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#### High-level political forum on sustainable development

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# Discussion papers on the theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, submitted by major groups and other stakeholders

### Note by the Secretariat\*

The present document is a compilation of the executive summaries of the position papers on the thematic focus of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development". The summaries have been submitted by the major groups and other stakeholders that have autonomously established and maintained effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum in accordance with General Assembly resolution 67/290. The full reports are posted on the website of the forum: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021.

<sup>\*</sup> The present document is a compilation of the executive summaries of the thematic papers submitted to the high-level political forum by the major groups and other stakeholders and does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.





### I. Women

- 1. As the high-level political forum on sustainable development prepares to gather virtually for the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues. The world mourns the loss of family, friends, elders, colleagues and feminist advocates. It mourns those who have lost their lives to COVID-19; to the accidents and health problems that overwhelmed and under-resourced health systems could not respond to; to the violence in homes; and to the State violence that has occurred during brutal crackdowns. It mourns the loss of life that is to come as countries in the global north continue to hoard vaccines and prioritize intellectual property and profits over the lives of people in the global south.
- 2. Over one year following the onset of the pandemic, women and girls in all their diversity, as well as their organizations, continue to be at the frontlines of the response. Through their paid and unpaid labour, women and girls keep homes, communities and economies afloat. And yet national and international funders do not prioritize organizations representing women and girls for support. Moreover, Governments, corporations and non-State actors continue to undermine the ability of women and girls to effectively and meaningfully participate in policymaking. They do so through, among other things, threats, harassment and violence against women environmental and human rights defenders.
- 3. Women and girls are at the frontlines because government systems to ensure care, health including sexual and reproductive health management of the economy, taxation, environmental management and global governance have been inadequate in responding to the pandemic, especially since those systems were built on inequality, subjugation and oppression. Patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, militarism, neoliberal capitalism, ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism built the systems that brought us to this moment of intersecting crises. Austerity and privatization pushed by neoliberal capitalism hollowed out public health systems. Militarism, illicit financial flows, tax abuse and unsustainable debt burdens have emptied public coffers of valuable resources that could, among other things, fund the public care systems women and girls desperately need. Extractive industries and industrial farming driven by colonialism and capitalism have destroyed biodiversity, habitats, territories and homes.
- 4. Without systemic change, those structural inequalities will continue to shape pandemic responses, derailing us further and moving us away from achieving gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals. States should heed the call of feminist advocates and place economic, racial, climate and gender justice at the centre of recovery from the pandemic and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 5. The women major group continues to believe in a multilateral system grounded in human rights. It believes not in a multilateralism that races to the lowest common denominator, but in one that fosters global solidarity and learning. It believes in multilateralism not as the arena for geopolitical skirmishes, but for cooperation, not in multilateralism as another space for the dominance of multinational corporations, but as a space for the people, especially those most marginalized.
- 6. The high-level political forum could play a key role in ensuring accountability and pushing for transformational implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by:
- (a) Focusing on the systemic barriers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

- (b) Abandoning the siloed approach to reviewing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
  - (c) Meaningfully engaging civil society;
  - (d) Emphasizing policy coherence, especially with human rights bodies;
  - (e) Becoming a space to review and act;
  - (f) Improving linkages between the national, regional and global levels.

# II. Indigenous peoples

- 7. The pandemic has worsened inequality and amplified the existing systemic discrimination and marginalization of indigenous peoples, further pushing them back and keeping them from reaching sustainable development. Many States were taking advantage of the pandemic to restrict fundamental rights and freedoms and to criminalize indigenous leaders who assert the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples. These measures have resulted in arbitrary arrests, detentions and extra-judicial killings of indigenous leaders. Furthermore, victims and their families have hardly any access to justice.
- 8. Land-grabbing and resource extraction by the public and private sectors continued during the pandemic, which had a profound impact on indigenous peoples. The loss of livelihood due to land grabs and lockdowns has resulted in more violence and abuse against indigenous women and girls.
- 9. To achieve a resilient recovery from the pandemic, indigenous peoples need to be given access to vaccines and public health-care systems need to be strengthened and need to be accessible to all without discrimination. Likewise, the efforts and initiatives of indigenous peoples to address the pandemic and strengthen their resilience for sustainable recovery must be recognized as critical contributions to the advancement of sustainable development in the decade of action to the deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 10. The inclusion of indigenous peoples in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals requires the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms as well as space for democracy that enables their meaningful participation without fear. Also, targeted policies, measures and programmes that are fully aligned with respect for the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples must be developed with their full and effective participation and must be sufficiently resourced for proper implementation, monitoring and reporting.
- 11. The current priority for economic growth for recovery from the pandemic is inconsistent with the need to balance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals. In fact, many States have weakened their policies for environmental protection and restricted democratic participation in order to pursue their economic targets in the guise of pursuing recovery from the pandemic and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, many corporations continue to exploit the lands and resources of indigenous peoples for profit, but are now labelling this exploitation as contributing to recovery from the pandemic and supporting sustainable development
- 12. As part of the decade of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, States must live up to their obligations and commitments to human rights, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Data need to be disaggregated by ethnicity to make indigenous peoples visible in the monitoring and reporting of the follow-up and review processes at all levels. Implementing the

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recommendations of the human rights system relating to indigenous peoples will accelerate their inclusion in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to fulfil the pledge of leaving no one behind.

