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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) and Council resolutions 1817 (LV) and 1998/46 (annex III). The 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development will see the conclusion of the first cycle of reviews of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, the report is intended to illustrate the work of the regional commissions in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels and the critical role performed at the regional level to bridge the national and global levels. The first part of the report provides an overview of the work in support of the 2030 Agenda, including in relation to the means of implementation, focusing on showcasing the impact of the regional commissions in shaping agendas and policies and the important steps undertaken by the regional commissions to align their work with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, it illustrates the role of the regional commissions in leveraging partnerships and intraregional and interregional cooperation in support of the 2030 Agenda. The second part of the report covers developments and outcomes in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, efforts to promote policy coherence at the regional level and enhanced cooperation among the regional commissions.

* Late submission due to internal consultations and to factor in, as appropriate, outcomes of the Economic and Social Council operational activities segment, ending on 23 May 2019.



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I. Regional dimension in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A. Advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the regions

1. Four years into the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all regions have embraced the Sustainable Development Goals, with countries around the globe adopting national strategies and plans to achieve the Goals and adapting their institutions to the requirements of the new development paradigm. Although there are encouraging signs of action, progress remains slow and uneven, both within and between regions. In this context, regional cooperation and integration are emerging as key drivers of progress that are essential to formulate integrated development strategies and to address regional and transboundary challenges. This is particularly the case for the means of implementation, in which regional cooperation is at the heart of strengthening monitoring and statistical capacities, the mobilization of finances and the advancement of innovative policy solutions.

2. The regional commissions play a critical role in supporting countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda by providing technical capacity and analytical work and policy advisory services, and serving as dedicated platforms for norm-setting and sectoral and intersectoral dialogue. The present section offers an overview of examples of the support and impact achieved in selected areas and an update on steps taken by the regional commissions to align their programmes of work and conference structures to better serve Member States and the needs arising from the 2030 Agenda. It also offers an illustration of how the regional commissions leverage partnerships and regional cooperation to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

1. Supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: selected areas

Latin America and the Caribbean

Integrating the 2030 Agenda and resilience-related goals into national development planning

3. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has emphasized the importance of planning as a key tool of policymaking and public management. Countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region have made significant commitments and taken steps to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into their national or subnational planning schemes. Of note is the support that ECLAC provided, in coordination with the United Nations country team, to the Government of Guatemala for the formulation of its national development plan, “K’atun: our Guatemala 2032”.

Strengthening effective, accountable and inclusive institutions for sustainable urbanization

4. As of 2018, 80 per cent of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean lived in cities or urban areas. Cities are the source of 70 per cent of regional greenhouse gas emissions and are characterized by high levels of inequality and segregation, excluding low-income groups from participating in the management of their cities. In response to this reality, ECLAC and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, in coordination with the relevant United Nations country teams, have partnered to strengthen accountability systems in cities in Brazil, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia and enable the monitoring of local government policies for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, providing an operational

platform for South-South cooperation and making available a set of virtual tools to facilitate city-to-city cooperation and knowledge exchange.

Supporting access to information and justice in environmental matters

5. ECLAC actively supported the comprehensive negotiation process that led to the adoption of the landmark Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), the only treaty to emerge from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The Agreement is also the first regional environmental treaty of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the first one with binding provisions on defenders of human rights in environmental matters. The Agreement opened for the signature of the 33 countries of the region on 27 September 2018 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. As of the end of April 2019, 16 countries had signed the Agreement and 1 had proceeded with ratification.

Debt swap initiative

6. Caribbean countries are among the most highly indebted countries in the world. In order to address the challenges of access to external financing for these countries, ECLAC presented its “Proposal on debt for climate adaptation swaps: a strategy for growth and economic transformation of Caribbean economies”, which calls for donors to use pledged resources from the Green Climate Fund to finance a gradual write-down of 100 per cent of the multilateral and bilateral debt stock of Caribbean small island developing States. In 2018, ECLAC leveraged its debt-for-climate adaptation swap initiative, and three member States were identified for its first phase.

Regional framework of indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals

7. After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, countries in Latin American and Caribbean, through the Statistical Conference of the Americas, expressed their interest in the prioritization and adaptation of the global monitoring framework for the Sustainable Development Goals to the region’s characteristics and challenges. In 2018, ECLAC, as secretariat to the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, carried out the request. As a result, a prioritized list of 154 indicators was agreed upon by countries in the region. This prioritization of measurement efforts, as well as the effective coordination of regional and international cooperation efforts to close gaps in statistical capabilities, is enabling countries in the region to report more efficiently on their progress in achieving the Goals through a region-specific, harmonized and comparable approach.

Africa

8. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) achieved significant milestones in recent years in deepening its value proposition in support of the development priorities of member States, as articulated in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union.

African Continental Free Trade Area

9. In supporting member States in achieving effective regional cooperation and integration for accelerated economic transformation and inclusive development, ECA contributed to the signing of the agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area by 44 African countries during the African Union summit held in Kigali in March 2018. This represented a momentous milestone for economic integration in Africa and will create a single continental market for goods and services that can

deliver economies of scale, improved competitiveness, foreign direct investment and poverty reduction. As of the end of February 2019, a total of 52 countries had signed the agreement, with 19 having ratified the protocols on the Free Trade Area.

