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2021 REGIONAL RESULTS REPORT OF THE

REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Executive Summary

In 2021, 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. The present annual report is prepared in response to the UN Secretary-General's Recommendation No. 3 on revamping the regional UN Development System architecture.

Multiagency Issue-based Coalitions operated in a complex environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic to respond to regional demands for policy advice and coherence, knowledge strengthening opportunities and advocacy. There is evidence of UN entities in the region jointly contributing to identified cross-region needs through specialized responses that addressed country and sub-regional issues, transboundary priorities as well as regional contributions to global forums.

Substantive and operational support to Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams was provided, including policy coherence and technical support for UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes. The Regional Business Operations Strategies have been advanced to strengthen business operations prioritizing a number of common services identified for their potential to increase efficiencies across the UN Development System.

Collaboration, targeted support and expertise at the regional level strengthened focus on the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and a post COVID-19 recovery. The report highlights results achieved in advancing the UN Secretary-General's reform agenda for the regional level; identifies regional challenges to sustainable development, current opportunities and the strategic UN response; provides highlights of system-wide results at the regional level; and indicates engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations and other regional stakeholders.

Introduction

In 2021, the regional UN system in Europe and Central Asia continued operating within the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) established in 2020. Comprised of over 30 UN entities, the regional UN system provides collective, multi-entity support to UN Country Teams and member States to advance the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This 2021 report seeks to advance the UN Secretary General's vision for regional support geared towards SDG achievement and is shared with member States on the occasion of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Region, taking place on 6-7 April 2022. This report focusses on the collective achievements and joint system-wide impact at the regional level, as well as on the strategic response of the UN system to development priorities of the region, and to the urgent needs resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

This report aims to enhance the transparency and results-based management priorities of the UN Development System (UNDS). In 2021, the RCP has further advanced joint action and the body of the report presents the achievements of the regional Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) and other regional interagency groups. IBCs are multi-agency coalitions coordinating the UN response to cross-cutting challenges emerging from country level demands in the region, and other regional interagency groups. Selected regional or sub-regional flagship programmes carried out by multiple agencies, joint contributions of regional intergovernmental processes and data and statistics support are also highlighted.

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

The repositioning of the UNDS at the regional level, as part of the overall UNDS reform, has enhanced collaboration, impact, transparency and efficiency of United Nations regional assets to support country level results. To this end, the UN Secretary-General has made recommendations in **five transformative areas to revamp the regional architecture**, which continued to be implemented in the Europe and Central Asia region in 2021 as follows:

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

Now in its second year, the RCP is serviced by a joint secretariat provided by the UN Development Coordination Office in 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 November 2020 – December 2021 focused on continued implementation of the regional UNDS repositioning and the key results of the seven regional IBCs and the other regional interagency groups.

In transitioning to a longer-term COVID-19 recovery, opportunities to accelerate SDG progress, and address human rights challenges and political crises and conflicts were among the major issues of concern to the RCP in the reporting period. IBCs support joint analytical work, joint advocacy and positioning, provide technical support to UNCTs and ensure knowledge sharing.

In response to the requirements of the regional UNDS reform as laid out by the UN Secretary-General, the ECA Regional Directors team decided to conduct an IBC review in the region that would support IBCs being fit for purpose and optimally equipped to respond to the new UNDS reform expectations[1]. The 2021 review and its recommendations has resulted in all IBC and working group TORs being revised to ensure:

- IBCs/inter-agency working groups are not operational entities tasked with project design or implementation, nor are they pursuing resource mobilization-related activities;
- Support provided by the IBCs and working groups to UNCTs is demand- and not supply-driven;
- IBCs'/working groups' accountability to the RCP;
- A Sunset Clause, outlining the conditions[2] under which an IBC/working group can discontinue its activities.

The IBCs have also developed individual Service Offers detailing a menu of support services[3] they can offer to UNCTs.

Recommendation 2: Establishing a strong regional knowledge management hub

Progress was achieved in 2021 towards the establishment of a regional knowledge management hub designed to provide consolidated access to knowledge products and expertise of the regional UN system. Funded by financial contributions of 15 RCP members, a virtual knowledge management hub was embedded in the new regional UN website, to be launched gradually in the first half of 2022. The knowledge hub is linked to the comprehensive and technologically advanced MANARA system developed by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which includes a search tool for UN knowledge products. The tool uses artificial intelligence to identify and describe products the user is searching for. The MANARA system will be adapted to the Europe and Central Asia region.

The knowledge hub will facilitate access of UNCTs and Member States to the expertise, resources, events and service offers of IBCs and

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[1] See Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, pg. 46
[2] Examples of such considerations could include, inter alia, insufficient engagement of a critical mass of IBC members, situations in which the work of

the IBC is taken over by other mechanisms or if the thematic area is no longer considered a priority for the reginal UN system for the coming year.
[3] Such services may include, inter alia, policy advice on the respective thematic area, technical support to UNCTs on the development of CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks, system wide knowledge management and information sharing.

groups on a range of cross-cutting regional priority issues. To enhance regional level expertise and UNCT access to SDG data and related resources and tools, the knowledge hub will also feature access to the UNECE Knowledge Hub on Statistics for SDGs, and the dashboard and database of SDG indicators.

Recommendation 3: Enhancing transparency and results-based management

The present results report of the RCP has been prepared in response to this UN Secretary-General recommendation, as highlighted in the introduction.

