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High-level political forum on sustainable development

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**Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease
(COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development at all levels**

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

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits, as input to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region on its seventh session, held on 29 and 30 March 2023.



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

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I. Attendance

1. The seventh session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region was held as a hybrid meeting at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 29 and 30 March 2023. The session was co-chaired by the Chair of the Council for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ambassador Miloš Prica, and the Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Switzerland, Ambassador Markus Reubi.
2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 52 States members of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, 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, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.
3. The following non-member States of ECE attended: Brazil, Iraq, South Africa and Tunisia. The non-member observer State of Palestine also attended the session.
4. The European Union was represented by the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva. The European Commission, the European Environment Agency, the European Investment Bank and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights also participated.
5. Representatives of the following United Nations bodies, departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations and initiatives attended the meeting: Development Coordination Office, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations Headquarters, United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, UN-Water, World Tourism Organization, World Health Organization, World Food Programme, World Intellectual Property Organization and World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Resident coordinators and representatives from resident coordinators' offices from 15 countries and the United Nations Development Coordinator in Kosovo¹ also attended.
6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the session: Asian Development Bank, Council of Europe, Congress

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

of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, Economic Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Development Bank, Eurasian Economic Commission, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Forest Institute, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, International Development Law Organization, International Organization for Standardization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Regional Cooperation Council, Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, Union for the Mediterranean and United Cities and Local Governments.

7. Representatives of about 200 non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of academia, the private sector and other organizations also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the regional forum (<https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2023>).

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/2023/1.

9. In their opening remarks, the Co-Chairs stressed that the meeting was taking place at a particularly challenging time. The impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and multiple crises were hampering progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which had been further set back by the ongoing war in Ukraine. There could be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. They also indicated that structural problems, such as inequality, migration and climate change, persisted in the region. Progress on achieving the Goals was insufficient and efforts must therefore be redoubled to avert a further sustainable development crisis. The fact that the Forum had been attended by a high number of participants was in itself a source of hope and sign of their commitment to the 2030 Agenda. At the halfway point to 2030, policies and innovative solutions were needed to accelerate progress towards achieving the Goals and to cushion the impact of the crises. There were good examples within the region that need to be scaled up. There was a need to work together and forge strong partnerships between civil society and the private sector, including scientists and statisticians and, most importantly, young people, who have the right to live in a healthy society on a healthy planet. The regional forum was an opportunity for the region to underscore its role as a global champion of sustainable development and deliver strong messages at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in September under the auspices of the General Assembly (Sustainable Development Goals Summit).

10. In her video message, the Deputy Secretary-General highlighted the cascading crises that were affecting the ECE region at the time, including geopolitical tensions, the climate crisis, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising costs of financing that were strongly affecting fragile economies. Despite these headwinds, change was possible through such initiatives as the European Green Deal and large fiscal stimulus packages used to soften the impact of the pandemic. The commitment of young people was also a source of hope and would be supported through the new United Nations Youth Office. Significant progress was being made in terms of digitalization in the region, as well as in the transition to renewable and efficient energy systems, efforts to scale up water resource management and in infrastructure provision. There was global momentum following major United Nations events, such as the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties

to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as the recent adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and its “30 by 30” target, as well as the draft 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 jurisdictions. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September is a critical opportunity to chart a new course to achieve transformative change. Efforts should focus on a stimulus package for the Goals and on policy changes that could have multiplier effects on key transitions.

11. In her video message, the President of the Economic and Social Council affirmed the importance of the regional forum as a milestone in a series of events leading up to the high-level political forum in July and then to the centrepiece of the year’s events, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September. She stated that in many areas, the world was off target to achieve the 2030 Agenda. However, since its adoption in 2015, it was important to recognize that progress had been made, particularly with respect to reducing child and maternal mortality, digitalization and its role in facilitating access to information as well as access to finance for rural populations and the growth of renewable energy technologies. There had been an almost universal uptake of the voluntary national review process. In 2023, the European Union became the first supranational organization to present a voluntary review, thereby paving the way for others to do so in the future. The results of the voluntary national review showed that progress had been made, but further acceleration was needed, as well as deep structural changes, the elimination of business-as-usual approaches to sustainable development and the provision of better financing. The promise of solidarity and prosperity made in 2015 must be kept.

12. The Executive Secretary of ECE reiterated that the region was far from achieving the 2030 Agenda. With reference to the war in Ukraine, the speaker called for peace in line with the Charter of the United Nations and international law and stated that it was important to remain hopeful and confident in the ability to deliver a better future for all. In the light of the current situation, policies and actions with far-reaching impacts were necessary to bring about transformational change, while taking advantage of synergies to ensure acceleration. The Goals under review in 2023 are those in which ECE possesses technical expertise. For Goal 6, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes is a key tool for transboundary water cooperation. As for Goal 11, the Forum of Mayors supports the role of cities and local authorities in driving forward progress towards achieving the Goals. The seventieth session of the Commission would be held in April on the theme of digital and green transformations for sustainable development, with a view to providing new insights and impulses for work in these areas and thereby contributing to Goal 9.

13. The Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States shared information on the work of the United Nations system in the region to better support the acceleration of sustainable development. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia had strengthened synergies and improved collaboration between regional United Nations entities to support United Nations country teams on the ground. A regional knowledge management hub was being further developed; transparency had been improved with the third annual regional United Nations system results report; a business development strategy at the regional level had increased efficiencies and reduced operational costs; issue-based coalitions with specific thematic priorities had provided technical advice and support to United Nations country teams and strengthened policy coherence and joint advocacy. Priority actions for 2023 included: providing country teams with support for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and the Summit of the Future; advancing green technology for a just energy transition;

supporting governments in preparations for the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; advancing work on food security; continuing work on digital transformation; and responding to refugee and internal displacement crises generated by the war in Ukraine.

III. High-level policy segment: “Ensuring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe region in times of multiple crises”

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

15. The following delegations took part in the ensuing high-level plenary debate, in protocol order: Hungary, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Croatia, Republic of Moldova, Portugal, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, United States, Czechia, Serbia, European Union, Israel, Poland, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and United Kingdom. Representatives of civil society and youth reported back on preparatory meetings and consultations. The Russian Federation, as well as the European Union and Ukraine, exercised their rights of reply at the end of the session.