Supporting sustainable macroeconomic and growth policies

10. ECA provided support to eight African countries in the formulation of their national development plans, with a focus on alignment with Agenda 2063, integrated and cross-pillar approaches, economic diversification and job creation. Eight countries (Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, Seychelles and Uganda) benefited from that support. ECA also conducted studies and supported the Comoros and Madagascar in formulating multisectoral policy frameworks on the blue economy. ECA leveraged the 2019 Conference of Ministers for effective policy dialogue and advocacy on institutional and policy reforms needed to enable African countries to maximize domestic resource mobilization for financing sustainable development in Africa.

Curbing illicit financial flows

11. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 all highlight the importance of tackling illicit financial flows. Over the past few years, ECA has been making continued efforts, including establishing a high-level panel on illicit financial flows, undertaking groundbreaking research on illicit financial flows methodology and estimates and providing policy advice to member States, to address illicit financial flows, tax evasion and trade misinvoicing. As a result of these efforts, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tunisia have begun to implement policies on illicit financial flows.

Strengthening statistical systems

12. ECA had significant influence on policy during the reporting period in the area of statistics. It provided technical assistance to member States on conducting comprehensive assessments and developing national improvement action plans for civil registration and vital statistics systems. A total of 27 African countries undertook such assessments within the framework of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, with 8 additional countries (Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe) currently undertaking the process. The ECA statistics database has been further revamped as an online statistical database for socioeconomic data on African countries and serves as a one-stop shop for validated data and metadata for 32 African countries, and it is fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

Economic Commission for Europe region

Addressing transboundary issues: Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

13. Climate change is placing increased pressure on water resources. Their effective management is critical to reconciling economic development with sustainability and to preventing conflicts. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes facilitates international cooperation to provide shared answers to these challenges. Chad and Senegal acceded in 2018 and, at the most recent meeting of the parties in Astana in October 2018, more than 15 countries from outside the pan-European region announced their interest in acceding to the Convention. This work has been complemented by capacity-building activities,

especially in Central Asia, where the need for transboundary cooperation in water management is particularly strong, but also in several African countries. Overall, a recent assessment of the work under the Convention found that there was a high degree of implementation, through national regulations, transboundary agreements and the establishment of institutional arrangements.

Improving road safety

14. The goal to halve the number of road traffic deaths and injuries by 2020 (target 3.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals) requires action and partnerships. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) manages several road safety legal instruments covering traffic rules, construction and the technical inspection of vehicles, among other issues. In addition, ECE has had an impact on road safety, including policy advice, modal shifts and the further advancement of an international legal framework for road safety. It is also, as secretariat of the United Nations road safety trust fund, which was launched in April 2018, engaged in the efforts to mobilize financing for road safety.

Developing frameworks for the improved management of natural resources

15. The United Nations Framework Classification for Fossil Energy and Mineral Resources is a comprehensive classification system for all energy and raw material resources that integrates social and environmental aspects, together with economic and technical feasibility criteria. This Framework is increasingly accepted as a global standard that can help to ensure the sound management of all resources, including secondary resources to facilitate the circular economy. In 2018, ECE launched several continent-wide initiatives to deploy the Framework in Europe, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas.

Improving statistics for sustainable development

16. The ECE statistical work is closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals that are intended to improve the availability of good-quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data for the measurement of progress towards achieving the Goals. ECE has developed a road map on statistics on the Goals that was approved in 2017 by chief statisticians from some 60 countries from the region and beyond. In addition, ECE is developing several tools to support countries in implementing the road map, providing further guidance on measuring sustainable development and engaging in capacity-building initiatives for reporting on the Goals.

Asia and the Pacific

Data and multi-sectoral analysis on the Sustainable Development Goals

17. With extensive in-house expertise, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has developed multisectoral research analysis on regional and national pathways for achieving the 2030 Agenda. The annual *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report* of ESCAP examines in-depth progress on the achievement of the Goals and their targets based on ESCAP methodology for benchmarking such progress. The *Report* provides an analysis of how data gaps can be addressed and, therefore, where priorities for capacity development should be directed and which partnerships strengthened.

18. In March 2019, ESCAP launched the “Asia-Pacific SDG gateway”, which provides access to available data and statistics on the status of progress against Sustainable Development Goal indicators in the 58 States members of ESCAP. The gateway serves as critical resource for all stakeholders to better prioritize their policy, programmes and investment.

19. ESCAP provides direct support to national statistics offices on the development of Sustainable Development Goal data, statistics and indicators through regional advisory services and capacity-building workshops. In 2018, at a meeting of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, member States adopted a declaration entitled “Navigating policy with data to leave no one behind”. Building on this, ESCAP worked with 42 countries throughout the region during 2018 on statistical capacity-building activities.

