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Advance Unedited Version

High-level political forum on sustainable development
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Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its sixth session

Note by the Secretariat
    The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the sixth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region, held on 6-7 April 2022, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

I.   Attendance

1.   The sixth session of the regional forum on sustainable development for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region was held as a hybrid meeting at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 6 and 7 April 2022. The session was chaired by the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, H.E. Mr. Edil Baisalov.

2.   The session was attended by representatives of the following 52 ECE member States: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, 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: Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Morocco, Peru. 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 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: Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Headquarters, United Nations Global Compact, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office at Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers, United Nations World Tourism Organization, World Health Organization, World Food Programme and World Meteorological Organization. Resident coordinators and representatives from resident coordinators' offices from 13 programme countries in the region also attended.

6.   Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations participated in the session: Asian Development Bank, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, Commonwealth Secretariat, Council of Europe, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe, Eurasian Development Bank, Eurasian Economic Commission, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Forest Institute, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Regional Cooperation Council, Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus.

7.   Representatives of about 200 non-governmental organizations as well as representatives of academia, the private sector, human rights institutions, 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-2022).

II. Opening and adoption of the agenda

8.   The regional forum adopted the provisional agenda for the session, contained in ECE/RFSD/2022/1.

9.   In his opening remarks, the Chair, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, H.E. Mr. Edil Baisalov, emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic had profoundly impacted the efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the Chair mentioned the severe conflict in the region that threatened to further set back the insufficient SDG progress. Peace is a pre-requisite for sustainable development, as enshrined in the preamble of the 2030 Agenda. The Kyrgyz Republic has integrated Sustainable Development Goals to its national policy development through the recently approved national development plan until 2026. Considering that a large share of the Kyrgyz population is comprised of children and young adults the President of the Kyrgyz Republic declared the goal of raising the standards of education and healthcare for children and young adults as the new national objective. To achieve this objective, measures such as higher salaries and increased training opportunities for teachers have been put in place. Unprecedented rise in food, fuel and other commodity prices are hitting the country, but the government is focusing its efforts to soften the external shock on most vulnerable communities.

10.   In her video message, the Deputy Secretary-General highlighted that war in Ukraine was causing human suffering on a massive scale and is responsible for the displacement of millions of people both internally and to neighbouring countries. The military conflict not only affects this region, but also has repercussions on a global level. Supply chains have been disrupted, and prices of food, energy, transport and other essential supplies have skyrocketed, threatening food security. A redoubling of efforts is needed to rescue the sustainable development agenda and build a just transition as the region seeks a pathway for peace. The next climate conference – COP27 in Egypt – will be the platform for countries across the region to deliver on their commitments. A just transition includes more sustainable and resilient food systems as highlighted in the UN Food Systems summit to support National Food Systems Transformation Pathways. In addition, harnessing the potential of digital tools in education, work and health is also necessary for a just transition. Inequalities with regard to digital connectivity within and between countries must be addressed to prevent a digital divide and increasing marginalization. Following the two years of ongoing pandemic countries need to build resilience against such crises. The pandemic must mark a watershed moment to ensure universal health coverage and build more resilient public health and surveillance systems. Finally, it is essential to tackle inequality across the region and invest in people, as one in five individuals in the region experiences multidimensional poverty. The meeting of the Regional Collaborative Platform allowed the adoption of an ambitious workplan and concrete deliverables to support countries across the region.

11.   The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe underscored that war had radically changed the outlook for sustainable development in the region. However, challenges to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda were already present before the conflict started. Available data shows that the region will achieve only 26 SDG targets by 2030, which represents a quarter of all the targets for which there is sufficient evidence. Income inequality is worsening in many countries and advances on nutrition and sustainable food supply has been insufficient. The region has made good progress towards access to basic services such as drinking water and energy, but it must speed up progress on sanitation, water quality and water-use efficiency. The green transition is well under way - reliance on renewable energy has increased and energy efficiency has improved. However, the pace of the transition must increase, and fossil fuel consumption drastically diminished. Infrastructure development is critical for the green transition, which requires additional investments and increased collaboration. Finally, gender equality is central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but progress is well behind of what is required, with only one gender-related target being on track.

12.   The Vice-Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) for Europe and Central Asia and UNDP Regional Director highlighted the fact that to better support acceleration towards achieving the SDGs, the regional UN development architecture has been reviewed in the past years. Some of the key steps and achievements in 2021 were the

further development of a strong knowledge management hub, the reporting on collective achievements to increase transparency and results-based reporting in the region, consolidation of capacities on data and statistics as well as increased regional efficiencies. Issue-based Coalitions and other regional interagency groups are the main vehicle to pull together UN system-wide expertise in response to identified regional and national development challenges. Priority actions for 2022 to support UN country teams were also stressed, including the implementation of green transition- and climate change-related initiatives, the development of policies and the provision of guidance on food security issues, advisory on emerging issues with potential impact on social protection systems, regional advocacy on priority health issues, an efficient and coordinated response to the refugee and internal displacement crisis, the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Data Strategy as well as the improvement of knowledge management throughout the region.

III. High-level Policy Segment "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region"

13.   The high-level policy segment heard a keynote address by Dr. Åsa Persson, Research Director and Deputy Director of the Stockholm Environment Institute and Member of the Independent Group of Scientists for the 2023 UN Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), which was followed by a high-level plenary debate.

14.   The following government delegations intervened in the plenary debate: Ukraine, Turkmenistan, France (as Presidency of the Council of the European Union), Romania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Cyprus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, United States, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Kyrgyz Republic, Czech Republic, Austria, Armenia, Bulgaria, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation. A mayor, a representative of civil society and a representative of youth reported back from preparatory meetings and consultations.

15.   The Chair's summary in the annex to the present report presents the main issues raised during the segment. Written statements are available on the website of the regional forum.