IV. Peer learning round tables³

A. First set of round tables

Goal 6

Clean water and sanitation: water and sanitation for all

The lead organizers were ECE and UNESCO. The session was moderated by the Director, Environment Division, ECE, Marco Keiner and the Director, Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, UNESCO, Ana Luiza Massot Thompson-Flores. Substantive inputs were presented by the following: Czechia; Finland; Georgia; Israel; Montenegro; Netherlands (Kingdom of the); Serbia; Tajikistan; European Union; DiploriA, Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; International Sava River Basin Commission; International Union for Conservation of Nature; Lavazza Group; Suez Group; and UN-Water.

Goal 7

Affordable and clean energy: accelerating the energy transition and enhancing energy system resiliency through increased energy efficiency and renewable energy

The lead organizers were ECE and UNDP. The session was moderated by the Director, Sustainable Energy Division, ECE, Dario Liguti and the Global Leader, Sustainable Finance, Deloitte Germany, Hans-Juergen Walter. Substantive inputs were presented by: Georgia; Germany; North Macedonia; Ukraine; ACCIONA Energy; DZ Bank; European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; Eurasian Development Bank; Habitat for

² The report is available at <https://w3.unece.org/sdg2023/>.

³ Further information on the peer learning round tables is available at <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/round-tables-regional-forum-2023>.

Humanity; Luxembourg Stock Exchange; RES Foundation; University of Exeter; Vanguard Properties; and UNDP.

B. Second set of round tables

Goal 11

Cities leading the transformation: Sustainable Development Goals in action and the new multilateralism

The lead organizers were ECE and the Geneva Liaison Office of UN-Habitat. The session was moderated by the Director for Strategic Partnerships, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Achim Wennmann. Substantive inputs were presented by: Republic of Moldova; Slovenia; Athens; Bishkek; Bonn (Germany); London; Madrid; Tirana; Cities Alliance; City Diplomacy Lab; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe; Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; Geneva Cities Hub; Housing Europe; OneWorks project team on Mykolaiv; and the resident coordinator, Turkmenistan.

Goal 9 (part one)

Industry, innovation and infrastructure: green, sustainable and resilient infrastructure

The lead organizers were ECE and UNIDO. The session was moderated by the Director, Sustainable Transport Division, ECE, Yuwei Li and the Head of the UNIDO Office at Geneva, Frank Van Rompaey. Substantive inputs were presented by: France; Georgia; Italy; Poland; Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; European Academies Science Advisory Council; Norm Cement; OneWorks; Renault Group; and World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations.

Goal 9 (part two)

Industry, innovation and infrastructure: transformative innovation to accelerate sustainable development

The lead organizer was ECE. The session was moderated by the Chief Strategy Adviser, Swedish Innovation Agency, Kjell-Hakan Närfelt. Substantive inputs were presented by: Slovenia; Uzbekistan; Climate-KIC; Connected Places Catapult; Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; and PurCity.

Goals 9 and 17

Industry, innovation and infrastructure and partnerships for the Goals: partnerships for inclusive and sustainable digital development

The lead organizers were United Nations Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia, ITU and WMO. The session was moderated by the Regional Director, Regional Office for the Commonwealth of Independent States, ITU, Natalia Mochu. Substantive inputs were presented by the following: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Norway; Poland; Republic of Moldova; Slovenia; Switzerland; electronic communications, postal and print media distribution regulatory authority of France; Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology of the European Commission; Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism; European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts; Kyrgyz Internet Society; Portugal Space; Waste Ukraine Analytics; UNEP UN-Women.

V. Plenary session: Halfway towards 2030: accelerating transformations to achieve the Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe region

16. At the outset of the plenary session, the following delegations, which had been unable to participate in the high-level policy segment owing to time constraints, took part, in protocol order: Armenia, Belarus and Azerbaijan. This was followed by the introduction of the key messages from the peer learning sessions by the Co-Chairs.

17. In a video message, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs warned that the promises of the Goals were in jeopardy, that progress had stalled and, in some cases, reversed. It was now time to turbocharge actions, drive transformations and make decisive investments. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit must be a rallying cry to pivot from crisis to a more peaceful, inclusive and green future. The Summit should consider reforming the international financial architecture and transforming the global economy so that it is sustainable, resilient and inclusive; advancing high-quality basic services that guarantee health, education and human dignity; ideas for practical ways to achieve rapid decarbonization to limit the rise in global temperatures; and scaling up support for developing countries to adapt to current and future crises, leaving no one behind.

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

- Research Director and Deputy Director, Stockholm Environment Institute, Member of the Independent Group of Scientists for the *2023 Global Sustainable Development Report*, Åsa Persson;
- State Counsellor to the Prime Minister of Romania, László Borbély;
- Assistant Minister, Ministry of Environmental Protection, Serbia, Dušan Čarkić;
- President of Swiss Sustainable Finance, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Bank Lombard Odier & Co. Ltd., Patrick Odier;
- Natasha Dokovska, on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism;
- Network Coordinator, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, with responsibility for the youth network in the Russian Federation, Arina Loginova.

19. The following delegations took part in the plenary debate: United States, Belarus, European Union, Switzerland and Council of Europe. A representative of civil society also spoke. The delegation of Armenia used their right of reply in response to the intervention by Azerbaijan at the beginning of the plenary session.

20. A summary of the discussions in the plenaries and peer learning sessions is contained in the annex to the present report. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum (<https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2023>).

VI. Closing

21. In her closing remarks, the Executive Secretary of ECE expressed her gratitude to those that had helped with the preparations for the forum, as well as the secretariat organizing team, the regional United Nation system entities and the member States that had provided financial support: Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. She also emphasized that strong collaboration between the regional and country levels

was required to achieve the Goals and that ECE was working closely with resident coordinators and country teams to make that happen.

22. Before closing the meeting, the Co-Chairs thanked the organizers and participants and explained that the draft report of the regional forum, including the Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions, would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the ECE region to the 2023 high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

Annex

Co-Chairs' summary of the discussions

High-level policy segment on the theme “Ensuring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe region in times of multiple crises”

1. The picture that emerges from the 2023 progress report on the Goals prepared by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) shows that significant progress is required at the halfway point to 2030. The study, which was prepared based on a methodology shared by all regional commissions, shows that the region would achieve only 21 of the 169 targets of the Goals by 2030, down from 26 targets assessed as being on track in 2022. For 79 of the targets, progress needed to be accelerated, up from 64 last year. As in the previous assessment, current trends need to be reversed for 15 of the targets. Data availability has improved, as in the assessment for 2023, it was possible to cover 10 more targets than in 2022. However, data are still insufficient for assessing 54 of the targets.

