Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
for the ECE Region

Eighth session
Geneva, 13 and 14 March 2024

Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region on its eighth session

Contents

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I. Attendance

1. The eighth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region was held as an in-person meeting at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 13 and 14 March 2024. The session was co-chaired by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Armenia, Mr. Vahan Kostanyan, and the Deputy Minister of Regional Development, Czechia, Mr. Radim Sršeň.

2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 48 States members of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Türkiye, 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: Cameroon, Panama and Uganda.

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 Environment Agency, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub Secretariat, and the Joint Research Centre also participated.

5. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations and initiatives attended the meeting: Development Coordination Office (DCO), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), United Nations Youth Office, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 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 Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations Futures Lab, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), United Nations University (UNU), World Bank Group (WBG), World Health Organization (WHO) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Resident coordinators and representatives from resident coordinators' offices from 13 countries and the United Nations Development Coordinator in Kosovo[1] also attended.

6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the session: Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, Commonwealth Secretariat, Council of Europe, Eurasian Development Bank, Eurasian Economic Commission, Inter-Parliamentary Union, International Development Law Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS,

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[1] References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, and United Cities and Local Governments.

7.   Representatives of over 170 non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of youth, academia, the private sector 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-2024).

II.   Opening of the session and adoption of the agenda

8.   The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda of the session, as contained in document ECE/RFSD/2024/1.

9.   In their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs stressed the critical need for collective action towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Slow progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been compounded by recent challenges in the ECE region, including the pandemic, war with all its destructive impacts, and an ensuing energy, food, and cost-of-living crises. These crises intersect with persistent longer-term issues such as inequality, migration, and environmental pressures, highlighting the urgent need for accelerated action. Despite these challenges, there were significant opportunities for a regional push towards the SDGs presented by advancements in technology, youth engagement, and growing climate awareness. The forum aims to foster discussions on generating momentum for SDG acceleration, exploring policies, innovative solutions, and partnerships necessary to overcome obstacles and leverage opportunities.

10.   In her opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General stressed the complex challenges humanity faces. Underscoring the integral link between peace and sustainable development, she highlighted the headwinds to sustainable development efforts in the region, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions including Russian invasion of Ukraine, financial vulnerabilities, and the triple planetary crises. Despite these challenges, there is hope. The Political Declaration endorsed at the SDG Summit signifies a renewed commitment to accelerating transformative policies and investments aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Pushing for an SDG Stimulus of $500 billion annually to provide affordable, long-term finance for developing countries remains crucial. The Stimulus also calls for a debt lifeline to give countries breathing space and the expansion of contingency financing for countries in need. Key areas for action include inclusive and sustainable energy, food security, education, and digital connectivity, with a need for collaborative initiatives and investment in infrastructure and climate adaptation. Across these important transitions, the UN's presence in countries and the regional capacities can help strengthen institutions, shape policy and regulatory frameworks, and harness investment pathways. The upcoming Summit of the Future represents an opportunity to create a more supportive global environment for peace, human rights, and sustainable development.

11.   The Executive Secretary of ECE delved into the SDG performance within the ECE region. Exacerbated by the war against Ukraine, the region's multifaceted challenges are further affecting the already insufficient progress towards the SDG targets. The data situation is also not satisfactory, with data available to measure progress against only about 70 per cent of the SDG targets in the region. Despite setbacks, the recent SDG Summit and the upcoming Summit of the Future present a unique opportunity for all stakeholders to accelerate progress Highlighting the importance of collaboration across regions, the speaker emphasized the need to leverage the unique opportunity presented by COP 29 in the region to address climate issues. She also stressed the significance of integrating the gender perspective across all sectors, especially in light of the regional review of the Beijing+30 process. Lastly, the speaker underscored the importance of the local level, referring in particular to ECE's Forum of Mayors.

12.   The Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and Co-Vice-Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) for Europe and Central Asia highlighted the urgency of reinforcing the 2030 Agenda in the midst of multiple crises. She outlined challenges faced by the region in addition to the war in

Ukraine, including earthquakes in Türkiye and the refugee crisis in Armenia, all exacerbating persisting environmental, social, economic, and governance issues. She underscored the imperative to protect and advance development amidst growing humanitarian needs Partnerships play a critical role in achieving SDG targets, and there is a need for collaboration among member States, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector. She highlighted the Regional Collaborative Platform's commitment to supporting SDG implementation through strategic regional-level actions and policy support. In 2024, the platform will focus on key transitions, including food systems transformation, energy transition, digitalization, climate change, education, and addressing the refugee crises.

III. High-level policy segment: "Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe region in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions"

13.   The high-level policy segment provided an opportunity to take stock of progress on the Goals in the region through a presentation on the findings of the annual ECE progress report on the Goals.[2]

14.   The following delegations took part in the ensuing high-level plenary debate, in protocol order: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechia, Cyprus, Portugal, Turkmenistan, Croatia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, United States, Switzerland, Austria, Albania (on behalf of the Central European Initiative countries), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Netherlands, Spain, Ukraine, Germany, United Kingdom, European Union, Poland, Montenegro, and Russian Federation. Representatives of civil society and youth reported back on preparatory meetings and consultations. A representative of IOM reported key messages from the Second Regional Review of the Global Compact on Migration. A representative of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development also spoke, representing the business sector. The Russian Federation exercised their right of reply.

IV. Peer learning round tables[3]

A. First set of round tables

Goal 1

No poverty: preparing social protection systems to respond to the poverty impacts of the climate crisis and green transitions

15.   The lead organizer was the Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection, co-led by UNICEF, ILO, UNDP and WHO. The session was moderated by the Director, UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Paul Ladd. Substantive inputs were presented by the following: Azerbaijan; Uzbekistan; Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors; Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY); Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (RCEM); and the UN in Albania Youth Advisory Group.

Goal 2

Zero hunger: healthy and sustainable diets: enhancing the sustainability of food systems in the face of climate change impacts

16.   The lead organizer was the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems, co-led by FAO, UNICEF, and WHO. The session was moderated by the Director, FAO Liaison Office in Geneva, Dominique Burgeon. Substantive inputs were presented by: Bulgaria;

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[2] The report is available at https://w3.unece.org/sdg2024/.

[3] Further information on the peer learning round tables is available at https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/round-tables-regional-forum-2024.