Leaving no one behind

20. ESCAP has the proven ability to convene stakeholders, including national and local governments, the private sector, civil society organizations and research and academic institutes, to share good practices and discuss and build consensus on issues related to the 2030 Agenda. It supports Governments in reaching consensus on norms, agreements and policies addressing the regional, subregional, multi-country and transboundary aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals.

21. The normative work of ESCAP has, among other things, been directed towards leaving no one behind. A case in point is the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, adopted in 2012, and its follow-up action, which resulted in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy in 2017.

22. ESCAP also assisted in the articulation of a regional perspective on migration through the Asia and the Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2017.

Institutional strengthening for the integration of and stakeholder engagement on the 2030 Agenda

23. ESCAP delivers technical assistance to member States and their partners in formulating and implementing policies and programmes in support of the 2030 Agenda. One such example is the assistance given to countries preparing voluntary national reviews to engage stakeholders in dialogues about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In 2018–2019, technical assistance was delivered to national processes, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangkok regional hub, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and resident coordinators, in the development of voluntary national reviews in Cambodia, Kazakhstan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Viet Nam, as well as the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu). Such assistance has facilitated participatory voluntary national review processes, mobilizing a wide range of stakeholders from various line ministries and civil society organizations around building capacity and intersectoral linkages.

Arab States

Monitoring and supporting progress on the Sustainable Development Goals

24. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has launched a data portal that comprises 100 million data points on social, economic and environmental data that is available in Arabic and English and that is the basis for a regional Sustainable Development Goal monitoring portal that will be launched later in 2019.

2030 Agenda macroeconomic model for sustainable fiscal policies

25. In promoting an integrated approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA has developed a macroeconomic Sustainable Development Goal model that simulates the impact of policy choices on each of the 17 Goals. It has also developed a social expenditure monitoring tool that feeds into the model and helps to optimize social allocations. ESCWA continues to refine this model and will apply it in pilot countries as a policy tool for sustainable financing of the Goals.

Creating a multidimensional poverty reduction measurement framework

26. In supporting member States in their efforts to address poverty, ESCWA has developed a regional multidimensional poverty reduction framework that was adopted by Arab leaders at the 2019 Arab Economic and Social Development Summit of the League of Arab States (LAS) and is currently developing an Arab multidimensional poverty index to be used by member States in measuring and combating poverty.

Leaving no one behind

27. In promoting the principle of leaving no one behind, ESCWA is focusing on equity and inclusiveness, especially on the disabled. In 2018, it updated its Arab regional overview and quantitative study on disability and made available the first regional data set that complies with the statistical standards and approach of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. ESCWA also developed a regional handbook, the first of its kind, on statistics on persons with disabilities.

Prevention of conflict relapse

28. ESCWA also developed an institutional gaps assessment for Arab countries in conflict or post-conflict settings. The tool assists countries in strengthening the public sector's capacity to support recovery, improve development outcomes and prevent conflict relapse. The gaps assessment has been deployed to Iraq and Yemen.

2. Aligning programmes and conference structures with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda

Regional forums for sustainable development

29. The regional forums for sustainable development,¹ convened annually by the regional commissions, have consolidated their status as the regional platforms for assessing progress and exchanging knowledge, best practices and solutions to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in line with regional priorities and specificities. In this context, countries have continued to receive support in the preparation of voluntary national reviews, benefiting from the wealth of knowledge and experiences shared in these forums. As part of their programme, the regional forums align with the global theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development from the regional perspective (in 2019, it is "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality"), thus constituting meaningful stepping stones towards the process of following up on and reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals. The regional forums are convened in collaboration with United Nations

¹ See General Assembly resolutions [67/290](#) and [70/1](#). The dates and locations of the forums for 2019, as well as the symbols of the reports, are as follows: Europe region, Geneva, 21 and 22 March ([E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.1](#)); Asia-Pacific region, Bangkok, 27–29 March ([E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.2](#)); Arab region, Beirut, 9–11 April ([E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.3](#)); Africa region, Marrakech, Morocco, 16–18 April ([E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.4](#)); and Latin America and the Caribbean region, Santiago, 22–26 April ([E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.5](#)).

agencies and bring together stakeholders from across the three dimensions of sustainable development, including from Member States, as well as regional and subregional organizations, international financial institutions, the private sector, academia and civil society organizations.

United Nations development system repositioning

30. The regional commissions have taken important steps to align their programmes and conference structures to the requirements of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, they play a very active role in the framework of the United Nations development system repositioning process (see [A/74/73-E/2019/14](#)). Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#), the regional commissions have taken swift action to implement key deliverables of the regional optimization phase (phase 1). They were also active participants in the extensive consultations undertaken in the context of the longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the United Nations (phase 2), including as members of the internal review team established by the Secretary-General, and provided logistical support to the outreach and consultations held in all regions in the context of the review. The repositioning process provides a renewed opportunity to enhance both the vertical policy backbone – connecting global, regional and country action – and horizontal coherence within each region in order to strengthen the United Nations system-wide support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The regional commissions stand ready to support the implementation of proposals presented by the Secretary-General to build a United Nations regional architecture best suited to respond to the imperatives of the 2030 Agenda. They also continue to engage actively in the work of multiple reform streams and within the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and its strategic results and advisory groups towards supporting the delivery of strengthened results by a new generation of United Nations country teams under empowered resident coordinators.

