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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region

#### Fourth session

Geneva, 19 March 2020

## Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region on its fourth session

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# Report of the fourth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region

## I. Format of the session

1. The fourth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Region took place on 19 March 2020. In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it was held as a virtual meeting, without the physical presence of participants. The session was chaired by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Vaqif Sadiqov.

2. The session was attended virtually through an online platform by more than 300 representatives of ECE member States, United Nations system entities and other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of academia, the private sector and other organizations.<sup>1</sup>

## II. Opening and adoption of the agenda

3. The Regional Forum adopted the revised provisional agenda for the fourth session, contained in [ECE/RFSD/2020/1/Rev.2](#).

4. In his opening remarks, the Chair emphasized that all current attention was necessarily directed at curbing the spread of COVID-19. Notwithstanding those difficult circumstances, the Regional Forum represented an opportunity to continue the dialogue on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was the objective of the online discussion to take away some inspiration and ideas on how to speed up progress towards full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the fifth year of efforts to achieve the Goals, it was clear that more decisive action and acceleration of progress was needed in the decade to come.

5. Referring to the national context in Azerbaijan, the Chair stressed that the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development had been established in 2016 and was headed by one of the country's Deputy Prime Ministers. The Council was responsible for providing policy advice to decision-makers to better mainstream, implement, monitor and report on progress in Sustainable Development Goal achievement. Azerbaijan identified a number of areas as Goal achievement accelerators, including the labour market, green growth, enhancing public services, gender equality, youth, social protection and early childhood development. Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to prepare a set of principles for its Goal nationalization efforts.

6. In her opening remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General characterized the coronavirus pandemic as a threat to the world's most vulnerable people, the global economy and the progress that Governments had been making since the Sustainable Development Goals were agreed to in 2015. The challenge was now to get the crisis response right in order to make good on the decade of action to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals once the crisis was over.

7. She also stated that, in recent years, policymakers and societies as a whole had become more aware of the need for sustainable development. Many actors were joining in and helping to strengthen the momentum, such as investors, innovators, young people, cities and

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the participants recorded their remote participation through a sign-in sheet, which is available on the website of the Regional Forum, at [www.unece.org/rfsd.html](http://www.unece.org/rfsd.html). All speakers provided their interventions through remote connections. The Chair's summary contains an overview of the main issues raised during the four segments (see annex I). Written statements are available on the website of the Regional Forum.

communities. At the same time, the broad and deep transformative change required under the 2030 Agenda had not happened yet.

8. She noted that action in three areas in particular would be instrumental. First, a broad mobilization of all actors and partners was required, with Governments leading the way and more sectors of society joining in. Young people in particular were a substantial force for positive change, already placing climate change and inclusive sustainable development higher up on the political agenda. Second, there was a need to raise ambition, including with regard to Governments meeting their commitments for international development cooperation, climate finance and climate action. Third, game-changing solutions and breakthrough innovations would help to deliver concrete results at scale.

9. She said that the United Nations would help tackle those difficult issues. A reformed resident coordinator system and a new generation of country teams now offered a stronger and more cohesive platform to provide Governments with integrated policy and programmatic support, centred around strategic United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. The support of Member States in these reforms was greatly appreciated. An ambitious process to reposition the United Nations development system at the regional level was also being carried out to foster collaboration on sustainable development across all development system entities operating at the regional level.

10. The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe expressed her gratitude that participants had accepted and engaged in the virtual format of the Regional Forum in the current challenging context. She underscored that the United Nations was supporting countries in addressing the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation required solidarity, multilateralism and joint engagement.

11. With regard to Sustainable Development Goal action, she stressed that the Goals were very much interconnected. ECE had therefore adopted a cross-sectoral nexus approach that generated integrated solutions and set examples. ECE was well recognized for its normative, standard-setting and policy work in the region and beyond. Looking ahead, ECE would focus its attention on making progress towards a circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources, which was planned as the theme of the sixty-ninth session of the Commission, to be held in April 2021. It was evident that there was a need to rethink the way in which societies produced and consumed and the way in which they generated new economic opportunities. In addition, resource mobilization would be crucial. An important example was the United Nations Road Safety Fund, which had managed to mobilize about \$20 million in a short time.

### **III. Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the Economic Commission for Europe region**

12. The following speakers intervened during the first segment:

- Keynote speaker: member of the independent group of scientists appointed by the Secretary-General to prepare the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*, professor at the University of Copenhagen and leader of its Sustainability Science Centre, Katherine Richardson
- Director of the Statistical Division of ECE, Lidia Bratanova
- Vice-President of the European Youth Forum, Tina Hočevár
- Permanent Observer of the International Chamber of Commerce to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, Crispin Conroy
- Co-founder of Eduactive, a regional civil society engagement mechanism, Ena Peeva

#### **IV. Accelerating Sustainable Development Goal progress through voluntary national reviews**

13. The following speakers intervened during the second segment:

- State Counsellor to the Prime Minister of the Government of Romania, László Borbély
- Delegate of the Federal Council of Switzerland for the 2030 Agenda, Jacques Ducrest
- Representative of Women for Women’s Human Rights, a regional civil society engagement mechanism, Şehnaz Kıymaz Bahçeci

