance transboundary water cooperation in the Senegal-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin, ECE supported the negotiation and signing of a joint declaration by the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal in 2021.

17. In “Building a new future: transformative recovery with equality and sustainability”, presented by ECLAC to member States at its thirty-eighth session, ECLAC identified eight sectors for green and resilient recovery, and provided estimates on their potential for job creation and CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction, building on the Commission’s “big push for sustainability” proposal. ECLAC has continued to push its development in transition approach to promote new forms of international cooperation with middle-income countries and address concessional financing eligibility beyond GDP per capita, including by elevating intergovernmental discussions through the creation of a biennial regional conference in December 2021. It has also developed an environmental-economic vulnerability index to capture vulnerabilities of Caribbean small island developing States that arise from climate change, including its economic consequences, in order to contribute to definitions of vulnerability beyond per capita income. The index builds on existing work done by the United Nations system regarding economic and multidimensional vulnerability indexes. In advancing the priorities of the region, ECLAC published two policy briefs on innovative financing for development for the recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean. The high level of indebtedness of the region has increased countries’ liquidity needs, reducing fiscal space for implementing countercyclical policies. ECLAC suggested several policy actions, including expanding and redistributing liquidity from developed to developing countries, institutional reform of the multilateral debt architecture and integration of liquidity and debt reduction measures into development financing strategy.

### **People-centered and gender-responsive initiatives for health, social protection and economic empowerment**

18. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused human suffering, undermined economies and has had an impact on all environmental, social and economic aspects of development. Compounded by uneven access to COVID vaccines, inequalities between countries and within societies are rising, leading to an unprecedented loss of jobs and livelihoods, disproportionately affecting the health and social and economic well-being of women. COVID-19 highlighted vulnerabilities due to disruptions in global supply chains and the overdependence of low- and middle-income countries on imported medicine and medical supplies.

19. During the reporting period, the commissions supported member States across the five regions in strengthening social protection by investing in people-centred and gender-responsive health and social protection systems, as well as strengthening technological and productive capacities in the health industry, to ensure greater resilience and self-sufficiency.

20. In the Africa region, ECA played a catalytic role in the conceptualization of the African Medical Supplies Platform, which is aimed at facilitating the procurement of cost-effective and certified medical equipment in response to COVID-19. The Platform, an offshoot of the African Continental Free Trade Area-anchored Pharmaceutical Initiative, has helped alleviate supply and logistical constraints by enabling African Governments to procure critical products such as ultra-low-temperature freezers and personal protection equipment. In a joint initiative with the African Union, the African Export-Import Bank and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, ECA supported, through the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust, continental advocacy efforts and provided technical assistance in the negotiation and acquisition of 35 per cent of the vaccines needed, the equivalent of approximately 470 million doses, to ensure vaccine availability with a view to reaching herd immunity on the continent.

21. In support of integrating gender concerns in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, ECA supported Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles in using the revised Index to monitor and report on commitments on gender equality, and Burundi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in costing interventions to achieve a gender-equal recovery and gender equality in the education sector.

22. In the Arab region, the ESCWA COVID-19 stimulus tracker, developed in cooperation with ECA, provided user-friendly information on economic policy and social protection measures across countries and regions, to inform peer learning and strengthen policymaking. In addition, ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), developed an accountability framework to mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women in national institutions. Following a successful pilot in Jordan, ESCWA is providing capacity support for the roll-out of the framework by national women's platforms in 11 Arab countries. To assist policymakers, ESCWA developed the first social justice policy gap assessment tool and a social justice barometer. In response to requests for technical assistance, ESCWA and relevant United Nations country teams organized tailor-made workshops to carry out hands-on assessments of select policy areas in Mauritania, the Sudan and Tunisia.

23. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP, in partnership with ILO, assisted member States in developing the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific, with a guiding framework of 12 national measures and 3 regional actions to be taken by 2030. Working with resident coordinators in Cambodia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal and the Philippines, ESCAP contributed to the implementation of the Action Plan by enhancing capacity at the country level to strengthen inclusive social protection systems. In support of national vaccination programmes, ESCAP convened dialogues on equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, leading to policy recommendations to step up the manufacturing, distribution and redistribution of vaccines.

