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First session

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Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region on its first session

Contents

	<i>Paragraphes</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Attendance.....	1-6	2
II. Opening and adoption of the agenda (Agenda item 1).....	7-8	3
III. 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 (Agenda item 2)	9-11	3-4
IV. Peer Learning Segment (Agenda item 3)	12-19	4
V. Reporting Back and Closing (Agenda item 4).....	20-22	5
Annex		
Chair's summary of the discussions during the Policy Segment and the Peer Learning Segment (Agenda item 3 and 4).....	1-77	6-17

I. Attendance

1. The first session of the Regional Forum was held on 25 April 2017, chaired by Ms. Laurence Monnoyer-Smith, Commissioner-General for Sustainable Development and Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development for the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Seas of France.
2. The session was attended by representatives of the following 46 UNECE member States: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan.
3. The European Union was represented by the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat).
4. Representatives of the following United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies and related organizations attended the meeting: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Group (UNDG), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Environment (UN Environment), United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO).
5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental and regional organizations also took part in the session: Asia-Europe Foundation, Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), Council of Europe, Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development, Nordic Council of Ministers, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN).
6. Representatives of 97 non-governmental organizations as well as of other organizations also participated. A complete list of participants can be found on the website of the Regional Forum.¹

¹ Available at: www.unece.org/rfsd2017

II. Opening and adoption of the agenda (Agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/1

7. The Regional Forum adopted the provisional agenda (ECE/AC.25/2017/1).

8. The UNECE Executive Secretary welcomed all participants and acknowledged progress in many countries towards sustainable development including national strategies, stakeholder involvement and how some countries now measured new legislation based on its impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He stressed how SDGs are pushing all members of the UN family and other international organizations to work together in new and effective ways. At the opening session, a group of young students associated to the Eduki Foundation, a Geneva-based organization that promotes the education and awareness of youngsters on the work of international organizations, offered their views on the need for a strong and broad commitment to the implementation of 2030 Agenda. The implementation of SDGs should involve youth, including through practical projects carried out by young people. In her opening remarks, the Chair emphasised the diversity of the UNECE region and underlined the importance of mobilizing all sectors for success. Several representatives of the United Nations system addressed the Forum at the opening session. The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasized that the United Nations system needs to engage with countries at different levels. Regional commissions are instrumental in mobilizing political leadership and facilitating partnerships. Its work can lead to regional and global public goods. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs drew attention to the importance of the regional dimension and the need to improve coherence, strengthen collaboration and facilitate communication as part of the overall efforts to implement the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Europe and the CIS, UNDP, and Chair of the Regional UNDG Team for Europe and Central Asia, outlined the multiple risks that the region is facing and stressed the role of the Agenda 2030 in addressing these challenges. There is a need to focus efforts on the most vulnerable and identify accelerators to drive forward SDG implementation. Gender equality is a key accelerator of progress across the 2030 Agenda and the multiple SDGs and targets.

III. 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 (Agenda item 2)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/INF2

9. The Policy Segment, which was moderated by the UNECE Executive Secretary, provided a platform for a cross-sectoral exchange and discussion on progress so far and pending challenges for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the UNECE region, with a particular focus on prosperity, health and well-being, and gender, within the broader theme of the 2017 High-level Political Forum.

10. The Policy Segment was introduced by a keynote speech by the President of the International Institute for Sustainable Development and followed by a panel discussion including the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Albania; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Non-European Countries, Economic and Development Cooperation of the Czech Republic; the Commissioner-General for Sustainable Development and Inter-ministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development for the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Seas of France; the Deputy Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation of Europe (OECD); the Director of the World

Health Organization Regional Office for Europe; the Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the President of the Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan. The latter conveyed to the Forum the outcome of a preparatory civil society consultation that took place on 24 April 2017 in Geneva. Interventions from the floor, including from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, Slovenia and Tajikistan, also contributed to the discussions at this Policy Segment.

11. The Chair's summary, included in annex I, presents the main issues raised. Written statements are available on the website of the Regional Forum.¹

IV. Peer Learning Segment (Agenda item 3)

Documentation: ECE/AC.25/2017/INF3, ECE/AC.25/2017/INF4 and ECE/AC.25/2017/INF5

12. The Peer Learning Segment was structured into three parallel Regional Round Tables, covering three different topics, to facilitate more in-depth practical exchange of experiences and best practices:

(a) Regional Round Table I: National and Local Adaptation of SDGs

13. Round Table I focused on the ongoing process of adapting the global SDGs to national and local circumstances. Reviewing and adjusting national strategies, plans and instruments is a major first step taken by governments in the region to start SDG implementation.