Recommendation 4: Consolidating capacities and knowledge on data and statistics

A Regional Coordination Group for Data and Statistics was established in 2020 and has consolidated its work throughout 2021, including technical contributions to the 2022 SDG Progress Report. As part of these efforts, the Group enlarged its membership to key non-UN entities active in data and statistics in the region, becoming more integrated into the global statistics community. At country level, the group has continued to provide downstream support to the UNCTs, including technical advice and contributions to knowledge products development and inter-governmental processes and events. More details are provided in a later section of the report.

Recommendation 5: Increasing regional efficiencies through common back offices

Recommendation 5 is part of the UN Secretary-General's efficiency initiatives and aims to leverage structures and capacities that already exist in the system to increase the quality and reduce the costs of operations at the regional level. Established in 2020, the Regional Operations Management Team (R-OMT) has consolidated its work in 2021 and is currently embedding the business operations expertise from 10 regional entities, co-chaired by UN Women and UNDP. Details on the results achieved by the R-OMT in 2021 are provided in a later section of the report.

Regional challenges, current opportunities and strategic UN response

Main challenges to sustainable development in the region

While the rebound of economic output worldwide has been a sign of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis in 2021, global issues continue to threaten people, societies, and the environment. Inequalities related to social protection and health services, aggravated by persisting gender disparities, are prevalent in the ECA region. Climate change continues to threaten ecosystems and food security, and the pandemic keeps highlighting the differences in digital access across the region, increasing challenges for young people, as well as impacting people's movement and migration.

Health and well-being concerns remain as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds in the region. As of December 2021, more than 169 million people have been infected and almost two million have lost their lives[4]. In addition to the challenge posed to people's safety and the livelihoods of the most vulnerable, enormous pressure has been placed on health care systems across all countries of the region, driven by reduced levels of physical activity and declining mental health. Priority is now given to the recovery and improvement of health care systems so as to mitigate a rise in noncommunicable diseases as well as improve mental health.

Issues of social protection challenge hinder the achievement of the SDGs in the region. While some countries have a good social protection response, there are response gaps across the region. The labour force in the Europe and Central Asia region is covered by legal protection mechanisms, but de facto coverage is much lower because of under-registration or practical barriers of access[5]. Economic insecurity, lasting poverty, and rising inequalities remain central among almost all countries, albeit at different levels. The post pandemic period provides an opportunity for governments to introduce new social protection measures or strengthen existing ones. It is now vital that

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[4] WHO Europe, Covid-19 situation in the WHO European Region, Accessed February 18, 2021. https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/ead3c6475654481ca51c248d52ab 9c61

[5] Issue-based Coalition on Social Protection (2020), COVID-19 and Social Protection in Europe and Central Asia

mobilised resources lead to well-designed mechanisms that deliver more equitable and sustainable outcomes for all categories of the population, especially groups at risk of being left behind such as women and girls, older people, and young workers.

Gender-based disparities, which exacerbate social and economic inequalities represent challenges for the region. At the current relative pace, it will take 134 years to potentially close gender gaps across the region.[6] Although the situation varies among different countries of the Europe and Central Asia region, issues such as women's and girls' access to education, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health services, women's economic opportunities, and persistent gender stereotypes are evident. These issues are even more visible for groups such as migrant women, women with disabilities, or from ethnic minorities[7]. Moreover, across the region, women represent one of the categories most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic[8]. The stress in balancing professional career with higher burden of unpaid domestic and care work, impacted further by school closures and lockdowns, has increased. Women have also been most affected by reductions in the workforce and firm closures[9]. At the intersection of gender and health, although progress has been made on maternal mortality, levels remain high in some countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and Central Asia, as reductions in health-care spending by governments affect women's access to reproductive and sexual health services[10].

Along with social and economic challenges, increasing environmental vulnerability continues to raise concerns in the region. Warmer temperatures, extreme weather phenomena such as droughts and floods, changing hydrology, and environmental degradation will have an impact on ecosystems as well as people's livelihoods. 2021 has been a turning point for the fight against climate change, with the publishing of the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The report has reiterated the urgent need to take concrete measures to address environmental challenges and reduce future emissions of climate-altering gases. In many European and Central Asian countries, the green transition has already

started, but structural transformations involve costs. The extensive influx of pandemic-related financing granted to many governments therefore represents an opportunity to boost the energy transition and transform business models.

As climate change causes environmental degradation, it impacts sustainable food systems and food security, which is exacerbated by the negative economic impact[11] of the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue is particularly relevant for children and young adolescents, which do not receive the nutrition they need to grow and develop. The pandemic has also highlighted the necessity of accessible food for all parts of the population.

Digitalisation also remains a priority factor for the achievement of the SDGs and improving people's lives. The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) plays an important role and allow the delivery of quality services in many fields, from education to health care, finance, commerce, governance, agriculture and others[12]. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalisation in the Europe and Central Asia region as a response to the mobility restrictions imposed. However, appropriate skills, sufficient infrastructures, institutional reforms, and capacity-building are necessary to unfold the potential of ICTs[13] and highly dependent on governments' ability to deploy them. For most countries, a limited skills base appears to be the most relevant constraining factor in advancing digitalisation[14]. Moreover, these factors are distributed unequally through the region, and there is a risk that countries fall further behind, especially those where advances before the pandemic had already been limited. Recovery funds are expected to support advancements in structural digital transformation.

