



Statement by

the Republic of Latvia

at

**the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable
Development and
the High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council**

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Latvia welcomes the thematic focus of this year's High-Level Political Forum on sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck the world just as it embarked on the Decade of Action. Moreover, it reversed hard-won progress, notably on poverty reduction and gender equality. That only underscores the urgent need for accelerated action to implement 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

A year ago in our statement we reported on Latvia's ability to adapt and demonstrate resilience in the initial phase of COVID-19 response. Since then – like many – Latvia has learned hard lessons on the dangers of complacency and pandemic fatigue. We have witnessed COVID-19 overwhelm our health system and challenge every aspect of our lives and economic sector. Yet we have also witnessed the dedication of our essential workers, the ingenuity of people as they adapted to the “new normal” and, finally, the relief brought by safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to test our resilience. Recovery will test our foresight.

The world is already making decisions and investments that pre-judge future development and create path-dependencies that will affect the delivery of the SDGs. To succeed we need a sustainable and resilient recovery that is green, digital, inclusive and just.

The Climate crisis is one of the most critical global challenges today and the world is not on track to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Looking forward to UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Latvia reaffirms its full support to stepping up ambition for climate action on a global scale, for both mitigation and adaptation measures, and its commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Recovery from COVID-19 can and should serve as an accelerator of climate action and the Government of Latvia has endorsed initiatives to ensure that the economic recovery aligns with climate objectives. More than one third of the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility investments in Latvia will be directed towards climate action, including investments in renewable energy and enabling grid infrastructure, greening of the industrial sector and climate adaptation.

The climate crisis cannot be tackled separately from loss of biodiversity and environmental pollution. These challenges are intertwined, and so solutions can be mutually supportive. Moreover, protecting and investing in natural capital also provides research, innovation and business opportunities and directly contributes to growth and jobs.

Latvia looks forward to adopting an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework at COP15 in Kunming.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalization. Years of digital transformation have been compressed into months. Unfortunately, this acceleration also manifested in the opposite direction - digital divides have widened within and between countries. While “connecting the unconnected” remains the preeminent goal, investments in infrastructure need to go hand-in-hand with investments in people - digital literacy and skills -, particularly for women and girls, and people in vulnerable situations.

Digital innovations and technologies play an essential role in the achievement of the SDGs. However, they can only benefit people, if individuals are equipped with the skills to thrive in the digital age and have a mindset for lifelong learning.

Latvia will use the recovery from COVID-19 to further advance digital transformation. Latvia will direct one fifth of EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility’s investments towards promoting digital transformation, including transformation of public services, digitalization of enterprises and innovation, digital skills and the development of 5G infrastructure.

Latvia is also a strong advocate for promoting information and media literacy. It is crucial for resilience building to stop the spread of disinformation and misinformation, which has had a detrimental effect on the fight against COVID-19, including vaccine uptake and should be viewed as a challenge to addressing other global challenges as well.

Tackling of the COVID-19 pandemic has required a whole-of-society response, and so does the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Sustainable development challenges are too complex and too interconnected to be tackled in silos. We need involvement of all stakeholders – parliaments, national and local governments, private sector and social partners, civil society and academia. Individuals and stakeholders need to be engaged in finding and designing solutions for sustainable recovery and development. Youth needs to be meaningfully engaged for fresh perspectives, innovative solutions and a long-term assessment. In this context, Latvia supports strengthening the UN Youth Delegate Programme and supports involvement of young leaders in discussions at the UN and beyond.

An inclusive and just recovery and sustainable development is not possible without good governance and rule of law. Latvia reiterates that it will continue to promote these principles and the implementation of SDG16 through development cooperation efforts and at the UN. Latvia was pleased to share its best practice on implementing effective anti-corruption measures this year at the UN General Assembly Special Session Against Corruption and believes that digital transformation must also be harnessed for building transparent, accountable, effective and inclusive institutions.

While we talk of recovery, we are aware that the pandemic is far from over. The spread of new variants and vaccine hesitancy caution on making premature declarations of victory. Strong global cooperation and solidarity is key in overcoming the challenges. Latvia is contributing in the Team Europe spirit to the response and recovery in partner countries, also by sharing COVID-19 vaccines. Access to safe and effective vaccines globally is a precondition to end this pandemic.

2030 Agenda has been described as a “guiding light” and a roadmap for overcoming and recovering from the pandemic. It is both - an aspirational vision and a concrete set of goals and targets that are crucial to building back better and a better future for all.

Latvia is committed to play its part through implementing its National Development Plan 2021-2027 and green, digital, inclusive recovery plans, as well as to contribute globally through development cooperation efforts and multilateral engagement, including as a Member of the Economic and Social Council.

In 2021, Latvia together with Indonesia had the honour to co-chair the 6th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. During the COVID-19 pandemic the world has witnessed the power of science, technology and innovation. It is important to keep momentum and harness the power of STI for achieving SDGs, address global challenges and be better prepared for unforeseen shocks, and Latvia is glad to play its part in these efforts.

As a member of ECOSOC, Latvia remains committed to work together with other UN Member States in the spirit of solidarity and mutual cooperation to advance recovery from COVID-19 and the Decade of Action.