Africa

31. To respond to the requirements of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, ECA has undertaken initiatives with a view to reorienting its programme to effectively support the implementation of and follow-up on the 2030 Agenda. In particular, it has undertaken a major review resulting in the identification of five new strategic directions, endorsed by its Conference of Ministers and the Economic and Social Council: (a) advancing ECA as premier knowledge institution in the region; (b) building sustainable development solutions to accelerate Africa's economic diversification and industrialization; (c) creating innovative solutions to finance sustainable infrastructure; (d) contributing solutions to transboundary issues, with a focus on social inclusion; and (e) developing regional solutions as a contribution to global governance issues.

32. The focus on the ECA macroeconomic policy programme is broadened to include economic governance matters and support for the African Peer Review Mechanism. A new programme on private sector development and finance was introduced, with a view to supporting member States in achieving accelerated job creation, sustained economic growth and transformation. Furthermore, ECA work on innovation and technology as facilitators of development was recalibrated to support all programmatic areas. The capacity development function was substantively mainstreamed as a core function across ECA work, and the work on social development was reconfigured to have a special focus on poverty and inequality. The five subregional offices of ECA also specialize in selected thematic areas to ensure a more effective approach to priority issues of concern and development challenges faced by member States in their relevant subregions.

Asia and the Pacific

33. The conference structure of ESCAP was aligned with the requirements of the 2030 Agenda through Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/30 and decision 2017/269, both of which came after an independent evaluation in 2014 that had identified several areas for enhancing the work of ESCAP, including:

(a) Financing for development and for science, technology and innovation, both of which were added to committees under the ESCAP subsidiary structure to allow for full coverage of the means of implementation of and follow-up on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda;

(b) The establishment of a committee on energy along with an energy division to enhance efforts in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 7;

(c) A realignment of all other sectoral committees to ensure that the entire intergovernmental structure was focused on the achievement of the Goals, including through regional economic cooperation and integration.

34. In line with the above changes, the strategic framework for the biennium 2018–2019 indicates which of the Sustainable Development Goals are the focus of each subprogramme. The 2020 programme plan took this a step further by making this feature central to the strategies of each subprogramme and establishing that the ESCAP programme of work contributes to the implementation of all 17 Goals.

35. Furthermore, in January 2019, the ESCAP Executive Secretary appointed an Advisory Group of Eminent Persons to identify strategic policy areas and further enhance the ESCAP focus to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. The members of the Group represent all subregions of the Asia-Pacific region, with a vast wealth of experience, expertise and commitment to regional cooperation and sustainable development.

Arab States

36. ESCWA has taken significant steps in the follow-up on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals that include but are not limited to the following areas: aligning the structure of the organization with the transformative features of the 2030 Agenda; readjusting or updating results-based budgeting and management, including performance indicators; taking action to enhance support for the principle of leaving no one behind and for integrated policy approaches; and developing Goal-specific strategies, plans or work programmes.

37. In December 2015, ESCWA presented a comprehensive strategy to its member States that was further complemented with the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Arab States, adopted at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission. The Doha Declaration contains a request for ESCWA to play a more active role in building the capacities of member States in integrating development planning for implementing the 2030 Agenda and in upgrading their statistical systems to monitor the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

38. ESCWA has mainstreamed the 2030 Agenda into its intergovernmental machinery. It is comprised of eight committees, on statistics, energy, water, trade and financing for development, social development, women, transport and technology for development. This mainstreaming included having a standing subtheme of these committees on the 2030 Agenda. This ensures that the regional thematic priorities are discussed through a Sustainable Development Goal lens.

39. ESCWA will continue to work with its member States to further align and sharpen its strategic focus to respond to the challenges of the 2030 Agenda in the region.

Economic Commission for Europe region

40. The ECE work programme is focused on supporting member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in eight broad areas or subprogrammes: environment, transport, statistics, economic cooperation and integration, sustainable energy, trade, forests and the forest industry, and housing, land management and population. All its subprogrammes are now fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. In addition, methodologies for the country assessments in all these areas have been adjusted to reflect the demands of the 2030 Agenda.

41. The nine Sustainable Development Goals that define the core specialization of ECE are Goals 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15 (Goals 5 and 17 underpin all of them). Subprogrammes have articulated their work according to the most relevant Goals from this selection in the strategic framework for the biennium 2018–2019.

42. In order to better position ECE to take advantage of these opportunities, its secretariat has created cross-divisional teams as flexible arrangements to strengthen established synergies/complementarities among ECE subprogrammes and identify possible new activities in high-impact areas. The four nexus areas are the sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable and smart cities for all ages, sustainable mobility and smart connectivity, and measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals.

Latin America and the Caribbean

43. ECLAC underwent a revision of its programme of work and its structure to better adapt its activities to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission's proposed programmatic structure incorporates an analysis of convergence and efforts to strengthen the synergies between subprogrammes to respond in a more efficient manner to member State mandates, in particular those deriving from the 2030 Agenda.

