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Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region

Ninth session

Geneva, 2 and 3 April 2025

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

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I. Attendance

1. The ninth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region was held as an in-person meeting at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 2 and 3 April 2025.
2. The session was co-chaired by the Deputy Minister of Economy and Finance of Uzbekistan, Mr. Umid Abidkhadjaev, and the Permanent Representative of Greece to the UN in Geneva, H.E. Ambassador Ioannis Ghikas.
3. The session was attended by representatives of the following 46 ECE member States: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Uzbekistan.
4. The European Union (EU) was represented by the Delegation of the EU to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva. The European External Action Service, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority, and the European Investment Bank also participated.
5. Representatives of the following UN bodies, departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations and initiatives attended the meeting: DCO, ECE, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, ECOSOC, FAO, IFAD, ILO, IOM, ITC, ITU, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UN DESA, UNDP, UNDRR, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN Global Compact, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS, UNOG, UNRSF, UN Women, UN Youth Office, WFP, WHO, WIPO, WMO, World Bank Group. Resident coordinators and representatives from resident coordinators' offices from 6 countries also attended.
6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the session: Council of Europe, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, Regional Cooperation Council, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
7. Representatives of over 100 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/index.php/events/regional-forum-2025>).

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/2025/2.
9. In their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs emphasized the need for a collaborative approach to accelerating SDG progress, despite setbacks and challenges. The forum aims to focus on verified solutions with proven results, evidence-based policies, and effective data-driven models, while also showcasing successful examples from countries and communities. The importance of partnerships across governments, civil society, youth, and the private sector was highlighted, alongside the need for sound scientific research to guide decision-making. The forum will feature peer learning sessions on key SDGs, with an emphasis on health, gender equality, economic growth and decent work, and financing for sustainable development, with outcomes to be reported at the High-level Political Forum in New York in July 2025.
10. In his opening remarks, the ECOSOC President highlighted the significance of the UN's 80th anniversary and the 10th anniversary of the SDGs, urging reflection on Europe's progress since 1945. He emphasized the urgent need to address challenges such as climate

change, gender equality, and displacement, stressing that global solidarity and multilateralism are vital. He acknowledged the financial challenges faced by the UN, calling for more efficient and sustainable ways of operation to ensure the organization can continue supporting those in need. The President encouraged Europe's leadership in sustainable technology and the need for commitment and action to meet SDG targets, particularly in health, decent work, partnerships, and life below water.

11. The Deputy Secretary-General, intervening through video message, stressed the urgent need for sustainable development action, noting that ten years after the 2030 Agenda's adoption, global progress remains insufficient, with only 17% of SDGs on track. Also the ECE region is projected to achieve only 17% of its SDG targets by 2030, facing challenges such as climate change, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical tensions. However, opportunities exist through advances in digital connectivity, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. The UN will support efforts to accelerate progress, including through the 4th Financing for Development Conference in Sevilla, which aims at unleashing finance, including finding innovative ways to harness domestic resources and attract private sector investment.

12. The Executive Secretary of ECE reaffirmed the region's collective commitment to the 2030 Agenda, despite ongoing global instability, conflict, and overlapping crises. The 2030 Agenda provides solutions to the challenges the region is facing. SDG Progress is slowing, with only 21 of 169 SDG targets on track in the region. She stressed the urgent need for tangible action, especially on climate and environmental sustainability. Sustainable development is not abstract, but directly tied to people's lives, requiring national and local action on jobs, health, education, and the environment. The speaker stressed the need for stronger partnerships across sectors and borders, calling for more youth and civil society involvement. The Forum provides an essential platform for solutions, innovation, and accountability. She urged renewed commitment to action as the UN celebrates its 80th anniversary and the tenth year of the SDGs.

13. The Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS and Co-Vice-Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia focused on the SDGs under in-depth review and highlighted both the resilience shown in response to multiple global crises and the achievements driven by regional UN collaboration. Notable results include expanded healthcare access, strengthened health systems, gender-responsive fiscal policies, social protection and job creation initiatives, support for women entrepreneurs, sustainable fisheries management, and ecosystem protection. Strong emphasis was placed on building inclusive partnerships, innovative financing tools, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

III. High-level policy segment: “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe region for leaving no one behind”

14. The high-level policy segment was opened by a keynote speech by the Chief Impact Officer, Nobel Prize Outreach and Co-Lead, Earth4All Initiative, Mr. Owen Gaffney.

15. The key findings of the 2025 ECE SDG Progress Report¹ were presented by the Chief of Social and Demographic Statistics Section, ECE Statistical Division, Mr. Andres Vikat.

16. The following delegations intervened in the ensuing plenary debate: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Cyprus, Czechia, EU, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal (video message), Romania, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan. Representatives of civil society, youth and the IPU Secretary General (video message) reported on preparatory meetings and consultations. The Head of the UN Youth Office (video message), Regional Cooperation Council, FAO and the

¹ The report is available at <https://w3.unece.org/sdg2025/>.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean also took the floor. The Russian Federation and Greece exercised their rights of reply.

IV. Peer learning round tables²

Goal 3

Building Health Systems for the Future: Inclusive, Resilient, and Multisectoral Solutions for Achieving SDG 3 in the ECE Region

17. The round table was led by WHO/Europe with the UN Issue-based Coalition on Health and Well-being (FAO, IOM, ILO, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN Women, ECE, UNESCO, WFP). It was moderated by Ms. Ritu Sadana, Head of Ageing and Health, WHO. Substantive inputs and presentations were made by Hungary, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Spain, Turkmenistan, IOM, UNICEF, UNICEF Youth, UNFPA, WHO and the NGO Committee on Ageing.

Goal 5

The Time is Now: Inclusive, Evidence-based and Transformative Solutions for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

18. The lead organizers were UN Women and UNFPA, with contributions from the regional UN Issue-based Coalition on Gender Equality. The round table was co-moderated by Ms. Helena Valas (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia) with Ms. Florence Bauer (UNFPA Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia) and Ms. Belén Sanz Luque (UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia). Substantive inputs were presented by: Albania; Armenia; Austria; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Malta; Moldova; Spain; Uzbekistan; Council of Europe; CEDAW; youth representatives; and the regional civil society engagement mechanism.

