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## Regional cooperation

### Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

#### Report of the Secretary-General\*

##### *Summary*

The present report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII), Council resolution 1817 (LV) and annex III to Council resolution 1998/46. The five regional commissions are mandated to foster economic integration at the regional and subregional levels, promote the achievement of internationally agreed development goals and support sustainable development by contributing to bridging economic, social and environmental gaps among their member countries and subregions.

Six years before the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the world is beset with multiple conflicts, geopolitical tensions and persistent economic uncertainties, and the impacts of the triple planetary crisis. Against this backdrop, progress towards achieving the Goals is worryingly off track and is fragile and uneven across the regions. In such a complex and ever-evolving context, the regional commissions continued to rise to the challenge in bringing together member States to facilitate policy dialogue and consensus around solutions to steer the world towards an inclusive, sustainable and resilient path by 2030 through regional cooperation.

The report provides a snapshot of the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the regions, highlighting the work undertaken and progress made in three broad thematic areas, and an overview of interregional cooperation and the steps taken by the regional commissions, as part of the repositioned United Nations development system, to effectively deliver on the ambitious goal of regional reform.

\* The present report was submitted for processing after the deadline for technical reasons while the Executive Office of the Secretary-General conducted its substantive review.



## **I. Policy and analysis**

### **A. Rising to the challenge: building inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies by 2030 through regional cooperation**

#### **1.1 State of the journey to 2030**

1. A prolonged period of low growth looms large, with global gross domestic product growth projected to slow from an estimated 2.7 per cent in 2023 to 2.4 per cent in 2024,<sup>1</sup> while the world remains prone to concurrent shocks, deeply intertwined risks and eroding resilience.

2. With only 15 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets on track globally, and in the light of the spiralling triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, as well as the socioeconomic impacts of escalating conflicts, the speed and scale of accelerating the Goals in the journey to 2030 is in no way commensurate with the enormity of the challenges. The fundamental requirements for realizing the Goals and globally agreed climate commitments, including a quantum leap in financing, a fair and inclusive global financial architecture and peaceful cooperation, are not in place.

3. The spirit of shared values and enhanced cooperation to collectively address global challenges is weakening, regional and subregional cooperation are holding steady as the building blocks of multilateralism, bringing countries together to take on common cross-border challenges. Against this backdrop, the Summit of the Future, to be held in September 2024, offers a platform for global leaders to chart multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow.

#### **1.2 Overview of progress on Sustainable Development Goals in the regions: regional dashboard on the status of progress on the Goals**

4. For more than 30 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets, progress has either stalled or gone into reverse in the face of cascading crises. If the current trends persist, the world is not likely to meet the targets by 2030.

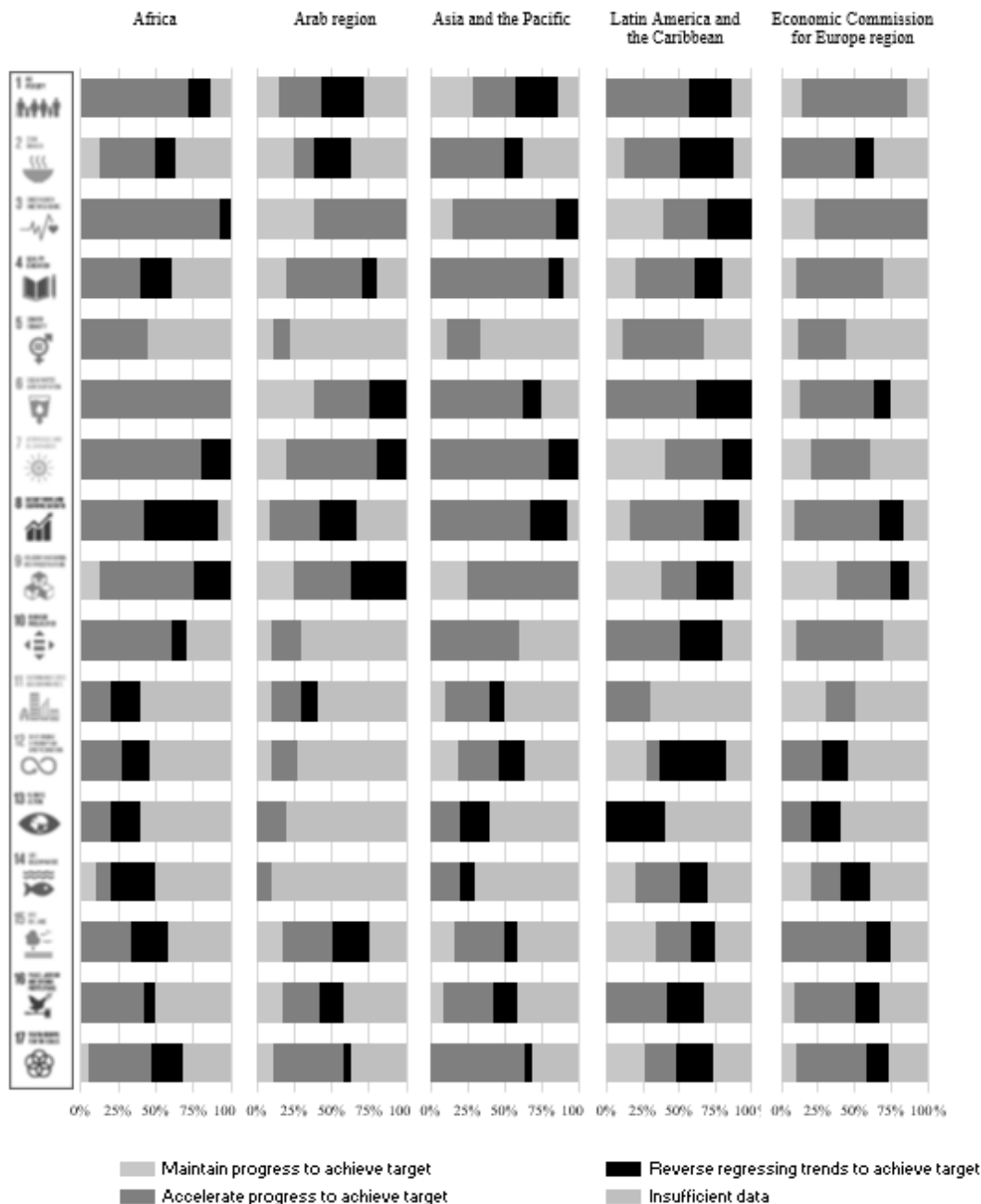
5. Despite the difficult road ahead, there are moments of hope and opportunities for the world, building on the political declaration entitled “Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development: political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit” and keeping sight of the Summit of the Future, to rise to the challenge with bold political leadership, renewed solidarity and ambitious efforts to turn the tide and put the world back on a new drive for achieving the Goals.

