Economic and Social Council

**High-level political forum on
sustainable development**
Convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council
9–18 July 2019

Report of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its third session

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its third session, held in Geneva on 21 and 22 March 2019, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

I. Attendance

1.   The third session of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region was held at the International Conference Centre Geneva, on 21 and 22 March 2019. The session was chaired by the Minister of Health and Social Protection of Albania, Ogerta Manastirliu.

2.   The session was attended by representatives of the following 51 ECE member States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

3.   The following non-member States of ECE attended: Colombia, Costa Rica, Mongolia.

4.   The European Union was represented by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva. The European Commission and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights also participated.

5.   Representatives of the following United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations, conventions, missions and entities attended the meeting: Environment Management Group, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Institute on Ageing, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union, International Trade Centre, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN-Water, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Development Coordination Office, United Nations Development Programme, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Headquarters, United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers, World Bank Group, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, World Meteorological Organization and World Trade Organization. Resident coordinators from 13 programme countries in the region also attended.

6.   Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the session: Central European Free Trade Agreement, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, Council of the Baltic Sea States, Eurasian Economic Commission, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Group on Earth Observations, Inter-Agency Network for the Sustainable Development Goals, International Development Law Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Nordic Council of Ministers, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Organization of American States, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus.

7.   Representatives of over 150 non-governmental organizations and representatives of academia, the private sector, human rights institutions and other organizations also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the regional forum (www.unece.org/rfsd2019.html).

II. Opening and adoption of the agenda

8.   The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda for the session, contained in ECE/RFSD/2019/1.

9.   In her opening remarks, the Chair emphasized that progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals needs to be pursued by the international community together with the people in the countries. It is crucial to leave no one behind and to ensure that societies do not suffer from inequalities and exclusion. The Chair also pointed out that gender equality is an intrinsic part of sustainable development and requires primary attention. The regional forum demonstrates that achieving the Goals is a common undertaking and that governments, international organizations, civil

society, scientists and businesses have an important part to play. Referring to the case of Albania, the Chair stressed that the country embraced the Goals from the beginning. At the same time, the process of accession to the European Union is a main driver of reform efforts at the national level in a number of priority areas, and such efforts help towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10.   In her special address, the Deputy Secretary-General recognized the regional forums as critical tools for maintaining the ambition, reviewing progress and exchanging good practices towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The regional forums in 2019 would pave the way for the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council and would also set the scene for the major meetings on sustainable development to be held in New York in September, including the summit on the Sustainable Development Goals at the General Assembly. Along with the other regions, the Economic Commission for Europe region still has much work ahead to achieve the Goals. An important accelerator for implementation of the Goals is breaking down the sectoral silos that constrain policy action. In addition, intentions need to matched by public and private financing. Gender equality and women's empowerment are also crucial. The United Nations is transforming itself in order to better support countries' efforts, including through an independent and empowered resident coordinator system and more cohesive, effective and accountable country teams. While the practice of collaboration among regional United Nations system entities is well established in the region, work is ongoing to review and adapt all United Nations regional assets.

11.   The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe underscored that the regional forum had become the reference platform for sustainable development in the region. The meeting was a reflection of the important role of ECE in bringing together governments and other stakeholders across sectoral boundaries. It was also an expression of the strong collaboration among United Nations system entities in the region. Many aspects of the 2030 Agenda have a transboundary dimension that is best addressed through regional cooperation. The Commission's normative work contributes to translating the Goals into concrete commitments and guidelines for action in respect of the environment, transport, energy, trade and other areas. In order to maximize its impact in view of the work towards the Goals, ECE will focus on four nexus areas – the sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable and smart cities, sustainable mobility and smart connectivity, and measuring and monitoring the implementation of the Goals.

12.   The Chair of the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia pointed out that the current pace of progress in some areas is insufficient to fully meet the 2030 Agenda. Throughout the Europe and Central Asia region, governments are "walking the talk" in terms of national coordination, resource mobilization and budget allocation, and by engaging parliaments and local authorities. However, a number of key challenges need to be addressed in order to accelerate progress, in particular rising inequalities, the lack of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, access to quality education for marginalized communities, climate change and ensuring peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

III. High-level policy segment: "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Economic Commission for Europe region"

13.   The high-level policy segment started with a high-level dialogue on "Voluntary national reviews as drivers of Sustainable Development Goal implementation? National experiences from ECE countries", which was followed by a plenary debate.

14.   The following panellists spoke during the high-level dialogue on voluntary national reviews:

- The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Liu Zhenmin

- The Commissioner-General for Sustainable Development and interministerial delegate for sustainable development, Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition of France, Laurence Monnoyer-Smith

- The Director General of the Department for Multilateral Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belarus, Larysa Belskaya

- The Secretary General for the Environment, Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy, Greece, Christina Baritaki

- The General Director of Sectors and Public Investments, Strategy and Budget Office of the Presidency, Turkey, Emin Sadik Aydin

15.   The following delegations intervened in the ensuing discussion and in the plenary debate: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

16.   Civil society organizations conveyed to the regional forum the outcome of a preparatory civil society consultation, held on 20 and 21 March 2019. The civil society positions were presented by a representative of the non-governmental organization Journalists for Human Rights, Andrea Nakova.

17.   The Chair's summary in the annex to the present report presents the main issues raised during the segment. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

IV. Focus events and peer learning segment

18.   Two focus events on cutting-edge topics affecting overall implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals were held in parallel to the peer learning round tables. In order to facilitate practical and targeted peer learning, the peer learning segment was structured into two sets of five round tables conducted in parallel, covering Goals that will be subject to in-depth review at the high-level political forum in 2019: Goals 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16. Peer learning and interactive discussions were facilitated by the presentation of case studies. Informal concept notes for all focus events and round tables, as well as a compilation of all the case studies (ECE/RFSD/2019/INF1), are available on the website of the regional forum. The Chair's summary in the annex to the present report contains a summary of the main challenges, policy responses and measures discussed at each focus event and round table.