IV. Plenary session: Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery

16.   At the outset of the plenary session, the key messages from the virtual peer learning sessions were introduced by the Chair. This was followed by a multi-stakeholder panel discussion on policy coherence and a plenary debate.

17.   The multi-stakeholder panel was composed of the following speakers:

- Mr. Andrea Innamorati, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry for Ecological Transition, Directorate General for Sustainable Growth and the Quality of Development, Italy

- Ms. Aneta Kankaras, Head of Office for Sustainable Development, Secretariat-General of the Government of Montenegro

- Biljana Ginova, Advocacy Manager ERA - LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey on behalf of civil society

18.   The following government delegations intervened during the plenary debate: Albania (Ombudswomen), Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russian Federation. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Investment Bank, the Council of Europe and UNECE also intervened.

19.   A summary of the discussions in this segment and the peer learning sessions is contained in the annex.

Introduction of the outcomes of the virtual Peer Learning Segment:[1]

(a)   Round tables – First set

Session 1: Regaining the momentum: advancing inclusion policies and strategies in the context of COVID-19

Moderator: Prof. Mel Ainscow, Professor of Education, University of Manchester.

Policy actions presented by: Albania, Germany, Finland, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Georgian Network of Women with Disabilities, Kyrgyz Indigo, Major Group of Workers and Trade Unions, Stakeholder Group on Ageing, UNESCO, UNICEF.

Session 2: Enhancing ocean literacy and the sustainable development of regional seas

Moderator: Ana Luiza M. Thompson Flores, Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

Policy actions presented by: Greece, Montenegro, ACTeon, ANACOM (Portugal), Ciência Viva (Portugal), UNESCO and UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan.

Session 3: Data and statistics for sustainable development

Moderators: Carolina Santos, National Institute of Statistics, INE Portugal; Claudia Wells, Development Initiatives, Director of Data Use.

Policy actions presented by: Turkey, United Kingdom, Alcohol and Illicit Drugs & Prison Health, Danish Institute for Human Rights, European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, EU Joint Research Center, European Trade Union Confederation, Israel Meteorological Service, Local NGO School of Data, World Health Organisation.

Session 4: Accelerating digital development through multistakeholder partnerships

Moderators: Jaroslaw Ponder, Head, ITU Office for Europe; Natalia Mochu, Regional Director, ITU Office for CIS; Elisabeth Tuerk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade, UNECE.

Policy actions presented by: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, European Commission, European Disability Forum, Generation Connect Europe and CIS Youth Groups, International Disability Forum, Union of Operators of Armenia.

(b)   Round tables – Second set

Session 5: Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

Moderator: Ms. Sylvie Durrer, Federal Office for Gender Equality, Switzerland.

Policy actions presented by: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, , Georgia, Kazakhstan, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Uzbekistan, Borusa Mannesmann (Turkey), CEDAW Committee , Council of Europe, Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS, Regional Cooperation Council, Standards Council of Canada, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian,

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[1] Further information on the 8 virtual peer learning sessions, including lead organizers, speakers, outlines and recordings, are available at: https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/round-tables-regional-forum-2022

Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights, UN Women Europe and Central Asia.

Session 6: Action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems

Moderators: Ana Luiza M. Thompson Flores, Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe Marco Keiner, Director, Environment Division, UNECE Bruno Maggy G. Pozzi, Director, Europe Office, UNEP.

Policy actions presented by: Czech Republic, Georgia, Slovenia, Uzbekistan, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Environmental Bureau, OSCE, UNEP, UNESCO.

Session 7: Urban forests for future proof cities

Moderator: Mr. Simone Borelli, Urban Forestry Officer, Forestry Division, FAO.

Policy actions presented by: Albania, France, Georgia, Slovenia, Switzerland, ArboCityNet, European Commission, European Environmental Bureau, ForestaMi, International Forestry Students' Association, Trees for Cities, UN Habitat.

Session 8: Rebalancing people, planet and prosperity: ESD as key enabler for the 17 SDGs and Agenda 2030

Moderator: Mr. Wondwosen Asnake Kibret, UNEP.

Policy actions presented by: Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, The Netherlands, European Commission, Masaryk university, UNECE ESD Youth Platform, UNECE Steering Committee for ESD, UN Secretary General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change.

V.   Closing

20.   In her closing remarks, the ECE Executive Secretary highlighted her appreciation for the fact that member States and other stakeholders had renewed their commitment to sustainable development in challenging circumstances due to the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. She called for peace, regional cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, the Regional Forum had managed to further increase its reach and accessibility by offering interpretation and sign language interpretation throughout the sessions. The meeting was the annual culmination of the multiple engagements ECE aimed to develop with its member States and other stakeholders throughout the year.

21.   Before closing the meeting, the Chair underlined that only a culture of peace, dialogue, and exchange would help the region to move forward with its common goals. This forum was a reminder of the broad benefits of multilateral cooperation which must be preserved even in the most difficult times. He further informed participants that the draft report of the Regional Forum, including the Chairs' summary of discussions, would be circulated for comments by participants. The final version would constitute the official input from the Economic Commission for Europe region to the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (to be held from Tuesday, 5 July, to Thursday, 7 July, and from Monday, 11 July, to Friday, 15 July 2022).

Annex

Chair' summary of the discussions

High-level Policy Segment "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region"

1.   At the outset of the high-level policy segment the keynote speaker drew attention to the global changing context for sustainable development that had been created by the pandemic, with setbacks that in some areas, like education, may leave long-lasting scars. Poverty and wealth inequality have increased, with negative consequences for many SDGs. The war in Ukraine and its regional and global implications present new threats for sustainable development.

2.   Some positive developments have taken place since the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GDSR) was prepared. Net zero targets covering almost 90% of emissions have been adopted. There is increasing awareness among the general public on SDGs and related knowledge-generation by academia.