#### **V. Actions for green and inclusive change**

14. The following speakers intervened during the third segment:

- Policy Officer with the Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission, Luca Marmo (“The European Green Deal and the new Circular Economy Action Plan”)
- Chief Negotiator for Climate Change at the Ministry of the Environment of Finland, Outi Honkatukia (“Finland: carbon neutrality by 2035”)
- President of the Danish Youth Council, Monika Skadborg (“The Youth Climate Council as channel of youth engagement in Denmark”)
- Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division of ECE, Paola Deda (“The Trees in Cities Challenge”)

#### **VI. Economic transformation, finance and technology for Sustainable Development Goal acceleration**

15. The following speakers intervened during the fourth segment:

- Director of the Europe Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Bruno Pozzi
- Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union, Doreen Bogdan-Martin
- Director of the Sustainable Digital Finance Alliance, Marianne Haahr
- Chief of the Resources and Markets Branch of the Economy Division of UNEP, Steven Stone

#### **VII. Closing**

16. In her closing remarks, the Executive Secretary thanked all member States of the region for their support in holding the Regional Forum in a virtual format. Despite the circumstances, a substantive discussion and a dialogue about accelerating sustainable development in the region took place. It was necessary to find new ways to carry out human economic activities, such as through a circular economy and by reusing resources. Currently, less than 10 per cent of natural resources that were extracted were recycled back into the economy, which presented a serious challenge. In the context of the current public health crisis, maintaining connectivity was also essential. Border shutdowns that might disrupt transport and the distribution of food, medical and humanitarian aid would not be an adequate way to react to the crisis.

17. Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed participants that, in follow-up to the fourth session of the Regional Forum, a report containing a Chair’s summary of the discussions would be submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened in 2020 under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. The draft report would be distributed to all Governments through diplomatic channels and would be available on the website of the Regional Forum, for comments by all other participants.

## Annex I

### Chair's summary of the discussions

#### Accelerating action and delivery for sustainable development in the Economic Commission for Europe region

1. The Participants in the first segment heard two major substantive inputs that helped to frame the discussions across the four segments of the virtual Regional Forum: the key messages of the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development* and the main findings of the progress report entitled *Towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE Region: A Statistical Portrait of Progress and Challenges*, launched prior to the Regional Forum. In addition, key messages were presented from three main groups of stakeholders: youth, the private sector and civil society.<sup>1</sup>
2. Introducing the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* and its implications for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, the keynote speaker, a professor at the University of Copenhagen and the leader of its Sustainability Science Centre, Katherine Richardson, emphasized at the outset that the Earth's resources were finite and that non-degradable waste had been accumulating on the planet and in the oceans. Those facts had been well known for a long time. Consequently, frameworks and agreements had been put in place for a number of related and other issues, such as biodiversity, climate and water. It was an achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals to bring all of those issues into a single framework.
3. On the one hand, many Sustainable Development Goals related to people were well on track. On the other hand, Sustainable Development Goals related to the planet and the environment were performing poorly, and trends were even moving in the wrong direction. The fundamental interaction within the Sustainable Development Goals was therefore how to equally share the Earth's resources among a global population of 9 to 10 billion people.
4. In the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019*, four levers were identified that could help to relieve the pressure on available resources: science and technology; the economic and financial system; governance structures; and collective and individual behaviour. It was important to note that technology alone would not solve the problem, but it could support a more efficient use of resources. Science and technology should be combined with changes in all of the other levers.
5. Six different thematic entry points in which the levers would need to trigger changes were also identified in the report: strengthening human well-being and capabilities; shifting towards sustainable and just economies; building sustainable food systems and healthy nutrition patterns; achieving energy decarbonization and universal access to energy; promoting sustainable urban and peri-urban development; and securing the global environmental commons.
6. In Europe, no country was on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The region faced considerable challenges, in particular, on climate action, life below water and life on land (Sustainable Development Goals 13, 14 and 15). The region had an enormous environmental footprint that urgently needed to be reduced. The central goal in the region and beyond must be to maximize human welfare at minimum environmental cost.
7. Introducing the first ECE regional report on Sustainable Development Goal progress, the Director of the ECE Statistical Division, Lidia Bratanova, emphasized that the report would help to focus efforts at the beginning of the decade of action. The report came at a key juncture in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The

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<sup>1</sup> Written statements by the Russian Federation, Sweden and the Civil Society Advisory Group for the UN-Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia are available on the website of the regional forum, at [www.unece.org/rfsd.html](http://www.unece.org/rfsd.html).

2030 Agenda could not be fulfilled without relevant and timely statistics to track progress, monitor the results and impact of policy actions and identify areas, groups or regions at risk of being left behind.

8. The report was designed to bring existing statistical data on ECE countries closer to users, provide explanations on indicators and show the extent of progress made and the variation in that progress among countries in the region. The Sustainable Development Goals included 232 global indicators, which were of varying relevance in different parts of the region. Prior to launching the report, ECE had launched a dashboard of Sustainable Development Goal indicators providing a valuable regional perspective on the global indicators.

9. Overall, the report on Sustainable Development Goal progress in the region provided a statistical portrait of progress and challenges. Prepared by the ECE Statistical Division, based on a mandate from the sixty-eighth session of the Economic Commission for Europe, it provided a description of the levels of and trends in achievement with regard to the 49 selected indicators relevant for the region for which data was available for most countries in the region. Those 49 indicators had been selected from among all the Goals, enabling an examination of change over recent years.