While economic recovery and the lifting of COVID restrictions supported the reactivation of transportation systems and the tourism industries in 2021, the continued impact on people's movement and internal and external migration was noticeable. In some countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, mobility within the region is essential for many people to access education, improve their economic

[6] Global Gender Gap report, 2021, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf
[7] UNICEF (2021), Gender Equality Strategy in Europe and Central Asia 2021-2025
[8] UN Women (2021), The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia, https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/07/the%20impact%20of%20covid 19%20on%20womens%20and%20mens%20lives%20and%20livelihoods%20in%20europe%20and%20central%20asia.pdf?la=en&vs=5703

[9] The World Bank (2021), Gender Equality in Europe and Central Asia
[10] UNICEF (2021), ibid.
[11] Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems (2021), Specific Food System Challenges and Priorities in the Europe and Central Asia Region
[12] UN Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia (2021), Supporting Digital Transformation in Europe and Central Asia: Accelerating Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals
[13] UN Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia (2021), Ibid.
[14] EBRD (2021), Transition Report 2020-2021. System Upgrade: Delivering the Digital Dividend

conditions, or reunite with their families[15]. The pandemic has restricted labour migration and therefore remittances, in turn affecting local economies and migrant households[16]. The biggest challenges, however, are the impacts on millions of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, refugee returnees, stateless persons, as well as international migrants that the region hosts and that are encountering even more obstacles, experiencing growing xenophobia and discrimination, thus increasing patterns of illegal migration.

Adolescents and young people are also facing many challenges aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis. Restrictions in social interactions imposed by school closures and lockdowns[17] are impacting the mental health and stability of youth. Sexual and reproductive health also continues to represent an issue for this part of the population, exposing young boys and girls to sexually transmitted infections, with the HIV transmission rate in Eastern Europe and Central Asia being one of the world's fastest growing. Finally, youth unemployment has continued to grow over the past decade and is now further impacted by the pandemic[18].

Characteristics of COVID-19 economic recovery

In 2021, the economies of Europe and Central Asia started to recover from the contraction triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic actors adapted to pandemic constraints and public authorities became more reluctant to impose restrictions. In addition, external factors provided a favourable environment for economic expansion, amid growing trade. Commodity producers benefited from high prices while remittances recovered in the main recipient countries, exceeding pre-pandemic levels in some cases. After shrinking by 4.5 percent in 2020, GDP rose by an estimated 4.8 percent in 2021. In 27 countries of the region, around half of the total, output levels had already recovered to pre-crisis levels, whereas in 14 countries, output remained more than 2 percent below 2019[19]. In the countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Western Balkans, GDP per capita in 2022 is expected to still be around 2 percent below pre-pandemic projections[20] due to economic sectors such as tourism that suffered the most under the pandemic but contribute significantly to the economy.

As economic output recovered in the region, employment increased, exceeding pre-pandemic levels in some cases. For the EU as a whole, employment returned to 2019 levels by the end of 2021, while the unemployment rate was slightly below, including youth unemployment. Job retention schemes were rolled out, but the number of hours worked was around 3 percent lower. For the Europe and Central Asia region as a whole, the shortfall in hours is estimated to be around 3.4 percent[21]. Labour shortages that have appeared in some areas are constraining output growth and social inclusion. This reflects limited opportunities, skill mismatches and low female participation rates.

In the CIS, the reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty in 2021 is estimated to have offset less than half the 4.8 percent increase in 2020[22]. In the EU, social support stabilised the median household disposable income and the share of the population at risk of poverty, despite the fall in median employment income, in 2020.

Increased levels of public debt have been one of the legacies of the COVID-19 crisis, as support programmes were expanded while revenues plummeted. The resumption of economic growth in 2021 led to the reduction of the debt to GDP ratios, which nevertheless remained significantly higher than before the crisis. Debt increases have been larger in the high-income countries in the region which had less financing constraints. In programme countries, the median increase of the government debt to GDP ratio in 2019-2021 is estimated to be almost 10 percentage points.[23]

Whilst financing costs remained below pre-pandemic levels, ongoing shifts in monetary policy in high-income economies will continue to effect financing conditions. Higher market financing costs might constrain developmental spending. In EU member states, NextGenerationEU funding will support fiscal

15 ICMPD (2020), Migration and Mobility in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: What to expect in times of COVID-19?
16 FAO (2021), Seasonal Migration in Europe and Central Asia in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic
17 UNESCO (2022), Global monitoring of school closures. https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse
18 UNFPA, Adolescents and Youth, Accessed February 16, 2021. https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/topics/adolescents-youth

19 DESA (2022), World Economic Situation and Prospects 2022
20 DESA (2022), ibid.
21 ILO modelled estimates accessed at https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-time/
22 DESA (2022), ibid.
23 IMF (2021), World Economic Outlook, October

spending for structural transformation, but different absorption capacities will influence the ability of countries to benefit from this funding.

Economic expansion has brought growing inflation, driven by a combination of higher food and energy prices[24], stronger demand, and continued supply disruptions. In some countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, headline inflation reached double-digit levels, partly fuelled by exchange rate depreciation. Price increases have a stronger impact on lower income households, with utilities and food accounting for a larger part of their total expenditure, particularly in less advanced countries. Inflation erodes real incomes and can fuel poverty and social tensions. Whilst it is anticipated that inflation will decline, continued pricing pressures are expected.

The pandemic has changed attitudes and expectations of the role of the state. Public intervention is seen as central to providing economic security and the preservation of health in crisis situations. Whilst recovery and support programmes have increased public spending, including social spending[25], financing constraints may limit future spending plans and renew emphasis on institutional capacity and policies to maximise public spending for resource mobilisation.

