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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region

#### Sixth session

Geneva, 6 and 7 April 2022

## Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its sixth session

### Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Attendance.....	1–7	2
II. Opening and adoption of the agenda.....	8–12	3–4
III. High-level policy segment: “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe Region” .....	13–15	4
IV. Plenary session: Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery .....	16–27	4–6
V. Closing .....	28–29	6
<b>Annex</b>		
Chair’s summary of the discussions .....	1–99	7–19



## I. Attendance

1. The sixth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region was held as a hybrid meeting at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 6 and 7 April 2022. The session was chaired by the Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan, Edil Baisalov.
2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 53 States members of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.
3. The following non-member States of ECE attended: Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Morocco, and Peru. The non-member observer State of Palestine also attended the session.
4. The European Union was represented by the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva. The European Commission, the European Investment Bank and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights also participated.
5. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations and initiatives attended the meeting: Economic Commission for Africa, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Headquarters, United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers, United Nations World Tourism Organization, World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme and World Meteorological Organization. Resident coordinators and representatives from resident coordinators' offices from 13 programme countries in the region also attended.
6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the session: Asian Development Bank, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, Commonwealth, Council of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe, Eurasian Development Bank, Eurasian Economic Commission, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Forest Institute, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Regional Cooperation Council and Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus.
7. Representatives of about 200 non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of academia, the private sector, human rights institutions, and other organizations also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the regional forum (<https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2022>).

## II. Opening and adoption of the agenda

8. The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda for the session, as contained in document [ECE/RFSD/2022/1](#).

9. In his opening remarks, the Chair emphasized that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had a profound impact on efforts towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also mentioned the severe conflict in the region that threatened to further set back the insufficient progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Peace was a prerequisite for sustainable development, as enshrined in the preamble of the 2030 Agenda. Kyrgyzstan had integrated the Goals into its national development policy through a recent national development plan approved until 2026. Considering that a large share of the Kyrgyz population comprised children and young adults, the President of the country announced the new national objective of raising the standards of education and health care for children and young adults. He indicated that, in order to achieve the objective, measures such as higher salaries and increased training opportunities for teachers had been put in place. An unprecedented rise in food, fuel and other commodity prices were having an impact on the country, but the Government was focusing its efforts on softening the external shock experienced by the most vulnerable communities.

10. In her video message, the Deputy Secretary-General highlighted that the war in Ukraine was causing human suffering on a massive scale and was responsible for the displacement of millions of people both internally and to neighbouring countries. The military conflict not only affected the region, but also had repercussions on a global level. Supply chains had been disrupted, and prices for food, energy, transport, and other essential supplies had skyrocketed, threatening food security. A redoubling of efforts was needed to rescue the sustainable development agenda and build a just transition as the region sought a pathway for peace. She stated that the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change would provide the moment for countries across the region to deliver on their commitments. A just transition included food systems that were more sustainable and resilient, as highlighted at the United Nations Food Systems Summit to support national food systems transformation pathways. In addition, harnessing the potential of digital tools in education, work and health was also necessary for a just transition. Inequalities with regard to digital connectivity within and between countries must be addressed to prevent a digital divide and increasing marginalization. Following the pandemic, ongoing for more than two years, countries would need to build resilience against such crises. The pandemic must mark a watershed moment to ensure universal health coverage and build more resilient public health and surveillance systems. Finally, it was essential to tackle inequality across the region and invest in people, as one in five individuals in the region experienced multidimensional poverty. The meeting of the Regional Collaborative Platform allowed the adoption of an ambitious work plan and concrete deliverables to support countries across the region.

11. The Executive Secretary of ECE underscored that the war had radically changed the outlook for sustainable development in the region. However, challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda had already been present before the conflict started. Available data showed that the region would achieve only 26 of the targets of the Goals by 2030, which represented a quarter of all the targets for which there was sufficient evidence. Income inequality was worsening in many countries and advances on nutrition and on a sustainable food supply had been insufficient. The region had made good progress in the context of access to basic services, such as drinking water and energy, but it must speed up progress on sanitation, water quality and water-use efficiency. The green transition was well under way – reliance on renewable energy had increased and energy efficiency had improved. However, the pace of the transition must increase, and fossil fuel consumption needed to be drastically diminished. Infrastructure development was critical for the green transition, which required additional investments and increased collaboration. Finally, gender equality was central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but progress was well behind what was required, with only one gender-related target being on track.

12. The Vice-Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia and Regional Director of the United Nations Development Programme highlighted the fact

that in order to better support acceleration towards achieving the Goals, the United Nations regional development architecture had been reviewed in the past years. Some of the key steps and achievements in 2021 included: further development of a strong knowledge management hub; reporting on collective achievements to increase transparency and results-based reporting in the region; consolidation of capacities on data and statistics; and increased regional efficiencies. Issue-based coalitions and other regional inter-agency groups were the main vehicle for gathering United Nations system-wide expertise in response to identified regional and national development challenges. Priority actions for 2022 to support United Nations country teams were also stressed, including: implementation of green transition- and climate change-related initiatives; development of policies and the provision of guidance on food security issues; advisory systems on emerging issues having a potential impact on social protection systems; regional advocacy on priority health issues; efficient and coordinated response to the refugee and internal displacement crisis; implementation of the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere; and improvement of knowledge management throughout the region.

### **III. High-level policy segment: “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe Region”**

13. The keynote address at the high-level policy segment was delivered by the Research Director and Deputy Director of the Stockholm Environment Institute and member of the Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 *Global Sustainable Development Report*, Åsa Persson, which was followed by a high-level plenary debate.

14. Delegations representing the Governments of the following countries took part in the plenary debate: Ukraine, Turkmenistan, France (as presidency of the Council of the European Union), Romania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cyprus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, United States, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Netherlands, Kyrgyzstan, Czechia, Austria, Armenia, Bulgaria, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Russian Federation. A mayor, a representative of civil society and a representative of youth reported back on preparatory meetings and consultations.