10. Overall, ECE countries were making good progress in many of the areas addressed in the report, such as eradicating extreme poverty; maternal, infant and child mortality; sanitation; and lowering the energy intensity of the economy. At the same time, more needed to be done in such areas as air pollution; the protection of marine areas; development assistance; and disaster risk reduction strategies.

11. On gender equality, achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 5.5 required the full and effective participation of women and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. The global indicator framework was focused on women in parliament, local government and managerial positions. The share of women parliamentarians had increased between 2015 and 2019. But only four countries in the ECE region (Finland, Spain, Sweden and Norway) had more than 40 per cent women among their members of parliament, which could be considered a level close to gender parity. Similarly, only four countries in the ECE region (Belarus, France, Iceland and Sweden) had a share of women among local government representatives that was close to gender parity. The proportion of women among managers had increased since 2012 in 32 out of 47 countries for which data was available; however, in 2017, the share of women among managers exceeded 40 per cent in only 7 countries.

12. Another important example was air pollution. Air pollution was the most significant environmental risk to human health. However, only 10 countries in the ECE region had levels of air pollution with fine particulate matter below the limit recommended by the WHO air quality guidelines.

13. The findings of the report would be valuable for national efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The 49 selected Sustainable Development Goal indicators provided valuable information about progress and shortcomings, even though they did not represent the full picture.

14. Voicing the concerns of youth, the Vice-President of the European Youth Forum, Tina Hočevár stressed the need for decisive action to progress on Sustainable Development Goals, but also to tackle the crisis surrounding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which exposed many vulnerabilities of societies. The welfare of the older persons and those in frail health was affected disproportionately by COVID-19. Vulnerable population groups should be at the centre of political attention, rather than the closing of borders, segregation, isolation and centralized control. There was a need to transform the current economic and political system to address the deep-rooted values crisis in society. A new system based on human rights, open-mindedness and cooperation would contribute to more equal societies that were better able to tackle future crises.

15. The Permanent Observer of the International Chamber of Commerce to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, Crispin Conroy, stressed the important contribution that the private sector could make to progress on achieving the

Sustainable Development Goals, including with regard to innovative finance and climate change. He expressed the hope that the business dialogue on the Sustainable Development Goals, which the United Nations Global Compact and the Chamber had planned to organize and hold during the Regional Forum, could be held on another occasion.

16. The International Chamber of Commerce was the world's largest business organization, with over 45 million institutional members worldwide. It was the only private sector organization to be admitted to the General Assembly as an observer. The Chamber was taking a leading role in mainstreaming and accelerating climate change action among businesses. One such initiative was the Chambers Climate Coalition. Launched in 2019, the Coalition had committed itself to advocating for climate action within the Chamber's business networks, supporting the goal of achieving net-zero emissions globally by 2050 mainstreaming climate mitigation and resilience guidance into chamber services. The Coalition also provided an opportunity to showcase the role of small businesses in promoting the transition to a cleaner planet.

17. Speaking for civil society, the co-founder of Eduactive, Ena Peeva, said that the ongoing pandemic was exposing existing weaknesses in both infrastructure and in the health and care systems, as well as the failure to reach certain marginalized groups, such as older people living alone or people with disabilities. She stressed that civil society had held a full-fledged virtual and accessible forum on the day preceding the Regional Forum, with 170 registered participants from 29 countries.

18. Regarding Sustainable Development Goal progress, civil society organizations agreed that all people must be reached by policy measures. Life-course policymaking, based on a commitment to include everyone from all walks of life and age, was needed. Moreover, the implementation of the human rights framework must be at the core of policymaking and financing. That was not the case at the moment, as reflected by the patchy access of citizens of the region to the right to health, decent work, social security, shelter, food, water and sanitation, clean energy, education and justice.

19. Against that backdrop, civil society had put forward a number of priority recommendations. Governments in the ECE region and worldwide were called upon to put in place urgent economic stimulus plans and social protection and social care measures to protect the health and income of workers and communities through coordinated multilateral responses in view of the COVID-19 crisis. With regard to human rights, equality, justice and non-discrimination, a cross-cutting human rights-based approach to Sustainable Development Goals was essential, in particular to ensure full access to human rights for people from marginalized groups. Promoting sustainable and just economies and decent work and implementing universal social protection systems were among the most effective measures for tackling poverty and inequality across generations.

20. On peace, civic space and democratic governance, it was crucial to strengthen the role of women in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and conflict and violence prevention. The democratic participation and active inclusion of all, especially of discriminated and marginalized groups, and processes that were fully accessible, such as through national sign languages and other accessible formats, were also essential. Special financing mechanisms were needed for empowering, and building resilience for, survivors of all forms of violence, conflict and natural disasters. In the area of climate justice, decarbonization and just transition, civil society recommended setting up an intergenerational commission to tackle the rollback of climate justice and oversee the implementation of climate agreements. At the global level, it was necessary to implement global economic governance and systemic reforms so as to ensure means of implementation, by decoupling gross domestic product growth from environmental degradation and integrating human rights into trade mechanisms.

### **Accelerating Sustainable Development Goal progress through voluntary national reviews**

21. The second segment provided an opportunity for discussion and the exchange of experiences on the contribution of voluntary national reviews to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The segment was also aimed at identifying the main lessons

learned from the voluntary national review exercise as a whole and ways to improve reviews in the next cycle of the high-level political forum, with a view to ensuring that they contribute more effectively to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

22. Member States from the ECE region are very active in the voluntary national review exercise. Of the 56 ECE member States, 54 will have undertaken a voluntary national review by 2020, accounting for more than 95 per cent of the membership. At the high-level political forum convened in 2020 under the auspices of Economic and Social Council, 13 member States from the region will be presenting their reviews, including 5 presenting for the second time.