6. The present section provides an overview of the status of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals across the five regions (see figure below), followed by a snapshot of progress in each region, highlighting areas where progress has been made and where it falls short.

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<sup>1</sup> *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024).

Percentage of Sustainable Development Goal targets by progress status, 2024



Sources: Data platforms of the regional commissions on progress towards the Goals, available at: <https://ecastats.uneca.org/africaundata/SDGs>; <https://arabsdgmonitor.unescwa.org/>; <https://data.unescap.org/>; <https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/index.html>; and <https://w3.unecce.org/sdg2024>.

Notes: Readers are encouraged to keep the following points in mind as they compare progress across the five regions: (a) different sets of indicators may have been used under each Goal, depending on data availability in each region; (b) progress is assessed against the set of target values specific to each region; (c) some countries have membership in two regional commissions. For more details on underlying data and methodology see the sources provided above.

### **Economic Commission for Africa region**

7. Although the pace of progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been lagging, some progress has been made in Africa on 13 of the 17 Goals. However, progress on Goals 7 (affordable and clean energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 13 (climate action) has either stalled or regressed. Progress on Goals 2 (zero hunger) and 3 (good health and well-being) has been comparatively better than that on other Goals. Overall progress in implementing the Goals has fallen short in Africa and the continent is at risk of not achieving any of the Goals by 2030. In relation to the Sustainable Development Goal targets, only 4 of the 169 targets are on track for achievement, while accelerated progress is required for 111 of those targets to be met. There is insufficient data to measure progress on 54 of the 169 targets. In addition, progress on the continent varies across the different subregions, with Southern and Eastern Africa showing relatively better performances compared with other subregions.

### **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific region**

8. Progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda remains uneven and inadequate within the region. Overall, the Asia and the Pacific region is set to achieve only one third of the Sustainable Development Goal targets by 2030.

9. Analysis by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) shows that only 8 per cent of the targets are on track to be met. On the current trajectory, the region will miss 60 per cent of the targets, and progress on almost 32 per cent of the targets cannot be measured due to insufficient data. Positive strides have been taken towards eliminating poverty (Goal 1) and bolstering sustainable industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). Reversing the worsening trends on Goal 13 (climate action) is an immediate priority for the region. The region also needs to address the significant inequalities between and within countries to ensure that no one is left behind. Among the various groups, small island developing States stand out, since they face significant challenges in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. While overall progress is slow, success stories in individual countries illustrate pathways to strengthen both data systems and policies for accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Economic Commission for Europe region**

11. Strong headwinds have been impairing advances in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in recent years. The 2024 progress report on the Goals<sup>2</sup> continued to show a worsening performance. The region is set to achieve only 20 Sustainable Development Goal targets by 2030, or just 17 per cent of measurable targets, down from 21 targets assessed as being on track in 2023 and 26 targets in 2022. For 80 targets, progress is expected to accelerate. The number of targets showing regression in the region increased from 15 to 17 in 2023. Data availability is improving, with the number of global indicators that cannot be assessed declining from 77 to 71.

12. Insufficient progress on the Sustainable Development Goals persists in several areas. On food security (Goal 2) no target is on track. Most energy targets are progressing too slowly to be achieved. The region must address disparities to achieve targets in the area of education. Progress is on track for only two climate and environmental targets (targets 14.6 and 14.b), while the trend for seven targets must be reversed.

<sup>2</sup> *Sustainable development in the UNECE region: Facing a Headwind in 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024).

### **Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region**

13. Over the years, the availability of disaggregated data has improved in the region, increasing from 50 per cent in 2020 to 65 per cent in 2023. Of the 102 (out of 169) targets that allow for monitoring progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, 27 are on track, 54 are in progress and 21 are showing regression and are off track. Goal 3 (good health and well-being) is showing decent progress and is very close to reaching the projected levels of achievement. If concrete efforts are made, three more Goals, namely Goals 4, 6 and 11, could reach the projected levels of achievement in the coming years. The region has recorded steady improvements in school enrolment and completion rates. Primary school completion increased with a small gender gap; however, lower secondary school completion rates remain relatively low.<sup>3</sup> With respect to Goal 1, extreme poverty in the region escalated from approximately 9.5 per cent in 2015 to 18.1 per cent in 2023. Since 2000, there have been significant improvements in the population's access to electricity and clean fuels (Goal 7) in both urban and rural areas, throughout the region. However, some rural populations still lack access to electricity (17 per cent) and clean fuel (21 per cent).