13. Inclusive pathways to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals must go hand in hand with policy coherence and transformational actions anchored in respect for human rights, environmental protection and a paradigm shift in favour of sustainable economic models. Strong global solidarity, political will and States with effective accountability mechanisms are needed so that they may primarily serve the interests and well-being of their citizens, including indigenous peoples, and protect the planet.

# III. Non-governmental organizations

- 14. The global pandemic intensifies the need for accelerated, united action. This urgency is amplified by the overwhelming toll the pandemic has taken on global health, social and environmental security, and on meaningful progress in implementing Agenda 2030 and fulfilment of the pledge to leave no one behind.
- 15. Women, young people, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups are affected the most by the pandemic. The rise of populism, isolationism, xenophobia, disregard for multilateral agreements, sanctions, exploitation of animals and the environment, and regressive stances on human rights present obstacles to sustainable development. Regional and national conflicts, proxy civil wars, the accelerating climate crisis and threats to biodiversity demonstrate that now is a moment of extreme peril and opportunity.
- 16. Structural barriers affecting progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals have been identified. In addition to fighting the pandemic, the underlying social, economic, environmental and political factors must be challenged that exacerbate its effects, which include economic inequality, poverty, lack of democracy, gender-based violence and inequality, lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene for all, and various forms of exploitation such as trafficking in persons and environmental destruction. Economic growth without ethical social development is self-defeating. It is imperative to invest in human rights and the empowerment of marginalized groups in vulnerable positions.
- 17. The pandemic has highlighted the inadequacy and insecurity of public health and social protection systems. On the other hand, the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) initiative has shown how quickly collective action can be taken for the global good. This positive, yet rare, initiative is tempered by fragmented thinking and action.
- 18. The least developed countries, countries with significant rural populations and small island developing States face additional challenges. Natural disasters, scarcity of resources, lack of strategic financing and high levels of national debt are particularly damaging elements of the myriad intersecting challenges.
- 19. The present document sets out concerns and opportunities regarding specific Goals. The major group of non-governmental organizations makes the following overarching appeals:
- (a) To recognize that there are inherent links between human rights and sustainable development and to take action accordingly;
- (b) To collect disaggregated data around the globe so as to inform decision-making and national action plans based on concrete evidence;

- (c) To include civil society organizations in all levels of policymaking;
- (d) To protect and amplify the voices of marginalized groups;
- (e) To end the war humankind has been waging with nature and instead work towards harmony with nature, create sustainable food systems and resilient water management, and ensure the well-being of humans, animals and the environment, and reverse the current existential environmental threats;
- (f) For Member States to prioritize those excluded and marginalized communities that have been affected by the pandemic the most and to ensure that basic services and social protection systems are universal and equitable. A commitment to preventing future pandemics must be included.
- 20. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said in November 2020 that people who have been pushed back and rendered powerless by generations of discrimination have systematically had unequal access to services and opportunities, and that they were placed at a structural disadvantage with regard to threats of any kind.
- 21. The non-governmental organizations major group stands in support of this statement and unites in calling on Member States to accelerate their actions to secure the 2030 Agenda and ensure that truly no one is left behind.

#### IV. Local authorities

- 22. Sustainable policymaking and the provision of public services at the local and regional levels is a crucial part of the global agendas and of health systems. As the crises stemming from the pandemic have shown, local public services and health-care systems are intrinsically linked to protecting people, protecting the planet and fostering prosperity and care for all.
- 23. Localization requires multilevel governance, shared leadership and multi-stakeholder coordination through which the 2030 Agenda is incorporated into local and regional plans, policies and actions. That means considering a system of intermediary cities, metropolitan entities and regions and providing financial support and capacity development that enable local and regional governments to participate. Rooting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in territorial priorities allows for a new governance framework that improves the day-to-day lives of people.
- 24. By undertaking joint efforts to maintain services and access to culture as an antidote, local and regional governments, through peer-learning and decentralization and with the support of their networks, civil society and the private sector, have been critical in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. To achieve an equitable recovery, it is necessary to ensure that public services are provided and reinforced together with universal access to health care and basic services.
- 25. The New Urban Agenda is a cornerstone with which to strengthen the governance needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It is important to reiterate that the New Urban Agenda is a prerequisite for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, an accelerator that offers the scale needed to implement policies that ensure equality between people and territories.
- 26. The local authorities major group calls on international systems and national Governments to promote the necessary reforms to strengthen the role and resources of local and regional governments with adequate regulatory frameworks that allow for aligning national and territorial plans. Unlocking the means of implementation for

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local and regional governments will enable the equal, inclusive and sustainable recovery of strategic sectors so as to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

- 27. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the involvement of local and regional governments in monitoring and reporting processes has evolved, but reporting under the voluntary national and voluntary subnational reviews shows that localization varies across countries. In 2020, in 55 per cent of countries, local and regional governments were asked to contribute or were included in the consultations, and processes are increasingly becoming participatory and multi-stakeholder.
- 28. Our major group calls for strengthening this process across all regions by doing the following: revising strategies to mobilize and involve local and regional governments and their associations in the voluntary national review processes; and promoting the development of voluntary national and voluntary subnational reviews as opportunities for policy consolidation as an integral part of fostering ownership and achieving the Goals promoted by local government associations with input from all local and regional governments.
- 29. The local authorities major group stresses that the high-level political forum needs to create space for local, regional and national governments to discuss innovative governance mechanisms.
- 30. Our major group calls for a renewed and inclusive forum that serves to institutionalize dialogue with local and regional governments and stakeholders as a means to deliver a multilateral system based on ownership, co-creation and partnership mechanisms that includes all actors in decision-making. Our major group calls for an equality-driven system that fully engages local and regional governments and their associations, is able to deliver universal basic services and health care powered by a green and sustainable vision, is enriched through peer-to-peer cooperation and is driven by accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