Progress of SDGs post COVID in Europe and Central Asia

The unequal COVID-19 recovery and the challenges in major policy areas have impacted the attainment of SDG targets and indicators. Below are some key messages summarising the latest assessment[26] of SDG progress by the different countries of the region.[27] It is noteworthy that the availability of statistical data for monitoring the SDGs is improving, and progress for the UNECE region can now be measured against 105 targets, up from 89 in 2021.

1 NO POVERTY	With the exception of extreme poverty that is rare in the region, targets to reduce **poverty and income inequality** are not on track to be achieved by 2030.
2 ZERO HUNGER	Regional progress on **nutrition and a sustainable food supply** has been insufficient. Malnutrition still affects some young children in the region, and the pace of progress to eliminate stunting by 2030 is slow (indicator 2.2.1).
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	The region is on track to meet targets on **maternal and child mortality and road safety**. All other health targets require acceleration. Progress towards reducing the incidence and impact of communicable (target 3.3) and non-communicable diseases and improving mental health and well-being (indicator 3.4) is slow.
4 QUALITY EDUCATION	The region benefits from well-equipped schools and qualified teachers and most countries have already met these **education targets** (4.a and 4.c). Participation in early childhood education has increased steadily in the region during the last 20 years. However, disparities within and across countries persist in the form of unequal access to education between disadvantaged and healthy students, exacerbated by the pandemic.
5 GENDER EQUALITY	Progress towards only four of nine SDG targets on **gender equality** (goal 5) can be measured and the data that is available show slow progress. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women, both at home and at work. There are data gaps on gender equality in many countries, particularly in areas where progress is threatened by the pandemic such as violence against women and economic rights.

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24 In the EU, food prices rose by 4.3 percent year-on-year and energy by 22.9 percent in December 2021.
25 In the programme countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, the median public spending to GDP ratio in 2022 is projected to be 0.8 percentage points above pre-pandemic levels, while in the West Balkans is expected to be 2.5 percentage points higher.
26 UNECE (2022) [to be published], Halfway to 2030: How Many Targets Will Be Achieved in the UNECE Region? Snapshot and insights in 2022.
27 The report covers the following 53 countries of Europe and Central Asia, with special focus on the 17 countries with UN Resident Coordinators and UN

Country Teams present (marked in bold): **Albania**, Andorra, **Armenia**, Austria, **Azerbaijan**, **Belarus**, Belgium, **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, **Georgia**, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, **Kazakhstan**, **Kyrgyzstan**, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, **Montenegro**, Netherlands, **North Macedonia**, Norway, Poland, Portugal, **Republic of Moldova**, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, **Serbia**, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, **Tajikistan**, **Turkey**, **Turkmenistan**, **Ukraine**, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, **Uzbekistan**.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION **7** AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	Concerning **water and energy** (goals 6 and 7), the region has made good progress towards access to basic services such as drinking water (target 6.1) and energy (target 7.1). However, to ensure the availability and sustainability of water and sanitation, the region must speed up progress on sanitation (target 6.2), water quality (6.3), water-use efficiency (6.4), and international cooperation and national management of water resources (6.5). The proportion of water bodies with potentially harmful levels of pollution is increasing in one third of countries with data (indicator 6.3.2). In nearly one quarter of countries with data, less than half the population uses safely managed sanitation services (indicator 6.2.1), and only half of countries in the region have made progress towards reducing industrial pressure on renewable freshwater resources (indicator 6.4.2). Regarding energy, most countries have increased reliance on renewable energy (indicator 7.2.1) and improved energy efficiency (indicator 7.3.1), but acceleration is required to meet the 2030 targets.
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	Most of the targets on **decent work and economic growth** (goal 8) are progressing too slowly to be achieved, and the impacts of the pandemic – which has affected nearly every aspect of national economies – are not yet reflected in the data available for this assessment.
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	On the positive side, pandemic-related changes in **industry and transportation** may help propel the region towards sustainable and clean industrialisation (targets 9.2 and 9.4).
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	Progress on **reducing inequalities within and among countries** (goal 10) has been slow, mostly as a result of worsening financial stability in the region.
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	Poor data availability limits the assessment of progress towards **sustainable cities and communities** (goal 11) as only 4 out of the 10 targets can be measured. The region has made good progress towards adequate housing (target 11.1) and is on track to reduce air pollution in urban areas (target 11.6). Disaster risk reduction strategies have been adopted by many countries and local governments in the region (target 11.b), and evidence suggests these policies may be mitigating the economic impact of disasters (indicator 11.5.2). However, vulnerabilities persist as the number of people in the region affected by disasters (indicator 11.5.1) has increased in recent years.
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION **13** CLIMATE ACTION **14** LIFE BELOW WATER	New data provides a clearer picture of where the region stands on progress towards **climate** and **environmental** targets[28]. Progress towards reducing fossil fuel subsidies has slowed (target 12.c) and despite a previously positive outlook, the region is no longer on track to achieve the target. Greenhouse gas emissions among lower-income countries in the region continue to increase. Among high-income countries emissions are decreasing but not quickly enough to meet the 2030 targets (indicator 13.2.2). Regarding reducing marine pollution (target 14.1), conserving coastal areas (target 14.5), and combatting illegal fishing (target 14.6), the region is on track
16 PEACE AND JUSTICE STRONG INSTITUTIONS **17** PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	Budgetary pressure and economic contraction may stall progress towards peaceful and inclusive societies (goal 16) and global partnerships for sustainable development (goal 17).