23. The Chair underscored that Azerbaijan had presented two voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum, in 2017 and again in 2019. The experience of Azerbaijan suggested that the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals and national development strategies were mutually reinforcing. Strong political commitment to Sustainable Development Goal achievement at the national level was a prerequisite for identifying opportunities for social and economic development and for ensuring a speedy transition to innovation policies and modernization in a country.

24. Sharing the experiences and views of his country with regard to voluntary national reviews, the State Counsellor to the Prime Minister of the Government of Romania, László Borbély, highlighted that Romania had presented the first voluntary national review at the high-level political forum held in New York in July 2018. The process had demonstrated the need for national coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda using a systemic approach. After its first voluntary national review, Romania had revised its Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, involving in the process all political actors, civil society, the private sector and the scientific community.

25. Furthermore, a Department of Sustainable Development had been established within the Office of the Prime Minister of Romania. The Department was responsible for strengthening the national institutional framework for Sustainable Development Goal achievement, and a number of measures had been taken in that regard. At the Government level, the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development was one of the key institutions for policy coherence. Composed of Government ministers, the Committee was headed by the Prime Minister.

26. With regard to the voluntary national review exercise in general, Mr. Borbély considered the reviews to be a very good tool. In follow-up to the reviews, a proper monitoring system was crucial for tracking progress and policy impact. For countries presenting a second review, a feedback loop between the two exercises could provide a good opportunity to highlight progress and avoid the repetition of previously reported data. The high-level political forum in 2020 would provide an opportunity to take stock of the voluntary national review process to date and to take decisions for the next cycle. These should also include decisions on those targets of the 2030 Agenda scheduled for achievement by 2020.

27. On behalf of Switzerland, the delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda, Jacques Ducrest, affirmed that the voluntary national review process had made it possible to identify specific challenges in achievement the Sustainable Development Goals and possible solutions for addressing those challenges. First, sustainable development was not a specific policy sector under the exclusive competence of one minister. The voluntary national review process led to an exchange of experiences, lessons learned and the fostering of new partnerships. It brought ministries to the table to discuss the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their own policy sectors. That exchange should go even further by having ministries decide together how to maximize co-benefits and manage trade-offs between different policies and interests. It should also include questions such as determining the right balance between trade and the environment, or between agriculture and biodiversity.

28. Second, in 2019, the Government of Switzerland decided to create a new organizational structure, the 2030 Agenda Steering Committee. The Steering Committee, along with the preparations for the voluntary national review, should help in overcoming the traditional silo approach in favour of a whole-of-government approach, with regard to both the national and international implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

29. On the voluntary national review presentation, Mr. Ducrest emphasized the need to not only share success stories, but to speak more honestly about the challenges faced in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Such a fair and open approach could encourage transparency by others and create a sense of mutual learning. The ongoing high-level political forum review was a good opportunity to jointly develop creative ideas. For a more transparent approach to the voluntary national reviews, it was important to have more structured discussions, including a peer learning system. Scientists and statisticians could help policymakers to make sound decisions. Voluntary national reviews should therefore reflect statistical data and scientific evidence on the progress made between two successive voluntary national reviews and on the impact of policy measures. With regard to data, the third United Nations World Data Forum would be held in Bern, from 18 to 21 October 2020.

30. Through a written statement, the Russian Federation shared some key features and lessons learned from the preparation of its first voluntary national review, to be presented at the high-level political forum in 2020. The main institution charged with preparing the voluntary national review was the Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian Federation, which was working closely with the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal State Statistics Service on preparing the voluntary national review. Seventeen thematic working groups had been established, one for each Sustainable Development Goal. Those groups had included representatives of government bodies, local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, academic and research institutions and the private sector.

31. A key lesson from the voluntary national review process in the Russian Federation was that policies aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and an overall sustainable development policy with balanced attention to economic, social and environmental factors was achievable within an integrated approach to national planning. Another important lesson was that more attention should be paid to raising the level of awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals among both policy practitioners and the public. Moreover, an intensified dialogue between Government and the private sector had proven useful.

32. On behalf of civil society, the representative of Women for Women's Human Rights, Şehnaz Kıymaz Bahçeci, stressed that the Sustainable Development Goals could only be achieved through solidarity, transparent and reliable information, and cooperation. In some countries, the voluntary national review processes were still very centralized and limited to government actors, without the broader engagement of civil society. It was encouraging, however, that in many countries, civil society was engaged in the voluntary national review process.

33. In many countries, strong civil society platforms existed that were monitoring progress in Sustainable Development Goal achievement. Civil society organizations were working with Governments and parliamentarians on the voluntary national reviews and on the longer term follow up. Shadow reports and statements were being issued and joint meetings were taking place, for example, in Finland, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, North Macedonia, the Russian Federation, Slovenia and Ukraine.

34. One key challenge emanating from the voluntary national review processes was the lack of consideration for the regional and global human rights monitoring mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the work of the Human Rights Council. There was a need to strengthen access to equal justice for all, and increased accountability through voluntary national reviews was the way to achieve this.