14. Round Table I was moderated by the President of the AtKisson Group. Switzerland served as the rapporteur.

(b) Regional Round Table II: Subregional Cooperation for SDG Implementation

15. The subregional level is important in a multi-layered system of SDG implementation and follow-up. Neighbouring countries working together can help address issues of common concern, including those of transboundary nature. The Round Table shared experiences and discuss how cooperation within the different UNECE subregions can help advance the SDGs.

16. Round Table II was moderated by the UN Environment Director for Europe. Portugal served as the rapporteur.

(c) Regional Round Table III: Data and Monitoring

17. Improving the data situation and building statistical capacities for SDG monitoring remains a significant challenge for all countries in the region and beyond. The Round Table provided an opportunity for dialogue between policy-makers and statisticians on the needs, feasibility and limitations of SDG data.

18. Round Table III was moderated by France. The United States of America served as the rapporteur.

19. The Chair's summary, included in annex I, presents main issues raised in the discussions at each Round Table. Written statements are available on the website of the Regional Forum.¹

V. Reporting Back and Closing (Agenda item 4)

20. The Rapporteurs reported back to the plenary of the Regional Forum the main messages resulting from the discussions at each Round Table, which are reflected in the Chair's summary included in annex I.

21. The Regional Forum heard a closing address by students facilitated by the Eduki Foundation. In her closing remarks, a civil society representative emphasized that the space for civil society is shrinking and stressed the importance of meaningful participation of civil society organizations in SDG implementation and the need to provide an institutional mechanism for this participation. The UNECE Executive Secretary remarked how ideas are now becoming actions that advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He emphasized how a multi-stakeholder approach had been critical for the development of the SDGs and now was even more important in their implementation. The Director-General of UNOG and Under-Secretary-General acknowledged the convening power of UNECE and its historical role in bridging divides. He introduced the work of the SDG Lab in bringing together different Geneva-based actors and tapping into different sources of knowledge as well as in taking forward the discussions at the Regional Forum.

22. Before closing the meeting, the Chair informed participants that the Chair's summary will be circulated for comments by participants. The final version will constitute the official input from the UNECE region to the 2017 High-level Political Forum.

Annex

Chair's summary of the Policy Segment and the Peer Learning Segment

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

1. The Policy Segment provided an opportunity to take stock of the current situation and exchange views on major factors influencing SDG implementation. Within the overall context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the broader theme of the 2017 High-level Political Forum, discussions had a particular focus on the key themes of prosperity, health and well-being and gender.
2. SDGs are universal so they concern all member States without distinction. An OECD pilot study showed that in many countries significant progress is required to meet the goals by 2030. Civil society organizations drew attention that, even in advanced economies, multidimensional inequality, precarious forms of labour market participation and homelessness, remain pressing concerns.
3. Despite progress, there are multiple fragilities in the region, including the looming challenges posed by climate change and large migration movements, in a context in which economic expansion remains moderate. Some participants pointed out that inequality is a serious threat to growth and social cohesion. In order to rally all parties to SDG implementation efforts, it is necessary to demonstrably show the benefits that advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development brings for all and to emphasize that the SDGs are a positive framework for change that can effectively address environmental and inequality concerns. Effective delivery is critical at this stage so there are visible results from policy action. Moreover, some participants stressed that, given the scale of the challenges ahead, the available time is limited.
4. The ambition of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with different trade-offs and synergies involved, and the need to ensure balance between the three pillars of sustainable development has led to new mechanism of coordination. Different institutional solutions to steer SDG implementation and facilitate coordination have been deployed throughout the region. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Prime Minister was in charge of preparing the new strategic framework for sustainable development. Innovative mechanisms for the involvement of parliament have also been put in place. In Hungary, a parliamentary ombudsman for future generations provides inputs on initiatives that can affect the quality of life of future generations.
5. While new bodies and mechanisms for SDG implementation have been or are being created, efforts to mainstream SDG within existing policy frameworks are critical, in order to ensure effective implementation and cope with resource limitations.
6. In some countries, experiences with MDGs provide a starting point. In Tajikistan, long-term development strategies incorporating the SDGs have been developed on the basis of the lessons learnt during MDG implementation. In Armenia, gaps in MDG implementation have been identified to inform SDG strategies, which have been based on a systematic screening of legislation in order to define a roadmap.
7. Implementation of the SDGs requires the adaptation of both domestic and foreign policy strategies. Some countries have already revised or developed new development cooperation initiatives that are aligned with the SDGs. Policy coherence between domestic

and international actions has been recognized as an important element of sustainable development strategic frameworks. The efforts of small countries also matter, as shown by the efforts of Slovenia to strengthen its international development cooperation.

