Policy Segment

The Second Year of the SDGs in the Region –
Knowing Where we Stand and Moving on to Prosperity and Well-Being for All

Informal Background Document¹
(ECE/AC.25/2017/INF2)

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¹ This document was prepared by the UNECE secretariat, based on inputs and in collaboration with the entities of the regional UN system.
1. **Introduction**

1. The first stand-alone Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region convenes at an early stage of SDG implementation. This provides an opportunity to take stock of the major sustainability challenges in the region, representing the starting position for the SDG journey. While SDG policies are still shaping up, it also allows for exchange and learning among governments and other stakeholders on the first steps taken and the further plans to implement and monitor the SDGs.

2. In line with the agenda of the 2017 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and the agreement among UNECE member States, the key themes of the Regional Forum and its Policy Segment are health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), and the key drivers of prosperity (innovation, industrialization and infrastructure – SDG 9) and their interlinkages.

3. In addition, the other SDGs under in-depth review at the HLPF - poverty and social protection (SDG 1), nutrition and agriculture (SDG 2) and oceans (SDG 14) - will also be covered.2

2. **The SDGs in the UNECE Region in 2017: Status, Key Challenges and Policy Responses**

2.1 Overall SDG status in the region and key challenges

4. In global terms, the UNECE region is mostly a developed region. Almost two thirds of its 56 countries are high-income economies, and about 90 per cent are either high-income or upper middle-income economies.3 Similarly, over 90 per cent of the UNECE countries rank very high or high regarding their level of human development.4 At the same time, comparatively lower levels of development prevail in some parts of the region, particularly in Central Asia.

5. Notwithstanding this basic characterization, the region and all of its countries and subregions face serious and pressing challenges in all dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental. Broadly, there is a lack of sustained and inclusive economic growth, coupled with a growing social divide within countries and a persistence of unsustainable consumption and production patterns. This status is a result of longer-term structural economic and social shifts, a broad set of technological trends and population dynamics5, as well as established policy trajectories and behavioural patterns in economies and societies.

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2 A compilation of background documents for the Regional Forum is available on the meeting website: [www.unece.org/rfsd2017](http://www.unece.org/rfsd2017)

3 According to the *World Bank Country and Lending Groups* classification, there are 36 high-income, 14 upper middle-income and 6 lower middle-income countries in the UNECE region. The last two low-income countries of the region that were re-classified to lower middle-income status were Kyrgyzstan (2014) and Tajikistan (2015).

4 *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*: *Human Development Report 2016, Human Development for Everyone*, New York, 2016. There are 37 UNECE countries with very high, 13 with high, and 4 with medium human development (data for Monaco and San Marino is not included).

5 *Regional United Nations Development Group (R-UNDG) for Europe and Central Asia and Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for Europe and Central Asia: Regional Advocacy Paper* (forthcoming), Issue Brief 1: Population Dynamics (led by UNFPA, Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia)
6. Economically, the share of the UNECE region in global economic activity has decreased from 50 per cent to currently about 40 per cent in the last decade.\textsuperscript{6} Recovering from multiple economic and financial crises, most of the region has experienced a prolonged period of sluggish growth with particularly detrimental effects on employment, leading to a further fragmentation of the labour market, increases in informality and downward pressures on wages.\textsuperscript{7} In most advanced economies in the region, economic activity continues to be subdued, with relatively high unemployment especially among youth. Economic development also remains vulnerable in the Eastern part of the region. This goes along with a number of structural constraints, such as an insufficiently diversified economy and geopolitical tensions in the countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and high unemployment and high dependence on external financing in South-Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{8}

7. Socially, inequalities in various forms\textsuperscript{9} are on the rise in all parts of the region, despite a high general level of development. The transition economies of the region experienced an unprecedented increase in inequality during the 1990s, after which income inequalities have fallen in some but not all transition economies.\textsuperscript{10} A number of advanced countries saw a marked increase in inequality since the 1980s\textsuperscript{11}, which has been worsened by multiple financial and economic crises. For an increasing number of households, these dynamics exacerbate social exclusion, pockets of poverty and access to social protection, health, housing, education, culture and other basic services.

8. In addition, marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and migrants and refugees face persistent exclusion, material deprivation and inferior health and education outcomes in many societies. Growing vulnerability of children\textsuperscript{12}, young people\textsuperscript{13}, and older persons remains a key concern. Discrimination and discriminatory practices, coupled with poor legal frameworks, weak implementation of laws and lack of access to justice persist. Moreover, there is a widening rural-urban divide. Within cities, residents of distressed urban areas have lagged behind for decades. Increasingly, there is also uneven access to natural resources, in particular to soil and water.\textsuperscript{14}

9. On a broader scale, considerable challenges also remain with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, such as persistent limitations in economic opportunities; gaps in social protection and access to services; dangerous effects of unregulated migration; rising

\textsuperscript{6} Share of UNECE region in global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates (UNECE calculations based on data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)).
\textsuperscript{7} R-UNDG/RCM: \textit{Regional Advocacy Paper} (forthcoming), Issue Brief 4: Decent Jobs for All (led by ILO, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia)
\textsuperscript{11} UN: \textit{World Economic and Social Survey 2014: Reducing Inequality for Sustainable Development}, New York, 2014
\textsuperscript{13} UNFPA, Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia: \textit{Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia}, Regional Issue Brief 2, Istanbul, 2015
\textsuperscript{14} R-UNDG/RCM: \textit{Regional Advocacy Paper} (forthcoming)
conservativism; shrinking space for women’s civic activism; the gendered impact of the demographic dividend and ageing; high prevalence of gender-based violence; and failure to address the gendered dimension of environmental disasters. Yet, there has also been progress in closing gender gaps in some areas over the past two decades, within the context of diverse economic and social conditions, cultures, and traditions.

10. Environmentally, the region as a whole has a very large ecological footprint and is struggling to significantly reduce or reverse the overuse of natural resources, the loss of biodiversity and the emission of pollutants and greenhouse gases. The way societies live, consume and produce continue to be disconnected from natural environments, owing to long-standing patterns and practices in policies, institutions, technologies and lifestyles.

11. The growing affluence of the population of some countries in the Europe and Central Asia region is moving consumption patterns further beyond the regenerative/carrying capacity of environmental systems. Although greenhouse gas emissions have broadly declined or stabilized in most parts of the pan-European region since the 1990s, they remain at a high level. Both North America and Europe have experienced climate change impacts such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, and temperature and precipitation extremes in the past decade.

12. Lifestyles and consumption patterns are moving towards more energy intensive categories of goods and services, such as large individual vehicles, larger housing, imported foods etc., particularly in Western Europe. Furthermore, materials and products are predominantly used only once or in very short cycles.

13. With regard to production patterns, there are vast differences within the region. Producing sectors in some countries remain relatively energy inefficient. Other countries have developed dynamic high-tech sectors. However, current production patterns as a whole exacerbate environmental degradation and resource depletion. This has led to an increased recognition of the benefits of shifting to resource-efficient production and the concept of a green economy, which provides new business opportunities, but may also require difficult structural changes.