35. Civil society organizations needed increased resources, time and opportunities to engage with the review process of the voluntary national reviews, both at the regional and global levels, which would require more financing. Furthermore, countries presenting voluntary national reviews should hold follow up meetings with civil society after their presentations, to ensure the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals with the full engagement of all segments of society.

## Actions for green and inclusive change

36. During the third segment, selected acceleration actions submitted for discussion by member States and other stakeholders were addressed. Actions by new groups of actors that have been able to influence the policy agenda and spearhead change, such as youth and cities, were also covered during the segment.

37. A policy officer with the Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission, Luca Marmo, presented the European Green Deal, adopted in December 2019, as the new growth strategy of the European Union, its goals being a resource-efficient and competitive economy, no greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and the decoupling of economic growth from resource use.

38. A key element in reaching those goals was the new Circular Economy Action Plan, adopted by the European Commission on 11 March 2020, which would support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 12, among others. The objective of the Plan was to move away from the current linear model of production and consumption. The plan included initiatives along the entire life cycle of products and comprised the following four major areas for action:

- (a) European Union legislation on sustainable product policy;
- (b) Empowerment of consumers by providing them with reliable information on, for example, the durability and reparability of products;
- (c) Interventions on priority sectors, such as electronics, information and communications technology (ICT), plastics, textiles and construction, to improve the circular economy;
- (d) Actions related to waste avoidance to transform waste into high-quality secondary raw materials to reduce the use of primary resources.

39. The overall aim was also to promote the transition to a circular economy at a global scale. To achieve that aim, the European Commission proposed the launch of a global circular economy alliance that could involve international and other actors. The European Commission was considering starting discussions on an international agreement on the management of natural resources and taking the lead on an international agreement on plastics.

40. The Chief Negotiator for Climate Change at the Ministry of the Environment of Finland, Outi Honkatukia, presented highlights from her Government's commitment to become carbon neutral by 2035, and carbon negative soon after that. Achieving those goals would require both accelerating emission reductions and strengthening carbon sinks.

41. The Government of Finland had developed a road map to carbon neutrality, to reduce emissions from the current 56 million tons to a range of 15–23 million tons by 2035. The implementation measures included the following:

- (a) An emission-trading scheme at European Union level;
- (b) An ambitious "energy tax" reform led by different industrial sectors and coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment;
- (c) A road map for fossil-free transport, also involving assessing taxes and charges in the transport sector;
- (d) The enhancement of carbon sinks.

42. Finland would welcome more ambitious policies toward climate action at the European level, at the level of the Group of 20 and globally. Finland intended to ensure that those who seemed to be losing out as a result of the transition in the short term were not being left behind, as all sectors of the population needed to be included to build a carbon-neutral society.

43. As reflected in a written statement, Sweden aimed to become carbon neutral and fossil free by 2045. To that end, in 2015, the Government of Sweden had launched the Fossil Free

Sweden initiative. The initiative brought together many different actors, such as enterprises, municipalities and associations, to identify common challenges in the transformation towards lower greenhouse emissions as a step towards achieving carbon neutrality.

44. The president of the Danish Youth Council, Monika Skadborg, presented the role of the Youth Climate Council in her country. The Council was composed of 13 young people elected by representatives of 75 youth organizations in Denmark. Each of its members had specific knowledge and skills, for instance on climate change, climate taxation and other issues.

45. Representatives of the Danish Youth Council had been part of the delegation of Denmark to the twenty-fourth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in 2018. As a follow-up, the Prime Minister of Denmark had agreed to establish a climate council as a channel for young people to provide input to the Government. The Youth Climate Council was able to meet the Minister in charge of climate policy twice a year and provide advice on climate change policies.

46. Ms. Skadborg stated that the advice provided by the Council stemmed from consultations with representatives of 75 youth organizations, which were translated into policy recommendations. The members of the Council felt empowered because their advice was taken seriously and was accepted for its substantive value rather than for procedural reasons.

47. The Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division of ECE, Paola Deda, presented the Trees in Cities Challenge, an initiative aimed at promoting the role of cities in climate change mitigation through urban forestry. Ms. Deda summarized how planting trees had important benefits for cities, as, for instance, they absorbed carbon dioxide and were a natural way of cooling the air in summer. They also contributed to biodiversity and to stronger communities, as having more urban green areas could have a positive impact on social cohesion and help to form stronger communities.

48. The Trees in Cities Challenge initiative had been launched by the Executive Secretary of ECE at the 2019 Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary General. With the recent pledge made by Turkmenistan, the initiative had reached 10 million trees. As the initiative had also been joined by cities outside the region, ECE was now reaching out to other regional commissions so they could also become partners in the initiative.

49. Ms. Deda also recalled that, on 6 October 2020, ECE would hold its Forum of Mayors, a platform for hearing from cities on progress and challenges in achieving sustainable development.

50. Participants engaged with speakers through questions submitted remotely. They asked for scientific evidence that greenhouse gas emissions and resource use could be decoupled from economic growth. Mr. Marmo indicated that the analysis on the use of natural resources and their impacts conducted by the International Resource Panel and outlined in its report, entitled *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want*, provided scientific evidence supporting decoupling. Reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provided additional evidence. Participants also expressed interest in the success factors of the Trees in Cities Challenge and in replicating the achievements through similar initiatives.