8. Some participants stressed that SDGs open a new role for international cooperation, creating new opportunities to work together. In some areas, cross-border cooperation is particularly important, including for example, the public health dimension of the ongoing refugees and migrant crisis or the many implications of climate change, including also on health.

9. The UN system has provided direct assistance to programme countries in the region, including through rapid integrated assessments and guidance on Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS). Various participants emphasized the importance of this support by the regional UN system. For example, Georgia counts on UN help to develop a monitoring and evaluation system for SDGs, which is still missing in the country. Some participants stressed the positive role that a strengthened UN at the regional level will continue to play in assisting member countries in advancing the 2030 Agenda.

10. Given the complexity of the SDGs and the numerous policy areas involved, many actors need to be engaged in implementation. Breaking down silos and bringing together stakeholders that may have opposing interests shows what is central for SDG implementation: dealing with complexities and identifying inter-relations to find durable solutions with the agreement of partners. Effective policy action would require attracting new allies and actors, for example, engaging municipalities and mayors in health-related interventions. However, it was emphasized that the ultimate responsibility for SDGs lies with governments and that concrete policies reflect different national choices.

11. New ways to cooperate are emerging, based on reciprocity and shared benefits. Technological possibilities are opening different channels to exchange knowledge, tapping into new constituencies and reaching out to different demographic groups. Some participants mentioned that the concentration of development partners in Geneva working on multiple aspects of the SDGs provides a favourable ecosystem that facilitates collaboration and information exchange.

12. There was a strong recognition of the role of civil society in SDG implementation. While the engagement of civil society is taking place mainly through organized groups, individual citizens, through their own initiatives and personal commitments, also have a role to play. To facilitate dialogue and encourage involvement, communication remains a critical factor. In Azerbaijan, the importance of awareness campaigns, including in schools, has been stressed. Strengthening ownership by society at large will promote increased public participation. Civil society organizations called for effective and meaningful engagement of civil society in all its diversity in the regional and national SDG processes and are seeking the institutionalization of a regional engagement mechanism.

13. In France, the mobilization of civil society has been a defining feature of its plans for SDG implementation, with a very structured programme of identification and engagement of partners across different goals, sometimes building on existing processes and carrying on the impetus stemming from COP 21. In this context, the strong synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, as well as the contribution of the multi-stakeholder coalitions under the Climate Action Agenda for the achievement of SDGs were highlighted.

14. Some participants emphasized that all different stakeholders should be involved, including those that are profit-oriented. It is important to reach a common understanding of the needs and possibilities of both the public and the private sectors in SDG implementation. This will require using a language that the business sector understands. Business opportunities have emerged in connection with the 2030 Agenda and the private

sector is increasingly aware that addressing sustainability is necessary and can be profitable. At the institutional level, business associations like the International Chamber of Commerce are committed to work with the UN to advance SDGs. However, a meaningful contribution to sustainable development requires business to respect social, labour and environmental standards.

15. Putting in place the necessary infrastructure will require tapping into appropriate sources of financing. The rapid growth of green finance, including green bonds, is an auspicious trend. It was remarked that incentive structures in financial markets need to be changed, so they appropriately reflect sustainability issues. Blended finance, where public resources are used to de-risk investments, can be deployed to involve the private sector in pursuing public goals, including those related to infrastructure. It is clear that ODA is insufficient to meet development goals and that the private sector needs to be involved, therefore new partnerships are required. However, civil society organizations called for ODA commitments to be upheld while including CSOs in public-private partnerships and other mechanisms that blend private and public finance. Clear accountability frameworks covering all development actors should be in place.

16. Health and well-being are outcomes, determinants and enablers for SDGs. Without health, many SDGs may not be achieved; at the same time, health benefits from progress towards other SDGs. Health 2020, the European health policy framework, is fully aligned with the SDGs and instrumental to their achievement. Bright spots in the region include higher life expectancy, reduced maternal mortality and a downward trend in non-communicable diseases. However, an overall positive picture masks significant differences within and between countries and population groups. Particular groups of women remain at higher risk of adverse outcomes during pregnancy and birth. Although most countries in the region provide at least near universal health coverage, there are great differences in health services delivery and financing. It was remarked that a rights-based approach is important to effectively tackle these health challenges.

17. There are also many areas where significant improvements are required. For example, if progress on deaths from road injuries continues at the current rate, the region will fall short of the global target of a 50 per cent reduction in road-traffic related fatalities by 2020. Some lifestyle choices damage health and well-being. Environmental determinants account for 16 per cent of deaths in the WHO Europe region. Environmental factors and health inequities, which could be avoided by policy interventions, involve large costs. Multisectoral actions are required to tackle the different factors that influence health outcomes. Addressing preventable death causes requires a particular focus on influencing the behaviour of young generations, without forgetting the health challenges posed by ageing societies.

