

**MESSAGES OF THE
REGIONAL FORA
ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**



2021

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**United
Nations**

In February and March 2021, the United Nations regional commissions organized the Regional Fora on Sustainable Development (RFSDs), promoting dialogue among multiple stakeholders on ways to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda and a sustainable recovery from COVID-19. The following key messages reflect shared priorities as well as region-specific challenges and recommendations.

Key messages emanating from all five regional fora

Five regions, one message

The 2030 Agenda is the guiding framework for a recovery from COVID-19 that is green, rights-based, inclusive, and sustainable.



Rethinking the global financing architecture is critical! All five regional fora called for inclusive and innovative financing systems, increasing access to concessional lending, debt relief and debt for climate swap mechanisms to support middle-income countries, countries in special situations, least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS), and reconsidering graduation criteria for developing countries beyond GDP per capita.



Investing in people-centred and gender-responsive health and social protection systems is necessary to address poverty and inequality. The groups most affected by the pandemic in all regions are often the ones that were most vulnerable and neglected before the crisis. Health and social protection must address those on the margins, including migrants, workers in the informal sector, persons with disabilities, women and youth among others.



Investment and innovation in data is crucial to achieve the SDGs, recovery efforts, and crisis response! This includes strengthening data collection and disaggregation, refining monitoring and evaluation systems, leveraging alternative data sources, using new technologies in censuses and surveys and building on alternative methodologies.



Commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment through concrete actions needs to be renewed and strengthened. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women. Domestic violence has often increased. Enacting and implementing legislation to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and expanding women's representation and participation in all aspects of public life are critical.



Digitalization must be leveraged in support of the SDGs. Urgent issues include supporting universal access to technology and connectivity, such as a universal basic digital basket, accelerating the digital transformation in the public and private sectors, including the health sector, and adopting strategies to improve research and development.

Africa

<https://www.uneca.org/arfsd2021>



National development strategies should be **aligned with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) process** towards boosting intra-African trade, promoting industrialization and integration into the world economy. **This alignment will enable countries to leverage the opportunities the Area offers to respond to and recover from COVID-19 crisis and build forward better.**



Investment and political commitment to make progress towards SDG 2 should be scaled up by focusing on three priority areas: linking rural actors to markets, enhancing financial services and promoting innovation to transform rural areas.



A green recovery will require innovating sources of finance. Swapping debt for nature and climate protection would provide a bridge to greater debt sustainability, potentially benefiting both agendas. Targeted support should be provided for protecting the Congo Basin, the second largest carbon sink in the world, through the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin. Nature-based solutions must be pursued.

Arab States

<http://afsd-2021.unescwa.org/>



Filling the financing gap for the SDGs demands a coordinated regional response and a political commitment to a regional road map to reduce illicit financial flows, tax evasion and financial corruption. At the national level, better alignment of national budgets with the SDGs and national development plans and programs is necessary. The pivotal role of the private sector in driving the national and regional economy is recognized and should be supported, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).



SDG 16 is a critical goal for the region to recover from COVID-19 and achieve the SDGs. The forum called for the political commitment to end war and conflict, increase civic space, and link humanitarian aid and emergency response to long-term recovery.



Addressing poverty and inequality and the shrinking of the middle class in the region is necessary for achieving inclusive recovery and implementing the SDGs. This requires redistributive policies, diversification of the economy and job creation. It also requires transforming and improving the educational system, enhancing inclusiveness, developing digital learning platforms as well as building the capacity of researchers and innovators as key elements in the region's efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Asia and the Pacific

<https://www.unescap.org/apfsd/8>



To advance towards the attainment of the SDGs under review, **building human capabilities, and promoting inclusive, resilient and sustainable development, including through scaled up social protection investments, will be important.** Fostering women's

participation in decision-making for nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures to enhance labour rights and build the resilience of poor and marginalized groups are critical.



Digitalization and connectivity will play an important role in **building resilience**. Ambition levels in Nationally Determined Contributions should be increased and environmental law strengthened. Redesign of finance and investment systems to become climate action compatible are a key component of such recoveries.



Solidarity and strengthened regional cooperation is required to ensure that no-one is left behind, and to build back better towards SDG achievement, sustainability, and resilience. Partnerships with, and engagement of civil society, private sector, local communities and other stakeholders and sharing of experiences play an important role in inclusive recovery efforts.

Latin America and the Caribbean

<https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2021/en>



The region is the hardest-hit developing region by COVID-19 (with 8,4% of the world population and 30% of casualties) with the worst economic recession in 120 years and more than a third of its population estimated to be living in poverty in 2020. **The regional coordinated response must be revitalized** including equitable access to vaccines and fostering production and distribution within the region.



The **“big environmental push for equality and sustainability”**, based on the 2030 Agenda, remains a crucial strategy for action endorsed by the region, around eight sectors for a new development pattern: energy transition to renewable sources; sustainable mobility and urban space; the digital revolution and universal access; the health-care manufacturing industry; the bio-economy, biological resources and natural ecosystems; valuing and expanding the care economy; the circular economy and sustainable tourism.



New engines of growth with redistributive results are needed to overcome the financing gaps and the trap affecting middle-income countries and Caribbean SIDS. It is important to expand and redistribute liquidity; broaden fiscal space, promote progressive tax reform, ending tax evasion and avoidance; expand the toolbox of innovative financing instruments; make MSMEs, emergency income and priorities for investment and public spending.

UNECE Region

<https://regionalforum.unece.org/>



The immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis should be complemented by **a long-term approach that relies on trade and innovation and leverages public and private investment into infrastructure**. There is also an opportunity to put tourism on a sustainable path. This requires measurable commitments by governments and policy coherence across the tourism value chain.



Young people have been hit strongly by the COVID-19 crisis. Their concerns should be at the center of recovery plans. They are ready to play a role in building back better, but more platforms for engagement are required.



Addressing the climate change and biodiversity crises demands a whole of society inter-generational approach. Sustainable consumption and production can drive an inclusive transition to a circular economy. A smart mix of regulations, standards, incentives and information tools is central to foster behavioural change towards sustainable lifestyles.

*Stakeholders across the five regions called for **reinvigorating multilateralism, promoting regional and international solidarity, and fostering regional integration** as crucial for tackling the challenges aggravated by COVID-19 pandemic and regaining momentum to achieve the SDGs.*

