

2020 Regional Results Report of the UN System for Europe and Central Asia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the reporting period 2020, the entities of the regional United Nations system in Europe and Central Asia provided collective support and offered policy guidance and tools to address key sustainable development challenges in the region. As the regional UN system was transitioning to the new architecture of the Regional Collaborative Platform, it assisted member States as well as UN Country Teams in their support to governments to respond to the urgencies of the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, several multi-agency Issue-based Coalitions – the substantive arms of the UN in the region – achieved results and supported decision-makers in crucial areas such as health and well-being; social protection; gender equality; youth and adolescents; migration, displacement and resilience; sustainable food systems; and environment and climate change. In addition, the UN entities in the region jointly contributed to regional intergovernmental processes and collaborated to advance digitalisation and data and statistics support. Substantive and operational support to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams as well as the rolling out of a significant number of new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks were among the main priorities. The collaboration and provision of targeted support and expertise at the regional level, further strengthened through the repositioning of the regional UN development system, will remain a key element in accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of a sustainable COVID-19 recovery.

1. Introduction

In the year 2020, as mandated in ECOSOC resolution 2020/23 Progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the regional UN system in Europe and Central Asia transitioned to the new architecture of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), which was formally established in December 2020. Comprising over 30 UN entities, the regional UN system provides collective, multi-agency support to member States to advance the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the reporting period of 2020, helping to strengthen the response to the far-reaching COVID-19 crisis represented a particularly urgent priority.

Building on a long-standing practice of cooperation among the regional UN entities in Europe and Central Asia, the initiative of the UN Secretary-General to reposition the UN Development System (UNDS) provided a welcome opportunity to further advance collaboration and joint action. As part of the reform and to enhance transparency and results-based management, the UN Secretary-General proposed to prepare an annual report on system-wide results of the UN at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda that should focus on collective achievements and joint system-wide impact at the regional level.

The present report has been prepared in response to this request and is shared with member States on the occasion of the fifth session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

for the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Region (17-18 March 2021). Its main part is based on the achievements of the regional Issue-based Coalitions, which are multi-agency coalitions coordinating the UN response to cross-cutting challenges in the region, and other regional interagency groups. Selected regional or subregional flagship programmes carried out by multiple agencies, joint contributions to regional intergovernmental processes and data and statistics support are also highlighted.

To put the system-wide results at the regional level in the broader context, the report starts by providing a brief overview of the current status of implementation of the regional UNDS reform, the particular regional challenges to sustainable development, and the strategic response of the UN system to these challenges.

2. Advancing the UN Secretary-General's reforms at the regional level in Europe and Central Asia

Repositioning the United Nations Development System (UNDS) at the regional level has been part of the overall UNDS reform. The regional review has aimed at achieving greater cohesion, a larger impact and more transparency for United Nations regional assets to support results on the ground. To better connect the regional UNDS entities and to advance collaboration, the UN Secretary-General has made recommendations in five transformative areas to revamp the regional architecture. Member States, through an ECOSOC and General Assembly resolution¹, welcomed the efforts of the UN Secretary-General in formulating these recommendations and requested the UN Secretary-General to continue to conduct and rely on, in the course of the implementation process, transparent and inclusive consultations with all countries concerned at all levels. The recommendations are in the process of being implemented as follows:

Recommendation 1: Establishing the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia

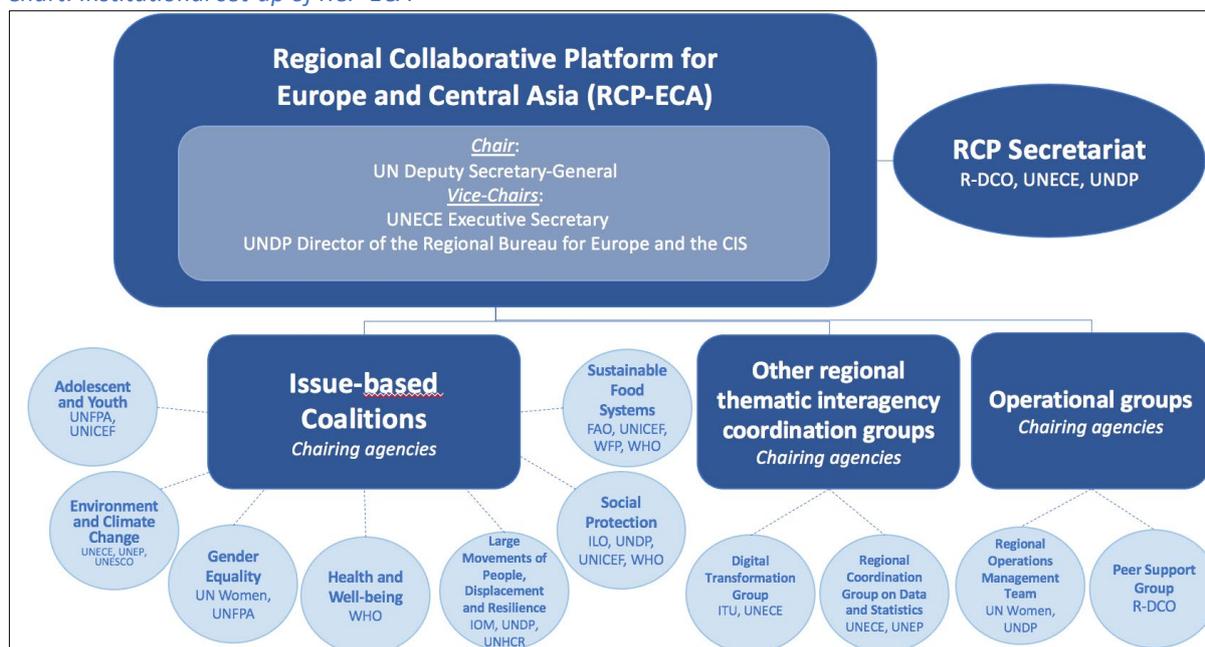
The Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia (RCP-ECA) as the main internal collaboration platform for sustainable development among the entities of the UN system in Europe and Central Asia was formally established in December 2020. The RCP-ECA is serviced by a joint secretariat that is provided by the UN Development Coordination Office for Europe and Central Asia (UNDCO), the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), under the overall direction of the RCP Chair, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, and the two Vice-Chairs of the platform, the UNECE Executive Secretary and the Director of the UNDP RBEC.

The RCP's inaugural annual workplan, covering the period from December 2020 – December 2021, focuses on the continuing implementation of the regional UNDS repositioning and the key results of the seven regional Issue-based Coalitions and the other regional interagency groups that the RCP's substantive and operational support is mainly based on (see chart). The first formal meeting of the RCP in Europe and Central Asia, chaired by the UN Deputy

¹ ECOSOC resolution 2020/23 / General Assembly resolution 74/297

Secretary-General and held in virtual format, will be organized back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region (17-18 March 2021).

Chart: Institutional set-up of RCP-ECA



Europe and Central Asia was the first region to establish Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs). Five of the currently seven Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) active in the region were established in 2016 as a result of interagency coordination. IBCs are a mechanism to pull together UN system-wide expertise to respond to the identified regional challenges and development issues. The objective of establishing IBCs was to avoid silo-ed approaches considering the indivisibility of the SDGs and to focus the UN system support and engagement on development challenges and issues, not on UN agencies' individual mandates.

Reacting to pressing challenges, the regional UN set up two new IBCs on Sustainable Food Systems and on Environment and Climate Change in 2020, while the existing IBCs are covering social protection; health and well-being; large movements of people, displacement and resilience; gender equality; and youth and adolescents.

As most IBCs in the region were established before the UNDS reform at the regional level, Regional Directors conducted a review of the IBCs in the region in 2020. This was done to ensure that IBCs respond to priorities in the region and are optimally equipped to respond the UNDS reform expectations. The review showed a strong consensus about specific areas where IBCs should be engaged, based on past results and emerging regional and country needs. Following this review, a management response plan was developed, containing clear next steps and deadlines for the implementation of the recommendations.

Other pre-existing groups, such as the Regional Peer Support Group (PSG), which provides substantive support to the UN Country Teams in the region that are guided by a UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), were incorporated under the RCP. To facilitate cooperation and collaboration in the field of digital transformation and

provide support to the regional UN system, a Digital Transformation Group was also established.

[Recommendation 2: Establishing a strong regional knowledge management hub](#)

A regional knowledge management hub is being developed to provide consolidated access to knowledge products and expertise of the regional UN system. Three elements are being considered in this context: knowledge products such as publications, reports or guidelines; expertise of UN staff in the regions; and data management.

Regarding access to knowledge products, cooperation is ongoing with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which has been developing a comprehensive and technologically advanced search tool for UN knowledge products named MANARA. The tool uses artificial intelligence to identify and describe products the user is searching for. The MANARA system will be adapted to the region and rolled out in the course of 2021.

Regarding the expert roster, the RCP expressed its preference for a system in which the IBCs would identify staff members or relevant experts that are available for support and deployment as part of the IBCs' menu of services that are offered, in particular, to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams. This would be limited to an interagency type of support and would not include support requests to individual agencies pertaining to their specific mandates. These support offers will be integrated in the menus of services that are being prepared by the IBCs.

To enhance access to SDG data and related resources and tools, a [Knowledge Hub on Statistics for SDGs](#) was launched by UNECE in December 2019, and a [dashboard and database of SDG indicators](#) were launched in March 2020.