Goal 8

Just Digital and Green Transitions to Leave No-One Behind

19. The round table was organized by ILO, ITU and ECE with the UN Digital Transformation Group and with contributions from FAO, IOM, UNEP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS and UN Women. It was moderated by Fiona McCluney, UN Resident Coordinator for Albania and Mr. Jaroslaw Ponder, Head of the ITU Europe Regional Office. Substantive inputs were presented by: Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Estonia, EU Delegation to the UN, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Spain, Sweden Innovation Agency, IndustriALL, International Organization of Employers, Pan-European Regional Council, Semadeni Industry Group (Switzerland), and the Society for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (SDPS Serbia).

Goal 14

From Policy to Practice: Strengthening Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Management under SDG 14

20. The lead organizers were UNEP and UNESCO, in close cooperation with Belgium. The round table was moderated by Ms. Magdalena Landry, UNESCO Regional Director for Science and Culture in Europe, and Mr. Arnold Kreilhuber, UNEP Regional Director for Europe. Substantive inputs were presented by: Belgium, Portugal, Flanders Marine Institute,

² Further information on the peer learning round tables is available at <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/round-tables-regional-forum-2025>

IUCN, MGCY, the UN Resident Coordinator in Türkiye, UNESCO, and the Thalassophile Project.

Goal 17

Closing the gap: Regional priorities for more diversified and resilient financing for sustainable development

21. The lead organizer was ECE in close collaboration with the UNEP Finance Initiative, UNDP, UN Women and UNOPS. The round table was moderated by Mr. Paul Ladd, Director ECE Sustainable Development Unit, and Mr. Daniel Bouzas Luis, Regional Lead Europe, UNEP Finance Initiative. Substantive inputs were presented by North Macedonia, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Tajikistan (together with the UN Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan), European Investment Bank, Geneva State Pension Fund, Platform Agenda 2030 on behalf of civil society, Regional Cooperation Council, Sustainable Finance Geneva, and ECE Greece exercised a right of reply.

V. Plenary session: Towards an Inclusive, Prosperous and Sustainable Future: Pathways for a Changing World

22. The Co-Chairs reported back on the key messages from the peer learning round tables on SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17.

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

- Permanent Representative of Greece to the UN in Geneva and Co-Chair, H.E. Ambassador Ioannis Ghikas (moderator);
- ECE Deputy Executive Secretary, Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin;
- National SDG Coordinator of the Netherlands, Ms. Anna Pot;
- Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Mr. Harald Sonderegger;
- Executive Director, UN Global Compact Network in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Mr. Antonio Hautle;
- ILO Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, Ms. Beate Andrees;
- CSO Representative, WO=MEN – Dutch Gender Platform; Netherlands, Ms. Yara Bon, on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for the ECE region;
- Youth representative, Major Group for Children and Youth, Ms. Rita de Jesus Barbosa Teixeira.

24. The following delegations took part in the ensuing plenary debate: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Spain, Switzerland.

25. A summary of the discussions in the plenaries and peer learning sessions is contained in the annex to the present report. Written statements and other related materials are available on the website of the regional forum (<https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2025>).

VI. Closing

26. In his closing remarks, the ECE Deputy Executive Secretary emphasized the importance of private sector involvement in advocating for sustainability. He also noted that local action, particularly from cities, often drives implementation efforts. The upcoming FfD4 conference provides an opportunity to set an innovative financing agenda for development and climate, while stressing the need for strategic foresight and agile thinking for future development. Lastly, the speaker highlighted ECE's role in promoting sustainability and high-quality regulation.

27. The Co-Chairs emphasized that challenges, like the oil price shock and the COVID-19 pandemic, can also catalyse positive developments, such as advancements in energy efficiency and digitalization, and encouraged viewing difficulties through a transformative lens. Additionally, they highlighted that the SDGs are crucial both for offering a multidimensional approach beyond GDP, and for promoting shared prosperity. Before closing the meeting, the Co-Chairs thanked the organizers and participants and the member States that had provided financial support: Germany and Switzerland. The draft report of the regional forum, including the Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions, will be circulated for comments by participants. The final version will constitute the official input from the ECE region to the 2025 High-level Political Forum convened under the auspices of ECOSOC.

Annex

Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions

High-level policy segment on the theme “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe region for leaving no one behind”

1. Nearly a decade after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the ECE region has been insufficient. The implementation process has faced significant challenges, including multiple crises, conflicts, and shifting priorities. Despite these obstacles, member States reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and to multilateral cooperation. Throughout the Regional Forum, a range of inclusive, innovative, and evidence-based solutions for sustainable development were presented, including on the SDGs under in-depth review, although these efforts still require scaling up to achieve broader impact.
2. Setting the scene, the keynote address³ provided a data-driven overview of the global situation calling for urgent, systemic change to achieve the SDGs within planetary boundaries. While it is the best time in history in terms of global health and literacy, the world is still grappling with a poly-crisis. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and social fragmentation continue to undermine stability. Key risks include the rise of AI, which could exacerbate inequality, and the continued acceleration of human activity that is pushing Earth's systems toward critical tipping points.
3. Despite these challenges, optimism is crucial. The tools to solve these problems are within reach. However, to succeed, it is urgent to implement systemic changes, including shifting energy systems, reforming agriculture, and addressing inequality. Political instability and the rise of autocratic governance pose additional risks to achieving these goals. The call to action involves a new social contract that builds trust, fosters cooperation, and ensures that the benefits of development are shared equitably. The UN's role in guiding these efforts remains vital, as it defends the rights of marginalized communities and promotes scientific integrity, acting as a reminder that despite the enormity of the challenges, a better future is possible.
4. Taking stock of regional progress towards the SDGs, the findings of the ECE SDG progress report revealed a sobering reality. Only 21 targets are on track to be achieved by 2030, down from 26 three years ago. For 84 targets, progress must accelerate. Trends on 20 targets must be reversed entirely, up from 15 targets three years ago. Data availability continues to improve, allowing assessment of more targets - yet 44 remain unmeasurable.
5. Goal 3 on good health and well-being remains the only goal where all targets can be assessed. The region is on track to reduce child, maternal, and noncommunicable disease mortality, while all other health-related targets are progressing too slowly. Under Goal 5 on gender equality, less than half of the targets can be measured. Technology for women's empowerment measured through mobile phone ownership is the only indicator on track, while legal and policy improvements are evident but insufficient to achieve parity in political and economic participation.
6. Goal 8, focused on inclusive economic growth and decent work, shows a return to GDP growth, but productivity per employed person is declining, requiring urgent reversal. Progress on youth employment is encouraging. While national reporting platforms are expanding, challenges with data comparability persist. Regional progress remains uneven, and overall acceleration is critical.