14. Altogether, the challenges of moving towards sustainable consumption and production patterns while still widely enjoying the benefits of economic growth and without exacerbating social tensions are relevant throughout the region. For the high-income countries in the region, the transformation challenge will be to maintain their high levels of economic and social development with much smaller ecological footprints. For the energy exporting countries, the

15 R-UNDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 3: Gender Equality, Women’s Rights and Women’s Empowerment (led by Regional Working Group on Gender, co-chaired by UNFPA and UN Women, Europe and Central Asia Regional Offices)
17 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNCE): Global Environment Outlook, GEO-6 Assessment for the Pan-European Region (EN, RU) and UNEP: Global Environment Outlook, GEO-6 Assessment for North America, Nairobi, 2016
18 R-UNEDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 10: Changing Consumption Patterns (led by UN Environment, Regional Office for Europe)
19 See, for example, UNECE: Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016: Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy (EN, FR, RU) and Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E)
20 R-UNDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 9: Changing Production Patterns (led by UNIDO, Regional Division for Europe and Central Asia)
challenge will be to reduce the production and use of fossil fuel energy while consolidating human
development. For the countries in the lower middle-income bracket, the challenge will be to
maintain their low ecological footprints while accelerating sustainable growth and human
development. In any given country, this will require strategies and policies aiming at simultaneous
progress towards prosperity and social inclusion while respecting planetary boundaries. Human
rights and rights-based policy approaches will be crucial to ensure that no one is left behind.

15. Much of the success of the 2030 Agenda will depend on a financing framework that matches
the ambition of the SDGs. Across the region, the challenge will be to mobilize additional and
redirect available financial resources towards long-term financing of sustainable development. A
process of reshaping and further developing the financial system towards sustainability finance is
already underway, driven by national and international regulatory efforts and initiatives of
financial market actors. It will be essential to continue and accelerate this process to strengthen
the impact of the financial system on SDG achievement.

16. Estimations regarding the magnitude of resources needed to finance the implementation of
the SDGs are in the trillions rather than billions of dollars. Large amounts of investable resources
that could meet these requirements are available in principle. The vast majority of the resources
that could be tapped to finance sustainable development are in private hands, including
institutional investors, other private savings intermediated by the financial sector, sovereign
wealth funds, and large multinational enterprises. In addition, domestic public resources can be
increased. However, not all available public and private resources will automatically be allocated
and used effectively to support the SDGs. The challenge is therefore to identify ways to channel
both domestic and international resources to meet the needs of sustainable development, using a
smart mix of policies and incentives.

17. Public policies and finance will play a key part in this effort. Public initiatives can leverage,
increase and complement private investments to achieve the SDGs. Public or semi-public investors
could spearhead investments in new areas with high SDG impact. Blended finance, bringing
together concessional public financing with other forms of public and private financing, has the
potential to significantly increase money available for sustainable development purposes. Well-
designed instruments for effective risk-sharing between the public and private sectors can
leverage public funding to bring in much larger private resources, including through well-designed
Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Also Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have an important
role to play, channeling resources to activities with high social returns that are less favoured by
private investors.

18. The region will also play a significant role within a renewed global partnership. The region’s
members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) accounted for three quarters of
global official development assistance (ODA) in 2015, which amounted to 132 billion US$ in total.
Six countries of the region - Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United
Kingdom – met the target to keep ODA at or above 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI). However,

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21 UNEP, Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System: The Financial System We Need, From Momentum to
22 World Bank/IMF Development Committee: From Billions to Trillions: Transforming Development Finance, Post-2015
23 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and Regional United Nations Development Group (R-UNDG)
for Europe and Central Asia: Regional Consultation on Financing for Development, Geneva, 23 March 2015
the funding challenges for humanitarian needs and large refugee and migration flows in the region have increased. Other countries in the region have become important non-DAC donors. At the same time, the scale of ODA is increasingly dwarfed by foreign investment and remittance flows, as well as by domestic finance for development. In the future, moving away from passive donor-recipient relationships towards customized partnerships and exchanges should be a critical feature of the region’s development cooperation landscape.24

2.2 Policy responses and steps taken to implement the SDGs

19. For many countries in the region, getting started with the SDGs has meant defining the priority action areas and reviewing the tools at hand. In particular, this process has involved all or some of the following elements:25

- a review of the national policy and legal frameworks
- a review of the institutional and coordination structures
- a substantive assessment of SDG gaps

Policy and legal frameworks

20. SDG implementation is taking place amidst a wealth of existing national strategies, policies and plans that are relevant to sustainable development. In many advanced countries of the region, policy frameworks on sustainable development had been in place since the 1990s, created in follow up to the 1992 Earth Summit.

21. In many countries of the region with UN programmatic presence, the mainstreaming of SDGs in national and local strategies, plans and programmes has benefitted from prior experiences with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Progress under this framework from 2000-2015 was uneven in the region and unfinished MDG business will be continued in the SDGs. Some general lessons from the MDGs for devising SDG policies in programme countries as well as other countries are:

- The need for an integral development agenda, as uncoordinated sector-oriented approaches are bound to have unintended consequences that can undermine progress in other areas and weaken policy coherence.

- The adaptation of global goals to diverse national, subnational and local situations is critical. Adapted targets, indicators and baselines should reflect the development needs of each country. The experience under the MDGs shows the importance of adaptation but also the need to pay attention to methodological and comparability issues.

24 R-UNDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 14: Partnership Dimensions of the 2030 Agenda (led by UNDP, Istanbul Regional Hub, Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS)
25 UNECE and R-UNDG: The Regional Survey on the Planning, Implementation, Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2016 (Survey, Summary of Replies); High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs): 2016 VNRs from UNECE Region: Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey
• Policies should have a particular focus on geographic areas and populations that are at the highest risk of marginalization and exclusion.\textsuperscript{26}

22. In programme countries, SDG implementation is critically supported by the UN Country Teams, using the umbrella framework of the UNDG Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) approach.\textsuperscript{27}

23. Efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda in member States and to adapt the SDGs to the specific needs and circumstances at the national and local levels have therefore sought to build on a variety of existing frameworks. National sustainable development strategies or national development strategies that are in place are being reviewed and adapted to the needs of the SDGs. However, there are differences in the progress made so far in incorporating SDGs in existing frameworks. In a few countries, new strategies were developed around the time SDGs were adopted and this facilitated a fuller incorporation of the SDGs. In some cases, this depends on the timing of the cycle for developing or updating these development strategies. In others, updating and revisions of existing strategies are required and will take place in accordance with already planned schedules. A few countries have already adopted revised national sustainable development strategies, taking into account the SDGs\textsuperscript{28}, while others are advanced in the process.

24. In general, member States are cognisant of the complexity and far-reaching character of the 2030 Agenda, which will require a significant effort to ensure that strategies and policies support its implementation. Therefore, ongoing processes will take some time because of the depth and breadth of the related domestic and international engagements and commitments.

\textit{Institutional and coordination structures}

25. Through its very nature, the 2030 Agenda framework requires policy integration. If overall progress under the SDGs is to be achieved, then measures taken in one area must no longer have adverse impacts on other areas covered by the agenda. Pursuing these synergistic policy solutions will have implications for government (as well as other) institutions. There is a far greater need for cross-sectoral coordination, consultation and policy learning among Ministries, government agencies and other organizations.

26. Currently, the inter-sectoral character of the SDGs is reflected in countries’ extensive use of inter-ministerial coordination structures. These are most often under the oversight of the highest level of government (office of the Prime Minister/Head of Government), although in a few cases, the Ministries of Economy, Environment or International Development are given a particular role in monitoring or coordinating implementation. Institutional arrangements may also be influenced by the distribution of competencies and responsibilities among the different levels of the state.

\textsuperscript{26} Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for Europe and Central Asia and Regional United Nations Development Group (R-UNDG) for Europe and Central Asia: \textit{Looking Back, Leaping Forward – Moving from MDGs to SDGs in Europe and Central Asia}, 2016
\textsuperscript{28} For example, Switzerland’s \textit{Sustainable Development Strategy 2016-2019} or Germany’s updated \textit{Sustainable Development Strategy 2016}. 