Finland; Germany; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan; Andriani SpA; Ankara University; DMUN Foundation; Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change; Farmer from Spain; MGCY; RCEM, and Planet-score.

B. Second set of round tables

Goal 13

Climate action: solving the Rubik's cube of the planetary crisis: lining up policy solutions for climate risks and biodiversity loss

17.   The lead organizer was the Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia, co-led by UNECE, UNEP and UNESCO. The session was moderated by the Director, Environment Division, UNECE, Marco Keiner, the Director, UNEP Europe Office, Arnold Kreilhuber, and the Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, Magdalena Landry. Substantive inputs were presented by: Germany; North Macedonia; Romania; Tajikistan; Center for Social Welfare, City of Bihac; College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York; Department of Environmental Systems Science, Federal Institute of Technology Zurich; IUCN; European Environment and Health Process (EHP) Partnership on Youth in the WHO European Region; RCEM; Sava Youth Parliament; Soka Gakkai International; UNFCCC; WMO; Youth Health Organization.

Goal 16

Peace, justice, and strong institutions: accelerating policies, partnerships and innovation for just, peaceful and inclusive societies in the UNECE region

18.   The lead organizer was UNDP. The session was moderated by the Team Leader, Governance and Peacebuilding Team, UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub, Robert Bernardo. Substantive inputs were presented by: Czechia; Republic of Moldova; Switzerland; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe; International Development Law Organization; Lviv - the European Youth Capital; RCEM; and the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention.

Goal 17

Partnerships for the Goals: building effective partnerships for digital transformation

19.   The lead organizer was the United Nations Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia, co-led by ITU and UNECE. The session was moderated by the Regional Director, Regional Office for Europe, ITU, Jaroslaw Ponder. Substantive inputs were presented by the following: Czechia; Estonia; Georgia; Poland; Romania; Spain; United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development; Council of Europe; EU Digital for Development (D4D) Hub; European Commission; Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; Capgemini; CERIT; City Institute for Public Health in Belgrade; Fundación ONCE; Halyk Bank Kyrgyzstan; International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence; MGCY; RCEM; Teenergizer; Unconnected Foundation; Union of Operators of Armenia; and the "Promoting and Measuring Universal and Meaningful Connectivity" Project (a partnership between ITU and the EU).

V.   Plenary session: Advancing key transitions and cooperation towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE region

20.   At the outset of the plenary session, the Co-Chairs introduced the key messages from the peer learning sessions.

21.   The co-facilitators of the Summit of the Future, Ambassador Antje Leendertse, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations in New York, and Ambassador Neville Gertze, Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations in New York, briefed the plenary session on the context of the ongoing negotiations around the Pact of the Future in New York.

22.   The following delegations took the floor in response to the intervention by the co-facilitators: Tajikistan, Latvia, United States, United Kingdom, and Austria. Representatives of civil society, youth and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization also spoke. The delegation of the Russian Federation used their right of reply.

23.   The Co-Chairs then introduced the multi-stakeholder panel composed of the following speakers:

- Mr. László Borbély, State Counsellor to the Prime Minister of Romania (moderator);

- Ms. Imme Scholz, Co-Chair of the Independent Group of Scientists for the *2023 Global Sustainable Development Report*, Co-President of the Heinrich Böll Foundation;

- Mr. Dominique Foray, Professor, Chair of Economics & Management of Innovation at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, Member of the Swiss Science Council;

- Mr. Grégoire Haenni, Board Member at Sustainable Finance Geneva, Special Advisor of the Board, Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change, Chief Investment Officer of the Geneva State Pension Fund;

- Ms. Elina Turalyeva, Chief Editor and Project Leader at TEENS.kg, Kyrgyzstan, on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism;

- Ms. Layla Jusko,   Researcher and student of Political Science and International Relations, Young European Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on behalf of the Major Group for Children and Youth European Regional Youth Caucus.

24.   The Assistant-Secretary-General for Youth Affairs of the United Nations as well as a representative of the Global Cities Hub took the floor as discussants. The following delegations intervened in the ensuing plenary debate: France, Switzerland. Representatives of civil society, youth, the Eurasian Development Bank and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean also spoke.

25.   A summary of the discussions in the plenaries and peer learning sessions is contained in the annex to the present report. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum (https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2024).

VI.   Closing

26.   In her closing remarks, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) highlighted the dynamic and diverse nature of the UNECE region. While it has been a leader in economic development and integration, it faces significant challenges, including conflicts and lagging progress on SDGs. Multistakeholder engagement, particularly involving civil society and youth, was underscored as crucial for effective implementation. Key areas for accelerated action include energy, education, climate, and digitalization. The role of International Geneva, particularly through initiatives like the UNOG SDG Lab, was highlighted in promoting long-term sustainability and achieving the SDGs.

27.   The Executive Secretary of ECE underscored the importance of the Regional Forum for renewing commitment to SDG acceleration and introducing new ideas and concrete proposals. Stakeholder engagement was emphasized, including governments, UN entities, civil society, and youth groups. She expressed her gratitude to those that had helped with the preparations for the forum, particularly the secretariat organizing team, the regional United Nation system entities and the member States that had provided financial support: Germany and Switzerland

28.   Before closing the meeting, the Co-Chairs thanked the organizers and participants and explained that the draft report of the regional forum, including the Co-Chairs' 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 2024 High-Level Political Forum convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

Annex

Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions

High-level policy segment on the theme "Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe region in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions"

1.   Strong headwinds have been impairing advances in SDG implementation in recent years, including the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, existing food, financing and energy vulnerabilities, gross violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee crisis, the triple planetary crisis, the war against Ukraine and the escalation of other conflicts in the UNECE region. In 2024, the SDG progress report prepared by ECE continued to show a worsening performance. The region will achieve only 20 targets by 2030, or just 17 per cent of measurable targets, down from 21 targets assessed as on track last year and 26 targets two years ago. For 80 targets, progress should accelerate. The number of targets in which the region is going backwards has increased to 17 from 15 last year.

2.   Data availability is improving, with the number of global indicators that cannot be assessed declining from 77 to 71. In addition, most countries in the region have developed national indicators and reporting platforms to measure progress, which, although cannot be used for international comparisons, provide critical information for implementation.

