

# The importance of a continued focus on climate action in support of UNCT engagement with Governments in Europe and Central Asia

## Issue-based Coalition on Environment and Climate Change for Europe and Central Asia



### Key messages

Climate change is here and is having global and local impacts:<sup>1</sup>

- During 2021, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations reached a record level, 50 per cent higher than pre-industrial levels.
- 2021 was the world's sixth warmest year on record. The Northern Hemisphere surface temperature was at 1.09°C above the 20<sup>th</sup> century average.
- In 2021, a total of 432 catastrophic events were recorded, which is considerably higher than the average of 357 annual catastrophic events for 2001–2020.
- In 2021, Arctic sea-ice fell to its lowest July extent on record.
- 80 per cent of people displaced by climate change are women.
- By 2030, more than 2 per cent of total working hours worldwide will be lost because of heat stress on labour productivity.
- With high or very high confidence, we can see that, in Asia, health and well-being are being adversely impacted by heat, malnutrition, mental health and displacement.
- Similarly, in the European region
  - adverse impacts on mental health are being observed
  - structural changes and shifts in species ranges and behaviours are being seen in all ecosystems
  - agricultural and crop production is being impacted.
- **Key risks in Europe include**
  - risks to people, economies and infrastructures due to coastal and inland flooding
  - stress and mortality to people due to increasing temperatures and heat extremes
  - marine and terrestrial ecosystems disruptions
  - water scarcity to multiple interconnected sectors
  - losses in crop production, due to compound heat and dry conditions, and extreme weather.

### Background

One of three action points that emerged from the Annual *Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia* meeting and the Resident Coordinators and RCP Member Meeting on 5 April 2022 was: “IBC Environment and Climate Change to support development of key messages on importance on continued focus on climate action in support of UNCT engagement with Governments”.

This note responds to the action point. It looks at why climate change must continue to be a leading focus of communications between UNCTs and Governments in Europe and Central Asia (ECA), combined with some broad recommendations for action. A more comprehensive set of policy actions that might be taken across sectors and within key sectors is presented in annex; the policy actions are based upon practical recommendations made to individual ECA programme countries.

<sup>1</sup> Sources include Sixth Assessment Report, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Feb. 2022

## Climate change impacts are now being observed:<sup>2</sup>

- Widespread, pervasive impacts to ecosystems, people, settlements and infrastructure have resulted from observed increases in the frequency and intensity of climate and weather extremes, including hot extremes on land and in the ocean, heavy precipitation events, drought and fire weather.<sup>3</sup>
- Overall adverse economic impacts attributable to climate change, including slow-onset and extreme weather events, have been increasingly identified.
- Climate change:
  - has caused impacts on human health, livelihoods and key infrastructure, in urban and rural settings
  - is contributing to humanitarian crises where climate hazards interact with high vulnerability
  - has adversely affected physical health of people globally and mental health of people in the ECA region, and occupational health and safe at work as temperatures rise
  - has caused substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses, in terrestrial, freshwater and coastal and open ocean marine ecosystems
  - has reduced food and water security, through increases in frequency and intensity of extremes, so hindering efforts to meet SDGs.
- The triple planetary crises of climate change, pollution and nature loss are severely impacting human rights, including the rights to adequate food, water, education, housing, health, development and life.
- The climate crisis is this generation’s defining human and child’s rights challenge and is already having a devastating impact on the well-being of children also in the ECA region. The *Children’s Climate Risk Index*<sup>4</sup> shows that 9 countries in the region are ranked low-medium risk, 12 are ranked medium-high risk.
  - 41.9 million children (57%) in the region are exposed to more than six heatwaves per year
  - 32.4 million children (49%) in the region are highly exposed to water scarcity
  - 7.5 million children (10%) in the region are highly exposed to riverine floods