2. With regard to the Goals that will be under in-depth review at the 2023 high-level political forum on sustainable development, it is clear that there is no room for complacency. Only one of the targets of Goal 6, access to safely managed water, is on track, but there has also been some progress in the area of water stress and water efficiency. Access to energy is widespread but this is the only target on track for Goal 7. As for Goal 9, the situation is better, with good performances for three targets, but persistent backsliding in terms of infrastructure development. Progress towards Goal 11 remains inconsistent, but no trend needs to be reversed to achieve the target by 2030. With respect to Goal 17, four targets will not be met if current dynamics are not reversed, although the region is doing well regarding Internet use and broadband subscriptions.

3. Multiple crises, which are not yet fully reflected in available data, have impaired the implementation of the Goals. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was a setback that had prompted the need to adopt health initiatives, but also to strengthen social protection and support economic activity. The war in Ukraine and growing economic uncertainty are new obstacles to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The climate and biodiversity crises and unabated environmental degradation continue to hinder progress. Despite these difficulties, however, participants stressed the need to enhance efforts to achieve the Goals.

4. The 2030 Agenda remains the only global road map for overcoming and recovering from the current difficulties we are experiencing and creating more resilient societies. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023 will offer the opportunity to provide new impetus to advance this Agenda and to reinvigorate global efforts towards a green, fair and more sustainable global economy that leaves no one behind. The crisis should stimulate positive action and change, leading to high-impact initiatives at a time in which solidarity, leadership and commitment are necessary.

5. Progress on gender equality remains essential to advance the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and should be the basis for all actions, but some setbacks have been observed since the pandemic. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the international women and girls strategy places gender equality at the heart of activities for these three dimensions.

6. Protecting people from marginalized groups when trying to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of various shocks has been a central concern of policies implemented in the region as a response to recent crises. In Serbia, various initiatives have focused on obtaining timely and reliable data in order to identify the groups most deserving of support. In Turkmenistan, food security has been an important area of concern.

7. The process of institutional development and the elaboration and alignment of strategies and plans with the 2030 Agenda has continued throughout the region, taking into account changing circumstances. In some countries, like the Republic of Moldova and Serbia, these initiatives have also been linked to advances in European Union integration. In Germany, six transformation areas were defined with corresponding interministerial teams. In Armenia, the Goals are seen as a way to deliver internal reforms and develop the Armenia transformation strategy 2050, which provides a framework for the implementation of the Goals. In Azerbaijan, the alignment process has culminated in the strategy for socioeconomic development 2022–2026, with an action plan fully integrated with the Goals.

8. Education and qualified human resources can add considerable impetus to sustainable development. In Romania, an initiative has been put in place to provide training for experts so that they can strengthen capabilities in various related areas across different ministries. More generally, increasing public awareness is crucial for the successful implementation of the Goals, which involves informing and educating the public about the relevance of each Goal and their interdependencies.

9. Besides the institutional and policy aspects, initiatives to engage different actors, including academia, science, the private sector and society at large, remain an important focus for the implementation of the Goals. Multi-stakeholder partnerships at all levels should be developed, with a particular emphasis on those who are disproportionately affected or left behind.

10. Voluntary national reviews are a mechanism that can be used to coordinate efforts involving various actors and to rally support for the implementation of the Goals. They are being used to build partnerships with a wide range of actors, including various levels of administration, academia, civil society and social partners, although the level of engagement varies across the region. Austria has conducted preparatory meetings with different partners, including representatives from the global South, to gain further insights. Voluntary national reviews have also served to identify solutions to accelerate progress in areas that were lagging. Initiatives presented have included not only domestic efforts but also those related to international action, which will figure prominently in the forthcoming voluntary review of the European Union. Civil society suggested that draft voluntary national reviews be discussed at future sessions of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region.

11. Progress towards sustainable development requires the localization of the Goals. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, many local governments have implemented sustainable development strategies that are aligned with the country's framework for the Goals, as promoted by the Council for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In Germany, several cities have published voluntary local reviews to showcase best practices and a national online community for engagement at the local level has been launched. Involving local governments in the implementation of the Goals is crucial. Various delegations stressed the useful role that the Forum of Mayors can play in facilitating this engagement.

12. Rapid urbanization and the role of cities in economic dynamism shows the importance of strategies that address territorial development challenges, in both large cities and rural areas, as recent initiatives in Kazakhstan have demonstrated. Equal

regional development is promoted in the national development strategy 2030 of Croatia, which is guided by the 2030 Agenda. The Republic of Moldova has supported local development through a major infrastructure programme for local communities. In Portugal, a national strategy for smart cities has been developed.

13. Stronger partnerships between developed and developing countries, which have fewer resources to implement the 2030 Agenda, are required. Increased support is necessary not only in terms of official development assistance, but also other forms of financing, from both public and private sources. The United Kingdom is driving innovative solutions to unlock financing for development and tackle infrastructure needs. The United States of America action plan on global water security seeks to strengthen local and global systems to meet the needs of underserved populations. Israel has promoted international cooperation efforts to establish responsible and inclusive water policies. Portugal has made gender equality and the empowerment of women a cross-cutting priority in its development cooperation strategy 2030. The European Union has sought to contribute to the advancement of the multilateral agenda through the Global Gateway strategy and the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

14. Subregional cooperation can add impetus to the implementation of the Goals. Bosnia and Herzegovina launched the Western Balkans Sustainable Development Goals forum as a platform to share and exchange knowledge and policies regarding the Goals. Initiatives in Central Asia, including in Kazakhstan, also aim to further subregional cooperation in support of the Goals.

15. Regional cooperation is essential to achieve the 2030 Agenda; the role that ECE has to play is therefore critical in this regard, in particular in relation to the Goals under in-depth review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2023 and the support provided to countries in Central Asia and the Western Balkans. Overall, close cooperation and common solutions are called for, in the spirit of partnership and shared responsibility. Current difficulties can only be tackled by joint efforts that translate into concrete and tangible projects. The challenges that affect us today stretch far beyond borders and can only be solved together, acting in solidarity.

16. Developing public policies that promote the Goals requires precise, reliable, up-to-date and comparable data, including satellite data, as emphasized by Switzerland. Investment is required to obtain the necessary statistics, as a basis for evidence-based decisions. Scientific research and advice should guide policy actions and serve as a source of innovative solutions that contribute to the attainment of all the Goals. In Austria, a network of universities and scientists will actively engage in the second voluntary national review.

