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Summary of the work of the Economic Commission for Europe, 2018–2019

Summary

The present report contains highlights of the work of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in the period 2018–2019. ECE assists countries in addressing some of the key sustainable development challenges facing the region through an integrated, multisectoral perspective. The adoption of a nexus approach in its work has facilitated the consideration of the interlinkages within the Sustainable Development Goals for enhanced impact. The appropriate management of natural resources requires a transboundary perspective, supported by appropriate normative frameworks and policy guidelines. Economic connectivity, through reliable transport links and free-flowing trade, is critical for the prosperity of the ECE region. ECE assists member States in harnessing the potential of trade, promoting innovation, increasing financing for the Goals and improving the availability of good-quality data, which is critical for adopting decisions and monitoring progress. Urbanization presents multiple challenges, and the solutions to many complex sustainable development problems require the development and implementation of appropriate actions at the city level. ECE provides practical tools to tackle the problems in an integrated fashion, including through its work on the nexus of smart and sustainable cities for all ages. ECE benefits greatly from its successful efforts in engaging multiple partners and will continue to reach out to various constituencies to provide a solid foundation for its work, facilitate its dissemination and encourage collective action in support of the 2030 Agenda.



I. Introduction

1. In the period 2018–2019, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) continued to support member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through closely aligned normative, policy advisory and capacity-building activities. A new nexus approach was adopted that was aimed at enhancing impact by facilitating cross-sectoral work and better reflecting the integrated character of the 2030 Agenda.

2. The Commission's activities address the key sustainable development problems of the region in a forward-looking way that considers the implications of ongoing trends and the role of innovation in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. ECE engages with multiple partners in their activities while reaching out to new constituencies that will have an important role in advancing the 2030 Agenda. By further leveraging its own strengths through enhanced cross-sectoral coordination and partnerships, it will remain a major contributor to sustainable development efforts in the region and beyond.

II. Advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region

4. Fulfilling the promises of the 2030 Agenda will require fundamental transitions in resource management, mobility and urban systems. Integrated, cross-sectoral answers are necessary in order to decarbonize energy and transport systems and reduce other harmful emissions; restore ecosystems and ecosystem services; decouple resource use from overall economic performance; and promote economic dynamism in the context of ageing societies.

5. ECE is supporting countries to address some of the key sustainable development challenges facing the region through an integrated, multisectoral approach. By leveraging its norms, standards and conventions, and by delivering policy assistance and building capacities, ECE is helping to accelerate countries' implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

6. ECE has adopted a new approach in its work to better exploit the opportunities for more effective action that result from the integrated character of the 2030 Agenda and the linkages and complementarities that exist between various Goals and targets. Four nexus areas that reflect major challenges for the region and will be the focus of cross-sectoral collaboration across ECE subprogrammes have been identified: the sustainable use of natural resources; sustainable and smart cities for all ages; sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; and measuring and monitoring of the Goals.

7. Progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda is facilitated by the existence of spaces for policy discussion as a catalyst for action. Such discussions are held by the large number of intergovernmental groups that support ECE work in various sectors. The annual Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region, which is organized in close collaboration with the regional United Nations system, has emerged as the most prominent sustainable development platform in the region, integrating multisectoral perspectives and the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, the business community and academia. In 2019, in accordance with the direction of the reform of the United Nations development system, all Resident Coordinators participated in policy discussions, thus facilitating the link between the discussions and operational realities. The themes considered mirrored the Goals that were under in-depth review at the high-level political forum on sustainable

development, thus providing a regional context for the discussion that will be held at the global level.

8. Urgent collective action, on the basis of internationally agreed normative frameworks, is needed to address climate change. The appropriate management of natural resources requires a transboundary perspective. Water is the main channel through which the effects of climate change will be felt. Water cooperation is critical to manage water in a way that reconciles economic development with sustainability and prevents conflicts. The momentum for transboundary water cooperation worldwide is increasing. The ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, 1992, facilitates international cooperation to provide shared answers to such challenges, and the Convention is now global. Chad and Senegal acceded to it in 2018, and, at the latest meeting of the Parties to the Convention, held in Astana in October 2018, more than 15 countries outside the Pan-European region announced their interest in joining the Convention.

9. There is growing awareness that success in addressing environmental challenges also has positive impacts on a number of other sustainable development indicators. Clean air is a regional public good that requires collective action, with results determined by the interplay among local, national and international measures. The long-range transport of fine particulate pollution is also an important concern, and multilevel air quality management is therefore needed. Efforts to reduce pollution, including by lowering the use of fossil fuels, can also contribute to decarbonization. Black carbon, a major pollutant, has a direct impact on climate change.