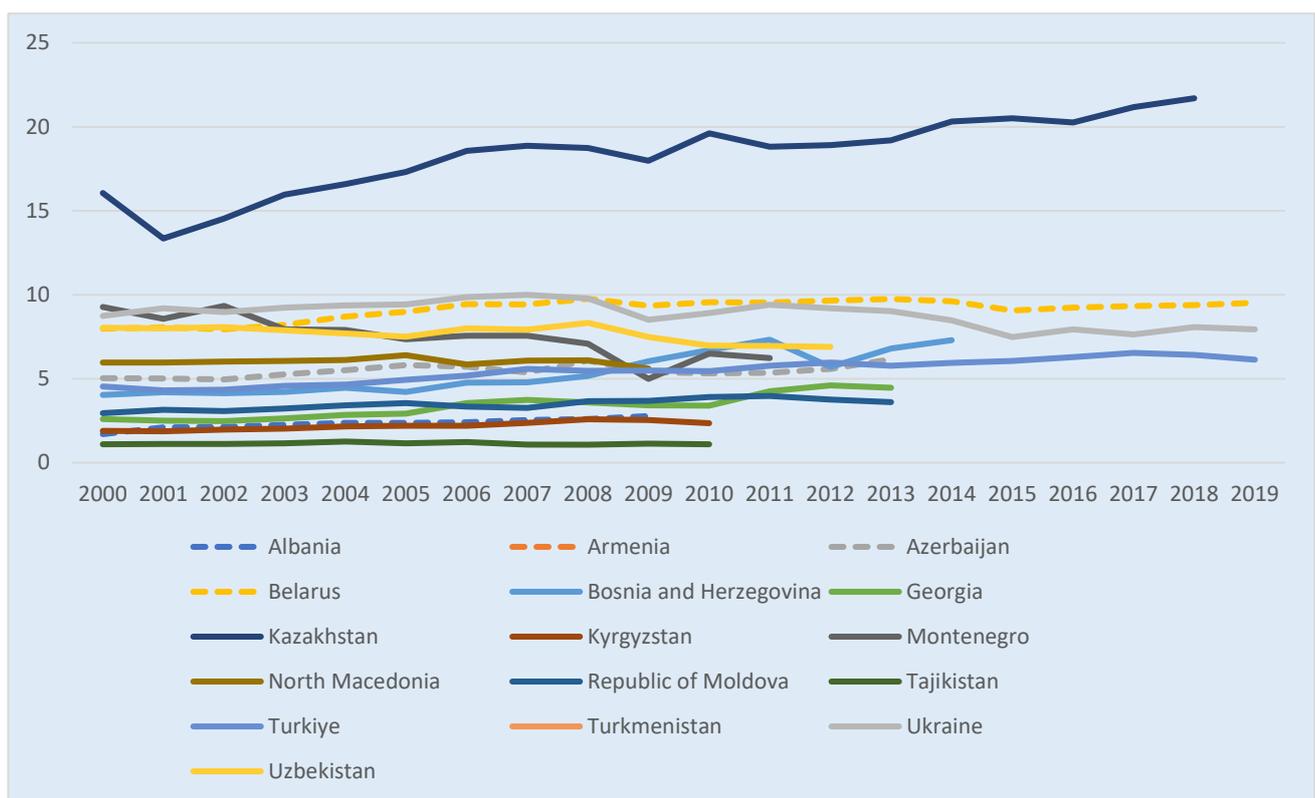


Figure 1: Total greenhouse gas emissions without LULUCF (t CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent) per capita, 2000–2019<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Based upon Sixth Assessment Report, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Insights into the state of the climate can be found in WMO statements: <https://public.wmo.int/en/our-mandate/climate/wmo-statement-state-of-global-climate>.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF (2021), *The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children’s Climate Risk Index*. New York: United Nations Children’s Fund. <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> UNDESA SDG Indicators Database (indicator 13.2.2; no data for Serbia) and UNECE Statistical Database, accessed 13 July 2022