17. The war in Ukraine and the consequences thereof were mentioned in the interventions of many delegations. Hungary underlined its negative impacts for European economies and the adverse implications of bloc divisions. The Republic of Moldova stated that, despite all the difficulties, it remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees. Israel expressed concern about the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on civilians and called for rapid humanitarian aid. Ukraine denounced the Russian aggression and stated that the Goals form the basis of the plan for recovery from the consequences of the war. In Czechia, the large inflow of Ukrainian refugees has prompted multiple initiatives to improve the availability of housing. Poland stated that the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine must stop and underlined that the invasion had strengthened solidarity and the resolve to shift economies towards the more dynamic development of renewable energy sources. The United Kingdom emphasized how the invasion of Ukraine had resulted in destruction and affected the region's ability to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Austria and Germany aligned themselves with the European Union statement

condemning Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which has impaired the achievement of all the Goals. The Russian Federation rejected all the accusations and stated that sanctions introduced by Western countries undermined the achievement of the Goals. Belarus also emphasized the negative consequences of sanctions for sustainable development.

18. The report from the civil society forum, which was attended by both the Co-Chairs and the Executive Secretary of ECE, highlighted that progress towards the implementation of the Goals had deteriorated, as a result of the impact of multiple crises, in a context of increased violence against women, workers and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, and rising inequality. There has been a marked increase in military expenditure in the region, diverting funds from health, education and social spending. Civil society space is shrinking in parts of the region, including as a result of legislation directed against civil society organizations. These crises should not be used as an excuse to backtrack progress, but to redouble efforts. The integrity of all countries and the dignity and rights of all people in their diversity should be respected. Civil society must be involved in decision-making processes and the development of voluntary national reviews, and alternative reports on the Goals should be taken into account to define policies.

19. The report on youth consultations also pointed to the reversal of progress made in advancing the 2030 Agenda, with direct negative impacts on young people. A call was made to remove barriers preventing the participation of young people in decisions that affect them. Policies that are being developed for young people cannot be made without them. Young people are facing intersecting forms of discrimination that need to be addressed. Access to water and sanitation must be recognized as a human rights issue, in particular for vulnerable groups. Precarious and unfair working conditions need to be addressed.

Outcomes of the peer learning round tables

A. First set of round tables

Goal 6

Clean water and sanitation: water and sanitation for all

20. The ECE region is not on track to achieve Goal 6, which in turn hinders the achievement of many other goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Many good regional practices and tools to accelerate progress are available; however, in order for them to be effective, water action needs to be prioritized at the political level.

21. The United Nations 2023 Water Conference, held in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023, emphasized the need to urgently scale up action to address the water and sanitation crisis and ensure equitable access to water and sanitation for all. It was an important opportunity to catalyse action by all stakeholders and resulted in more than 700 commitments that are now part of the Water Action Agenda. It is crucial to implement and finance these commitments and regularly review their progress. Water should be added to the agenda of the upcoming political summits and processes beyond the water sector, for major events such as the Conference of the Parties on climate and on biodiversity.

22. While access to safely managed drinking water services is available for 96 per cent of the population in the ECE region, with 20 countries having achieved universal access, access to sanitation remains a challenge, with 27 million people lacking access to even basic sanitation services. Aggregated data also frequently mask inequalities. Policies and investments should focus on eliminating the existing disparities between

urban and rural areas; ensuring affordability and providing access to disproportionately affected and marginalized groups, and in specific settings such as schools and hospitals; and addressing menstrual health issues. The Protocol on Water and Health to the 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, through support provided for organizing self-assessments of equitable access to water and sanitation, the progressive target-setting mechanism and reporting framework, as well as support for water, sanitation and hygiene services in schools and health-care facilities, has proven to be a useful tool for realizing the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

23. Thanks to advances in domestic wastewater treatment, point source water pollution has decreased overall across the region. Nevertheless, wastewater discharges remain significant with great variability between subregions and countries. Plastic pollution, caused by macro, micro and nanoplastics, is also a common concern for public health, fresh water and the oceans. The fast development of the mining sector in some countries represents additional pollution risks, when not coupled with strong policies and enforcement mechanisms. Improving water quality and protecting ecosystems and biodiversity require concerted action, as promoted by the European Union Water Framework Directive and the European Green Deal, which provide a set of policy initiatives for improving the quality of water resources and their sustainable management, and incentivize investments in sustainable water-related projects. Action should focus on preventing diffuse pollution and pollution at source and throughout product life cycles, especially persistent and hazardous pollutants and microplastics, as well as conserving and restoring ecosystems.

24. Hydrological changes induced by climate change, such as an increase in the frequency and magnitude of floods and droughts, as well as the degradation of aquatic ecosystems and changes in river flows, cause human and economic damage, make sustainable water management more challenging and have a negative impact on freshwater ecosystems. Possible measures to address these problems include improved access to and exchange of data, including geospatial data, for effective flood and drought forecasting, and water demand management and inclusive basin management plans. Water should be mainstreamed into nationally determined contributions, climate policies and disaster risk reduction strategies. Nature-based solutions, such as natural water retention or wetland restoration, are effective and affordable approaches to improve resilience to climate shocks, stresses and disasters. These solutions, which are increasingly promoted in the region, also support source-to-sea management and coastal zone protection. Tools such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions can support good practices to help countries integrate nature-based solutions into water management.

25. In the light of the growing demand for water and increased water stress and scarcity, there is a need for improved vertical and horizontal governance, the deployment of innovative technologies and increased cooperation among stakeholders, the public and private sectors, and countries, in order to improve water use efficiency and foster circular economy approaches. Examples of companies that have taken innovative action to reuse wastewater for energy and agriculture or improve water use efficiency must be highlighted. Policies that support the use of wastewater and nutrients in agriculture and industry without undermining safety, bring substantial economic benefits and help improve the efficiency of water use, while protecting the environment. Participatory, multi-stakeholder and intersectoral assessments of the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus, such as the assessment successfully conducted in the Alazani River basin using the nexus methodology under the terms of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, have helped to improve resource use efficiency.