10. The toll that pollution takes on human life and health is significant and a major factor in initiatives to improve air quality. ECE has been a major player in driving action for cleaner air in the pan-European region. Thanks to measures taken under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution to cut harmful emissions, including particulate matter, average life expectancy in Europe is estimated to be 12 months longer than it otherwise would have been. At the first Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health of the World Health Organization (WHO), held in 2018, ECE shared its 40 years of experience with regard to the Convention.

11. Access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters are critical contributors to the protection of the environment and the avoidance of activities that are harmful to human health. The year 2018 marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention). The Convention is an effective tool for promoting environmental democracy across the ECE region, and interest in the Convention has increased beyond the region. In past years, ECE has supported the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in pursuing negotiations on an instrument for Latin America and the Caribbean that was similar to the Convention, which led to the successful adoption of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) in March 2018.

12. Pollutant release and transfer registers serve to promote much-needed transparency in environmental matters and support informed decision-making and to assist Governments in meeting their reporting obligations under various multilateral environmental agreements. The significance of the Commission's Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, which has been used as a prototype for establishing pollutant release and transfer registers in and beyond the ECE region, was recognized at the third Global Round Table on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, held in Geneva on 7 and 8 November 2018.

13. In the ECE region, there is a trend towards increased resource efficiency, which contributes to reducing environmental pressures. However, notwithstanding the progress made, according to relative measurements that scale domestic material consumption by population or output, the overall material footprint remains elevated in absolute terms. There is a need to better manage resources, promote a circular economy, which reduces waste and encourages reutilization, and engineer a shift towards resources with a smaller environmental footprint. Such an effort represents a major challenge for the region. It is a challenge that also has global implications, given the overall share of ECE countries of global resource consumption and carbon emissions.

14. ECE contributes to better management of resources and decarbonization through multiple activities, but its core normative work is the most significant and far-reaching. The United Nations Framework Classification for Resources is a comprehensive management system for all energy and raw material resources that integrates social and environmental aspects into economic and technical feasibility criteria. The Framework is increasingly accepted as a global standard that can help to ensure the sound management of all resources, including by facilitating innovation.

15. In 2018, ECE started several continent-wide initiatives to deploy the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources, led in Europe by the European Commission, in Africa by the African Union Commission and in the Americas by Mexico, as well as a pilot project in Eurasia led by the Russian Federation. Another milestone achieved in 2018 was the adoption of specifications for the recovery of value from residues or wastes generated by human activity, which will support the circular economy.

16. The use of wood products in construction, coupled with sustainable forest management, can contribute to decarbonization. Wood products, such as innovative cellulose fibres, can also provide alternative materials for other sectors, such as textiles, which rely on water-intensive crops, like cotton, and carbon-intensive materials, like polyester. ECE has advanced the role of properly managed forests, from serving as providers of ecosystem services to becoming sources of materials for renewable and recyclable products in various sectors, replacing more polluting and carbon-emitting materials.

17. Communicating this message to a broad audience is important to increase awareness and offer new perspectives. The video *Made in Forests* contains a short story on sustainable fashion that has been shared widely. A call to exploit the multiple benefits of wood products was made in the Vancouver Invitation on Forest Products for a Better Future, which received broad support from the participants in the seventy-sixth session of the Commission's Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry held in November 2018.

18. Scaling up efforts to restore forest landscapes is vital in harnessing the many important benefits that forests offer, including in relation to strengthened climate action. ECE and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supported Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in their commitment to restoring more than 2.5 million ha from degraded land to healthy, productive forests by 2030 under the Bonn Challenge, a global effort to bring 350 million ha of degraded and deforested land to restoration by 2030. The commitment was made at the first Ministerial Round Table on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia, held in Astana on 21 and 22 June 2018.

19. Economic connectivity through reliable transport links and the smooth movement of people and goods is critical for the prosperity of the ECE region, as a reflection and a driver of integration. Openness is the foundation of thriving

innovative economies, which can enjoy the benefits of cross-border cooperation. In addition, improved transport solutions can play an important role in the achievement of the Goals, including in relation to climate change mitigation and the reduction of traffic deaths.