15. The Chair’s summary contained in the annex to the present report provides the main issues raised during the segment. Written statements are available on the website of the Regional Forum.<sup>1</sup>

### **IV. Plenary session: Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery**

16. At the outset of the plenary session, the Chair introduced the key messages from the virtual peer learning sessions. A multi-stakeholder panel discussion on policy coherence and a plenary debate ensued.

17. The multi-stakeholder panel was composed of the following speakers: Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry for Ecological Transition, Directorate General for Sustainable Growth and the Quality of Development, Italy, Andrea Innamorati; Head of Office for Sustainable Development, Secretariat-General of the Government of Montenegro, Aneta Kankaras; Advocacy Manager, ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey, on behalf of civil society, Biljana Ginova.

18. Delegations representing the Governments of the following countries took part in the plenary debate: Albania (Ombudswomen), Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russian Federation. The following also participated in the debate: Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization,

<sup>1</sup> See <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2022>.

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, European Investment Bank, Council of Europe and ECE.

19. A summary of the discussions held during the session and the virtual peer learning round tables<sup>2</sup> is contained in the annex to the present report.

## Outcomes of the virtual peer learning round tables

### First set of round tables

*Session 1: Regaining the momentum: advancing inclusion policies and strategies in the context of COVID-19*

20. The session was moderated by Professor of Education, University of Manchester, Mel Ainscow. Presentations on policy actions were given by the following: Albania; Germany; Finland; Kazakhstan; Serbia; Switzerland; Turkey; Uzbekistan; Georgian Network of Women with Disabilities; Kyrgyz Indigo; workers and trade unions major group; Stakeholder Group on Ageing; UNESCO; and United Nations Children's Fund.

*Session 2: Enhancing ocean literacy and the sustainable development of regional seas*

21. The session was moderated by the Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Ana Luiza M. Thompson Flores. Presentations on policy actions were given by the following: Greece; Montenegro; ACTeon; ANACOM (Portugal); Ciência Viva (Portugal); UNESCO; and Mediterranean Action Plan of UNEP.

*Session 3: Data and statistics for sustainable development*

22. The session was moderated by the following: Expert in External Relations and Cooperation and the Sustainable Development Goals, National Institute of Statistics, Portugal, Carolina Fresta dos Santos; and Director of Data Use, Development Initiatives, Claudia Wells. Presentations on policy actions were given by the following: Turkey; United Kingdom; Alcohol and Illicit Drugs & Prison Health, European Office for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, World Health Organization; Danish Institute for Human Rights; Joint Research Centre, European Commission; European Trade Union Confederation; Israel Meteorological Service; School of Data; and WHO.

*Session 4: Accelerating digital development through multistakeholder partnerships*

23. The session was moderated by the following: Head, Regional Office for Europe, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Jaroslav Ponder; Director, Regional Office for the Commonwealth of Independent States, ITU, Natalia Mochu; and Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade, ECE, Elisabeth Tuerk. Presentations on policy actions were given by the following: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Georgia; Italy; Kazakhstan; Slovenia; United Kingdom; Uzbekistan; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts; European Commission; European Disability Forum; Generation Connect Europe and CIS Youth Groups, ITU; International Disability Forum; and Union of Operators of Armenia.

<sup>2</sup> Further information on the eight virtual peer learning sessions, including lead organizers, speakers, outlines, and recordings, are available at <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/round-tables-regional-forum-2022>.

## Second set of round tables

### *Session 5: Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic*

24. The session was moderated by the Director, Federal Office for Gender Equality, Switzerland, Sylvie Durrer. Presentations on policy actions were given by the following: Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Portugal; Republic of Moldova; Uzbekistan; Borusan Mannesmann (Turkey); Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Council of Europe; Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS; Regional Cooperation Council; Standards Council of Canada; Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

### *Session 6: Action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems*

25. The following moderated the session: Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Ana Luiza M. Thompson Flores; Director, Environment Division, ECE, Marco Keiner; and, Director, Europe Office UNEP, Bruno G. Pozzi. Policy actions presented by the following: Czechia; Georgia; Slovenia, Uzbekistan; European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; European Environmental Bureau; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, UNEP, UNESCO.

### *Session 7: Urban forests for future proof cities*

26. The session was moderated by Urban Forestry Officer, Forestry Division, FAO, Simone Borelli. Presentations on action policy were given by Albania; France; Georgia; Slovenia; Switzerland; ArboCityNet; European Commission; European Environmental Bureau; ForestaMi; International Forestry Students' Association; Trees for Cities; United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat).

### *Session 8: Rebalancing people, planet, and prosperity: ESD as key enabler for the 17 SDGs and Agenda 2030*

27. The session was moderated by Policy and Partnerships Coordinator, UNEP, Wondwosen Asnake Kibret. Presentations on policy actions were given by: Denmark; Finland; Georgia; Germany; Hungary; Israel; Netherlands; European Commission; Masaryk University; ECE Education for Sustainable Development Youth Platform; ECE Steering Committee for Education for Sustainable Development; and Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change.

## V. Closing

28. In her closing remarks, the Executive Secretary highlighted her appreciation for the fact that member States and other stakeholders had renewed their commitment to sustainable development in the challenging circumstances arising from the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. She called for peace, regional cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, the Forum had managed to further increase its reach and accessibility by offering interpretation and sign language interpretation throughout the sessions. The meeting represented the annual culmination of the multiple engagements ECE aimed to develop with its member States and other stakeholders throughout the year.

29. Before closing the meeting, the Chair underlined that only a culture of peace, dialogue and exchange would help the region to move forward with its common goals. The Forum was a reminder of the broad benefits of multilateral cooperation, which must be preserved even in the most difficult times. He further informed participants that the draft report of the Regional Forum, including the Chair's summary of the discussions, would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the ECE region to the high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, to be held from 5 to 7 and 11 to 15 July 2022.