26. The pan-European region represents the most advanced region globally as regards transboundary water cooperation, with 20 countries having all their transboundary basin areas covered by operational arrangements for water cooperation, out of a total of 24 countries that have achieved this result at the global level. The achievement is also attributed to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. Since its adoption in 1992, more than 100 agreements have been developed on shared waters. In Eastern Europe and the Caucasus in particular, however, in relation to groundwater, transboundary cooperation is still insufficient. Examples of advanced basin organizations, such as the International Sava River Basin Commission and the Finnish-Swedish Transboundary River Commission, show that transboundary cooperation can bring concrete benefits not only for water but also for climate action and resilience, energy and food security, fisheries and biodiversity. Sufficient financing for transboundary cooperation and the involvement of civil society, as in the Dniester River basin, strengthening capacity and improving the availability and exchange of information, should all be fostered.

27. It is crucial to reinforce inclusive, multi-stakeholder and integrated water governance for the successful and coherent implementation of Goal 6 and of the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Such efforts call for the establishment of inclusive and participatory concertation and decision-making mechanisms that take into account the voices of young people. Women's equal leadership and the mainstreaming of gender considerations in decision-making are also central. Existing instruments such as the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the Protocol on Water and Health and European instruments must be used and extended.

Goal 7

Affordable and clean energy: accelerating the energy transition and enhancing energy system resiliency through increased energy efficiency and renewable energy

28. Advancing the implementation of Goal 7 represents a critical contribution to reaching climate goals, ensuring environmental sustainability and providing the necessary infrastructure for a prosperous future for all. Integrated thinking and policymaking, good governance and cross-sectoral actions to improve energy efficiency and the scale of renewable energy deployment will determine the pace of the energy transition.

29. While the evidence-based policy brief on Goal 7 published by ECE in 2022 confirmed positive trends, it recognized that the region is not doing enough to ensure that energy plays a broader role in the quest for a sustainable future. The changing energy backdrop increases the urgency of achieving the targets of Goal 7 to improve the resilience of energy systems, including by addressing policy challenges relating to the supply chains that will underpin the green transition.

30. In 2019, the ECE region accounted for 38 per cent of the world's total energy supply, down from 61 per cent in 1990. The rate of improvement in energy intensity accelerated from 2010 to 2019 compared to the period from 1990 to 2010, and outpaced the global rate of improvement. The share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption more than doubled between 1990 and 2019, increasing from 5.8 to 12.8 per cent. However, the eastern part of the region has failed to attract investments as it faces persistent barriers. Existing government plans could reverse this situation.

31. Recent data and ongoing trends show that ECE countries are not on track to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement. The war in Ukraine and the resulting

energy crisis are having a negative impact, with some member States reverting to unsustainable energy sources. Countries and all stakeholders therefore need to strengthen action to move towards a decarbonized energy system by accelerating the deployment of renewable energy and improving efficiency in the production, transmission, distribution and consumption of energy. Attention should be paid to digital solutions in order to substantially contribute to this acceleration.

32. Despite ongoing progress in increasing energy efficiency and renewable energy generation, there are multiple barriers that slow down the pace of the transition. They include, inter alia, the availability of critical raw materials, flawed policy frameworks, fossil fuel subsidies, the lack of enabling market mechanisms and insufficient reliable data.

33. At the same time, many technical, regulatory and financial solutions exist and have been successfully deployed. Good practices that have replication potential include energy markets structuring and taxation mechanisms, notably in the residential sector. Raising public awareness to increase citizens' participation and contribution can accelerate change. Energy consumers must be made aware of the multiple benefits of increased energy efficiency and renewable energy deployment, in order to increase end-user demand for both technical and non-technical solutions.

34. The energy transition requires significant investments to be made in clean technologies and infrastructure, which need to be financed. Instruments that improve the risk-return profile of investments, such as government guarantees, subsidies or other credit enhancers, could be deployed to attract increased private financing. New financial products could capitalize on investors' growing interest in sustainability.

35. Breaking down barriers to achieve solutions must be driven by trust and transparency, training and education, with a particular focus on youth, and willingness to collaborate on achieving common goals based on the principles of just transition. All key actors have a role to play in supporting governments to adopt the necessary policies to ensure energy affordability and system resiliency, as well as environmental sustainability in the ECE region.

36. International cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil fuel technology, is critical, given the existing differences across countries. This should ensure that the sufficient financing is available to expand energy infrastructure and upgrade technology to provide modern and sustainable energy services for all.

37. Policymakers may consider that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. National circumstances and capabilities need to be taken into account. Long-term objectives should be included in the design of current policies. There is a need to address behavioural barriers that constrain innovation and prevent the potential of digitalization from being harnessed. The energy transition would have significant implications for labour markets, with changes in the skills demanded. While some workers would be negatively affected, skills shortages will emerge in other areas. A just energy transition requires providing appropriate support, including gender-responsive measures, for the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, while attending to the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

38. Resiliency concerns should be integrated into existing and related planning efforts. End-user resiliency can be improved by avoiding unnecessary energy use (energy waste) and increasing the efficiency of the necessary use (energy efficiency). In particular, the deployment of renewables and the energy transition will generate soaring demand for critical raw materials; this demand needs to be managed accordingly, including by applying the principles of circular economy. Climate change is already a reality that will affect energy supply and demand even further.

39. The ultimate goal of policies aimed at supporting the energy transition is to ensure the right balance between energy affordability, reliability and environmental sustainability. A resilient energy system is one in which energy makes an optimal contribution to a country's social, economic and environmental development. At the same time, the system should be able to withstand and recover quickly from any unanticipated shocks, while reflecting the potential impact of climate change on energy resources in its planning and operations.

40. In order to succeed in meeting the multiple challenges that energy systems in the ECE region are facing, member States must take focused action and strengthen their commitment to pursue the Goals with strong political commitment, significantly higher financial resources, adequate regulatory frameworks and skilled human resources.

B. Second set of round tables

Goal 9 (part one)

Industry, innovation and infrastructure: green, sustainable and resilient infrastructure

41. Overall, emissions from infrastructure assets, including embodied carbon in new construction, account for 60 per cent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. While the decarbonization of infrastructure has progressed over the past decade, it still has a long way to go to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement. In the transport sector, the rising demand for motorized mobility has outweighed improvements in fuel efficiency, modal share and the electrification of the vehicle fleet.

42. As for the transport infrastructure construction sector, the industrial primary products that remain particularly challenging for cost-effective decarbonization are steel and cement. They each account for around 7–8 per cent of energy-related emissions globally. Reaching net-zero carbon dioxide emissions for these sectors will require reducing demand, as well as more and higher value recycling, greater investment in the development of innovative solutions for the manufacturing of materials and switching to clean energy sourcing and green fuels for primary production. Reducing the carbon footprint of transport infrastructure construction requires existing transport assets to be optimized for improved efficiency rather than expanding and/or building new assets. It is thus imperative to develop a new value chain and market for clearly defined low-carbon construction and manufacturing products.