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(national, subnational, local) as well as between the executive and legislative branches of government. In particular, parliaments have a key role to play in the national and local adaptation of the SDGs.  

27. In some countries, in particular in those that have sustainable development strategies in place, there are National Councils for Sustainable Development (or similar structures), with the participation of civil society, private sector and academia. These Councils are expected to contribute to implementation, with a few countries planning to widen their remit and membership or even to use them as platforms to develop broader partnerships and stronger participation.

28. Looking ahead, it is likely that further changes in the landscape of government institutions will unfold in response to the significant policy-making challenges of the 2030 Agenda. Policy integration may be further incorporated in the incentive and budgetary structures of public administrations, which could, for instance, involve shared work plans or cross-sectoral budgets.

**Substantive SDG assessments**

29. Several countries in the region have been taking stock of their status in different SDG-related areas, which has served to assess the extent of existing gaps to achieve the SDG targets and, hence, to determine the country’s baseline from which progress can be assessed. Areas in which the distance between targets and the current situation is larger are those that may require stronger policy efforts.

30. Assessments of SDG readiness have also been conducted by other stakeholders, in particular for the advanced countries of the region. The advanced countries, for which the MDGs were seen as largely irrelevant domestically, are also striving to implement the universal 2030 Agenda in a national context. According to studies carried out, not all advanced countries are fit or prepared for the goals, albeit to a varying degree, and no one advanced country performs outstandingly in all goals. Moreover, even the best-performing advanced countries by today’s standards will need to strive for significant improvements until 2030.

### 3. Achieving Prosperity, Health and Well-being for All

31. While preserving the overall context of the 2030 Agenda, which is to be implemented in its entirety, the Policy Segment particularly zooms in on the critical goals of health and well-being for all (SDG 3), gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5), and innovation,
industrialization and infrastructure (SDG 9). In addition, poverty and social protection (SDG 1),
nutrition and agriculture (SDG 2), and oceans (SDG 14) will be covered.

32. Based on a brief overview of the region’s point of departure for these goals, the main
linkages between these areas and resulting pathways for cross-sectoral policy-making will be
identified.

3.1 Status of SDGs under in-depth review in the region

a) Key themes: Health, Gender Equality, Prosperity

Healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages (SDG 3)

33. Health and well-being are at the centre of the 2030 Agenda. Health is closely interlinked with
all SDGs in multiple ways – as a determinant, an enabler, a key component and an outcome.

34. SDG 3 addresses all major health priorities: maternal (target 3.1) and child (3.2) mortality;
communicable (3.3) and non-communicable (3.4) diseases; substance abuse (3.5); road traffic
accidents (3.6); universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services (3.7); universal
health coverage (3.8); pollution (3.9); tobacco control (3.10); access to medicines and vaccines
(3.B); health financing and health workforce (3.C); and the capacity of all countries in health risk
reduction and management (3.D).

35. In Europe and Central Asia, there have been substantial health improvements over the past
decades. At the same time, progress has been uneven among and within countries. In addition,
new health challenges have increased, for instance with regard to lifestyles, environmental and
social determinants of health, or mental health.

36. While there have been improvements in life expectancy overall in the region, an ageing
population and a range of risk factors contribute to a poor quality of life, in particular in the last
decade. Many policies, measures and strategies in the health sector and in other sectors are
available to further improve health and well-being for all at all ages.

37. From 2000-2015, progress was achieved in Europe and Central Asia on the health-related
components of the MDGs. However, not all of them were met. New HIV cases continue to rise
rapidly, especially in Eastern European and Central Asian countries. Tuberculosis also remains a
challenge, in particular multidrug resistant tuberculosis, despite a steady decrease of prevalence.

38. Particular groups of women remain at higher risk of adverse outcomes during pregnancy and
birth: adolescents, migrants, Roma and other marginalized groups, women who reside in rural

32 For the health status in the region, see R-UNDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 6: Health and
Well-being for all at all ages (led by WHO, Regional Office for Europe). For a full status of health-related SDGs and targets,
as currently available, see WHO: World Health Statistics 2016, Monitoring Health for the Sustainable Development Goals
(SDGs), Geneva, 2016
areas and women with low socioeconomic status or education level. Unmet family planning needs and other sexual and reproductive health disparities within and between countries also remain.\textsuperscript{33}

39. The Europe and Central Asia region has the highest global burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCD), the four major ones being cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. These together account for 77 per cent of the burden of disease and almost 86 per cent of premature mortality. Commonly, the growing burden of NCDs is related to risk factors including tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity, overweight/obesity, air pollution and many others. Currently 21 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women over 18 years are obese and obesity rates are rising among children, which represents a serious challenge.

40. It has also been estimated that mental disorders affect more than a third of the population every year, the most common causes being depression and anxiety. In all countries, mental disorders tend to be more prevalent among those who are most deprived.

41. Road traffic injuries represent a major preventable cause of death.\textsuperscript{34} In addition to human loss and suffering, they cause considerable associated costs, which amount, in some countries, to 1-3 per cent of GDP.\textsuperscript{35} Almost 85,000 people died as a result of road traffic accidents in Europe and Central Asia in 2013. Currently the number of cases is decreasing, but not fast enough to meet target 3.6 of a 50 per cent reduction in road traffic-related fatalities by 2020.

42. Moreover, 1.4 million deaths in Europe and Central Asia, equivalent to 16 per cent of all deaths, are caused by environmental factors that could be avoided or eliminated. Air pollution is the largest contributor to the burden of disease from the environment.\textsuperscript{36} In 2012, almost half a million persons in Europe and Central Asia died prematurely from air pollution. In addition, one year of life expectancy is lost for every person through ambient air pollution.

43. In terms of health systems, most countries in the region offer universal or near-universal population health coverage. However, there are large differences in health service delivery, health financing and the capacity of the health workforce. The goal of all people and communities receiving the needed quality services without financial hardship, including health protection, promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation, is relevant to all countries and offers an unprecedented opportunity to increase coherence in health-related actions and implementing the European Health 2020 initiative.\textsuperscript{37}

44. There is also a need for relevant, timely and quality health data and strengthened health information systems. In addition to providing disaggregated data, the information generated will provide valuable evidence for policy-making.

\textsuperscript{33} UNECE and UNFPA: Report of the UNECE Regional Conference on ICPD beyond 2014 “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century” \textsuperscript{(EN, FR, RU)}

\textsuperscript{34} WHO: Global Status Report on Road Safety 2015, Geneva, 2015


\textsuperscript{36} UNECE: Clean Air for Life, Geneva, 2016 \textsuperscript{(EN, RU)}

\textsuperscript{37} World Health Organization (WHO), Regional Office for Europe: Health 2020, A European Policy Framework and Strategy for the 21st Century, Copenhagen, 2013 \textsuperscript{(EN, FR, RU)}
45. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are yet another centerpiece of the 2030 Agenda. They matter in their own right, but also as a prerequisite for the development of and societies, as drivers of economic growth and as key contributors to sustainable development. Improving the lives of women and girls is indispensable for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

46. As a stand-alone goal, SDG 5 covers many important dimensions to tackle the gender inequalities that remain persistent across the region: Ending discrimination (5.1) and violence (5.2) against all women and girls, eliminating harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (5.3), recognizing unpaid care and domestic work (5.4), ensuring women’s participation and equal opportunities for leadership in political, economic and public life (5.5), universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (5.6), reforms for women’s equal rights to economic and other resources (5.7), technology for women’s empowerment (5.8), and sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (5.9). In addition, gender equality is also prioritized across 14 out of the 17 SDGs through concrete, gender-specific targets and indicators.