3.   Looking at the SDGs under in-depth review, the picture that emerges is concerning. While the region has experienced a reduction in extreme poverty and is on track to meet this target, all other targets in SDG 1, including social protection, require accelerated progress. None of the targets related to hunger and food security (SDG 2) are on track. Strong challenges persist regarding climate action (SDG 13). Only two targets are measured, showing that greenhouse gas emissions are increasing and that resilience to disasters needs to improve, amid more frequent climate shocks and natural disasters. Current trends show that no target will be achieved by 2030 on SDG 16, focusing on peace and justice, while the region is regressing on human trafficking and effective institutions. Progress on SDG 17, partnerships for the goals, remains insufficient in practically all areas, with the exception of science cooperation and capacity building for ICT.

4.   The SDG Summit in September 2023 resulted in a renewed commitment to accelerate policies and investments that can drive transformative change across the SDGs, and finally deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda. The Summit of the Future in September 2024 offers a new opportunity to strengthen multilateral cooperation in support of sustainable development. While there are serious challenges, there is also a unique opportunity to be seized, as advances in knowledge and technology, if properly managed, could deliver a better future for all. Strong and sustained international cooperation is essential in this regard.

5.   The recent episodes of high energy prices have created serious social problems in many countries in the region and tested social safety nets. Countries are committed to advance decarbonization efforts, but measures are needed to bring about a just transition and protect the population from negative effects. To illustrate, a needs-based energy subsidy programme mitigated poverty impacts in Moldova and in Slovenia, the definition of energy poverty was the basis for an action plan and the identification of corrective measures.

6.   Multiple shocks have negatively impacted food security in recent years. Investing in resilient infrastructure is important to mitigate the negative consequences of these shocks. Bioeconomy development and the use of residual material and waste can offer solutions to existing challenges, as explored in Bulgaria. Holistic solutions that take into account the multiple dimensions of the problem are necessary.

7.   Developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions, while ensuring responsive and inclusive participatory and representative decision making at all levels would have a positive impact across many SDGs. For example, Poland is focusing on enhancing the effectiveness of institutions for growth and social and economic inclusion. The United States

is providing funding to tap into the possibilities of artificial intelligence to accelerate the attainment of SDGs.

8.   Institutional changes are contributing to the effectiveness and coherence of government actions. In Slovenia, for example, a new ministry merges the responsibility for climate and environment with that for energy and transport policy. In the Netherlands, trade and development are seen as intrinsically linked and therefore fall under the responsibility of a single ministry. In Czechia new legal forms of municipal partnerships are promoted to support the sustainable development policies coherence. Armenia's ambitious reform agenda, aligned with the SDGs, contributed to reaching up to double-digit economic growth and maintaining strong economic outlook, allowing to address the short-term needs of more than 108,000 forcibly displaced refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023.

9.   Education and human capital development will be critical in the efforts for achieving the SDGs. In Cyprus, a holistic national strategy on education and the green transition is being developed that is reflected in teaching programmes and considers school buildings as learning communities. Romania is committed to enhance public sector capabilities and is steadily increasing the number of experts on sustainable development. Croatia also emphasized education and culture change as a transformational tool. Spain, which together with Moldova, co-chaired the regional Conference on ICPD30 "Population and Development: Ensuring Rights and Choices" (Geneva, 19-20 October 2023), stressed that a common notion emerging in that Conference was that building human capital is essential for addressing demographic change.

10.   Armenia mentioned that equitable and inclusive connectivity, open borders and fully functioning transport infrastructure are important drivers for economic prosperity and sustainable development, in particular for landlocked countries. In this sense, Armenia is advocating the Crossroads of Peace Initiative to create conditions to unlock the significant potential of the region. Turkmenistan is proposing the creation of a global atlas of sustainable transport connectivity that, on the basis of a multistakeholder partnership, would provide analysis and solutions. The Netherlands also stressed the importance of enhancing transport options to facilitate trade.

11.   Global, regional, national, and local partnerships for sustainable development, engaging all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, academia, and youth, are critical. A whole-of-society approach needs to complement a whole-of-government approach. This requires investing in developing an efficient institutional framework. In Germany, the forthcoming update of the National Sustainable Development Strategy will involve extensive stakeholder consultations.

12.   Local action is key to achieving the SDGs, as more than half of the world's population lives in cities and most SDG targets cannot be reached without the engagement of local and regional governments, as underlined by the Czechia. Public administration reforms and decentralisation processes realised in many countries in last years enabled the implementation of the community-based approaches and diversification of local actions. Integrated and participatory place-based approaches have proven to be very effective way of sustainable development, respecting specific needs of each place.

13.   Initiatives and organizations that support knowledge transfer and collective action can play a valuable role in advancing SDGs. The role of UNECE, as a platform for regional dialogue, peer-learning and exchange of experiences, with strong competencies in many different areas, was stressed by many participants. At the subregional level, the Central European Initiative has a large range of funding opportunities, programmes and instruments that promote the SDGs, including through partnerships with other entities.

14.   Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) contribute to advancing the implementation of the SDGs, by taking stock of existing progress, bringing together various stakeholders in their elaboration and prompting follow-up actions. In Portugal, after its second VNR in 2023, a 2030 national roadmap for sustainable development is being designed, incorporating a strategic framework aiming at policy coherence. Austria is preparing a second VNR, which is putting a special emphasis on building partnerships with a wide range of actors and closing statistical gaps.

15.   Transformational change requires appropriate financing. In many countries, budgetary allocations for the green transition have increased and new financial instruments have been put in place, including in the context of regional policies. In Bosnia and

Herzegovina, a working group on financing SDGs including a wide range of experts has issued recommendations to increase financial flows for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

16. Beyond domestic initiatives, the international dimension of financing, both regarding private and public resources, is critical. The reform of the global financial architecture is essential to facilitate access to finance. The United Kingdom is leveraging its position as leading financial centre to remove barriers to investment, including by pushing for the reform of multilateral development banks and eliminating barriers to private sector investment. Through various initiatives, the EU is channelling resources to address environmental and social issues in other parts of the world. Portugal, as a creditor country, has concluded debt swaps for climate agreements with two partner countries to support the conversion of sovereign debt into climate-related investments.