## Annex

### Chair's summary of the discussions

#### **High-level policy segment on the theme “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe region”**

1. At the outset of the high-level policy segment, the keynote speaker drew attention to the global changing context for sustainable development that had been created by the pandemic, with setbacks that in some areas, like education, may leave long-lasting scars. Poverty and wealth inequality have increased, with negative consequences in the context of many of the Sustainable Development Goals. The war in Ukraine and its regional and global implications present new threats for sustainable development.
2. Some positive developments have taken place since the issuance of the publication entitled *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*. Net zero targets covering almost 90 per cent of emissions have been adopted. There is increasing awareness by the general public about the Goals and related knowledge-generation by academia.
3. Sustainability science has developed a range of methods that allow policymakers or companies to self-assess how their proposed actions lead to synergies or trade-offs between the Goals, which are very context dependent. However, these methods are not sufficiently used.
4. The *Global Sustainable Development Report* to be issued in 2023 will be aimed at reviewing and providing pathways to achieve the Goals, by synthesizing and assessing relevant scientific literature and drawing on examples and practices by States and non-state actors. The focus of the report will be on acceleration. Building on the previous analytical framework, a transformation pathway will be suggested for considering how the impact of efforts can be maximized, including by removing existent impediments and developing capacities. Interventions must be sequenced for maximum impact, stimulating self-reinforcing change and positive feedback loops. A systemic view that considers dynamic effects over time is necessary. A stronger science-policy interface that co-generates knowledge and answers practical demands, can play an important role in accelerating achievement of the Goals.
5. Despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine, participants reaffirmed their commitment to the values and goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Multiple initiatives have been undertaken in the region to address the negative consequences of the pandemic, in particular on health, education, gender equality and on the most vulnerable, including by strengthening social protection systems. Some economic sectors that were particularly strongly hit have received special assistance. United Nations country teams, for example in the Republic of Moldova, have supported the preparation of recovery plans. The pandemic gave a new impulse to digitalization, including in the public sector; however, it also raised concerns about exclusion and the need to develop digital skills, prompting new initiatives, such as in Bulgaria.
6. Regardless of the difficult circumstances caused by the pandemic, efforts continued with regard to integrating the Goals into policies, strategies, and action plans. Coordination and monitoring mechanisms have been refined and strengthened. Institutional changes have sometimes been aimed at broadening the engagement of stakeholders, as in the new council established in Bosnia and Herzegovina for monitoring implementation of the Goals.
7. With less than a decade left to achieve the Goals, there is a need to focus on systematic change and areas of transformation that will help to accelerate progress. The necessary transformation requires systematic approaches and integrated policy responses, bringing



together different policy areas, as problems cannot be solved in isolation. Changes in the institutional structures of Governments, as in the case of Germany, may facilitate the connection between environment and economy.

8. Sectoral initiatives have been undertaken to foster the green transformation in different countries, reflecting the structure of national economies. Efforts to address climate change also require actions at the local level. In some cases, Governments work closely with local authorities to empower them to adopt nature-based strategies, as done recently in Israel. Climate change adaptation should be part of these efforts, as emphasized throughout initiatives in Czechia.

9 Voluntary national reviews can serve to enhance policy coherence and address trade-offs in Goal initiatives, including between climate actions and COVID-19 recovery measures, as exemplified in Greece. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, such as in the recent voluntary national reviews in Georgia, remains critical.

10. Science and education can play an important role in guiding actions and creating the conditions for sustainable development. In Cyprus, the Goals have been placed at the heart of the educational system, and in Portugal new initiatives on ocean literacy have been developed. In Armenia, a new State education programme is under preparation. Education is critical for equal opportunities, but these require specific support, targeting the most vulnerable. Dealing with this complex challenge requires the involvement of many stakeholders, as in the case of the Dutch Alliance for education.

11. Appropriate financing remains a critical element. It is important to ensure that adequate provisions are made, including by reflecting action plans in medium-term expenditure frameworks, as has been done in Azerbaijan. As public resources will be insufficient, efforts to attract private financing will remain critical. In the context of Goal 17 on global partnerships, initiatives by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland include engaging the private sector in order to help raise necessary resources.

12. Good quality data is essential for monitoring progress. In Romania, a mechanism has been developed to offer information to policymakers in real time. The monitoring instrument serves to examine and collect data on the Goals and their degree of implementation, thus facilitating the development of accurate strategies and policies. Strong work on developing monitoring and accounting indicators is ongoing in Kyrgyzstan. Implementation reports, supported by evidence, serve as points of reference in national debates, raise awareness and contribute to accountability, as for example in Austria. In Switzerland, a digital tool has been introduced to facilitate gathering inputs for monitoring from all parties, thus strengthening coordination and coherence in the evaluation of progress.

13. Building partnerships among a wide range of actors at the local, national, and regional levels and promoting a better understanding of the Goals among citizens remains critical. Global crises demand global responses. Therefore, a strong multilateral system is key to advancing the full implementation of the Goals. Despite the difficult circumstances, participants recognized the value of ECE as the platform to forge cohesion, enhance policy coherence and facilitate peer learning on sustainable development in the region.

14. At the ECE second Forum of Mayors,<sup>1</sup> mayors shared city experiences on people-centred solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of their citizens and ensure the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The focus was on four key global challenges identified in the Geneva Declaration of Mayors: sustainable urban transport, shared mobility, and safer roads; vibrant public spaces, greener cities, and nature-based solutions; resilient, healthy, and climate-neutral buildings and affordable and adequate housing; and sustainable urban planning, including the concept of the 15-Minute City and smart urban development solutions.

<sup>1</sup> The second Forum of Mayors was held on 4 and 5 April 2022, immediately prior to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region, as mandated by the ECE Executive Committee, which also decided that the Forum of Mayors in 2022 would report both to the Regional Forum and the Committee on Urban Development and Housing Management. An advance unedited version of the summary of the Forum of Mayors is available at <https://forumofmayors.unece.org/>.