#### V. Workers and trade unions

#### Impact of the crisis on the world of work

- 31. The crisis has had the following impact on the world of work:
- (a) Overall 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost for the whole of 2020 relative to the fourth quarter of 2019, which is equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs;
- (b) There was a decline of 8.3 per cent in global labour income (not including support measures), which is equivalent to 4.4 per cent of the global gross domestic product;
- (c) On a global scale, employment losses for women stand at 5.0 per cent, compared with 3.9 per cent for men; women were much more likely than men to drop out of the labour market and become inactive;
- (d) During the COVID-19 crisis, workers performing non-standard, precarious and informal work have suffered a disproportionate share of the job losses and have been the least likely to be covered by social protections;
- (e) There has been an increase in violations of workers' and trade union rights, in particular in the form of non-compliance with labour regulations on layoffs, working hours, the payment of wages, and occupational safety and health;

- (f) Although CO<sub>2</sub> emissions decreased, they did not do so at the expected rate, which means that the need for stringent implementation of just transition measures is greater than ever.
- 32. Through its targets on worker protection, decent work, social protection, inclusive growth and environmental preservation Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) is multidimensional in nature and has the power to drive the 2030 Agenda forward. Figure 1 shows the connections between Goal 8 and the other Goals of the 2030 Agenda based on a network text analysis of all 169 targets of the Agenda. The thicker the line, the stronger the relationship. The diagram clearly shows the centrality of Goal 8 to the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

Figure 1
Evidence-based correlations between Sustainable Development Goal 8 and other Goals of the Agenda 2030



Source: International Trade Union Confederation, "SDG decade of action: trade union policy responses" (Brussels, 2020).

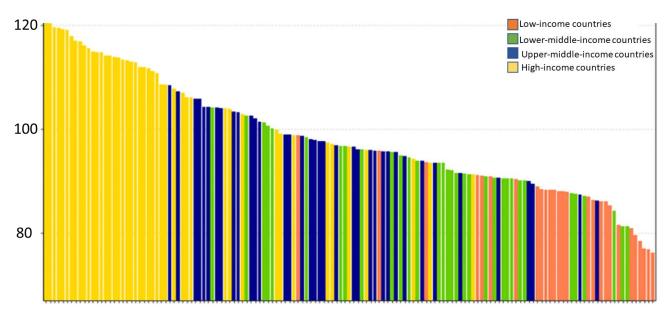
33. The International Trade Union Confederation has developed a global composite indicator to measure countries' performance in their efforts to achieve Sustainable

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Development Goal 8. As that indicator shows, the world was not on track to achieve Goal 8 even before the pandemic. The majority of the world's countries perform below the world average (100) and, although high-income countries are performing better, there is still a long way ahead for them as well, as the highest-rating country in that group scored (see fig. 2).

Figure 2

Global composite indicator of the International Trade Union Confederation by income group



World average equals 100.

Source: International Trade Union Confederation, "SDG decade of action: trade union policy responses" (Brussels, 2020).

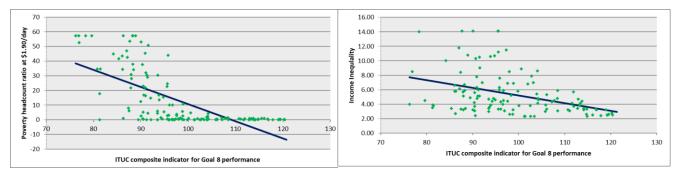
34. There are significant positive spill-over effects between Goal 8 and other Goals. For example, as shown in figure 3, there is a positive correlation between good performance with regard to Goal 8 on one hand, and low poverty headcount rates (indicator 1.1.1) and low rates of income inequality on the other. There is also a positive correlation with a higher female share of employment in managerial positions (indicator 5.5.2) and with higher secondary education enrolment (indicator 4.1.1).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), "SDG decade of action: trade union policy responses" (Brussels, 2020).

Figure 3
Correlation between performance with regard to Goal 8 and poverty, inequality, gender and education

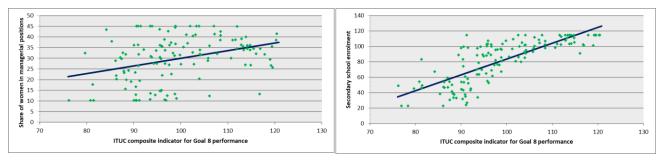
Goal 8 performance and poverty

Goal 8 performance and inequality



Goal 8 performance and gender parity

Goal 8 performance and education



Source: ITUC, "SDG decade of action: trade union policy responses" (Brussels, 2020).

Abbreviation: ITUC, International Trade Union Confederation.

35. However, this means that the negative impact of the crisis on progress towards the targets of Goal 8 means a wider slowdown with regard to other targets across the 2030 Agenda.

