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## Economic Commission for Europe

### 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 Economic Commission for Europe (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, Umid Abidkhadjaev, and the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations in Geneva, 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 (Kingdom of the), 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 was represented by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations 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 United Nations bodies, departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations and initiatives attended the meeting: Development Coordination Office, ECE, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Economic and Social Council, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Trade Centre (ITC), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Road Safety Fund, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Youth Office, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), World Bank Group. Resident coordinators and representatives from resident coordinators' offices in six 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 and Natural Resources, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, Regional Cooperation Council, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
7. Representatives of more than 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/2025/1.

9. In their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs emphasized the need for a collaborative approach to accelerating progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, despite setbacks and challenges. The Regional Forum aimed 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 featured peer learning sessions on key Goals, 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 President of the Economic and Social Council highlighted the significance of the eightieth anniversary of the United Nations and the tenth anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals, 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 United Nations, calling for more efficient and sustainable ways of operation to ensure that the organization can continue to support those in need. The President encouraged Europe's leadership in sustainable technology and the need for commitment and action to meet Goal targets, in particular in health, decent work, partnerships and life below water.

11. The Deputy Secretary-General, in a video message, stressed the urgent need for sustainable development action, noting that, 10 years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, global progress remains insufficient, with only 17 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals on track. The ECE region is projected to achieve only 17 per cent of its Goal 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 United Nations will support efforts to accelerate progress, including through the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Seville, Spain, which is aimed at unleashing finance, including finding innovative ways to harness domestic resources and attract private sector investment.

12. The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe 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 that the region is facing. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is slowing, with only 21 of 169 Goal 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. She went on to stress 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 United Nations celebrates its eightieth anniversary and the tenth year of the Goals.

13. The Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and Co-Vice-Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia focused on the Sustainable Development Goals under in-depth review and highlighted both the resilience shown in response to multiple global crises and the achievements driven by regional United Nations 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 in a keynote speech by the Chief Impact Officer, Nobel Prize Outreach and Co-Lead, Earth4All Initiative, Owen Gaffney.

15. The key findings of the 2025 ECE Sustainable Development Goals progress report<sup>1</sup> were presented by the Chief of Social and Demographic Statistics Section, ECE Statistical Division, Andres Vikat.

16. The following delegations took part in the ensuing plenary debate: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Cyprus, Czechia, European Union, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Poland, Portugal (video message), Romania, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan. Representatives of civil society and youth and the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (video message) reported on preparatory meetings and consultations. The Head of the United Nations Youth Office (video message), the Regional Cooperation Council, FAO and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean also took the floor. The Russian Federation and Greece exercised their rights of reply.

### **IV. Peer learning round tables<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Goal 3**

##### **Building health systems for the future: inclusive, resilient and multisectoral solutions for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 in the Economic Commission for Europe Region**

17. The round table was led by the WHO Regional Office for Europe with the United Nations Issue-based Coalition on Health and Well-being (FAO, IOM, ILO, OHCHR, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN-Women, ECE, UNESCO, WFP). It was moderated by the Head of Ageing and Health, WHO, Ritu Sadana. Substantive inputs and presentations were provided by Hungary, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Spain, Turkmenistan, IOM, UNICEF, UNICEF Youth delegate, 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 United Nations Issue-based Coalition on Gender Equality. The round table was co-moderated by Helena Valas (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia) with Florence Bauer (UNFPA Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia) and Belén Sanz Luque (UN-Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia). Substantive inputs were presented by: Albania; Armenia; Austria; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Malta; Republic of Moldova; Spain; Uzbekistan; Council of Europe; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; youth representatives; and the regional civil society engagement mechanism.

<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://w3.unece.org/sdg2025/>.

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

**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 United Nations Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia and with contributions from FAO, IOM, UNEP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNOPS and UN-Women. It was moderated by the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Albania, Fiona McCluney, and the Head of the ITU Regional Office for Europe, Jaroslaw Ponder. Substantive inputs were presented by: Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Estonia, the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Spain, Vinnova, the innovation agency of Sweden, IndustriALL, the International Organization of Employers, the Pan-European Regional Council, the Semadeni Industry Group (Switzerland) and the Society for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (SDPS).