47. Over the last two decades, there has been progress in the region regarding gender equality. However, progress has been uneven and a wide spectrum of challenges remains to be addressed.38 To tackle gender inequalities, countries in the region have primarily focused on combating violence against women, women in the economy, and women in power and decision-making. Gender mainstreaming and the collection of sex-disaggregated statistics have been key instruments to achieve and monitor progress.

48. Violence against women remains a key violation of women’s rights in the region. In parts of the region, up to one fourth of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner.39 Public acceptance of violence has decreased and more women today assert their rights with the help of law enforcement as well as women’s organizations. This has been achieved in part thanks to improvements in the legal framework addressing gender-based, and particularly domestic violence. Most countries have adopted legislation on violence and established services for the victims of violence. However, particularly in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) countries and South-East Europe (SEE), there are gaps in services and access to justice.40


40 UNECE: Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, 6-7 November 2014, Regional Review of Progress: Regional Synthesis (EN, FR, RU), para. 10
49. Gender-biased sex selection persists in some parts of the region. The practice generated a skewed ratio between male and female births and has already resulted in an estimated 171,000 “missing” girls.\footnote{UNFPA, Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia: \textit{Preventing Gender-biased Sex Selection in Eastern Europe and Central Asia}, Issue Brief 4, Istanbul, 2015}

50. Countries have also undertaken efforts to increase women’s labour force participation, reduce occupational segregation and the gender pay gap, facilitate the reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities, support women’s entrepreneurship or enhance female participation in top-level economic decision-making. Nevertheless, significant gender gaps remain.

51. The gender wage gap constitutes a major setback for women’s economic opportunities: women's gross hourly earnings in 2015 were, on average, 21.8 per cent less in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and 16 per cent less in the countries of the European Union. A large portion of the wage gap stems from gender-based discrimination.

52. Throughout the region, women work longer hours than men when unpaid work is factored in. A disproportionate load of unpaid care and domestic work provided by women and girls remain largely unrecognized and undervalued.

53. Moreover, progress in women’s political participation and representation has been slow. Numerous models of quotas and other measures to promote women in elected bodies have been developed, but have rarely achieved a major change in the unequal distribution of power between women and men. With very few exceptions, female political representation across all levels remains far below the 40 per cent recommended by the Council of Europe as indicating balanced representation.

54. The complex character of regional trends in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls require comprehensive and regular monitoring with reliable and comparable data. Despite progress in some countries, gaps in availability, analysis and use of sex-disaggregated data persist, which limits the scope of evidence-based policy.

55. In the past twenty years, gender equality has become a well-established policy paradigm and countries have made important progress in institutionalizing gender mainstreaming as a strategy for promoting equality. From 1995 to 2005, thanks to the momentum of the Beijing Conference, many new laws and action plans on gender equality were introduced. Yet, as the momentum of the Conference subsided, progress in legislation and in particular in its implementation slowed down.\footnote{UNECE: \textit{Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, 6-7 November 2014, Regional Review of Progress: Regional Synthesis (EN, FR, RU)}, para. 15} However, the adoption of the SDGs has reinforced the momentum for the achievement of gender equality.

\textit{Prosperity – Infrastructure, Innovation, Industrialization (SDG 9)}

56. Infrastructure, innovation and industrialization remain major drivers of prosperity throughout the region, in which many countries are struggling to uphold or revive economic
growth. SDG 9 recognizes this key role by calling for developing quality infrastructure (9.1), promoting sustainable industrialization and related employment (9.2), increasing access of enterprises to financial services (9.3), upgrading infrastructure and retrofitting industries towards clean technologies (9.4), enhancing science, research and technology (9.5), and providing relevant financial and technological support to developing countries (9.A-C).

Infrastructure

57. Infrastructure has received significant attention due to its perceived critical role in spurring economic growth and development. In the broader sense, infrastructure is composed of basic assets and objects that are deemed essential for the functioning of society and the economy, including mainly connectivity infrastructure, such as roads, transport systems, and information and communication technologies, and, to a lesser extent, basic services such as water, sanitation and energy. These categories of infrastructure are considered crucial to advance sustainable development.

58. Well-developed transport, digital and energy networks in particular serve to facilitate trade and economic integration among neighbouring countries within subregions and to strengthen their ties to other economic centers.

59. Yet, long-term trends in the region suggest that there has been an overall decline in the availability of infrastructure. Also, in a number of developed countries, perceptions on the quality of infrastructure have deteriorated.

60. As a cross-cutting sector, transport will play an important role in efforts towards achieving the SDGs. Efforts should aim at providing affordable, efficient, safe and secure transport, improving energy efficiency, and at the same time reducing pollution and congestion. This is particularly a challenge for the parts of the region that are closely connected through developed infrastructure networks and highly economically integrated.

61. International transport links are the most important facilitator of cross-border trade and a prerequisite for economic development. Participation in global and regional supply chains is essential for attracting foreign investment and enterprises as well as human capital. In many areas this is hampered by underdeveloped international transport links, which undermine national and regional competitiveness. Foreign trade is especially important for small and land-locked economies, which are dependent on hinterland connections and border crossings. Emerging land-locked economies require particular attention, as their geography constrains trade and economic development. Inefficient border crossings adversely affect international trade, and are a particular challenge in parts of South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

43 UN: Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2016, New York, chapter 2
44 Regional Cooperation Council (RCC): Connectivity, Sarajevo, 2016; Asian Development Bank Institute: Connecting Central Asia with Economic Centers, Tokyo, 2014; World Economic Forum (WEF): How Technology Can Unlock the Growth Potential along the New Silk Road, Geneva, 2017
62. There are also challenges with regard to transport statistics. In particular, underreporting and insufficient global harmonization of statistics are obstacles to improving insight into transport safety challenges and to developing effective solutions.47

63. Digital technologies have spread rapidly in much of the world. In many instances digital technologies have boosted growth, expanded opportunities, and improved service delivery. Yet their aggregate impact is unevenly distributed. For digital technologies to benefit everyone everywhere requires closing the remaining digital divide within and among countries, especially in internet access and mobile broadband.48

64. In comparison to other regions, the proportion of households with Internet access at home in Europe is very high, estimated at 84 per cent. Europe is also leading in mobile subscriptions.49 The region is therefore well placed to further advance technological capacities in its economies and societies.

65. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are recognized as important catalysts for achieving a number of goals and targets beyond SDG 9, as they are expected to become ever more important and pervasive in the period up to 2030. This includes the use of ICTs in UNECE areas of work such as trade facilitation and electronic business, intelligent transport systems, automated vehicles, environmental monitoring, and smart cities.

66. According to the World Economic Forum50, Western and Northern Europe and the United States remain at the technology frontier in terms of their capacity to leverage ICTs for increased competitiveness and well-being. Several Central European countries - notably Slovakia, Poland, and the Czech Republic – have been successful in improving the economic and social impacts of ICTs. Central Asia continues its upward technological trajectory, led by Kazakhstan.