20. The Commission's extensive work on transport addresses the multiple aspects of the sector. Its normative work contributes to defining its regulatory backbone, including issues that shape the future of transport. The development and deployment of automated vehicles is one of the leading issues that the car industry, policymakers and regulators face today. Many questions relating to safety standards, traffic rules, signs and signals, insurance regimes, cybersecurity and data protection, to name a few, are addressed through the Commission's Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety and World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations to ensure the safety of automated vehicles in the market and their safe use. Vehicle regulations adopted at ECE also deal with technical issues regarding, for example, automated brake systems and innovative testing methods. In 2018, ECE continued to advance its work in these areas, engaging with all of the major car-manufacturing countries in its intergovernmental structures.

21. Reducing the environmental footprint of vehicles requires a realistic and robust fuel economy and carbon dioxide emissions control systems that are trusted. This is the condition necessary for public acceptance and genuine innovation. Since 1 September 2018, the Worldwide Harmonized Light Vehicle Test Procedure, developed at ECE, applies to all new passenger cars sold within European Union and European Free Trade Association countries. ECE has started to work on a global methodology to measure on-road car emissions, which will further improve existing assessments.

22. Decarbonization efforts can also be pursued through a modal shift in transport that privileges the use of forms that have a smaller environmental impact. ECE promotes multimodality in its work, including through the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme, which is an intersectoral activity based on inter-entity cooperation. The Convention on the facilitation of border crossing procedures for passengers, luggage and load-luggage carried in international traffic by rail was adopted by the Inland Transport Committee of ECE in February 2019, becoming the fifty-ninth legal instrument in the field of inland transport developed under ECE auspices. The Convention will make it easier to attract people to environmentally sound rail transport. Its adoption will also serve to further support efforts towards improved, efficient, green and sustainable transport. Inland navigation has significant potential for sustainable development, resulting from reduced logistics costs, improved safety, environmental protection and diminishing road traffic congestion, as stressed in the ministerial declaration entitled "Inland navigation in a global setting", adopted in Wroclaw, Poland, in April 2018.

23. A total of 1.35 million people die each year as a result of road traffic accidents. Increased vehicle ownership and traffic density, in particular in low- and middle-income countries, where most road traffic deaths occur, will create further pressures on road safety. But even in the European Union, target 3.6 of the Goals, to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020, does not appear within reach. Energetic responses and strong partnerships to accelerate progress are required. The United Nations road safety trust fund was launched in April 2018 to mobilize finance from all sources in order to improve global road safety. The fund, which has a secretariat hosted by ECE, had a promising start: by the end of that year, total pledges had already reached nearly \$20 million.

24. Facilitating the flow of goods across borders requires more than simply improving physical infrastructure. The development of transport infrastructure should

be complemented by a “soft” connectivity agenda that is aimed at eliminating regulatory barriers and creating conditions for the easy passage of goods. The TIR System is the only global customs transit system in existence. It facilitates trade and the seamless and secure movement of goods across borders. In 2018, the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention) continued to gain momentum, expanding in the Middle East and Latin America in particular and undergoing increasing implementation in Eurasia. The System, used by the more than 34,000 transport and logistics companies included in its 76 contracting parties, can reduce cross-border transport time by some 80 per cent and costs by nearly 40 per cent, according to some estimates.

25. Ageing is a well-established secular trend in the region that will have multiple ramifications. Its impact on societies and on the lives of individuals will depend on the policy answers to what is a defining feature of our collective future. In accordance with the promise in the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind, attention should be paid to the diversity of individual needs and aspirations over the course of life. In 2018, the connection between ageing-related policies and the Goals was highlighted in ECE work, which continued to emphasize the untapped potential of older persons to contribute to the economy and society.

26. Advancing sustainable development requires that citizens have the knowledge and skills to take informed decisions in order to create sustainable societies. Education for sustainable development is not only a target of the Goals but also a key enabler for them. ECE is advancing the fourth phase of implementation of its Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, including through strategic planning, capacity-building activities and engagement with multiple processes at various levels.

III. Strengthening the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda

27. ECE has continued to support its member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda by assisting them in harnessing the potential of trade, promoting innovation, raising finance for the Goals and improving the availability of high-quality data, which is critical for adopting decisions and monitoring progress. In addition, the Commission’s extensive technical assistance activities, which are closely linked to its normative work, have helped to address capacity gaps and provided policy advice in multiple areas.