### **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean region**

14. The latest projections of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) highlight that just 22 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets for which data are available are likely to be fulfilled by 2030, 46 per cent demonstrate a positive trend but require acceleration and 32 per cent of targets are backsliding. The Goals with the most positive outlook in the period leading up to 2030 include Goals 3, 7, 9 and 15, whereas the risk of failure is highest for Goals 12 and 13. Goals related to poverty (Goal 1), hunger (Goal 2), education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), water and sanitation (Goal 6), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), inequalities (Goal 10), sustainable urbanization (Goal 11) and peace and justice (Goal 16) are moving in the right direction, but require acceleration if targets are to be achieved by 2030. The regional context of low growth, with an economic growth rate of 1.9 per cent expected for 2024, slow employment creation and persistently high inequalities present a challenging backdrop for these objectives. The regional poverty rate has returned to pre-pandemic levels but still affects close to 30 per cent of the region's population, or 180 million people, 70 million of whom live in extreme poverty.

## **1.3 Accelerating transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**

15. The present section, organized around three broad thematic areas, summarizes selected examples of the work of the regional commissions during the reporting period.

### **1.3.1 Financing sustainable recovery and resilience**

16. In the context of the widening Sustainable Development Goal financing and investment gaps, estimated in the range of \$2.5 trillion to \$4 trillion annually,<sup>4</sup> debt burdens and rising borrowing costs have been reversing hard-won development gains.

17. In this context, the regional commissions contributed to driving the financing for development agenda in the regions, through data analysis, policy dialogues and advocacy for innovative approaches, to enable economies adapt to shocks, achieve

<sup>3</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Arab Sustainable Development Goal Monitor*, available at <https://arabsdgmonitor.unescwa.org>.

<sup>4</sup> *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024: Financing for Development at a Crossroads* (United Nations publication, 2024).

growth and accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals. They also engaged with regional development banks to promote dialogue around sustainable investment pathways and the reform of the international financial architecture.

18. In the Africa region, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) undertook advocacy initiatives to effectively address challenges at the intersection of debt, climate and development.

19. On sustainable debt management, ECA supported the Sustainable Debt Coalition initiative to advocate the reform of the global sovereign debt architecture. The Coalition advocated for the inclusion of climate contingency clauses, the consideration of debt-for-nature swaps in all new sovereign debt and the adoption of a sustainable budgeting approach. In collaboration with the African Peer Review Mechanism, ECA contributed to the capacity-building of policymakers for effective engagement with credit rating agencies and investors.

20. In the area of domestic resource mobilization, ECA assisted Ethiopia in the finalization of its property tax proclamation, and Benin and Zambia in the development of action plans for improving the governance of tax expenditures.

21. In deepening domestic capital markets to help channel private capital to strategic sectors of the economy, ECA contributed to the capacity-building of key market actors in Ethiopia in order to launch the country's inaugural securities exchange portfolio of instruments. In Guinea, ECA supported efforts to improve sovereign risk management, in order to raise financing and assess the country's readiness for a sovereign credit rating exercise.

22. In the area of climate finance, ECA is working with member States to monetize their significant natural capital through access to carbon credit markets. Such efforts include the development of a national carbon market in Malawi, the development of a stock of tradable blue carbon credits in Sao Tome and Principe and the establishment of emission baselines and elaboration of a harmonized protocol in Zambia to support carbon market integrity for the Congo Basin Climate Commission.

23. In the Arab region, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) provided support to Egypt for the design of its first integrated national financing strategy. National stakeholders employed ESCWA toolkits to improve the distributive impacts and efficiency of the budget, optimize investment planning for maximal impact to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and better target structural reforms. Jordan also benefited from the tools to undertake development finance assessment, paving the way towards a national financing strategy. Oman is also benefiting from the tools to evaluate its 5-year plan and Oman Vision 2040. In recognition of their added value ESCWA financing for development tools have been incorporated into the global guidance on integrated national financing frameworks and its integrated budget intelligence toolkit was incorporated into the global guidance on budget credibility as a pioneering tool to enhance public spending efficiency and financial planning.

24. Ahead of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023, ESCWA issued a joint call with the Union of Arab Banks to encourage Arab banks to align at least US\$1 trillion of their lending with the Goals, thereby expanding Goal financing for the region.<sup>5</sup> The call promotes financing for key transitions in the areas of social protection, energy, education, food systems, digital transformation, biodiversity and nature.

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.unescwa.org/news/union-arab-banks-encourage-arab-banks-provide-target-1-trillion-sdg-financing-region](http://www.unescwa.org/news/union-arab-banks-encourage-arab-banks-provide-target-1-trillion-sdg-financing-region).

25. In advancing efforts to rebalance social expenditure priorities, ESCWA, through its Social Expenditure Monitor, supports member States in analysing the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of fiscal policy and budgeting in the region, while improving capacities to address macrofiscal challenges and inefficiencies in social expenditure. The work has resulted in Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia deploying the Social Expenditure Monitor to boost spending on key social development programmes.

26. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP provided technical support to build national capacity in developing innovative climate and Sustainable Development Goal financing instruments. This included its partnership with the Securities and Exchange Regulator of Cambodia to launch the Cambodia Sustainable Bond Accelerator programme to support private green bond issuers and the development of a public green bond framework in Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan. ESCAP provided training to government officials and representatives of the private sector in climate risk management and disclosure reporting policy in Sri Lanka, in integrated national climate financing strategies in Samoa, in increasing tax revenues from digital tax systems in Pakistan and in integrating climate risks into financial stability analysis by the central bank in Mongolia.

27. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, as part of its efforts to address the region's financing for development challenges, ECLAC collaborated with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on the preparation of a joint report entitled "Public debt and development distress in Latin America and the Caribbean", which analysed the development impacts of rising debt servicing pressures. The solutions proposed with respect to sovereign debt resolution and restructuring were presented to authorities at a regional seminar on fiscal policy held in 2023. ECLAC also provided support for the convening of a meeting of ministers of finance of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, led by the pro tempore presidency of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, to discuss the region's economic and fiscal context and the proposed reforms of the international financial architecture.