24. The work of ESCAP with women-led micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises led to positive changes in the policy and business environment for women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Nepal, Samoa and Viet Nam. For example, recent revisions in the Law on Support for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Viet Nam have integrated provisions for assistance to women-led small

and medium-sized enterprises. ESCAP is also working with partners to develop and scale up innovative digital financing and e-commerce solutions in support of women entrepreneurs in those six countries. Joint analysis by ESCAP and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) secretariat helped inform the deliberations of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women and identify concrete policy actions to close gender gaps in unpaid care work and bolster the care economy.

25. In the ECE region, ECE has undertaken joint efforts with other regional commissions and UN-Women to support Governments in scaling up their responses to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic on women and girls. Two regional studies – on empowering women through reducing unpaid care work and on public investments – identified opportunities for and challenges to gender equality in the economic realm. National assessments on childcare and the empowerment of women in Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia detailed existing gender inequality and the crisis of care. The findings of those assessments are informing the integration of gender and care dimensions into various economic and social policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

26. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, ECLAC, in response to the request of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), developed a plan for self-sufficiency in health matters in the region to strengthen capacities to produce and distribute vaccines and medicines. The sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States unanimously approved the plan in September 2021 and mandated ECLAC to support implementation. In relation to social protection, CELAC member States welcomed the position document entitled “Disasters and inequality in a protracted crisis: towards universal, comprehensive, resilient and sustainable social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean” during the fourth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and requested ECLAC to promote it. In the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC is developing the analytical foundations of the care society concept, including the economic impact on the care economy. The ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean makes available to Governments strategic gender inequality indicators and analytical tools for policymaking and maintains up-to-date oversight of women’s physical, economic and political decision-making autonomies.

27. In response to a request by four member States, ECLAC led the preparation of the Comprehensive Development Plan for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and south-south-east Mexico to address the structural causes of migration and forced displacement, which was approved in the framework of the sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government of CELAC in September 2021. Up to 20 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes contributed, as did the four resident coordinators and the regional office of the Development Coordination Office. Since then, based on the priorities of each country, ECLAC has developed, in coordination with the four resident coordinators and the Development Coordination Office, the implementation and financing strategy, as well as a georeferencing tool to monitor implementation.

### **Data, statistics and digitalization in support of the Sustainable Development Goals**

28. Consistent, accurate and timely data are essential to ensure proper follow-up and review and support decision makers in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional commissions provided tailored support to national statistical systems to produce harmonized data and make available authoritative regional data and statistics to inform evidence-based policymaking. COVID-19 has evolved into a “catalyst” for the adoption and increased use of digital technologies,

offering opportunities for resilient recovery and accelerated achievement of the Goals. During the reporting period, regional commissions continued to support pathways to universal access to technology, the acceleration of digital transformation in the public and private sectors and the design of strategies to improve research and development.

29. ECA, in partnership with 17 regional United Nations entities, unveiled in September 2021 the Africa United Nations Data for Development Platform to serve as a repository that captures high-quality data and evidence related to the 2030 Agenda from all African countries. The new data portal presents comprehensive data sets, facilitates the reporting of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including for voluntary national reviews, and allows tracking at a granular level. The portal consolidates statistics from platforms and technological tools available across United Nations entities and enables Governments to evaluate outcomes, carry out in-depth analyses and link them with national development plans. Further, ECA has provided digital census-planning support, including the deployment of information technology assets to Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In advancing digital transformation, ECA has supported the development and adoption of the Kenyan digital economy project, the e-commerce pilot project of Ethiopia and the expansion of the broadband infrastructure of Cameroon.

30. ESCWA developed a practical guide to support Jordan in its review of its 2021–2024 development programme. The guide was elaborated to support the new generation of five-year development plans under preparation in several countries in the region. ESCWA is brokering collaborations between audit institutions and voluntary national reporting teams in countries and upscaling work with parliamentarians to tackle legislative infrastructure for, as well as oversight on, the Sustainable Development Goals. Further, ESCWA is leading work on information and communications technologies for development policies, conducting regional dialogues on meaningful access, the development of information and communications technology infrastructure, and legal and regulatory frameworks. On technology and innovation, ESCWA partnered with the International Chamber of Commerce in the development of digital labour markets in the region, including through the creation of dynamic entrepreneurial environments.

31. ESCAP developed a Sustainable Development Goal tracker to support the assessment of progress at the national level. The tracker enables countries to produce their own progress assessment dashboards, using their own data, indicators and targets. In 2021, ESCAP supported the United Nations country team in Thailand in using the tracker to produce a national progress assessment on the Goals and an integrated analysis feeding into the common country analysis. The tracker is being implemented in collaboration with national statistical and resident coordinator offices in seven countries: Brunei Darussalam, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nauru, Philippines, Samoa and Tonga.