17. Reliable, comparable, up to date data is vital to develop effective strategies to advance the SDGs on the basis of well-founded decisions. Data and statistics allow us to assess progress, identify shortcomings and gaps, and to anticipate the future. Switzerland has bolstered the capacity of its National Statistical Office to improve the availability of quality data. Montenegro is identifying priorities for the development and improvement of relevant indicators.

18 Civil Society emphasized the urgency of action with only six years left to implement the 2030 Agenda. The consequences of the climate crisis, armed conflicts, and economic disparities are dire. Structural economic systemic change is imperative to live within planetary boundaries. There is a need to value care work, develop green jobs, and end reliance on fossil fuels. Fundamental freedoms need to be protected and corporations should be accountable for negative externalities. A just transition requires transparent stakeholder engagement, addressing gender inequality, and equitable funding distribution. Despite challenges, progress is possible, drawing on solidarity and cooperation. The opportunities offered by the Summit of the Future should not be missed.

19. The Major Group on Children and Youth emphasized the significance of the 2030 Agenda for all communities, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, and stressed the need for economic, environmental, and intergenerational justice. There is a need for public investments in education to tackle poverty, reforms of the global financial architecture, and strengthening of social protection floors. In addressing hunger, just trade practices and awareness campaigns on food waste are important, Food supplies should reach areas affected by conflict without restriction. Climate justice, youth involvement in governance, and ecosystem protection should inform and accelerate climate actions Fossil fuels should be phased out. Freedom of speech and peaceful protest should be protected, and governments should resolve ongoing conflicts. Transparent governance, inclusive policymaking, and access to resources for youth and civil society are the foundation for effective partnerships. Achieving the SDGs requires peace, justice, and the protection of human rights defenders.

20. Given the urgency of addressing climate change and achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, cooperation between governments and the private sector is critical. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development's (WBCSD) seeks to mobilize businesses for collective action, particularly focusing on climate, nature, and equity agendas across global value chains. The upcoming Summit of the Future presents an opportunity to step up collaboration between business and governments.

21. The Second Regional Review of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) in the UNECE Region, held back-to-back with the Regional Forum, highlighted the significance of migration, with over half of the world's international migrants residing in this region. Despite extensive progress towards the GCM objectives, challenges such as risks to vulnerable populations, loss of life during migration, and violations of migrant rights persist. Concrete actions discussed included meeting labour market needs, facilitating safe migration pathways, ensuring ethical recruitment, and addressing root causes like poverty, conflict, and climate change. Concerns were raised about rising anti-migrant sentiments and the need to combat discrimination. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of data collection and debunking misleading narratives.

22. Various delegations mentioned that the war against Ukraine has been having devastating consequences for the UNECE region and globally. Ukraine denounced Russia's illegal and unprovoked aggression and the continued violation of international law, while

drawing attention to the negative consequences of the war for SDG implementation. The EU, on behalf of its member States, reiterated the strong condemnation of Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified actions against Ukraine. Austria stated that the war was not only an aggression on a sovereign country but an attack on common aspirations and values. Czechia emphasized that also Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine poses a range of potentially catastrophic and existential threats to humanity. Germany and Poland stressed that there cannot be sustainable development without peace and security and reiterated their support for Ukraine and international law. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom urged the Russian Federation to end its illegal invasion of Ukraine. The Russian Federation rejected all accusations and stated that sanctions introduced by Western countries undermine the achievement of SDGs. Belarus emphasized the negative consequences of sanctions for sustainable development and that the shrinking space for cooperation is leading to missed opportunities. Hungary stressed the need to avoid the politicization of technical organizations and the fragmentation of international cooperation in the region.

Outcomes of the peer learning round tables

A. First set of round tables

Session 1: Preparing social protection systems to respond to the poverty impacts of the climate crisis and green transitions

23. In the European and Central Asian region, the climate crisis, in addition to a number of other drivers like inequality and limited access to quality social services, is contributing to increasing the incidence and severity of poverty, with unequal impacts on women and girls and vulnerable populations. Multiple crises such as displacement, natural disasters, conflict, and the increase in food and energy prices, are threatening progress on SDG 1 and the global development agenda more broadly.

24. Sustained commitment to social protection that is linked with wider employment, skilling, reskilling and other development programmes is already contributing to poverty reduction. Integrated approaches like the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection and other High Impact Initiatives, can drive policy changes to address green, digital, and social transitions. Context-specific, well-designed, human rights-based, and participatory social protection plays a key role in responding to shocks, including those from climate change, especially in the context of demographic shifts including climate-driven migration.

25. Economic, social and health inequalities between rural and urban areas will be exacerbated by the climate crisis. Rural areas face critical challenges in the context of rapid urbanization. These include gaps in digital connectivity as well as more limited infrastructure and services than cities, ageing populations, a shrinking workforce and the outward migration of young people. This context drives other challenges, including health and livelihood insecurity, a shrinking tax base, limited opportunities for education, strain on public service delivery capacity, and potential loss of trust in institutions. In cities, challenges like growing inequality, living costs, urban sprawl/unplanned development, and air pollution continue to affect household well-being, disproportionately impacting populations that are already disadvantaged.

26. Social protection systems could mitigate impacts and provide families and communities with increased capacity to cope or adjust. In some countries, efforts are underway to make social protection systems and programmes shock-responsive, recognizing different types of risks and the need to adapt to specific local contexts and needs. Key emerging themes include the need for coordinated planning to mitigate risks, disaster preparedness and management and prioritizing and including the most vulnerable communities in the design of social protection systems and programmes. Nongovernmental institutions play a very important role in these processes especially in the socially segregated groups involvement.

27. Digital, transparent systems and robust information and accountability mechanisms are necessary to ensure effective delivery of social protection services, including to combat corruption. There is a need to generate evidence and data to inform shock-responsive social protection strategies, engage young people in decision-making processes, provide accessible

methods for marginalized populations to participate and adapting programs to meet evolving needs.

28.   Financing remains a challenge in a context where urgent needs are present. New multi-stakeholder alliances are advancing options for financing and design of social protection. Useful lessons can be derived from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where government budgets and international financing were leveraged to fund a rapid expansion of social protection benefits. Financing social protection ultimately requires domestic resource mobilization and progressive fiscal policies. In countries with less capacities and resources, global mechanisms can also provide resources.