18. As a stand-alone goal, SDG 5 covers many important dimensions to tackle the gender inequalities that remain persistent across the region. Gender equality is also a means to achieve all other goals, which cannot be met without an end to gender discrimination. Progress on achieving gender equality will facilitate reaching SDG 3 targets on health and well-being, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. At the country level, for example, Albania's reforms in the agricultural sector ensure that public support for the sector include provisions to encourage women's businesses and promote their engagement in economic activities. France has produced a map of the relations between SDG 5 and other goals, a tool that is projected to be used for other goals as well. In Georgia, developing an appropriate legal framework and being sensitive to gender issues has been an early concern. Tajikistan also recognized gender as a cross-cutting issue in its development plans.

19. However, it was also mentioned that much remains to be done and that some trends are not encouraging. The amount of gender-related ODA is declining; civil society

organizations emphasized that funding for women's rights organizations has been reduced and that formal provision of high quality childcare and long-term care for the elderly is virtually inexistent in many UNECE countries. Increased public investment is required to advance SDG 5 and reap the positive influence of gender equality on other SDGs.

20. Many participants emphasised the close linkages that exist between different SDGs. The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development opens new and more complex spaces for policy intervention. Navigating those spaces require a good understanding of the relations between different goals but also an ability to work together across sectoral and organisational boundaries.

Regional Round Table I: National and local adaptation of SDGs

21. Multiple initiatives are being carried out across the ECE region to advance SDG implementation. Countries appear determined to make an early start by reviewing the existing mechanisms and strategies while introducing different legal, institutional and policy changes. Although resources remain constrained, the overall picture for the region is that progress is taking place. However, significant efforts will be required in all countries, even in the most developed ones.

22. Countries have revised existing strategies and sectoral plans or introduced new ones in light of the SDGs. Existing policies are being inventoried and their contribution to SDGs assessed, including through stocktaking, mapping of goals and targets and gap analysis. Work may proceed at varying speeds in different policy areas and, in some countries, different Ministries may have reached various degrees of readiness. Actions undertaken concern both the external and the domestic dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. Some countries are putting SDGs at the core of their development policies and humanitarian actions.

23. National implementation plans do not take place in a vacuum, so there is a need to understand how new SDG priorities relate to previous policy initiatives. In EU accession countries, ongoing efforts are also establishing linkages between the EU agenda and SDGs. The new or revised strategies often consider the institutional and social context for SDG implementation. Consultative processes have also been used in many countries to make these assessments.

24. Some participants reflected that the process of adaptation should also pay attention to the need for simplification to avoid the proliferation of too many policy documents. In some cases, targets are nationalised and introduced into existing reporting systems, with the possible inclusion of alternative indicators that reflect domestic challenges and political priorities. Some countries, like Denmark, are undertaking a systematic assessment of new legislation regarding its conformity with SDG implementation. Overall, the process of incorporating SDGs into national legal and policy frameworks seems well advanced in the region.

25. The importance of broad political ownership was emphasised by different participants. Implementation of SDGs requires a clear institutional framework, where the key role and contribution of the parliament is clearly recognised. In some countries, like the Netherlands, existing procedures determine the involvement of the parliament on SDG implementation, including regarding reporting and the connection with the budgeting process. The increased engagement of the legislature is an important trend through the region but some participants, while recognising ongoing progress, felt that more efforts should be carried out to involve parliamentarians.

26. SDGs need to be translated into a language that can be effectively used in the political debate, as shown by the experience of Romania. Handbooks to assist parliamentarians may be useful as a part of a broader effort to communicate and educate on

SDGs. Overall, increasing awareness of SDGs across multiple groups, including the media, is important. Advocacy work should have a broad reach, including different constituencies and geographies to ensure active participation of all actors at various levels. Innovative and media-friendly approaches can be useful when seeking to engage different groups. Accessible technologies should be deployed to reach persons with disabilities.

27. Implementing SDGs requires the creation of appropriate coordination structures, which have an intrinsic intersectoral character. These may take various forms in different countries, depending on government and national choices. Some participants remarked that institutional changes appear particularly challenging and that institutional innovations are desirable but have been limited.

28. National councils of sustainable development for top level discussions and working groups and subgroups focussing on specific areas are typical coordination mechanisms. In Belarus, particular emphasis has been put on wide representation in these mechanisms to ensure both horizontal and vertical coordination. In Armenia, a new institution, which operates as a public-private partnership, has been created to support long-term strategic reforms and analyse existing strategies. Improving governance and strengthening institutional capacities are seen in Montenegro as significant factors in early SDG implementation.