32. The registration of births and deaths is improving compared with the beginning of the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015–2024), with 26 countries registering more than 90 per cent of births by 2020. The second Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific took stock of and laid out clear actions to accelerate progress. Contributing to the progress is the technical support delivered by the “Get everyone in the picture” regional initiative, facilitated by ESCAP, addressing the production of vital statistics, assessing inequalities in registration, setting up national coordination mechanisms and strengthening national systems and processes.

33. ECE published methodological guidance on the use of administrative data sources in population censuses and provided direct support to many countries for its application. In addition, new national reporting platforms on the Sustainable Development Goals and more efficient mechanisms for the communication and dissemination of national statistics have been developed. Administrative sources, rapid surveys to assess the impact of the pandemic, and new technologies for statistics have been used.

34. ECE has accelerated the implementation of the eTIR international system to make border crossing paperless and contactless. Nine member States are already in the process of interconnecting their customs information systems with eTIR. ECE is developing an inland transport and connectivity eLearning platform to digitalize basic training on the 59 United Nations legal instruments it administers in the area of transport. ECE has also continued to advance work on environmental, social and governance traceability and the transparency of value chains in priority industries such as minerals and textiles.

35. ECLAC developed the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean to encourage the development of the digital ecosystem through a process of integration and regional cooperation, strengthening digital policies that drive knowledge, inclusion and equality, innovation and environmental sustainability. ECLAC presented the document entitled “Innovation for development: the key to a transformative recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean” during the third session of the Conference on Science, Innovation and Information and Communications Technologies. In partnership with the Pacific Alliance, ECLAC continues to promote the establishment of a regional digital market to enhance regional economic integration and support the digitalization and export capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises. With the support of ECLAC, the region has advanced in the economic valuation of unpaid work to obtain a more precise calculation of what society produces. Within the framework of the Working Group on Gender Statistics of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, a total work time indicator is continuously updated and disseminated by the ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory. Time use information has allowed the generation of non-market indicators that show the inequalities in the gender division of labour and its impact on women.

## **B. Other key policy issues addressed by the regional commissions**

### **1. Regional forums on sustainable development**

36. Convened annually by the regional commissions, the regional forums on sustainable development are the pre-eminent regional multi-stakeholder platforms for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and for exchanging knowledge, best practices and solutions to support implementation. During the reporting period, the five regional commissions hosted their respective regional forums, which were aligned with the theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Regional assessments, progress reports and data contributed to identifying gaps and opportunities for action by the United Nations system in line with regional and country priorities. In this context, countries have also continued to receive support in the preparation and follow-up of their voluntary national reviews and broader implementation efforts. The forums have provided space to address the role of the reviews in driving Sustainable Development Goal implementation. The 2022 regional forums reaffirmed the need for strengthened regional cooperation and partnerships to recover better, build resilience against future shocks and deliver on the 2030 Agenda. The forums underscored the need for inclusive and sustainable policy actions in social protection and education, grounded in human rights and focused on the most vulnerable and on the empowerment of women and girls. The importance of scaling

up investments to accelerate the transition to inclusive and green economies, preserve ecosystems and promote just transitions in digital connectivity, energy and food systems was also highlighted. The reform of the global financial architecture to effectively address gaps and asymmetries between and within countries was also a prevailing theme.

37. The outcomes continue to be reported by the chairs of the regional forums as part of the ministerial segment of the high-level political forum. Efforts also continue by the regional commissions to ensure that adequate space is dedicated to the regional dimension of sustainable development at the forum.

## 2. Overview of key policy issues covered in ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings

38. The regional commissions have influenced various high-level meetings in areas relevant to their regions. The table below contains highlights of the sessions of the commissions held during the reporting period.