15. The mayors saw the pandemic as an opportunity to develop creative solutions to build back better. The integration of the Goals at the local and national levels makes it possible to have common objectives and exploit synergies. Many cities have developed plans regarding the Goals or undertaken commitments to become climate neutral by 2030. A participatory approach is essential for responding to the needs of citizens and overcoming resistance to change.

16. Civil society representatives stressed strongly the negative consequences of the war in Ukraine for all the Goals, including the detrimental effect on education (Goal 4), gender equality and women's human rights (Goal 5) and the environment (Goals 14 and 15). In the context of presenting the outcomes of the Youth Forum, representatives called for fully including young people in decision-making processes, while drawing attention to the multiple forms of discrimination they experience, in particular, young people with disabilities, and highlighting the urgency of addressing systemic factors that prevent progress with regard to the Goals.

17. Many member States stressed that there could not be sustainable development without peace, which was also a precondition for international cooperation. Ukraine described the devastation brought about by the military aggression of the Russian Federation and how it had set back efforts to advance the Goals. The United States of America expressed its solidarity with the people of Ukraine while France, on behalf of the European Union and its member States, strongly condemned the actions of the Russian Federation as an act of aggression that violated international law. Other States members of the European Union that took the floor aligned themselves with the statement made by France. Georgia drew attention to the need to respect international law and the Republic of Moldova condemned the act of war launched against Ukraine. Israel called on the Russian Federation to stop the attacks while Switzerland and the United Kingdom joined other countries in condemning the military aggression of the Russian Federation. Belarus drew attention to the negative impact of sanctions on the population in and beyond the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region and the need to preserve cooperation. The Russian Federation rejected all allegations made by those who condemned its actions and stressed that sanctions were undermining the achievement of the Goals.<sup>2</sup>

## Outcomes of the peer learning round tables

### (a) First set of round tables

*Session 1: Regaining the momentum: advancing inclusion policies and strategies in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*

18. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted stronger reliance on connectivity and the digitalization of education, with teaching and learning moving to virtual spaces. Education systems need to provide greater resilience through innovation in order to prepare for future crises and mitigate further learning disruptions, including through digital learning for all. Data on and evidence and analysis of these disruptions during the pandemic have offered lessons that should be used to ensure continuity of learning, including by introducing more flexible curricula and assessments at all levels of learning.

19. Education must better reflect the evolution and transformation happening in society. Connectivity is key to supporting the right to education, contributing to the implementation of global commitments, and providing new opportunities for inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, the growing use and reliance on technology for education also brings multiple challenges and risks related to increased learning inequality, exclusion and inadequate digital skills and competencies, especially among women and girls. The language barriers faced by migrant and refugee populations and the most vulnerable populations present additional difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> Full statements have been posted online as received by the Secretariat and requested by member States. See <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2022>.

20. Committed, collaborative, evidence-based policy planning should involve multi-stakeholder consultations and partnerships. Inclusiveness should be a goal, both in policies and practices, in order to address barriers facing learners in particular circumstances. Education providers should have autonomy in the assessment of their contexts and use of resources. Teachers and other education personnel should enjoy decent working conditions. Social dialogue, while upholding the rights of teachers, is essential. Flexible curricula and teaching methods are critical for quality and inclusive education.

21. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the fundamental right to education as a public and common good. In this regard, it is imperative that the necessary investments be made for education systems to be inclusive and resilient. Participatory approaches bringing together different stakeholders will facilitate cohesion and integration, including of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Attention should be paid to the whole life cycle of learning and to the importance of investing in early years education as well as acknowledging the learning needs of aging population.

22. Vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, minorities, learners with special needs and refugees should receive particular attention. A gender perspective should be mainstreamed through all education policies. Connectivity for all schools and the provision of digital resources to students in all grades should be prioritized. Appropriate investment in professional learning and support of teachers are necessary, together with the financing of evidence-based measures, to facilitate inclusion. Regardless of their age, circumstances, backgrounds or characteristics, every person has the right to lifelong learning. The Transforming Education Summit, to be held in September 2022, is a key initiative of Our Common Agenda and provides an opportunity to reignite global efforts to deliver the education-related Sustainable Development Goals.

*Session: 2: Enhancing ocean literacy and the sustainable development of regional seas*

23. Oceans cover 72 per cent of the surface of the planet and constitute more than 95 per cent of the biosphere. They provide a substantial share of the global population with food and livelihoods and support transport means for 80 per cent of global trade. However, human activities are seriously taxing the resilience of the marine and coastal resource base. Overfishing and pollution contribute to the loss of biodiversity and the decline in the provision of environmental services. Climate change is having a negative impact on the foundations of coastal development and undermining maritime ecosystems.

24. It is essential to increase awareness of the critical role oceans play as the life support system of the planet and humankind and to develop a good understanding of how human behaviour influences them. However, these issues are not sufficiently considered in national curricula.

25. A number of initiatives and projects are aimed at enhancing ocean literacy. Some examples include the network of blue schools promoted by the European Commission to bring the ocean to the classrooms. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has launched a proposal for a new blue curriculum that includes not only ways to increase knowledge about the oceans but is also aimed at increasing the competences, skills, and nature-connectedness of students. Partnerships with the local community, engagement with all stakeholders and recognition of the different specificities of countries and regions are essential to advance ocean literacy and bring about the behavioural changes necessary for the sustainable management of ocean resources. A good example is the European Ocean Coalition (EU4Ocean), which connects diverse organizations, projects and people that contribute to ocean literacy and the sustainable management of the ocean.

26. Oceans have been perceived as a means of free resource extraction and waste dumping without consideration of the environmental costs in economic calculations. The “blue economy” provides an alternative development model to incorporate ocean values and services in decision-making processes.

27. The Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is aimed at supporting ocean-based economic, social, and environmental benefits in a sustainable way. The intention is to enhance decision-making, enabling the

development and implementation of sustainable, climate-resilient, and inclusive blue economy policies, strategies and solutions that reduce human impacts and support the sound use of marine and coastal ecosystems and their many services.