³ The related slides are available at: <https://regionalforum.unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/KeynoteSpeech-PlanetaryStewardship.pdf>

7. In the plenary debate, effective national strategies were highlighted as crucial to accelerating progress towards the SDGs. The updated sustainability strategy of Germany takes a whole-of-society approach and includes specific measures to address spillover effects. Georgia's development strategy, Vision 2030, is fully aligned with the SDGs and supported by specific action plans. For some countries, national development strategies not only align national priorities with the SDGs but also with the process of EU accession, as highlighted by Albania and North Macedonia.

8. Ahead of the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, the mobilization of financial resources was emphasized as a key driver of sustainable development. Poland pointed to its approach to mobilize domestic resources through investing in the efficiency of administration and tax systems and to leverage the potential of the private sector. Portugal stressed its priority to support more vulnerable countries, which need increased support not only through ODA but also through innovative public and private financing sources. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the most important achievements was the adoption of the SDG financing framework by all levels of government.

9. In the run-up to the 2nd World Summit for Social Development, addressing social challenges has been prioritized. Armenia has focused on advancing inclusive education, ensuring universal and accessible healthcare, and strengthening resilient social protection systems. The Netherlands emphasized the need for development benefits to be distributed in an inclusive and sustainable way, with the decent work agenda playing a key role. Türkiye showcased the success of its social assistance system, powered by the Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAS), which enables efficient, data-driven support for vulnerable populations.

10. In light of the ongoing crises and growing geopolitical divides, the need for cooperation and partnerships has never been more urgent, also in the context of the implementation of the Pact for the Future, which was adopted last year through the co-facilitation of Germany and Namibia.

11. The considerable potential of technology, digitalization, and AI to accelerate sustainable development was emphasized, along with the necessity of addressing associated risks. Azerbaijan highlighted digital technology, innovation and upskilling its workforce as key elements of the country's long-term transformation strategy. Belarus highlighted its draft National Development Strategy until 2040 envisaging the achievement of high living standards and emphasized the negative consequences of illegal sanctions for sustainable development.

12. Addressing climate change, environmental degradation and advancing the sustainable energy transition remains a key concern. Belgium stressed that the sustainable management of marine ecosystems is an important issue for the country. Kyrgyzstan pointed out that Central Asia is highly vulnerable to climate change. Despite being responsible for only a tiny proportion of global emissions, the country has set ambitious goals to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Malta as a small island state is prioritizing climate action and environmental sustainability and continues to implement a low-carbon development strategy, investing in renewable energy, sustainable mobility, and nature-based solutions.

13. Tajikistan reaffirmed its commitment to address water- and climate-related global challenges and will host the High-level International Conference on Glaciers' Preservation in Dushanbe from 29-31 May 2025. Uzbekistan outlined its reforms on poverty reduction, economic growth and green transition, referencing the 'From Poverty to Prosperity' programme, also sharing progress in health and education, noting a significant rise in renewable energy generation and the development of a long-term decarbonization strategy until 2055.

14. Ensuring good health and providing access to healthcare remain important priorities for governments across the region. In Ireland, national progress across SDG 3 has been underpinned by Sláintecare, a national reform programme which is building towards equal access to services for every citizen based on patient need rather than their ability to pay. In the Russian Federation, the achievement of targets on reducing maternal and infant mortality is based on a three-tiered model for providing medical assistance to develop perinatal centres, providing medical facilities with modern equipment and enhancing the qualifications of

medical personnel. In addition, healthy diets, reducing zoonotic disease risks, improving food safety and promoting sustainable agriculture contribute to progress under SDG 3, as pointed out by FAO.

15. Achieving gender equality remains a key concern in the ECE region. The EU stressed that gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and their full and equal enjoyment of human rights are core values of the EU. In this regard, the European Commission has adopted an EU gender equality strategy and the EU Gender Action Plan III, an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in the EU's external action.

16. Education and investment in human capital is fundamental. In Cyprus, the revised national strategy for education for sustainable development and green transition ensures that sustainability principles are integrated into the educational system. Similarly, Romania is focusing on enhancing public sector capabilities by steadily increasing the number of experts trained in sustainable development.

17. The importance of the private sector in driving economic growth and employment was highlighted. Turkmenistan is particularly focused on fostering the development of its private sector and enhancing export potential through the support of SMEs.

18. Economic prosperity requires equitable and inclusive connectivity. Hungary emphasized the role of ECE to enhance interconnectivity and synergies between countries in this large geographical region.

19. The importance of partnerships at all levels has been stressed throughout the forum. The local level is particularly significant as it responds directly to the sustainability concerns of its populations. Austria supports the implementation of the SDGs at the subnational level and held a subnational SDG dialogue forum in September 2024 in the Austrian province of Carinthia. Czechia underscored the potential of cities and subnational regions to address major trends such as demographic change, new technologies or climate impacts.

20. Additionally, regional and subregional cooperation was highlighted as essential. ECE was recognized as a key platform for fostering regional dialogue, enabling peer learning, and facilitating the exchange of experiences in areas related to sustainability. Furthermore, collaboration at the subregional level plays a critical role, such as within the Central European Initiative and the Regional Cooperation Council.