## **Economic transformation, finance and technology for Sustainable Development Goal acceleration**

51. The focus of the fourth segment was on structural economic transformation, financing and innovative technologies for Sustainable Development Goal acceleration. The objective of the segment was to discuss the role of finance and technology in creating greener products and services and in strengthening investments related to sustainability. The segment was co-organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with the purpose of encouraging new commitments to align economic policies and financial systems with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 1.5°C global warming targets. The starting point of the segment was on the widespread

understanding of the need for a rapid, integrated and just green transition to respond to planetary, social and economic challenges. In that regard, the role of women in finding new solutions and the differentiated gender impacts of the expected changes was recognized at the outset of the segment.

52. Introducing the topics to be addressed during the segment, the Director of the Europe Office of UNEP, Bruno Pozzi, started by noting that the COVID-19 outbreak had highlighted the urgency of structural transition towards resilience and sustainability. He pointed out that preliminary findings of studies looking into the role of human activity in triggering pandemics indicated that degraded habitats were likely to carry more viruses, which would infect humans. The resulting transmission of disease from wildlife to humans was “a hidden cost of human economic development”.

53. Mr. Pozzi then stressed the need to value nature and ecosystems. That meant redirecting financial flows towards sustainability, including through nature-based solutions, which could restore biodiversity, boost livelihoods and health and create climate resilience. There was a need to invest in a new type of growth, which was based on circularity and on carbon neutrality. Digital technologies also played a role in creating new ways of operating and participating in the economy for producers and users. One of the lessons to be learned through the COVID-19 crisis was that the way business was done could be changed, so that mistakes of the past would not be repeated after the present crisis.

54. The Director of the Sustainable Digital Finance Alliance, Marianne Haahr, emphasized that the financial services sector was a key sector that could help drive the sustainability transformation, in particular in combination with the use of digital technologies. The financial sector continued to be misaligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement and the preservation of biodiversity. Currently, only less than 2 per cent of the trillion-dollar bond market was invested in nature assets. Financing could serve as a tool to internalize the cost of externalities, including of carbon emissions. There were several encouraging examples of banks using technology in innovative ways, including in the Netherlands, where some banks had spearheaded the funding of energy-efficient buildings. In those cases, digital tools were used to assess the energy efficiency of buildings, and capital costs depended on their energy performance, thus creating incentives for sustainable real estate investments. There were also small pilot projects providing loans to farmers, in which the cost of capital would vary according to the farmers' impact on biodiversity.

55. Another approach to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is the financial sector's use of digital technologies to make green financial products more efficient. Such products would typically entail higher data and administrative requirements, such as the more elaborate measurement frameworks required for green bonds. The deployment of technology could help to meet such requirements and facilitate data collection. There were examples from Africa, for instance, where blockchain chips had been incorporated into solar cells to successfully harvest data for investors. Such use of technology could help to boost investor confidence and support the roll-out of renewable energy projects in developing markets.

56. Ms. Haahr added that a promising strategy was to integrate new technical functionalities in green financial products. One example was a mobile wallet with an integrated functionality that tracked the real-time carbon footprint of the consumer and offered incentives to reduce that footprint. In China and elsewhere in Asia, that kind of service was being applied by hundreds of millions of users. Similar mobile wallets could also be rolled out in other regions. She also mentioned loans for micro and small businesses that could integrate an evaluation of the ecological performance of a business into its credit score.

57. The presentation of Chief of the Resources and Markets Branch of the Economy Division of UNEP, Steven Stone, was focused on lifestyle choices, government policies and the need to shift financial flows. The top five risks identified in the *Global Risks Report 2020*, issued by the World Economic Forum, were all related to the environment, and often linked to natural resource extraction and climate change. That situation was due to the dominant economic model, which remained a “take-make-dispose” economy based on fuelling consumer demand, lowering prices, increasing throughput, leading to ever-increasing environmental footprints. In his presentation, Mr. Stone indicated that over 100 billion tons

of natural resources were being extracted every year, of which less than 10 per cent was recycled back into the economy. More than half of the materials that were turned into products ended up either being discarded as waste or being emitted or dispersed into the environment after use.

58. Several programmes implemented by the United Nations and its partners were addressing that challenge. UNEP was focusing in particular on Sustainable Development Goal 12, on sustainable production and consumption. One of the key implementation mechanisms for that goal was the One Planet network. Mr. Stone indicated that a substantial driver on the demand side was public procurement. Trillions of dollars were spent by Governments each year on routine purchases that could help to boost markets for greener products and more sustainable consumption. Another part of the equation involved individual lifestyle choices. There were many encouraging initiatives, such as the I Live Simply Movement. To influence the demand-side drivers and to align finance with sustainability, UNEP was also partnering with more than 150 banks on the Principles for Responsible Banking framework. According to Mr. Stone, the Programme's partners now represented over \$42 trillion in assets that would be aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The initiative had tremendous potential with regard to aligning financial portfolios and assets with the Sustainable Development Goals through an approach based on peer benchmarking in the financial services industry.

59. The Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of ITU, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, presented the technology connectivity side of Sustainable Development Goal acceleration. She began by pointing out that half of the planet was now online, but about 3.6 billion people were still cut off from connectivity. Internet access had enormous transformative potential through the power of information. The Secretary-General had reinforced the importance of digital technologies through his High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. That and other initiatives would be focused on developing meaningful connectivity for unconnected communities, thus empowering people and eventually improving their lives.