Trade

28. Standards, regulatory convergence and the development of a common language to facilitate exchanges can promote trade while ensuring that sustainable development principles can be monitored and enforced. ECE plays a central role in such efforts, in particular through the work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, which contributes to simplifying, standardizing and harmonizing trade rules and procedures and cuts the cost and time of doing trade across borders through more than 40 policy recommendations and 440 e-business standards, developed and maintained in the past 40 years. Some of the key policy recommendations and e-business standards recently adopted include those for single submission portals, public-private partnerships in trade facilitation, trade and transport facilitation monitoring mechanisms, sustainable procurement, multi-modal transport reference data models and road consignment notes.

29. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business is exploring the potential of new technologies, such as blockchain, the Internet of things

and artificial intelligence, to enhance the reliability and security of electronic data exchanges and is developing guidance on how such technologies could contribute to advancing progress on the Goals. The work is being supported by the recently launched Advisory Group on Advanced Technologies in Trade and Logistics, which brings together multiple stakeholders.

30. Governments and the trade community are looking increasingly to traceability standards to confirm that the production, transport and distribution of goods and services reflect policy objectives and civil society values. Such efforts underpin the contribution of trade to sustainable development. The agriculture expert group of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business has already developed an international technical standard to trace business processes in the animal and fish supply chain. In 2018, the Centre worked on a large project to develop a transparency and traceability framework in order to provide a structured approach to tracking and tracing sustainable garment and footwear value chains.

31. Overfishing and illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing account for one quarter of the fish resources taken from the oceans. An essential step in the effective management of fish resources is the timely acquisition of information on vessels, stocks and catches, as well as the exchange of such information among stakeholders. The United Nations Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange standard is already being used in 23 European Union member States, and countries in other regions of the world, including Brazil, Peru and Thailand, will soon implement it.

32. ECE is actively promoting regulatory cooperation and standardization by engaging the collaboration of diverse stakeholders to develop joint solutions to shared challenges in diverse fields. In 2018, it led a groundbreaking initiative on standards for the Goals to enhance the uptake of standards for sustainable development. Under the initiative, an innovative platform was developed to allow local and national administrations, as well as regulatory bodies, the business community and other key stakeholders, to identify and gain access to standards in order to ensure the interoperability of structures and services, support optimal integration among diverse technologies and systems drawn from many providers and avoid buyer lock-in.

33. Regulatory and procedural barriers to trade prevent countries from obtaining the full benefit thereof, as well as preventing their participation in global value chains. Addressing such barriers requires efforts that involve multiple government agencies. ECE supports countries in identifying existing problems and taking remedial actions through comprehensive country studies. The studies, including the most recent one, on Georgia, provide the added benefit of engaging with a large group of stakeholders, from the public and business sectors, thus facilitating the implementation of recommendations.

34. ECE not only develops new standards but also helps countries to implement them, thus supporting their efforts to create more dynamic and diversified economies. In 2018, it helped Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to reach new markets for their agricultural produce through training in the use of its international standards. Uzbekistan adopted 80 ECE agricultural quality standards, the largest single-country adoption. In the Western Balkans, the Commission has helped to improve trade connectivity by building capacity for the use of the standards and data models for international trade developed by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business and the European Union. The impact of ECE activities extends beyond the region. For example, the Commission has helped the Dominican Republic to enhance, on the basis of ECE standards, the quality of the fruit and vegetables it exports.

Innovation

35. In the 2030 Agenda, innovation is highlighted as a critical factor for achieving the Goals. Innovation can serve to provide new solutions to development-related challenges and reduce the need to make difficult choices in efforts to reconcile objectives that conflict with one another, such as economic prosperity and sound environmental management.

36. ECE supports the efforts of its members to promote innovation in multiple ways, including through its publications featuring innovation reviews that provide analyses of national policies in the light of international best practices, and recommendations for improvement. The underlying methodology of the reviews is being revised to mainstream sustainable development more fully into the whole set of issues covered in the reviews. Follow-up policy advisory and capacity-building activities serve to assist Governments, upon their request, in implementing selected policy recommendations.

37. In 2018, the innovation for sustainable development review of Kyrgyzstan was launched, while work continued on the review of Georgia. The Government of Kyrgyzstan has developed a draft action plan to implement the recommendations made in the review. Belarus, which already underwent a second-cycle review, has signed a partnership with ECE to harness innovation for sustainable development, supporting reforms on the basis recommendations made in previous reviews.