29.   Ensuring universal access to social protection floors and keeping social protection high on the agenda demands political will. Social protection is an investment in resilient economies and healthy, cohesive societies as well as human capital. Equity-proofing requires assessing multiple dimensions of inequality with disaggregated data (including by age, gender, disability, ethnicity, migrant status and other dimensions of inequity), while adapting to changing situations and shocks.

30.   There is a strong link between social protection systems, national care systems and informal care. While ageing societies can strain social protection and care systems, older people are also instrumental in providing care. Potential solutions include support for carers or childcare and the empowerment of women and girls financially. Care work should be recognized.

31.   Universal access to social protection should be ensured but targeted measures to support particular groups may also be necessary. However, targeted benefits also carry risks including the cost of identifying and keeping track of those in need, stigmatization and possible exclusion and/or discrimination if not well-designed. Issues such as identification costs, scalability, comprehensiveness, inclusiveness and rights-based approaches need to be considered to ensure systems and programmes that can respond effectively to shocks. Future demographic shifts and diverse needs should be taken into account.

32.   Effective national green transition strategies should deliver on economic and social objectives while also responding to digital transitions and job losses in some sectors. They should consider investment in green jobs, a greater focus on green skills, lifelong learning and re-skilling, and formalization of work.

33.   Social protection should be integrated into climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, leveraging international cooperation, and prioritizing inclusive policies. As a result of the climate crisis, mass displacement is likely to increase in the coming 50 years. Questions of legal identity and entitlement to social protection are becoming important. Cooperation, both cross-border and regional, on schemes that people are likely to need will be necessary, in particular around the issue of residency-based social protection systems and cross-border climate-induced vulnerabilities. International cooperation on climate financing remains vital, including the impacts on debt sustainability of future climate risks. Further action is needed on how climate finance mechanisms can support or augment existing social protection systems.

34.   Shock- and equity-proofed social protection system and green transitions must be aligned with countries' characteristics. A focus on families and individuals should be complemented with the attention to area-based transitions and social protection, with for example, a focus on community resilience. The disproportionate impact of disasters on remote and rural communities, especially affecting children, young people, women, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups means that geographic and age dimensions need to be incorporated into policy designs. Accessible social services, especially in rural areas, are important. Disaggregated and granular data is necessary to effectively address the specific needs of vulnerable populations.

Session: 2: Healthy and sustainable diets: enhancing the sustainability of food systems in the face of climate change impacts

35.   The UNECE region is not on track to achieve hunger and food security targets. The UNECE SDG progress report and the 2023 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition indicate that access to sufficient and nutritious food is not universal in the region. In one third of the countries, more than 10 per cent of all adults experience food insecurity. Although the prevalence of undernourishment in the region is below 2.5 per cent, more than

110 million people are still moderately or severely food insecure. Other nutritional challenges include anaemia among women, prevalence of under-five children overweight and rising rates of adult obesity.

36.   There is an urgent need for sustainable food production on a global scale. The nexus of food systems and climate change emerges as pivotal. Food systems are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts while also contributing 23 per cent to annual greenhouse gas emissions. Food systems must be part of the climate solution in terms of mitigation and adaptation to ensure food security for all.

37.   Climate action and food systems transformation are crucial to sustainably feed the growing global population while preserving climate, biodiversity, and rural communities' livelihoods. Sustainable agricultural and livestock practices, such as agroecology, organic farming, climate-smart and regenerative agriculture offer solutions for climate, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and improvement of nutritional status. Rewetting peatlands is a crucial issue in the region for climate and biodiversity. Reducing food loss and waste is critical for saving valuable resources and reducing emissions. Setting ambitious national targets in support of sustainable practices and implementing inclusive and impactful joint actions is crucial.

38.   The increasing demands for higher quality food and agricultural products, coupled with challenging market conditions, are putting farmers under significant economic strain. The agriculture sector is under pressure to contribute to climate neutrality, without compromising competitiveness or food security. As farmers respond to market demand and incentive structures, policies need to be tailored to stimulate demand for more healthy and sustainable food. It is key to provide sufficient compensation to farmers to overcome losses due to weather events, disease outbreaks and the like; demonstrate the benefits of the green transition; foster education, capacity development and green investments to support farmers in adapting to a changing climate.

39.   Innovative solutions and state-of-the-art technologies are essential for transforming food systems, including plant-based alternatives and health-focused approaches. In line with the One Health approach, prudent use of antimicrobials is essential for global health and food safety. Strategies, such as zero customs duties on nutritious foods, were mentioned to make healthier options more affordable and accessible. The private sector has also a key role in improving the food environment and pioneering the implementation of innovative initiatives that can promote sustainable and healthy diets.

40.   Civil society stressed the need to recognize and implement access to food and nutrition as a human right, to address the root causes of hunger and malnutrition, and to adopt effective and inclusive policies. Shifting from a narrative of food security to one of food justice, based on research and data, and adopting an intersectionality approach were also suggested.

41.   The European Union and the governments in the region can influence the markets to produce quality, safe food in a more environmentally friendly way. Multi-stakeholder and participatory policy processes, with the involvement of smallholder farmers, youth, women, and marginalized groups, as well as the private sector and academia, are key for creating sustainable food systems. Multilateral mechanisms and processes, such as the Committee on Food Security, COP29 and the follow up to the United Nations Food Systems Summit, are key instruments in this context. Food systems national convenors also play a vital role in mobilizing stakeholder engagement, increasing policy coherence for sustainable food systems.

42.   Obesity and unhealthy diets have emerged as significant contributors to mortality rates. More coordinated action between health and agrifood sectors is required to address the growing number of diet-related non-communicable diseases, by providing an enabling food environment, where sustainable healthy diets are more available and affordable. To assure a healthy diet for all, the quality and safety of food needs continuous efforts by food companies, and food safety authorities. Consumers ability to make healthy food choices is informed by the 'food environment' where food labelling, advertising, retail structure and markets are all influencing factors.

43.   There is a need for stricter regulations on food marketing, especially concerning advertising to children. Transparent environmental and nutrition food labelling were highlighted as tools to inform consumers about the environmental impact of food products and nutritional value. The importance of education campaigns was also acknowledged to

raise awareness about the benefits of consuming organic, seasonal, and locally produced foods. Economic incentives, such as tax benefits for sustainable and organic food producers, were also proposed as a means to promote healthier options and discourage the consumption of foods with a high environmental footprint. Understanding the true cost of food can help provide guidance in this regard.