[Recommendation 3: Enhancing transparency and results-based management](#)

The present results report has been prepared in response to this SG recommendation, as highlighted in the introduction, recognizing that it is a transitional report since the RCP was formally established in December 2020. The first annual results report of the RCP will be presented in 2022.

[Recommendation 4: Consolidating capacities on data and statistics](#)

A Regional Coordination Group for Data and Statistics was established in 2020 in response to this recommendation. Overall, the group aims at building a cooperation between the UN at regional and country levels and the intergovernmental sphere, with a strong connection to the statistical processes at the global level.

The group met five times during the year. The outcomes of the group's work are reflected in the section on the results highlights.

Recommendation 5: Increasing regional efficiencies through common back offices

The objective of recommendation 5 is to identify opportunities and leverage structures and capacities that already exist in the system to increase the quality and reduce the costs of operations at the regional level.

A first step at the regional level will be identifying the operational supply and demand. This will be determined following the development of the regional Business Operations Strategy (BOS), which will be driven in 2021 by the Regional Operations Management Team (R-OMT), established in October 2020 and co-chaired by UNDP and UN Women for the next two years (2021-2022).

3. Regional challenges, current opportunities and strategic UN response

a) Main challenges to sustainable development in the region

Already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards the SDGs in the 53 countries of the Europe and Central Asia region, largely consisting of high- and upper-middle-income countries, has been mixed. A common trend across the region has been increasing inequality, as evidenced by a declining labour share of gross domestic product in many countries, and to below 50% and a number of countries, and below average real income growth of the bottom 40%², running counter to the ambition of leaving no one behind. In some cases, the increase in inequality has been accompanied by persistent unemployment, including among young people, and the marginalization of the most vulnerable population groups. Many countries in the region will experience negative population growth over the coming years. Migration flows to and within the region are among the highest globally. The Europe and Central Asia region is home to 144 million international migrants representing close to half of the world's international migrants. The proportion of migrants relative to total population within the region is 8.7%, which is more than twice the world average of 3.5 %. The devastating socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on many parts of the world could further increase the potential for mixed migrant and refugee movements towards the region.

The persistence of gender disparities continues to hold back a faster pace of improvement across multiple goals. For instance, the share of women among managers and local government representatives is close to gender parity in only a few countries in the region.³

Unresolved conflicts and political instability represent a major impediment to sustainable development in parts of the region.

Additionally, despite advances, meeting environment-related goals remains yet out of reach for many countries. The overall material footprint per capita is elevated, and biodiversity loss remains an important concern. Progress in reducing CO2 emissions in the region has been

² UNECE, Is the UNECE region on track for 2030?, Assessment, stories and insights, Geneva, 2021, available at: <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/SDG-Report%202021%20Embargo%2015March.pdf>; UNECE, Snapshot Report: SDGs in the UNECE region, Geneva, 2019, available at: https://unece.org/DAM/RCM_Website/RFS_D_2019_SDG_Snapshot_Report.pdf.

³ UNECE, Towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the UNECE Region, Geneva, 2020, available at: https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2020/SDG_report_for_web.pdf.

slow and emissions per capita remain significantly higher than global averages. For example, CO₂ emissions from fuel combustion per capita in Europe are approximately 60% above world average.

Climate action in the region remains insufficient to combat climate change, and the need to reconcile economic growth with social progress and environmental sustainability is urgent. Moreover, there are nine Landlocked Developing Countries in the region, primarily in the Caucasus and Central Asia, which face special trade and development challenges.

b) Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Against this background, the unfolding COVID-19 crisis has had drastic negative consequences for people, economies and societies in the region throughout most of the year 2020. It constitutes a major setback across multiple SDGs, reversing development gains and exacerbating adverse trends that predate the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging evidence points to negative impacts in particular on education (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).

Most immediately, with over 26 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and over 580,000 confirmed COVID-19 deaths in 2020 in the region⁴, the pandemic has affected the lives and health of many people, and has put health systems under extreme pressure.

Moreover, the imposed lockdowns, mobility restrictions and sanitary measures caused a dramatic worsening of the socio-economic situation with large implications for household incomes and employment. The 27 member states of the European Union (EU) are expected to have seen an economic contraction of 7.8 per cent in 2020, and unemployment increasing by almost 1 percentage point to 7.5%, leading to further rising inequality. The pandemic also caused depressed economic activity and widespread disruptions in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, exacerbated by declining remittances and volatile conditions for external financing. The GDP decline for the CIS and Georgia is estimated at 3.4% in 2020, with more negative impacts in some CIS countries caused by lower prices for oil and other commodities. The impact of the pandemic on the countries of South-Eastern Europe has varied, but was adversely affected by the worsening economic situation in the EU, the main destination for its exports and a source of investments and remittances. Countries with high public debt and a significant share of the tourism sector in overall output, including Albania and Montenegro, are expected to have contracted by 6-11 per cent in 2020.