44. One example of these efforts is the merging of two subprogrammes, Macroeconomic policies and Growth and financing for development, to respond more effectively and efficiently to the new demands from countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region regarding the design and implementation of macroeconomic policies in connection with fiscal, monetary and financial matters, as well as labour market policies, to support economic growth and achieve sustainable development in countries of the region, and to facilitate the adoption of an integrated approach to the thematic areas of domestic resource mobilization and external resources to finance development.

45. ECLAC also established a regional conference on science, innovation and information and communications technologies, the objectives of which include promoting the development and improvement of national policies on science, technology and innovation and those related to the information and knowledge society.

B. Leveraging partnerships for sustainable development

46. The attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals requires multi-stakeholder partnerships and significant resources that cannot be mobilized through traditional

official development assistance. Strong global and regional partnerships and cooperation are essential to meet the 2030 Agenda. As an integral part of their regional institutional landscape, the regional commissions have, for decades, enjoyed strategic partnerships with United Nations development system agencies, funds and programmes, as well as with organizations outside the system, with relevant regional, subregional organizations and with other stakeholders.

Asia and the Pacific

Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

47. In order to help to fill the Sustainable Development Goal data gaps, ESCAP has supported multiple data and statistics partnerships regarding the Goals. It has facilitated the ministerial declaration on civil registration and vital statistics and the regional action framework on civil registration and vital statistics. The Asia-Pacific disaster-related statistical framework is another example. Established by ESCAP in partnership with member States and partners, such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ECLAC and ECE, the framework contributes to monitoring the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

48. The ESCAP Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development is a unique regional mechanism pooling together regional resources in the form of satellite-derived data, knowledge products, tailored tools, timely services and a training network to address sustainable development. This mechanism showcases the use of South-South and triangular cooperation to share knowledge and technical resources to benefit countries in the region. The mechanism is supported by 25 member States and implemented in collaboration with research entities.

49. ESCAP has worked closely with subregional organizations such as the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat in integrating the 2030 Agenda into subregional processes. Some highlights include ESCAP support for the development and implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between the Association of Southeast Nations and the United Nations (2016–2020) and the collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat in the development of the Pacific Sustainable Development Goals road map.

Financing for development

50. The ESCAP Sustainable Business Network is the main mechanism to advance business engagement in working towards implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific through six task forces covering the digital economy, disaster and climate risk reduction, innovation and competitiveness, banking and finance, youth and women entrepreneurship and green business. The Network has actively engaged in promoting sustainable development through public-private partnerships such as support for the organization of the annual Asia-Pacific Business Forum.

Arab States

Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

51. ESCWA continues to provide the Arab region with a dedicated regional platform for knowledge-sharing and policy coordination. It capitalizes on longstanding partnerships with other regional organizations such as LAS and United Nations entities, including other regional commissions, and with different constituencies central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. ESCWA, the UNDP Regional

Bureau for Arab States and the Islamic Development Bank, in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, organized the 2019 Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda.

52. In leveraging the partnership with civil society, ESCWA held a series of “CSO dialogues”, which targeted several ESCWA member States and focused on selected areas of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as Goals 10 and 16. In April 2018, ESCWA organized the regional meeting of civil society on sustainable development in the Arab region.

Financing for development

53. With respect to partnerships with the private sector, ESCWA redefined its engagement with the Global Compact Local Network (Lebanon chapter) and invited the Global Compact to lead the preparation of the outcomes of a conference held in November 2018 on domestic private finance.

Migration

54. On the United Nations side, ESCWA co-chairs the inter-agency Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region, the main goal of which is to promote joint research and interventions on international migration in the region. In addition, it partners with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in supporting Arab countries in reforming their social protection systems. It further partners with ILO in a joint regional project on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market.

Administrative efficiencies

55. ESCWA leveraged its partnership networks to optimize the allocation of its assets to provide regional administrative services, realize cost savings and more efficiently support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To that end, it has expanded the provision of administrative services to other entities at the regional level in various areas, such as conference services, translation and printing, banking, medical services, travel and human resources.

Africa

Health financing

56. The Africa Business: Health Forum is intended to strengthen partnerships, promote an ongoing dialogue between the African private and public sectors and foster opportunities for the private sector to contribute to strengthening national health systems in Africa. The Forum has helped to constitute the African Business Coalition for Health, which brought together ECA, the Global Business Coalition for Health (GBCHealth), the Aliko Dangote Foundation and Private Sector Health Alliance of Nigeria. The African Business Coalition for Health was launched on the margins of the African Union summit held in January 2019.

Centre of excellence on digital identity, trade and the digital economy

57. In October 2018, ECA launched, with its strategic partners, its centre of excellence on digital identity, trade and the digital economy. The centre of excellence, the work of which is overseen by a high-level advisory board, serves as an on-demand source of technical advice for countries on their digital identity, trade and the digital

economy, and will undertake research on the multifarious dimensions of the digital economy. It will also seek to backstop ECA support for the creation of a digital common market under the African Continental Free Trade Area. In this regard, the ECA partnership with the Omidyar Network is aimed at supporting the establishment of a digital identity platform for Africa. The partnership will also support building the capacity of African senior officials and the establishment at ECA of another centre of excellence, on digital identity and data privacy, thus contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 16.