28. ECLAC fosters regional cooperation on tax matters and serves as technical secretariat and coordinator of the working group of the Regional Platform for Tax Cooperation for Latin America and the Caribbean. Established in 2023, the Platform seeks to foster regional cooperation on international tax matters and on the mobilization of domestic resources. In the area of climate financing, the Commission published the 2023 edition of the "Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean" on the theme "Financing a sustainable transition: investment for growth and climate change action". The report provides an overview of the long-term economic impacts of climate shocks in the most vulnerable countries, with a focus on Central America and Caribbean small island developing States, and proposals for financing investments that foster growth and climate action.

29. In the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, ECE published a legal framework for public-private partnerships in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and a practical guide on public-private partnerships for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction in support of the Goals, which were endorsed at the seventh session of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships in December 2023. The guidelines include policy recommendations on how public-private partnership projects can be accelerated during the reconstruction phase in post-disaster and post-war contexts.

30. The new ECE Public-Private Partnership and Infrastructure Evaluation and Rating System methodology is being increasingly used to rate public-private partnership projects. Close to 50 projects from 33 countries were presented at the

seventh ECE International Public-Private Partnerships Forum held in Athens in May 2023.

31. With a view to aligning infrastructure development with environmental standards and contributing to the greening of the financial industry, ECE developed a set of principles for green financing for sustainable real estate, infrastructure and urban transformation projects, which were endorsed by the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management at its eighty-fourth session in October 2023.

32. In furtherance of sustainable transboundary basin development and cooperation, ECE, together with multilateral development banks and other partners, organized in December 2023 a second global workshop on funding and financing transboundary water cooperation, which focused on mobilizing public and private capital for cross-border water cooperation and management.

### **1.3.2 Powering a just energy transition through policies and partnerships**

33. In the Africa region, ECA, in collaboration with the African Union Commission and other partners, is supporting the establishment of a platform to assist African countries in the design of energy transition plans. In collaboration with the Southern African Development Community, ECA is undertaking an assessment to provide guidance to members of the Community on energy transition strategies.

34. As part of efforts towards the mobilization of the private sector to invest in energy transformation, ECA organized a side event at the Global Energy Interconnection Conference, held in Beijing in September 2023, to present major energy and infrastructure projects to Chinese investors. In addition, during the World Investment Forum, held in Abu Dhabi in October 2023, ECA introduced potential investors to opportunities in public-private partnership energy projects in selected African countries.

35. In October 2023, ECA helped to build the capacity of 15 energy regulatory experts and policymakers from eight African countries on the application of a planning tool for regulatory environment analysis and energy infrastructure reform. In collaboration with the African Export-Import Bank, ECA conducted a study on the role of power pools in the energy transition in Africa, with a view to identifying investment areas and tailoring capacity-building interventions.

36. In the Arab region, ESCWA supported member States with enhancing the role of minerals and raw materials as elements of the energy transition and coordinating national actions at the regional level through the regional expert group on extractive industries and the Middle East and North Africa Climate Week 2023. Through its work, ESCWA is seeking to promote the formulation of national policy frameworks to transform the extractive energy sector and transition to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy systems.

37. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP has been working with countries to develop scenarios for accelerating inclusive and just energy transition through national road maps for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7, which are currently available in nine countries and eight cities. In furtherance of accelerated energy transition, ESCAP launched a green power corridor road map for North-East Asia with various cross-border connectivity scenarios, as part of the implementation of its regional road map on power system connectivity. Work is ongoing to support the development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Power Grid focusing on enhanced multilateral power trading and better integration of renewable energy resources. Partnership with the ASEAN secretariat resulted in the development of a set of principles for sustainable minerals development, endorsed at the ministerial



level by ASEAN member States in 2023. As part of the Working Group on Transforming the Extractive Industries for Sustainable Development, ESCAP and the other regional commissions contributed to a web-based toolkit for United Nations country teams on the secure and sustainable development of critical energy transition materials.

38. Through the regional cooperation mechanism on low-carbon transport, ESCAP is working with member States and key stakeholders to lock in the changeover to low-carbon mobility and clean energy technologies and logistics. Those efforts are complemented by peer learning and experience sharing under the Asia-Pacific initiative on electric mobility. In addition, ESCAP has been working to channel investments into sustainable development, including by providing support to Governments to monitor, evaluate and approve investments with sustainable foreign direct investment indicators and mobilizing businesses through the Asia-Pacific Green Deal for Business.

39. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, ECLAC has identified strategic productive sectors for accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals, which, if implemented at scale, can promote growth and yield dividends across multiple Goals. Among these transformational sectors, the energy transition and related industries play an important role, including through enhancing renewable energies and energy efficiency. In July 2023, ECLAC launched the policy brief “Lithium extraction and industrialization: opportunities and challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean”, which provides guidelines for policymakers regarding productive lithium-related development and opportunities for value addition. ECLAC also provides transboundary technical assistance to the countries comprising the so-called “lithium triangle” (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of) and Chile) through the Permanent Technical Dialogue Forum on Lithium Innovation, Technological Development and Value Addition, which promotes innovation, technological development and value addition, and through technical studies and an online course.

40. In the ECE region, ECE undertakes work aimed at putting in place resilient energy infrastructure, while ensuring equitable access to clean, reliable and affordable energy for all. Multiple reports, guidelines and case studies provided support for policymaking on resilient and carbon neutral energy systems, thereby contributing to discussions within the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the Group of 20 and the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Together with other partners, ECE has initiated the development of an artificial intelligence-powered platform to support policymakers in their efforts to build resilient energy systems. In June 2023, it launched a hydrogen task force, comprising a cross-sectoral group of experts, which focuses on classification, value chain development and synergies with renewable energy sources.

41. The United Nations Resource Management System, developed by the ECE Expert Group on Resource Management, was endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2023 as a global standard for the sustainable and integrated management of natural resources. The System provides a common language and framework for assessing and improving the sustainability performance of resource extraction and processing activities.

42. An ECE-led partnership provided support to Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan to address the readiness of the building supply chain industry to deliver the materials, technologies and equipment needed for high-performance buildings and connect building energy efficiency with nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement.

