

*Halfway there, but nowhere near...  
Need for genuine actions towards inclusive transformation*

**“Regional perspective for the UNECE region on the shrinking space for civil society”**

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President of ECOSOC, Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, and friends,

The Secretary-General’s **Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023** states that “**a global alliance for SDG action**” (para 8) including civil society, science and young people, is needed in order to put the world on a better path, and to deliver for people and planet. It also calls for the strengthening of parliament and civil society engagement, as a key priority, in SDG monitoring, follow up, and review. (para 58)

The European region, stretching from the Caucuses to the Canadian Pacific coast, has a vibrant and active civil society, while including most of the **donor countries** and **major foundations**.

The ECE Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism is closely involved in the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, and, most recently, has been in dialogue with the co-chairs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Switzerland.

However,

- While a global concern, the ‘**Shrinking space for civil society**’, already referred to, is particularly prevalent in the **European region**.
- Organizations were already experiencing the effects of shrinking space, **before the outbreak of COVID-19**. The pandemic exacerbated the situation with face-to-face meetings no longer being possible. And, it has **taken longer for organizations to return to meetings**, such as this one, affecting our role in implementing the 2030 Agenda.  
In the European region, moreover, CSOs have also witnessed a back-sliding on issues such as gender, and sexual and gender-based violence, which had increased during COVID-19.
- Post-pandemic, the financial, economic and environmental and climate change crises; the **rise of populist governments**; movements of people; and the **war in Ukraine** have also impacted negatively. While affecting the living standards for the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in the region, it has also meant that **financial and other overseas development aid** for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the **furthest behind developing countries** has greatly diminished.

In looking towards the SDG Summit this September, we appeal to Member States, the UN system and others in the European, and all other regions, to **ensure the restoration of civil society space, coupled with the availability of adequate funding for CSOs**. This will enable us to contribute fully to a global alliance for SDG action, as called for in the UN Secretary-General’s Report.

Thank you