3.   Sustainability science has developed a range of methods that allow policymakers or companies to self-assess how their proposed actions lead to synergies or trade-offs between SDGs, which are very context-dependent. However, these methods are not sufficiently used.

4.   The goal of the 2023 GSDR is to review and provide pathways to achieve the SDGs, by synthesizing and assessing relevant scientific literature and drawing on examples and practices by states and non-state actors. The focus of the report will be on acceleration. Building on the previous analytical framework, a transformation pathway will be suggested to consider how the impact of efforts can be maximized, including by removing existent impediments and developing capacities. Interventions must be sequenced for maximum impact, stimulating self-reinforcing change and positive feedback loops. A systemic view that considers dynamic effects over time is necessary. A stronger science-policy interface that co-generates knowledge and answers practical demands, can play an important role in SDG acceleration.

5.   Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine, participants reaffirmed their commitment to the values and goals set out in the 2030 Agenda. Multiple initiatives have been undertaken in the region to address the negative consequences of the pandemic, in particular on health, education, gender equality and on the most vulnerable, including by strengthening social protection systems. Some economic sectors that were hit particularly strongly have received special assistance. UN County Teams have supported in some cases, like the Republic of Moldova, the preparation of recovery plans. The pandemic gave a new impulse to digitalization, including in the public sector. But it also raised concerns on exclusion and the need to develop digital skills, prompting new initiatives, as in Bulgaria

6.   Albeit in more difficult circumstances, the pandemic did not stop efforts to integrate SDGs into policies, strategies and action plans. Coordination and monitoring mechanisms have been refined and strengthened. Institutional changes have sometimes aimed at broadening the engagement of stakeholders, as in the new SDG Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

7.   With less than a decade left to achieve the SDGs, there is a need to focus on systematic change and areas of transformation to accelerate SDG progress. The necessary transformation requires systematic approaches and integrated policy responses, bringing together different policy areas, as problems cannot be solved in isolation. Changes in government's institutional structures, as in Germany, may facilitate the connection between environment and economy.

8.   Sectoral initiatives have been undertaken to foster the green transformation in different countries, reflecting the structure of national economies. Efforts to address

climate change require actions at the local level as well. In some cases, governments work closely with local authorities to empower them to adopt nature-based strategies, as in recent initiatives in Israel. Climate change adaptation should be part of these efforts, as emphasized in the Czech Republic.

9   Voluntary National Reviews can serve to enhance policy coherence and address trade-offs in SDGs initiatives, including between climate actions and COVID recovery measures, as in Greece. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, as in recent VNRs in Georgia, remains critical.

10.   Science and education can play an important role in guiding actions and creating the conditions for sustainable development. In Cyprus, SDGs have been placed at the heart of the educational system while Portugal has developed new initiatives on ocean literacy. In Armenia, a new state education programme is under preparation. Education is critical for equal opportunities, but these require specific support, targeting the most vulnerable. Dealing with this complex challenge requires the involvement of many stakeholders, as in the case of Netherlands' alliance for education.

11.   Appropriate financing remains a critical element. It is important that adequate provisions are made, including by reflecting action plans in medium-term expenditure frameworks, like in Azerbaijan. As public resources will be insufficient, efforts to attract private financing. will remain critical. A global partnership must contribute to raise the necessary resources, including by engaging the private sector, as supported by the United Kingdom's initiatives.

12.   Good quality data is essential to monitor progress. In Romania, a mechanism has been developed to offer information to policymakers in real time. This monitoring instrument examines and collects data on SDGs and their degree of implementation, thus facilitating the development of accurate strategies and policies. Strong work on developing monitoring and accounting indicators is ongoing in the Kyrgyz Republic. Implementation reports, supported by evidence, serve as points of reference in national debates, raise awareness and contribute to accountability, as used in Austria. In Switzerland, a digital tool has been introduced to facilitate gathering inputs for monitoring from all parties, thus strengthening coordination and coherence in the evaluation of progress.

13.   Building partnerships among a wide range of actors at local, national and regional levels and promoting a better understanding of SDGs among citizens remains critical. Global crises demand global responses. Therefore, a strong multilateral system is key to advance the full implementation of the SDGs. Despite the difficult circumstances, participants recognised the value of UNECE as the platform to forge cohesion, enhance policy coherence and facilitate peer learning on sustainable development in the region.

14.   The UNECE Second Forum of Mayors[2] shared city experiences on people-centered solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of their citizens and ensure the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The focus was on four key global challenges identified in the Geneva Declaration of Mayors: sustainable urban transport, shared mobility and safer roads; vibrant public spaces, greener cities, and nature-based solutions; resilient, healthy and climate neutral buildings and affordable and adequate housing and, finally, sustainable urban planning, the 15-minute city and smart urban development solutions.

15.   Mayors saw the pandemic as an opportunity to develop creative solutions to build back better. The integration of SDGs at both the local and national levels makes it possible to have common objectives and exploit synergies. Many cities have developed SDGs plans or undertaken commitments to become climate neutral by 2030. A participatory approach is essential to respond to the needs of citizens and overcome resistance to change.

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[2] The UNECE Second Forum of Mayors took place from 4-5 April 2022 back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region as mandated by the UNECE Executive Committee, who also decided that the Forum of Mayors 2022 will report both to the Regional Forum and the Committee on Urban Development and Housing Management (ECE/EX/2020/L.16). An advance unedited version of the Summary of the Forum of Mayors is available at: https://forumofmayors.unece.org/.

16.   Civil society representatives stressed strongly the negative consequences of the war in Ukraine for all SDGs, including the detrimental effect on education (SDG 4), gender equality and women's human rights (SDG 5) and the environment (SDGs 14 and 15). Presenting the outcomes of the Youth Forum, a call to fully include young people in decision-making processes was made, while drawing attention to the multiple forms of discrimination they experience, in particular young people with disabilities, and the urgency of addressing systemic factors that prevent SDG progress.