**Goal 14****From policy to practice: strengthening marine and coastal ecosystem management under Sustainable Development Goal 14**

20. The lead organizers were UNEP and UNESCO, in close cooperation with Belgium. The round table was moderated by the UNESCO Regional Director for Science and Culture in Europe, Magdalena Landry, and the UNEP Regional Director for Europe, Arnold Kreilhuber. Substantive inputs were presented by: Belgium, Portugal, the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the Major Group for Children and Youth, the United Nations 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 the Director of the ECE Sustainable Development Unit, Paul Ladd, and the Regional Lead Europe, UNEP Finance Initiative, Daniel Bouzas Luis. Substantive inputs were presented by North Macedonia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Tajikistan (with the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan), the European Investment Bank, the Geneva State Pension Fund, Platform Agenda 2030 on behalf of civil society, the 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 Sustainable Development Goals 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 United Nations in Geneva and Co-Chair, Ioannis Ghikas (moderator);
- ECE Deputy Executive Secretary, Dmitry Mariyasin;
- National Coordinator for the Sustainable Development Goals of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Anna Pot;
- Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Harald Sonderegger;
- Executive Director, United Nations Global Compact Network in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Antonio Hautle;

- ILO Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, Beate Andrees;
- Civil society organization representative, WO=MEN – Dutch Gender Platform; Kingdom of the Netherlands, Yara Bon, on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for the ECE region;
- Youth representative, Major Group for Children and Youth, 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, in particular from cities, often drives implementation efforts. The upcoming Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development 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 the role of ECE in promoting sustainability and high-quality regulation.

27. The Co-Chairs emphasized that challenges, such as the oil price shock and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, can also catalyse positive developments, such as advancements in energy efficiency and digitalization, and encouraged viewing difficulties through a transformative lens. In addition, they highlighted that the Sustainable Development Goals are crucial both for offering a multidimensional approach beyond gross domestic product (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 the Economic and Social Council.

## Annex

### Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions

#### I. 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 for Sustainable Development, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 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 Goals that were under in-depth review, although these efforts still require scaling up to achieve broader impact

2. Setting the scene, the keynote address<sup>1</sup> provided a data-driven overview of the global situation, indicating a need for urgent, systemic change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 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 artificial intelligence, which could exacerbate inequality, and the continued acceleration of human activity, which is pushing Earth’s systems towards 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 role of the United Nations 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 Sustainable Development Goals, the findings of the ECE Sustainable Development Goal 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. Sustainable Development 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 telephone ownership is the only indicator on track, while legal and policy improvements are evident but insufficient for achieving parity in political and economic participation.

6. Sustainable Development 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

<sup>1</sup> The related slides are available at: <https://regionalforum.unece.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/KeynoteSpeech-PlanetaryStewardship.pdf>.

reporting platforms are expanding, challenges with data comparability persist. Regional progress remains uneven, and overall acceleration is critical.

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

8. Ahead of the Fourth 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 mobilizing domestic resources through investing in the efficiency of administration and tax systems and leveraging the potential of the private sector. Portugal stressed its priority of supporting more vulnerable countries, which need increased support not only through official development assistance (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 Sustainable Development Goal financing framework by all levels of government.

9. In the run-up to the Second 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 Kingdom of 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 the 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 in 2024 through the co-facilitation of Germany and Namibia.

11. The considerable potential of technology, digitalization and artificial intelligence 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, to be held in Dushanbe from 29 to 31 May 2025. Uzbekistan outlined its reforms on poverty reduction, economic growth and green transition, referring to 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 Sustainable Development Goal 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 Goal 3, as pointed out by FAO.

15. Achieving gender equality remains a key concern in the ECE region. The European Union 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 European Union. In this regard, the European Commission has adopted a European Union gender equality strategy and the European Union Gender Action Plan III, an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in the European Union'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 education 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 small and medium-sized enterprises.

18. Economic prosperity requires equitable and inclusive connectivity. Hungary emphasized the role of ECE in enhancing 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 Sustainable Development Goals at the subnational level and held a subnational Sustainable Development Goal dialogue forum in September 2024 in the Austrian province of Carinthia. Czechia underscored the potential of cities and subnational regions in addressing major trends such as demographic change, new technologies or climate impacts.

20. In addition, 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, as within the Central European Initiative and the Regional Cooperation Council.