#### Policies for crisis recovery and resilience

- 36. Goal 8 is central to pulling us all out of the crisis in the following ways:
- (a) Strategies and public policies must ensure decent and climate-friendly jobs accompanied by just transition measures so as to guarantee that no one is left behind by industrial transformation processes; large numbers of jobs can be created through sustainable investments in infrastructure, health, public transport, housing, repairing ecosystems and making innovative improvements to cities;
- (b) In advancing towards universal social protection systems and floors, it is crucial to provide free access to health care for all and income support to the most vulnerable, including workers in the informal economy; a global social protection fund as proposed by the Special Rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty would help the world's poorest countries effectively;
- (c) More sustainable responses to the crisis are delivered when social partners are engaged. <sup>2</sup> Social dialogue and industrial relations help to rebuild trust in institutions and assist in crafting equitable policies. This is true within countries, but

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See ITUC, "SDGs for recovery and resilience in Latin America: case studies from Chile, Colombia and Argentina" (Brussels, 2021).

also across nations. A truly inclusive multilateral system where social partners are on board and have a say will make the difference and pave the way to global resilience.

### VI. Education and academia

- 37. The pandemic has created the most severe disruption to global education systems in history, forcing more than 1.6 billion learners in over 190 countries out of school at the peak of the crisis. All sectors and levels of education and learning were affected, including formal and non-formal education, schools, universities, community learning centres and adult literacy courses. Not only learners, but teachers, parents and family members were affected too.
- 38. Schools closures meant not only losing the opportunity to continue education and learning; for millions of children, it also meant losing a lifeline, necessary socialization, safety, a meal and a chance for a better future. The closures have threatened the progress made towards gender equality, as for many girls around the globe, being out of schools means a bigger risk of adolescent pregnancy, early and forced marriage, and violence.
- 39. There are two obvious ways in which education helps people to cope with the new situation that COVID-19 presents: teaching about health, viruses, prevention measures and new behaviour. Education also plays a role in teaching people better ways to use digital technology, as it enables them to continue learning, attending school and learning skills that help them to find a job or to work from home.
- 40. However, the pandemic exposed a clear need for other types of content, which should be considered for the recovery period. In times of crisis, people have a greater need for information, orientation and critical understanding, especially with regard to fake news, conspiracy theories and similar phenomena. Therefore, health education and the teaching of digital skills should be expanded together with media literacy, critical thinking and civic education. In civic education, awareness should be raised about the importance of upholding human rights during the pandemic, given that authoritarian regimes used the pandemic as an opportunity to cut civic rights, freedom of speech, participation of citizens and other rights and freedoms. Education and learning should include awareness of the ways in which people participate in democratic societies and decision-making. It is equally central to share information and raise awareness about the global issues of sustainable development, human-made climate change and environmental degradation that could cause or encourage the spread of new diseases.
- 41. While online and remote learning did help to overcome the disruption that the pandemic caused in education, and while it showed many advantages that digital technologies offer for lifelong learning and education, the exclusive focus on online technologies could leave millions behind, increase existing digital gaps and thus reduce the support that learning could provide to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals. For many areas of education and for many marginalized groups, in-person instruction will remain an important form of learning. Therefore, an adequate balance should be struck in the recovery efforts.
- 42. The pandemic has deepened inequities in access to and benefits from education, and revealed educational challenges that have not been adequately addressed before. To guarantee everyone's right to education, it is necessary to focus on the recovery of schools and other educational institutions and of education systems, as well as on lifelong learning opportunities at every age. It is important to tackle systemic inequality and discrimination and to use education and lifelong learning to prevent future crises, or to reduce their consequences. It is necessary to invest more, increase

- quality and support teachers and educators so that they can cope with the new challenges, and to focus on those most excluded from education opportunities.
- 43. Education and learning help not only to think about a "new normal", but also to rethink and critically address the problems of the "old normal": uneven global development, power structures and socioeconomic disparities that widen gaps, widen inequalities and worsen injustice with every new crisis.

# VII. Business and industry major group

- 44. The private sector has been at the forefront in tackling the pandemic, from the historic race to develop vaccines to opening up premises for the production of personal protective equipment and running vaccination campaigns to educating employees on public health and safety. It is in everyone's interest that health-care services and vaccines are equally accessible for all. The pandemic has thrown into stark relief the pressing need for countries to address informality and sustainable social protection systems.
- 45. Private enterprises have been hit hard by the pandemic, which has resulted in growing poverty and vulnerability. Business closures due to pandemic restrictions have resulted in a decline of nearly 9 per cent in working hours and an increase in the number of persons outside the labour force by 81 million.<sup>3</sup> The review of Goal 8 during the 2021 high-level political forum will be more important than ever for creating a roadmap for a job-rich recovery and getting us back on track to achieving the Goals.
- 46. Recovering sustainably in the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals will require a stronger-than-ever commitment to multistakeholder engagement and partnership in inclusive intergovernmental deliberations. The private sector must be a meaningful partner in building back better by contributing funding, innovation, expertise, technology, fresh ideas and the diverse perspectives of businesses and employers. That applies in particular to small and medium-sized enterprises, which are so important to economic growth at the local level.
- 47. The business and industry major group urges Member States and the United Nations development system to bring diverse stakeholders, including representative business groups and employer federations, into the formulation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework common country analyses and the preparation of voluntary national reviews. Doing so would ensure that programming reflects the reality on the ground more effectively and leverages the valuable perspectives and contributions of the private sector, including small and medium-sized businesses, in tackling the most pressing issues.
- 48. Our major group recommends that the 2021 high-level forum prioritize and support the following:
- (a) Cross-sectoral partnerships and cooperation with the business sector at the national level, through resident coordinators, and the regional level, in relation to investment and finance and across the entire gamut of the Goals;
- (b) New ways of conducting meetings that truly enhance the substantive engagement of businesses and other stakeholders, with recognition for the distinct role of the business sector;

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization, "COVID-19 and labour statistics". Available at https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/covid-19/.