17.   Many member States stressed that there cannot be sustainable development without peace, which is also a precondition for international cooperation. Ukraine described the devastation brought by the Russian Federation's military aggression and how it had set back efforts to advance SDGs. The United States expressed its solidarity with the people of Ukraine while France, on behalf of the European Union and its member States, strongly condemned the Russian Federation's actions as an act of aggression that violated international law. Other EU member States that took the floor aligned themselves with the statement made by France. Georgia drew attention to the need to respect international law and Moldova condemned the act of war launched against Ukraine. Israel called on the Russian Federation to stop the attacks while Switzerland and the United Kingdom joined other countries in condemning the Russian Federation's military aggression. Belarus drew attention to the negative impact of sanctions on the population in and beyond our region and the need to preserve cooperation. The Russian Federation rejected all allegations made by those who condemned its actions and stressed that sanctions were undermining the achievement of the SDGs[3].

Outcomes of the peer learning round tables:

(a) Round tables – First set

Session 1: Regaining the momentum: advancing inclusion policies and strategies in the context of COVID-19

18.   The COVID-19 pandemic prompted stronger reliance on connectivity and the digitalization of education, with teaching and learning moving to virtual spaces. Education systems need to build more resilience through innovation to prepare for future crises and mitigate further learning disruptions, including through digital learning for all. Data, evidence, and analysis of these disruptions during the pandemic offer lessons that should be used to ensure continuity of learning, including by introducing more flexible curricula and assessments at all levels of learning.

19.   Education must better reflect the evolution and transformation happening in our societies. Connectivity is key to supporting the right to education, contributing to the implementation of global commitments, and providing new opportunities for inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, the growing use and reliance on technology for education also brings multiple challenges and risks related to increased learning inequality, exclusion and inadequate digital skills and competencies, especially among women and girls. Language barriers of migrant and refugee populations and the most vulnerable populations present additional difficulties.

20.   Committed, collaborative evidence-based policy planning should involve multi-stakeholder consultations and partnerships. Inclusiveness should be a goal, both in policies and practices, in order to address barriers facing learners in particular circumstances. Education providers should have autonomy in the assessment of their contexts and use of resources. Teachers and other education personnel should enjoy decent working conditions. Social dialogue, while upholding the rights of teachers, is essential. Flexible curricula and teaching methods are critical for quality and inclusive education.

21.   The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the fundamental right to education, as a public and common good. In this regard, it is imperative that the

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[3] Full statements have been posted online as received by the Secretariat and requested by member States.

necessary investments are made for education systems to be inclusive and resilient. Participatory approaches bringing together different stakeholders will facilitate cohesion and integration, including of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Attention should be paid to the whole lifecycle of learning, while stressing the importance of investing in early years education as well as acknowledging the learning needs of aging population.

22.   Vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, minorities, learners with special needs and refugees should receive particular attention. A gender perspective should be mainstreamed through all education policies. Connectivity for all schools and the provision of digital resources to students in all grades should be prioritized. Appropriate investment in professional learning and support of teachers is necessary, together with the financing of evidence-based measures, to facilitate inclusion. Regardless of their age, circumstances, backgrounds, and characteristics, every person has the right to lifelong learning. The Transforming Education Summit, a key initiative of Our Common Agenda taking place in September 2022, is an opportunity to reignite global efforts to deliver the education-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Session 2: Enhancing ocean literacy and the sustainable development of regional seas

23.   Oceans cover 72% of the surface of the planet and constitute more than 95% of the biosphere. They provide a substantial share of the global population with food and livelihoods and support transport means for 80% of global trade. However, human activities are seriously taxing the resilience of the marine and coastal resource base. Overfishing and pollution contribute to the loss of biodiversity and the decline in the provision of environmental services. Climate change is having a negative impact on the foundations of coastal development and undermining maritime ecosystems.

24.   It is essential to increase awareness of the critical role oceans play as the life support system of the planet and humankind and to develop a good understanding of how humane behaviour influences them. However, these issues are not sufficiently considered in national curricula.

25.   A number of initiatives and projects seek to enhance ocean literacy. Some examples include the network of blue schools promoted by the European Commission to bring the ocean to the classrooms. UNESCO has launched a proposal for a new blue curriculum, which includes not only ways to increase ocean knowledge but also aims to increase students' competences, skills and nature-connectedness. Partnerships with the local community, engaging with all stakeholders and recognizing the different specificities of countries and regions are essential to advance ocean literacy and bring about behavioural changes necessary for the sustainable management of ocean resources. A good example is the European Ocean Coalition (EU4Ocean), which connects diverse organisations, projects and people that contribute to ocean literacy and the sustainable management of the ocean.

26.   Oceans have been perceived as a means of free resource extraction and waste dumping without reflecting environmental costs in economic calculations. The "Blue Economy" provides an alternative development model to incorporate ocean values and services in decision-making processes.

27.   UNEP's 'Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative', aims to obtain ocean-based economic, social and environmental benefits in a sustainable way. It seeks to enhance decision-making, enabling conditions and capacities to develop and implement sustainable, climate-resilient and inclusive blue economy polices, strategies and solutions that reduce human impacts and support the sound use of marine and coastal ecosystems and their many services.

28.   The five pan-European regional seas provide an opportunity for developing sustainable, resilient and inclusive blue economies at basin level. Support to the joint implementation of management measures and tools, such as marine protected areas and other marine conservation measures, marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management contribute to reap the benefits of sustainable blue economies. Restoration actions in the context of the UN Decade for Ecosystems Restoration (2021-2030) are

also of great importance. The UN Environment Assembly resolution entitled "End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument" represents a ground-breaking commitment to support the global ocean community and regional seas in addressing one of the key challenges of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, loss of biodiversity, and climate change.