Innovation

67. Innovation is closely linked to ICTs, as it is increasingly based on the infrastructure of digital technologies as well as on science and research. At the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, innovations often combine powerful innovative technologies in new business models.51 At the same time, there is a need to anticipate and manage the potentially disruptive impacts of technological change on the economy and the employment landscape, including those caused by the increased use of automation and robots.52

68. Innovations, based on technology, science and research, will help generate solutions for many sustainable development issues addressed in the 2030 Agenda. The challenge is to identify

47 Ibid.
49 UN: 2016 Report of the Secretary-General: Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels, New York, 2017 (EN, FR, RU); The Earth Institute, Columbia University and Ericsson: ICTs & SDGs, How Information and Communications Technology can Accelerate Action on the Sustainable Development Goals, 2016
51 Ibid.
and remedy the most critical bottlenecks to innovation. Frequently cited obstacles inhibiting innovative behaviour are weak linkages between industry, universities and research institutes, a lack of capabilities and finance to conduct research and development, and shortages of management skills.53

69. In terms of research and development (R&D) as a major basis of innovation, according to UNESCO54, the United States continues to be a global leader, accounting for over 28 per cent of world gross domestic R&D expenditures. Canada has the highest level of publications per million population among the large advanced economies. Canada is also taking initiatives to strengthen industry-academia links and build on its existing industrial strengths in areas such as energy, pharmaceuticals, and ICTs. Much of the EU continues to be characterized by slow growth in R&D expenditure. The Russian Federation has taken initiatives since 2012 to improve conditions of researchers, promote key strategic technologies such as nanotechnologies and generate better synergies between business and academia. The R&D intensity of the economy has risen in Turkey while it remains significantly below its historical levels in a number of Eastern European countries. Meanwhile, Central Asia is in the process of transitioning away from fully state-controlled economic and research systems, with Kazakhstan having emerged as the subregional leader in terms of the number of scientific publications per million inhabitants. Indeed, exports from transition countries in the region have become more innovation-intensive over the past two decades. Innovation through the adoption of existing state-of-the-art technologies has played an increasingly important role.55

70. In the past two decades, Israel succeeded in establishing a knowledge-intensive economy with high- and medium-tech products contributing significantly to the trade balance. Israel achieved top ranks in terms of R&D expenditures and venture capital as a percentage of GDP. It has the second highest concentration of high-tech companies in the world and is a major player in the development and application of technology, cyber security, and innovative capacity. The close ties between academia, industry and government enable scientific innovation to be swiftly translated into marketable products and business initiatives.56

**Industrialization**

71. For the industrial sectors in countries with both advanced and transition economies, the major challenge is to transform production patterns towards a green industry – an industry that is economically viable but socially inclusive and does not harm the environment.57

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57 R-UNDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 9: Changing Production Patterns (led by UNIDO, Regional Division for Europe and Central Asia)
72. In most transition economies, manufacturing’s contribution to GDP has declined in the course of the transformation process since the 1990s. Some Central European countries have successfully transformed their manufacturing sectors.\textsuperscript{58} Industrial sectors in many high- and middle-income countries in the region are technologically advanced and highly specialized within complex supply chains, but remain resource-intensive. Altogether, in view of global competition and technological progress, there is significant potential for the greening of industries in the advanced and middle-income economies of the region. This could be realized with investment in business infrastructure, industrial modernization, institutional reforms and regional cooperation and could also spur innovation and job creation.

b) Other SDGs under in-depth review:
Poverty and Social Protection, Nutrition and Agriculture, Oceans

Poverty and social protection (SDG 1)

73. While the region as a whole enjoys a relatively high level of economic and social development, material deprivation of marginalized population groups and pockets of relative poverty persist. SDG 1 is also relevant for countries where extreme poverty is inexistente, as it includes as one of its targets the reduction at least by half of the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

74. Poverty is multidimensional and its eradication requires a multisectoral effort. Using only income and expenditures measures do not capture fully the deprivations of the poor regarding access to basic services, such as health or housing. Monetary information needs to be complemented with non-monetary factors, which requires the elaboration of appropriate multidimensional poverty indices.\textsuperscript{59}

75. Poverty and social exclusion affect people’s health and lower education outcomes, thus reducing opportunities and increasing further the risk of poverty. The importance of addressing poverty and inequality is increasingly recognized as an inherent component of sustainable, inclusive growth in advanced societies. For instance, the EU Europe 2020 strategy has set the target of lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2020 compared with the year 2008. In 2014, almost every fourth person in the EU was still at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This risk was higher for non-native citizens and for those living in rural areas.\textsuperscript{60}

76. Throughout the region, the unresolved legacy of the global financial crisis has led to the reversal of past gains in reducing poverty, as many countries face persistently high unemployment and precarious forms of labour market participation. In many EECCA countries, rapid growth from the late 1990s up to 2008 enabled increases in public expenditure on education, health and social

\textsuperscript{58} UNIDO: \textit{Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development in Europe and Central Asia}, 2014
\textsuperscript{59} UNECE is currently preparing a guide on measuring poverty that includes also a chapter on multidimensional poverty, including material deprivation.
\textsuperscript{60} Eurostat: \textit{Smarter, greener, more inclusive? Indicators to Support the Europe 2020 Strategy, 2016 edition}, Luxembourg, 2016
protection. The 2008-2009 global financial and economic crisis brought an end to the catch-up boom and increased national poverty headcounts.61

77. Social protection is emerging among governments and international institutions worldwide as a key strategy not only to reduce poverty and exclusion, but to protect people, households and communities from shocks and make them less vulnerable to economic crises, natural disasters, climate change and conflict.

78. In times of economic crisis, social protection serves as an automatic stabilizer. Most countries of the region have a long tradition of comprehensive and well-developed social protection systems, but in many cases they face challenges in terms of coverage, adequacy and financial sustainability. In some cases, the share of those in need who receive social protection is limited due to complexity in accessing them and strict eligibility criteria. Inadequacy of benefit levels is an additional challenge in several countries, as they fail to provide a decent standard of living, hinder beneficiaries’ ability to escape poverty, and make it harder to re-enter the formal labour market by driving people into informal work.62 In some countries, the influxes of refugees and migrants have stretched the capacity of authorities to support public services and to maintain community security and cohesion. Irregular migration is a long-standing challenge throughout the region, with human trafficking, smuggling exploitation and abuse becoming more frequent. There is a need to mainstream migration and refugee issues into poverty reduction strategies.63

**Nutrition and Agriculture (SDG 2)**

79. Agriculture is closely linked to many sustainable development challenges, not only hunger and malnutrition but also poverty, health, water, energy, climate change and unsustainable production and consumption. For example, agriculture contributes significantly to climate change with an estimated 25 per cent of total greenhouse gases. In turn, environmental threats such as climate change and loss of biodiversity put both agriculture and livelihoods at risk. At the same time, agricultural sectors are affected by rapid changes in a number of areas, including demography (urbanisation, rural-urban migrations), changes in farm structures, dietary habits, and technological and managerial innovations.64

80. Health disparities, obesity and environmental degradation are among the most pressing public health issues, including in Europe and Central Asia. Contributing to each of these problems is our current food system, with its heavy dependence on fossil fuels, pesticides and fertilisers for large-scale production and long-distance transport of often high-calorie, nutrient-poor food. The result is not only damaging to health and the environment but is also devastating to the economic base of rural communities.