- (c) Support for and provision of new and concrete engagement mechanisms, institutional infrastructure and opportunities for the United Nations system, Governments, businesses and other stakeholders to come together on achieving the Goals.
- 49. At this critical time, there is an opportunity to engage with Member States, the United Nations system and all other stakeholders at the 2021 high-level political forum now that hope is on the horizon, but realize that bold and collective action, and institutional innovation are required, building on the recommendations of the concluding report of the "UN75" initiative. Our major group stands ready to do its part.

#### VIII. Persons with disabilities

- 50. Leaving no one behind must remain the core concern of all work to advance inclusive development. In response to the theme of the 2021 high-level political forum, the stakeholder group of persons with disabilities offers Member States and the United Nations system the recommendations outlined below for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities, while recognizing the important linkages with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- 51. **COVID-19**: persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, as well as by discriminatory health-care systems and policies. Governments and the United Nations system should act to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities during the response to and recovery from the pandemic.
- 52. Vaccinations: persons with disabilities should be prioritized to receive vaccinations because they face increased risks in the pandemic and have been left behind both before and during the pandemic response. Doing so is essential to ensure that they will not be left behind further, experiencing disproportionate loss of lives and livelihoods, inaccessible health-care services and undignified lives and aggravated disconnection from society
- 53. **Employment**: prior to the pandemic, persons with disabilities were already facing widespread exclusion from the labour market, which has only been exacerbated. Dismantling barriers to employment for persons with disabilities must be central to government responses in order to guarantee that they will be sustainable and resilient.
- 54. **Poverty**: persons with disabilities are disproportionally affected by multidimensional poverty. Persons with disabilities often face barriers in accessing services, information, education and employment. As a result of those barriers, they are less likely to participate in the economy, which results in poverty. Governments should uphold the Convention's standards on the right to access to social protection and poverty reduction programmes, including to assistance to offset the cost of disability-related expenses for persons with disabilities living in poverty.
- 55. **Data**: the collection and disaggregation of data on persons with disabilities should be increased. The Washington Group short set of questions should be included in all household surveys and censuses to ensure that policymakers address gaps. Statisticians must collect disability data and inform policymakers, who, in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities and in line with the Convention, must enact new evidence-based laws and regulations to ensure the inclusion and equal participation of persons with disabilities in society.
- 56. **Accessibility**: persons with disabilities should have access, on an equal basis with others, to the built environment, to information and communication technology

systems and to other facilities, in line with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda. The Secretary-General has reported on the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy aimed at including persons with disabilities throughout the United Nations system. Progress on accessibility and inclusion should continue to be advanced.

## IX. Volunteer groups

- 57. Volunteers are building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.
- 58. Volunteers are essential to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to a sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic. So is support for their efforts. Volunteer groups are heartened by the growing acknowledgement of their role in this context.

#### Recommendations

59. The stakeholder group representing volunteers offers the following recommendations to the high-level political forum for 2021 and beyond.

# 1. Formally recognize the contribution of volunteering to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the voluntary national reviews of Member States at the 2021 high-level political forum

60. All Member States should include the contribution of volunteers in their voluntary national reviews. In 2020, in their voluntary national reviews, countries around the world as diverse as Benin, Brunei Darussalam, India, Kenya, Malawi, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Samoa and Slovenia all emphatically acknowledged the positive contribution of volunteering to achieving the Goals;

# 2. Ensure that volunteer groups are fully recognized and supported in national plans and strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda

61. Every country should build volunteering into its plans and strategies. Currently, nearly 100 countries throughout the world have policies or legislation on volunteering, including legislation that supports and promotes it.

# 3. Follow the lead of Member States by affirming full support for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 67/290, in which the Assembly provided for the participation of non-governmental actors

62. All Governments should continue to engage all stakeholders as contributors to and beneficiaries of policies that will allow us all to work towards realizing the 2030 Agenda. In its resolution 73/140, the Assembly commended volunteers and encouraged all Member States to increasingly cooperate with volunteer-involving and civil society organizations. In the same resolution, the Assembly called on Member States to include information on the scale, contribution and impact of volunteerism in future voluntary national reviews and to engage volunteers for the monitoring of progress towards achieving the Goals at the national and subnational levels and as part of wider citizen engagement.

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- 4. Ensure that the framework for accountability, transparency and review for the Goals involves community consultation at all levels, including representation of the most marginalized voices and of the volunteers who work most closely with them
  - 63. All Member States should consult with volunteer groups and include volunteers and the most marginalized voices as part of the mechanism to review the Goals at the national and local levels.

# 5. Formally recognize the role of volunteering in crisis prevention, management and resolution

64. Volunteers and groups organizing volunteers are working daily to meet the Goals in their local communities and are at the front lines of COVID-19 relief, climate change action and other extraordinary situations. Volunteers are helping to build back better.