29.   Ocean monitoring, data collection and research translate into knowledge, creating new opportunities for a sustainable blue economy, peaceful transboundary cooperation, and social cohesion. Information and Communication Technologies play a critical role in ocean and climate monitoring, as well as disaster warning. Long-term monitoring, data sharing, information and knowledge and improved context-specific forecasts – including early warning systems to predict more extreme El Niño/La Niña events, tropical cyclones and marine heatwaves – can help manage negative impacts from ocean changes. Technologies can also promote a smart approach to modern and inclusive ocean governance. More case studies and success stories of individual sustainable blue economy projects are needed to learn and promote the sustainable blue economy paradigm shift.

30.   Partnerships help create necessary networks for the development of science and knowledge. The need for transboundary and regional cooperation to prevent pollution and the depletion of ocean resources was emphasized by civil society. Moreover, a broad engagement of civil society, the private sector, local authorities, governments, and international organizations, including in support of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, is crucial for preserving the ocean we need for the future we want.

Session 3: Data and statistics for sustainable development

31.   Tracking progress towards SDG implementation involves the use of relevant, timely and sufficiently granular data for identifying areas, groups or regions that risk being left behind. These data requirements are too vast to be covered by official statistics alone. To leave no one behind, cooperation and partnerships between all possible data producers are essential. National statistical offices, government agencies, non-governmental institutions, research and mass media can work together to provide good quality data on vulnerable groups.

32.   Identifying who is being left behind from a human rights perspective can provide an input to human rights-based policies and processes. The collaboration between the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and national statistical offices (for example, in Albania and the United Kingdom) shows how to mainstream a human rights-based approach to monitor the 2030 Agenda. This cooperation should be encouraged so that international and national human rights data can fill information and data gaps and better identify groups in need of special protection in the region.

33.   Citizen-generated data can provide valuable spatially disaggregated insights to sustainable development at the regional and local levels, as demonstrated in the work of the European Union Joint Research Centre. Local data can mobilise local communities to act on issues that directly concern them, such as waste handling and pollution.

34.   A network for collecting and using evidence-based data to develop policies and strategies aimed at migrant populations have resulted from the cooperation between the Presidency of Migration Management in Turkey and local, national and international institutions. In the Kyrgyz Republic, a joint project between mass media, artists, and the Soros Foundation provided gender disaggregated femicide data to fill in the data gap in this area.

35.   The United Nations Hub and Database on Health in Prison, which is the outcome of the cooperation between the World Health Organisation and national authorities, provides data for 53 WHO member States of the European region. It allows to fill an information void on another group that is often left behind.

36.   Improved communication between data producers and users contributes to progress measurement, informed decision-making, transparency, and accountability. Good practices include the development of indices, data hubs, unified data policies and strengthening the relations with data journalists.

37.   Composite indices can be useful to facilitate communication and capture both media and policy attention. While indices provide a very general view, they encourage discussion and dialogue and thus help to develop a better understanding of data which may lead to policy action. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom has developed a health index providing a single measure of health that can be tracked over time and broken down by various geographies and health topics, thus highlighting possible regional disparities and enabling local policy action.

38.   The European Trade Union Confederation in cooperation with the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development has elaborated the "Sustainable Growth & Decent Work Index". The tool assesses the implementation of SDG 8 in Europe, thus contributing to policy proposals which zoom in into vulnerable groups at both European and national levels.

39.   Data hubs and storytelling techniques, as used by Statistics Canada, can help users to understand complex and sometimes overlapping indicator frameworks, translating them into easily interpretable information, accessible through single entry points and open and user-friendly interfaces.

40.   A Unified Policy for the International Exchange of Earth System Data was approved at the extraordinary World Meteorological Congress in October 2021. The new Policy covers seven domains and disciplines in a single policy statement that extends beyond the traditional areas of weather, climate and water data to incorporate also atmospheric composition, oceans, cryosphere and space weather. The Policy expands from engaging only national meteorological and hydrological services to endorsing relevant data exchange among all partners, including different agencies, private sector and academia. This integrated approach seeks to ensure an effective communication to support policy actions, as part of climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. The Israel Meteorological Service provides an example of a good implementation practice aimed to improve early warning systems and weather forecasting capabilities.

41.   The global commitment to achieving SDGs requires a global commitment to reporting and sharing data. Bringing different stakeholders and perspectives together to provide data and statistics to monitor, measure and report on SDG progress is essential.

Session 4: Accelerating digital development through multi-stakeholder partnerships

42.   The Covid-19 pandemic exposed how inequalities can be worsened by the digital divide. Policies focusing on digital inclusion, access, security, skills, and sustainability are necessary to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Multistakeholder partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation are required to ensure a human-centered, whole-of-ecosystem digital development.

43.   Multistakeholder initiatives, such as the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition[4], launched with the Secretary General's Envoy on Technology and directly responding to the Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation, is a game-changing opportunity to take a holistic approach, catalyse new partnerships, and mobilize the resources needed to connect the 2.9 billion people still unconnected.

44.   To capture the role of ICT as development enablers, special attention should be paid to four pillars: access, adoption, value creation and acceleration through the mobilisation of the necessary investments.

45.   There is a need to ensure that high-speed, reliable, affordable, and safe internet connectivity is provided for all communities, including remote and rural areas and countries with particular geographical situations. Appropriate policies and regulations around infrastructure development are needed. New business models can support last-mile connectivity. Unequal infrastructure in households and schools contributes to the digital divide which mainly affects marginalized children. Partnerships across Ministries of Education, Ministries of ICTs, and regulatory authorities together with local

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[4] https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/partner2connect/

governments are of strategic importance to spur the necessary changes to redress this situation.