### 1.3.3 Fostering social development and leaving no one behind

43. In the Africa region, ECA is supporting member States to build capacity for the development of equity-focused policies and interventions targeting vulnerable populations. On youth, ECA provided technical support to member States for accelerating the implementation of the African Union road map for harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in young people. With technical support from ECA, five member States<sup>6</sup> undertook budget elasticity analyses on the required investment, with a view to integrating the results into their 2024 budgeting processes.

44. On gender, ECA conducted a study on the gender dimension of a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) impact mitigation programme in Guinea, with a focus on access to land ownership and women's participation in food security and agribusiness. In September 2023, ECA organized workshops geared towards building the gender and digitalization capacities of 83 policymakers and representatives of civil society and academia in Lesotho, Seychelles and South Africa. In addition, ECA conducted a study on leveraging digitalization to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment across Africa, providing concrete examples of information and communications technology driving development and creating opportunities, in particular for women.

45. On fostering local development for resilient economies, ECA provided capacity-building support to eight member States<sup>7</sup> for the conduct of voluntary local reviews to facilitate the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, the monitoring of local actions and the addressing of local development challenges.

46. In the Arab region, long-standing structural challenges in the region's economies, poor performance in growth and job creation, high levels of inequality and insufficiently redistributive fiscal policies pose significant obstacles to realizing inclusive growth. In this context, ESCWA supports member States in reforming their national social protection systems by identifying critical reform needs and proposing viable and costed reform options. To this end, in 2023, ESCWA initiated a Comprehensive National Social Protection Systems and Reforms Country Profile for Jordan, which enabled evidence-driven dialogue with the Government on reform needs and options that fed into the ongoing review of the country's National Social Protection Strategy.

47. Under the "leave no one behind" principle, ESCWA support to member States resulted in Tunisia and Yemen identifying enhancements to their social protection systems to boost their efficiency and inclusiveness; Jordan adopting its second national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security; Lebanon submitting to its Parliament amendments to its labour law aimed at improving women's economic participation; and the United Arab Emirates making significant progress in its Global Gender Gap Index ranking, moving from 120th to 68th position.

48. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Asian and Pacific Population Conference identified the profound demographic shifts of rapid ageing and declining fertility. ESCAP continued to support countries in developing forward-looking policies and programmes to address ageing and develop a care economy in Cambodia, China, Indonesia and the Philippines.

49. To enhance national social protection systems, ESCAP is supporting Cambodia, the Maldives and Mongolia, in line with the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific. To ensure that everyone has

<sup>6</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

<sup>7</sup> Ethiopia, Djibouti, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

access to a legal identity, ESCAP worked with national stakeholders in Bangladesh, Fiji, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, the Philippines and Samoa to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics. This resulted in improvements in birth registration in Fiji and in the analysis of inequality in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

50. At its eighth session in July 2023, the ESCAP Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction recommended several key actions, including the development of a regional strategy to achieve early warnings for all by 2027, in line with the Early Warnings for All initiative and the Executive Action Plan on Early Warnings for All, 2023–2027, launched by the Secretary-General in November 2022. ESCAP provided a framework for countries and collaborated with the United Nations development system to support comprehensive early warnings in Cambodia and Maldives.

51. In advancing the principle of “leaving no one behind” in the rapid digital transformation, ESCAP continued to work with member States in bridging the digital divide through the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022–2026. ESCAP is facilitating the application of geospatial tools and systems for resilient agriculture, air pollution control and disaster risk management in member States.

52. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, ECLAC has placed increased emphasis on the analysis of labour inclusion policies as a central axis of inclusive social development and social protection systems, and devoted its annual flagship report, *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean*, to labour inclusion. ECLAC also continued to develop its work on the care society paradigm, so as to foster the development of comprehensive care systems, including to address the setbacks prompted by cascading crises and the burden of care as a barrier to women's inclusion in the labour market. ECLAC supports countries in developing and updating time-use statistics, through the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into statistical production. Regarding efforts to foster digital inclusion in the Caribbean, ECLAC conducted a workshop on the theme of “Measuring the digital society for inclusion” for countries seeking to develop metrics in order to better capture gaps and facilitate action on digital inclusion. In late April 2024, ECLAC and the International Labour Organization convened the high-level seminar entitled “Towards the Second World Summit for Social Development” to foster reflections on priorities to be addressed at the Second World Summit for Social Development to be held in 2025.

53. In the ECE region, to review progress made at the regional level in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, ECE and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office jointly organized, in October 2023, a regional conference on the 30-year review of the implementation of the Programme of Action, entitled “Population and development: ensuring rights and choices”. The conference served to identify trends and setbacks in population and development outcomes over time and priorities for the way forward, culminating in a regional report as input to the global report on the 30-year review.

54. In cooperation with UNFPA, the five regional commissions undertook regional reviews of the 30 years of implementation of the Programme of Action. The resulting regional reports and the outcomes of the regional population conferences will culminate in the global report on the 30-year review of the implementation of the Programme of Action to feed into the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the Summit of the Future.

## B. Regional forums on sustainable development and the road to the Summit of the Future

55. As the premier multi-stakeholder platforms for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level, the regional forums on sustainable development held in 2024 provided an opportunity to review progress, challenges and opportunities for accelerated implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The forums also continued to facilitate peer learning and experience sharing on the preparation of voluntary national reviews.

56. The forums contributed to mobilizing transformative action, building on the reservoir of hope and momentum generated during the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and rekindling a spirit of solidarity and cooperation in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future. Member States, regional organizations and stakeholders reiterated the importance of unlocking investment pathways to drive sustainable transitions in key sectors, including social protection, energy, biodiversity, climate action and digital cooperation, and called for the reform of the international financial architecture.