A. Focus events

1. Technology, digitalization, artificial intelligence: curse or blessing for sustainable development?

Moderator: Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union, Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Panellists:

- Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva and Chairperson of the Economic Commission for Europe, Ambassador Janis Karklins

- Head of the Digital Economy and Society programme and member of the Executive Committee, World Economic Forum, Derek O'Halloran

- Group Public Policy Development Director, Vodafone Group Services, Reinald Kruger

- Head of Public Affairs, Communications Regulatory Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Amela Odobašić

- Director of the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative and Director of Digital Strategy for the University of Geneva, François Grey

2. How to measure progress? Data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

Moderator: Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Children's Fund, and Chair of the regional Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Development Goal Data and Monitoring, Afshan Khan

Panellists:

- Member of the State Council on Statistics of Armenia, Anahit Safyan

- Head of Analysis and Engagement, Sustainable Development Goals, Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom, Joanne Evans

- Manager and Special Representative to the United Nations and World Trade Organization, World Bank Geneva, Jos Verbeek

- Director, Commonwealth Medical Trust and representative of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism, Marianne Haslegrave

B. Peer learning segment

The following rapporteurs covered the two round tables under each Goal subject to in-depth review:

- Senior Policy Officer, Strategy and Information, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Food Quality, Netherlands, Roeland van Raaij (Goal 4)

- Head of Project Group of New Economies and Blockchain Technology, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Slovenia, Nena Dokuzov (Goal 8)

- Head of Joint Stock Company "Economic Research Institute", Ministry of National Economy, Kazakhstan, Yerlik Karazhan (Goal 10)

- State Counsellor to the Prime Minister, Romania, Laszlo Borbely (Goal 13)

• Executive Secretary of the National Sustainable Development Goal Council of Georgia, Nino Sarishvili (Goal 16)

1. **Round tables (first set)**

(a) **Learning without limits: lifelong learning and inclusive education (Goal 4)**

Moderators: Director, Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, UNESCO, Ana Luiza Massot Thompson-Flores, and Director, Almaty Office, UNESCO, Krista Pikkat.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Armenia, Austria and Germany (jointly), France, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Serbia and the League of Professional Women (Ukraine).

(b) **The growth we want: solutions for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Goal 8)**

Moderators: Chief Economist and Director, Division of Market Development, International Trade Centre, Marion Jansen, and, Officer in Charge, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, ECE, Maria Ceccarelli.

Case studies presented or submitted by: France, Germany, Georgia, Italy, Netherlands, Central European Free Trade Agreement, Cooperativa Agricola "Insieme" (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Disability Hub Europe (Spain), and Visa (Turkey).

(c) **Bridging the gap: achieving greater income and economic equality (Goal 10)**

Moderator: Director, Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, United Nations Development Programme, Mirjana Spoljaric Egger.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (jointly), Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Whiteshield Partners (Kazakhstan).

(d) **Acting for the climate: stepping up climate change policies, action and awareness in the region (Goal 13)**

Moderators: Executive Director, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, Nikhil Seth, and Manager, Climate Policy, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Karl Vella.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Serbia, Tajikistan, Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (Armenia), EcoClub (Ukraine), University of Geneva (Switzerland), Vaude (Germany), and Women Engage for a Common Future (Netherlands).

(e) **Strengthening institutions for change: fostering effective and inclusive governance for sustainable development (Goal 16)**

Moderator: Public Participation Expert, Tomas Rakos (proposed by Czechia).

Case studies presented or submitted by: Albania, Czechia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Council of Europe and UN-Women.

2. Round tables (second set)

(a) The power of knowledge for change: education and learning as drivers of sustainable development (Goal 4)

Moderators: Director, Environment Division, ECE, Marco Keiner, and Commissioner for Sustainable Development of Gibraltar and United Kingdom focal point to ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, Daniella Tilbury.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Cyprus, Journalists for Human Rights (North Macedonia), Silviva Foundation (Switzerland), and University of Gloucestershire (United Kingdom).

(b) The future of work: productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8)

Moderators: Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, International Labour Organization, Heinz Koller, and Regional Director, Europe and Central Asia, UN-Women, Alia El-Yassir.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Federation of Organisations Persons with Disability (Malta), Happy Tosti (Netherlands), and World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Occupational Health (Croatia).

(c) Towards a world of equal opportunity: tackling inequality caused by exclusion and discrimination (Goal 10)

Moderators: Regional Director, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Population Fund, Alanna Armitage, and Head of the European Office for Investment for Health and Development, World Health Organization, Christine Brown.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Armenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Health Education and Research Association (North Macedonia), United Nations Volunteers, UN-Women and Irish Men's Sheds Association (Ireland).

(d) Coping with climate change: strengthening resilience and adaptation (Goal 13)

Moderator: Adviser, Civil Protection and Crisis Planning Department, Ministry of the Interior, Slovakia, Dominika Reynolds.

Case studies presented or submitted by: France, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Academy of Medical Sciences (Croatia), E3G – Third Generation Environmentalism (United Kingdom), European Academies Science Advisory Council and Tecnofilm SpA Compounds Termoplastici (Italy).

(e) Empowering people to protect the planet: the environmental dimension of Goal 16 (Goal 16)

Moderator: Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities, OSCE, Ambassador Vuk Zugic.

Case studies presented or submitted by: Serbia, Ukraine, Office of the Ombudsman for Future Generations (Hungary), Supreme Court of Kazakhstan, Earthjustice (Switzerland), and German Speleological Federation (Germany).

V. Connecting the dots: moving ahead towards empowerment, inclusion and equality in the region

19.   The Permanent Representative of Albania to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Ravesa Lleshi, served as acting Chair for the remainder of the regional forum.

20.   The segment featured a briefing from the preparatory meeting of youth in advance of the third session of the forum, presented by a board member of the European Youth Forum, Rosalyn Old, and from the regional consultation on the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda, presented by the Chair of the regional consultation and Head of the Economic Research Institute, Ministry of National Economy, Kazakhstan, Mr. Karazhan. Both meetings took place on 21 March 2019.

21.   The segment continued with a presentation of key messages from the focus events by the acting Chair and from the round-table discussions by the five rapporteurs, followed by a moderated discussion on the major obstacles to making the linkages between the Sustainable Development Goals in policy and practice, the enablers and good practices towards an integrated approach that allows for more rapid and sustainable results in respect of the Goals. The discussion was moderated by the Director of the Sustainable Development Goal Lab in the Office of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Nadia Isler. A keynote address entitled "Towards sustainable development: interlinkages calling for systems transformations" was given by the Director of the Environmental Policy Centre at the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and member of the independent team of scientists preparing the 2019 *Global Sustainable Development Report*, Eeva Furman. The Chair's summary in the annex to the present report contains a summary of the discussion and its main conclusions. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

VI. Closing

22.   Delivering closing remarks on behalf of civil society, the Executive Secretary of the Pan-European Regional Council of the International Trade Union Confederation, Anton Leppik, stressed that dialogue and partnerships with civil society are essential for governments to achieve progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Inequalities are the main concern of civil society as a whole. The full compliance of States with international obligations is a precondition for achieving the Goals. Independent and effective national human rights institutions can serve as bridge-builders between State authorities and civil society. In view of significant challenges, an inclusive approach for a just transition brings together workers, communities, business and governments in dialogue towards concrete steps needed for climate-friendly resilient cities, environmental protection, sustainable economies and sustainable consumption. Addressing women's double burden of work and care across the life cycle is critical for closing the gender gap, including through recognition for unpaid care work and the provision of social protection and adequate pensions and gender-balanced parental leave. Social protection, quality public services and education are investments in the sustainability of societies.