Public-private partnerships and infrastructure: Belt and Road Initiative

58. ECA concluded a partnership agreement in November 2018 with the National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China on the Belt and Road Initiative, with the aim of leveraging public-private partnership models for sustainable development and for infrastructure networks supporting regional connectivity in Africa. The partnership will contribute to sustainable development and regional connectivity such as the one promoted under the 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals 9 and 17), the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa and Agenda 2063.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

59. ECLAC has worked in close partnership with entities of the United Nations development system in Latin America and the Caribbean on various aspects of the 2030 Agenda. For example, joint publications issued in 2017 and 2018 include the ECLAC-UNICEF quarterly bulletin of child poverty from various perspectives; the ECLAC-ILO bulletin entitled "Employment situation in Latin America and the Caribbean: labour immigration in Latin America"; *The Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Americas: A Perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean 2017–2018*, published by ECLAC and FAO; and the publication entitled "The cost of the double burden of malnutrition", published jointly with WFP. ECLAC has also collaborated with the secretariat of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund and other United Nations specialized agencies in formulating policies and adopting measures to address climate change and mitigation, as well as natural disasters, including using the ECLAC damage and loss assessment methodology.

60. ECLAC collaborates with the Central American Integration System in supporting the energy integration process. One of the results of this long-standing collaboration was the presentation of the first draft of the 2030 energy strategy for the countries of the Central American Integration System.

61. The partnerships with civil society, together with government officials, in the negotiation process that led to the Escazú Agreement are also worth noting.

Leaving no one behind

62. ECLAC forged an alliance of think tanks from Mexico and three Central American countries to construct a narrative on migration that is closely linked to development models and human security.

63. Synergies have also been explored, and technical cooperation projects funded by external donors, with the German and Spanish cooperation agencies (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development/German Agency for Technical Cooperation and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation,

respectively), and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the area of gender equality.

Financing for development

64. To promote the financial inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises in support of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8, ECLAC partnered with the Latin American Association of Development Financing Institutions to promote innovative policies in development banking. ECLAC has also developed partnerships with the European Commission and the Development Centre for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to further analyse the new kind of financing for development that best meets the requirements of countries ascending to relatively higher levels of development.

Economic Commission for Europe region

Supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

65. ECE has been strengthening existing partnerships and developing new ones to support its member States in their efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda. There are multiple examples, with a wide range of partners. ECE and FAO have been working together for more than 70 years through their Joint Forestry and Timber Section. This partnership and joint office are proving vital vis-à-vis the work on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular because work on data, monitoring and assessment is undertaken jointly, thus avoiding duplication, overlap and inconsistency.

66. An example of partnerships to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in an integrated manner is the role of ECE as a co-organizer, together with the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants and the World Bank of the first Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health, held in Geneva from 30 October to 1 November 2018, aimed at contributing to the achievement of Goals 3, 7, 11 and 13.

67. ECE has established partnerships with multiple research organizations and other knowledge institutions. Specific research products are sometimes developed in collaboration with universities, for example, the Active Ageing Index, which is the result of the collaboration with Southampton University. In the areas of sustainable energy, ECE is extending its city-level network of International Centres of Excellence on High-Performance Buildings and its Global Building Network of universities to carry out training and research related to the ECE Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings.

68. Sustainable Mobility for All is a global, multi-stakeholder partnership that acts collectively to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and transform the transport sector. ECE plays a leading role as a member of the steering committee and a co-lead in two of the five open-ended working groups, namely, those on safety and on efficiency.

II. Developments and outcomes in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation

A. Major policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings

69. In addition to the policy issues relating to the areas addressed in section I of the report, the regional commissions have deliberated on a number of other areas relevant to their regions at their sessions and at other high-level meetings.

70. Three regional commissions held their sessions in 2019, as decided by their member States. The table below contains the highlights and focuses of the sessions of the commissions held in 2019.

Commission sessions in 2019

Fifty-second session of ECA (annual)	Marrakech, Morocco 20–26 March	The session included a ministerial segment focused on the theme of “Fiscal policy, trade and the private sector in a digital era: a strategy for Africa”, which recognized the vital role of digitization in enhancing fiscal policy effectiveness and efficiency
Sixty-eighth session of ECE (biennial)	Geneva 9 and 10 April	The session included a high-level segment on the theme of “Smart sustainable cities: drivers for sustainable development”, which discussed how cities could provide inhabitants of all ages with a high quality of life and not leaving anyone behind, while becoming centres of innovation and competitiveness. It built on World Cities Day, gathering approximately 50 mayors from the region to discuss challenges and opportunities of smart sustainable cities
Seventy-fifth session of ESCAP (annual)	Bangkok 27–31 May	The session included a ministerial segment that, building on the 2018 session on inequality, examined how empowerment and inclusion, achieved through sustainable and secure access to basic opportunities and a decent income, were fundamental factors for social mobility and how increased mobility was critical for reducing inequality

71. Summaries of the work of the regional commissions submitted to the Economic and Social Council provide more details of the work undertaken by the commissions during the reporting period (see [E/2019/16](#), [E/2019/17](#), [E/2019/18](#), [E/2019/19](#) and [E/2019/20](#)).