21. A number of countries referred to past or upcoming VNRs, which have emerged as a valuable tool for assessing progress in achieving the SDGs. This included countries from the region, such as Bulgaria, Germany, Malta and Switzerland, which will present their VNRs at the 2025 or 2026 HLPF. Bulgaria's second VNR will focus on the achievements and challenges in advancing national economic and social development and will include strong youth involvement.

22. Reliable, comparable, up-to-date and disaggregated data are necessary to measure progress toward the SDGs. Switzerland stressed that it is vital to strengthen the collection and availability of statistics so that governments can make informed decisions.

23. Reporting back from the civil society forum, civil society organizations across the region expressed deep concern about the overlapping political, ecological, and economic crises. There is growing pressure on civil society spaces, with governments increasingly reducing civil society to service providers while restricting advocacy efforts. Notably, military spending is rising, exacerbating global tensions. Civil society urged governments to build inclusive, resilient health systems, invest in workforce training, and prioritize mental health. Additionally, it called for stronger gender equality measures, social protection, and environmental actions, particularly regarding plastic pollution. The growing cuts in donor funding threaten human rights organizations, and civil society called for fairer tax systems and sustainable funding, including for grassroots groups. Civil society plays a critical role in advancing the SDGs and must be supported in the efforts to increase inclusiveness and enhancing leaving no one behind.

24. In the preparatory youth consultation, youth representatives from around 40 member States expressed their commitment to contributing to the discussions during the RFSD, highlighting their experiences and the need for inclusion in decision-making processes. On

SDG 3, they emphasized the importance of accessible, free healthcare and reliable information, particularly in light of the trauma caused by the pandemic and the spread of misinformation. For SDG 5, they called for policies to address sexual harassment, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence, discrimination, and the need for sufficient resources like menstrual hygiene products and age-appropriate sexuality education. Regarding SDG 8, youth stressed the importance of policies supporting young people entering the job market. On SDG 14, they highlighted the need for sustainable management of water ecosystems. Finally, they urged member States to collaborate more actively and ensure young people are included as leaders in peacebuilding and achieving the SDGs.

25. Adding to the outcomes of the youth consultation through a video message, the Head of the UN Youth Office stated that the core focus of the mandate of his office is to ensure that more young people are meaningfully included in policy-making and decision-making spaces. In Europe, those aged 15 to 35 represent approximately a fifth of the population.

26. Parliaments play a critical role in achieving sustainable development. In a video message, the IPU Secretary General highlighted a preparatory event jointly organized by IPU, ESCAP and ECE, which was centred around investing in strong public health and care systems while addressing gender inequalities. Parliaments, governments and relevant stakeholders discussed how to advance gender responsive socioeconomic policies and legislation. Similarly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean stressed the importance of cooperation between national Parliaments and pointed to the development of the first-ever parliamentarian's guide to protecting the Mediterranean Sea and Coast, which was drafted as a concrete tool for members of Parliament in navigating environmental policies in the Mediterranean.

27. Several delegations mentioned the war against Ukraine and its adverse consequences. Czechia emphasized that the Russian aggression against Ukraine continues to hinder progress on the 2030 Agenda in the ECE region and beyond. The EU stressed that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development, and that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its repercussions for European and global security in a changing environment constitute an existential challenge for the EU. Austria stated that the ongoing war against Ukraine is not only an aggression against a sovereign nation, but also an attack on common aspirations and values, freedom, democracy, human rights and prosperity. Germany condemned Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine that is a breach of the UN charter and has repercussions for the ECE region and worldwide. Malta stressed that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has far-reaching consequences for European and global security. Poland underscored that efforts to achieve the SDGs are hindered by conflicts such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which violates the UN charter. The Russian Federation rejected all accusations and called for a non-politicized approach to achieving the 2030 Agenda and for a multilateralism in line with equality and mutual respect.

28. Greece underlined the need for all Member States of the UN to abide by the UN Charter, international law and international treaties and in particular the Prespa Agreement of 12 February of 2019, which specifies in article 1 that the Constitutional name of the country is the "Republic of North Macedonia" and its short name is "North Macedonia" to be used *erga omnes*.

Outcomes of the peer learning round tables

Goal 3

Building Health Systems for the Future: Inclusive, Resilient, and Multisectoral Solutions for Achieving SDG 3 in the ECE Region

29. The ECE region has made significant strides in improving public health, but considerable challenges persist. Among the most pressing issues are growing health inequities, gaps in essential services, and the rising burden of non-communicable diseases and mental health problems. Addressing the health needs of vulnerable populations and tackling emerging global risks must be prioritized to ensure equitable health outcomes.

30. Consultations held on the next WHO European Programme of Work have identified several "megatrends" shaping public health. These include an ageing population, rising chronic diseases, mental health challenges, climate change, and health security concerns exacerbated by geopolitical and environmental crises. These interconnected trends have profound implications for health systems, requiring strong political commitment, intersectoral collaboration, and public engagement to create cross-cutting solutions. To meet these evolving challenges, health systems must be resilient, flexible, and adaptable, integrating climate-smart policies, embracing technology-driven solutions, and adopting a life-course approach tailored to local contexts.

31. The development of resilient health systems requires national efforts to improve health literacy, prevent obesity, address tobacco and alcohol use, and promote healthy diets and active lifestyles. Multisectoral collaboration is essential, with successful initiatives integrating health services into education and community development frameworks. These integrated approaches are crucial for addressing both current and future public health challenges.

32. One of the key challenges identified is the role of migrant health workers in responding to demographic shifts and providing essential services to ageing populations. Migrants have played a vital role during health crises, yet their contributions are often overlooked in policy discussions and healthcare systems. To address migration-driven care gaps, especially in rural and crisis-affected areas, targeted policy interventions are necessary to better recognize and support migrant healthcare workers.