43. Since governments are the main clients for large-scale construction projects, a comprehensive reform of the public procurement system and capacity-building are required in order to incorporate green considerations. Sustainable public procurement or green procurement in large infrastructure projects can drive the reduction of carbon emissions and the innovation of environmentally friendly products and services.

44. While a net contributor to carbon emissions, the transport sector is also vulnerable to the effects of climate change, given that its infrastructure is increasingly affected by extreme weather events and rising temperatures and sea levels. Those factors can cause both physical damage to infrastructure, resulting in expensive reconstruction costs and socioeconomic losses as a result of increased travel time, and reduce the availability or safety levels of infrastructure. As the first step of a coordinated adaptation process, governments should conduct systematic risk, vulnerability and criticality assessments of transport assets in order to identify hotspots for which an effective intervention programme must be implemented so as to increase resilience. Overall, given the increasing urgency of the need to adapt to climate change, international cooperation on the adaptation of transport infrastructure

needs to be encouraged, for instance through the actions of the ECE Group of Experts on assessment of climate change impacts and adaptation for inland transport.

45. The international regulatory framework for vehicles, managed through the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations, plays a leading role in making vehicles greener and more sustainable. Regulations on vehicle emissions and recommendations on fuel quality as well as on safety for battery electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, including durability requirements for vehicle traction batteries, have been issued and are being used worldwide by governments and industry. At the same time, the ECE Working Party on Pollution and Energy, which recognizes that in order to reduce the carbon footprint of vehicles, a “whole life cycle” approach is necessary, aims to have a harmonized vehicle carbon footprint measurement procedure ready by 2025. Ultimately, using greener fuels and energy sources and recycling or reusing/repurposing resources during the manufacturing process should result in the decarbonization of the entire sourcing and production process.

46. Finally, it should be recognized that the development of transport infrastructure, including in support of a modal shift, plays an important part in promoting low-carbon transport. Transport policies should, inter alia, be used to shape travel demand and mobility patterns, and governments should deploy incentives and disincentives (fiscal or otherwise) to reward decarbonization initiatives and prioritize investment in greener modes of transport, such as rail or zero-emission public transport and active mobility (walking and cycling). To drive innovation, improve energy conversion efficiency and switch to renewable energy, carriers must be promoted through carbon pricing and more effective coordination and/or communication should be established between vehicles, the infrastructure on which they operate (including charging/refuelling infrastructure) and the broader energy supply ecosystem, while ensuring that supply and demand remain in balance.

Goal 9 (part two)

Industry, innovation and infrastructure: transformative innovation to accelerate sustainable development

47. The starting point of the second part of the round table, dealing with transformative innovation, was that incremental changes in consumption and production patterns are not enough for the ECE region to achieve the Goals by 2030. To accelerate progress, there is an urgent need to transform entire socioeconomic systems. This will require complementary innovations across different fields that together create a transformative effect on economic and ecological sustainability.

48. Many solutions to this end already exist, while others still need to be developed. For instance, the built environment is responsible for about one third of carbon emissions. Recent innovations in design, insulation and construction materials, energy generation, heating and cooling systems, lighting and smart building management have made it possible to construct buildings with net-zero carbon emissions. According to the World Resources Institute, however, only 1 per cent of buildings worldwide currently meet this standard. Much more innovation is therefore needed to bring down the costs of constructing net-zero buildings and of retrofitting existing buildings.

49. The same can be said for other key socioeconomic systems, such as energy generation and distribution, transport, industry and cities: it is possible to make them sustainable, but accelerated innovation is required in order to do so swiftly. Ultimately, these innovations, in new, more sustainable products, services, production processes and business models, will be developed in the research and development laboratories of universities and companies, and decisions about how much to invest in them and

how rapidly to deploy them will be made by businesses and consumers across the ECE region.

50. The challenge is that the commercial viability of one innovation, and hence the incentive to invest in it, often depends on simultaneous progress in other areas. For instance, the viability of hydrogen-powered jet engines depends on simultaneous progress in the process of producing clean hydrogen and in the storage and refuelling infrastructure of airports.

51. Governments therefore need to cooperate with civil society and the business community to reach a consensus on the overall direction of innovation efforts, in order to reduce the risks for innovators of failing because not enough progress has been made in complementary areas. Governments also need to review and adjust regulations and other policies to align private incentives with the overall direction of the innovation effort. Rather than incentivizing individual innovations, it will be important for policies to catalyse the development of innovation ecosystems and of knowledge and innovation communities of practice in order to coordinate complementary innovations that cumulatively alter the sustainability of a sector or a place.

52. An innovation-oriented approach to policymaking is required, which involves carrying out foresight exercises to identify medium-term opportunities and threats, responding quickly to lessons learned and experimenting in regulatory test beds before scaling up policies.

53. Against this background, decision makers in the ECE region were called to take the lead in creating new partnerships between governments, businesses and civil society to reach an international consensus on performance targets and timelines and on regulations, standards and other supporting policies, including for example financing and infrastructure, that are needed to catalyse truly transformative innovation.

Goal 11

Cities leading the transformation: Sustainable Development Goals in action and the new multilateralism

54. Cities are facing multiple challenges. They include, inter alia, the consequences of climate change, the implications of biodiversity loss, air pollution, waste management, increasing and ageing populations and migration. Insufficient financing constrains the ability to address these challenges effectively.

55. Despite these difficulties, cities are striving to make progress in the implementation of Goal 11 and other urban-related targets. Multiple initiatives have been undertaken to address the negative consequences of the pandemic and climate change, in order to strengthen cities' resilience and set up plans regarding the Goals. The key priorities are the need for increased resilience to natural and human-caused disasters; the urgency of developing sustainable urban transport; and the importance of creating vibrant public spaces, shaping nature-based solutions and offering affordable and adequate housing. Sustainable and resilient urban planning will underpin these efforts.

56. The city of London responded to the need for increased resilience by developing a resilience strategy for the city. In the light of human-caused and natural disasters, there is a need for effective action to redress the devastation caused. The recent earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye had a catastrophic impact, which required a significant emergency response. Civil society stressed the importance of strong society networks to address these problems. In order to support the reconstruction efforts in cities and other human settlements, the Ministry of

Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine has elaborated a draft framework for plans for the integrated rehabilitation of settlements (territories). One of the pilot projects described in that context is the development of a master plan for the city of Mykolaiv.