28. The five pan-European regional seas provide an opportunity for developing sustainable, resilient and inclusive blue economies at the basin level. Support for the joint implementation of management measures and tools, such as marine protected areas and other marine conservation measures, marine spatial planning, and integrated coastal zone management, contribute to reaping the benefits of sustainable blue economies. Restoration actions in the context of the United Nations Decade for Ecosystems Restoration (2021–2030) are also of great importance. The resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP entitled “End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument” represents a ground-breaking commitment to support the global ocean community and regional seas in addressing one of the key challenges of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, loss of biodiversity and climate change.

29. Ocean monitoring, data collection and research translate into knowledge, creating new opportunities for a sustainable blue economy, peaceful transboundary cooperation, and social cohesion. Information and communication technologies play a critical role in ocean and climate monitoring, as well as in disaster warning. Long-term monitoring, data sharing, information and knowledge and improved context-specific forecasts – including early warning systems to predict more extreme El Niño and/or La Niña events, tropical cyclones, and marine heatwaves – can help to manage the negative impacts of ocean changes. Technologies can also promote a smart approach to modern and inclusive ocean governance. More case studies and success stories of individual sustainable blue economy projects are needed to raise awareness of and promote the sustainable blue economy paradigm shift.

30. Partnerships help to create necessary networks for the development of science and knowledge. Transboundary and regional cooperation are needed to prevent pollution and the depletion of ocean resources. Moreover, the broad engagement of civil society, the private sector, local authorities, Governments, and international organizations, including in support of multilateral environmental agreements, is crucial for preserving the ocean “we need for the future we want”.

### *Session 3: Data and statistics for sustainable development*

31. Tracking progress towards implementation of the Goals involves the use of relevant, timely and sufficiently granular data for identifying areas, groups or regions that risk being left behind. These data requirements are too vast to be covered by official statistics alone. In order to leave no one behind, cooperation and partnerships between all possible data producers are essential. National statistical offices, government agencies, non-governmental institutions, research, and mass media can work together to provide good quality data on vulnerable groups.

32. Identifying who is being left behind from a human rights perspective can provide an input in human rights-based policies and processes. The collaboration between the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and national statistical offices (for example, in Albania and the United Kingdom) shows how to mainstream a human rights-based approach in monitoring the 2030 Agenda. Such cooperation should be encouraged so that international and national human rights data can fill information and data gaps and better identify groups in need of special protection in the region.

33. Citizen-generated data can provide valuable spatially disaggregated insights to sustainable development at the regional and local levels, as demonstrated in the work of the European Commission Joint Research Centre. Local data can mobilize local communities to act on issues that directly concern them, such as waste handling and pollution.

34. A network for collecting and using evidence-based data to develop policies and strategies aimed at migrant populations have resulted from the cooperation between the Presidency of Migration Management in Turkey and local, national, and international institutions. In Kyrgyzstan, a joint project between mass media, artists and the Soros Foundation have provided gender disaggregated femicide data to fill in the data gap in this area.

35. The Health in Prisons European Database, which is the outcome of cooperation between the World Health Organization (WHO) and national authorities, provides data for 53 European region States members of WHO, filling an information void on another group that is often left behind.

36. Improved communication between data producers and users contributes to progress measurement, informed decision-making, transparency and accountability. Good practices include the development of indices, data hubs, unified data policies and strengthening relations with data journalists.

37. Composite indices can be useful to facilitate communication and capture both media and policy attention. While indices provide a very general view, they encourage discussion and dialogue and thus help to develop a better understanding of data which may lead to policy action. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom has developed a health index providing a single measure of health that can be tracked over time and broken down by various geographies and health topics, thus highlighting possible regional disparities and enabling local policy action.

38. The European Trade Union Confederation in cooperation with the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development has elaborated a sustainable growth and decent work index. The tool serves to assess the implementation of Goal 8 in Europe, thus contributing to policy proposals that focus on vulnerable groups at both the regional and national levels.

39. Data hubs and storytelling techniques, as used by Statistics Canada, can help users to understand complex and sometimes overlapping indicator frameworks, translating them into easily interpretable information, accessible through single entry points and open and user-friendly interfaces.

40. A unified policy of the World Meteorological Organization for the international exchange of earth system data was approved at the extraordinary session of the World Meteorological Congress held in October 2021. The new policy covers seven domains and disciplines in a single policy statement that extends beyond the traditional areas of weather, climate, and water data to incorporate also atmospheric composition, oceans, the cryosphere, and space weather. The policy expands from engaging only national meteorological and hydrological services to endorsing relevant data exchange among all partners, including different agencies, the private sector and academia. This integrated approach is aimed at ensuring effective communication to support policy actions, as part of climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. The Israel Meteorological Service provides an example of a good implementation practice aimed at improving early warning systems and weather forecasting capabilities.

41. The global commitment to achieve the Goals requires a global commitment to reporting and sharing data. Bringing different stakeholders and perspectives together to provide data and statistics to monitor, measure and report on progress on the Goals is essential.

#### *Session 4: Accelerating digital development through multi-stakeholder partnerships*

42. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how inequalities can be worsened by the digital divide. Policies focusing on digital inclusion, access, security, skills and sustainability are necessary in order to advance the Goals. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation are required to ensure a human-centred, whole-of-ecosystem digital development.

43. Multistakeholder initiatives, such as the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition,<sup>3</sup> launched with the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology and directly responding to the Secretary-General's Road Map for Digital Cooperation, provide a game-changing opportunity to take a holistic approach, catalyse new partnerships and mobilize the resources needed to connect the 2.9 billion people still unconnected.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/partner2connect/>.

44. To capture the role of information and communications technology (ICT) as a development enabler, special attention should be paid to four pillars: access, adoption, value creation and acceleration through the mobilization of the necessary investments.