38. ECE is developing a subregional innovation policy outlook, which will facilitate peer learning and the sharing of good practices while fostering coordination among various ministries and agencies. Through such a composite index, innovation policies and institutions for sustainable development will be assessed in six countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

39. ECE is working on the development of a subregional strategy on innovation for sustainable development for the countries of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, which will be adopted by Governing Council of the Special Programme. Through the strategy, which is based on an assessment of subregional sustainable development gaps and priorities, ways are identified in which subregional cooperation on innovation policy can contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Finance

40. Advancing the 2030 Agenda requires efforts aimed at improving infrastructure, in order to support economic dynamism, meet social needs and facilitate a shift towards a green economy. Given the scale of the financing required, it is clear that contributions from the private sector are essential. However, it is also critical that the involvement of the private sector be aligned with the Goals. ECE has developed a pioneering work on public-private partnerships, promoting the people-first public-private partnership model, which ensures that public-private partnerships contribute to the Goals by highlighting the importance of non-economic aspects.

41. With regard to public-private standards, ECE has concentrated its efforts on developing guiding principles, best practices and recommendations, as well as on promoting the voluntary use and implementation of such principles, practices and recommendations in support of the Goals. Standards for railways, renewable energy and roads were completed in 2018. Work is continuing on draft standards for the supply and sanitation of water and on urban rail transit, as well as on a model law on public-private partnerships and concessions. A project impact assessment tool, which

is being developed in cooperation with other regional commissions, will be used to measure and score public-private partnership projects against a set of people-first criteria and the Goals, with a view to scaling up and replicating projects that are Goal-compliant.

42. The lack of appropriate capacity in the public sector to deal with the complexities of public-private partnerships and limits their use, and ECE contributes to alleviating that constraint. In 2018, together with its partners, the Commission trained 10,000 government officials in people-first public-private partnerships, helping to bring Governments and businesses together for the sustainable financing of key infrastructure developments and services, including transport, energy and water management.

Statistics

43. The availability of appropriate data is critical to identify existing problems, consider policy options and assess progress. A sufficient level of disaggregation in particular is required to fulfil the pledge in the 2030 Agenda that no one will be left behind.

44. ECE strengthens country-led reporting of statistics on the Goals in three main ways. First, it provides guidance and support to national statistical offices as national coordinators of statistics on the Goals. The guidance is consolidated in the *Conference of European Statisticians Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*. In 2018 and 2019, ECE prepared documents to be used as tools for the national implementation of the *Road Map*, such as those entitled “National reporting platforms: practical guide” and “Guidance on modernizing statistical legislation”. Using the guidance contained in the “National reporting platforms”, 34 countries have already developed or are developing national platforms to communicate Goal indicators. Through the use of “Guidance on modernizing statistical legislation”, nine countries have changed their statistical laws.

45. Second, ECE develops methodological guidance on demographic, social, economic and environment-related statistics that inform national policy decisions for the achievement of the Goals. In 2018 and 2019, ECE expert groups developed eight methodological guidelines to assist member States in producing and communicating statistics for the Goals. For the first time, all ECE member States expressed their intention to conduct a population census in the 2020 round, in compliance with the Commission’s recommendations. Further methodological work addressed the modernization of official statistics, including the development of a strategic communication framework and the updating of four common standards for statistical activities. Nearly half of ECE member States have implemented the Commission’s Generic Statistical Business Production Model to modernize their statistical production processes.

46. Third, ECE carries out capacity-building activities to increase the ability of countries to monitor progress towards the Goals. To provide gender-sensitive indicators and fill gaps in national statistical systems, ECE held 10 regional and 4 national training workshops for the countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, as well as a number of advisory missions. In 2018, the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed a new ECE statistical capacity development strategy, reinforcing the user-driven nature of the capacity development activities.

47. ECE also carries out relevant data-related activities, in particular in sectors that are critical for sustainable development. It works with the United Nations Environment Programme and the European Environment Agency to implement the

Shared Environmental Information System across Europe and Central Asia. Substantial progress in the establishment of the System was reported in 2018.

Technical cooperation

48. ECE technical cooperation is demand-driven and closely intertwined with normative and policy advice functions. It provides a direct link between the Commission's intergovernmentally agreed norms and standards and the request of member States to facilitate their implementation at the national and subregional levels in support of the 2030 Agenda. Technical cooperation activities draw on the Commission's ability to mobilize a large number of experts through its 217 intergovernmental bodies and on having dedicated staff focused on technical cooperation in each sectoral area of ECE expertise.