B. Promoting coherence at the regional level and enhanced policy-operational nexus

Regional coordination mechanisms

72. The regional coordination mechanisms were established following Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46 (annex III). As part of their relevant regional institutional landscape and as mandated in paragraph 12 of the same resolution, the regional commissions have long-established strategic coordination arrangements with regional and subregional organizations. The Council, in its landmark resolution, recognized that the “team leadership role of the regional commissions calls for their holding regular inter-agency meetings in each region with a view to improving coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system in that region”. The Secretary-General has proposed the creation of a unified

mechanism for coordination in each region, namely a United Nations regional collaborative platform, to foster collaboration on sustainable development across United Nations development system entities operating at the regional level. The high-level meetings of the platforms in all regions will be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, as initially envisioned by the Council in its resolution 1998/46, to ensure coherent leadership at all levels. Specific arrangements for the platforms will be developed on a region-by-region basis, following consideration by the Council of all proposals put forward by the Secretary-General to reposition the United Nations work at the regional level.

73. In 2019, the regional coordination mechanisms, under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, who visited almost all regions and chaired mechanism meetings or held consultations back-to-back with the regional forums, were leveraged as platforms for regional consultations on the longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the United Nations on a region-by-region basis. The outcome of these consultations informed the deliberations of the internal review team and the work of the think tank that coordinated an independent analysis and mapping of regional functions and capacities. This ultimately led to the proposals contained in the 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, 2019 ([A/74/73](#)).

74. During the reporting period, the regional coordination mechanisms and the regional office of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group continued to pursue greater coordination. In addition, the mechanisms also continued their focus on their programme of work for 2019 in terms of continuing to promote coherence in policy and in regional and subregional programming. For example, in Africa, at the twentieth meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, United Nations system support for the African Union in addressing issues related to refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa was discussed. In Asia and the Pacific, the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism discussed the progress in monitoring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region and the priorities for regional action by the United Nations development system. In Europe and Central Asia, the joint meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Europe and Central Asia and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group focused on jointly identifying and addressing transboundary and subregional issues.

75. The regional issue-based coalitions and regional coordination mechanism working groups also continued to play an important role as major platforms for substantive and technical assistance work, and the Secretary-General intends to expand and strengthen these modalities. In the ECE region, the United Nations issue-based coalition for health and well-being in Europe and Central Asia launched the United Nations common position paper on ending tuberculosis, HIV and viral hepatitis through intersectoral collaboration and the issue-based coalition on social protection produced a publication on joint advocacy messages, in order to foster policy coherence among United Nations actors in the area of social protection. In Asia and the Pacific, the Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women initiated a regional review of gender data and situation analysis for girls and delivered a series of training workshops on gender statistics to enhance national capacities to collect disaggregated statistics. The Thematic Working Group on Resource Efficient Growth developed joint projects to support the implementation of the ASEAN-United Nations action plan on the environment and climate change (2017–2020), collaborated on the development of Sustainable Development Goal profiles for the regional forum and provided support to countries with special needs to develop joint programming on sustainable urbanization. The Thematic Working Group on Sustainable Societies mapped regional or multi-country activities related to

young people, ageing, international migration and urbanization, which is expected to lead to more coordinated and effective support to member States.

76. In Latin America and the Caribbean, building on the agreement reached at the 2018 meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Latin America and the Caribbean that migration in northern Central America and Mexico would be a priority area, ECLAC, UNDP and the International Organization for Migration are strengthening collaboration in the follow-up on and implementation of the comprehensive development plan for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico initiated by ECLAC at the request of the Governments of these countries. The Mechanism has also placed emphasis on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all its endeavours. In the Arab region, a joint operational framework for collaboration was agreed among United Nations development system entities. It is intended to enhance regional coordination, ensure more effective analysis and action on regional and transboundary issues, improve the capacity of the regional offices of the United Nations development system to deliver integrated policy advice in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to Member States and United Nations country teams, enhance the leadership and coordination in the area of data and reduce duplication and enhance cooperation in the production of regional knowledge products.

Strengthened country-regional nexus

77. In addition to the alignment of the regional architecture described above, efforts are being made to strengthen the country-regional nexus. Building on the statement of collaboration signed by the regional commissions and the Chair of the United Nations Development Group in 2016, a set of key actions were agreed to improve collaboration among different United Nations actors at the regional level and their interaction with the wider system at both the global and country levels. This phase of optimization of the current regional mechanisms and structures was initiated in the second half of 2018 and culminated in nine specific deliverables.²

78. The regional commissions are increasingly active members of the relevant regional peer support group mechanisms, which support the development and review of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks, allowing for the leveraging of their cross-sectoral expertise and ensuring a more thorough analysis of regional and transboundary issues. The new cooperation frameworks guidance recognizes the regional dimension of sustainable development, including the need to integrate regional and transboundary issues into the relevant cooperation frameworks.