The magnitude of those downturns has depended on a country's economic structure and its capacity to adopt offsetting measures.⁵

The decline in economic activity reflects supply shocks from the disruption of global value chains and demand shocks from reductions in spending on travel, tourism, trade and other sectors.

⁴ Statement by Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, Copenhagen, 7 January 2021, available at: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/statements/2021/statement-covid-19-a-challenging-start-to-2021,-new-covid-19-variants-and-promising-vaccine-progress>

⁵ United Nations, [World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021](#), New York.

Despite the recovery expected in 2021, output losses for the region as a whole are expected to be longer-lasting, and progress in advancing the 2030 Agenda is at risk of being derailed. A strong fiscal response was necessary to address the emergency social and health situation and provide an economic stimulus, but it would leave on its trail a massive increase in public debt.

Furthermore, the pandemic and its socio-economic impact have exposed pre-existing weaknesses and systemic inequalities and worsened trends in a number of critical areas for sustainable development:

- **Gender equality:** The pandemic has intensified inequalities for women and girls in various ways - women are more likely to be front-line health workers; women bear exacerbated burdens of unpaid care work; women are hit harder by the economic downturns because they are more often engaged in short-term, part-time or informal employment; domestic violence increases with restricted mobility; and overstretched health services often divert resources away from services women need.⁶
- **Social protection:** While a number of countries, including most member states of the European Union (EU), have mature and relatively comprehensive social protection systems in place, there are some important gaps. In other parts of the region, especially in Central Asia, social protection systems face challenges of fragmentation, low levels of public social spending, limited coverage and inadequate benefit levels. Estimates indicate that a little over 85% of the labour force in Europe and Central Asia - representing less than half of the working-age population - is legally covered by social protection, but de facto coverage is considered lower due to practical barriers of access and under-registration. This includes areas such as sickness benefits, unemployment protection or old-age pensions.⁷ COVID-19 is exposing critical gaps in social protection coverage that undermine social security.
- **Youth:** Although children, adolescents and young people seem less vulnerable to the immediate health consequences of COVID-19, they face a number of risks and consequences related to the pandemic, including on their health, education and employment prospects. For instance, youth unemployment in the EU, which represents a serious challenge, increased by 2 percentage points to 17% in 2020.
- **Digital access for all:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of Internet connectivity has helped maintain business continuity, keep children in education, and ensured that people in the region can access essential goods and services online. Europe is the region with the highest Internet usage rates worldwide, with over 80% of individuals using the Internet, and still over 70% in the CIS region. However, the pandemic

⁶ UN Regional Issue-based Coalition on Gender Equality, Gender Equality and the COVID-19 Outbreak, 2020, available at: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/04/final%20ibc%20gender%20guidance%20note%20general%20english.pdf?la=en&vs=3842>

⁷ UN Regional Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection, COVID-19 and social protection in Europe and Central Asia, 2020, available at: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/IBCs/Social_Protection_Brief_v1_publication.pdf

has also exposed significant areas of inequality and exclusion in the digital world, pointing to the need to provide access to information and communication technology for all.

- Migration, forced displacements and resilience: The Europe and Central Asia region hosts over 11 million refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers, refugee returnees and stateless persons, and is home to 57 per cent of the world's international migrants. The region is also a major sender and recipient of international remittances, and Europe and Central Asia are expected to be affected by the steepest drop in remittances worldwide, with inward remittances estimated to fall by 16 percent in 2020. Solutions to the pandemic will therefore need to address the specific vulnerabilities of migrants as well as forcibly displaced populations, including their exposure to high-density living conditions, such as in camp or camp-like settings, exploitative situations, health risks, xenophobia, violence, and lack of access to services. Inclusion of these populations in national response plans as well as maintaining a positive protective environment are equally important.
- Food: Against the background of a general need to strengthen sustainable food systems in the Europe and Central Asia region, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the food supply chains, including through trade restrictions on food and reduced mobility of workers. Increased efforts are needed to ensure that food value chains function well and to promote the production and availability of sustainable, diversified, safe and nutritious food for all.