<i>Regional commission</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
ECA	1 December 2021 (New York)	Fifth African Union-United Nations Annual Conference
ECA	11–17 May 2022 (Dakar)	Fifty-fourth session of ECA and 2022 Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
ECE	17–18 May 2021 (online, hosted by Austria)	Fifth High-level Ministerial Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adoption of the Vienna Declaration, on transitioning to clean, safe, healthy and inclusive mobility and transport systems for all, and the first Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion.</li> </ul>
ECE	6–7 October 2021 (Geneva)	ECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Endorsement of the regional action plan for the ECE region entitled “Place and life in the ECE - a regional action plan 2030: tackling challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate and housing emergencies in region, city, neighbourhood and homes”.</li> </ul>
ECLAC	18 September 2021 (Mexico City)	Sixth Summit of Heads of State and Government of CELAC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unanimous approval of the lines of action and proposals for a plan for self-sufficiency in health matters in Latin America and the Caribbean</li> </ul> <p>Approval of a fund for disaster risk resilience, to be administered by ECLAC</p>
ECLAC	26–28 October 2021 (online, hosted by Antigua and Barbuda)	Fourth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized jointly by ECLAC and the United Nations Development Programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Coordination of social protection systems with disaster risk management policies to strengthen the capacity for mitigation, prevention, response and adaptation.</li> </ul>

<i>Regional commission</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
ESCAP	14–17 December 2021 (Bangkok and online)	Fourth session of the Ministerial Conference on Transport. – Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific (2022–2026).
ESCAP	23–27 May 2022 (Bangkok and online)	Seventy-eighth session of ESCAP – Inclusion of a high-level segment for Heads of State and Government on the seventy-fifth anniversary of ESCAP and a high-level general debate on the theme of the session, “A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”.
ESCWA	30 November 2021	Ministerial forum on “The future of social protection in the Arab region: building a vision for a post-COVID-19 reality”
ESCWA	15 March 2021	Round table on the extractive industries as an engine for sustainable development in the Arab region

## II. Developments and outcomes in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, including in the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system

39. The report of the Secretary-General on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review provides an overview of progress in 2021 and recommendations for accelerated action in the next year. In addition, the annual system-wide results report of the regional collaborative platforms detail joint action and results achieved in 2021. The regional commissions, under the leadership of their Executive Secretaries as co-Vice-Chairs of the regional collaborative platforms with UNDP regional directors, have actively supported the roll-out of the repositioning of the regional assets of the United Nations development system around the five transformative areas proposed by the Secretary-General,<sup>9</sup> with a view to promoting collaboration and efficiency and fostering joined-up action for the 2030 Agenda, as set out in Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/23](#), which was referenced in General Assembly resolution [74/297](#).

### A. Promoting coherence at the regional level

#### 1. Contributions of regional commissions to issue-based coalitions

40. Issue-based coalitions are inter-agency collaboration mechanisms to address the most pressing regional and subregional challenges identified by United Nations country teams and by bringing the collective strength of the regional United Nations development system to bear on actions aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda. Regional commissions, through the coalitions they convene and/or participate in, produced knowledge products, data, tools and policy recommendations, and leveraged the collaborative potential in a holistic manner to support United Nations country teams in advancing transformational change, as described below.

<sup>9</sup> See General Assembly resolution [71/243](#), [A/74/73-E/2019/14](#) and [A/75/79-E/2020/55](#).



41. In the Africa region, the improved engagement with the African Union, in particular on the African Continental Free Trade Area, finance and climate response, was part of notable progress achieved in 2021 by the Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa. ECA co-led two issue-based coalitions, on integrated data and statistics and on macroeconomic management and economic transformation, and contributed to the Africa United Nations Data for Development Platform, the United Nations-Africa data and statistics strategy and the country-level implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

42. In the ESCWA region, the Commission contributed to the work of the Regional Collaborative Platform in providing support for the adoption of a ministerial declaration with key guiding principles for post-COVID-19 social protection and to the regional review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration with Member States. The Platform also supported nine countries in their preparations for the United Nations Food Systems Summit, held in September 2021. In early 2022, the eight issue-based coalitions established in 2020 were assessed for ongoing relevance, and the formulation of the coalitions was recalibrated to meet regional priorities and needs. The coalitions produce joint regional public goods in the form of knowledge products, data, tools and policy recommendations, targeting the most pressing issues in the region and informing the work of the Platform.

43. In the Asia-Pacific region, some two thirds of the United Nations country teams surveyed in 2021 reported having benefited from technical support provided by the issue-based coalitions and other groups under the Regional Collaborative Platform. The coalition on climate change mitigation, co-led by ESCAP and the United Nations Environment Programme, brought together regional expertise to assess nationally determined contributions in the region and mobilize the United Nations at the regional and country levels to support raising ambitions in the lead-up to and during the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Advocacy efforts of the coalition included those related to pathways for phasing out coal and promoting actions to commemorate the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies. Through contribution to other coalitions, ESCAP helped inform the deliberations of Member States on holistic disaster risk reduction at the seventh session of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction. The tools and methodologies for identifying the furthest behind and measuring inequality were instrumental to the work of the coalition on human rights and gender equality in building the capacity of United Nations country teams.