29. The importance of the local level was stressed by some participants. While multiple ongoing initiatives already exist at the national level, there is much work yet to be done at the regional and local levels. The relevance of the regional and local levels depends on the degree of decentralization and it may be particularly significant for countries like Switzerland, where lower levels of government have broad competencies. In any case, it is clear that, while the political impulse for the 2030 Agenda came from national governments, authorities at all levels need to be brought on board for successful adaptation and implementation of the SDGs. Partnerships are key to advance SDGs and many of them can be struck at the local and regional levels. In some countries, UN support may be useful to reach out to local and regional authorities and complement their capacities.

30. Horizontal and vertical coordination across different policy areas and government levels is important, but multiple stakeholders should also be involved, both in implementing and monitoring. In particular, different participants emphasised the role of the private sector. Involving stakeholders is not a burden but a positive contribution to SDG implementation.

31. Underlining the importance of civil society participation, there were proposals to bring the 2030 Agenda into educational curricula, as championed by Norway, in order to further spread the knowledge on SDGs and their implications. Some participants emphasised the importance of youth as an agent of change and shared existing country experiences to tap into this potential, but, at the same time, others expressed concern that existing mechanisms for youth involvement are insufficient.

32. There is a need to preserve policy stability beyond political changes and create a long-term vision for national development. In Turkey, different initiatives are anchored in long-term plans that identify core priorities. In Finland, a broad consensus on focus areas has been reached which is expected to survive changes in government. By contrast, specific actions to make progress in these particular areas may be subject to review, reflecting changing political choices.

33. Countries are often experimenting with different schemes and learning from early experiences, which underlines the relevance of mechanisms for knowledge sharing, as provided by the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Peer-learning within and across different national constituencies is being sought but it remains challenging. At the

international level, the role of the European Sustainable Development Network was mentioned.

34. The importance of a monitoring and evaluation framework was stressed by many participants. As it is the case for implementation, multiple partners should be involved in these efforts. In some cases, like in Georgia for SDG 16, a monitoring and evaluation framework has been developed for a particular SDG in order to build on this experience to develop a more comprehensive framework. Some participants remarked the significance of evidence-based accountability for effective implementation and the fact that it should encompass all stakeholders.

35. Success in implementing SDGs requires the mobilisation of sufficient public and private resources. In most countries, SDG goals and targets are linked to action plans that have clear connections with budgetary processes and resource allocation. In some countries, these action plans are used to raise funding from external donors. However, some countries emphasised that resources remain key constraints.

36. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is integrated and indivisible and there are multiple linkages across SDGs that require concerted policy action. However, from a policy point of view, it is critical to look at those actions that have potentially larger impacts across multiple SDGs. As available funds are likely to remain unchanged, it is important to focus priority efforts on initiatives that will offer larger results. The correct identification of the size of existing multipliers for policy interventions is not easy but it would facilitate establishing priorities and using effectively limited budgetary resources. However, developing criteria for “smart spending” also faces difficulties in the presence of data limitations, including the absence of time series for relevant variables.

37. There was a broad agreement on the particular importance of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, not only as a separate goal but as a cross-cutting issue that greatly influences success in the implementation of other goals. Some countries, like Belarus and Bulgaria, have made gender equality a particular focus of early SDG implementation. In others, like Sweden, gender-budgeting is an established practice that evaluates the gender equality effects of budget policies. International partnerships, such as the one between Croatia and Finland, may serve to advance gender mainstreaming through training and knowledge sharing.

38. Implementation of particular goals may benefit from international cooperation initiatives, such as the Mediterranean Action Plan for SDG 14. By contrast, lack of clearly identified responsible authorities for implementation can create difficulties in meeting SDG 17.

39. Data remains a problem for the national adaptation and implementation of SDGs, even in advanced countries. Most countries are struggling with issues of data availability and reliability. Insufficient disaggregation creates difficulties to formulate and evaluate appropriate policies that leave nobody behind. In the Netherlands, for example, around one third of indicators cannot yet be measured. In most countries, there are ongoing efforts to develop missing indicators. The need to identify indicators that are relevant for the region was raised by civil society organisations, such as, for example, homelessness as an indicator for SDG1 concerning growing and extreme poverty.

40. Efficient delivery of the support provided by the UN system is also an important element of success for SDG implementation; it requires strong coordination efforts among UN entities. The Regional UN System is assisting countries in multiple areas, including alignment of national policy frameworks with SDGs, institutional arrangements and advocacy efforts. In particular, some participants stressed the role of the UN, including its regional commissions, in helping countries to address data problems. SDG dashboards are being developed in some countries with UN assistance.

41. Some participants also encouraged the Regional Forum to take advantage of relevant outcomes of the 67th session of the ECE and their follow-up processes. This would not need to involve changes in the work programme of the ECE or its budget but it demands increased collaboration with other UN agencies, drawing on past best practices, such as those related to the collaboration between the ECE and UNFPA.