33. Declining immunization rates and the resurgence of preventable diseases, such as measles, were also highlighted as critical concerns for the region. In response, robust vaccination programmes must be implemented, alongside community engagement efforts. Strengthening primary healthcare systems is essential to address health disparities, particularly for vulnerable populations. Investment in primary healthcare provides high returns by offering timely, equitable access to essential services and tackling health disparities.

34. Urban planning initiatives that promote active mobility, such as walking and cycling infrastructure, were identified as effective ways to improve public health. They require collaboration across sectors such as transportation, education, and the environment to create supportive infrastructure that fosters healthier communities. Furthermore, the health sector's contribution to climate change demands the adoption of climate-smart practices, including low-carbon infrastructure and sustainable policies.

35. The need for multilateral collaboration to strengthen health systems was also emphasized. Innovative financing mechanisms and inclusive partnerships are critical to addressing funding gaps in essential public services. Effective policy reforms and coordinated actions are necessary to tackle issues like childhood obesity and rare diseases, while balancing immediate health needs with long-term systemic improvements.

36. Technology offers transformative potential for healthcare, particularly through AI and precision medicine. However, achieving equitable access to these innovations requires significant investments in digital infrastructure and health literacy. Digital tools can enhance healthcare efficiency, improve patient outcomes, and increase community engagement. Nevertheless, regulatory frameworks must be developed to ensure that these tools are accessible and equitable. Digital health assessments for monitoring sanitation in healthcare facilities were highlighted as a cutting-edge example.

37. Basic services like water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are fundamental to achieving equitable health outcomes. Access to these services is essential for preventing diseases and protecting public health, especially for underserved communities. Addressing disparities in access to WASH services requires targeted solutions and localized interventions, which can significantly improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

38. Education and training are recognized as cornerstones of fostering resilience and well-being. By integrating health literacy into school curricula and promoting equity-focused educational strategies, societies can better equip individuals to navigate health challenges and reduce health disparities.

39. Food System-Based Dietary Guidelines are another critical tool for addressing public health challenges because they provide science-based recommendations for healthy eating and sustainable diets, helping to combat NCDs, obesity, malnutrition, and nutrient deficiencies.

40. Civil society representatives highlighted critical gaps in healthcare access for marginalized groups, including LGBTQI+ individuals, rural populations, and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantages. Transgender youth are at higher risk of mental health issues and suicide. There was a strong emphasis on the need for inclusive healthcare policies that prioritize sexual and reproductive health and rights for all individuals. This is crucial for building resilient health systems and managing demographic changes and directly impacts maternal health, fertility, and cancer prevention.

41. Community-based solutions are vital for addressing healthcare access disparities. Empowering local volunteer networks, expanding digital health literacy, and investing in adaptable care models for underserved areas were identified as promising strategies. Successful examples, such as mobile healthcare services and task-shifting to community health workers, demonstrate the effectiveness of timely, effective care delivery in communities where it is most needed.

42. Youth representatives stressed the importance of engaging young people meaningfully in their own future and involving them in the development, implementation and monitoring of health policies. They also called for integrating digital tools and science-driven approaches into policymaking processes. They called for greater transparency, equity, and inclusivity in designing digital health solutions, ensuring that all communities, particularly marginalized ones, benefit from advancements in healthcare technology.

43. The round table concluded with a strong call to action. Achieving SDG 3 requires transformative strategies to strengthen health systems, including political commitment, adequate funding, and evidence-based decision-making. Coordinated efforts between governments, UN agencies, and civil society are essential for driving progress. Key priorities include investing in child and adolescent health, strengthening primary healthcare, and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

Goal 5

The time is now: Inclusive, evidence-based and transformative solutions for gender equality and women's empowerment

44. The ECE region faces significant challenges in achieving gender equality targets. According to assessments presented during the round table, only one SDG 5 target (5.B on access to technology for women's empowerment) is on track. While three targets need acceleration, half of the targets lack sufficient data to adequately measure progress. The path to gender equality remains extremely difficult, with recent assessments indicating that without immediate action, it could take centuries to close critical gender gaps.

45. Despite some progress, the region continues to face significant challenges in implementing SDG 5. Women continue to bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which limits their economic participation. Women's representation in political and economic decision-making, while improving in some countries, remains far from parity across the region and should be strengthened, including by implementing CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40. Gender-based discrimination, stereotypes, and various forms of violence against women persist, including emerging forms of technology-facilitated violence.

46. Gender data gaps emerged as a critical barrier to policy action. Without high-quality intersectional data, gender inequalities remain hidden, limiting the effectiveness of policies and interventions. The round table emphasized the importance of strengthening gender data systems, creating national frameworks of gender equality indicators, and establishing dedicated mechanisms for gender statistics. Several innovative approaches were highlighted, including digitized systems for recording domestic violence cases, gender-responsive budgeting trackers, and national transfer accounts to analyze resource distribution across genders.

47. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks is essential for advancing gender equality. Many countries have adopted overarching legal frameworks to promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality. Progress was reported in criminalizing various forms of gender-based violence, introducing gender-based assessments of legislation, implementing electoral quotas for women, and establishing anti-discrimination laws. However, legislative advancement has not always translated into real impact on women's rights, and implementation remains a challenge.

48. Care systems and unpaid care work were identified as central to achieving gender equality. Women in the region spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men, with some countries reporting women spending up to 6.8 hours per day on these activities—more than twice the European average. The economic value of care work remains undervalued and unrecognized. Participants stressed the need to view care not as a social protection burden but as an economic opportunity that can generate employment and address demographic challenges.

49. Comprehensive approaches to childcare and parental leave policies are crucial for women's economic empowerment. Several initiatives were highlighted, including expanding access to childcare services, developing flexible parental leave options, introducing paternity leave, allowing parallel work and maternity benefits, and creating alternative childcare models. Early childhood education emerged as a critical investment, with some countries in the region having coverage as low as 17 per cent compared to the EU average of 93 per cent.