60. Through its regional offices for Europe and for the Commonwealth of Independent States, ITU was contributing to Sustainable Development Goal acceleration on several fronts. A regional transformational group, five regional initiatives and several projects with various United Nations partners had been set up to leverage the power of ICT in education, health and the empowerment of women, as well as other key issues of the 2030 Agenda. Ms. Bogdan-Martin also noted that the COVID-19 outbreak was a wake-up call on the vital importance of getting the world connected and on using the power of technology to improve disaster preparedness, mitigation strategies and community outreach.

## Annex II

### Summary of additional segments held as webinars<sup>1\*</sup>

#### Sustainable Development Goal challenges (18 March 2020, 1:30–3:30 p.m.)

1. The SDG Lab, located at the United Nations Office at Geneva, organized a webinar with five States members of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) to share challenges to Sustainable Development Goal achievement. Those five member States, Austria, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia, used the webinar to zero in on one key issue faced by each of their Governments in delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
2. The concept for the webinar was a pilot initiative by the SDG Lab. It had previously been tested in the context of regular requests received by the Lab from Member States, in order to provide not only a forum for the exchange of good practices related to the Sustainable Development Goals, but also a space to openly discuss the many issues Member States faced in delivering on the 2030 Agenda. The webinar was jointly organized by the SDG Lab and the International Institute for Sustainable Development, in partnership with the ECE secretariat.
3. A group of experts from the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem and elsewhere, invited by the SDG Lab, joined the webinar to provide ideas, resources and connections to the presenting countries. The five countries also used the webinar to stimulate an exchange of solutions among themselves and to benefit from each other's ideas and from lessons learned in the region. More than 100 participants attended the webinar.
4. Austria received input on the theme of using digitization to help in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The expert discussant was the Head of the Office for Europe of the International Telecommunication Union, Jaroslav Ponder. Mr. Ponder kick-started the discussion by remarking that information and communication technology (ICT) was often perceived as a solution and not necessarily as a challenge. He noted that ICT could provide opportunities in many sectors, such as health and agriculture, but it could also be a source of risk in terms of data privacy and protection and cybersecurity. He encouraged Austria and other countries to better assess how digitization could be used for the public good rather than just to connect citizens.
5. Bulgaria presented its challenge on tackling demographic change and the Sustainable Development Goals. The expert discussant was the Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia of the United Nations Population Fund, Alanna Armitage. Ms. Armitage acknowledged that the issue of demographic decline was one that many countries were grappling with. She stated that Bulgaria had a comprehensive strategy for addressing its declining population and that the country was prioritizing investments in human capital, an important counter-measure. She said that Governments needed to adopt a whole-of-government approach when it comes to tackling demographic challenges. That included specific measures for the education and health sector, as well as initiatives that promoted active ageing and lifelong learning.
6. North Macedonia unpacked its challenge of better linking its national budget to the Sustainable Development Goals and increasing accountability for donor aid. The expert discussant was a policy analyst with the Directorate for Public Governance of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Scherie Nicol. Ms. Nicol invited North Macedonia to consider how new technologies, like artificial intelligence and machine learning, could be used to optimize the ways in which resources and budgets were tracked and reported. Similarly, she noted that a crucial element was ensuring that donor

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\* In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the virtual format of the 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region, two segments that had originally been part of the formal programme of the Regional Forum were held as webinars. These segments are covered in the present annex.

Governments, recipient Governments and funding agencies had Sustainable Development Goal-aligned budgets.

7. Romania identified policy coherence for sustainable development as one of its main challenges. The expert discussant was a policy analyst on policy coherence for sustainable development, also at OECD, Anna Piccinni. Ms. Piccinni remarked that the 2030 Agenda offered countries a comprehensive framework that was holistic and that promoted a whole-of-government approach. She underscored that the Sustainable Development Goal framework must be integrated across all ministries and treated as central to planning, budgeting and implementation. She commended Romania for creating sustainable development hubs at the level of line ministries and agencies, which served as liaisons between different departments and other mechanisms responsible for implementing the country's sustainable development strategy.

8. The fifth country to present its Sustainable Development Goal-related challenge was Slovenia, which used the webinar to solicit ideas on balancing disaggregated equality data with data privacy and protection. The expert discussant was the founding director of DiploFoundation, Jovan Kurbalija. Mr. Kurbalija highlighted the importance of consulting such stakeholders as standards bodies and equality infrastructure institutions (e.g. conformity assessment bodies) to ensure that privacy regulations were adhered to. He noted that attempts to collect disaggregated data could amplify stereotypes and further promote exclusions in society, but that there were measures that could be put in place to mitigate those impacts. He also stressed the necessity for countries to develop a good taxonomy of data and a common understanding of what the definition of privacy meant in practice.

### **Leveraging data and statistics for Sustainable Development Goal progress (20 March 2020, 10 a.m.–noon)**

9. Under the aegis of the 2020 virtual Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region, the Statistical Division of ECE organized a webinar on leveraging data and statistics for Sustainable Development Goal progress, to bring together some of the main stakeholders of evidence-based policymaking for progress on achieving the Goals: data producers and data users for policy action.<sup>1</sup>

10. The webinar was structured into two parts, following the perspectives associated with the production and use of statistics related to Sustainable Development Goal achievement. The first part, entitled “How the data are pooled together on national reporting platforms”, served to present the initiatives, challenges and solutions of national statistical offices in the production and dissemination of statistics related to the Sustainable Development Goals. The second part, entitled “How the data are used for policy-making for sustainable development”, served to showcase how data thus pooled were used to develop policy action, targeting the national and subnational levels or groups and dimensions that were “left behind”. Representatives of Belarus, Georgia, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, the Russian Federation and the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions met virtually to showcase the progress and challenges. The webinar was moderated by a representative of Statistics Netherlands, Lieneke Hoeksma.