57. The forums also focused on measures for reinforcing regional and subregional cooperation to address transboundary challenges in the areas of trade and connectivity, food systems transformation, sustainable natural resources management and digital transition. The forums emphasized the need to boost preparedness to deal with social and environmental megatrends, and deliberated on reimagining work, learning, social care and health-care systems. In 2024, the forums mobilized the engagement of member States in the preparatory process for the Summit of the Future and called for an inclusive preparatory process that incorporates the views and aspirations of women, young people and persons with disabilities.

## C. Other policy issues covered by the regional commissions in their ministerial sessions

58. In addition to the policy issues addressed in section A above, the regional commissions have deliberated on other issues relevant to their regions in their annual sessions and other high-level meetings. The table below contains the highlights of the sessions of the regional commissions.

### Regional commission sessions held during the reporting period

<i>Regional commission</i>	<i>Location and date</i>	<i>Description</i>
ESCWA	Cairo 16–18 December 2023	Thirty-first session: ministerial segment on the theme of governance and conflict prevention
ECA	Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) 4 and 5 March 2024	Fifty-sixth session: ministerial segment on financing the transition to inclusive green economies
ESCAP	Bangkok 22–26 April 2024	Eightieth session: ministerial segment on leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development

*Abbreviations:* ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

## II. Developments and outcomes in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, including in the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system

59. The present section serves to highlight progress in the implementation of the repositioning of the United Nations development system, including against items on the checklist prepared for the governing bodies of United Nations entities, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 76/4.<sup>8</sup>

60. Since the launch of the repositioning of the United Nations development system, regional commissions have increasingly strengthened their collaboration and engagement with the resident coordinator system and United Nations country teams, ensuring effective linkages between regional, sub-regional and national dimensions and recalibrating their offers in response to country needs and priorities.

61. In ensuring systematic consultation with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, the regional commissions have guided their country-level work in line with the management and accountability framework by revising, where necessary, their business models for engaging with resident coordinators, including with regard to their contributions to performance appraisals. The regional commissions have put in place internal structures and guidelines to ensure that the large body of existing knowledge and practice within the commissions is leveraged in an integrated and coherent manner, including through the regional collaborative platforms and issue-based coalitions or inter-agency working groups, to provide optimal solutions to address regional, subregional and national priorities.

62. The regional commissions continue to provide data, evidence-based analysis and policy guidance on regional and transboundary frameworks and issues in support of United Nations country teams during country-level programming, notably through participation, upon request, in common country analyses and the formulation of cooperation frameworks. As part of peer support groups, the regional commissions continue to provide quality assurance for all common country analyses, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and joint work plans in their respective regions.

63. The regional commissions are also continuing to advance efforts in the regional operations management teams to ensure streamlined operating practices and the consolidation of back offices, thereby resulting in projected savings and higher quality services.

64. The full array of contributions of the regional United Nations development system is reflected in the annual system-wide regional results reports prepared by the regional collaborative platforms and issued in advance of the regional forums for sustainable development.

65. Within the new regional architecture, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, the regional commissions have been actively advancing efforts to deliver integrated policy advice, expertise and capacity support and foster joined-up action at the regional level, in alignment with country needs and priorities, as described in detail below.

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-development-system-reform-checklist-unsdg-entities-governing-bodies>.

## A. Promoting policy coherence and joined-up action at the regional level

### 1. Driving collaborative delivery of support for United Nations country teams

66. Issue-based coalitions, primary vehicles for joined-up interagency support for United Nations country teams under the auspices of the regional collaborative platforms, are delivering demand-driven, tailored support that leverages expertise and resources from their member entities. In the Africa region, ECA, as the co-convenor of two issue-based coalitions and two task forces, played a key role in driving regional joint work in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Under the first issue-based coalition, ECA responded to United Nations country team requests by helping member States to improve the availability of geospatial data; updating data for most of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators;<sup>9</sup> enhancing the capacity of 18 countries in the use of digital tools for the 2020 round of population and housing censuses;<sup>10</sup> and helping to close the gender digital divide by training young women and girls in basic coding and digital literacy skills.<sup>11</sup> Through the third issue-based coalition, ECA facilitated training in digital skills for 170 girls from Angola and Mozambique. Under the fourth issue-based coalition, ECA contributed to the regional preparatory meeting on food systems in Africa and through the provision of advisory support to 37 countries in articulating and submitting their national pathways. In 2023, the Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa took stock of opportunities to deepen collaboration with the African Union, including through the college-to-college initiative for high-level strategic engagement between the African Union Commission and principals of regional United Nations entities.

67. In 2023, the Regional Collaborative Platform for Arab States, through its eight issue-based coalitions, facilitated 10 regional dialogues, high-level discussions and webinars, 5 policy briefs, 11 analyses, 3 guidance notes and 1 country profile. These deliverables covered a range of issues, including measures for bringing forward climate-related commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit; synergies between the humanitarian, development and peace aspects of work; Sustainable Development Goal financing; data; education; and food. Examples of specific results include a detailed analysis of the regional impact of the war in Gaza, jointly conducted by ESCWA and the United Nations Development Programme, in collaboration with the United Nations network of economists in the region. The analysis considered scenarios including ceasefires and potential regional spillover, concluding with a call for an immediate ceasefire and a comprehensive and coordinated approach, which includes international support, regional cooperation, financial aid, policy advice and technical support.

68. In the Asia-Pacific region, the issue-based coalition on raising ambitions on climate action, co-chaired by ESCAP and the United Nations Environment Programme, led the annual assessment of nationally determined contributions and emission gaps to inform discussion among resident coordinators and Governments in the lead up to and during the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. ESCAP worked with other members of the coalition and member States to spearhead the Asia-Pacific Climate Week, in order to enable the exchange of climate solutions. The coalition also

<sup>9</sup> See <https://ecastats.uneca.org/unsdgsafrica/>.

<sup>10</sup> Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Ongoing support: Benin, Burundi, Djibouti, Gambia, Nigeria, Somalia, Tunisia and Uganda.