50. Women's economic empowerment requires addressing structural barriers in labour markets. Gender pay gaps persist across the region, ranging from less than 1% to over 22% in some countries, with subsequent impacts on pension gaps of up to 30%. Women are more likely to be engaged in vulnerable employment without social protection. Policies need to promote women's labour market participation, ensure equal pay, expand flexible work arrangements, strengthen part-time work protections, and support women entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas.

51. Political participation of women has improved but remains insufficient. The use of electoral quotas has generated significant progress in women's political representation in some countries, with women's seats in national parliaments increasing from an average of 19% in 2015 to 27% currently in parts of the region. However, women still face barriers including gender stereotypes, online harassment and violence, and structural limitations to meaningful participation in decision-making. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging men and boys as allies for gender equality.

52. Gender-based violence remains prevalent across the region, with one in four women aged 15-49 experiencing physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The round table noted progress in legal reforms, particularly relating to ratification of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, but highlighted implementation gaps and new challenges such as online violence, where young women aged 18-24 are four times more likely to face online violence compared to women over 65.

53. Disasters can exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Integrating gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction ensures responsiveness to the distinct needs and capacities of women and men.

54. The round table emphasized the importance of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, with examples of gender accelerator programmes that integrate efforts across sectors and stakeholders. Participants highlighted the need for partnerships between all levels of government, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations to leverage resources, expertise, and political will for gender equality.

55. Digital tools and innovation offer new opportunities for gender equality. Examples included digital tools for reproductive health education, digitized systems for gender-responsive budgeting, and technological solutions to address gender-based violence. However, participants also cautioned about digital gender gaps and the need to ensure women's equal access to digital technologies while addressing emerging forms of online violence.

56. Youth voices emphasized the urgency of action on gender equality. Young people called for recognition of care responsibilities that fall on young women, better support and protection of young people when it comes to gender-based violence, improved access to sexual and reproductive health services, and meaningful inclusion, also of marginalized groups, in policy development beyond tokenistic participation. The message was clear: progress on gender equality cannot wait for future generations – action is needed now.

Goal 8

Just Digital and Green Transitions to Leave No One Behind

57. The round table reflected on the role of decent work and sustainable economic growth in the context of three profound structural transformations: the green transition, digitalization and demographic shifts towards population ageing.

58. Speakers highlighted the importance of international collaboration, bringing together diverse perspectives. These transitions must be just and inclusive, grounded in equity, human rights, and social justice, and capable of delivering for all. Drawing from the ILO Just Transition Guidelines and relevant international labour standards—including Convention No. 122 on Employment Policy and Convention No. 144 on Tripartite Consultation—several interventions highlighted how countries are embedding fairness and participation into transition planning, particularly through social dialogue.

59. While the green and digital transitions present significant opportunities for scientific and entrepreneurial innovation, resource efficiency, better service delivery, and governance, they also carry the risk of exacerbating inequalities. The shift away from carbon-intensive industries, combined with the disruptive effects of digitalization and AI on the world of work, disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations, including women, young people, older persons, people with disabilities, migrants, informal workers, and rural communities.

60. Moving toward low-carbon and digital economies, it is crucial to ensure that sustainability does not come at the expense of inclusion. These transitions should empower individuals and communities, supporting long-term growth. In a region already facing skills gaps and demographic pressures, migration can bridge labour market divides and serve as a driver of positive change.

61. The green transition, beyond addressing environmental challenges, presents an opportunity to develop future-oriented skills and build resilient economic structures. Entrepreneurship and transformative innovation drive sustainable economic growth and development, but they also require more than just new technologies. They depend on supportive ecosystems and collaboration between public and private sectors. Governments play a crucial role in fostering these conditions by enabling policy experimentation and learning. For example, countries in the region are positioning themselves as sustainability hubs, using regional accelerators focused on sustainability and AI to harness innovation for inclusive growth.

62. Education and training are the cornerstones of building an innovation-driven and sustainable economy, and initiatives to incorporate training in entrepreneurship, robotics, and other digital skills at an early stage are vital in nurturing future talent. For smaller economies, international cooperation platforms, dialogue and peer learning through multilateral initiatives such as the ECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies and the ECE Transformative Innovation Network are particularly valuable.

63. Transitioning to a circular economy is key to decoupling economic growth from natural resource depletion. This requires technological, social, and systemic innovation, alongside smart regulation, incentives, and collaboration among all stakeholders. However, businesses still face significant barriers, including regulatory uncertainties, high upfront investment costs, and insufficient consumer cooperation. Governments can support this transition by providing clear information and incentives.

64. Digitalization is a powerful enabler of sustainable economic growth, but it must be ensured that digital technologies serve people, prioritize inclusivity, equality, accessibility, dignity, privacy, freedom of expression, and welfare. While 90% of citizens in Europe and the CIS region are connected to the internet, more efforts are needed to make this connectivity

meaningful. The roles of the private sector, governments, academia, experts, and civil society are crucial in addressing global infrastructure gaps and prioritizing underserved regions.

65. Governments that digitalize their services, such as tax and employment services, help move workers from informal to formal employment. The digitalization of government services has facilitated smoother transitions for workers by matching job seekers with available opportunities and supporting formal employment pathways. Similarly, circular economy initiatives combine environmental sustainability and social inclusion, offering training and subsidized employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups. These efforts demonstrate how digital and green transitions can be mutually reinforcing.

66. Lifelong learning and inclusive upskilling and reskilling strategies are essential, especially in underserved and disadvantaged areas. Countries are modernizing vocational education and training systems to respond to emerging skill demands, particularly for young people and women.

67. One key point raised in the discussions was the need for regional and sector-specific strategies to address the distinct challenges faced by different industries and communities during these transitions.

68. Nature-based solutions also illustrate how sustainability and livelihoods can be mutually reinforcing. These low-cost, scalable interventions create jobs while addressing climate and biodiversity challenges.

