



*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”  
Marianne Haslegrave, Commonwealth Medical Trust and ECE Regional Civil Society  
Engagement Mechanism**

President of ECOSOC, Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

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, and includes most of the donor countries and major foundations.

The ECE Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism is closely involved in 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 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; rise of populist governments; movements of people; and war in Ukraine have 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

### **Concluding comments**

The roles of civil society in developing the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was unique and transformative.

The contributions from Member States and Stakeholders during this session have been heartening and one hopes will translate into increased involvement with civil society going forward. From local to global, civil society organizations can reach those who are being left behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

As can be seen from the discussions, there are variations and differences in the work of civil society from region to region.

Getting the SDG targets back on track requires the involvement of all, and civil society organizations will continue to work for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We would ask Member States to reach out to civil society at national and local levels; and also at the regional and global levels in SDG monitoring, follow up and review