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62 R-UNDG/RCM: *Regional Advocacy Paper* (forthcoming), Issue Brief 5: Social Protection For All (led by ILO, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia)
63 R-UNDG/RCM: *Regional Advocacy Paper* (forthcoming), Issue Brief 3: Large Movements of Refugees, Migration and Resilience (led by UNHCR, Bureau for Europe)
64 FAO: *Role of Sustainable Food and Agriculture in Implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change*, Budapest, 2016
Having made major strides in reducing the prevalence of hunger over the last decades, many countries in Europe and Central Asia are now looking to improve the quality of people’s diets and transform their food systems in order to adapt to climate change, optimize the use of natural resources, and reduce waste. But despite overall positive trends regarding food security, other forms of malnutrition still persist and continue to be a problem, affecting all the countries in the region. For example, in 48 of the countries in the Europe and Central Asia region, the combined overweight and obesity prevalence in the adult population exceeds 55 per cent, while relatively high rates of malnutrition and stunting continue to be seen among children in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Many governments in the region have already started taken steps that move beyond just producing more food and seek to transform food systems to improve food quality and people’s nutrition. A substantial number of the region's poor and malnourished people live in rural communities, meaning that fostering dynamic rural economies must remain at the heart of development efforts.65

**Oceans (SDG 14)**

Oceans and seas and their resources support human well-being and livelihoods. Yet, many of Europe’s marine ecosystems are environmentally, economically and socially vulnerable and they risk being irreversibly damaged by human activities and are exposed to unsustainable uses.

Overfishing has been reduced in European Atlantic waters, the North Sea and the Baltic Sea during the last decades, showing that effective policy implementation and related improvements can lead to positive outcomes. Across all of Europe’s regional seas, marine biodiversity is in poor condition. The chemical status of pan-European oceans and seas has generally improved, but recent assessments also show that harmful substances continue to degrade coastal areas and open oceans, nutrients loads remain high and the impacts of new pollutants, including plastic wastes forming marine litter are growing.66

In North America, the coastal and marine environment is under increasing threat, both from harmful trends regarding some traditional environmental pressures such as nutrient loads, as well as new pressures such as ocean acidification, ocean warming, sea-level rise, and marine debris.67

### 3.2 Principal linkages between key thematic areas and pathways for integrated policy-making

Progress under all SDGs, and specifically in the thematic areas discussed above, requires a multitude of legal, institutional, policy, sectoral and technical measures at all levels. At the same time, to embark on a meaningful path of SDG implementation, it is crucial to translate the at times overwhelming complexity of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets into an operational and digestible concept for policy-makers. As there is no one-size-fits-all approach, implementing the SDGs in a country or a community will inevitably involve some degree of choice or prioritization, according

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65 R-UNDG/RCM: *Regional Advocacy Paper* (forthcoming), Issue Brief 11: Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (led by FAO, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia)

66 UNEP and UNECE: *Global Environment Outlook, GEO-6 Assessment for the Pan-European Region*, Nairobi, 2016 (EN, RU)

to the specific bottlenecks and needs that are identified and the outcomes of dialogues and consultations that are held in societies.

86. Based on this, a practical and effective way to choose action areas is to identify the strongest interrelations at the target level and to focus policy efforts and investments on areas with most co-benefits and multiplier effects on other areas. For instance, improving health or nutrition in countries will positively affect a number of other areas such as education, gender, and economic development. A specific mapping of interrelations between targets should be done at the country level, as the degree of linkages may vary depending on the country context.

87. The Figure below shows the main channels of interconnections among health, gender equality and prosperity, and with the other SDGs under in-depth review. These linkages are mainly those that are reflected in the SDGs and targets and identified in the relevant literature.\(^68\) Therefore, they are not exhaustive. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that the Figure below represents only a part of the connections among all SDGs. In policy-making at the local, national and international level, however, the entire network of interlinkages needs to be taken into account. Satisfactory advances in health, gender equality and prosperity will not be possible without progress in education, decent work, energy, cities, ecosystems and further key areas that are enshrined in the other SDGs.

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1. Better infrastructure (9.1) enhancing road safety (3.6) and access to health services (3.4). Clean and environmentally sound industry and infrastructure (9.4) reducing air, water and soil pollution (3.9). Using technology and innovation (9.5) to improve health services.

2. Health system without discrimination against women and girls (5.1), achieving universal health coverage (3.8) for women and girls and enabling women’s participation and leadership in political, economic and public life (5.5). Eliminating violence against women and girls (5.2), reducing maternal mortality (3.1), ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (3.7; 5.6), and ending communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS (3.3).

3. Promoting infrastructure (9.1), industry and employment (9.2) and increasing access of small-scale enterprises to financing (9.3) for women’s participation in the economy (5.5). Enhancing the use of technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote women’s empowerment (5.8) and close the digital gender divide.

4. Improving health through sustainable ocean management and fishing practices (14.4; 14.6).

5. Managing impacts of higher share of industry (9.2) on marine pollution (14.1), oceans and fishery management (14.4); 14.6) and coastal and marine conservation (14.5). Increase science, research and technology (9.5) for ocean management (14.4).

6. Ensuring access to food (2.1) and agricultural markets (2.3) through better infrastructure (9.1). Increasing agricultural productivity (2.3) through science, technology and innovation (9.6).

7. Improving health, reducing child mortality (3.2) and non-communicable diseases (3.4) through access to food (2.1), ending malnutrition (2.2) and reducing pollutants (3.9) in the food chain.

8. Improving health and reducing health inequalities through poverty reduction (1.2) and social protection (1.3) and vice versa.

9. Reducing poverty (1.2) and discrimination of women and girls (5.1). Social protection (1.3) of vulnerable women and girls.

10. Enhancing women’s resilience against unsustainable management of oceans and marine and coastal resources (14.2) and destructive fishing practices (14.4; 14.6). Increasing women’s role in marine science, research and technology (14.4).

11. Ending women’s discrimination (5.1) in agriculture, including through access to land and other productive resources (2.3). Ensuring access of women and girls to food (2.1) and addressing the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women (2.2).

12. Reducing poverty (1.2) through promoting industry and employment (9.2). Developing infrastructure (9.1) to ensure access to economic resources and basic services (1.4).
88. Nevertheless, the mapping points to a number of areas with strong positive interconnections that suggest possible policy pathways. There is a range of different solutions to move along these policy pathways and harness the interlinkages for simultaneous improvements in several SDG areas, depending on the local and country context. In addition, making progress will require partnerships and alliances between various actors at all levels. The involvement and engagement of the public, civil society, the private sector, academia and other groups will be crucial for progress.

89. In devising and implementing integrated policies, policy-makers will also use national and international policy frameworks and instruments that are already in place. To some extent, both national and international policy and normative frameworks will need to be adapted to the more integrated policy-making that is required by the SDGs. It is also worthwhile to consider the time dimension of SDG policies. Impacts will take time to build and mature and most policy pathways that are outlined are of a longer-term nature. For instance, the positive effects of measures taken in health or infrastructure may unfold gradually over many years.

a) Linkages among the key themes of health, gender equality, and prosperity

90. It is evident that there are vital linkages between the key themes of health, gender equality and prosperity, which enable and reinforce each other. These linkages will be examined more closely in the following.

Health and Gender Equality

91. Simultaneous progress in health and gender equality requires health systems that do not discriminate against and provide universal health coverage for women and girls. This requires understanding the factors that determine women’s health and well-being and the impact of gender-based discrimination and gender stereotypes. This understanding will facilitate addressing women’s specific health needs in the region. Improving women’s health will enable their participation and leadership in political, economic and public life. Further reducing maternal mortality and combating violence against women and girls are crucial action areas. Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights will support informed decision-making and family planning, and will contribute to ending communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

92. To achieve progress in these closely interlinked aspects of women’s and girls’ health, UNECE member States and other stakeholders can build on and further strengthen national health policies, strategies and plans as well as using a range of international commitments, agreements, instruments and tools already available, including at the regional level. International instruments may need to be aligned and synchronized with the requirements of SDG implementation and follow-up.