While the status of SDGs related to people and prosperity has clearly worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some goals related to the environment and climate have been affected positively. Some environmental pressures have abated because of lower economic activity. However, this is a temporary respite that does not reflect policy or structural changes. Looking ahead, the COVID-19 crisis underscores the need to prevent large-scale environmental crises and address vulnerabilities and disaster risks.

c) Opportunities related to a sustainable COVID-19 recovery

In some areas, the changes that occurred and the measures that were taken in response to COVID-19 may also provide opportunities to strengthen a sustainable recovery and to revive and accelerate SDG progress:

- Fiscal stimuli and increased public spending associated with the COVID-19 response can make a significant contribution to advancing sustainable development, provided they include incentives, conditions and measures for 'building back better'. In addition, time-bound programmes designed to stimulate the sending of remittances and to promote the inclusion of returnees or remittance-recipients can support economic stabilization in parts of the region.
- The COVID-19 pandemic may accelerate sectoral shifts in activity, such as towards new and innovative technologies. Digitalization, automation, and technologies such as blockchain and artificial intelligence will facilitate new business models and create employment opportunities.

- The COVID-19 crisis is likely to reinforce pre-existing trends towards carbon neutrality and more sustainability in areas such as mobility and tourism. Those trends, in particular carbon neutrality, would be further affected by policy choices. The region includes a number of energy producers for which these changes may be challenging. Those trends would have both positive and negative effects on employment, emphasizing the importance of just transition mechanisms that ease workers' adaptation.

d) Strategic response by the UN system in Europe and Central Asia

In view of the longer-term challenges to sustainable development in the region and the pressing needs emanating from the COVID-19 crisis, the UN system at the regional level is focusing its joint action on substantive, technical and operational support on cross-cutting issues and key bottlenecks as well as on harnessing opportunities for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery. The thematic coverage includes health and well-being; gender equality; youth and adolescents; social protection; large movements of people, displacement and resilience; environment and climate change; and sustainable food systems.

Much of the collective activities and products in these areas are geared towards all member States of the region, regardless of their level of development, as related challenges exist across the region, albeit with varying priorities and magnitudes. In addition, joint support is directed specifically towards countries and settings in the region with UN System development presences on the ground. In a survey launched by the UN in 2020 to mark its 75th anniversary, support on many of these critical challenges was a key expectation towards the UN expressed by many respondents from the region.⁸

The joint support from the regional level is complementary to the wealth of instruments and programmes offered by the individual UN entities within their respective mandates and to the support carried out at the country level through RCs and UNCTs. Crucial support at the country level would include, for instance, the assessments of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 carried out so far⁹ and of socio-economic response plans¹⁰.

Within the revamped regional architecture, joint action at the regional level is overseen and coordinated by the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP). It is mainly organized in multi-agency Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) and other regional interagency groups.

In addition to and separate from the RCP structure, the regional UN system work on conflict prevention and response is being conducted through a number of dedicated regional mechanisms, including Regional Monthly Reviews, Inter-Agency Task Forces and working groups, which are outside of the scope of this report.

Using the opportunity of the repositioning of the UN Development System at the regional level, the IBCs were reviewed in 2020 and recommendations were made through a dedicated

⁸ For the surveys and dialogues marking the UN's 75th anniversary, see <https://un75.online>.

⁹ Socio-economic impact assessments are available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus/socio-economic-impact-of-covid-19.html>

¹⁰ Socio-economic response plans are available on the [COVID-19 Data Portal at \(uninfo.org\)](https://www.uninfo.org/).

response management plan to further strengthen their functioning and provide insights on how to ensure they are equipped to respond to the UNDS reform expectations. Recommendations from the review are being implemented and will further strengthen the impact of the IBCs, including through clear support offers, enhanced accountability, and increased and more systematic outreach to country teams.

Based on this strategic approach and architecture, the highlights of the results jointly achieved by the regional UN system in 2020 are laid out in the following section.

4. Highlights of system-wide results at the regional level

In 2020, the UN system in the region achieved results in a number of areas:

- Provision of support on common regional and transboundary challenges.
- Joint contributions to regional intergovernmental processes on SDG implementation.
- Strengthening of operational support to Resident Coordinators (RCs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs), and enhancing the efficiency of UN operations in the region.
- Provision of data and statistics support.

a) Addressing common regional and transboundary challenges

To address regional, subregional and cross-border challenges, the UN system in the region provided support and prepared policy guidance and tools to be taken up directly by member States across the region or via RCs and UNCTs in the countries concerned. The support addressed the pressing needs of the COVID-19 crisis as well as a number of issues covered by the IBCs.

COVID-19

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the regional UN system has significantly stepped up its activities in support of the COVID-19 response. A total of nine regional UN system meetings were held in 2020 to coordinate the regional-level support measures, which was provided in addition to the massive support at the country level and by individual agencies. The latter covered crucial issues such as the health response, vaccination strategies, school openings and countering the socio-economic impact of the pandemic.

IBC's have significantly intensified their engagement, particularly with RCs, including through webinars, development of knowledge products and conduct of consultation sessions. The efforts of IBCs to provide increased technical support and guidance during the crisis have resulted in increased awareness among RCs and members of UNCTs. In this context, the IBCs are developing a clear 'support offer' (menu of services) outlining modalities and thematic coverage of support.