44.   School meal programmes are key instruments to promote food education, health, and sustainability. By utilizing public procurement for school meals, governments can support local agriculture, promote healthy eating habits among students, and ensure that meals meet nutritional guidelines. Acknowledging school catering as an investment is crucial. Aligning school meals with national nutrition and hygienic standards and considering student preferences can address challenges such as promoting healthy food acceptance, guaranteeing adequate nutrition in meals, enhancing food accessibility, and promoting equity. Introducing vegetarian meal choices is a strategy to combat the low intake of fruits and vegetables among students.

45.   Processed foods in categories known to significantly contribute to the intake of fats, sugar, and salt in the population should be monitored, with a focus on promoting the continuous improvement in their nutritional content.

Second set of round tables

Session 3: Solving the Rubik's cube of the planetary crisis: lining up policy solutions for climate risks and biodiversity loss

46.   Climate change causes widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere that threaten to reverse the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

47.   2023 is set to be the warmest year on record globally, with worrying trends continuing for other climate indicators too, such as ocean heat content, global mean sea level, Antarctic sea-ice extent and glacier ice mass. The "State of the Climate in Europe 2022" report explains that Europe has been warming at twice the global rate since the 1980s, with far-reaching impacts on the region's socioeconomic fabric and ecosystems.

48.   Extreme weather and climate-related events such as floods, heat- and cold-waves, heavy precipitation and droughts impact every aspect of society, including the right to life, health, housing and access to water and sanitation. In 2022, these hazardous events resulted in approximately 16,000 reported fatalities and directly affected 156,000 people in Europe.

49.   Targeted and coordinated support is required particularly for high-risk countries to address their urgent needs in building effective multi-hazard early warning systems. The Early Warnings for All initiative (EW4All) was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2022 with the aim of ensuring that everyone is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate events through life-saving early warning systems by the end of 2027.

50.   In Europe and Central Asia, significant gaps remain in implementation of effective early warning systems that are risk-sensitive, target communities most at risk, effectively disseminate messages and warnings, ensure preparedness and support early action. In Tajikistan, weather-related disasters have caused enormous socioeconomic and environmental damage, which in turn hinders the sustainable development of the country. Therefore, the country is taking action to implement the EW4All initiative nationally and calls for active and broad participation of the international community under the initiative. As the first pilot country in the region, Tajikistan has pledged its efforts for the successful implementation of the initiative and will be ready to share its experience.

51.   Effective climate risk reduction policies at the national level involve both the establishment of an early warning system and the integration of climate adaptation and disaster risk management across all sectors. Execution of the EW4All initiative at the national level, and other policies and actions addressing climate risks, must be based on collaboration between actors at local, national and transboundary levels.

52.   Climate risks including extreme weather events cause long-lasting socioeconomic impacts. They also exacerbate inequality because the most vulnerable communities are often the least equipped to respond, recover and adapt. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on the heightened impacts on these communities. Children, people living with disabilities, women

and families living in poverty must have access to climate-informed social services. Further, shock-responsive social protection plays a vital role in shielding the most vulnerable.

53.   Policies and actions addressing climate risks should encompass all ages, including youth. Supporting young people through education, green skills development, mentoring schemes and meaningful engagement in all national, regional and international climate change negotiations and decisions is instrumental. It will provide adolescents and youth with the opportunity to influence climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction policies.

54.   The interconnectedness of climate change and biodiversity loss is critical and neither of these challenges can be successfully resolved unless tackled together. As highlighted by the "Global Stocktake" outcome of the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, these two crises need to be addressed in a comprehensive and synergetic manner if the SDGs are to be achieved. To succeed, countries need to develop holistic policies based on science, inclusion and consensus and to communicate effectively on the role of nature.

55.   Research on the role of soil and vegetation in the carbon cycle and climate system strengthens our understanding of climate change and biodiversity loss. Advanced information-gathering tools and state-of-the-art computer models, drawing from diverse data sources, give insights into the links between nature, climate change and human activity, well-being and rights. Current scientific knowledge supports advocacy for the protection and restoration of ecosystems, which are critical to food production, the economy and human health.

56.   Based on the scientific evidence and stories of success, consensus on joint action can be built among affected stakeholders, as well as within academia. This can lead to collaboration between communities, academia and the private sector on shared sustainable, evidence-based policy solutions.

57.   Strategies for addressing the interlinked challenges of climate change and biodiversity conservation, as well as land degradation, include integrated planning, policy and budgeting frameworks. National level alignment is needed when developing key instruments such as Nationally Determined Contributions and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans in support of the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, respectively, as well as Land Degradation Neutrality targets. In practical terms, this means bringing together at the national level the focal points for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Enhancing synergies between the three Rio Conventions could lead to common and concrete rights-based national commitments on sustainable land management, ecosystem restoration and other nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

58.   Transparency, accountability and inclusive decision-making are essential for successful climate and biodiversity policies and financing. Refocusing investment and redirecting financing such as agriculture subsidies can turn the policies into practice. Capacity building initiatives are recommended to empower governments, financial institutions and civil society organizations in designing and implementing climate and biodiversity financing projects.

59.   Participatory approaches foster ownership and co-production of knowledge and policy solutions grounded in social justice and human rights. Inclusion of children, youth, women and minorities needs to be supported by establishing new – or tapping into existing – participatory mechanisms at national and subnational levels to ensure meaningful participation of stakeholders in decision-making processes. Grants focused on meaningful engagement of minorities in academia and decision-making are needed. Increased investment in education on climate resilience and biodiversity action, including funding for schools, teacher training and peer-to-peer learning, is fundamental.

Session 4: Accelerating policies, partnerships and innovation for just, peaceful and inclusive societies in the UNECE region

60.   The UNECE region confronts unprecedented challenges, with escalating crises impeding the achievement of SDG 16. Previous advances were lost during the pandemic; armed conflicts, disinformation spreading, systematic corruption and widening inequalities threaten to derail progress. Declining trust in public and formal justice institutions is fuelled by democratic backsliding. Civil society organizations, media professionals and rights

defenders are under threat for their work on defending media freedom, human rights and the environment, protection for displaced populations, arms control and provision of access to justice. The fact that all SDG 16 targets are off-track demands a renewed policy focus and bold action.