23.   The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva underscored that the year 2019 marks the end of the first four-year cycle of the Sustainable Development Goal review process. The Goals have become a unifier of action and narrative across silos and disciplines and a global common road map to integrate efforts. There was a growing realization that the 2030 Agenda is about a fundamental,

holistic shift. However, the pace of progress in respect of the 2030 Agenda is still too slow. The regional forum had demonstrated the vital role that regional actors play. The scope of ambition may be global, but the real action of implementation happens in national, regional and local contexts. With over 100 international organizations, some 400 non-governmental organizations, representatives of 179 States, a vibrant private sector and world-class academic institutions, the international community in Geneva, often referred to as International Geneva, provides a unique ecosystem and is in many ways the operational centre of Sustainable Development Goal implementation.

24. In her closing remarks, the Executive Secretary of the Commission stressed that it is the ambition of the regional forum to encourage breaking down sectoral barriers, to stimulate innovative responses and to draw in all relevant stakeholders across the region. The regional forum has been put on the map as a regular event that brings together the sustainable development community and encourages collaboration. It represents the broadest platform in the region for the exchange of policies and solutions.

25. Before closing the meeting, the acting Chair informed participants that the draft report of the regional forum, including the Chair's summary of discussions, would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the Economic Commission for Europe region to the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Council (to be held from 9 to 18 July 2019).

Annex

Chair's summary of the discussions

High-level policy segment: empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the Economic Commission for Europe region

1.   The high-level policy segment provided an opportunity to discuss the impact of voluntary national reviews on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, participants shared their views on existing challenges and the lessons that can be drawn to advance the 2030 Agenda in the region.

2.   Monitoring and reporting are key for the implementation of the Goals. The high-level political forum has a central role in reviewing the implementation process. The process of conducting voluntary national reviews is challenging and requires significant preparation, so it is advisable to start the process early. However, there are multiple benefits that can be derived from the catalytic impulse provided by those reviews in different areas that are relevant for advancing the 2030 Agenda.

3.   Some countries in the region have presented or are about to present a second voluntary national review. While the emphasis in a first review was typically on defining plans for implementation, second reviews are more focused on covering achievements and the progress made so far.

4.   Voluntary national reviews should reflect national realities. The preparation of the reviews allows an assessment of how the current situation fits with existing commitments. A process of analysis that translates targets and Goals into the national context and clarifies responsibilities for the implementation thereof has often accompanied the preparation of reviews. National indicators may be adopted to operationalize the monitoring of the implementation of Goals and define baselines.

5.   The alignment of national plans with the 2030 Agenda is critical for facilitating implementation and promoting government ownership at different levels, thus supporting the integrated efforts that are necessary for success. Voluntary national reviews can prompt new national initiatives. The engagement of all government institutions under a well-established oversight mechanism is conducive to high-quality outcomes. Strong strategic guidance from such mechanisms can provide a sense of direction and ensure the coherence of disparate efforts.

6.   While the definition of the overall legal and operational framework takes place at the level of the central government, most measures are implemented at subnational levels. It is therefore essential to also involve subnational actors.

7.   The successful implementation of the Goals requires the engagement of stakeholders. A whole-of-government approach should be complemented with a whole-of-society approach. Voluntary national reviews, while driven by governments, provide an important opportunity to involve multiple actors, including the parliament, civil society, local governments, international organizations, universities and business communities. The involvement of parliaments, in particular, has been acknowledged as providing a significant impulse. The participation of multiple stakeholders contributes to ensure that the principle of leaving no one behind is put into practice, including by considering specific policy proposals put forward by different groups.

8.   The involvement of non-governmental actors should not be limited only to the preparation of voluntary national reviews. Some countries have also given space to non-governmental voices in the presentation of those reviews. It is essential to

establish regular channels of communication with these multiple actors, including with the support of an institutionalized framework for regular engagement.

9.   The preparation of voluntary national reviews can generate a broad public debate and encourage discussions among different groups. In this way, the reviews serve to increase awareness, crystallize positions and lead to the undertaking of new commitments. They can spur road maps for implementation that are truly national, going beyond government-led actions. However, it is important that governments fuel such nationwide processes through strategic communications.

10.   Voluntary national reviews have served to establish new partnerships with various actors, which provide a new impulse to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The dissemination and collection of good practices across a large number of stakeholders can be facilitated through online platforms.

11.   The reviews provide an opportunity to examine the extent to which implementation takes place under sectoral programmes or has become truly integrated. The broad mobilization of multiple actors contributes to developing a better understanding of the linkages among different Goals, so that such knowledge can be translated into more effective policy action. Identifying key accelerators, such as gender equality or a good quality of education, can support faster progress in implementation.

12.   Voluntary national reviews should address not only national challenges but also the global effects of domestic actions. In this way, they also provide an opportunity to rethink international cooperation.

13.   Many lessons can be derived from the experience of other countries in the preparation of their reviews. The value of platforms and mechanisms that facilitate sharing those experiences, including the contributions of networks of national coordinators for the Goals, was acknowledged.

14.   Voluntary national reviews can also be of benefit in subregional cooperation, as during the process of conducting the reviews, countries have been prompted to discuss with other countries how efforts towards the Goals can prompt closer collaboration, including in connection with common EU integration processes.

15.   International cooperation can supply concrete inputs that benefit the review process. In terms of United Nations support, recommendations from inter-agency mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support missions, including the identification of key accelerators, have provided useful insights that can inform the implementation of the Goals.

16.   There was wide agreement that collecting the necessary data to support an evidence-based voluntary national review is a significant challenge, in particular regarding the need for disaggregation. The preparation of reviews provides a rallying point to identify and address existing shortcomings in statistical capacity. The development of national reporting platforms that include the documentation of metadata on indicators contributes to progress.

17.   Voluntary national reviews should be seen as a stepping stone in a long journey of development reforms and societal transformation. They are part of a continuous process of reviewing progress and adjusting policy actions. The process may take different forms depending on country-specific institutional arrangements, but integrated planning and cross-sectoral perspectives are acknowledged as highly beneficial to such efforts.

18.   Innovation has a particular role to play in speeding up the implementation of the Goals. In some cases, specific organizations have been set up to cultivate creative ideas, identify implementation and funding gaps, as well as prototype solutions, and

raise public awareness. Scientific and social innovations have a strong potential that should be harnessed to ensure that no one is left behind.

19.   The transformative impact of the Goals was emphasized, as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda prompts administrative reforms and new ways of policymaking that break down sectoral barriers and reach out to different constituencies. However, using pre-existing governance arrangements, to the extent possible, can produce quicker results.