57. Sustainable mobility was highlighted as another major challenge. The city of Bonn (Germany) is addressing this through its 2019 Bonn strategy, by testing new mobility concepts in small neighbourhoods. In Athens, the 2021–2030 action plan focuses on promoting active travel and restoring the city’s pedestrian areas and increasing cycling.

58. Other cities are focusing their urban development plans on smart-city initiatives and digitalization, including through the application of the latest technologies to make homes controllable remotely. Arkadag (Turkmenistan) and Bishkek provided examples of this approach. Bishkek benefited greatly from the ECE smart sustainable city profile to prepare for the next steps, including the elaboration of the first voluntary local review.

59. Housing affordability is another challenge for many cities, as mentioned by Housing Europe. Slovenia has developed a national housing programme through its housing law to improve affordability and accessibility. The urgent need for improving energy efficiency was recalled by Switzerland, where cities and cantons promote the renovation of buildings and use of renewable energies. The lack of green areas is a common problem that undermines biodiversity. The production of food locally, as stated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, could provide an answer to environmental and affordability problems. In Tirana, multiple initiatives have been developed to encourage food production, reduce food waste and promote related innovation.

60. Making cities more sustainable requires financial resources. In Italy, the national recovery and resilience plan is allocating €20.7 billion to the implementation of Goal 11, while the Republic of Moldova is now allocating tax revenues to local authorities.

61. Large migratory flows are also a challenge for many cities in the region. In the Republic of Moldova, an ambitious agenda that covers local development and migration flows has been launched. Diaspora resources have been combined with other funding to finance local projects.

62. Urban renewal plans must be anthropocentric and respect the identity of cities. The policy problems posed by an ageing population and the specific difficulties faced by youth and other vulnerable segments of the population cannot be overlooked. Strategic considerations in urban planning regarding older persons, in line with the principles of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), should be considered. Climate change is the main challenge all cities need to focus on in all their current and future plans.

63. Cities are playing a greater role in international relations. In addition to city-to-city cooperation, this also involves collaborating with national Governments and international organizations. This growing network of relations gives cities more power to respond to existing challenges, mainly through knowledge exchange. These linkages allow them to work together to imagine and build a sustainable future that is aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The Forum of Mayors, to be held in Geneva on 2 and 3 October 2023, is an essential platform for mayors to exchange their best practices. It provides multiple possibilities for advocacy and dissemination. In particular, it facilitates linkages and meaningful dialogue at the local and national levels.

64. The importance of cooperating through partnerships, alliances and city networks was highlighted. Examples of strategic collaborations include the C40 Cities Climate

Leadership Group and Eurocities. One partnership that was highlighted by Athens and Tirana as particularly noteworthy of mention is the B40 Balkan Cities Network, which fosters successful alliances between cities in a subregion where there are specific challenges associated with cooperation between countries.

65. Bonn, Bishkek and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe underlined the importance of voluntary local reviews, as they help cities to communicate with citizens while showcasing, at the international level, action taken at the local level. The importance of supporting voluntary national reviews with voluntary local reviews was also highlighted by many participants.

66. Madrid and other cities also recalled the need to improve dialogue between national and local authorities for a better alignment between policies and strategies. While approaches to development might differ at the national and local levels, local and national authorities should be working towards the same objective. Athens and the Geneva Cities Hub reiterated the importance of affording cities an international legal personality, for instance through a specific consultative status with respect to the Economic and Social Council, so that they could participate in United Nations processes in their own capacity.

67. The round table concluded that cities have the agility, inventiveness and ingenuity to tackle situations that might seem unmanageable and make an important contribution to the implementation of the relevant Goals. Cities are important political actors with transformational powers and are promoting a new form of multilateralism that is proving effective. To guarantee that future urban development is well planned and equitable, cities and local administrations must have the necessary capacity and resources and be fully included in global efforts to meet the Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.

Goals 9 and 17

Industry, innovation and infrastructure and partnerships for the Goals: partnerships for inclusive and sustainable digital development

68. Information and communication technologies and digital development are key to ensuring the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Partnerships between different stakeholders, sectors, countries and levels of governance are necessary to ensure the success of digital development and to prevent gaps from widening owing to disparities in the speed of adoption of new technologies. The catalytic role of the United Nations system in supporting digital development at the national, regional and global levels is critical. Instruments such as the digital development toolbox and digital development country profiles may help to strengthen a One United Nations approach on digital matters.

69. The lack of resilient digital infrastructure and the rural-urban digital divide, with unequal connectivity across schools, remain a major challenge. Landlocked countries, in particular, struggle to offer Internet connectivity. More investments in digital infrastructure, together with adequate policies and regulations, are needed to improve access to the Internet. Broadband mapping systems are essential to improve knowledge on the scope and quality of digital networks and services. These systems allow regulators to assess market competition and gaps in coverage requiring funding, while facilitating the selection of service providers by citizens. The affordability of Internet access and devices is a key policy concern. The Partner2Connect initiative, established in close cooperation with the Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Technology, provides a platform for catalysing investment and harnessing partnerships for sustainable and inclusive digital development, with far-reaching actions and impact on the ground.

70. With the growth of the information society, countries aspire to become innovation-driven digital economies, but often lack the human and institutional capabilities needed to integrate information and communications technology (ICT) innovation. Initiatives such as the International Telecommunication Union Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development can help to bridge those gaps. The ICT sector is particularly reliant on innovation. However, as a result of limited access to financing, particularly in the case of small and medium-sized enterprises, businesses are unable to invest in new technologies and innovate, thus hindering their competitiveness. Access to finance, grants and voucher systems at all stages of business development can effectively support the development of ICT sectors.

71. Digital government services are a prerequisite for the success of the digital transformation. They are essential for delivering efficient and effective public services to citizens. To provide digital public services, it is essential to develop a resilient e-government ecosystem. Offering digitalization as a service, through a front office digitalization platform, to service providers is an effective way of digitizing public services in a quick, standardized, cost-effective and scalable way. It is necessary to adopt the perspective of users when designing services and to provide them in local languages in order to ensure they are inclusive and accessible.

72. Digital development should be human-centred and, in particular, take into account new and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. Special attention should be paid to the link between human rights, good governance and new technologies. Institutions are often unable to provide adequate safeguards to deal with new risks and the undesirable impacts of such technologies, such as negative social norms, data privacy breaches, cyberharassment and bullying, among others. Countries should establish normative frameworks and update existing legislation to provide safeguards against these impacts.