69 Universal Health Coverage (UHC) ensures that all people obtain the health services they need without suffering financial hardship when paying for them.
70 WHO: Women’s Health and Well-being in Europe: Beyond the Mortality Advantage, Copenhagen, 2016
93. This includes WHO’s “Health 2020, A European Policy Framework and Strategy for the 21st Century”\(^{71}\), which recognizes that countries can reduce health inequalities and improve governance for health if they work across government. This also includes the “Strategy on Women’s Health and Well-being in the WHO European Region”\(^{72}\), which sets out principles and priorities for gender-responsive health policies.

94. Similarly, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Plan of Action and its regional follow-up should be fully integrated as the key platform on population development.\(^{73}\) In line with ICPD, all barriers should be removed, including for women and girls, preventing them from accessing quality sexual and reproductive health information, services and commodities, according to their needs.\(^{74}\)

95. In addition, the Beijing Platform for Action and its regional follow-up\(^{75}\) address a number of critical areas, including women and health and violence against women.

96. Promoting the protection of women against violence is the objective of the Council of Europe’s “Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence”. Signed by 44 and ratified by 22 countries, the convention entered into force in 2014.\(^{76}\)

97. Crucially, achieving gender equality and women’s health has a strong human rights dimension. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a key international treaty in this regard, with almost universal ratification. CEDAW has provided a major platform for integrating women’s rights in the 2030 Agenda.\(^{77}\)

**Health and Prosperity**

98. Infrastructure, innovation and industrialization are also connected to health and well-being in several ways.

99. Better, safer and more reliable infrastructure, in particular transport, will generally enhance access to health services. Improved infrastructure will enhance road safety and contribute to reducing deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.

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\(^{71}\) WHO, Regional Office for Europe: Health 2020, A European Policy Framework and Strategy for the 21st Century, Copenhagen, 2013 (EN, FR, RU)

\(^{72}\) WHO, Regional Office for Europe: Strategy on Women’s Health and Well-being in the WHO European Region, Copenhagen, 2016

\(^{73}\) International Conference on Population and Development; for regional follow-up, see UNECE: Report of the UNECE Regional Conference on ICPD beyond 2014 “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century” (EN, FR, RU)


\(^{75}\) UNECE: Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, 6-7 November 2014, Regional Review of Progress: Regional Synthesis (EN, FR, RU)

\(^{76}\) Council of Europe, Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: Chart of Signatures and Ratifications

\(^{77}\) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Submission to the High-level Political Forum 2016
100. A crucial link is the health impact of pollution from infrastructure and industrial activity. Increased resource efficiency and cleaner and more environmentally sound technology and processes in the infrastructure and industrial sectors will reduce air, water and soil pollution and contamination and positively affect the health situation. In the region, air pollution caused by transport and industry, as well as by other sectors, calls for particular attention. \(^{78}\) Because of these interlinkages, health impacts need to be taken into account in infrastructure and industrial planning. This is particularly important in cities where the concept of smart and sustainable cities provides new opportunities to use information and communication technologies to improve the quality of life in our cities.\(^ {79}\)

101. With regard to innovation, the wider use of ICTs for health, also referred to as “e-health”, has the potential to expand health services, increase health system efficiency, and lead to better health outcomes. Technology can be applied throughout the entire health care spectrum - from administrative systems to broader medical information systems to telemedicine, electronic medical records, clinical decision support, and patient portals.\(^ {80}\) In view of population ageing in most of the region\(^ {81}\), ICTs also have significant potential to promote health among older persons, supporting social connectivity, emotional health, cognitive ability and physical functioning.\(^ {82}\)

102. In addition to national tools, numerous legal and policy instruments and platforms are available at the international and regional levels to achieve progress under the interconnected health, infrastructure, innovation and industrialization targets. In particular creating a cross-border transport network and combating transboundary pollution require international and regional cooperation.

103. To promote sustainable transport, 58 UN transport-related legal instruments are managed by UNECE under the purview of its Inland Transport Committee, with over 1,700 contracting parties from around the globe.\(^ {83}\) The conventions cover crucial issues, ranging from vehicle regulations, road traffic and safety, and infrastructure to border crossing and transport of goods. Implementation of and accession to these conventions is essential to improve the sustainability of the transport sector, including for health and environment.

104. Because transboundary sources are often major contributors to air pollution, including in many European cities, local action alone is not sufficient to meet the recommended levels of air pollutants.\(^ {84}\) The UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its protocols is therefore an important instrument for cooperation on air pollution abatement.

105. More recently, being aware of the still-severe air pollution situation in the region, the voluntary Batumi Action for Cleaner Air was adopted at the 8th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The initiative supports countries’ efforts in improving air quality and

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\(^{78}\) UNECE: Clean Air for Life, Geneva, 2016 (EN, RU)

\(^{79}\) See ITU and UNECE: United 4 Smart Sustainable Cities


\(^{81}\) R-UNDG/RCM: Regional Advocacy Paper (forthcoming), Issue Brief 1: Population Dynamics, (led by UNFPA, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office)


protecting public health and ecosystems and has so far collected 88 voluntary commitments from countries and other stakeholders.  

106. The crucial connection between transport, health and the environment is addressed by THE PEP – the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme. The European Environment and Health process covers the environmental determinants of health, including pollution from transport and industry. The process will culminate in the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (13–15 June 2017, Ostrava, Czech Republic).

107. The Protocol on Water and Health addresses water-related diseases. Adequate water infrastructure can contribute to their prevention and reduction.

108. The activities of many UN entities and other organizations and partners relate to the cross-sectoral theme of health. To coordinate these activities, the WHO Regional Office for Europe leads an Issue-based Coalition on Health. Created in 2016, the first-ever alliance of this kind acts as a pan-European enabling mechanism to facilitate and promote the achievement at regional level of the targets of SDG 3 and of the health-related targets included in other goals.

109. Efforts to move towards more sustainable industrial sectors in the region can be meaningfully embedded in overall strategies and policies to green the economy. A Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy is available, setting out practical tools and best practices for the green economy transition in a number of focus areas, including healthy living and well-being.

110. Sustainable infrastructure and industries will also critically rest on the collaboration of the private sector and the alignment of its activities with the 2030 Agenda. Not directly bound by internationally agreed development goals, this cooperation will be largely voluntary and guided by targeted polices, incentive structures and solid business cases. The awareness of and support for sustainable practices and business models in the private sector is increasing, and there is a growing body of guidance tools that can be used to the end, for instance by the UN Global Compact, the World Business Council For Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the International Chamber of Commerce.

Gender and Prosperity

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85 Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA)
86 See, for instance, WHO, Regional Office for Europe and UNECE - THE PEP Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme: Paris Declaration, City in Motion: People First, New York and Geneva, 2015 (EN, FR, RU)
87 European Environment and Health Process (EHP)
88 See Protocol on Water and Health
89 WHO, Regional Office for Europe: First Meeting of the Issue-based Coalition on Health: Health and Well-being for All at All Ages in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, Copenhagen, 2016
90 UNECE: Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016: Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy (EN, FR, RU) and Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E)
111. Infrastructure, industry and innovation as key drivers of prosperity are interconnected with the achievement of gender equality through various channels.

112. Promoting infrastructure, industry and related employment in a gender-sensitive way will enhance women’s participation in the labour market and the economy. Increased access of small-scale enterprises to financing will help promote women’s entrepreneurship. For instance, microcredit institutions and grants have supported women-run small and medium enterprises and are prevalent in EECCA countries in particular.92

113. There is also significant potential to enhance the use of innovation and technology, in particular ICTs, to promote women’s empowerment. This includes overcoming gender inequalities in access to digital technologies and supporting women and girls with skills in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). In this way, they can become not only ICT users, but also creators, leaders and entrepreneurs in the digital world, thus closing the digital gender divide.