20.   Sharing the main messages from the preparatory civil society consultation held on 20 and 21 March, the civil society representative stressed the importance of education and learning, including for marginalized groups and across the life cycle. Decent work and social protection are lacking across the Economic Commission for Europe region. Policies should spur the growth of well-being instead of growth in gross domestic product (GDP). Inequalities are increasing, and many people face discrimination and exclusion. In order to tackle climate change, it is crucial to ensure equitable access to sustainable energy, in particular access to small-scale renewable energy for low- and middle-income groups. There is a need to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions and to ensure inclusive participation in decision-making processes through proactive disclosure of public information as well as access to information, in line with the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

Focus events

Technology, digitalization, artificial intelligence: curse or blessing for sustainable development?

21.   Technological change led by information and communications technologies holds great promise for sustainable development. Particular contributions can be made in the area of learning, addressing climate change, public participation, health, the reduction of transaction costs and increasing productivity, including through trade facilitation.

22.   There are a number of promising technologies, including artificial intelligence, blockchain, the Internet of things and drones, that advance digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Such technologies can reduce inequalities by offering new opportunities for youth, older persons and persons with disabilities and helping to close the gender and rural/urban gaps.

23.   Nevertheless, there also potential negative effects and emerging divides that need to be addressed. Challenges include privacy, data protection, cybersecurity and ethical use. Digitalization is a source of economic dynamism, but it may also lead to drastic changes in labour markets and new demands for skills that leave some workers vulnerable.

24.   Facilitating equitable access, guaranteeing affordability, promoting the acquisition of digital skills and strengthening trust are critical elements for reaping benefits and avoiding pitfalls. Technological standards can support interoperability and strengthen trust in the marketplace.

25.   An enabling environment in which cross-sectoral aspects are considered is required in order to ensure that information and communications technologies develop further and have a positive impact on the efforts to achieve the Goals. However, the appropriate regulations, policies and investment models will differ depending on national circumstances and development levels. Ensuring the various

aspects are fit for purpose would help in increasing the engagement of the private sector and would boost innovation.

26.   National authorities should have a leading role in advancing the use of information and communications technologies for sustainable development. Nevertheless, all stakeholders need to work together and governments should be open to the influence of civil society and industry. Partnerships across all sectors are necessary for progress and international cooperation also has an important role to play. The sharing of good practices can enable the identification of replicable aspects across countries.

27.   Although there are few specific references to information and communications technologies in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, they are cross-cutting enablers for advancing the efforts to achieve the Goals. For the past 14 years, the global community has been building upon the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, including by stressing the importance of human-centred technologies, so as to ensure that no one is left behind and that all ethical aspects are duly respected. The ongoing alignment of the processes relating to the World Summit on the Information Society and the Sustainable Development Goals is of paramount importance.

How to measure progress? Data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals

28.   The statistical community is making steady progress in improving the availability of data for measuring progress towards the achievement of the Goals. But the indicators set out in the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development alone will not be enough. Many countries are establishing additional national indicators to better inform policy action at the national and local levels. The use of new technologies to reduce cost and respondent burden, as well as the use of qualitative data and process indicators, are all important to improve the quality and availability of data for decision-making. The regional dimension is essential for the purposes of comparing progress with, and learning from, countries in similar situations. The *Conference of European Statisticians Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals* is a tool for sharing guidance and should be updated.

29.   Additional financial resources are needed in order to develop national statistical capacity and modernize current systems, as part of a critical national information infrastructure. Without these additional resources, national statistics systems will focus on data production over analysis and dissemination, and on economic sectors over social and environmental aspects.

30.   There are many examples of data having been used in policymaking in relation to the Goals, but there is also considerable potential for improvement in this regard. In order to have data at the centre of decision-making, capacities for the use and analysis of data should be increased by improving accessibility, promoting an open data culture and engaging national statistical offices and decision makers together in analytical processes. Intermediaries between data producers and policymakers are needed so as to make full use of the potential of data, in particular with respect to dimensions of equity.

31.   There is a clear need to improve the disaggregation of data in order to give a fuller picture of the groups left behind. Complementary efforts for data collection on sensitive issues, like human rights in relation to the Goals, should also be undertaken. Academia, the private sector and civil society all have a role to play as both producers and users of data. The official statistics community should seek strategic partners that can offer added value. There is a need for better clarity on the entry points for

representatives from those stakeholder groups to engage with the official statistics community and to play a formal role in monitoring processes relating to the Goals.

Round tables

Round table on Goal 4 (first set)

Learning without limits: lifelong learning and inclusive education

32. Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all is essential for sustainable development. Granting equitable access to education and training to the most vulnerable groups of society will require a paradigm shift. Inclusion in education needs to be understood as a process of responding to the diverse needs of all learners, at all stages of life.

33. While the Economic Commission for Europe region has achieved high rates of participation in basic education, disparities based on wealth, location, gender, age and disability remain. Inclusive education systems require the reorganization of specialized education and the inclusion of all learners in regular schools, with a view to replacing the segregation of children with special needs.

34. Vulnerable groups, specifically children with disabilities and from ethnic minorities, are often left behind and suffer as a result of social attitudes that stigmatize them, restrict their opportunities and lower their self-esteem. It is crucial to mobilize and engage all parts of society in order to overcome resistance towards inclusion.

35. Changes in education policies need to be accompanied by long-term investments in capacities and the establishment of responsive government structures at all levels. Investments in competency training for teachers and educators are crucial for effectively implementing curricula and ensuring quality education.

36. Education reforms need to be centred around student learning and policy interventions need to be consistent and forward-looking. Key factors that affect the quality of education are teacher training, content and relevance, pedagogical approaches and formative assessments and evaluations. Comprehensive approaches to learning assessment are needed, using a variety of measures for national and subnational assessment purposes. Improved collection of data would allow for a detailed analysis of trends, as well as disaggregation by key subgroups.

37. Learning opportunities should be diversified so as to respond to the different needs of learners. Education and learning opportunities for older persons ensure their full participation and contribution to society as well as the development of their skill sets. The prospect of lifelong learning broadens the scope of individual options: empowerment, self-determination and fulfilment.

38. The digital inclusion of older persons is crucial for their full participation in social, economic and cultural life, and the availability and accessibility of technology is a prerequisite for achieving such inclusion. Digital training needs to use methodologies tailored to the needs of target groups and training needs to reach all learners, even in remote areas.

Round table on Goal 4 (second set)

The power of knowledge for change: education and learning as drivers of sustainable development

39. Education for sustainable development enables learners to take informed and responsible decisions for creating sustainable societies. Citizens of all ages need to

be able to acquire the knowledge and skills and to develop the attitudes and values to support the transformation towards a more sustainable future.