61. The 2024 "super election year," with major elections in approximately 60 countries worldwide, underscores the vulnerabilities of democratic processes. There are serious policy concerns surrounding election-related misinformation and the need for agile communication to respond to false news and misinformation, the imperative of digital transformation in public services, and the pivotal roles of transparency and universal access to justice in fostering social cohesion. The escalating conflicts and aggression throughout the UNECE region are having a particular toll on children and youth – both physically and psychologically.

62. Policy frameworks that encourage collaboration and leverage innovation to mitigate the impacts of various intertwined crises have a transformative power. As a response to ongoing difficulties, the Republic of Moldova developed a data-driven programme designed to alleviate energy poverty, targeting those most in need and strengthening the rule of law and transparency. Policy successes demonstrate the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, evidence-based policymaking, and the strategic, inclusive use of technology.

63. Inclusive digitalization is central to achieving equitable progress, with access to justice for all recognized as a critical enabler of public participation and the realization of all SDGs. Policies that facilitate and regulate the development and deployment of digital tools and platforms can enhance public service delivery, improve transparency and widen access to justice. Digital literacy improvement is an important precondition to achieve SDG goals.

64. Special attention must be paid to bridging digital divides and ensuring that technological solutions are accessible and empowering to all. Examples include digital solutions to support anti-corruption efforts and to increase transparency. In particular, grievances can be addressed in an open way through electronic recording and audio-visual transcripts of court proceedings, electronic case legal filing and frameworks for electronic public registers.

65. Prioritizing accessible, inclusive, and gender-sensitive justice systems, with a focus on informal and customary mechanisms, is crucial to reach the most marginalized and ensure that no one is left behind. Eliminating discriminatory laws, empowering women in the justice sector, and addressing gender-based violence are prerequisites for peace, sustainable development, and achieving SDG 16 - particularly in conflict and crisis contexts.

66. Empowering local and regional governance is essential. Policies should strengthen meaningful and effective participation of all segments of society, placing particular emphasis on women, youth, and vulnerable communities. Decentralization, supported by effective meaningful inclusive participatory mechanisms, enables citizen-centric policymaking. This boosts public trust and enhances the responsiveness and efficacy of government in addressing people's immediate needs, achieving the SDGs, and promoting human rights and democratic values.

67. There is a need to design and institutionalize effective and meaningful public participatory mechanisms across all levels of governance to foster community ownership of programs and decision-making processes. Civic education focused on democratic principles, critical thinking, and active citizenship, especially among youth, should be encouraged.

68. Examples of initiatives addressing these issues include the citizen assembly in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the youth well-being index in the municipality of Lviv, Ukraine. This index evaluates conditions for youth and actively engages them in shaping solutions. It is used to shape evidence-based youth strategies and networks of youth centres to support youth-led programs addressing diverse needs.

69. Cross-sectoral partnerships and open communication between local and national governments are crucial for coordinated and effective SDG policy implementation.

70. Robust data infrastructure is fundamental for effective policy design, implementation, and evaluation. Supporting data collection and analysis, particularly data disaggregated by key factors such as gender, location, and income, is crucial to identify inequalities and ensure targeted interventions that leave no one behind.

71. Bridging the digital divide and enhancing access to information to ensure no one is left behind should be another policy priority. This can include coupling online services with offline access points through a network of support offices in remote communities to provide guidance in using digital systems.

72. Upholding the rule of law, combating corruption, and building transparent, accountable institutions should be a core concern. For this, strengthening judicial systems and judicial cooperation, safeguarding the independence of oversight bodies, and ensuring equitable law enforcement, are important measures to safeguard sustainable development.

73. Policies that protect environmental and human rights defenders from harassment, intimidation, and violence should be enacted and enforced. Mechanisms, in consultation with defenders, should be created for prompt reporting and investigation of threats, while ensuring access to legal recourse, and robust support networks.

74. There is an urgent need to prioritize the achievement of SDG 16 through coordinated action by governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations. The challenges facing the UNECE region require effective law enforcement and bold policy frameworks backed by political will, resource allocation, and a steadfast commitment to inclusivity and partnership. Given the cross-cutting implications of SDG 16, advances in this area will be closely linked to progress in all other SDGs. Synergies with 17.4 – policy coherent for sustainable development- are important to prioritize SDG 16 achievement.

Session 5: Building Effective Partnerships for Digital Transformation

75. Digital technologies and services are critical drivers of sustainable development. The forthcoming Summit of the Future, the anticipated Global Digital Compact and the review of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) show that they are a central policy concern.

76. Digital transformation offers significant promise in meeting SDG targets and advancing the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. However, despite continued efforts, several digital divides still exist, and, with the high innovation dynamics of information and communication technologies (ICTs), new ones are constantly emerging.

77. Closing the digital gap, by equipping everyone with the digital skills they need, is a moral imperative. This will have also positive benefits on economic growth and innovation. Individuals without basic digital skills are at risk of being left behind in an increasingly digital society. The provision of basic digital skills, both among the young and the old, and the access to affordable tools are essential. Actions to bridge this gap and advance gender inclusion should be core policy aspirations. Women's employment in digital activities is constrained by access limitations and insufficient skills, especially in rural areas.

78. The private sector can contribute to initiatives empowering and supporting underprivileged youth and communities, promoting STEM education, especially for women, driving investments, and encouraging digital education and training. Banks, in particular, can play a crucial role in driving change for development.

79. A human-centric approach should be at the core of digital development. Fostering digital inclusion and providing new opportunities and easy access to services to disadvantaged groups of society requires special attention. Consideration should be given to the needs of people with disabilities.

80. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of meaningful connectivity and technologies for social connections and mental wellbeing. Initiatives that use technology to bridge the digital divide and foster intergenerational communication create a more inclusive and resilient society for people of all ages.

81. Evidence- based policy making is essential for advancing digital development, but this requires strengthening data collection efforts at national and regional levels. To gain trust and confidence in ICTs, accurate, inclusive, disaggregated, and intersectional statistical data can improve transparency, foster social dialogue, and enhance public participation.

82. Digital infrastructures need to be robust and resilient, which is a challenge especially in the least connected regions. Data governance frameworks should address current challenges in data protection, digital technologies and AI, while also anticipating future developments.