44. In the Latin American and Caribbean region, ECLAC co-chairs three issue-based coalitions, on equitable growth, financing for development and human mobility. Through the coalition on equitable growth, ECLAC co-organized policy-oriented webinars on employment, decent work and productivity (with ILO and UNDP) and fiscal policy challenges for sustainable development (with UNDP). With ILO, it prepared two joint publications, entitled “Employment situation in Latin America and the Caribbean: policies to protect labour relations and hiring subsidies amid the COVID-19 pandemic” and “Employment situation in Latin America and the Caribbean: decent work for platform workers in Latin America”. As co-Chair of the coalition on financing for development, established in February 2022, ECLAC engaged the 21 United Nations resident coordinators in the region to foster collaboration around challenges. During the fifth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, ECLAC coordinated several sessions on financing for development, including multilateral and regional development banks. As part of the work of the coalition on human mobility, ECLAC led the regional review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (with IOM), which informed the 2022 International Migration Review Forum and provided a coordinated response to the demand for support from the Government of Colombia for the ministerial conference

on migration held in Bogotá in October 2021. ECLAC also coordinated the joint preparation of the comprehensive development plan for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and south-south-east Mexico.

45. In the ECE region, the Regional Collaborative Platform focused in 2021 on transitioning to a longer-term COVID-19 recovery, leveraging opportunities to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and addressing human rights challenges, political crises and conflicts. In this regard, the coalition on environment and climate change equipped resident coordinators and United Nations country teams with a compendium of measures for green post-pandemic recovery to support member States in “greening” recovery plans. The coalition on sustainable food systems provided technical support to country teams in the preparation of the United Nations Food Systems Summit and launched a regional community of practice on the sustainability of food systems to provide key stakeholders with an inclusive digital space in which to share ideas, practices and knowledge on regional policy areas. The Platform has reviewed and recalibrated its issue-based coalitions to ensure a stronger focus on supporting resident coordinators and United Nations country teams on pressing issues. Support provided by the coalitions and regional working groups to country teams is demand-driven. The coalitions have developed individual service offers detailing a menu of support services they can offer to the country teams. A sunset clause outlines the conditions under which a coalition or working group can discontinue its activities.

## **2. Knowledge management hubs, data gateways and mapping of regional expertise: progress made**

46. The regional commissions have contributed to advancing progress in each region by positioning the knowledge management hubs as “one-stop shops” where expertise, data and knowledge resources are readily accessible for member States and the United Nations system, including the United Nations country teams. Steps have been taken to bring coherence to the data architecture for evidence-based planning, programming, monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.

47. In the Africa region, the Africa United Nations Data for Development Platform was launched in 2021 as a regional repository of high-quality data from all African countries on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. The Platform presents comprehensive data sets to support Governments and partners in monitoring progress, making sound decisions, evaluating outcomes and impacts at the target and indicator levels and linking them with national development plans. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa also developed the United Nations-Africa data and statistics strategy to strengthen and coordinate an integrated data and statistical system for sustainable development in Africa. The strategy will ensure coordinated efforts by United Nations agencies and increase the visibility of the work of United Nations with regard to providing support at the global, regional and national levels.

48. In the ESCWA region, the Manara knowledge platform was launched in early 2022 as a comprehensive platform with an intelligent search engine on Sustainable Development Goal data and statistics, along with interactive tools for surveys, data analysis, visualization and simulations, among other features. The platform is accessible to regional organizations, member States, United Nations country teams and stakeholders, and communicates with platforms in other regions.

49. In the ESCAP region, the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub, co-led by ESCAP and the regional office of the Development Coordination Office, has evolved into a one-stop-shop for regional expertise and knowledge assets, with over 3,600 new users. A community of practice focused on the implementation of nationally determined contributions was piloted, which enabled exchanges between the coalitions and the resident coordinator offices, such as the sharing of updated analysis

in the lead-up to the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Sustainable Development Goal data and statistics working group co-chaired by ESCAP and the United Nations Population Fund, strengthened the capacity of resident coordinators' offices and country teams to better assist national statistical systems.