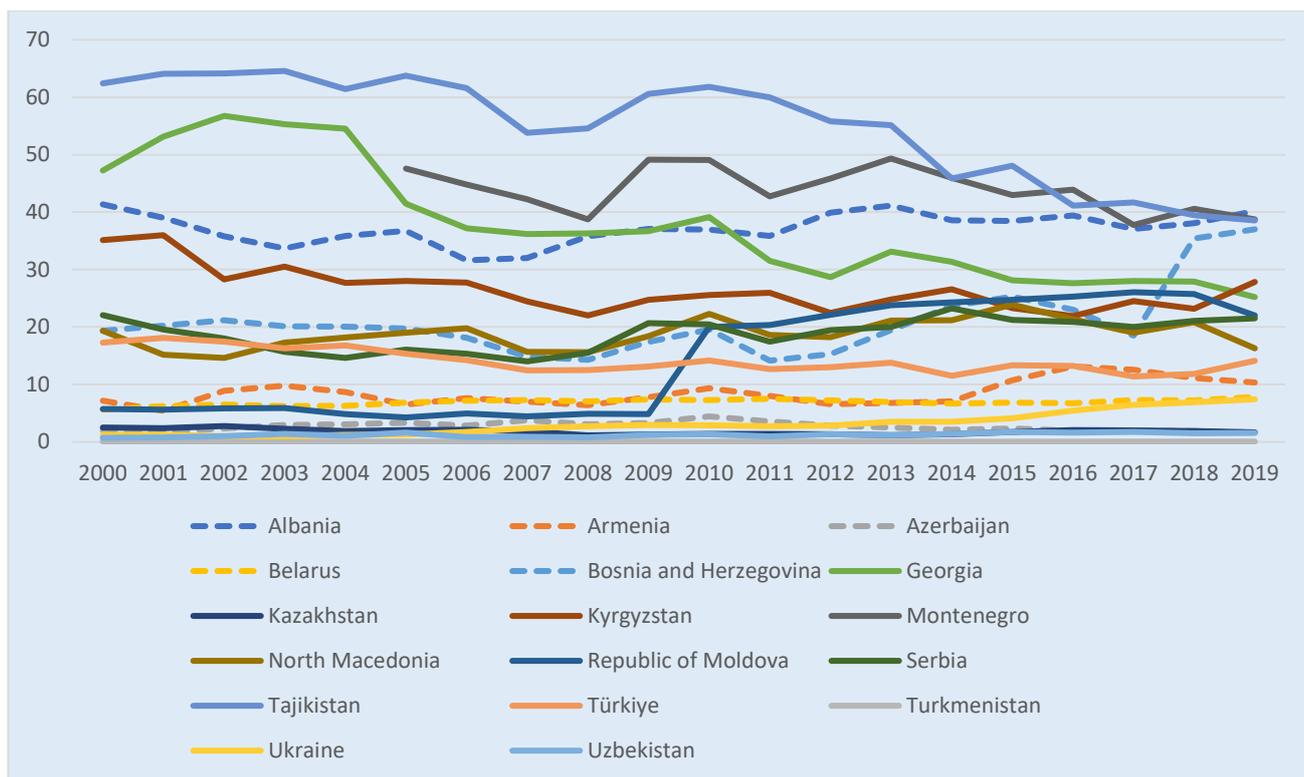


Figure 2: Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption (per cent), 2000–2019<sup>6</sup>

The **mitigation** commitments being made are inadequate to keep temperature rises below 2°C (let alone 1.5°C). Programme country Governments should be encouraged to:

- Keep NDC commitments under review and ratchet up ambition as soon as feasible, while also ensuring the needs and priorities of children, in particular, are addressed in them.
- Develop NDCs and Long-term Strategies (LTSs) in a consistent, coordinated manner, so that the short-term and medium-term commitments are consistent with the longer-term objectives.
- Develop and adopt a national mitigation strategy and related action plan, aligned with international commitments and ensuring a just transition of the workforce.
- Base national mitigation strategies (i.e. just transition plans) on social dialogue and develop them together with social partners and other key stakeholders.
- Develop a low-emission development strategy, in line with other recent strategies, with an action plan.
- Integrate mitigation issues into national and local policies, strategies, plans, programmes and budgets, notably in housing, transport, agriculture, urban planning, industry & mining, health and energy sectors.
- Ensure financial and human resources for the implementation of these different strategies and plans and continue funds mobilization.
- **Strengthen institutions and capacities:**
  - Strengthen the human capacities of the authorities that are most relevant for mitigation by establishing climate change units with a clear mandate for mainstreaming climate change in their sector and for coming together in a working group.
  - Promote and enhance coordination across relevant national institutions in the implementation of economic, social and environmental policies to make the relevant policies and actions coherent and effective.
  - Raise the level of expertise at national, regional and municipal levels, through capacity-development programmes in climate change issues, including just transition and green job creation.
  - Make legal and institutional preparations for implementation of projects under carbon market mechanisms. Designate a body for implementing such projects and entrust it with preparing ready-to-offer projects to investors.
- Reduce coal consumption and prioritize phase-out of coal.

<sup>6</sup> UNDESA SDG Indicators Database (indicator 7.2.1).

- Take practical measures:
  - Make just transition plans and take measures to phase out coal fast, increase use of natural gas as an interim replacement if necessary but limit investment in assets that will be stranded later.
  - Invest in renewables and work on electricity networks and storage solutions.
  - Take measures to improve energy efficiency of buildings, including social housing, as a priority, but also in energy-intensive industries.
  - Shift from fossil fuels in transport and mobility and, where possible, from personal cars towards electric and public transport and active mobility modes.
  - Switch from fossil fuel subsidies, which are both regressive and encourage consumption and thus greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, to social assistance measures for poor and vulnerable individuals and households affected by increasing prices and declining incomes.
  - Consider effects of mitigation measures on human well-being and ecosystems, including in transboundary basins, and facilitate cross-country coordination and discussion of such measures.
  - Invest in afforestation and raise awareness of farmers about mitigation.
  - Address the root causes of social inequality and injustice that contribute to putting people in vulnerable situations and at greater risk of suffering climate change impacts.
- Include those most affected – notably youth – as part of the solution to combat climate change, ensuring their equitable, effective and meaningful participation in climate action.

The **war in Ukraine** is impacting energy security and efficiency, but the climate crisis continues, so programme country Governments should be encouraged to:

- Avoid fresh investment in oil or coal sectors, except for emission controls. For example, new activities in exploration, development, production, import, export or use will likely lead to stranded assets.
- Reflect carefully on any fresh investment in the gas sector, except for emission controls or when replacing oil or coal sector assets, production or consumption.
- Rapidly transform the energy sector towards sustainable renewable sources as not only critical for mitigating climate and air pollution but also contributing significantly to energy security and sovereignty.

Climate change is impacting economies and society, above all persons in vulnerable situations. Governments should be encouraged to implement **adaptation** measures:

- Ensure that:
  - all climate measures that have an impact on the rights of indigenous peoples are implemented with their free, prior and informed consent
  - policies are based on gender disaggregated data and mainstream gender considerations
  - adaptation investments benefit all, including people and communities in vulnerable situations.
- Develop and adopt a national adaptation strategy and related action plan, building on a national climate change risk and vulnerability assessment and which support a just transition for all.
- Base the national adaptation strategy on social dialogue and develop it together with social partners and other key stakeholders.
- Develop and adopt a national strategy on disaster risk management taking an all-risk approach. Integrate climate change scenario modelling into the disaster risk profile.
- Ensure financial and human resources for the implementation of the strategies and action plans and continue fund mobilization for adaptation actions.
- Promote and enhance coordination across relevant national institutions in the implementation of economic, social and environmental policies to make the relevant policies and actions coherent and effective.
- Integrate climate change adaptation issues into national, sectoral and local strategies, plans, programmes and budgets, with measures to increase resilience of economic sectors.
- Facilitate communication, coordination and joint development and implementation of adaptation strategies and plans among countries in transboundary basins.