40.   Education for sustainable development requires innovative approaches to education, including the revision of learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and learning environments. It is a broad and challenging theme, going far beyond the traditional courses and specialized education on environmental issues. A broader reflection on the purpose and desired outcomes of education is needed so as to more directly contribute to sustainable changes.

41.   Education for sustainable development is not confined to formal education or to classrooms but can take place in a diversity of environments, using innovative methodologies and informal settings. Effective learning and teaching are learner-centred and draw on interactive and exploratory elements, which include "learning by doing" and "learning in nature", for example through forest pedagogy, to inspire learners of all ages to act with sustainability in mind.

42.   Learning processes need to actively engage stakeholders with different roles and backgrounds in bringing about change in processes, systems and everyday activities. Multi-stakeholder learning stimulates social learning or social innovation that often complement new technologies.

43.   Together with the necessity of acquiring new technological skills and introducing innovations for addressing environmental challenges, other factors such as global citizenship, behavioural change and principles of solidarity need to be addressed. It will be essential to make a change from a traditional top-down delivery of knowledge to a bottom-up learning route, which goes hand in hand with promoting core competencies, such as collaborative decision-making.

44.   Political commitments are necessary in order to reflect education for sustainable development in curricula and to equip teachers and educators with the necessary competencies, while adequate funding is a prerequisite for such efforts. The embedding of education for sustainable development in institutional structures fosters coherent and integrated policies for sustainable societies. Examples from various countries demonstrate effective cooperation between ministries of education and diverse sectoral ministries, as well as the establishment of special units for education for sustainable development within the ministerial structure, following multi-stakeholder consultation processes.

45.   International cooperation, partnerships and networks are necessary to further define and change education towards learning for sustainable development and to promote quality assurance and enhancement systems that support transformative learning.

Round table on Goal 8 (first set)

The growth we want: solutions for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth

46.   Achieving sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is a complex effort. It requires mobilizing investments and harnessing the potential of trade and regional economic integration to support development that is more equitable and decoupled from environmental degradation through appropriate incentives and policies.

47.   Digitalization can have multiple effects on productivity, employment and trade. Enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as workers, have a lot to gain from the ongoing digital revolution, which has the potential to lower

transaction costs and boost competitiveness. At the same time, the uptake of new technologies poses multiple challenges and risks that need to be well understood.

48.   Institutional adaptation, suitable infrastructure and the dissemination of sound business practices should be promoted, while avoiding social exclusion. However, investment is often insufficient and there are challenges as relates to targeted communication between policymakers and small and medium-sized enterprises; such enterprises are at a particular disadvantage in terms of trade opportunities and raising finance. Trade facilitation efforts, including through collaboration between the public and the private sectors, are required to reduce the cost of trade and facilitate integration into regional and global value chains.

49.   Digital technologies hold great promise, including for small and medium-sized enterprises, but the integration of such technologies into business models is not simple. Fostering cooperation with academia and the improvement of traditional education systems will be essential for ensuring that the relevant knowledge is available and that it is used. Collaboration between the public and the private sectors contributes to unlocking the necessary investment in infrastructure and ensuring interoperability among digital systems.

50.   Growth should be decoupled from environmental degradation by disseminating knowledge and technologies that promote clean and resource-efficient production processes and infrastructure. An examination of the entire value chain is necessary to increase resource productivity and develop a circular economy that facilitates this decoupling. Broad stakeholder involvement will be required, including regarding the monitoring of results. However, some participants argued that instead of decoupling, positive post-growth policies would be necessary.

51.   Climate-related and other environmental disclosures can enhance transparency on companies' investment strategies and contribute to raising the necessary finance to support the transition to a green economy. Increased public awareness is necessary so as to ensure a growing demand for green financial products.

52.   The benefits of technological change should be shared fairly, in accordance with the principles of gender equality and leaving no one behind, so as to avoid a situation where technological innovation might lead to the emergence of private monopolies, which eventually restrict competition and have other detrimental effects.

53.   Conventional measures of economic activity, such as GDP, have their limitations. Alternative indicators that better capture the environmental and social impact of economic activities should be explored. The emphasis on growth, as currently measured, can undermine the achievement of other Goals.

54.   International cooperation has a key role in fostering sustainable and inclusive growth, including through the development of international standards that also need to respond to the requirements of developing countries.

Round table on Goal 8 (second set)

The future of work: productive employment and decent work for all

55.   Technological and demographic changes are influencing the dynamics of labour markets. Challenges affecting the Economic Commission for Europe region include those relating to inequality in access to the labour market and the gender pay gap, discrimination, youth unemployment, the informal sector and the lack of integration of migrant workers. Social determinants of health, such as poor or dangerous working conditions and a lack of income security, can be major causes of ill health and should be addressed.

56. Technological innovations should be seen in a positive light. Certain jobs will be eliminated, but others will be created. An effective enabling environment for business that encourages innovation and investment is crucial, thus harnessing the expertise of the private sector for the implementation of the Goals. Constant dialogue and partnerships between business and government, for example on skills, would be a precondition for success. A universal entitlement to lifelong learning is needed. There is also a need for active labour market policies targeting youth, adults and older persons.

57. The full and productive employment of men and women is an overriding goal, while gender equality is an accelerator for achieving multiple Goals. Advancing those aims requires an enabling environment for business to create jobs, invest and innovate. An ongoing dialogue among governments, businesses and trade unions will support progress and inclusion. Respect for a normative agenda that includes fundamental workers' rights, mandatory social protection schemes, an adequate living wage, limits on hours of work and protection in relation to health and safety is essential.

58. The need to address discrimination in the labour market, in particular all forms of gender biases and those that concern persons with disabilities and older workers, remains a major concern. Gender equality and the principle of leaving no one behind should be at the centre of the implementation of all policies and actions to ensure productive employment and decent work for all.

59. Childcare of good quality prepares children for the future and improves employment opportunities for women. Investing in free, universal, quality childcare can significantly improve women's employment prospects and their earnings.

60. Policy coherence and a multifaceted approach are essential for achieving progress on Goal 8. The involvement of partners and other actors, including through tripartite commissions involving governments, trade unions and employers, is necessary. Comprehensive policy frameworks that mainstream the implementation of the Goals may include job creation targets, skills development, minimum wages and entrepreneurship programmes.

61. Youth unemployment remains a major problem in many countries. Partnerships between government, business and education sectors can improve youth labour market prospects by identifying and addressing skills gaps, including through internships and apprenticeship opportunities. Supporting young people in efforts towards job creation can also include policies that encourage risk-taking and entrepreneurship.