49. In 2018, ECE was responsible for 208 advisory missions and capacity-building activities. In the 17 programme countries in the ECE region, technical cooperation activities were carried out in an integrated and coherent manner through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, in cooperation with United Nations country teams. Through its Working Group on Technical Cooperation, ECE regularly communicates with Resident Coordinators to ensure coordination on technical cooperation. The approach has enabled ECE to enhance national ownership and better align its technical assistance with national priorities, strengthen cooperation with development stakeholders at the country level, establish necessary cross-sectoral synergies and linkages in the work of ECE subprogrammes and with the work of other United Nations entities and enhance the impact and sustainability of ECE technical cooperation. In 2018, ECE participated in or co-led two mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support strategy missions, in Albania, from 16 to 20 April, and in Serbia, from 3 to 7 September.

IV. Smart and sustainable cities for all ages

50. The ECE region is one of the most highly urbanized in the world, with close to 50 per cent of the population in Central Asia, and more than 75 per cent in Europe and 80 per cent in North America, concentrated in urban areas. Urbanization is expected to increase further, in particular in Central Asia. In such economies, the increased importance of cities will be part of the overall structural transformation supporting the growth of higher incomes and the emergence of new productive patterns.

51. Urbanization presents obvious challenges, including in relation to resource depletion, waste generation, climate change mitigation, disaster resilience, the supply of food and energy, urban transport and others. However, urban agglomerations are also a major driver of economic dynamism, and they will be reshaped by the possibilities generated by new technologies and the needs of ageing populations. Urbanization offers the potential for significant benefits resulting from economies of scale, improved access to infrastructure and better opportunities to share knowledge.

52. Solutions to many complex sustainable development problems, including in relation to the need to devise sustainable and healthy mobility alternatives, increase energy efficiency and reduce pollution, require the development and implementation of appropriate actions at the city level. In all countries, cities will remain a focus of the key challenges that the ECE region will face.

53. Building on its expertise in the areas of urban development, housing and land management, the environment, disaster risk reduction, energy, transport, innovation

and competitiveness, trade, agricultural standards and population, ECE promotes a holistic, integrated, cross-sectoral approach that advances the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda. Given the centrality of cities to sustainable development in the region, sustainable and smart cities for all ages have been identified as one of the high-impact areas around which cross-sectoral work has coalesced in the ECE.

54. Global problems will require the implementation of solutions at the local level. This is clearly the case regarding climate change. Energy performance in buildings, which accounts for 40 per cent of global energy demand, will need to improve dramatically to accelerate climate mitigation efforts.

55. In 2018, ECE strengthened the knowledge base and enhanced international cooperation in this critical area. Initiatives included studies mapping the use of energy efficiency standards and technologies in buildings in the region. Countries that have achieved significant progress in energy efficiency technology deployment have done so through a comprehensive and consistent policy approach to developing and implementing building standards.

56. A strong research effort that generates results that are generally accepted and translated into policy actions is enhanced by collaboration with multiple partners. In 2018, ECE launched the Global Building Network, which will conduct the research, communication, dissemination of information and education necessary for the implementation of the Commission's framework guidelines for energy efficiency standards in buildings. Participating centres have already been established in Belgium, Canada, Ireland and the United States of America to advance research, education and on-the-ground implementation for high-performance building materials, design and construction.

57. Reducing material intensity and stepping up decarbonization efforts demand imaginative responses that explore the potential of alternative construction materials. ECE promotes the use of wood in construction as a renewable, low-carbon material that can support the transition to a circular economy. Initiatives in 2018 included mobilizing Government and forest industry stakeholder commitments to building the future with forests and highlighting the contribution that innovative wood-based buildings can make to climate action in the context of the 24th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

58. Waste management is one of the key challenges faced by countries and cities, with important implications for environmental sustainability and quality of life. ECE, through its programme of environmental performance reviews, provides recommendations on how to reduce the environmental impact of waste, encourage reuse and recycling and create efficient waste management mechanisms. Reviews of Kazakhstan and North Macedonia were concluded in 2018, while a review of Uzbekistan is being finalized.

59. Voluntary standards can support efforts to promote sustainable cities and communities. ECE work contributes to sharing information on the use of such standards and identifying lessons derived from their practical application and the conditions necessary for the replication of successful experiences. In 2018, a compilation of case studies was prepared that covered a large scope of policy issues in various countries.

60. Housing shapes cities and the life of their populations. The Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing is a non-legally binding document that is aimed at supporting member States as they seek to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all. Geneva Charter centres advance the Charter by carrying out various activities, including the dissemination of information and the organization of

capacity-building and networking events and specific projects on the ground, to improve the quality of life in cities. In 2018, the fourth Geneva Charter Centre of Excellence was established in Vienna, joining centres in Tirana; Tallinn; and Glasgow, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

61. The principles and recommendations of the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing have also spurred legal changes in ECE member countries. A recent example are the laws on rental housing and housing relations promulgated in Ukraine, which also reflected the policy recommendations made in an ECE study on social housing in the ECE Region.

