

Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027)

UNECE contribution

Structural transformation, productive employment and decent work in the context of a changing global scenario

The COVID-19 crisis hit strongly Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (MSMEs), given their weaker capabilities to absorb shocks. These companies, however, represent a major source of employment and economic dynamism. They are called to play a major role in a structural transformation towards higher added value activities in emerging economies. Supporting MSMEs to extend their networks, embrace digitalization and access international supply chains will be crucial to foster a sustainable recovery and advance inclusive development. ECE, together with other partners, is engaged in a global UN Development Account project aiming to strengthen the capacity and resilience of MSMEs to mitigate the economic and social impact of the global COVID-19 crisis, including by addressing issues related to energy efficiency and women entrepreneurship in natural resource management.

The COVID-19 crisis disrupted supply chains of MSMEs. A series of ECE survey-based studies on Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova have documented these disruptions and the limited capacity of these companies to recover and compete in domestic and global markets. Vulnerability was aggravated by deep-seated structural weaknesses that prevented them from relying on alternatives such as e-commerce. The studies also provided detailed action-oriented recommendations aligned with the 2030 Agenda for addressing not only current but also long-term development needs for structural transformation.

Human capacity development: addressing the non-income forms of poverty

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the need for continuous water supply and improved hygiene practices to reduce the transmission of the virus, particularly given the need for frequent handwashing. Yet, 31 million people in the pan-European region do not have access to basic sanitation and 48 million people do not have piped water at home. ECE actively promotes the tools of the Protocol on Water and Health (jointly serviced with WHO-Europe), which seek to assist countries in enhancing equitable access to water and sanitation. The Equitable Access Scorecard, an analytical tool developed under the Protocol, is used to assess equity in existing water and sanitation public policies and possible actions to be taken.

Poverty has a clear territorial dimension, not only regarding its distribution but also in connection with the access to different types of services, which have an influence on non-income forms of poverty. ECE launched a project on the Post COVID-19 Recovery in Informal Settlements in the ECE Region, which supported the development of a Post COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements. The aim of the project is to strengthen the capacity of national and local governments to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups of population living in the informal settlements. In addition, concrete recommendations have been elaborated for four pilot cities on how to upgrade the informal settlements and support an inclusive recovery.

The future of food and sustainable agriculture

The transformation of the agricultural sector, increasing productivity and improving quality standards to facilitate exports, will play an important role in combating poverty and raising living standards. Food loss is sometimes the result of failing to meet export and trade requirements, coupled with the

inability of domestic markets to absorb products rejected abroad. ECE, together with ESCAP and ECA, has been engaged in a project to reduce food losses in the supply chain, including by developing the necessary international standards. ECE has worked in countries in Central Asia, improving the analysis of the existing situation and producing training materials for capacity-building. The marketability of products has a direct impact on production and employment potential.

Reducing inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened to reverse some of the progress made in advancing gender equality. Women's time devoted to unpaid care has significantly increased due to the closure of care and education institutions, and the working conditions of paid care, mostly done by women, have become more challenging. Many women had to leave their jobs or find part-time jobs to take care of relatives, which led to a sharp decline of their income and increased uncertainty in re-joining the labour market. Women's poverty increased in some countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia as many women previously informally employed were left with no job or social protection. ECE, together with other partners, has carried out a regional analysis of the care economy through a gender lens in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim is to support governments in designing policy packages that include support to the care economy in a way that advances gender equality.

Addressing climate change and the intensification of natural hazards

Climate change will have a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. The post-pandemic recovery needs to be green and inclusive and policies that seek to relaunch economic activity and address immediate emergency needs should be well aligned with longer term environmental goals. ECE has been pivotal in bringing increased coherence and effectiveness on environmental matters in the Europe and Central Asia region. Together with UNEP and UNESCO, ECE is co-leading the inter-agency Issue-based Coalition (IBC) on Environment and Climate Change, which brings together 18 agencies, funds and programmes active in the region. The IBC, which is active as of January 2020, addresses activities dedicated to strengthening environmental and climate change governance, improving environmental management and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and promoting sustainable management of natural resources. To respond to the immediate needs of Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams, the Coalition developed key recommendations and a compendium of measures to green the post-pandemic recovery. Some of the measures shows how a green transition can be a source of job opportunities.

Modalities of Delivery: Building Momentum, Tracking Progress, Learning Lessons, Identifying Emerging Issues And Adapting Actions- Poverty measurement

The identification of the most vulnerable sectors of the population and the appropriate measurement of poverty are essential to design effective policies and monitor their effects. ECE is strongly engaged in a range of related statistical issues. Methodological guidelines on data disaggregation in poverty measurement was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2020. A publication providing guidance on applying various approaches to data disaggregation for measuring poverty, which can serve to improve the international comparability of poverty statistics, was prepared. The publication discusses methods to adapt data collection to reach beyond the traditional survey methodologies and capture the groups that are most exposed to the risk of poverty. It provides analysis on measurement issues such as social transfers in kind, disability cost or high medical expenditures, housing wealth, imputed rent, assets poverty and unequal sharing of resources within households, and multi-dimensional poverty.