62. Trade raises the demand for skilled workers and increases the size of the formal sector. It supports the creation of jobs, higher earnings and the reduction of poverty but it also has consequences on the distribution of income. International cooperation is necessary to address protectionism.

63. According to civil society representatives, despite some good initiatives, the region is still suffering shortcomings in relation to decent work. Current practices relating to social dialogue and collective bargaining are still insufficient and, in some countries, there are still violations of fundamental rights, including forced and child labour. The space for youth involvement in social dialogue is limited and there is an insufficient number of quality jobs for young people. The recommendations of the Global Commission on the Future of Work regarding the need for investment in people, jobs and institutions and a universal labour guarantee should be observed.

Round table on Goal 10 (first set)

Bridging the gap: achieving greater income and economic equality

64. Inequality within countries has risen globally over the past three decades. The dynamics of extreme wealth, power and exclusion subvert political processes and leave disadvantaged people and countries locked out of the benefits of globalization and growth. Diverging incomes are leaving humanity divided and undermining the sustainable development of nations.

65. Poverty is expected to remain a persistent challenge for the middle- and low-income countries in the Economic Commission for Europe region. Rural populations are particularly affected, usually having fewer employment opportunities and weaker social protection systems. Small-scale investments, including through remittances, are essential for boosting rural development, supporting income diversification and reducing inequality between rural and urban communities.

66. There are significant problems relating to the measurement of inequality. Different data sources and indicators produce different results. The use of consumption data tends to show a better picture than indicators based on income. The Gini coefficient remains sensitive to the tail distribution but allows for cross-country comparisons and the aggregation of global data on inequality. An analysis of the bottom 40 per cent mixes the most vulnerable groups with the middle class. An analysis of the top 1 per cent reveals some information about income and wealth concentration but none about the most vulnerable groups. The availability of disaggregated data of good quality on inequality and poverty is a precondition for designing appropriate policies.

67. Comprehensive social protection is required in order to reduce inequalities and achieve the Goals. The most pressing challenge is to increase coverage and improve targeting effectiveness. However, most countries are struggling with fiscal imbalances and excessive public debt, so the expansion of redistributive programmes is constrained. Fiscal space may be created by reallocating spending from other government sectors, increasing tax revenues or expanding social insurance coverage and contributions. Policy dialogues should also be fostered around the progressive implementation of social protection floors and minimum standards for food security and nutrition.

68. The use of income-redistribution policies is subject to other limits. Excessive redistribution can undermine productivity and innovation, as well as incentives to work. The political and administrative capacity to deliver well-targeted redistributive programmes is limited. Redistributive policies must be concentrated on the most vulnerable groups. Successful examples include active labour market policies, support for micro- and small businesses, or income support conditional on eventually entering the labour market.

69. Delivering public goods of high quality, such as education, health care, technical and municipal infrastructure or public security, which are available to all groups, can also improve the chances of excluded groups in the longer term. Eliminating market distortions, which result in economic and social exclusion or create privileged positions for some groups, can help to reduce inequalities.

Round table on Goal 10 (second set)

Towards a world of equal opportunity: tackling inequality caused by exclusion and discrimination

70. Despite progress in the Economic Commission for Europe region in addressing social inequalities, regional and national averages often mask major inequalities.

Challenges persist with regard to inequalities between different population groups and geographical areas, in particular urban and rural settings. Discrimination takes many forms and may relate to gender, ethnicity, origin, age, sexual orientation, disability or other factors, which may at times intersect. Discrimination and stereotyping affect the legal and administrative status of the persons concerned, as well as, for example, their life expectancy, well-being and health.

71. In recent years, advances in gender equality, women's rights and the empowerment of women and girls in the region have been uneven, with setbacks in some areas. Violence against women and girls is a persistent phenomenon that no country has yet managed to eliminate. A comprehensive and multisectoral approach to countering gender-based violence and discrimination is the most effective strategy, including legislative measures, policy and capacity development. At a very early stage, gender imbalances can be prevented by tackling prenatal sex selection, which favours boys over girls.

72. Addressing the social determinants of health is critical for reducing health inequalities and may lead to higher and more equitable levels of well-being, increased life expectancy across different population groups and reduced morbidity and mortality across the region. Health is affected by the lack of access to affordable, adequate, decent and sustainable housing, as well as by food, income and employment insecurity. In addition, a sense of belonging and a feeling of safety are important for all individuals. In this context, peer-led and community-based initiatives can deliver positive outcomes for members of marginalized groups by allowing individuals to learn from and interact with each other on health-related as well as other aspects of community life.

73. Entities at the local level are well placed to formulate, implement and monitor social inclusion policies and projects, including for ethnic minorities, such as Roma, and migrants. The development of skills and employment opportunities and the promotion of interaction with other population groups have proven effective in reducing social tensions, addressing discrimination and strengthening social cohesion.

74. A range of interventions is available to prevent and address the various forms of discrimination, ranging from hard instruments, such as laws and regulations, to soft tools, such as awareness-raising and dialogue. In all approaches, it is essential to hear the voices of the people affected and to fully take into account the diversity of societies in all stages of the policymaking process.

Round table on Goal 13 (first set)

Acting for the climate: stepping up climate change policies, action and awareness in the region

75. Climate change is one of the greatest and most pressing challenges of the present moment. Tackling that challenge will require far-reaching economic, social and environmental changes. It is important to respect, promote and consider human rights when taking climate action. To date, action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions worldwide and in the region is clearly insufficient, as shown in recent analysis by the United Nations Environment Programme, in its 2018 *Emissions Gap Report* and by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5° C*, published in 2018. Action needs to be scaled up at the political level, key groups such as consumers, civil society and youth need to be further mobilized, and the opportunities presented by technological progress and sustainable business and financing models need to be fully leveraged. The Economic Commission for Europe region has the potential to pioneer decisive climate action.

76.   The Paris Agreement is the key multilateral framework for climate change mitigation, adaptation and finance. It is crucial that the Agreement be backed by action and fully implemented. The package agreed at the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Katowice, Poland, represents an important step in this direction, setting out the essential procedures and mechanisms to operationalize the Paris Agreement.

77.   Significant climate change action and contributions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions are required from all stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental. At the national level, governments and parliaments may consider appropriate legal, regulatory and fiscal measures, such as carbon pricing, to mitigate climate change. Local authorities and institutions can play an important role in finding low-carbon solutions that fit the needs of communities. Nature-based solutions also provide effective options for addressing climate change while simultaneously contributing to other Goals. Civil society has a vital role in raising climate change awareness, changing behavioural patterns and contributing to national and local climate action.