Regional Round Table II: Subregional Cooperation for SDG Implementation

42. The implementation of and follow-up to the SDGs is taking place at different levels: from global, regional, subregional, national, subnational to local. All levels are necessary within a multi-layered system to live up to the ambition and complexity of the 2030 Agenda. The subregional level is very relevant, as geographical proximity, shared features and problems, as well as the existence of institutions create a strong rationale for cooperation and exchange of experiences and solutions, in particular in a region as diverse as the UNECE region.

43. Against this background, Regional Round Table II focused on the contribution of subregional cooperation to SDG implementation. The discussion was structured around three core issues: the thematic areas in which subregional cooperation is most useful; effective forms of cooperation at the subregional level; and the alignment of existing subregional cooperation structures with the SDGs.

44. Participants put forward a range of thematic areas, in which subregional cooperation can contribute to developing joint solutions. In a number of settings, subregional cooperation has focused on economic integration and cooperation, in particular trade and trade facilitation, cross-border investment and infrastructure among a limited number of countries. The subregional level is also considered instrumental for cooperation on environmental challenges and the management of shared natural resources, including fresh water, oceans and seas, fishery and marine pollution.

45. Moreover, participants highlighted a number of other areas, in which approaches at the subregional level or among a limited number of countries concerned have been pursued, such as environment, water, migration, energy, agriculture, health, and youth. Subregional initiatives in these areas have mainly been chosen to address transboundary issues, to better respond to emerging challenges, and to create enabling conditions for SDG implementation. The Russian Federation said that refraining from unilateral economic measures and harmonizing existing integration processes is essential for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level.

46. It was also stressed that exchange of experiences, capacity-building and learning on SDG data and monitoring at the subregional level has proven useful, for instance within the framework of a multi-country exchange organized by the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub. In addition, the subregional level can play an important role in the follow-up and review of relevant SDGs.

47. Civil society representatives expressed the view that subregional cooperation in many instances is heavily focused on economic integration, in particular trade. Extending subregional cooperation to broader issues such as human rights and gender equality would represent a step forward.

48. Reflecting different themes, constituencies and objectives, there is a significant diversity in the forms and modalities of subregional cooperation. They range from informal dialogues, thematic initiatives and coalitions to formal intergovernmental organizations and

legally binding instruments, which are mainly driven by governments and/or international organizations.

49. A number of UN organizations presented examples of subregional dialogues, initiatives, partnerships and coalitions, which are contributing to joint solutions and advancing SDG implementation in certain areas.

50. International migration is one of the issues for which subregional and regional cooperation is of crucial importance. Cooperation and dialogue on migration has been expanding in different frameworks, actively supported by IOM. Many of them are looking at ways to support the achievement of migration-related aspects of the 2030 Agenda. One well-recognized cooperation model in the area of migration are the *Regional Consultative Processes* on migration, which promote policy dialogue, cooperation and partnership on migration issues among their member states. They are state-led and on-going, informal and mostly non-binding. This type of forums has shown to be effective at building consensus and enabling dialogue and joint work on migration. In this context, subregional and regional consultations contribute to the on-going inter-governmental process in the General Assembly to develop a *Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration*, which should, for the first time, present a comprehensive framework for migration governance.

51. Taking into account subregional communalities with regard to environmental degradation and climate change, multi-country cooperation on the management of environmental resources, sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods could yield significant benefits, for instance in Central Asia. Subregional dialogue and collaboration on SDG 2 is facilitated and supported by FAO and other UN and non-UN partners. One example of a specific initiative is the *Eurasian Soil Partnership*, which promotes sustainable soil management among governments and other stakeholders of 13 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

52. Several subregional initiatives are driven by common challenges in the areas of health and population. This includes the *South-eastern Europe Health Network*, the *Nordic/Baltic Policy Dialogue on Implementing the WHO Health 2020 Vision*, and the *Black Sea Countries Coalition on Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention*. UNFPA also supports a regional youth network to promote training and education on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention and an initiative among 17 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to strengthen the health system response to gender-based violence.

53. Other initiatives under the auspices of WHO Europe underline that cooperation is not only triggered by geographic proximity, but also by similar circumstances and challenges. This involves, for instance, the cooperation on health issues of cities across Europe (within the *WHO European Healthy Cities Network*), subnational regions (within the *Regions for Health Network*) and small countries (*Small Countries Initiative*).