# X. Ageing

- 65. Bold action is needed to effect a sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic and achieve the Goals. Older persons have paid a heavy toll during the pandemic. An age-inclusive recovery that ensures that older persons are not left behind requires the following:
  - (a) Addressing severe violations of the human rights of older persons;
- (b) Recognizing the contributions of older persons to the economy, to society and family;
- (c) Enshrining the rights of older persons in national and international legislation.
- 66. Unprecedented global attention was drawn to the unequal treatment for COVID-19. Priorities were set that excluded and discriminated against older persons. Older persons were stigmatized, found abandoned, abused, neglected and dead in care institutions and in their homes, lacking safeguards to long-term and palliative care, or to home-based health care. They were denied access to treatments, protective equipment and vaccines, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Affordable preventive care, treatment, rehabilitation and long-term care including palliative care must be accessible for persons of all ages in all settings.
- 67. In the absence of job security and flexible retirement regulations, many older workers became unemployed, were dismissed or were forced to retire against their wishes, without adequate social protection. Job loss resulted in their significant overrepresentation among the long-term unemployed. Lockdowns hit older workers in the informal sector particularly hard. Increased poverty threatened the right of older persons to a decent life and to dignity.
- 68. Overcoming ageism in the world of work entails social protection, including safety nets for informal workers. Obstacles to labour market participation by older workers must be overcome by adhering to international obligations regarding the equal treatment of workers at all ages, introducing incentives to employing and retaining older workers, and providing lifelong learning opportunities and digital access. Ageist stereotypes persist, despite the economic need to employ a growing share of older workers to sustain growth.
- 69. For older persons, access to justice has been hampered by lockdowns of judicial institutions, complex proceedings, lack of access to information and excessive costs

in the absence of a globally agreed monitoring mechanism to provide evidence on the worsening health, social and economic status of older persons.

- 70. Age discrimination in law and practice forms a barrier to achieving the Goals related to poverty, health, decent work, economic growth and gender equality. Ageing is not a problem; ageism is the problem.
- 71. The stakeholder group on ageing urges Member States to:
  - (a) Embrace the contributions of older persons;
  - (b) Implement the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030;
- (c) Fully implement international labour standards and guarantee the rights of older workers to decent work and social protection;
- (d) Combat ageism by abolishing all forms of age exclusion and age discrimination;
  - (e) Establish legal measures to ensure equality and access to justice.
- 72. An inclusive path for recovery and accomplishment of the Goals includes:
  - (a) Empowerment of older persons with age-inclusive legislation and policies;
  - (b) Achievement of a just society for all people of all ages;
  - (c) Development of a convention to protect the rights of older persons.

# XI. Asia-Pacific regional civil society organization engagement

- 73. Unless the systemic failures that render exploited groups more vulnerable are dealt with, there will be no recovery from COVID-19. In *Asia and the Pacific: SDG Progress Report 2021*, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific shows that Asia Pacific is not on track to realize most of Agenda 2030 and that the pandemic has further pushed the region off track. The pandemic reveals the need to dismantle the neoliberal development model and instead realize a transformative, fairer and resilient future for all.
- 74. There can be no resilient and sustainable recovery from the pandemic without addressing systemic barriers to sustainable development. The crisis has exacerbated prevalent unequal distribution of wealth, power and resources, thus exposing the violence of the neoliberalism, corporatization and capitalist hegemony that are hijacking democracies, of the international economic, trade and monetary frameworks that are restricting the policy space for States, of the militarism that is breeding conflict, of the patriarchy that is widening authoritarianism across State and social institutions, and of flawed governance that is marginalizing the poorest. The crisis has exposed the lack of political will with regard to such strategic issues as health, education and social protection, a decent standard of living and a safe ecosystem. The crisis has uncovered globalized capitalism as the catalyst for calamities and has proven the failure of neoliberal development at large.
- 75. During its thematic and ministerial segments, the high-level political forum must analyse the systemic determinants of the lack of progress. The process should be focused on efficient recovery for developing countries, the least developed countries and countries facing special situations by reducing debt distress, curbing illicit financial flows and protecting the policy space for States to safeguard the public interest through a fundamental reconfiguration of global economic, trade, tax, monetary and financial frameworks. Rather than pushing poor countries to mobilize domestic resources, multilateral processes should synergize the taxation architecture

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to avoid massive tax evasion, help to resist debt conditionalities designed to constrict public financing across key sectors, and help to redress hegemonic trade rules and agreements that include instruments such as investor-State dispute settlements through which billions of dollars are plundered away from States while leaving no fiscal space for development or sustainability.

- 76. The voluntary national review process needs to be democratized to avoid tokenistic representation and needs the involvement of subaltern voices to be inclusive and transparent. To measure change, voluntary national review processes must include a recognition of the potential of data generated by civil society in a citizen-led process.
- 77. The high-level political forum needs an annual comprehensive review of progress towards all the Goals and must reassess the current clustered approach in the next cycle of the high-level political forum. The following is needed: (a) interim voluntary national reviews submitted to the regional forums and a mechanism for follow-up reporting in the region; (b) a systematic integration of regional forum outcomes and perspectives into the high-level political forum with continuous feedback into the regional, subregional and national levels for efficient follow-up.
- 78. People's movements, grassroots communities and civil society in Asia and the Pacific propose a clear vision of recovery from COVID-19 in which the possibility is emphasized to realize a rights-based people-centred development model that addresses the unequal distribution of wealth, power and resources within and among countries, between the rich and the poor, and between men and women, as well as with regard to other marginalized groups. That vision includes development justice, the striving for redistributive, economic, environmental, social and gender justice, and for accountability to peoples, as the way forward for people and planet.