As an immediate impact, the COVID-19 outbreak has put immense pressure on social protection systems across the region. In this context and as a result of the collaborative efforts of the Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection, governments and policy-makers have been

provided with a cutting-edge overview of options to use COVID-19 as an opportunity to expand and strengthen social protection mechanisms. This policy advice by the regional UN system was provided in a document on “[Covid-19 and social protection in Europe and Central Asia](#)”. The document describes key social protection interventions, including health protection, unemployment, family and child support, and measures against social exclusion and housing insecurity.¹¹

Furthermore, the IBC on Health and Well-being supported member States in developing COVID-19 Country Preparedness and Response Plans. These plans outline the public health and essential health services needed to prepare for and respond. In addition, the activation of the WHO/UN/Red Cross Regional Platform for COVID-19 has been integrated into the IBC. The platform enables discussions to be held on Strategic Preparedness and Response Plans, humanitarian response plans and country-specific challenges. This has facilitated a tightly coordinated and harmonized multisectoral response, which is not only saving lives but is also reaching beyond the health sector to support and inform member States in shaping the wider COVID-19 response and building back better.

Further, policy-makers in the region were provided with access to evidence, analysis, tools, and best practices on COVID-19 and food systems. This is the result of a [repository](#) launched by the IBC on Sustainable Food Systems, set up in early 2020.

Climate Change and Environment

Beyond the immediate urgencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, tackling the climate and environmental crisis remained a priority of the regional UN system in 2020.

The IBC on Environment and Climate Change, established to respond to this priority at the regional level, provided consolidated access to [resources](#) on COVID-19, the environment and climate change. This collection includes guidance for member States on building back better their economies, create jobs and support businesses, while bearing in mind better air quality, water and sanitation, waste management and biodiversity protection, as well as reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, UNCTs and RCs can now select from a [menu](#) and request support services related to the environment and climate change. This includes policy advice, advisory services, capacity development, scientific data sharing and outreach and communication, offered by the IBC on Environment and Climate Change. Task teams have been established under the IBC to respond to the thematic demands of UNCTs.

Further, UNCTs are now equipped to advise governments on “greening” recovery plans following the COVID-19 outbreak. UNCTs have access to [recommendations](#) by the IBC on post-COVID recovery strategies and a “rebuilding- better” approach. They can also use a COVID- and environment-related compendium of measures to green the post-pandemic recovery, as well as [materials](#), including on waste management.

In addition to the collective action carried out by the regional UN system through the established IBCs, results were achieved through collaborative efforts of a limited number of regional UN entities. The Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE

¹¹ The document was publicly launched with over 100 participants, recorded and published on [YouTube](#).

PEP), co-serviced by UNECE and WHO, issued guidance documents in 2020 on [creating jobs in green and healthy transport](#) and [sustainable mobility](#) that are relevant to a post-COVID context. As a result of a [joint value proposition](#) on climate and health published by UNDP and WHO, member States in the region now have improved knowledge about entry points and possible interventions to address climate change and health.

In addition, decision-makers now have specific, subregional recommendations on how to address the cascading risks of multiple natural disaster occurring simultaneously or one after another. This was done through assessing the lessons learned by National Disaster Risk Authorities in the region, supported by UNDRR and UNDP and compiled in a forthcoming report. UNCTs in the region are now better able to support governments in monitoring the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

[Large movements of people, displacement and resilience](#)

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the IBC on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience called for the inclusion of migrants, refugees, IDPs, stateless people and vulnerable communities in response plans and socio-economic assessments in a coordinated and consistent manner. This was the result of [key messages and advocacy points](#) formulated by the IBC. Further, a new Community of Practice made it possible to better manage and share knowledge for UNCTs and national UN Networks on Migration.

[Sustainable Food Systems and Food Security](#)

To support sustainable food systems in the longer term, member States can now be better supported by UNCTs in adopting a food systems lens in the development and revision of national processes, e.g., COVID-19 National Recovery Plans. Further, UNCTs can now better guide countries in preparing country dialogues for the Food Systems Summit in 2021. This is the result of a technical note drafted by the IBC on Sustainable Food Systems to be published in early 2021, and two webinars with UNCTs on measuring the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition. In one of these webinars, UNCTs also had the opportunity to get familiarized with the concept of child-friendly food systems, especially in the context of the pandemic in the region. A child-friendly food system is responding to the special needs of children by promoting healthier diets among them.

In addition, governments and decision-makers in the region have now access to a multi-sectorial assessment of progress, trends and emerging issues related to food security, nutrition, health, and climate change (SDGs 2,3,13). This is the result of a regional overview in 2020 of food security and nutrition in the region to be published in early 2021. For the first time, such an overview was prepared jointly by six UN agencies.