45. There is a need to ensure that high-speed, reliable, affordable, and safe Internet connectivity is provided for all communities, including remote and rural areas and countries with particular geographical situations. Appropriate policies and regulations around infrastructure development are needed. New business models can support last-mile connectivity. Unequal infrastructure in households and schools contributes to the digital divide, which mainly affects marginalized children. Partnerships across ministries of education, ministries of information and communications technologies, and regulatory authorities, together with local governments, are of strategic importance to efforts to spur the changes necessary for redressing this situation.

46. Countries should undertake a flexible approach to digital services adapted to end-user needs, including accessibility for persons with disabilities and adaptation to local languages. Targeted communities should be involved in the design and decision-making process. Governments should include science, technology, engineering and mathematics and ICT in education curricula at all levels. Special attention should be given to teachers' digital skills. Personalized and competency-based approaches that include both formal and extracurricular education are needed to advance gender equality.

47. A clear ownership of the digital agenda at the governmental level, together with a unified strategy across all ministries, is of critical importance to fostering digital ecosystems. Multi-stakeholder engagement, the incorporation of market trends and the development of collaborative innovation mechanisms are also necessary.

48. Common interoperable standards facilitate the digitalization of services and sectors. United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business standards for international information exchange in agriculture and food trade are supported by various international organizations and conventions, such as the Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control, Codex Alimentarius, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Digital solutions for sustainable use of resources underwater, such as vessel monitoring tools and electronic reporting, and the guidance provided by the Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange should be widely used. Standards such as eWaste allow for the efficient handling of real time business-to-administration data flows. ICT tools can serve to mitigate the environmental impact of human activities.

49. Investments worth \$428 billion are needed globally to meet connectivity needs by 2030, of which \$33 billion is needed for Europe and Central Asia. Public and private investments must target both supply and demand to close the rural digital divide and increase technology adoption rates. National strategies and coordination mechanisms for multistakeholder partnerships are required to mobilize financing, including through public-private partnerships. International standards developed by international organizations enhance investments and make them secure.

**(b) Second set of round tables**

*Session 5: Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic*

50. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women. It has exacerbated underlying structural inequalities and resulted in increased violence against women, threatening the reversal of decades of progress in the fight against poverty, human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Patriarchal social norms and discriminatory gender practices must be addressed. National institutional gender equality mechanisms and women's and youth organizations need to be sufficiently resourced to drive policy and legal changes and actions for gender equality.

51. Equal participation in political and public life and in decision-making remains crucial. Women have remained largely excluded from the planning of pandemic responses and recovery efforts. Special measures, like quotas, are necessary. Other useful practices are the

“pairing” of women and men appointed to elected seats from party lists following the elections, in proportional systems (“zipper system”).

52. Gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in all policies, services and systems and gender-responsive standards need to be applied to contribute to the elimination of the underlying structural inequalities. Standards should be developed in a participatory way while responding to the specific needs of those who are historically marginalized. Gender-responsive budgeting should be used as a tool to promote more equitable allocation and utilization of financial resources.

53. The effective prevention of gender-based violence, considering the intersectionality of factors such as age, disability, and migration, needs to be prioritized. Important progress has been made in strengthening legal and policy frameworks to address such violence in the region, yet critical shortcomings remain. Gender-responsive budgeting would help to determine the adequate level of funding to deliver the services needed. Initiatives and practices on such budgeting led by civil society organizations needs to be applied in order to be able to plan, support and monitor the implementation of policies preventing violence against women. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence requires full implementation as the most far-reaching international treaty on tackling the issue.

54. In order to achieve the target of the Goals on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, services for sexual and reproductive health and rights should be provided as part of universal health coverage, including for marginalized groups. Services should be tailored to meet the needs of those who are left behind and the capacities of providers should be enhanced. HIV prevention programmes and treatments to meet needs of particular groups should be supported, including though assistance provided to community organizations.

55. Long-standing gender disparities in access to economic resources and opportunities across the region remain. Women are less likely than men to have paid formal employment and are more likely to occupy jobs as frontliners. Women’s access to decent work must be supported. Special measures are needed for women entrepreneurs. Unpaid care and domestic work need to be recognized and equitably redistributed. Special efforts are needed to support the care economy, such as investments in early childhood education and care and paid parental leave policies. Best practices by private companies on alternative childcare for their employees, flexible work schedules and paternity leave need to be replicated. Efforts are needed to change expectations about gender roles and to increase awareness of the contribution that unpaid care work makes to economies.

56. Quality disaggregated data need to be collected and used to inform standards and policies and track progress. The role of alternative data generated by civil society experts to measure achievements and gaps of gender equality should be recognized.

57. The Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for the Europe and Central Asia region shared the collective recommendations from the Civil Society Forum related to gender equality. They include recognizing the important role of women and feminist movements in promoting women’s human rights and gender equality; putting in place a structural dialogue with women’s organizations and supporting them with the necessary resources and space for voicing gender-related needs and priorities; investing in a gender transformative macroeconomic structure with equitable social protection and health systems; investing in creating decent and climate-friendly jobs in the care economy; ensuring that women in all their diversity are included, at all levels, in COVID-19 recovery programmes; and strengthening the participation of women in conflict prevention and peace negotiation processes.

58. In addition to the peer learning round table, a gender-related business dialogue concluded that there was a strong business case for action on gender equality. However, the gap between commitments and implementation remains huge. Disaggregated data within companies is required to allow the identification of inequalities, to fight stereotypes and to encourage women and girls to develop careers in areas where they are less represented. A systematic, collaborative approach that engages male employees is required to address underrepresentation.

*Session 6: Action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems*

59. Progress on Goal 15 in the region has been uneven at best. To date, 75 per cent of all terrestrial ecosystems have been altered by human activity. Land degradation, overfishing and deforestation harm food security and livelihoods. It is therefore imperative to accelerate actions towards the achievement of the Goal.

60. Ecosystem restoration contributes to the achievement of all the Goals and will be an essential element of the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Resilient ecosystems are crucial for securing and enhancing biodiversity, climate change action and human well-being, including health. Member States recognized the importance of resilient ecosystems through the adoption by the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP of resolution [UNEP/EA.5/RES.5](#) on nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development.