54. Intergovernmental cooperation within subregional organizations and initiatives is well-established to achieve progress in areas of common concern. There is a long-standing tradition of cooperation among the five Nordic countries. The *Nordic Council of Ministers* promotes cooperation among governments in areas such as environment and youth. The *Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation* focuses on cooperation among its 12 member states in trade, economic development, road and maritime infrastructure, green energy and agriculture. The broad areas of cooperation among the 18 member states of the *Central European Initiative (CEI)* are sustainable economic development and knowledge-based and inclusive societies. In 2016, under the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the CEI advanced cooperation with other international and subregional organizations, such as the UN and the Baltic States cooperation.

55. Legally binding instruments are a strong mechanism of subregional cooperation. In particular, the major role of the Regional Seas Conventions and their related action plans

and of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations were emphasized as effective examples of cross-sectoral cooperation on oceans, seas and marine resources, which are shared by neighbouring countries. This includes instruments administered by UN Environment - the Barcelona Convention and *Mediterranean Action Plan* for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution, the Tehran Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea, and the Carpathian Convention for the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians. It also includes other regional bodies beyond those administered by UN Environment.

56. Cooperation on oceans and seas can also be fruitful between a few coastal states for the preservation and sustainable management of a particular area. One example is the trilateral “RAMOGE” agreement between France, Italy and Monaco, aiming at preventing and reducing marine pollution along a coastal stretch connecting the three states. In addition, the application of regional or global agreements at the subregional or even local cross-border context was highlighted as an important aspect. For example, cooperation on water management between the Canton of Geneva in Switzerland and neighbouring communities in France takes place within the overall framework of the *UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention)*.

57. A number of more informal initiatives with a subregional perspective are actively contributing to SDG implementation. In more formal cooperation structures, efforts to review and align activities and instruments with the SDGs are ongoing. For instance, within the *Nordic Council of Ministers*, a joint initiative on SDGs is underway, as well as an SDG mapping exercise and the integration of the SDGs in the existing cooperation among Nordic countries. Within the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, the focus on joint action for SDG implementation is being strengthened. Notwithstanding these positive examples, some participants expressed the view that there is potential to raise awareness for SDGs and accelerate SDG alignment in some subregional and regional activities.

58. In view of a rich and dynamic landscape of subregional mechanisms, several participants stressed that horizontal coordination, cooperation and coherence between various subregional and regional platforms is essential, as well as vertical consistency with the local, national and global levels. Within the UN, the creation of issue-based coalitions on health, gender, adolescents and youth, social protection and migration by the Regional UN System in Europe and Central Asia was referred to as an innovative approach to coordinate activities among different UN agencies, which is, at the same time, open to the involvement of external partners.

59. Several participants emphasized the importance of developing multi-stakeholder partnerships as a crucial means of SDG implementation, including at the subregional level. Partnerships and coalitions involving all relevant international organizations, local authorities, civil society, academia and businesses will be an important complement of intergovernmental cooperation. Some participants, including from the science community, called for strengthening dialogue and a more systematic involvement of science and research institutions. The *Ocean and Climate Initiatives Alliance* was mentioned as a promising multi-stakeholder action framework to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change and contribute to the achievement of SDGs beyond climate issues, in particular SDG14.

60. Representatives from civil society called for a meaningful and institutionalized involvement of civil society in SDG implementation, follow-up and review at all levels, including the regional and subregional. The creation of a regional civil society engagement mechanism could be useful in this regard, also in view of shrinking space and funding constraints for civil society engagement in parts of the region. Civil society stands ready as

a partner not only in discussions, but also as a source of advice and expertise in SDG implementation.

Regional Round Table III: Data and monitoring

61. The comprehensive and ambitious 2030 Agenda underscores the importance of quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data to measure progress and ensure that no one is left behind. The statistical community has taken up this challenge and initiated SDG-related activities at national, regional and global levels.

62. Against this background, Regional Roundtable III provided the opportunity to share insights on core issues for policy-makers and statisticians with regard to SDG data and monitoring. The discussion was structured around the role and limits of official statistics, cooperation between policy-makers and statisticians, strengthening of statistical capacities, and coordination and cooperation between different actors.

63. The first UN World Data Forum in January 2017 brought together data producers and data users and launched the Cape Town Global Action Plan (CTGAP). At the global level, in March 2017, the UN Statistical Commission adopted the global indicator framework with more than 240 SDG indicators as well as a draft resolution with basic elements regarding data flows between the national and global levels.

64. At the national level, SDG implementation has started in many countries with the adoption or adjustment of national sustainable development strategies. National councils for sustainable development have been established, often with extensive consultation processes and the engagement of multiple actors. These national strategies provide the basis for national statistical systems to develop national indicators in an open stakeholder process to enable tracking the progress in implementing these strategies, and to develop national action plans to produce the data. In some countries, as in Albania, baseline reports for SDGs are being developed.