[28] For a list of climate and environment targets and indicators, see United Nations Environment Programme (2019), Measuring Progress: Towards Achieving the Environmental Dimension of the SDGS. Nairobi: United Nations

Highlights of system-wide results at the regional level

Against this backdrop, the regional UN system has focused its joint action on substantive, technical and operational support on cross-cutting issues and key bottlenecks as well as on continuing to harness opportunities for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery. The RCP and its inter-agency mechanisms have continued, in 2021, to provide support to the UNCTs and the Resident Coordinator System in Europe and Central Asia on policy coherence, advocacy, technical advice in the development of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, as well as knowledge management and knowledge sharing. The thematic coverage has included health and well-being; gender equality; youth and adolescents; social protection; large movements of people, displacement and resilience; environment and climate change; digitalization; sustainable food systems; and data and statistics.

In addition to and separate from the RCP structure, the UN system focuses on the attainment of results in the areas of conflict prevention and response, 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.

Much of the collective activities and products in the thematic areas are geared towards all member States in the region, regardless of their level of development, and taking into account varying priorities. However, joint support is directed specifically towards countries and settings in the region with UN presence on the ground. Below are selected flagship results of the IBCs, other inter-agency groups and joint initiatives of UN entities in the region in 2021, in response to the regional challenges and in support of the work of UNCTs on the development priorities identified.

Addressing regional challenges, including those of cross-border/ transboundary nature

Health and well-being

Health and well-being, with special focus on the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery, immunization and ageing, was one of the thematic areas prioritized by the RCP for 2021. The IBC Health, with a freshly revamped Terms of Reference and a Service Offer, provided downstream **technical support to the UNCTs** in the region in the Cooperation Framework and Common Country Analysis (CCA) development processes. Additionally, strategic policy advice and technical support was provided to WHO country offices and partners across the Region in the implementation of the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (GAP). As part of these efforts, the IBC developed a guidance note (forthcoming) to support mainstreaming and elevating health and well-being in the UN sustainable development context, while also ensuring policy coherence across the region, describing how partners can collaborate better. Additionally, the IBC has provided technical support to UNCTs on the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines.

In terms of **policy advice**, under the lead of WHO and UNICEF, the IBC has supported the UNCTs in helping Governments restore immunization coverage. The IBC has also provided **advocacy support**, having developed, inter alia, guidance notes to address vaccine hesitancy among healthcare workers and vulnerable populations, as well as an information platform on COVID-19 (HealthBuddy+) to provide timely and evidence-based information on the disease and COVID-19 vaccines. Available on the web and as a mobile application, HealthBuddy+ uses artificial intelligence to interact with users through a chatbot.

In terms of regional level **knowledge sharing,** the IBC Health facilitated the regional launch of the Global Report on Ageism, together with the Government of Serbia.

Climate Change and Environment

Beyond the urgencies of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts, tackling the climate and environmental crisis remained a priority of the regional UN system in 2021.

The IBC on Environment and Climate Change focused its support to UNCTs on **technical assistance and trainings**, **policy advice** and **advocacy** on sustainable recovery after the COVID pandemic and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Thus, in terms of **technical assistance,** the IBC developed and launched a guidance note on mainstreaming environment and climate change in the Cooperation Framework processes, which has since been used in the development of the CCA, e.g., in Kyrgyzstan. The guidance note and the training provided increased awareness and understanding of RCOs and UNCTs on the importance of strengthening the environmental dimension of CCAs, integrating environmental concerns across all outcomes in the Cooperation Frameworks and enhance the capacity in linking subregional and transboundary issues with national priorities. The IBC also addressed several priority thematic issues identified by UNCTs, including, inter alia, air pollution from domestic heating in Serbia, good practices on Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation for Risk-informed and Climate-smart Development; and preventing water conflicts through transboundary water cooperation. This type of technical support provided RCs and UNCTs with data, tools and policy recommendations on how to assist member States in improving environmental management.

Moreover, as **policy advice**, the IBC developed a compendium of measures for a green post-pandemic recovery. The compendium equips RCs and UNCTs for providing their advice and support and offering concrete measures to governments in "greening" recovery plans.

In terms of **intergovernmental level advocacy**, the IBC contributed to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, discussing partnerships for a sustainable recovery and initiatives to accelerate the achievement of the environment and climate goals of the 2030 Agenda. These actions have resulted in increased awareness of member States regarding the importance of integrating environmental and climate change issues into post-COVID recovery strategies and supporting a "recovering better" approach.

Throughout 2021, the UN development system in UNECE also continued to provide joint **support to UNCTs and Governments in the region beyond the IBC-level work**. For example, the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), co-chaired by the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub and UNICEF, is a global partnership composed of 20 organizations aiming to strengthen countries' capacities to reduce exposure and vulnerability to disaster and climate risk across sectors. The project's engagement in the region has focused on the Kyrgyz Republic and a 'multi-sectoral capacity diagnosis report' with analysis and recommendations informing the national development plan. National Disaster Risk Reduction and CCA planning at national and local levels identified key challenges in a virtual scoping exercise in June 2021, as well as issues related to intersectoral coordination, governance, disaster preparedness and multi-hazard risk assessment capacity, damage and loss data management.

Large movements of people, displacement and resilience

With 7.9 million refugees and asylum-seekers, 2 million IDPs and 1.6 million conflict affected persons, the region hosts nearly 14 percent of the forcibly displaced worldwide. The region is home to 143.4 million international migrants and the proportion of migrants relative to the overall population within the region (11.7 percent) is more than three times the world's average (3.5 percent). The region is also a major sender and recipient of international remittances which reached $689 billion globally in 2019, surpassing official development assistance, underscoring international migration as a driver of economic development.