46.   Countries should undertake a flexible approach to digital services adapted to end-user needs, including accessibility for persons with disabilities and adaptation to local languages. Targeted communities should be involved in the design and decision-making process. Governments should include science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and ICT in the education curricula at all levels. Special attention should be given to teachers' digital skills. Personalized and competency-based approaches which include both formal and extra-curricular education are needed to advance gender equality.

47.   A clear ownership of the digital agenda at the governmental level, together with a unified strategy across all ministries, is of critical importance to fostering digital ecosystems. Multi-stakeholder engagement, the incorporation of market trends, and the development of collaborative innovation mechanisms are also necessary.

48.   Common interoperable standards facilitate digitalization of services and sectors. UN/CEFACT standards for international information exchange in agriculture and food trade are supported by various international organizations and conventions, such as IPPC, Codex Alimentarius, FAO and CITES. Digital solutions for sustainable use of resources underwater, such as Vessel Monitoring tools and Electronic Reporting, and the guidance provide by UN/FLUX should be widely used. Standards as eWaste allow for the efficient handling of real time business-to-administration data flows. ICT tools can serve to mitigate the environmental impact of human activities.

49.   Investments worth 428 billion USD are needed globally to meet connectivity needs by 2030, of which 33 billion USD for Europe and Central Asia. Public and private investments must target both supply and demand to close the rural digital divide and increase technology adoption rates. National strategies and coordination mechanisms for multistakeholder partnerships are required to mobilise financing, including through. public-private partnerships. International standards developed by international organizations enhance investments and make them secure.

(b) Round tables – Second set

Session 5: Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

50.   The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted women. It exacerbated underlying structural inequalities and resulted in increased violence against women (VAW), threatening the reversal of decades of progress in the fight against poverty, human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Patriarchal social norms and discriminatory gender practices must be addressed. National institutional gender equality mechanisms and women's and youth organizations need to be sufficiently resourced to drive policy and legal changes and actions for gender equality.

51.   Equal participation in political and public life and in decision-making remains crucial. Women have remained largely excluded from the planning of pandemic responses and recovery efforts. Special measures, like quotas, are necessary. Other useful practices are the "pairing" of women and men appointed to elected seats from party lists following the elections, in proportional systems ("zipper system").

52.   Gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in all policies, services and systems and gender responsive standards need to be applied to contribute to elimination of the underlying structural inequalities. Standards should be developed in a participatory way while responding to the specific needs of those who are historically marginalized. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) should be used as a tool to promote more equitable allocation and utilization of financial resources.

53.   The effective prevention of gender-based violence, considering the intersectionality of factors such as age, disability and migration, needs to be prioritized. Important progress has been made in strengthening legal and policy frameworks to address VAW in the region, yet critical shortcomings remain. GRB would help to determine the adequate level of funding to deliver the services needed. Initiatives and

practices on GRB led by civil society organization need to be applied to plan, spend, and monitor the implementation of policies preventing VAW. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating VAW requires full implementation as the most far-reaching international treaty on tackling VAW.

54.   To achieve the SDG target on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), SRHR services should be provided as part of Universal Health coverage, including for marginalized groups. Services should be tailored to meet the needs of those who are left behind and the capacities of providers should be enhanced. HIV prevention programmes and treatments to meet needs of particular groups should be supported, including though assistance provided to community organizations.

55.   Long-standing gender disparities in access to economic resources and opportunities across the region remain. Women are less likely than men to have paid formal employment and are more likely to occupy jobs as front-liners. Women's access to decent work must be supported. Special measures are needed for women entrepreneurs. Unpaid care and domestic work need to be recognized and equitably redistributed. Special efforts are needed to support the care economy – such as investments in early childhood education and care and paid parental leave policies. Best practices by private companies on alternative childcare for their employees, flexible work schedules, and paternity leave need to be replicated. Efforts are needed to change expectations about gender roles and to increase awareness of the contribution that unpaid care work makes to economies.

56.   Quality disaggregated data need to be collected and used to inform standards and policies and track progress. The role of alternative data generated by civil society experts to measure achievements and gaps of gender equality should be recognised.

57. The RCEM for the Europe and Central Asia region shared the collective recommendations from the Civil Society Forum related to gender equality. They include recognizing the important role of women and feminist movements in promoting women's human rights and gender equality; putting in place a structural dialogue with women's organizations and supporting them with the necessary resources and space for voicing the gender related needs and priorities; investing in a gender transformative macroeconomic structure with equitable social protection and health systems; investing in creating decent and climate-friendly jobs in the care economy; ensuring that women in all their diversity are included, at all levels, in COVID-19 recovery programs; and strengthening the participation of women in conflict prevention and peace negotiation processes.

58.   In addition to the peer learning round table, a gender-related business dialogue concluded that there is a strong business case for action on gender equality. However, the gap between commitments and implementation remains huge. Disaggregated data within companies is required to allow the identification of inequalities, to fight stereotypes and to encourage women and girls to develop careers in areas where they are less represented. A systematic, collaborative approach that engages male employees is required to address underrepresentation.

Session 6: Action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems

59.   Progress on SDG 15 in the region has been uneven at best. To date, 75% of all terrestrial ecosystems have been altered by human activity. Land degradation, overfishing and deforestation harm food security and livelihoods. It is therefore imperative to accelerate actions towards the achievement of SDG 15.

60.   Ecosystem restoration contributes to the achievement of all SDGs and will be an essential element of the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Resilient ecosystems are crucial for securing and enhancing biodiversity, climate change action and human wellbeing, including health. Member States recognized the importance of resilient ecosystems through the adoption of the UN Environment Assembly resolution on nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development (UNEP/EA.5/L.9).

61.   The UN Decade for Ecosystem restoration, launched last year, is building momentum around commitments to restore one billion hectares of degraded land by

2030, as well as oceans and coasts. By April 2022, a network of over 100 organizations, 5 task forces and an advisory board of 30 members has been put in place.