21. A number of countries referred to past or upcoming voluntary national reviews, which have emerged as a valuable tool for assessing progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This included countries from the region, such as Bulgaria, Germany, Malta and Switzerland, which will present their voluntary national reviews at the 2025 or 2026 high-level political forum on sustainable development. The second voluntary national review of Bulgaria will be focused 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 towards the Sustainable Development Goals. 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. In addition, it called for stronger gender equality measures, social protection and environmental actions, in particular 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 grass-roots groups. Civil society plays a critical role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals and must be supported in the efforts to increase inclusiveness and to leave no one behind.

24. In the preparatory youth consultation, youth representatives from some 40 member States expressed their commitment to contributing to the discussions during the Regional Forum, highlighting their experiences and the need for inclusion in decision-making processes. On Sustainable Development Goal 3, they emphasized the importance of accessible, free healthcare and reliable information, in particular in the light of the trauma caused by the pandemic and the spread of misinformation. For Goal 5, they called for policies to address sexual harassment, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence, discrimination and the need for sufficient resources such as menstrual hygiene products and age-appropriate sexuality education. Regarding Goal 8, youth stressed the importance of policies supporting young people entering the job market. On Goal 14, they highlighted the need for sustainable management of water ecosystems. Lastly, they urged member States to collaborate more actively and ensure that young people are included as leaders in peacebuilding and achieving the Goals.

25. Adding to the outcomes of the youth consultation through a video message, the Head of the United Nations Youth Office stated that the core focus of the mandate of his office is to ensure that more young people are meaningfully included in policymaking 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 Secretary-General of IPU highlighted a preparatory event jointly organized by IPU, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 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 European Union stressed that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development, and that the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and its repercussions for European and global security in a changing environment constitute an existential challenge for the European Union. 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 the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which is a breach of the Charter of the United Nations and has repercussions for the ECE region and worldwide. Malta stressed that the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine has far-reaching consequences for European and global security. Poland underscored that efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals are hindered by conflicts such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which violates the 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 States Member of the United Nations to abide by the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international treaties, and in particular the Prespa Agreement of 12 February 2019, which stipulates in article 1 that the Constitutional name of the country is the "Republic of North Macedonia" and that its short name is "North Macedonia", to be used *erga omnes*.

## II. Outcomes of the peer learning round tables

### Goal 3

#### **Building health systems for the future: inclusive, resilient and multisectoral solutions for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 in the Economic Commission for Europe 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, in particular 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 necessitates 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 such as childhood obesity and rare diseases, while balancing immediate health needs with long-term systemic improvements.

36. Technology offers transformative potential for healthcare, in particular through artificial intelligence 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 such as 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 these services requires targeted solutions and localized interventions, which can significantly improve health outcomes for vulnerable populations.

38. Education and training are recognized as cornerstones for 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 noncommunicable diseases, 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 socioeconomic 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 the integration of 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, in particular marginalized ones, benefit from advancements in healthcare technology.

43. The round table concluded with a strong call to action. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 requires transformative strategies to strengthen health systems, including political commitment, adequate funding and evidence-based decision-making. Coordinated efforts between Governments, United Nations 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 Sustainable Development Goal 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 Sustainable Development Goal 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 general recommendation No. 40 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 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. Participants in 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 analyse 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 with the European Union 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 per cent to more than 22 per cent in some countries, with subsequent impacts on pension gaps of up to 30 per cent. Women are more likely to be engaged in vulnerable employment without social protection. Policies should 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. The 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 per cent in 2015 to 27 per cent 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. Participants in the round table noted progress in legal reforms, in particular relating to ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), but highlighted implementation gaps and new challenges such as online violence, with young women aged 18–24 four times more likely to face online violence compared with 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. Participants in 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 the recognition of care responsibilities that fall on young women, better support for and protection of young people with regard 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. Participants in 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 guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all and relevant international labour standards – including the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) and the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) – several participants highlighted how countries are embedding fairness and participation into transition planning, in particular 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 artificial intelligence 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 towards 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 the 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 artificial intelligence to harness innovation for inclusive growth.