Against this backdrop, the IBC on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience, also serving as Regional UN Network on Migration (R-UNNM), with UNHCR, IOM and UNDP as co-leads, has continued to provide coherent support to the UNCTs towards advancement of the Global Compact on Migration and SDGs through exchange of information, development of advocacy messages, policy guidance and legislative changes affecting the resilience of migrants and refugees. A**dvocacy messages** on the inclusion of migrants and refugees in vaccination plans were developed and distributed to UNCTs, building on the 2020 IBC advocacy brief on the inclusion of migrants and refugees in COVID-19 response plans.

In terms of **technical support**, in 2021, the IBC , working with UNHCR and IOM in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in consultation with the RC, OHCHR and relevant entities, developed a regional engagement and operational plan to more effectively address migration and refugee issues. A UN Strategic Response in Bosnia and Herzegovina for Migrants, Asylum-Seekers and Refugees 2021-2023 was developed at country level with the IBC supporting the development of a regional "chapeau" to the strategy.

Social Protection–Disability and Social Inclusion

In 2021, the main focus of the IBC on Social Protection was disability and social inclusion. In coordination with the World Bank, the IBC provided **capacity-building**, **knowledge sharing** and **partnerships support** to the UNCTs for disability inclusion in the region, through a series of trainings focused on Disability-Inclusive Social Protection in ECA. The six-part webinar series consists of sessions on introductory concepts, disability assessment and determination, a set of lifecycle focused sessions (children, working age, elderly), and a concluding session on inclusive delivery mechanisms (two already delivered, with the remainder scheduled for early 2022).

Sustainable Food Systems and Food Security

Food systems and food security were priorities in 2021, with regional forums engaging member States resulting in wider knowledge around sustainability of food systems, leading to greater coordinated actions to address food security and nutrition challenges in the region.

In 2021, the IBC on Sustainable Food Systems **strengthened capacities** of UNCTs and tools to support member States in the preparation of the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). This is the direct result of the **technical support** and **guidance notes** developed by the IBC to support the Food Systems Summit national dialogues.

Additionally, in terms of **knowledge management**, the IBC has launched a regional community of practice on sustainability of food systems to provide key stakeholders with an inclusive and open digital space to share ideas, practices and knowledge on regional policy areas related to food systems. Member States also benefitted from the exchange of knowledge and policy experience through the Food Systems Summit regional dialogues organized by the IBC (e.g. "Policy and governance issues to transform food systems in Europe and Central Asia", May 2021).

Advocacy on the importance of food systems transformation was another key area of work for the IBC, targeting both UN country teams and member States. Such efforts have been conducted through the launch of the Food System Talks, a series of thematic dialogues focusing on the importance of systems transformation for achieving health of the people and the planet. Moreover, a policy paper with key messages related to COVID-19 and food systems has been developed by the IBC and will be released in early 2022.

Digitalization

In 2021, regional digitalization was advanced through policy guidance, innovation, knowledge sharing and technical support, including the development of roadmaps for digital transformation in a number of countries in the region. Expanded connectivity, sectoral application and relevance to social priorities including the aged and economic empowerment for women were all priority areas that benefitted from results around digitalization.

Within the framework of the UN Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia (UNDTG4ECA), flagship multiagency initiatives supporting digital transformation in the region have been implemented, providing **policy guidance** to UNCTs, while assessing the financial gaps at the regional and country levels. The results of such initiatives include knowledge products such as ICTs Solutions Stocktaking Report, Digitally empowered generation equality: Women, girls and ICT in the context of COVID-19 in selected Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries; Stocktaking Report: Digital Excellence in Agriculture - Good practices in the field of digital agriculture listing 171 innovative practices; and Connectivity in Education: Status and recent development in nine non-European Union countries.

To provide adequate support to RCs and UNCTs, the UNDTG4ECA undertook a consultative exercise to identify country-specific digital priorities and types of support that the Group could provide. Following this objective, and in response to specific requests, the Group has provided **technical advice** and **capacity-building** support through Data Protection Executive Trainings addressed to RCs, RC Offices and UNCT members in Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

In terms of **advocacy** efforts, the UNDTG4ECA held a series of flagship events, including in the framework of regional intergovernmental processes, positioning priorities at the regional and global levels and aligning their implementation with UN Processes. The events included the Cross-Cutting Session on Digitalization: Digital Transformation in the Wake of COVID-19 organized under the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development; and the thematic workshop Driving the WSIS Action Lines to foster digital transformation in Europe and Central Asia held within the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Moreover, within the framework of the Digital Transformation Group, several flagship

multiagency initiatives supporting digital transformation in the regions were implemented. As an example, UNICEF and ITU joined forces to connect every school to the internet[29] and made good progress in 2021 with four countries in Europe and Central Asia[30] (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kosovo[31]) in the process of connecting the most remote schools to internet through the GIGA initiative. The two agencies also developed the report "Connectivity in Education: Status and recent development in nine non-European Union countries", which provides a holistic overview of the situation in each country[32] with a view to equipping national stakeholders with the necessary understanding to address gaps and challenges as well as identify multi-stakeholder partnerships and financing mechanisms for investment in school connectivity.

Gender Equality

Gender Equality remained a priority in 2021, when the work of the IBC on Gender Equality (comprised of 14 UN entities and co-chaired by UNFPA and UN Women) focused on spearheading formal and informal dialogues to address gender equality challenges and opportunities across the region. The work of the IBC consisted in advocacy, policy coherence and technical support provided at both regional and country levels.