79. All regional commissions have contributed to the formulation of some cooperation frameworks through common country assessment exercises and the peer support group mechanisms. This includes dialogues with resident coordinators on subregional and transboundary issues that have also covered the results, lessons learned and future plans on mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support missions with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, including how to ensure that the recommendations emerging from the dialogues with the resident coordinators feed into future cooperation frameworks.

80. The engagement among the regional commissions and the resident coordinators and United Nations country teams has increased notably, including through familiarization visits, the development of induction programmes for resident coordinators, communication on upcoming travel by staff of the regional commissions to the countries, joint retreats and dedicated meetings to enhance awareness of the assets available in the regions to be leveraged by the resident

² For a complete list of the deliverables, please refer to paragraph 101 of [A/74/73-E/2019/4](#).

coordinators in support of the implementation of the cooperation frameworks. The commissions have also further encouraged the participation of United Nations development system entities and resident coordinators in the meetings of their subsidiary intergovernmental bodies, including the regional forums for sustainable development. Furthermore, some regional commissions have taken the lead in discussing with resident coordinator offices the strengthening of their economic policy function, among other things, through collaborating in the vetting of the senior economists who will be hired in the offices of the resident coordinators and setting up regional United Nations economists networks.

Strengthened regional-global nexus

81. The regional-global nexus has also been strengthened, among other things, through the high-level reporting of the outcomes of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to the high-level political forum on sustainable development by the Chairs of the regional forums as part of the ministerial segment of the high-level political forum. Efforts also continue by the regional commissions to ensure that adequate space is dedicated to the regional dimension of sustainable development at the high-level political forum, including by mainstreaming the regional dimension into the various panels and roundtables of the high-level political forum.

82. The nexus has also been strengthened through other thematic intergovernmental processes in which the regional commissions serve as platforms for the follow-up on and review of globally agreed frameworks and contribute the regional voice for the formulation of global frameworks. For example, in the second half of 2018, the regional commissions conducted regional reviews of the International Conference on Population and Development, the outcomes of which were transmitted to the fifty-second session of the Commission on Population and Development.

83. Moreover, collaboration with global entities has been furthered in areas such as financing for development, migration, social development, disaster risk reduction and South-South and triangular cooperation. Regarding the latter, the outcome document of the High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation contains a strong and explicit recognition of the role of the regional commissions and proposals for action at the regional level in support of South-South cooperation (General Assembly resolution [73/291](#), annex).

C. Enhanced interregional cooperation among the regional commissions

84. Since the previous report ([E/2018/15](#) and [E/2018/15/Add.1](#)), the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions have met 20 times in person on the margins of other meetings or by videoconference. Their meetings resulted in coordinated positions and contributions to regional responses in support of the 2030 Agenda, including on the repositioning of the United Nations to better support Member States in the achievement of their development goals, as well as on migration and other matters. The regional commissions also organized a joint session on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional and subregional levels at the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development and joint side events such as those during the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, held in Marrakech, Morocco, in December 2018.

85. The regional commissions continued to collaborate in areas such as regional economic integration, illicit financial flows, road safety, environmental performance,

energy, trade facilitation and reducing inequality. ECE is leading collaboration among all the regional commissions to advance road safety in countries and communities and to promote people-first public-private partnerships for the 2030 Agenda.

86. Regional economic integration is a key priority for advancing economic diversification, industrialization and structural transformation, which in turn enables sustainable growth and development. ECA cooperates with ESCAP and ESCWA in developing robust regional integration indexes to allow for ranking countries and regional economic communities according to their integration performances. The information generated through the African regional integration index is used for better policymaking and analysis, with a view to improving their own performance in regional integration. This interregional cooperation is also aimed at strengthening the capacity of six developing countries from Africa, the Arab region and the Asia-Pacific region (two from each region) to measure, monitor and improve their performance in regional integration.

87. ECA, in collaboration with ECLAC, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, has been working since 2018 towards developing a statistical methodology to estimate illicit financial flows, with the objectives of gaining more accurate knowledge of their size and origins, strengthening the political will to address this problem and providing evidence for a targeted and effective policy response. The cooperation supports, among other things, improving capacities of nine African countries to produce their own illicit financial flows estimates, study their evolution through time and monitor the impact of policies put in place to reduce these flows.

88. Under the Forum for East Asia–Latin America Cooperation, ECLAC and ESCAP collaborated in the design of a trust fund to support projects promoting interregional cooperation in trade and investment; science, technology and innovation; infrastructure and transport; and public policies and public-private partnerships for sustainable growth and for a reduction in inequality and improving social cohesion. Established in 2017, the fund has received voluntary contributions from seven member States, and ECLAC and ESCAP are jointly implementing two interregional projects: one that addresses reducing inequality in member countries of the Forum through innovative policymaking and another that focuses on value chain development for the deeper integration of East Asia and Latin America.

89. Lastly, the regional commissions are also working with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other entities of the United Nations development system to harmonize statistical dashboards in support of monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals.