#### XII. Communities discriminated on work and descent

- 79. Communities discriminated on work and descent number more than 260 million people across the world. They are among the most marginalized and excluded. Many are living in conditions of slavery that are often tied to descent. They are more commonly known as Dalits, Roma-Sinti, Quilombola, Burakumin, Haratine, Oru and Shambara, among many other names. They lack public recognition and are not acknowledged within or beyond the Goals.
- 80. The pandemic has cemented social hierarchies and aggravated discrimination and systematic exclusion of communities discriminated on work and descent. Marginalization, discrimination and exclusion are compounded when persons belonging to such a community face intersectional discrimination based not only on their work and descent, but also on their gender identity, disability, age and/or sexual orientation, to name but a few, and depend on their daily wage or on work in the informal sector. As farmers, factory workers, domestic helpers, sweepers, waste collectors, street vendors or sanitation workers, they are forced to perform menial jobs related to human sanitation and human and animal death using their bare hands or minimal tools. Many have lost all sources of income because of the pandemic.
- 81. Access to water, hygiene products and sanitation facilities were severely restricted. This situation escalated in South Asia during the summer months, when infections peaked. Dalits were restricted from accessing public water and sanitation facilities for being considered "unclean". Governments failed to ensure access to those facilities across the globe for such communities.
- 82. There have been several cases of such communities being discriminated against when attempting to gain access to quarantine facilities, economic relief packages and

other social security measures, especially the women among them. There have been severe consequences for the mental health of community members. Unemployment, the inability to provide for their families and a rise in discrimination and violence have resulted in an rise in suicides during this time.

#### Recommendations

- 83. With regard to communities discriminated on work and descent, the following recommendations are made:
- (a) Roll out a "people's vaccine", prioritizing the most vulnerable, including communities discriminated on work and descent, so as to leave no one behind and forgotten (Goals 3 and 10);
- (b) Make contributions to the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund as detailed in the report by the Secretary-General entitled "Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19" with the aim of achieving all the Goals;
- (c) Implement country- and community-specific interventions to meet the most immediate needs of the most vulnerable with regard to health care, including mental health care, water and sanitation, food, education and help and shelter for those who suffer domestic violence and abuse. (Goals 1–6);
- (d) Take note of communities discriminated on work and descent and implement regulatory provisions necessary to protect them and other minority groups from online and offline discrimination and hate speech and resulting violence and discrimination as detailed by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues in his report dated 3 March 2021 (A/HRC/46/57), which has direct implications for the Goals (targets 1.4, 4.5, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.a, 8.5, 8.8 and 10.3).
- (e) To achieve conditions of decent work and alleviate some of the negative effects of the pandemic for communities discriminated on work and descent, steps should be taken to ensure that they have land tenure and ownership (Goals 1, 2, 3, 8 and 10).

# XIII. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons

- 84. The pandemic has had a profound impact on populations around the globe in every aspect of their lives. While harmful to all, COVID-19 has been especially taxing for marginalized populations. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons continue to experience stigma, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, and face high barriers in accessing development. Those experiences have been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- 85. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons has been evidenced in several civil society reports; pandemic responses have, in numerous instances, replicated forms of discrimination, increased social and political inequalities, and reinforced barriers in accessing education, employment, health care, food and shelter, aggravating already existing vulnerabilities and violence faced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.
- 86. Among other measures contributing to the increased vulnerability of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, the following were pervasive: selective restrictions on their peaceful assembly justified by the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19; limitations and disruptions of HIV prevention and antiretroviral

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therapy programmes and of access to hormonal treatments or gender-affirming services; exclusion from humanitarian aid programmes, in particular for trans and non-binary persons, who have been unable to access relief efforts because they do not have identification documents that reflected their identity; higher rates of domestic, family and intimate partner violence coupled with reduced support services owing to pandemic control measures; and exclusion from social protection measures in an environment of elevated job loss, greater financial and food insecurity, poverty and homelessness.

- 87. The current health and economic crisis highlights the fundamental need for universal health care, a social floor, social protection and access to justice. Urgent responses are required from States and other stakeholders to end the criminalization and pathologization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, lower the barriers they face in accessing human development and create and implement public policies, laws and programmes that address their needs and guarantee that they are not the furthest left-behind.
- 88. Sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic requires an inclusive approach to development. Such an approach should be free from assumptions of hetero- and cisnormativity, respond to misconceptions and stereotypes that are often used to exclude the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people from development activities and must be designed, implemented and evaluated with regard to all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.
- 89. In the light of the 2021 theme of high-level political forum on sustainable, "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development", the stakeholder group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons calls on all stakeholders to ensure that pandemic responses and recovery policies are inclusive of all, including for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, and to guarantee that all are free from violence and discrimination, in order to promote a sustainable and resilient recovery. Measures adopted by States must comply with principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation, empowerment and accountability, always following a human rights framework and including those most marginalized at all stages of "building back better" to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

# XIV. Financing for development

- 90. The humanitarian and economic crisis triggered by the pandemic is threatening the well-being of billions of people. Inequalities within and between countries have been magnified, with unpaid domestic and care work subsidizing the global economy.
- 91. The financing for development major group urgently calls for the following systemic solutions are urgently needed in order to address the broken global economic architecture:
- (a) Debt cancellations and the establishment of a sovereign debt workout mechanism at the United Nations to address unsustainable and illegitimate debt. The pandemic has increased the risk of a new wave of debt crises that will make systemic solutions vital to avoiding devastating impacts, especially on developing countries;
- (b) A United Nations tax convention to address tax havens, tax abuse by multinational corporations and other illicit financial flows, to be developed through a universal, intergovernmental process at the United Nations. Unless the failures of the

international tax system are urgently addressed, countries around the world will continue to lose billions of dollars because of illicit financial flows;