In order to better address the needs of the UNCTs, the IBC engaged substantially with UNCT Gender Theme/Result Groups in addressing regional and sub-regional challenges related to gender equality and women's rights and the advancement of SDG 5. This engagement resulted in a demand-driven work plan and menu of services to guide and inform the work of the IBC on Gender Equality moving forward. Gender equality challenges, including pushback on the rights of women and girls and on international commitments, were raised in regional fora and discussed within the UN regional system under the Regional Collaborative Platform, being followed up by **technical guidance** to UNCTs and RCs, including under the CCA and Cooperation Framework development processes.

Moreover, in terms of **support to policy coherence** and **advocacy**, the IBC facilitated the

regionalization of global commitments made under the Generation Equality Forums. The IBC provided targeted briefings for the regional UN System and UNCTs to facilitate strong participation and positioning of regional priorities during the Forums in Mexico and Paris.

In 2021, strengthened support to feminist movements in the region was a priority of the IBC. Commitments made through "Action Coalition 6" on Feminist Movements and Leadership were advanced through regional multi-stakeholder events that highlighted the need for flexible and accessible financing to women's civil society organizations, as well as the continued opportunities for networking and regional cooperation between feminist organizations.

The IBC co-chairs also convened an inter-regional dialogue with the Asia Pacific IBC on Gender and Human Rights to discuss the implications of the crisis in Afghanistan in the ECA region. Approaches to tackle the increasing trend of gender equality pushbacks in both regions were also discussed and further sharing of approaches and good practices was agreed to ensure inter-regional learning and South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

Youth and Adolescents

In 2021, the regional architecture provided **technical support** to UNCTs in engaging with youth around priority issues such as the green agenda, employment, mental health and skills development. Thus, young people were engaged in **policy dialogues** with Governments and youth networks on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people and proposed solutions for addressing key concerns of youth.

To enhance **advocacy** on priority issues related to youth and adolescents, the IBC worked with young people in organizing a Regional Forum on Sustainable Development roundtable on the impact of COVID-19 on youth and follow-up through strengthening of youth networks around key issues. Youth engagement, voices and views were heard around issues of health, social protection, jobs, climate change, forests, SDGs and digitalization as they participated as speakers in a number of Forum's round tables, identified and supported by the IBC.

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[29] Goals set within the GIGA initiative established in 2020

[30] Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kosovo* *All references made in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1244*

[31] *All references made in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1244*

[32] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine

Providing data and statistics support

The Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics continued its work in 2021. As part of these efforts, the Group enlarged its membership to key non-UN entities active in data and statistics in the region, including the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Eurasian Economic Commission, Eurostat, OECD and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, ensuring its progressively enhanced integration into the global official statistics community and bringing in more comparative and diverse perspectives. At country level, the group has continued to provide downstream advice, capacity-development and technical support on data and statistics to the UNCTs. Moreover, the Group has provided inputs to key SDG-related knowledge products (annual regional SDG progress report "*Is the UNECE region on track for 2030?*") and intergovernmental processes (e.g. Conference of European Statisticians Roadmap on Statistics for SDGs and the 2021 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development).

Achieving efficiencies

The Regional Operations Management Team (R-OMT) was established in 2021 and comprises business operations expertise from 10 regional entities, co-chaired by UN Women and UNDP. The R-OMT initiated the development of the regional Business Operations Strategy (R-BOS) through the establishment of R-BOS thematic working groups. that identified three common service areas of collaboration identified: Common Procurement, Common Administrative and Common Logistic Services

In addition to the development of R-BOS, the R-OMT continued to provide guidance to the UNCTs in terms of the Business Operations Strategy (BOS), Local Shared Services Center (LSSC) and Common Premises (CP) roll-out within the region.

Contributing to regional intergovernmental processes

The regional UN system collaborated in the organization of the 2021 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region, which culminated in hybrid plenary sessions in Geneva on 17 and 18 March 2021. Several IBCs and over 15 regional UN entities were engaged as lead organizers of and contributors to 12 virtual peer learning sessions, which discussed concrete policy actions by governments and other stakeholders related to the thematic clusters of people, prosperity and the planet.

Technical support to UNCTs, RCs and RCOs at the country level through quality assurance for the CCAs and Cooperation Frameworks

In 2021, the Peer Support Group (PSG), through technical and quality assurance, continued to strengthen the UN programming coherence of Cooperation Frameworks across the region. The quality of Cooperation Framework processes was increased including through review of and dialogues on roadmaps (Moldova, Ukraine, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), CCA (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine) and Cooperation Framework (Albania-2022, and Serbia-2021 rollout). The RCs were invited to present the Roadmaps and Theory of Change to the RCP members, products that have been developed with the technical and capacity building support of the PSG members and thematic expertise of the IBCs. The DCO-led global independent desk review concluded that the region was producing the highest quality Cooperation Frameworks and

Other regional and transboundary challenges

Regional UN system response to other regional and cross border challenges in 2021 included:

- **Violence against women**, with the regional **Spotlight Initiative** initiating the establishment of specialized units on protection of women against violence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, following an exchange between law-enforcement agencies from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The methodology for review of national gender-based violence legislation and law-enforcement practices was developed and a mapping of existing in-country data and types of data was conducted.

- **Cross-border areas confidence building**, with an inter-agency cross-border needs assessment in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan having resulted in the approval of a joint programme to be implemented by FAO and UNFPA. The programme will focus on building confidence and trust between local governments, communities and civil society organizations through shared prosperity and cooperation in border regions. Valuable experience has been gained on the participation and engagement of two governments at design stage and in reaching a joint perspective about priority areas for cross-border cooperation.