[Digitalisation](#)

In 2020, the UN system has provided support on several strategic issues for digitalisation in the region, spearheaded by the Digital Transformation Group of the regional UN system. This includes digital solutions to advance the SDGs, the participation of women and girls in the digital sector, digital agriculture, and raising financing to connect every school to the internet.

Governments and partners will soon have access to good practices and inspiration for digital solutions to advance the SDGs. This is the result of a stocktaking exercise in 2020 that collected and described flagship digital transformation initiatives of the UN in the region. The exercise was carried out by the Digital Transformation Group.

Further, eight Member States can now implement recommendations on how to improve participation of women and girls in the digital sector in education and entrepreneurship. This is the result of a regional study supported by the Digital Transformation Group, UN Women and ITU.

Member states also have access to an overview of digital agriculture in 18 countries of Europe and Central Asia. This is the result of a [study](#) published by ITU and FAO. This cooperation aims at closing the digital, rural and gender divides, known as the triple divide, to include all members of society in this unprecedented transition.

In addition, nine countries in the region now have information on financing opportunities to connect every school to the internet. Together with country profiles, this study will be published in early 2021. This is done under the umbrella of the [Giga](#) initiative by UNICEF and ITU launched in 2019.

Gender Equality

To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the region, the IBC on Gender Equality has been actively engaged in supporting UNCTs and producing technical guidance.

Within the context of the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the IBC on Gender Equality organized a virtual dialogue with over 100 women leaders and change makers from the region to discuss women's key role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making. The dialogue provided an important platform to share experiences and inspire women's contributions towards peaceful change and gender equality through political participation. The event also aligned with the priority theme of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2021 "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls".

UNCTs are better able to integrate gender aspects into national recovery plans and UNCT socioeconomic impact assessments and response plans for COVID-19. UNCTs have now access to key messages, advocacy points and recommendations in a regional [guidance note](#). UNCTs also have specific guidance, key messages and country examples provided through a [repository](#), which includes practical tools, guidance and country examples in areas such as violence against women and girls, unpaid care work, gender data, women's role in decision-making and women health workers. Further, there is now a mapping of gender-targeted COVID-19 interventions to support UN system coordination and showcase examples of good practices. This was achieved through the IBC on Gender Equality.

In addition, the IBC on Gender Equality prepared an [advocacy brief](#) on the Istanbul Convention, which summarizes core principles from the comprehensive framework of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and answers Frequently Asked Questions in English and Turkish.

Moreover, UNCTs now have regional guidance on what to factor in and how to engage adolescents and young people in assessing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and in recovery. The [guidance](#) includes practical tools and links to knowledge products. It was published by the IBC on Adolescents and Youth.

In addition, agencies worked together in various other collaborative settings and provided support, for instance, on an online platform for asylum procedures, on [COVID-19 and women living with HIV](#), and a model cooperative of vulnerable Afghan, Syrian and Turkish women.

Ageing

In recognition of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on older persons in the region, which hosts the world's largest proportion of older people, UNFPA, WHO and UNECE launched a new joint initiative on ageing: "Building forward better in light of COVID-19: Upholding the rights and dignity of older persons through health, social care and enabling environments in Europe and Central Asia." The programme aims to promote preparedness and emergency response to mitigate the risks for older persons during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, support the delivery of person-centred integrated health and social care for older people, and strengthen the human rights of older persons and create participatory and enabling environments.

b) Positioning regional priorities at the global level

In 2020, the regional UN system provided joint inputs to regional intergovernmental processes.

The annual *Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region* was scaled down to a virtual half-day meeting in March 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the virtual sessions of the Forum was jointly organized by the regional offices of UNEP and ITU, addressing the theme of "Economic transformation, finance and technology for SDG acceleration". The session resulted in key messages on the importance of finance and technology in creating greener products and services that were conveyed to the [regional session](#) at the global 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, as part of the official meeting report of the [2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#).

Moreover, for the first time, member States in the region have [reviewed progress](#) on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). During this first regional review in November 2020, 360 stakeholders participated, and 27 member States submitted written [inputs](#). The IBC on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, serving as the Regional UN Network on Migration, played a key role in the preparations of the regional

review and also supported related civil society consultations to ensure a whole-of-society approach is integrated in the GCM implementation and review.

In addition, in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees, the regional UN system, through the IBC on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, supported the follow up to the Global Refugee Forum and organized regular sessions with UN agencies at the regional level and with RCs and UNCTs on achievements, gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Forum pledges.

c) Supporting operations of UNCTs, RCs and RCOs at country level

UNCTs, RCs and RC Offices (RCOs) at the country level are now receiving enhanced support from the Regional Peer Support Group (PSG) to carry out their work, in particular in the development of Common Country Analyses (CCAs) to underpin the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), which is at the core of the UNDS reform as the instrument for providing a coherent, strategic direction for UN development activities by all UN entities at country level.

CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks are systematically peer reviewed for quality by 17 UN entities¹² that regularly provide technical support and quality assurance in the PSG. In 2020, 16 CCAs and 11 UNSDCFs were supported and quality assured based on new quality criteria reflecting the spirit and expectations of the new UNSDCF guidelines. This included substantive guidance, solutions and options on issues faced by UNCTs, including methodologies for integrated approaches, and recommendations for technical experts.

Overall, there is an increase in engagement of the wider UN system in the UNSDCF process, enabling the UN to better utilize the breadth of policy expertise in support of sustainable development. A noticeable improvement in the quality of Cooperation Frameworks was noted in balancing sensitive normative issues and political realities. On the other hand, there remain opportunities and challenges to ensure genuine integrated approaches across several CCAs and UNSDCFs, in analysing the UN's comparative advantage and positioning within a wider partnership context, transboundary aspects and analysis of the financial dimensions.

Further, the PSG has developed and tested a concept for country dialogues. This should help to solicit regional expertise on the design as well as strategic advice from Regional Directors on priorities that reflect political and strategic considerations. To further improve exchange of knowledge and best practice, a review of lessons learned was conducted in late 2020 that will inform priorities for the following year.

The UN system in the region will soon have guidelines on mainstreaming environment and climate change considerations in planning frameworks. In 2020, a gap analysis of integrating environment and climate change into the UNSDCF processes has been completed. The objective of the guidelines is to strengthen the environmental dimension of CCAs, integrating environmental concerns across all outcomes in the UNSDCFs and enhancing the capacity of

¹² In 2020, membership in the PSG was expanded to include UNHCR.

RCOs and UNCTs in linking regional, subregional, and transboundary challenges with national priorities.

In addition, the UN system in nearly all countries in the region aimed at enhancing the efficiency of operations in 2020. To this end, it has developed Business Operations Strategies, a critical instrument to advance the UN Secretary-General's agenda. The UN started implementing the BOS 2.0, rolled out by the UN Development Coordination Office in the region. The BOS is a results-based framework on joint business operations. It aims at eliminating duplication, leveraging the common bargaining power of the UN, and maximizing economies of scale. BOS 2.0 is an improved, simplified, and more flexible and nimbler operations collaboration framework allowing UNCTs avoid costs and improve service delivery processes by implementing common services. BOS 2.0 with the BOS online platform has a dedicated space for development business analysis, hosting over 250 pre-recorded common UN services, and provides aggregated data of existing service provision structures from UNCTs.

As part of the UNSG's recommendation 5 package, BOS 2.0 will also be rolled out at the regional level, where the regional entities will be exploring cooperation opportunities via developing regional BOSs. This will be done with the support of a newly established Regional Operations Management Team (R-OMT) with terms of cooperation and work plans. With an approved annual workplan, R-OMT will be ensuring the implementation of the efficiency agenda at the regional level, as well supporting the UNDCO on achieving the UN Secretary-General's operational reform targets in the region.

d) Providing data and statistics support

The Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics was created as a regional version of the global Committee on the Coordination of Statistical Activities, which brings together over 40 UN and non-UN agencies working in the area of official statistics. As such, the Regional Coordination Group has reached out to the main non-UN and other UN agencies active in the region (e.g. Eurostat, OECD, CIS-Stat, IMF, World Bank), many of whom have nominated representatives to participate in group activities.

Policy makers in the region now have better access to data and statistics in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. This includes examples on how National Statistical Officers in the region have supported governments and the public dealing with the crisis and resources on COVID-19 and official statistics. A calendar of data and statistics capacity development events in the region is now publicly available at a dynamic [web portal](#) run by the *UN Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics*.

Additionally, with the support of the UN Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics, many UN focal points for statistics in the UN Country Offices of the region are now connected to the global statistical community.

5. Conclusion

The year 2020 was a period of transition to a new regional architecture while facing an historic pandemic as well as significant longer-term and structural challenges to sustainable development in the region. The regional UN system has responded to these challenges in an agile and targeted manner and has offered its support where it was most impactful and needed. As the implementation of the regional UNDS repositioning as well as of the recommendations of the regional IBC review will further accelerate, collaboration among the regional UN entities and support modalities will continue to be strengthened and aligned, reaffirming the importance of collective action taken by the regional UN system in Europe and Central Asia in a fully functioning new collaborative architecture. This will be reflected in the next annual regional results report to be prepared for the reporting period of 2021 and submitted to the 2022 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region.