62.   Strengthening regional cooperation for joint action through multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approaches and partnerships is essential for the achievement of SDG 15 in an integrated manner and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

63.   Experience of subregional mountain treaties and transboundary biosphere reserves demonstrates the success of working across borders, establishing ecological corridors and connectivity, and engaging all relevant actors. Nonetheless, success depends on vision, political will, persistence, clear roles for different actors, continuity and the collection of good data to make the case in favour of funding. Scientific findings and research are important for designing effective restoration actions and informed decision making. Regional and national legally binding instruments are effective tools, provided they include measurable and time bound targets, and strong enforcement mechanisms.

64.   The engagement of all stakeholders and, critically, the support of local people are key factors for success. Local communities must have a clear understanding of the benefits, including sustainable use, they will reap from ecosystem protection and restoration.

65.   Support to farmers, particularly in vulnerable communities, in introducing new soil management technologies, prioritizing climate resilient endemic crops and promoting crop rotation and diversification can help advance sustainable land management and reversing land degradation.

66.   Youth engagement in conservation and restoration contributes to finding innovative solutions for sustainable land-use and ecosystem restoration and helps create sustainable livelihood opportunities for young people at local level. Effective youth engagement can particularly benefit from experience sharing and solidarity building through networks such as UNESCO's Man and Biosphere EUROMAB youth network.

67.   Gender-inclusive restoration initiatives and decision-making processes that involve women can facilitate access to resources and provide an opportunity for women's economic empowerment, which ultimately enhances sustainable livelihoods.

68.   Findings from the first issue of the State of Finance for Nature report show that there is an urgent need to triple investments in nature-based solutions by 2030 and increase capital flows four times by 2050. Meeting these targets requires scaling up private sector finance by leveraging recent commitments to net zero emissions and environmental preservation.

69.   The root causes of ecosystems degradation need to be addressed through changes in consumption and production patterns. There is a need to build on existing experiences of change at national and transboundary level to accelerate progress and meet SDG 15 targets in the region by 2030.

Session 7: Urban forests for future proof cities

70.   By 2050, over two-thirds of humanity will live in cities, which are already responsible for around 75% of global CO_2 emissions. Cities are therefore at the forefront of fighting climate change.

71.   Sustainable urban forestry is an integrative and cost-effective nature-based solution that helps develop greener, healthier, and more resilient cities. Trees and forests in urban and peri-urban areas provide vital benefits for health and wellbeing, sustainable development, climate adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction. This contributes not only to sustainable local development, but also to national objectives and to most SDGs.

72.   Integrated long-term planning, designand management at the local and national level are critical to unlock the multiple co-benefits urban forestry provides. These should give due consideration to enhancing ecological linkages, restoring degraded areas and saving other valuable ecosystems like grasslands and increase biodiversity. Cities with urban forest master plans can take full consideration of these dynamics and integrate them into city planning processes to green existing as well as future urbanized areas.

73.   Policy actions must be aligned across sectors and levels of government to be consistent with urban forestry objectives. Legally binding policies, such as tree cover targets, can be very effective. At the same time, overly prescriptive policies or targets may lead to hasty solutions such as planting the wrong type of trees in the wrong place. Effective planting programmes require research into future-proof tree species in the face of changing climatic conditions as well as sufficient capacity in tree nurseries.

74.   National governments are well positioned to provide capacity-building and technical assistance to planning and management. This may include the development of standards and the collection of baseline geospatial data, which are key tools that enhance city planning and monitoring.

75.   Green spaces are not a cost but a good investment for cities and national governments. Predictable sources of long-term finance to allow for proper investment decisions, planning and management, are required. Municipal budgets are often far too small. The participation of the community, the business sector and private owners can play an important role in supplementing resources. National funds can help catalyse municipal spending on urban forestry, while aligning local actions with national objectives.

76.   Innovative finance instruments such as green bonds, payment for ecosystem services, social loans, natural capital payments and carbon credits offer additional alternatives. However, they are also complex and relatively underdeveloped. Dedicated funds, which may blend finance from public and private sources, can also mobilize resources.

77.   Urban forests should be accessible to all (SDG 11.7), planned and managed based on principles of social inclusiveness and environmental justice, while considering the geographic distribution of benefits such as increased property values, disaster risk reduction and protection from future pandemics. An effective engagement of the community, private owners and other stakeholders is critical to unlock long-term benefits and other urban forestry policy goals.

78.   Engaging diverse groups of stakeholders of all ages through a shared vision is critical. It creates a sense of ownership but also an array of valuable resources, capacities and skills. At the national and regional levels, dedicated interdisciplinary networks and educational programmes can facilitate exchange and peer learning, strengthening awareness and capacity to implement urban forestry as a nature-based solution.

79.   Good communication and learning are essential for effective cooperation and can be supported by awareness campaigns, educational activities and dialogue. Cooperation must also empower communities, including women, youth and vulnerable groups, as important stakeholders, allies for awareness raising and outreach, catalysts of change and stewards of urban forests.

80.   While there is an urgent need to maintain and expand the urban forest cover in urban and peri-urban areas, any intervention should be planned, designed, and managed sustainably, including through adequate funding. This ensures that the benefits of urban forests are optimized over time. In addition to local action by city governments, national governments can support urban forestry through national policies, standardized data collection, financial support and cooperation across boundaries and sectors. International initiatives such as the UNECE's Trees in Cities Challenge and FAO's Tree Cities of the World programme play an important role to promote and expand sustainable urban forestry.

Session 8: Rebalancing people, planet and prosperity: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as key enabler for the 17 SDGs and Agenda 2030

81.   Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution; the rise of conflicts and violent ideologies and the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic on a generation of students worldwide clearly calls for immediate action. Education for sustainable development is a pre-eminent tool to address these global challenges.