<sup>11</sup> Angola, Niger and Mozambique.

led joint advocacy efforts such as youth engagement in climate actions and the building of partnerships through the Climate and Clean Air Conference.

69. ESCAP also contributed to dialogue with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams on inclusive growth, financing for development and public debt sustainability through the issue-based coalition on inclusive economic growth and COVID-19 recovery. In response to rapid ageing in the region, the working group led by ESCAP galvanized system-wide support to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

70. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean 2.0 was launched in April 2023 with a sharpened thematic focus and with the objective of providing more tailored responses to resident coordinator and United Nations country team requests. The working groups of the updated Platform developed a workplan to respond to the demand for support, including to help address Sustainable Development Goal gaps with a subregional or cross-border dimension. One example is the work of the issue-based coalition on human mobility, which generates reports and data on the current migration dynamics of the region. In response to requests by the resident coordinators of Colombia, Mexico and Central America, the coalition issued quarterly reports on mixed migration movements and launched an online dashboard to provide real-time information on human mobility. The coalition also responded to requests from the resident coordinators of Haiti and the Dominican Republic by producing joint analysis and providing support for the development of a strategic framework to address challenges and opportunities in the border area between the two countries. ECLAC also analysed the six transitions for acceleration of the Goals and their adaptation to the work of the Platform.

71. In the ECE region, the issue-based coalitions and regional interagency groups have been empowered and their work realigned with four out of six key transition areas, namely the environment and climate change; sustainable food systems; digital transformation; and social protection. The coalitions are delivering targeted and demand-driven support on critical enablers and accelerators of sustainable development in areas such as gender equality; large movements of people, displacement and resilience; youth and adolescents; health and well-being; and data and statistics. ECE is the Co-Chair of the issue-based coalition on environment and climate change, which organized a regional workshop for resident coordinators and United Nations country team representatives in September 2023 on integrating climate change, pollution, biodiversity and just transition into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks for 15 countries. A biodiversity webinar in June 2023 built the capacity of members of country teams to deliver on the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

## **2. Efforts towards leveraging knowledge management hubs to support economic and social transformation and closing Sustainable Development Goal data gaps**

72. In the Africa region, support has been focused on transforming and modernizing official statistics across a range of data ecosystems. Within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals Data Alliance initiative, ECA supported ten member States<sup>12</sup> in the establishment of national data hubs geared towards publishing and accessing national statistical data, including data for tracking progress on the Goals. ECA also assisted the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial

<sup>12</sup> Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Morocco, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia.

Information Management for Africa to develop a manual on geocoding for the modernization of geospatial information and statistical processes in Africa.

73. Launched in September 2023, the Africa Knowledge Management Hub continued to serve as a one-stop shop, ensuring integrated access to data and making available knowledge resources relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals and other continental development agendas. The Hub features an expertise repository, which is a tool that facilitates the identification and location of expertise within the regional United Nations system, and a community of practice platform that provides peer-to-peer knowledge facilitation and networking services.

74. In the Asia-Pacific region, in 2022, the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Management Hub recorded a 150 per cent increase in users and a 70 per cent increase in page views, compared with 2021, with over 12,000 users and over 44,000 page views as at March 2024. The Hub hosts more than 250 knowledge resources, including flagship reports, policy guidance and research papers from regional United Nations entities. The working group on data and statistics of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Asia and the Pacific, co-chaired by ESCAP and UNFPA, organized a three-day Sustainable Development Goal data learning lab, which was attended by 23 United Nations country team members and two Sustainable Development Goal focal persons from national statistical offices. The capacity-building exercise offered practical training in strengthening national statistical systems and exploring diverse data sources.

75. In the Arab region, ESCWA has developed a coherent and comprehensive regional data ecosystem in the form of a regional data and knowledge management hub called Manara. In 2023, Manara continued to optimize its functions and outputs using artificial intelligence and large language models, giving its 18,000 users enhanced user-friendly access to over 76,000 data sets from 40 different sources. The hub also gives users access to over 1.6 million publications from 17 United Nations entities, covering all topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals, among other areas. Users, including resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, currently search Manara and receive in-time, up-to-date responses to their queries, in the form of raw data sets, visualizations for easy analysis, publications, geographic information system-based maps, news articles and social media posts. In 2024, Manara will be better integrated into the United Nations Arab Region Data and Policy Support Hub. Additional data and publication sources will be made available and a large language model-based interface will be launched.

76. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, ECLAC has advanced in the consolidation of its data ecosystem and web-based data visualization and dissemination platforms. The strategy prioritizes the use of open-source formats and interoperability and enables comparative analysis between countries. ECLAC has also added two new regional data portals to its ecosystem, including a portal on inequalities in Latin America, which disseminates accessible data visualizations and disaggregated data. In addition, ECLAC launched CEPALGEO – a platform providing access to standardized geospatial metadata and earth observation products. CEPALGEO is aligned with the guidelines of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, so as to strengthen the management of geospatial information in the region. ECLAC co-chairs the working group on Sustainable Development Goal data and statistics, providing support for strengthening the statistical capacities of United Nations country teams. The Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean 2.0 also developed a roster of expertise to facilitate the deployment of demand-driven integrated policy advice to resident coordinators and country teams.

77. In the ECE region, the Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics for Europe and Central Asia, co-chaired by ECE and the United Nations Environment



Programme, organized various regional and subregional events on data and statistics, including joint activities with the European Free Trade Association, Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on a global assessment of national statistical systems in Kazakhstan and Georgia, which involved United Nations country team data experts; a high-level seminar on modernizing statistical production; and a thematic conference on managing a statistical organization in times of change.

### **3. Delivering efficiencies at the regional level**

78. In pursuing efficiencies through joint business operations and streamlined practices at the country and regional levels, the regional commissions have contributed, as Co-Chairs of the regional operations management teams, to advancing the objectives of the regional reform.