73. Digital tools and services should, by design, address the needs of all women and girls. Gender should be mainstreamed in digital policies to remove barriers to equal access. Stakeholders need to foster a policy of zero tolerance for online gender-based violence occurring through or amplified using technology. Both public and private sector entities should prioritize the prevention and elimination of such abuse. In this regard, the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women should be translated into actions.

74. Civil society representatives expressed concerns over digital restrictions, such as the blocking and restricting of access to information resources, and recommended developing a digital bill of rights in consultation with civil society organizations. Renewed efforts are needed to develop digital literacy and digital skills, particularly among older people and vulnerable groups, including in the areas of data protection and privacy. This is necessary to build trust and confidence, minimize the negative impact or misuse of disinformation and promote digital inclusion. New technologies are also pivotal to strengthening democratic institutions and improving transparency, accountability, civic participation and decentralization. They can also reduce barriers to access and inequalities.

75. Digital development should be environmentally sound, socially trusted and economically prosperous. The ICT sector must continue to become more circular and sustainable in order to tackle issues such as electronic waste, energy consumption and GHG emissions, while remaining compatible with the Paris Agreement. As the demand for earth metals such as graphite, lithium and cobalt is rising rapidly, effective policies and actions by governments are key to addressing the needs for critical raw materials while preventing environmental and social harms to local communities.

76. Legislative measures should set criteria for green public procurement of information and communication technologies. The standardization of digitalization

and the transparency and interoperability of data are essential. Investment in tools to measure and disclose the environmental and carbon footprint of technologies is required. Authorities often lack skills to use analytical tools to predict the cost and dynamics of the circular and low-carbon digital transition. Data collection and storage are needed to support decision-making processes. Collaboration between environmental and ICT regulatory authorities is fundamental, in order to leverage the complementary technical knowledge required to assess the entire life cycle of digital devices so as to make precise measurements and projections.

77. Space data (including satellite imagery), the Internet of things and other new and emerging technologies help to track biodiversity, implement climate mitigation and adaptation measures and provide more accurate forecasts of extreme weather events. Early warning systems, which use a combination of radar, satellite and weather station data, with the help of supercomputers and forecast models encompassing the latest scientific advances, give early warnings of extreme weather events and protect populations, including in the context of humanitarian crises. The Early Warnings for All initiative can support countries in deploying such systems. Space data can also serve to support greener transportation systems through enabling autonomous automobiles. Energy consumption can be reduced by providing real-time data on traffic and road conditions, while ensuring that automobiles are interconnected, including in areas without ground infrastructure.

C. Plenary session

Halfway towards 2030: accelerating transformations to achieve the Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe region

78. While the progress achieved so far in advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is insufficient, the scientific evidence presented in the forthcoming 2023 *Global Sustainable Development Report* shows that transformation is possible and can be shaped in a way that safeguards and enhances sustainable development. The Goals offer more positive than negative interlinkages, thus facilitating interventions for transformative change. Context-specific analysis is required to shape appropriate policies.

79. Transformation is a process that requires different types of actions at different stages. Nurturing innovation and strategic direction being determined by governments are important levers in this transformation process. The ability to address trade-offs or goal conflicts is critical, and may require building the necessary capacities. Managing interlinkages throughout the various stages of this process is essential, including with the support provided by scientific advice.

80. Suitable institutional frameworks are required to underpin transformation, which is ultimately driven by political will. Policy coherence is ensured by adopting a whole-of-government approach, which is complemented by whole-of-society engagement. Promoting education and relevant skills among civil servants is a sound investment that adds to the effectiveness of interventions, as demonstrated in Romania. When addressing the interlinkages of the Goals in an interconnected world, partnerships and dialogue are critical to drive transformation.

81. The green transition is a major transformational goal, which in Serbia has led to multiple initiatives in different areas, including waste management, the circular economy and air pollution. Legal and regulatory changes are being accompanied by infrastructure development. In order to achieve a sustainable, circular and carbon-neutral economy, it is necessary to increase investment, knowledge, skills, innovation, technologies and partnerships. Subregional cooperation, including with the support

of the United Nations, could help to create new opportunities to advance sustainable development.

82. The financial sector is one of the most important levers in driving the transformation towards sustainable development. Investment funds are increasingly allocated in line with sustainability considerations. Financial actors can also engage with companies to influence their business practices. Sustainability criteria are being reflected in the assessment of risks and the valuation of companies, thus providing an increasingly useful guide for lending decisions. Regulatory changes and the development of standards, including the European Union taxonomy for sustainable activities, are broadening the scope for consideration of sustainability in the allocation of resources. The financial sector could act as a catalyst for change through initiatives that promote collaboration among stakeholders, research and advocacy. The scale and complexity of the sustainable transition requires building bridges between multiple stakeholders in the finance, government and international development communities.

83. Far-reaching transformative initiatives are taking place in various countries. In the United States, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act will be funding massive investments in decarbonizing the energy supply, reducing GHG emissions and building sustainable and resilient infrastructure. In the European Union, the Green Deal Industrial Plan rests on four pillars (a predictable and simplified regulatory environment, faster access to funding, enhancing skills and open trade) to advance clean technologies and innovation on the road to a net-zero industry. Climate change is seen as an opportunity to increase competitiveness. This will require strengthening cooperation at various levels, including as part of the work of ECE.

84. Looking back, civil society drew attention to inequitable responses to the recent crises and the fact that the situation in the global South was already precarious before the latest shocks. While awareness of sustainability has increased, financial allocations and existing plans fall well short of what is required. There is a need to implement debt cancellation strategies and provide appropriate financing for a stimulus package for the Goals that reaches all, in particular those who are at risk of exclusion. Unpaid work done by women should no longer be considered a free resource. Planetary and environmental boundaries should be respected. All forms of discrimination should come to an end and attempts in some countries to restrict the role of civil society should stop. Civil society should be engaged not only in the development of voluntary national reviews, but also in action that should follow for the implementation of the Goals, including through social dialogue.

85. The youth representative emphasized the need to combat stigma and discrimination, ensure equal access to all services and bridge existing gaps. The persecution of youth activists must stop. Internships should be fairly paid and all individuals given meaningful opportunities to obtain decent work. Young people should be involved in voluntary national review processes and serve as a source of accountability. Investing in young people is investing in the future.