114. In view of changing labour markets and technological progress, women’s participation in the economy and women’s entrepreneurship will need to be further strengthened. Internationally, efforts can build on the Beijing Platform for Action, which contains women and the economy as a critical area of concern. Also regional capacity-building programmes on women’s entrepreneurship, such as the ones carried out by UNECE93, and initiatives such as EQUALS: The Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, a coalition of programmes dedicated to women and girls in technology and launched by ITU and UN Women in 201694, will be instrumental.

b) Linkages of key themes with other SDGs under in-depth review

Poverty and Social Protection

115. In the region, reducing relative poverty and strengthening social protection is closely linked to targeting women and girls, especially those in vulnerable situations. Better infrastructure will help reduce poverty by ensuring access to economic resources and basic services. More employment opportunities in industry will also contribute to poverty reduction. At the same time, the transition to green industries needs to be managed in a way that prevents job losses and ensures that no one is left behind, e.g. through retraining workers for new technologies. Less poverty and better social protection will also improve health outcomes, and vice versa, better health will enable poverty reduction.

116. Designing and transforming infrastructure and social protection for gender equality includes investment in expanding and maintaining social services and supporting infrastructure, such as child-care services, free day-care centres, senior care centres and rehabilitation centres for

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92 UNECE: Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, 6-7 November 2014, Regional Review of Progress: Regional Synthesis (EN, FR, RU)
93 UNECE: Women’s Entrepreneurship
94 ITU and UN Women: EQUALS: The Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age
children with disabilities, affordable and secure public transport, and promoting social protection to increase girl’s school enrolment and attendance.\textsuperscript{95}

117. An important approach in this context is the concept of social protection floors, which was launched by the UN in 2009 through the Social Protection Floor Initiative\textsuperscript{96}, a coalition of UN agencies and other partners promoting universal access to essential social transfers and services. ILO recommends implementing national social protection floors containing basic social security guarantees that ensure universal access to essential health care and income security at a nationally defined minimum level.\textsuperscript{97}

\textit{Nutrition and Agriculture}

118. In the region, access to nutritious and sufficient food, ending malnutrition and reducing pollutants in the food chain will improve health outcomes and help reduce child mortality and noncommunicable diseases. Access to land and other productive resources for women will help end discrimination in agriculture and contribute to increased food security. Access to food for women and girls will address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women.

119. Better infrastructure, in particular rural infrastructure, will improve both access to food and to agricultural markets. Innovation, technology and science are important factors to increase agricultural productivity and upgrade farming practices\textsuperscript{98}, making them more economically viable as well as environmentally sustainable.

\textit{Oceans}

120. Sustainable management of the region’s oceans and seas and sustainable fishing practices will contribute to improving the health situation. Enhanced resilience of women and increasing women’s role in marine science, research and technology will be beneficial to the sustainable use of the oceans’ resources and to gender equality. Land-based industrial activities as well as industrialized fishing practices may have severe impacts on oceans that need to be managed. At the same time, a higher share of manufacturing in the economy may also, in some coastal areas in the region, reduce the need for primary resource extraction from oceans.

121. A strong link exists with science, research and technology, which are increasingly used and have significant potential for sustainable ocean management. Many ocean characteristics remain unexplored. Therefore, supporting scientific research and marine technology, including

\textsuperscript{96} ILO-UN Social Protection Floor Initiative
\textsuperscript{97} ILO: R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012
observation and monitoring systems, is required to gain a better understanding of this complex system.\textsuperscript{99} An essential step for the sustainable management of fish resources is the timely acquisition and exchange of fishery data.\textsuperscript{100}

122. The regional sea conventions and programmes are crucial instruments for cooperation on sustainable oceans. They cover the Caspian Sea, the Baltic Sea, as well as the Mediterranean, the Arctic, and the North East Atlantic region.\textsuperscript{101}

**Resource mobilization in key thematic areas**

123. Investments, programmes and policy measures that address the above linkages will depend on sufficient resource mobilization and partnerships, as formulated in SDG 17 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.\textsuperscript{102}

124. In the health sector, for instance, trends such as population ageing and technological progress are expected to increase healthcare spending. The health systems will thus face significant challenges in identifying additional sources of funding. This will require clarifying the role of the private sector alongside the crucial public financing mechanisms. Public and private sectors will have to work together to address the challenges of affordability, availability, accessibility and quality of care over the coming years.\textsuperscript{103}

125. Funding for gender equality, including for national and local gender equality institutions and for women’s organizations, remains weak in some parts of the region.\textsuperscript{104} Developing new financial instruments and incentives from both public and private sectors can contribute to closing gender gaps.

126. To foster the development of sustainable and resilient infrastructure, it will be crucial to strengthen public-private cooperation, to unlock private capital, and to integrate sustainability criteria in infrastructure projects.\textsuperscript{105} Well-designed and managed Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can be instrumental for infrastructure finance in certain sectors.\textsuperscript{106} Standards, such as those promoted by the UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence\textsuperscript{107}, can facilitate the development of PPPs and strengthen their transparency and accountability.

\textsuperscript{100} See UN/CEFACT *Flux Standard for Sustainable Fisheries Management*
\textsuperscript{102} Means of Implementation, including SDG 17, will be reviewed annually at the High-level Political Forum.
\textsuperscript{104} UNECE: *Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting, Geneva, 6-7 November 2014, Regional Review of Progress: Regional Synthesis (EN, FR, RU)*
\textsuperscript{107} UNECE International PPP Centre of Excellence
127. Access to financing is also critically important for innovation, in particular for start-ups and small- and medium-sized enterprises at the early stages of developing an innovative business or technology.

Key issues of Regional Round Tables: National and local adaptation of SDGs, subregional cooperation, and data and monitoring

128. A number of functional issues are cutting across the themes covered in the Policy Segment: how to adapt the SDGs nationally and locally; how to cooperate at the subregional level; and how to advance on data and monitoring. Key issues related to these areas will be raised in the Policy Segment and discussed more in-depth in the three Regional Round Tables.108

4. Questions for Discussion

129. The following overall questions for discussion will guide the debate at the Policy Segment, which will focus on health, gender equality and prosperity (infrastructure, industrialization and innovation) as well as the other SDGs under in-depth review (poverty and social protection; nutrition and agriculture; oceans):

- What are the major constraints in developing effective policies related to the SDGs under in-depth review? Is there a policy consensus on what needs to be done?

- How are the SDGs changing policymaking at the national level? What mechanisms exist or are being developed to address cross-sectoral coordination? How are priorities being defined and potential impacts assessed?

- How can international policy and normative frameworks support national efforts to develop integrated SDG initiatives? Are changes required?

- What is the role of the private sector in advancing the implementation of the SDGs under review? What policy steps are required to effectively engage business?

- What are the drivers of the key health issues in our region? How can coherence in health-related initiatives be increased, including across multiple policy fields?

- What are the major issues that need to be tackled to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls? How would progress in this area contribute to better outcomes in other SDGs?

- How can we ensure that new infrastructure contributes to advancing the 2030 Agenda? How can the necessary resources be mobilised?

108 See the concept notes for the Regional Round Tables on the meeting website: www.unec.org/rfsd2017
• How can innovation contribute to the implementation of the SDGs under in-depth review? Which new business models in support of sustainable development are possible thanks to technological innovation?

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