61. The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, launched in 2021, is building momentum around commitments to restore 1 billion ha of degraded land by 2030, as well as oceans and coasts. By April 2022, a network of over 100 organizations, five task forces and an advisory board of 30 members was put in place.

62. Strengthening regional cooperation for joint action through multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approaches and partnerships is essential for the achievement of Goal 15 in an integrated manner and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

63. Experience in the context of subregional mountain treaties and transboundary biosphere reserves demonstrates the success of working across borders, establishing ecological corridors and connectivity, and engaging all relevant actors. Nonetheless, success depends on vision, political will, persistence, clear roles for different actors, continuity, and the collection of good data to make the case in favour of funding. Scientific findings and research are important for designing effective restoration actions and informed decision-making. Regional and national legally binding instruments are effective tools, provided they include measurable and time-bound targets, and strong enforcement mechanisms.

64. The engagement of all stakeholders and, critically, the support of local people are key factors for success. Local communities must have a clear understanding of the benefits, including sustainable use, they will reap from ecosystem protection and restoration.

65. Support to farmers, particularly in vulnerable communities, in introducing new soil management technologies, prioritizing climate resilient endemic crops and promoting crop rotation and diversification can help to advance sustainable land management and reverse land degradation.

66. Youth engagement in conservation and restoration efforts contributes to finding innovative solutions for sustainable land-use and ecosystem restoration and helps to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for young people at the local level. The sharing of experiences and building of solidarity building through networks, such as the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Network for the Europe and North America Region, can support youth engagement.

67. Gender-inclusive restoration initiatives and decision-making processes that involve women can facilitate access to resources and provide an opportunity for women's economic empowerment, which ultimately enhances sustainable livelihoods.

68. Findings from the first issue of the *State of Finance for Nature* report show that there is an urgent need to triple investments in nature-based solutions by 2030 and increase capital flows four times by 2050. Meeting these targets requires scaling up private sector finance by leveraging recent commitments to net zero emissions and environmental preservation.

69. The root causes of ecosystems degradation need to be addressed through changes in consumption and production patterns. There is a need to build on existing experiences of change at the national and transboundary levels to accelerate progress and meet the targets of Goal 15 in the region by 2030.



*Session 7: Urban forests for future proof cities*

70. By 2050, over two thirds of humanity will live in cities, which are already responsible for around 75 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. Cities are therefore at the forefront of fighting climate change.

71. Sustainable urban forestry is an integrative and cost-effective nature-based solution that helps to develop greener, healthier, and more resilient cities. Trees and forests in urban and peri-urban areas provide vital benefits for health and well-being, sustainable development, climate adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction. Such solutions contribute not only to sustainable local development but also to national objectives and to most of the Goals.

72. Integrated long-term planning, design and management at the local and national levels are critical to unlocking the multiple co-benefits that urban forestry provides. These should take into consideration the need to enhance ecological linkages, restore degraded areas and save such other valuable ecosystems as grasslands and increase biodiversity. In the context of urban forest master plans, cities can incorporate full consideration of these dynamics and integrate them into city planning processes to promote the greening of existing and future urbanized areas.

73. Policy actions must be aligned across sectors and levels of government to be consistent with urban forestry objectives. Legally binding policies, such as tree cover targets, can be very effective. At the same time, overly prescriptive policies or targets may lead to hasty solutions, such as planting the wrong type of trees in the wrong place. Effective planting programmes require research into future-proof tree species in the face of changing climatic conditions as well as sufficient capacity in tree nurseries.

74. National Governments are well positioned to provide capacity-building and technical assistance to planning and management. Such initiatives may include the development of standards and the collection of baseline geospatial data, which are key tools that enhance city planning and monitoring.

75. Green spaces are not a cost but a good investment for cities and national Governments. Predictable sources of long-term financing are required in order for proper investment decisions, planning and management to be undertaken. Municipal budgets are often far too small, and the participation of the community, the business sector and private owners can play an important role in supplementing resources. National funds can help to catalyse municipal spending on urban forestry, while aligning local actions with national objectives.

76. Innovative finance instruments, such as green bonds, payment for ecosystem services, social loans, natural capital payments and carbon credits, offer additional alternatives. However, they are also complex and relatively underdeveloped. Dedicated funds, which may blend finance from public and private sources, can also support the mobilization of resources.

77. Urban forests should be accessible to all (target 11.7 of the Goals), planned and managed on the basis of the principles of social inclusiveness and environmental justice. In this regard, the geographic distribution of benefits, such as increased property values, disaster risk reduction and protection from future pandemics, need to be taken into consideration. Effective engagement of the community, private owners and other stakeholders is critical to unlocking long-term benefits and other urban forestry policy goals.

78. The engagement of diverse groups of stakeholders of all ages through a shared vision is critical. It creates a sense of ownership and an array of valuable resources, capacities, and skills. At the national and regional levels, dedicated interdisciplinary networks and educational programmes can facilitate exchange and peer learning, strengthening awareness and capacity to implement urban forestry as a nature-based solution.

79. Good communication and learning are essential for effective cooperation and can be supported by awareness campaigns, educational activities, and dialogue. Cooperation must also empower communities, including women, youth and vulnerable groups, as important stakeholders, allies for awareness raising and outreach, catalysts of change and stewards of urban forests.

80. While there is an urgent need to maintain and expand the urban forest cover in urban and peri-urban areas, any intervention should be planned, designed, and managed sustainably, including through adequate funding. This ensures that the benefits of urban forests are optimized over time. In addition to local action by city governments, national Governments can support urban forestry through national policies, standardized data collection, financial support and cooperation across boundaries and sectors. International initiatives such as the Trees in Cities Challenge initiative of ECE and the Tree Cities of the World programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations play an important role in promoting and expanding sustainable urban forestry.

*Session 8: Rebalancing people, planet, and prosperity: education for sustainable development as key enabler for the 17 Goals and the 2030 Agenda*

81. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, the rise of conflicts and violent ideologies and the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic on a generation of students worldwide clearly necessitate immediate action. Education for sustainable development is a pre-eminent tool to address these global challenges.