62. ECE, together with the WHO Regional Office for Europe, supports an approach to establishing linkages among policies on transport, health and the environment through its Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme. It includes guidance on how sustainable transport can be part of land-use planning not only in cities but also in peri-urban and rural areas. The Programme also provides information on the development of partnerships among member States and international organizations to implement specific policies, such as the identification and promotion of green jobs in the transport sector. “Relay race” workshops have helped in the sharing of good practices and policy recommendations on clean and healthy transport in a number of cities in the region. Among the topics covered in the workshops have been eco-driving, walking and cycling. In 2018, the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme contributed to strengthening capacities for the integration of transport, health and environmental objectives into urban and spatial planning policies in Central Asian countries.

63. An integrated approach also informs ECE policy advisory services, which encompass a wide range of issues relating to sustainable urban development. The recommendations contained in the country profiles on the housing sector have given rise to legal and policy changes in the countries concerned. By the end of 2018, more than 70 national policy documents, including laws, strategic programmes and action plans, were developed and/or updated by ECE member States on the basis of the recommendations provided in the country profiles.

64. Older populations have particular needs in relation to urban environments regarding, for example, housing and transport systems. Ageing has multiple policy implications, which are addressed in the ECE road maps for mainstreaming ageing. ECE is completing such a road map for Belarus, which will add to the existing ones for Armenia, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

65. The rise of the knowledge economy and digitalization are generating new possibilities for employment and the organization of production, with implications for urban planning. The search for new models of sustainable urban development that harness the potential of innovative information and communication technologies to shape smart, sustainable cities is a well-established policy trend. The use of technology can create an enabling, networked environment where new solutions and forms of collaboration are possible.

66. ECE, together with the International Telecommunication Union and other United Nations bodies and relevant stakeholders, has developed a set of key performance indicators for smart sustainable cities within the framework of the United for Smart Sustainable Cities initiative. The indicators establish criteria to evaluate the contributions of information and communications technology to making cities smarter and more sustainable and providing cities with the means for self-assessment. The number of cities using the indicators has increased to more than 50, thus supporting local authorities’ efforts to monitor progress in harnessing the potential of technology and stakeholder engagement for sustainable development.

67. Cities are exposed to a number of risks that need to be managed carefully. ECE has been promoting the development and implementation of normative frameworks and guidelines that are aimed at reducing the risks and consequences of industrial accidents, including for urban agglomerations. In 2018, 35 ECE countries agreed on actions to strengthen the integration of procedures for land-use planning, industrial safety, environmental assessments and public participation, thus fostering the implementation of the recommendations of the ECE publication *Guidance on Land-Use Planning, the Siting of Hazardous Activities and related Safety Aspects* and enhancing disaster resilience.

68. In order to increase the involvement of local decision makers and raise greater awareness of existing ECE instruments, the Day of Cities was held in Geneva on 8 April 2019, bringing together 50 mayors from 33 ECE member States. The mayors and deputy mayors presented practical solutions to improve the quality of life of people and the efficiency of urban operations, services and competitiveness. They also highlighted the importance of engaging with local authorities for achieving the Goals.

69. The ensuing sixty-eighth session of ECE, held in Geneva on 9 and 10 April, featured a round table on regional and national solutions for smart sustainable cities, at which ECE instruments and national approaches were presented, covering four segments: measuring performance; the circular economy and innovation policies; road safety and sustainable transport; and reducing the environmental footprint.

70. Inspired by the outcome of the events and pursuing the policy directions set by its member States, ECE will continue to foster cross-sectoral policy integration and multi-stakeholder engagement to make cities smarter and more sustainable, with an improved quality of life for residents of all ages.

V. Leveraging partnerships for sustainable development

71. ECE works with a number of regional and subregional organizations with the aim of combining efforts, ensuring mutual benefits and avoiding overlap and duplication. The forms of cooperation, which are quite varied, include the development of joint programmes of work, support for particular normative instruments and narrower forms of collaboration on specific activities or the dissemination of outputs.

72. The partnership with FAO on forest issues is the oldest, having been forged in the early years of the creation of ECE. It is also the strongest and the most structured, leading to joint intergovernmental bodies, a joint programme of work covering a large number of knowledge products and activities and joint sessions of the intergovernmental bodies of both organizations.