- **Social cohesion and reconciliation**, with UNDP, FAO and UNICEF supporting the Western Balkan 6[1] collective leadership and empowering young people through the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

CCAs of all regions. The increased capacity of UNCTs to apply results-based approaches and effective gender integration in the development of new Cooperation Frameworks is a result of the PSG-delivered training on RBM and gender mainstreaming (e.g. Montenegro).

Engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations and other regional stakeholders

In 2021, IBCs and other mechanisms of the RCP have been instrumental in engaging with regional and sub-regional organizations and other regional stakeholders to achieve results in the priority areas of health and well-being, disaster risk reduction, migration, statistics and climate change. This has included the results achieved through collaboration with non-governmental organizations around data availability.

Regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organizations

UNDRR, through its grant agreement with the Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction, supported the annual multi-agency Forum of Heads of National Disaster Management Authorities of Central Asia. The November 2021 Forum endorsed the *Strategy for the development of cooperation of Central Asian Countries in Disaster Risk Reduction for 2022-2030*. The Council of Baltic Sea States reiterated its support to Member Countries in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for DRR and the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR) Regional Roadmap 2021-2030 in 2021. Strengthened strategic relationship between UNDRR and the European Union resulted in development of a Joint Work Plan for 2021 with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Civil Protection. UNDRR, in partnership with the Secretariat of Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South-East Europe (DPPI SEE), had jointly supported the development of the subnational INFORM model for South-East Europe, developed in collaboration with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) INFORM team. Collaboration with DPPI and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities established a regional roadmap for local resilience to support implementation of MCR2030 in the sub-region.

Regional Civil Society Organizations

The regional UN system collaborated with the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (RCEM) and with youth groups in the organization of the 2021 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

The IBC LMPDR organized a side event at the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development on *Leaving No One Behind – SDGs, migration and refugees in the COVID-19 response*. The event was co-organized by the three IBC co-chairs and the Global Call to Action Against Poverty NGO. Also, the same IBC, with IOM as Coordinator of the GCM, established engagements with a large number of civil society, migrant and diaspora and faith-based organizations, National Human Rights Institutions, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, academia, the media and other relevant stakeholders.

Moreover, the IBC Youth and Adolescents collaborated with regional youth networks, including the Group of European Youth for Change, the European Youth Forum and the UN Major Group on Children and Youth as a mechanism for mobilizing broader groups of young people.

Other regional and sub-regional stakeholders

In 2021, the Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics was enlarged to include coordination and facilitation of joint events with non-UN agencies active in the field in Europe and Central Asia, including the Eurasian Economic Commission, Eurostat, OECD and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The CES Task Force on Statistics on Children Adolescents and Young People, in addition to member States, UNECE and UNICEF, has also involved Eurostat and OECD. In addition, CISStat participates as an observer. It serves as an example of different stakeholders coming together to improve data availability on vulnerable groups of children.

The IBC Environment and Climate Change subgroup on air pollution works in close partnership with the RES Foundation in Serbia. The International Institute for Sustainable Development also supports the Coalition in the development and training on Environment and Climate Change mainstreaming guidance. The IBC has also collaborated with 'The Partnering Initiative', the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Iberdrola (a utility company in Spain) and the EU Directorate-General for International Partnerships.

Conclusion

Now in its second year, the Regional Collaborative Platform faced the continued impacts from COVID-19 global pandemic with substantial challenges to sustainable development in the region. The regional UN system has responded to these challenges with determination in an environment of persistent physical and economic restrictions, making best use of the regional architecture's IBCs and specialized networks to fulfill their mandate for purposeful advocacy, policy advice and knowledge management.

With the IBC review and the implementation of its management response plan completed in 2021, the work of the RCP in 2022 will focus on further strengthening the dialogue between the IBCs and UNCTs to secure the demand-driven nature of the IBC work and ensure an improved alignment of what the regional support mechanism offers in response to country level needs.

The RCP has fostered regional cooperation among the UNDS entities responding to the development challenges in ECA, pulling together regional capacities and using synergies to respond to regional and country needs with system-wide technical support, advocacy, and policy solutions to achieve shared goals.

Moving forward, the priority actions for 2022 include support to UNCTs to:

➢ implement green transitional climate change related initiatives;
➢ follow up on the UN Food Systems Summit;
➢ advise on emerging issues with potential impact on social protection systems, including migration demographics, pension reform and ageing, and guidance to UNCTs on the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy;
➢ advocate regionally on priority health issues, including in areas of immunization ,vaccine uptake, hesitancy, misinformation and access difficulties and COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery
➢ implement commitments of the Global Refugee Forum and the International Migration Review Forum;
➢ ensure robust integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in CCAs and Cooperation Framework processes;
➢ implement the UN Secretary-General's Data Strategy and the CEB's Roadmap on Data and Statistics; and support regional efficiencies through the development of the regional Business Operations Strategy;
➢ improve knowledge management throughout the region with the Knowledge Management Hub having the expertise held by the Issue-based Coalitions and regional inter-agency groups as its core.

Considering the unfolding war in Ukraine and the substantial socio-economic impacts the crisis will have in the entire ECA region and globally, the regional UN system will prioritize a tailored support to the UNCTs in their immediate response and recovery efforts.

These priorities will be reflected in the next annual regional results report to be prepared for the reporting period of 2022 and submitted to the 2023 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region.