79. Across the regions, notable progress was made during the reporting period through the work of the regional operations management teams on strengthening the integration of and guidance to national-level operations management teams in the regions, the provision of capacity-building workshops on the efficiency agenda and guidance on the roll-out of the business operations strategy, as well as through the identification of further opportunities for regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

80. With the exception of ECE, all the regional commissions continued to deliver common services in the areas of security, conference, finance, procurement, human resources, facilities management and information and communications technology services, both at the regional level and for entities based in headquarter locations. The implementation of the regional business operations strategies is on track and most of the regional common service solutions being utilized by regional and national entities across the four regions are expected to generate cost savings, including a projected \$1.9 million in the case of the Arab region.

81. In the Africa region, the regional operations management team supported the capacity-building of regional focal points and team members in business operations strategies, common back offices, and common premises methodologies to ensure effective support at country level.

82. In alignment with the 2023 roll-out of the regional business operations strategy for Africa, the regional operations management team initiated coordinated efforts with multiple United Nations entities to kick-start key interventions, such as developing long-term agreements with translation firms (led by ECA), virtual events management services (led by UNFPA) and video production/multimedia content services (led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

83. Under the common premises framework, the regional operations management team completed a quality assurance exercise in all 54 African countries in the first quarter of 2023 and is on track to achieve the global target of establishing 17 common premises in targeted countries by 2024.

### **B. Promoting interregional cooperation: joint initiatives undertaken by the regional commissions**

84. During the reporting period, the Regional Commissions New York Office provided strategic policy advice, undertook outreach and facilitated regular dialogues among regional commissions, including among the Executive Secretaries and at technical levels, to strengthen coordination and collaboration and to ensure effective

support to system-wide initiatives and processes. The work of the Office resulted in more coherence and visibility for the regional commissions' joint policy and advocacy work and events, uptake of their innovations and platforms, and effective positioning of the regional dimension of sustainable development in the deliberations and recommendations of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies. The Office contributed to amplifying the voices of the regional commissions in global policy discussions, resulting in increased awareness and informed decision-making on sustainable development matters.

85. Work undertaken during the reporting period includes a joint progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals and transformative pathways for selected countries, a joint input to the Secretary-General's policy brief on the reform of the international financial architecture, and a toolkit on critical energy transition materials for resident coordinators, as well as thematic side events on urban resilience, the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus and financing the energy transition during the United Nations 2023 Water Conference and Financing for Development Forum.

86. Regarding debt, the regional commissions collaborated with UNCTAD in supporting the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, providing regional data, analysis and inputs for the report "A world of debt: a growing burden to global prosperity" launched in July 2023. The commissions also produced a joint policy brief entitled "Addressing public debt challenges to effectively pursue the sustainable development goals: regional perspectives", organized a side event during the Financing for Development Forum in 2023 on rethinking public debt policies for the Sustainable Development Goals, and a global public debt dashboard<sup>13</sup> providing a country-level overview of public debt and development spending indicators.

87. In an effort to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia, ECE and ESCAP jointly supported the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, a country-led platform to facilitate the subregion's integration into the world economy. The first Summit of Heads of State and Government of States participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia adopted the Baku Declaration in November 2023, endorsing a road map for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the trans-Caspian transport corridor and welcoming plans to establish a multi-partner trust fund for the Special Programme.

88. In the context of United Nations Development Account projects, ECE is collaborating with ESCAP to improve the capacity of policymakers to develop road maps for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7. Furthermore, together with ECA and ECLAC, ESCWA has been working on enhancing the capacity of policymakers in selected member States to access innovative financing instruments for climate action and sustainable development in response to the triple crisis of food, energy and finance. All the five regional commissions collaborate among themselves and other United Nations partners on urban resilience, blockchain for trade facilitation, South-South cooperation, and measuring and curbing illicit financial flows.

89. Regional commissions collectively conducted the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation; ESCAP, ECA and ECLAC launched a joint database on regional digital trade integration; ESCAP and ECLAC collaborated on the development of a database on the use of e-commerce platforms in their respective regions; and ESCAP and ECA released a handbook and joint course on Options and Provisions for Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Trade

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://unctad.org/publication/world-of-debt/dashboard>.

Agreements. ECE, together with the other regional commissions and UNCTAD, has developed an online course on the role of blockchain for trade facilitation.

90. ECLAC and ESCAP collaborated in the framework of the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation Fund on supporting the participation of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in cross-border goods and services e-commerce in East Asia and Latin America, and also providing joint training on digital trade regulations in the two regions.

91. ECA collaborated with ESCWA on two side events in the 2023 Arab Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Summit convened by ESCWA, during which ECA launched the final report on “Gender-smart investing for inclusive growth in North Africa” and held a side event on “Supporting Female-Led Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Earthquake-Affected Areas in Morocco” to explore strategies that female-led micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises can adopt to build resilience and ensure business continuity.

### **III. Conclusion**

92. The regional commissions navigated a complex and uncertain context in the regions to foster regional and interregional cooperation in response to pressing challenges at a time when the spirit of global solidarity and multilateralism was being eroded. The regional commissions leveraged their cutting-edge thought leadership, policy and normative work, intergovernmental platforms, tailored capacity support and multi-stakeholder partnerships to continue to engender transformative shifts pivotal to Sustainable Development Goal acceleration in areas such as inclusive growth, climate change, biodiversity loss, energy, food systems transformation, demographic trends, digital connectivity and social protection.

93. The joint work of the regional commissions will advance the financing for development agenda, including advancing the Secretary-General’s Sustainable Development Goal Stimulus, as well as driving climate action in the regions. The regional commissions will contribute to generating regional inputs and building momentum for ambitious outcomes of the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and forging global and regional consensus around social policies essential for sustainable development in preparation for the second World Summit for Social Development in 2025.