73. In the area of the environment, ECE works closely with WHO.. Led jointly by the Environment and Sustainable Transport Divisions of ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, the Pan-European Programme provides a unique policy framework to encourage national Governments and municipal authorities to consider the health and environmental impacts of transport policy and planning.

74. Recent work under the Programme has been focused on the follow-up to the outcomes of the Fourth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment, held in Paris from 14 to 16 April 2014, and the preparation for the Fifth High-level Meeting, to be held in Vienna from 22 to 24 October 2019. The forthcoming meeting will cover issues such as decarbonization, the contribution of sustainable mobility to the economy in terms of job creation and how urban and transport planning can work

in synergy. A pan-European master plan for cycling promotion is expected to be adopted.

75. The Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, jointly served by ECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, has had its role as a powerful tool consolidated to advance the implementation of the Goals on water, sanitation and health in the pan-European region. Most of the parties to the Protocol and many other States have been working to set or revise and implement their national targets on water and health to align them with the 2030 Agenda.

76. A long-standing collaboration with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has supported the implementation of ECE normative environmental work in various areas. A network of 60 Aarhus centres, operating in 14 countries and supporting the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, has been established as a result of the partnership between both organizations. In 2018, ECE and OSCE collaborated on fostering legal changes in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to advance the implementation of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment. The work, including further promotion of strategic environmental assessment in other Central Asian countries, is expected to continue.

77. The partnership between ECE and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on environmental matters covers multiple areas. ECE is a member of the Bureau of the Green Economy and Environment Action Programme Task Force, which supports the countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe in their efforts to reconcile their economic and environmental goals.

78. ECE develops its work on regulatory cooperation and standardization in close cooperation with other international organizations, including the World Trade Organization, the International Organization for Standardization and OECD. It has collaborated with the International Trade Centre (ITC) on several initiatives, in particular in the area of gender-responsive and voluntary sustainability standards. It has promoted the implementation of standards for the reduction of disaster risk, in close cooperation with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

79. ECE work on trade facilitation is carried out in close cooperation with multiple partners, in particular other regional commissions. For example, a global survey on trade facilitation is regularly conducted jointly with other commissions. ECE collaborates with other key regional and international players, such as OSCE, the Eurasian Economic Commission, the African Development Bank, ITC and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, in several advisory services projects to support the Caucasus, Central Asian, Eastern European and Western Balkans countries in assessing trade facilitation needs and implementing necessary reforms.

80. In many areas of the Commission's work, the private sector is the direct or indirect beneficiary of its recommendations and standards. Therefore, the quality of the Commission's outputs and their acceptance depend heavily on the engagement of the private sector. Examples of such partnerships include the Public-Private Partnership Business Advisory Board, which provides technical advice on a pro bono basis to Governments on their public-private partnership projects and business environment; multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder project teams for developing best practices in the agriculture trade; and the trade facilitation recommendations on public-private partnerships under the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business.

VI. Conclusion

81. Progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires action in multiple policy areas. Given the scale of the changes necessary, it is crucial that emphasis be placed on how to accelerate the pace of transformation and make a maximum impact.

82. The Commission's varied normative outputs and policy frameworks can make an important contribution to supporting national policy efforts and guiding the decisions of economic actors in accordance with sustainable development needs. Such normative work is relevant for all ECE member States, providing the key channel for engaging with high-income countries on sustainable development issues.

83. A cross-sectoral perspective that fully takes into account the linkages between various Goals is necessary for the identification of accelerators and multipliers that will increase the effectiveness of actions. The nexus approach adopted by the Secretariat is a forward-looking initiative that reflects the integrated character of the 2030 Agenda and will translate the perspective into specific deliverables.

84. The Goals present the opportunity for ECE to adapt its technical cooperation services to the demands of member States for cross-sectoral and integrated advice. The nexus approach will allow ECE to offer to its member States more integrated technical cooperation services that can help them to navigate the complexity of the 2030 Agenda and its interlinkages. Such an approach may lead to more stable sources of funding that would facilitate planning and the implementation of a coherent vision for technical cooperation that is closely linked with ECE normative work.

85. Progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda will depend on the mobilization of multiple stakeholders. ECE benefits greatly from its successful efforts towards engaging with multiple partners in their work. In particular, the Commission's knowledge base relies heavily on the ability to draw on a very large network of experts across multiple fields. ECE will continue to reach out to various partners to provide a solid foundation for its work, facilitate the dissemination of its outputs and encourage collective action in support of the 2030 Agenda.