50. In 2021, the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean consolidated the regional knowledge management platform known as the Sustainable Development Goal gateway, with the implementation of a content management system to achieve efficiencies by automating and decentralizing the uploading of information by Platform members. One of the main assets of the gateway is the information system on support activities on Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and reporting, created to support the national statistical systems of the countries of the region. During 2021, the gateway attracted 122,470 users and 381,630 page views. The Sustainable Development Goal data and statistics group led by ECLAC supports the Platform by facilitating coordination among United Nations entities and other organizations, including through the ECLAC Statistical Conference of the Americas. Further, ECLAC presented, jointly with the Development Coordination Office and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, a revamped version of its CEPALSTAT portal, linking regional statistics and geospatial information, thereby reinforcing the interoperability of information through open data.

51. The Regional United Nations Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia supported United Nations country teams in 2021 and enlarged its membership to key non-United Nations entities active in data and statistics. A virtual knowledge management hub was embedded in the new Regional Collaborative Platform website, to be launched in 2022, which was adapted from the Manara system developed by ESCWA to meet the needs of the Europe and Central Asia region. It is expected to facilitate access to the expertise, resources, events and service offers of issue-based coalitions and regional working groups on a range of cross-cutting regional priority issues.

## **B. Enhanced cooperation among the regional economic commissions**

### **Joint initiatives undertaken by the regional commissions**

52. In 2021, the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions coordinated their positions on policy matters, exchanged experiences, articulated regional responses and advanced collaboration around joint projects and other areas of mutual interest. Under the leadership of the coordinator, and with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the regional commissions organized round tables on extractive industries and sustainable development in the five regions. They also jointly prepared an interregional policy brief on extractive industries and coordinated inputs to the Secretary-General's policy brief to inform the global round table on extractive industries held in May 2021. In addition, the commissions co-led efforts to advance the work of the cluster dealing with the operationalization of measures to combat illicit financial flows, and jointly prepared the Secretary-General's policy brief on illicit financial flows.

53. Ahead of the United Nations Food Systems Summit, the commissions launched a joint policy brief which included proposals for harmonized pathways and strategies to overcome common challenges and transform food systems to be more inclusive, healthy, sustainable and resilient. During the high-level dialogue on energy, the Executive Secretaries issued a joint statement calling for enhanced regional cooperation to develop solutions for capturing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

54. Regional commissions also collaborated in preparing a joint publication on SDRs and the COVID-19 crisis, analysing the financing needs of developing countries and SDR utilization rates. The publication included proposals for innovative mechanisms for rechanneling SDRs to countries in need, a trust fund for middle-income countries to finance Sustainable Development Goal-related investment projects, and the allocation of SDRs to fund the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility launched by ECA.

55. On the margins of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the regional commissions organized a joint side event on bridging the gap in climate finance to showcase regional initiatives and perspectives on defining green and climate finance options to support post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery aligned with more ambitious nationally determined contributions.

56. Recognizing that the hundreds of regional trade agreements in place provided no guidance to countries on how to keep trade going during the COVID-19 pandemic, regional commissions joined forces with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and other United Nations partners to prepare a United Nations handbook to help countries negotiate trade agreements for increased resilience in times of crisis and pandemic.

57. Leveraging opportunities offered by the United Nations Development Account, regional commissions jointly implemented five short-term joint projects in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the areas of supporting micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, facilitating transport and trade connectivity, strengthening social protection with a focus on integrating gender and care dimensions, mobilizing financial resources and building urban economic resilience. These projects provided capacity-building support to countries and promoted knowledge exchange across regions. The commissions are also collaborating in supporting countries across the regions in measuring and curbing illicit financial flows to improve domestic resource mobilization and strengthen socioeconomic resilience to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

58. In promoting interregional exchange, the methodology of ESCAP for assessing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals has been adopted by ECE to produce regional progress assessments, and by ESCWA to develop the Arab Sustainable Development Goal gateway. In the context of the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation, ECLAC and ESCAP concluded an interregional project aimed at strengthening the evidence base on inequality in member countries by using innovative methodologies. To this end, ESCAP has developed and applied a new methodology for measuring inequality of opportunities in Mongolia and Thailand, visualizing various inequality indicators and simulating policy impacts.

59. All regions, however, continue to experience significant data gaps for various indicators, and addressing these gaps to ensure that no one is left behind remains imperative in all regions. Similarly, ensuring that Sustainable Development Goal data reporting is harmonized across regions, ensuring comparability of data, including with Global data on the Goals, remains a work in progress. This will be a priority area for cooperation in 2022.