69. Countries shared examples of initiatives designed to enhance digital skills and bridge digital divides. A national digital competence centre was highlighted as an example of such initiatives. In addition, it was shown how digital innovations, such as AI and robotics, are transforming long-term care services for older persons, addressing care needs of ageing populations. For instance, telecare services that use sensor systems in toilets and kitchens to monitor older individuals living alone, while robots assist in caregiving in nursing homes.

70. While AI presents opportunities and can embrace innovation for social good, it also presents risks to human rights, privacy, and labour. Both white-collar and blue-collar workers will be impacted, and algorithms and surveillance need to be transparent to protect them.

71. Participants were warned of growing inequalities, low wages, precarious work, and ethical concerns in digital industries. Marginalized groups remain underrepresented in the digital sector, from STEM education to employment opportunities, and largely underserved by digital technologies. There is a need for fair algorithm management, creation of intergenerational workplaces and investment in the care economy.

72. Work policies should benefit both businesses and individuals, while mitigating risks and enhancing opportunities. Addressing rural infrastructure gaps and equipping educational institutions with modern technologies will facilitate more effective education delivery. Policies must focus on young people as well as target older workers, vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and those living in rural areas.

73. In 2025, several important events and processes such as the WSIS+20 review process and high-level event in Geneva, and later WTDC-25 in Baku, will shape the future of digitalization and connectivity for the SDGs.

Goal 14

From Policy to Practice: Strengthening Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Management under SDG 14

74. Urgent and coordinated action is essential to reverse the decline of marine and coastal ecosystems, as global and European marine habitats continue to face increasing pressures from pollution, overfishing, habitat degradation, and climate change. The peer learning session reaffirmed the critical need to translate policy into practice, prioritizing science-based solutions, inclusive governance, and robust cross-sectoral collaboration.

75. The pioneering role of marine sciences and ocean observation was highlighted. The significance of data-sharing platforms and their integration across different sectors as key instruments to support informed policy and action was underscored.

76. A reflection on deep maritime identity and traditions followed, positioning ocean protection as central to sustainable development. Examples of leadership in ocean literacy, such as the Blue School initiative, and its commitment to enhancing marine protected areas (MPAs), including areas beyond national jurisdiction under the BBNJ agreement were illustrated. Innovative use of nanosatellites for monitoring MPAs, demonstrating effective integration of policy, science, and technology showcased.

77. The Sea Level Station Monitoring Facility at the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), was presented as a powerful tool for early warning systems, particularly during events such as the 2022 Tonga tsunami. The importance of sharing not only open data, but also metadata and infrastructure, to reduce costs and increase the effectiveness of regional and international cooperation was emphasized.

78. The urgency of a holistic approach to address marine degradation was stressed. In Europe and Central Asia, important progress in sustainable aquaculture and fisheries regulation were noted while challenges in implementing comprehensive ocean literacy initiatives call for multi-level strategies that include behavioural change and cross-regional collaboration.

79. Examples such as the Thalassophile Project, which collaborates with deaf communities to produce accessible educational content, including the translation of marine science resources into international scientific sign language, reminded participants that the ocean belongs to all, and no one should be left behind.

80. The alarming concentration of microplastic pollution in the Mediterranean calls for data-driven solutions, sustainable alternatives, and financial incentives to eliminate single-use plastics.

81. No nation is too distant from the ocean to disengage from its fate. Ocean protection is a shared responsibility—and an opportunity for collective resilience, innovation, and equity.

82. With regard to the role of climate resilience and the sustainable blue economy in addressing the ongoing degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems under SDG 14, the discussion highlighted the urgency of aligning ocean protection with climate objectives and the need to scale up partnerships that translate scientific knowledge into practical action.

83. The economic and societal value of open marine data was underscored. Public data platforms, such as those supporting ocean biodiversity and environmental monitoring, were presented as essential tools for informed policy, risk management, and sustainable development. These open-access systems enable real-time decision-making, contribute to early warning capacities, and support broader socio-economic benefits within the blue economy.

84. Participants emphasized the importance of transforming ocean economies from extractive models to ones based on sustainability, equity, and long-term resilience. Nature-based solutions, such as the protection and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems, were identified as critical for enhancing climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and economic opportunities. Policy frameworks that encourage cross-sectoral collaboration and prioritize inclusive development approaches are vital to this transition.

85. The conversation also highlighted the importance of meaningful engagement of youth, coastal communities, and marginalized groups in shaping marine policies. Building resilient and inclusive blue economies requires consistent financial support for grassroots initiatives and local actors, who play a pivotal role in driving behavioural change and fostering innovation.

86. The need for integrated national plans that embed ocean data, climate science, and biodiversity objectives was reiterated, as was the importance of involving landlocked countries in marine governance efforts. Participants called for clear regulatory frameworks, investment in nature-positive activities, and expanded ocean literacy to support implementation.

87. A shared message is that ocean data must inform not only scientific research but also governance, policy, and investment strategies. Protecting marine and coastal ecosystems is a

global imperative—and an opportunity to build a sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient future.

Goal 17

Closing the gap: Regional priorities for more diversified and resilient financing for sustainable development

88. The round table provided a perspective on pathways to close the gap the region is facing between current investment levels and the financial needs required to support the achievement of the SDGs. The discussion was held also with a view to the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), supporting efforts towards an inclusive and transformative FfD4 outcome document.

89. Substantial levels of financing by both public and private sectors need to be mobilized to bridge the funding gap, with public mechanisms frequently paving the way for the flow of private resources. In a diverse financial landscape with public and private actors, cooperation and coordination is of crucial importance. While fiscal instruments are to be aligned with climate and environmental goals, combining public and private funds and modalities through blended finance was highlighted as an effective way to foster this collaboration. Strong partnerships with the private sector are necessary, with the ultimate goal of aligning all financial flows with sustainability.

90. Regarding public finance, political will and coordination mechanisms at the centre of the Government are crucial. Furthermore, stability of the financing environment, trust and predictability of the legal and regulatory background are essential for the private sector. National development strategies can be key instruments to define sustainable development in the national context and to align financial flows with the national sustainability objectives.