82. Education must serve to prepare learners to navigate uncertain futures and help them to create a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world. Education systems urgently need to move beyond literacy and numeracy to inculcate values, knowledge and skills that promote peace, sustainable development, human rights, and democracy. The purpose, content and outcome of education must be reconsidered. The outcome must be no other than that of creating a peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable future for people and planet.

83. The COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate impact on the life satisfaction and mental well-being of young people. Young people should be engaged in designing and co-creating sustainable solutions.

84. It is vital to integrate climate change and environmental issues into national development policies, strategies, action plans and in particular in school curricula to equip all learners and the public with the skills and values required to contribute to more sustainable societies and a healthy environment.

85. At the UNESCO 2021 World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, Governments made commitments to ensuring that environmental and climate action was a core curriculum component in all education systems. Multisectoral and multidisciplinary cooperation on education for sustainable development must be promoted at all levels to prepare learners for the future. In addition, efforts are needed to strengthen training programmes, support whole-of-institution approaches and assist local communities in becoming hubs for sustainable development.

86. Whole-of-school approaches offer schools opportunities and perspectives to reposition themselves within their local communities, as engines of transformation, initiators of local evidence-based decision-making and incubators of youth involvement.

87. Youth are environmentally conscious and are leading a generational movement to take positive action on climate change. They ask to be heard and want to participate and be empowered. They are demanding that education systems be adapted to current world realities and that action-based, participatory approaches be promoted so that real changes in their environment and lives can be made.

88. There is a need to implement existing frameworks and commitments through the collective action of all relevant actors, including UNESCO, ECE, UNEP, the European Commission, and other key stakeholders.

89. The High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries, to be held in Nicosia from 5 to 7 October 2022, and its follow-up provide a unique opportunity to communicate and exchange information and good practices on how education for sustainable development strategies can help to advance, amplify, and scale up transformative actions. It can also help to strengthen cooperation between education, environment, and other sectors to prepare learners for building a sustainable future and accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

90. Investing in education for sustainable development yields large returns, as it helps to put people on a path towards a sustainable future, to help promote and guarantee the human right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and to build a culture of peace and global citizenship for sustainable development.

### **Plenary session: Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery**

91. Policy coherence is essential to address trade-offs and synergies at all levels, including between policies on the Goals and COVID-19 recovery measures. Short- and medium-term recovery initiatives should be aligned with long-term sustainable development goals.

92. In crafting policy responses for a sustainable recovery, there is a need to understand potential risks, which are often interconnected. Effective risk governance requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that identifies multiple hazards. The importance of urban resilience for the climate agenda, underlines the significance of localization for policy coherence. Developing forward-looking coherent policies that build resilience demands strong international collaboration.

93. An examination of governance mechanisms, both horizontal and vertical, helps to identify weaknesses in policy coherence. Putting in place these mechanisms has been an essential element of the strategy in Montenegro to implement the Goals. The extent to which budgets at various levels align with national strategic objectives is also important in this regard. Coherence between domestic initiatives and external actions determines overall sustainability impact. Civil servants need to be equipped with the skills necessary to navigate this complex landscape and use relevant tools, such as those developed by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to facilitate assessments.

94. Parliaments play a critical role in shaping policies and providing impulse for change. They enact and improve relevant legislation, monitor implementation, convey information on the impact of programmes to relevant ministries and provide oversight with regard to the actions of Governments on implementation of the Goals. In this regard, they can make an important contribution to policy coherence. Parliamentary involvement in the voluntary national reviews is key to strengthening national ownership of the Goals, building more political support for them, and ensuring that the needs of marginalized, underrepresented, or vulnerable segments of society are duly taken into account.

95. Voluntary national and local reviews serve to promote policy coherence and multilevel collaboration to address shared challenges. By bringing together different actors, they help to bridge differences in perceptions that act as a barrier to change. The voluntary national review of Italy in 2022 will contain at least 10 voluntary local reviews and include the views of non-institutional actors in order to incorporate a complementary perspective that helps to identify where the bottlenecks to implementation lie.

96. Voluntary national reviews also offer an opportunity to mainstream children's rights. The review process should be based on an integrated child- and gender-sensitive approach. This would ensure coherent and coordinated policies in line with the 2030 Agenda and regional and international standards. Actions carried out to meet commitments made in the context of other international cooperation initiatives that serve to advance the Goals can be reflected in reviews. The Council of Europe assists its members in drawing on the participation in the activities of the organization to prepare their voluntary national reviews.

97. Civil society representatives emphasized the need to take a holistic and coordinated approach to policymaking, while expressing concern that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the dominance of economic considerations over social and environmental issues. Data, knowledge, and expertise provided by civil society organizations, which are key actors of change, should inform decision-making, in an inclusive process that embraces historically excluded groups, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other non-normative gender or sexual identities (LGBTQI+) community.

98. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated human rights inequalities in the ECE region, according to the European Network of Human Rights Institutions, who

emphasized the need to undertake human rights and equality impact assessments of policies and other measures. Forward-looking initiatives should redress this situation, notably by integrating human rights education as a key accelerator of the 2030 Agenda. Appropriate data remains essential for identifying groups that need special protection and developing evidence-based responses. Punitive laws and policies that drive discrimination, stigma and inequalities must be repealed.

99. A sustainable recovery from COVID-19 demands multisectoral and multistakeholder approaches, which in turn requires strengthening and expanding existing tools for cooperation and partnerships. In this regard, international organizations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, can help to shape and implement forward-looking policies by facilitating economic cooperation and the harmonization of efforts in their areas of work. The role of multilateral development banks, like the European Investment Bank, is critical to mobilize the necessary financing, in particular as regards climate action and environmental sustainability. Partnerships are also necessary to address the negative health legacy of COVID-19 and shape effective action in other health areas, as envisaged in multiple WHO initiatives.

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