62. Education and training are the cornerstones for 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, prioritizing inclusivity, equality, accessibility, dignity, privacy, freedom of expression and welfare. While 90 per cent of citizens in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States 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, in particular 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 artificial intelligence and robotics, are transforming long-term care services for older persons, addressing care needs of ageing populations. For instance, there are 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 artificial intelligence 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 science, technology, engineering and mathematics education to employment opportunities, and largely underserved by digital technologies. There is a need for fair algorithm management, the 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 be focused on young people, as well as targeting older workers and vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and those living in rural areas.

73. In 2025, several important events and processes such as the World Summit on the Information Society 20-year review process and high-level event to be held in Geneva, and subsequently the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2025, to be held in Baku, will shape the future of digitalization and connectivity for the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### **Goal 14**

##### **From policy to practice: strengthening marine and coastal ecosystem management under Sustainable Development Goal 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 Schools initiative, and its commitment to enhancing marine protected areas, including areas beyond national jurisdiction under the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction were illustrated. Innovative use of nanosatellites for monitoring marine protected areas, showcased the effective integration of policy, science and technology.

77. The Sea Level Station Monitoring Facility at the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) was presented as a powerful tool for early warning systems, in particular during events such as the tsunami resulting from the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption in 2022. 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 was noted, while challenges in implementing comprehensive ocean literacy initiatives indicates a need for multilevel 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 indicates a need 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 Sustainable Development Goal 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 socioeconomic 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 grass-roots 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 faced by the region between current investment levels and the financial needs required to support the achievement of the Goals. The discussion was also held in view of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, supporting efforts towards an inclusive and transformative outcome document of the Conference.

89. Substantial levels of financing by both the 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 are 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 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 European Investment Bank 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 multilateral development bank and the mobilization of private capital, is needed.

93. Collaborations between government and the private sector, such as on 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, support eligible micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in undertaking climate-smart initiatives. The United Nations cooperates closely with Tajikistan on identifying and implementing effective financing strategies in the context of the integrated national financing framework.

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 into 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 increasing risks of disasters, such as flooding, wildfires, heatwaves 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 serves a bridging function to make financing solutions inclusive. Civil society called for preserving civic space and funding, and encouraged Governments to report on Goal 17 in their voluntary national reviews.

### **III. 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 Goals. Implementing global outcomes, such as the Pact for the Future, and harnessing the momentum of upcoming summits, such as the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the Second World Summit for Social Development, are important to support implementation efforts.

98. The Goals are a global framework that belongs 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 start-ups addressing Goal-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 objectives of the Goals. The Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is focused on fostering partnerships to address issues such as living wages and sustainable business practices.

100. In view of insufficient progress on the Goals 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 that investments in infrastructure are future-proofed for climate impacts and demographic shifts, particularly an ageing populations.

101. Local and subnational governments play a crucial role in achieving the Goals, with more than 60 per cent of the 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 in addressing emerging challenges was stressed particularly 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 Goals. The United Nations 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 the rule of law and trust in contracts to attract private investment and ensure long-term success.

103. The ILO tripartite structure, involving government, business and labour representatives, fosters effective multi-stakeholder engagement, which has become key to accelerating progress on the Goals. In preparation for the upcoming World Summit for Social Development, ILO has launched the Global Coalition for Social Justice to mobilize diverse stakeholders, emphasizing social justice, just transitions, labour protection and the importance of policy coherence while advocating 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, increasing authoritarianism and funding cuts, remains resilient and continues to mobilize for the implementation of the Goals. Representatives thereof 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 improved access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as 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, thereby ensuring their leadership in shaping a just and sustainable future.

106. As host of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, Spain emphasized the urgent need for global political will to address the \$4 trillion annual Goals financing gap and for concrete and actionable outcomes of the Conference. 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 uphold the principles of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to address the global challenges. Austria emphasized gender equality as a key driver of sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting are therefore firmly embedded in the governance structures of Austria. Azerbaijan highlighted that it had made the transition from a resource-dependent economy to one driven by innovation, technology and investment in non-oil sectors. Belarus underscored the importance of regional integration through the example of the Eurasian Economic Union, systemic dialogue and exchange of experiences between different regional integration structures and coupling of national and regional development strategies on the Eurasian continent. Switzerland pointed to localization of the Goals and the need to anticipate the use of future technologies, including artificial intelligence and digitalization, as two major trends for accelerating Goal implementation.