91. Despite strains on multilateralism, action at the local level can be highly impactful. Connecting capital providers with capital seekers in cities and communities, such as utilities and transport providers, can support capital allocation to sustainable development. Building a pipeline of concrete, investable projects may be easier at the local level. The public sector can support these efforts by using tools such as public procurement, concessional finance, and guarantees to alter the risk profile of projects. In this context, impact investment as a holistic investment strategy combines decent returns for investors with positive sustainability outcomes.

92. Further developing and broadening the use of innovative financial instruments is crucial to raise financial resources for sustainable development at scale. It was noted that considerable and impactful product innovation has taken place, such as the EIB's Climate Awareness Bonds, Sustainability Awareness Bonds and bonds linked to affordable housing and educational infrastructure. More blended finance as well as a stronger link between MDBs and the mobilization of private capital is needed.

93. Collaborations of government with the private sector, such as the issuance of green bonds in Tajikistan, are a powerful example of strengthening resource mobilization. The proceeds of the green bond, issued in local currency in 2024, supports eligible micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in undertaking climate-smart initiatives. The UN cooperates closely with Tajikistan on identifying and implementing effective financing strategies in the context of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF).

94. As businesses and financial institutions are increasingly recognizing the viability of the business case related to sustainability and social stability, there are other examples of progress in green and sustainability-oriented financial instruments. For example, it is regarded as good business to integrate principles of circularity and waste reduction in commercial activities. Governments should create enabling environments for these practices and engage in effective partnerships with businesses and the financial industry.

95. Insurance is another critical area in times of rising disaster risks, such as flooding, wildfires, heat waves, and earthquakes. Subregional cooperation, such as in South-Eastern Europe through the Regional Cooperation Council, is vital to make disaster risk insurance affordable and accessible. Economies of scale across smaller economies are critical to

increase the affordability of disaster insurance schemes and to overcome the structural insurance coverage gap.

96. Civil society is an important actor and plays a bridging function to make financing solutions inclusive. Civil society called for preserving civic space and funding and encouraged governments to report on SDG 17 in their VNRs.

C. Plenary session

Towards an Inclusive, Prosperous and Sustainable Future: Pathways for a Changing World

97. The multi-stakeholder panel discussion highlighted a number of levers and stakeholder groups that are crucial to turbocharge the SDGs. Implementing global outcomes, such as the Pact for the Future, and harnessing the momentum of upcoming summits such as FfD4 and the 2nd World Summit for Social Development is important to support implementation efforts.

98. The SDGs are a global framework that belong to all of humanity. Every individual, private business, and community shares responsibility for achieving them. Furthermore, crises should be seen as opportunities to drive innovation, and the growing number of venture startups addressing SDG-related issues demonstrates the power of this innovative approach.

99. Central to this effort is collaboration with the private sector, which plays a key role in achieving SDG objectives. The Government of the Netherlands is focused on fostering partnerships to address issues such as living wages and sustainable business practices.

100. In view of insufficient SDG progress and significant disparities across countries key challenges include managing the digital economy transition, enhancing green economy resilience, promoting circularity, and addressing disruptions in global supply chains, while ensuring investments in infrastructure are future-proofed for climate impacts and demographic shifts, particularly an ageing population.

101. Local and subnational governments play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs, with more than 60 per cent of these goals to be realized at the local level. It was stressed that local and subnational authorities must be given proper autonomy for action and decision-making, including proper competencies and financial and budgetary autonomy. The importance of partnerships between local, subnational, and international bodies to address emerging challenges was particularly stressed in relation to issues such as social rights and development, inclusion, youth and gender equality. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has adopted pertinent recommendations in these areas.

102. The private sector, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, plays a pivotal role in driving global development and achieving the SDGs. The UN Global Compact promotes responsible business conduct through its ten principles, encouraging companies to focus on human rights, environmental sustainability, and anti-corruption, while emphasizing the need for rule of law and trust in contracts to attract private investment and ensure long-term success.

103. The ILO's tripartite structure, involving government, business, and labour representatives, fosters effective multi-stakeholder engagement, which has become key to accelerating progress on the SDGs. In preparation for the upcoming World Summit for Social Development, the ILO has launched a Global Coalition for Social Justice to mobilize diverse stakeholders, emphasizing social justice, just transitions, labour protection, and the importance of policy coherence, while advocating for stronger social dialogue and follow-up mechanisms to ensure the implementation of summit outcomes.

104. Civil society, despite facing numerous challenges such as shrinking civic space, rising authoritarianism, and funding cuts, remains resilient and continues to mobilize for the implementation of the SDGs. They emphasized the need for inclusive, intersectional approaches to health, gender equality, and social protection, while urging stronger regulation of technology, environmental protection, and greater investment in care economies and

climate justice, highlighting the critical role of progressive taxation, political will and multilateral cooperation.

105. Young people advocated for improved access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, quality education, and sustainable employment. To accelerate progress, young people must be actively involved in decision-making processes, supported by dedicated financing mechanisms, skills development, and protections for youth activists, ensuring their leadership in shaping a just and sustainable future.

106. As host of the FfD4 conference, Spain emphasized the urgent need for global political will to address the \$4 trillion annual SDG financing gap and for concrete and actionable outcomes of FfD4. It is critical to ensure that developing countries have the fiscal space to implement their national development strategies.

107. In the ensuing discussion, Armenia stressed the need to reinvigorate multilateral cooperation and to uphold the principles of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus for addressing the global challenges. Austria emphasized gender equality as a key driver of sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting are therefore firmly embedded in Austria's governance structures. Azerbaijan highlighted that it has transitioned from a resource-dependent economy to one driven by innovation, technology and investment in non-oil sectors. Belarus underscored the importance of regional integration by the example of the Eurasian Economic Union, systemic dialogue and exchange of experience between different regional integration structures and coupling of national and regional development strategies on the Eurasian continent. Switzerland pointed to SDG localization and the need to anticipate the use of future technologies including AI and digitalisation as two major trends for accelerating SDG implementation.