82. Education must prepare learners to navigate uncertain futures and help them create a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Education systems urgently need to move beyond literacy and numeracy, and inculcate values, knowledge and skills that promote peace, sustainable development, human rights and democracy. The purpose, content and outcome of education must be reconsidered. The outcome must be no other that creating a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable future for people and planet.

83. The COVID-19 crisis had a disproportionate impact on young people's life satisfaction and mental well-being. Young people should be engaged in designing and co-creating sustainable solutions.

84. It is vital to integrate climate change and environmental issues into national development policies, strategies, action plans and particularly in school curricula to equip all learners and the public with skills and values required to contribute to more sustainable societies and healthy environment.

85. At the UNESCO 2021 World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, governments committed to ensure environmental and climate action as a core curriculum component in all education systems. Multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary cooperation on education for sustainable development must be promoted at all levels to prepare learners for the future. Additional, efforts are also needed to strengthen training programmes, support whole institution approaches, and assist local communities to become hubs for sustainable development.

86. Whole school approaches offer schools opportunities and perspectives to reposition themselves within their local communities, as engines of transformation, initiators of local evidence-based decision-making as well as incubators of youth involvement.

87. Youth are environmentally conscious and are leading a generational movement to take positive action on climate change. They ask to be heard, they want to participate, and they want to be empowered. They are demanding to adapt education systems to current world realities and to promote action-based, participatory approaches to make real changes in their environment and lives.

88. There is a need to implement existing frameworks and commitments through collective action of all relevant actors, including UNESCO, UNECE, UNEP, the European Commission and other key stakeholders.

89. The upcoming High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries in Nicosia, Cyprus (5-7 October 2022) and its follow up provides a unique opportunity to communicate and exchange information and good practices on how education for sustainable development strategies can help advance, amplify and scale up transformative actions. It can also help to strengthen cooperation between education, environment and other sectors to prepare learners for building a sustainable future and help accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

90. Investing in education for sustainable development yields large returns, as it helps to put people on a path towards a sustainable future, to help promote and guarantee the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and to build a culture of peace and global citizenship for sustainable development.

Plenary session: Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery

91. Policy coherence is essential to address trade-offs and synergies at all levels, including between SDG policies and COVID-19 recovery measures. Short- and medium-term recovery initiatives should be aligned with long-term sustainable development goals.

92. In crafting policy responses for a sustainable recovery, there is a need to understand potential risks, which are often interconnected. Effective risk governance requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach that identifies multiple hazards. The importance of urban resilience for the climate agenda, underlines the

significance of localization for policy coherence. Developing forward-looking coherent policies that build resilience demands strong international collaboration.

93.   An examination of governance mechanisms, both horizontal and vertical, helps to identify weaknesses in policy coherence. Putting in place these mechanisms has been an essential element of the SDG implementation strategy in Montenegro. The extent to which budgets at various levels align with national strategic objectives is also important in this regard. Coherence between domestic initiatives and external actions determines overall sustainability impact. Civil servants need to be equipped with the skills necessary to navigate this complex landscape and use relevant tools, such as those developed by OECD to facilitate assessments.

94.   Parliaments play a critical role in shaping policies and providing impulse for change. They enact and improve relevant legislation, monitor implementation, convey information on the impact of programmes to relevant ministries, and provide oversight over the actions of governments on SDG implementation. In this regard, they can make an important contribution to policy coherence. Parliamentary involvement in the VNRs is key to strengthening national ownership of the SDGs, building more political support for them and ensuring that the needs of marginalised, underrepresented, or vulnerable segments of society are duly taken into account.

95.   Voluntary national and local reviews serve to promote policy coherence and multi-level collaboration to address shared challenges. By bringing together different actors, they help to bridge differences in perceptions that act as a barrier to change. Italy's 2022 VNR will present at least ten voluntary local reviews and include the views of non-institutional actors to incorporate a complementary perspective that helps to identify where the bottlenecks to implementation lie.

96.   VNRs also offer an opportunity to mainstream children's rights. The review process should be based on an integrated child and gender-sensitive approach. This would ensure coherent and coordinated policies in line with the 2030 Agenda and regional and international standards. Actions carried out to meet commitments made in the context of other international cooperation initiatives that serve to advance SDGs can be reflected in VNRs. The Council of Europe assists its members in drawing on the participation in the activities of the organization to prepare their VNRs.

97.   Civil society emphasised the need to take a holistic and coordinated approach to policymaking, while expressing concern that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the dominance of economic considerations over social and environmental issues. Data, knowledge and expertise provided by civil society organizations, which are key actors of change, should inform decision-making, in an inclusive process that embraces historically excluded groups, such as the LGBTQI+ community.

98.   The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated human rights inequalities in the UNECE region, according to the European Network of Human Rights Institutions, who emphasised the need to undertake human rights and equality impact assessments of policies and other measures. Forward-looking initiatives should redress this situation, notablyby integrating human rights education as a key accelerator of the 2030 Agenda. Appropriate data remains essential to identify groups that need special protection and develop evidence-based responses. Punitive laws and policies that drive discrimination, stigma and inequalities must be repealed.

99.   A sustainable recovery from COVID-19 demands multisectoral and multistakeholder approaches, which in turn requires strengthening and expanding existing tools for cooperation and partnerships. In this regard, international organizations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), can help to shape and implement forward-looking policies by facilitating economic cooperation and the harmonization of efforts in their areas of work. The role of multilateral development banks, like the European Investment Bank, is critical to mobilise the necessary financing, in particular as regards climate action and environmental sustainability. Partnerships are also necessary to address the negative health legacy of COVID-19 and shape effective action in other health areas, as envisaged in WHO multiple initiatives.

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