78.   Moreover, the required scale of climate change action cannot be achieved without businesses and the private sector. More sustainable business models and reporting practices are on the rise. The private sector will also be crucial in helping to disseminate innovative solutions and the use of digital technologies to address climate change. In addition, unlocking and redirecting private resources towards climate change mitigation will be essential, together with other sources of financing, including the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility.

79.   It is important to include a gender perspective in climate action. Capacity-building of civil servants and the involvement of civil society and community groups can help integrate gender considerations when devising specific policies and measures for climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience. As evidenced by practical examples, engaging women will contribute to the much-needed acceleration of climate action.

Round table on Goal 13 (second set)

Coping with climate change: strengthening resilience and adaptation

80.   The Economic Commission for Europe region is highly exposed to risks from natural hazards. As a result of climate change, the frequency and the intensity of extreme events have increased in the region, with more heatwaves, forest fires, torrential rains, floods and droughts. Natural disasters have not only left a trail of victims, but also caused severe health consequences, economic loss and damage to infrastructure, impairing economic growth and the potential for sustainable development.

81.   Many extreme weather events and effects of climate change are water-related (for example, floods and droughts). Since the majority of freshwater resources in the region cross borders, transboundary and regional cooperation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction can help to prevent the negative impact of unilateral measures and make adaptation measures more effective.

82.   National and local disaster risk reduction and adaptation strategies, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, are necessary to address the continuing growth of climate risks in the region. Gender aspects should be mainstreamed in such strategies. Appropriate climate-sensitive spatial planning approaches are particularly important to prevent future disasters and to effectively mitigate the consequences of disasters, and to prevent the waste of public resources.

83.   Climate change is expected to have a detrimental impact on health. Health-care services need to be prepared to act quickly, especially to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. In order to ensure a swift and effective health sector response, preparation and contingency planning should engage multiple stakeholders. Matters pertaining to health should become an integral part of national adaptation planning, and health considerations should be included in other sectors' adaptation strategies. Plans that address health interventions in response to climate change have proven successful in several countries across the region.

84.   Food security is one of the elements that needs to be considered when talking about disaster risk reduction. Agricultural production and food systems will be affected by climate change in Europe and elsewhere. At the same time, current agricultural practices are a contributor to climate change, so alternative methods need to be explored.

85.   Public-private cooperation is critical in addressing disaster risk reduction. The private sector can be a powerful actor with regard to prevention and emergency management. The need for risk-informed investments as part of efforts to achieve disaster resilience is emphasized in the Sendai Framework. Therefore, resilience should be embedded in the ongoing sustainable finance initiatives. However, the urgency of addressing climate change is not yet sufficiently understood and accepted. This leads to the underestimation of the risks involved for companies and financial institutions. A poor appreciation of risks and the impact thereof leads to insufficient financing.

86.   There is a need to better understand coping capacity while continuing to upgrade critical infrastructure. The coherence across development and disaster risk reduction strategies should be reinforced, while seeking to engage small and medium-sized enterprises in related efforts. The implementation of Goal 13 in coherence with the Sendai Framework contributes to addressing the underlying causes of fragility and crises.

Round table on Goal 16 (first set)

Strengthening institutions for change: fostering effective and inclusive governance for sustainable development

87.   Governments in the Economic Commission for Europe region are acknowledging the crucial importance of effective governance systems in support of the 2030 Agenda and have introduced national coordination mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and reporting relating to the Goals.

88.   Linkages between national development planning, budgeting and financing need to be further strengthened. The strong emphasis on inclusive and integrated strategic planning needs to be matched by an equally strong emphasis on effective and efficient implementation. It is essential that financing for the Sustainable Development Goals promotes inclusive, transparent, innovative, gender-sensitive and responsive actions. It is also critical to ensure that public resources and services are directed to the most vulnerable as a matter of priority.

89.   Peace is a precondition for sustainable development. Countries need to be able to identify and address critical risks and the drivers of conflict, migration, violence and radicalism, among other factors. Such an approach requires ensuring the protection and promotion of fundamental human rights and the effective implementation of the rule of law.

90.   Enhancing the capacity of justice, security and human rights institutions and enhancing service delivery and protection, especially in respect of vulnerable groups, is critical for nurturing public trust and confidence.

91.   Whole-of-society approaches are necessary to ensure effective implementation of the Goals in all countries. Civil society, the private sector, academia, community-based organizations, volunteers and activists all have important roles in ensuring the effective performance of national institutions. However, in many countries, such organizations face increasing social, economic and political pressures.

92.   National human rights institutions, pursuant to the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles), function as bridges between state authorities and civil society and generate public awareness about the relevance of the Goals and human rights in people's daily lives.

93.   The increased use of information and communications technology applications in public service delivery systems, citizen engagement processes, public information campaigns and advocacy through social media, have advanced governance systems and processes in many countries. At the same time, such technologies have increased inequalities and social and economic exclusion, in particular in countries with wide digital divides. Inclusive and tailored approaches to public needs and demands need to be recognized as part of governance solutions.

94.   Data challenges exist for the planning, monitoring and reporting relating to Goal 16. Addressing such challenges requires innovative approaches and solutions, in addition to enhancing institutional capacities and systems in national statistical offices and agencies. The use of non-traditional or alternative data (big data, real-time feedback systems, etc.) needs to be recognized as equally valid for monitoring and reporting with respect to the Goals. Third-party or shadow reports further enhance transparency and national commitment to inclusive monitoring of and reporting on the Goals.

95.   A lack of knowledge regarding legal provisions and governance systems could derail important democratic processes and potentially lead to public misinformation. Civil society, including local activists, religious leaders and goodwill ambassadors, could play a vital role in engaging citizens and contribute to a more cohesive society. In this regard, open government partnerships have been considered effective mechanisms to enhance transparency and foster civic engagement processes.

96.   The active engagement of all stakeholders, including young men and women, not only as part of participatory processes but also in identifying demand-driven, innovative development solutions that are relevant and appropriate to their needs, should be actively pursued by national institutions at all levels.

97.   Continuous learning opportunities, including through training, mentorship and coaching mechanisms and by ensuring modern approaches, in particular within civil service academies, are critical to enhancing institutional and human capacities. Tailored approaches, in particular for vulnerable groups, would allow greater responsiveness for transformational change.

Round table on Goal 16 (second set)

Empowering people to protect the planet: the environmental dimension of Goal 16

98.   Climate change and the loss of biodiversity, along with air and water pollution, are among the global environmental problems that affect everyone's health and well-being. Tackling such challenges in the context of social and economic development is at the very heart of efforts to attain the Goals. Public rights to gain timely access to information and to participate in decision-making in environmental matters are essential for the effective response to such challenges. Access to justice is critical for

securing these rights. Success in furthering the environmental dimension of Goal 16 would thereby contribute to the achievement of all Goals.