65. Policymakers need timely and reliable data for evidence-based decision-making. As pointed out by several participants, interaction and dialogue between policymakers and statisticians is therefore of great importance. To achieve sustainable development, it is also utterly important to strengthen statistical communication and allow all users equal access to data, following the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*.

66. National statistical offices have a key coordinating role in generating, disseminating and administering SDG-related data. Countries are currently able to produce roughly about one third of the SDG indicators. Even developed countries with strong statistical systems, like Germany, cannot produce more than half. Participants agreed that all countries need to increase their statistical capacity. In some instances, there may be a need to strengthen the statistical institutional framework to ensure the necessary coordination with other actors, including academia, civil society and the private sector, and to improve statistical quality, as highlighted by Montenegro. This requires political support and appropriate funding. Education to improve statistical literacy among the present and future generations is also necessary.

67. Support should also come from donors, through South-South cooperation and partnerships. Several participants observed that there was a need to think differently about statistical capacity building, namely to learn to better coordinate and match the supply and demand for capacity building, and look for partnerships. Examples for such partnerships were mentioned, like twinning projects with the involvement of the European Union and the World Bank.

68. The UN system also has an important role to play in providing capacity-building to countries, with specialized agencies offering support in their areas of expertise. Concepts used for developing countries could be tailored to the needs of developed countries, as suggested by FAO. The WHO Regional Office for Europe had been asked by its member States to propose a process for establishing a joint monitoring framework that includes common indicators of the Health 2020 framework, the SDGs and the global action plan on non-communicable diseases resulting in a reduced list of core indicators. UNFPA pointed out that 93 indicators are population-based and stressed the strong synergies between the SDGs and the ICPD process. UNFPA also mentioned its collaboration with UNICEF in middle-income countries in the region and with WHO on data and indicators related to sexual and reproductive health. ILO and others emphasized the necessity for the UN system to come together and develop joint capacity-building programmes, considering also that most SDG indicators are under custodianship of more than one UN agency.

69. The Regional Road Map developed by the UNECE Steering Group on Statistics for SDGs was considered a useful tool to provide practical guidance to countries to build up a robust SDG measurement system. Statisticians in the UNECE region are piloting and exploring solutions that can be later used by countries in other regions.

70. For member States of the European Union, Eurostat is producing official statistics according to requirements set by a code of practice. The European Environment Agency is collecting data from a network of about 39 countries in specific focus areas and pointed to the challenge of filtering out relevant, timely and high-quality data.

71. OECD has undertaken a pilot study of selected member States to establish their starting position on individual targets to help governments with the development of national action plans.

72. The WHO Regional Office for Europe proposed to establish a European Information Initiative, mirroring its own European Health Information Initiative to coordinate information and statistical issues in the region with all stakeholders at regular intervals.

73. Some participants, including from civil society organisations, pointed to specific issues and groups addressed in the SDGs with a particular need for more and better quality data, like migration, human trafficking, early marriage, older persons and persons with disabilities. It was also suggested that countries in the ECE region could go beyond the baseline established in the global indicator framework and develop more ambitious indicators to take the lead on specific issues, for example with regard to gender equality, as supported by Monaco. The Council of Europe proposed that accession to specific legally binding conventions and the results of related monitoring mechanisms could serve as indicators at the regional level for a specific target, such as the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Other participants emphasized areas that are new to official statistics, like governance or means of implementation and human rights indicators. Methods to measure these areas in an internationally agreed and comparable way needed to be developed.

74. There was agreement that all of the SDG data could not be produced by the official statistics using the traditional methods, and some warned that work on missing indicators should not distract countries from developing and strengthening their national statistical systems.

75. Some of the SDG data would need to come from outside the official statistical system. Big data, geospatial, satellite and administrative data all needed to be considered. Participation from academia, private sector, civil society, media, etc. was needed in this regard.

76. However, using alternative sources was coming with its own challenges because data quality might often not be sufficient and the information source might not be sustainable. Ensuring data confidentiality and reducing respondent burden were also important concerns. The Conference of European Statisticians through its High-level Group for Modernisation of Official Statistics is working actively to explore the use of other data sources, such as administrative registers and Big Data.

77. Several participants, including the Russian Federation and Canada, highlighted the need to streamline the different international reporting processes as there was significant overlap between the different reporting frameworks.

78. In concluding, participants emphasized that no country or organization could succeed on its own – collaboration and cooperation were needed at all levels and with all relevant stakeholders to achieve the SDGs. The Round Table had provided a useful opportunity for dialogue, mutual learning, and exchange of experience. ECE was encouraged to continue such dialogues in the framework of the regional Forum on a regular basis, taking advantage of other regional and global processes to maximize impact.

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