- (c) A moratorium on investor-State dispute settlement cases, the removal of all investor-State dispute settlement provisions from bilateral investment treaties and trade agreements, and non-implementation of current trade and investment commitments, including intellectual property rights rules under the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and "TRIPS-plus agreements" wherever those are in conflict with public policy objectives, during the pandemic;
- (d) A review of the development outcomes of public-private partnerships and the "private finance first" approach and a reaffirmation of the centrality of public policies and investments. The pandemic has been a stark reminder of the importance of accessible and affordable public services and the shortcomings of development models that prioritize private profit over public needs;
- (e) A review of the official development assistance framework with a view to immediately reversing the decline in official development assistance, and fulfilling and, where possible, exceeding the 0.7 per cent target for such assistance in the form of unconditional grants. It is vital that the long-standing commitments to deliver international development assistance are realized, including by ensuring its quality and effectiveness;
- (f) An assessment of the systemic risks posed by unregulated or inadequately regulated financial sector instruments and actors. This includes the regulation of credit rating agencies, agreement by countries around the globe about capital account management and the urgent allocation of new special drawing rights commensurate with the level of need among developing countries;
- (g) A global technology assessment mechanism at the United Nations. As the United Nations, Governments and institutions grapple with the governance of digital technologies, there is an urgent need for transparent and inclusive deliberations on the current and potential impacts of those technologies on the environment, the labour market, tax policy, livelihoods and society;
- (h) Fiscal space for and a scaling-up of international cooperation for universal social protection. The pandemic illustrates the importance of ensuring adequate fiscal space to support the extension of social protection systems and offer universal coverage with social protection floors in line with the standards of the International Labour Organization;
- 92. Decisions about some of these critical topics have been in a stalemate and it is time to agree on a new consensus that allows real progress in tackling the pandemic and to advance the 2030 Agenda. The financing for development major group therefore calls on Member States to mandate the organization of the next International Conference on Financing for Development. Given the context of the global crisis, it could be held in the form of an international summit on economic reconstruction and systemic reform, as proposed by the Civil Society Financing for Development Group, to move towards a new global economic architecture that works for the people and the planet.

# XV. Scientific and technological communities

- 93. Below is a summary of the position paper of the scientific and technological communities major group for the 2021 high-level political forum.
- 94. Impact. The pandemic abruptly disrupted the implementation of actions focused on achieving many of the Goals and, in some cases, reversed hard-won

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- progress. The measures taken to mitigate the pandemic's impact caused an abrupt loss of jobs and the closure of millions of enterprises and factories. All over the world, extreme poverty is on the rise for the first time in 20 years, with the pandemic driving up acute hunger in countries already experiencing food crises, creating new hunger hotspots across the globe. The pandemic has further exposed the rising threat posed by global inequality to the health, well-being and security of all people.
- 95. Warning. The pandemic is a symptom of the devastating impacts of human activities on natural ecosystems. It comes as a timely warning to urgently and drastically transform human actions and relations, including with regard to nature. Returning to the pre-pandemic normal is not an option. Profound systemic transformations are needed to stabilize the Earth system, which is currently threatened by the further destruction of biodiversity, ecosystem degradation, air and water pollution, climate destabilization and general devastation of natural capital
- 96. **Opportunity**. The scientific and technological communities major group stresses the unique opportunity provided by the current crisis for substantial climate action and for safeguarding and restoring natural capital. In that context, recovery must not entail reinstating historical development pathways and should instead focus on new investments to lock humanity into more sustainable pathways. To do otherwise risks global average temperature increases well beyond 2°C, leading to catastrophic consequences for humanity and life on Earth.
- 97. **Transformation**. The scientific and technological communities major group calls for a truly transformative recovery that is centred on and aligned with the principles of the Goals. While fighting to bring the pandemic to an end, Governments must foster sustainable and equitable economic recovery, and jointly address the climate and biodiversity emergencies, while leaving no one and no place behind. The scientific and engineering communities should be given a more proactive role in the fight against COVID-19 and in the pursuit of a truly transformative recovery.
- 98. **Just transition**. The scientific and technological communities major group calls for a recovery process that ensures a just transition to decarbonized and sustainable futures and focuses on building more creative, engaged and resilient societies better equipped to prevent, prepare for and tackle future crises. The growing risks of major planetary disruptions, compounded by rising inequalities and new forms of vulnerability, pose existential threats. These multi-level risk-creation and risk-amplifying processes could drastically undermine all attempts to achieve sustainable development and erode the social and environmental foundations on which humankind depends to live and thrive.
- 99. **Diversity**. The scientific and technological communities major group emphasizes the importance of utilizing diverse knowledge and engineering practices to help in transforming mindsets, leadership and action, and to craft innovative, efficient, applicable and sustainable solutions to today's urgent challenges. The scientific and technological communities major group stands ready to work with all stakeholders to devise feasible and implementable science-informed solutions to help decision makers and societies to recover from the pandemic and build more equitable, resilient and sustainable futures. Simultaneously, the major group is ready to lead the way to a more ethical and inclusive use of technology that fosters sustainable innovation and benefits society at large.