99.   The Economic Commission for Europe region has made good progress in promoting the environmental dimension. The vast majority of countries have supporting legislative, institutional and practical measures in place, and modern technologies significantly assist Governments in their efforts.

100. Online portals and smartphone applications are used to increase the effectiveness of public participation procedures in environmental impact assessments. Those tools also help individuals with gaining access to public services and help to reduce corruption by making authorities' decisions more transparent.

101. One of the vehicles to channel public views into decision-making processes are national human rights institutions. As an example, an Office of the Ombudsman for Future Generations initiated stakeholders' consultations and successfully channelled their outcomes into shaping legislation better aligned with the Goals.

102. The organization of public participation procedures in a transboundary context proves to be challenging across the region. At the same time, it was demonstrated that specific legislative and practical measures could, indeed, make the effective engagement of the public a reality.

103. The rule of law and accountable and transparent institutions require effective and independent judicial review procedures. Challenges in this regard can include the limited capacity of judges to handle environmental cases, along with the absence of specialized courts dealing exclusively with environmental matters. Capacity-building for judges, such as mentoring and in-house trainings in courts with significant experience in environmental adjudication, are practical measures for addressing such challenges.

104. Responses to growing security concerns can lead to restricting access to information and possibilities for public participation, thereby affecting the attainment of Goal 16. Examples were presented of how countries overcame such challenges, including by allowing broad accreditation of non-governmental organizations and establishing a designated area for civil society next to the venue of important global meetings, and by promoting the protection of human rights defenders through international instruments and bilateral agreements.

105. Factors contributing to such achievements include strong political will and close cooperation within and across sectors; the promotion of transparent, inclusive and participatory decision-making, planning and implementation at all levels; effective access to justice; and the provision of enabling space for environmental defenders. Those factors have been catalysed through two solid legally binding instruments in the region – the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. Those instruments help governments make significant advances in promoting the environmental dimension of Goal 16. In a number of countries, Aarhus centres have been created as supporting partners for efforts relating to both instruments.

106. In order to reinforce the ability of Governments to further the environmental dimension of Goal 16, a number of priority actions were identified. These include promoting greater political support for transparency, the rule of law, accountability and effective and inclusive public participation in decision-making; encouraging the use of modern technologies and innovative approaches to managing integrated data; allocating sufficient resources and strengthening the capacity of governmental authorities and relevant stakeholders to support the required measures; promoting effective and independent administrative and judicial review procedures by

eliminating standing-related, financial and other barriers, by strengthening the capacities of review bodies and by fostering international judicial cooperation; taking measures to promote safe and enabling space for the public and ensuring "zero" tolerance for any threats towards environmental defenders; identifying measurable indicators and monitoring methodologies, and collecting relevant statistics on the implementation of the environmental dimension of Goal 16.

Connecting the dots: moving ahead towards empowerment, inclusion and equality in the region

107. In a briefing to participants, the youth representative shared input from the first-ever preparatory meeting of youth in advance of the regional forum, in which she stressed the lack of action in view of alarming trends such as the mass extinction of species, threats to the global climate system and increasing inequality. She stated that youth stand ready to put their valuable skills, experience and knowledge to good use and to lead the change. Young people are eager to engage in education that promotes skills for life, meaningful work, real inclusion and dialogue as equals.

108. A key message emanating from the regional consultation on the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda is that volunteers can be powerful accelerators of the Goals if volunteerism is fully integrated into national frameworks. The ambitions of the 2030 Agenda require mobilizing extraordinary resources, including people. There are many volunteers in the Economic Commission for Europe region but in order to harness their potential, volunteerism should be mainstreamed into international development strategies and incorporated into national road maps for the achievement of the Goals. Barriers to access that prevent volunteerism should be reduced. An increased focus on measuring the impact of volunteers' activities on efforts towards the Goals would provide evidence to build a stronger case for volunteerism. Volunteers themselves can be powerful data collectors, especially in collecting data relating to the groups left furthest behind. Regional discussions can contribute to fostering the role of volunteerism.

109. The design and implementation of policies purely along sectoral lines remain unaddressed challenges to advancing the 2030 Agenda. Many important implications of policy actions in critical areas are missed as a result of the silo approach. The importance of linkages is generally acknowledged, but an integrated approach to policymaking will not emerge spontaneously. Bringing together disparate interests requires creating appropriate incentives and supportive multi-stakeholder structures. While the problems are well known, finding the solutions is challenging.

110. An analysis of linkages across the 17 Goals shows that the potential for synergies is greater than existing trade-offs. There is, therefore, an auspicious base upon which to build cross-sectoral coalitions for change in order to reap benefits and to address the costs of interventions, which may act as a barrier to transformation. Regional dimensions and the diversity of situations should be considered when providing policy recommendations.

111. Scientific analysis can clarify the interactions between different targets, thus offering guidance for more effective action. Sustainability science should be interdisciplinary and look at the impact beyond national borders. Existing structures, such as the national academies for science, as a source of knowledge and conveners, can play their part in strengthening the science-policy interface.

112. Communicating the implications of policy actions is required in order to deal with trade-offs. Overall, policies should be based on human rights obligations and be responsive to those left behind. Those aims need to be supported by appropriate data. The cooperation of governments with statistical offices, civil society organizations and national human rights institutions can help in filling data gaps.

113. Efforts to understand linkages should be an integral part of the search for levers to generate the necessary transformation. Understanding such linkages should not be seen as adding new complexities but, by contrast, as providing clearer routes for action on the basis of identified multipliers.

114. The analysis of linkages shows the need for international cooperation to tackle the interactions between the Goals and their targets. Despite progress in multiple areas, there is no country that can claim to have achieved sustainable development, reconciling economic prosperity with respect for the environment and social inclusion. Poverty and inequality, from a social perspective, and climate change and biodiversity, from an environmental lens, are critical turning points that challenge the international community into action. The urgency of addressing climate change cannot be stressed enough.

115. Systemic transformations will be required in many areas that are critical for sustainable development, including energy decarbonization, access to energy, and food and nutrition, among others. Action in those areas will generate complex spillover effects on various Goals, which need to be assessed. The challenges relating to gender parity and social inclusion vary for different age groups.

116. Translating the analysis of linkages and interdependencies into coherent action remains difficult, given the need to arbitrate conflicts of interest and overcome the political dominance of short-term considerations. With a silo mentality still prevalent, sustainable development considerations have not yet penetrated into key decision-making areas.

117. Engaging private sector expertise and ingenuity is essential in order to generate new solutions for sustainable development. Shifts in lifestyle preferences are required so as to create the demand that supports the emergence of sustainable systems of production and consumption. Transformative action at the individual level is indispensable for systems change.

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