83. New challenges are emerging. The concentration of power on some technological giants, including in connection with the development of artificial intelligence, can create new divides. International cooperation is required to address cyber threats. Ensuring the resilience and protection of IT networks and systems that support the functions of defence, national security, public order and governance requires a consolidated legislation in cyber security. Authorities should intervene whenever technological advances could make institutions' IT systems vulnerable to cyber-attacks.

84. Digital technologies can serve to address environmental challenges. Pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR) systems collect and disseminate information about environmental releases and transfers of hazardous substances from industrial and other facilities. These environmental information tools are important for pollution management and the assessment of resource consumption. They facilitate data exchange in a transparent way.

85. The Council of Europe has been tackling the issue of digital transition, aiming to ensure that fundamental values, human rights and rule of law and democracy are also defended in a digital environment. In particular, the use and development of AI, protection of children's rights and gender equality in a digital environment, addressing cybercrime and violence against women are priorities.

86. The European Commission uses a guiding strategic framework based on four dimensions: people, business, government and infrastructure. The European Declaration on digital rights and principles promotes EU values and a sustainable human centric vision of digital transformation.

87. The Youth believe that there should be a collective human centric vision and digital justice so all can benefit. To bridge the digital divide, the young, especially girls, should be empowered, and their initiatives supporting sustainable goals promoted. Regional and local skill programs can have strong impacts. Translating key documents into local languages will broaden understanding and engagement.

88. Civil Society points out that the majority of unconnected are women, girls, marginalized groups such as older people, and those with disabilities or language barriers. There is insufficient data for many targets, which often lacks intersectional gender disaggregation. Artificial intelligence is moving at a rapid speed. Human control over it is needed to prioritize human rights against unchecked progress.

89. Digital poverty is a critical issue, initiatives like the Unconnected Foundation make a difference by connecting students, refugees, women and underserved communities, with the help of donors, sponsors, and other organizations. Strategic platforms such as the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub strengthen sustainable digital cooperation between the European Union and its member States, by engaging with different stakeholders.

90. Digital inclusion requires a multi-stakeholder approach and can benefit from collaborating with a diverse ecosystem. Progress depends on partnerships and learning from failures and achievements. Collaboration would also avoid duplication, cut development costs, ensure project success, and facilitate the development of proper regulation. Multistakeholder alliances like the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition foster universal connectivity and digital transformation globally, mobilize investments and utilize partnerships effectively.

91. To strengthen the one UN approach, the UN needs to work together on digital development at the national, regional and global levels. Platforms such as the UN Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia are essential for strengthening the One UN approach for Digital.

Plenary session: Advancing key transitions and cooperation towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe region

92. The Summit of the Future offers a once in a generation opportunity to reshape international cooperation, improve the response to global shocks and strengthen inclusion, by meaningfully addressing the needs of current and future generations. There is an intricate linkage between the 2030 Agenda and the forthcoming Pact for the Future. The Pact is expected not only to provide a boost to SDG implementation but also to sustain SDGs into the future, once they are achieved.

93.   The importance of global cooperation based on shared values and respect for international law was stressed by Latvia. The United States encouraged UNECE to continue its work in supporting Ukrainian reconstruction and, noted the opportunity that the Summit of the Future offers to rekindle trust in the power of multilateralism. In this context, both countries denounced the Russian Federation war against Ukraine. The Russian Federation rejected these statements as attempts to politicize the UNECE platform.

94.   The United Kingdom remarked that multilateralism should deliver real impact for all people and that the concepts of inclusion and multistakeholder participation are intertwined. Austria mentioned the importance of a bottom-up approach to sustainable development, which is embodied by UNECE, and expressed the hope that the Pact for the Future would recognize the importance of regional cooperation for advancing sustainable development. The need to mobilize resources for developing countries, including through reforms of multilateral banks to address their concerns, was stressed by Tajikistan. France emphasized the importance of a human rights-based approach and gender equality as a precondition for sustainable development, while drawing attention to the contributions that Geneva's "practical multilateralism" can make to bring concrete actions.

95.   Civil society expressed concern about backsliding on key issues such as gender equality, ageism and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The importance of the Summit of the Future was acknowledged, given the changes in the world since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the need for acceleration. In a context of shrinking space for civil society, it is critical to create channels for its meaningful engagement in all processes.

96.   While seeking to advance the key transformations necessary for SDG acceleration, there is a need to put in place locally relevant, synergistic, coherent and integrative strategies. SDG national plans should be built on a clear understanding of the linkages between SDGs, prioritizing actions in areas that are lagging behind. Broad societal support is required to anticipate conflict and provide solutions to address it, as some transformations may encounter resistance. Creating capacities in the public sector, including through learning partnerships, is necessary to manage these processes.

97.   Building narratives for transformation becomes more challenging when there are also negative consequences and complex choices need to be made. This is, however, necessary to guide the behaviour of all players involved, including consumers and investors. Markets do not provide signals to drive change in the right direction. Innovation is a powerful force, but it needs to be harnessed by appropriate policies to deliver societal goals and avoid harmful consequences.

98.   Significant transformations lie ahead, with sizeable sectoral shifts that will create many opportunities but also generate large economic and social dislocations. Financial intermediaries, driving capital allocation in the right direction, and technology can help to advance these transformations while minimizing disruptions.

99.   Local efforts are critical for many goals across the whole 2030 Agenda, including poverty or climate change. Policy coherence for sustainable development can only be achieved by engaging multiple levels of governance. The increased use of Voluntary Local Reviews in the UNECE region is a positive development, contributing to improved multilevel governance. The next UNECE Forum of Mayors is ready to put into action the outcomes of the Summit of the Future at the local level.

100.   Civil society stressed the need to shift the balance of economic priorities to focus on the wellbeing of people and the planet, building on human rights frameworks, including international humanitarian law. Social protection, lifelong education and the recognition of the value of unpaid work are basic demands. Timely and accessible information should be provided to civil society actors for meaningful engagements. Political persecution for peaceful activities should be eliminated and political prisoners released across the region.

101.   The contribution of children, adolescents and youth to drive and shape the necessary transformations is essential. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow but the voice of change today. However, meaningful youth participation opportunities are insufficient. There is a need to further develop and create spaces where young people can engage in decision-making processes. Education, including the integration of sustainability principles into school curricula, is pivotal to equip the next generation with the knowledge and skills they need to approach complex challenges.