11. The first part was focused on the processes and partnerships behind the production and dissemination of statistics for Sustainable Development Goals and the role of national statistical offices and national coordination mechanisms.

12. Elena Kukharevich presented the national coordination mechanisms in Belarus and the inter-agency working groups cooperating on Sustainable Development Goal progress management architecture. The coordination and leading role of the National Statistical Committee allowed for the creation and development of the national system for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring and evaluation, applying to both global and national indicators for monitoring 2030 Agenda implementation.

<sup>1</sup> Additional information on the webinar is available at <https://statswiki.unece.org/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=278036895>.

13. Monika Gorzelak presented the approach of Statistics Poland to compiling and providing statistics on the national reporting platform. Open-source solutions and customization for national priorities offered the possibility of disseminating global and national indicator sets for Sustainable Development Goals in a user-friendly and visual manner. An innovative feature of the platform was the section referring to business indicators, which contained a set of 30 indicators monitoring six Sustainable Development Goals relevant to business. Statistics Poland offered guidance and support in calculating a company's individual impact and contribution to progress in Sustainable Development Goal achievement.

14. Natalia Ignatova presented a federal coordination scheme for Sustainable Development Goal-related statistics production and dissemination by Russian Federation government agencies. The production and dissemination of Sustainable Development Goal indicators by the Federal State Statistics Service and other federal authorities, as well as their submission to international organizations, was regulated by the federal plan of statistical works, which authorized the Statistics Service to coordinate the activities of the federal authorities on the collection and submission of official statistical information on Sustainable Development Goal indicators to international organizations. The unified interdepartmental statistical information system was designed to disseminate the Sustainable Development Goal indicators produced by the Statistics Service and other agencies.

15. The National Institute of Statistics of Spain showcased the national coordination mechanism and procedure to disseminate the Sustainable Development Goal indicators on the national reporting platform, adopting open-source solutions and international standards for data transmission (Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX)). Ana Carmen Saura presented the three levels of coordination, national, subnational/regional and global, that enabled the statistical office of Spain to promote and implement the international standards and recommendations for producing statistics related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

16. The Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland had taken full advantage of the indicator system for monitoring sustainable development (known as "MONET") already in use in the country since 2003 and had adapted it to the conditions and requirements of the 2030 Agenda. Anne Boesch described the process of nationalizing and adapting the Sustainable Development Goal targets to the Swiss context and the progress made as a result of close cooperation by different stakeholders and the active involvement of the Federal Statistical Office at all stages of indicator nationalization.

17. In the second part of the webinar, presenters outlined how data could point to who was getting left behind, so as to target them through policy initiatives. Two institutions from Georgia presented their best practices on how data and statistics led to policy action. In the first example, a representative of the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health, Lela Sturua, focused on lead contamination as an obstacle to achieving numerous Sustainable Development Goals. As a result of dedicated survey and data compilation from different sources, a set of immediate and long-term strategic response actions had been initiated to address the lead contamination problem. Inter-agency cooperation and coordination became essential in order to address the issue in a comprehensive and complex manner and to ensure a targeted response in the future.

18. Integrating the human rights dimension into policy action made it possible to apply the principle of leaving no one behind, as showcased in the examples presented by Alison Hosie on behalf of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. Although the human rights indicators were not directly mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goal indicators, they were an indispensable dimension of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. In Belgium, the Network had formulated policy recommendations for people living in poverty, on the basis of qualitative data collected from a variety of stakeholders. In both the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Denmark, the Network had embarked on partnerships with national statistical offices to support the monitoring and data collection processes with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals. According to Ms. Hosie, the Scottish Human Rights Commission had developed a monitoring framework for the country's national action plan on human rights, making an explicit connection to progress in Sustainable Development Goal achievement.

19. The second example from Georgia, presented by Ekaterine Skhiladze, showed how data could lead to changes in laws. On the basis of the findings of a data collection exercise initiated by the Office of the Public Defender in Georgia, sexual harassment had become part of Georgian anti-discrimination legislation in 2019, following the failure to pass a bill on sexual harassment in 2014 owing to insufficient evidence and statistics. Nevertheless, the challenge remained to continue to collect the data; in the future, steps would be taken to harmonize the data collection methodology and data disaggregation throughout the country.

20. Monika Gorzelak presented the innovative partnership between Statistics Poland and representatives of business and academia, which had resulted in the development of an impact barometer, a tool comprising a set of 30 indicators for businesses based on Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 12. The tool made it possible to measure the impact of individual enterprises on Sustainable Development Goal achievement and carry out a collective analysis of individual enterprise impacts as an indication of progress towards that end.

21. The concept for the round-table-style webinar was built around the idea that data and statistics were important elements for making progress in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. The Conference of European Statisticians Steering Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Regional Coordination Group for Data and Statistics provided case studies and support for the organization of the webinar.

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