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Regional cooperation

Summary of the work of the Economic Commission for Europe, 2024–2025

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith a summary of the work of the Economic Commission for Europe for the period 2024–2025.



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Summary

Amid the ongoing challenges stemming from climate change, geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainties and the accelerating pace of technological innovation, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has remained steadfast in supporting its member States in the pursuit of sustainable development. The present report provides a summary of the activities undertaken across ECE subprogrammes in the year under review, as well as an overview of how the Commission's normative, policy and technical cooperation work continues to deliver impact with regard to shared and common challenges in the region. Through the normative and technical work of ECE, water cooperation, the circular economy, gender equality and safe mobility were advanced, while regional and cross-sector partnerships remained critical to delivering results on the ground. In response to challenges in sustainable finance, ECE facilitated partnerships and piloted investment projects in key sectors, such as energy and transport, and in climate resilience. Through its continued efforts to promote data-driven decision-making and regulatory coherence, ECE provided its member States with actionable tools and methodologies to support policy development. Together, those efforts reflect the commitment of ECE to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by mobilizing knowledge, partnerships and innovation for a more sustainable and resilient future for all. In the report, a particular spotlight is cast on local action for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the relevance of all dimensions of sustainability for local communities, including in cities, is highlighted. Collaborative partnerships with a wide range of actors continue to play an important role in effectively fulfilling ECE mandates and advancing the attainment of the Goals.

I. Introduction

1. Geopolitical tensions, multiple crises and a series of economic, social and environmental shocks have led to insufficient progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. At the Summit of the Future in 2024, Member States reaffirmed their political commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The resulting Pact for the Future gave a renewed impetus to accelerating the achievement of the Goals and to the search for more effective and innovative policy responses to ongoing challenges, including at the regional level.

2. Addressing environmental pressures while promoting economic dynamism and enhancing social inclusion requires transformational changes in key sectors, including transport and energy. Multilateral frameworks are critical for preserving the environment and managing natural resources effectively. Moreover, taking action at all governance levels, including at the local and subnational levels, is crucial to addressing the sustainability concerns of all population groups.

3. The Commission has continued to support its member States in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in its mandated areas of work, in circumstances that remain difficult. It continues to update and develop normative frameworks and policy guidance and to promote regional and transboundary cooperation in order to better address relevant issues and respond to evolving contexts, including in the light of rapid technological change. In a diverse region, the facilitation of technical cooperation is critical to ensure overall progress that leaves no one behind, supporting the practical implementation of normative and policy outputs in all countries.

II. Advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region

4. While the commitment to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda remains strong following the Summit of the Future, progress in achieving the Goals is falling short. In recent years, the ECE region has been shaken by the war against Ukraine, the energy crisis and surging inflation. The 2025 progress report on the Goals prepared by ECE shows that the region is getting further off track.¹ With the inclusion of newly available data, the latest assessment reveals further deterioration in performance, alongside a few positive developments.

5. At the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region, held in Geneva on 2 and 3 April 2025, it was noted that insufficient progress had been made in achieving the Goals in the context of multiple challenges and slowing economic growth. An urgent call for renewed commitment to and action on the 2030 Agenda was issued, drawing momentum from the Pact for the Future, while recognizing that the United Nations system itself was also facing challenges and calls for reform. Means of implementation, especially financing, were raised in the context of the discussions on the forthcoming Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development and the Second World Summit for Social Development.

6. On the basis of current trends, the region will achieve only 21 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, or just 17 per cent of measurable targets, down from a projected 26 targets in 2022. For 84 targets, progress needs to be accelerated. Current trends need to be reversed for 20 targets, up from 15 targets in

¹ *Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region in 2025: More Data, Persistent Challenges* (United Nations publication, 2025).

2022. Data availability is improving, with the number of targets that can be assessed increasing from 105 to 125 over the past three years.

7. Under Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), the ECE region is set to achieve targets on the reduction of child and maternal mortality, as well as on mortality from noncommunicable diseases. Progress on all the other health and well-being targets needs to be accelerated. Improvements continue to be slow on combating discrimination and ensuring the representation of women in economic and political life. Technology for the empowerment of women is the only gender-related target on track (under Goal 5). Although the region has returned to the path of economic growth (Goal 8) and the implementation of dedicated strategies for youth employment is on track, progress towards the other targets on decent work and economic growth must be accelerated. Regarding Goals 12 to 15, relating to climate and the environment, the region is on track to achieve only two targets; for six targets under those Goals, the trends must be reversed.

8. Environmental sustainability, natural resource management and climate change resilience remain critical challenges in the region. ECE leads, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the issue-based coalition on environment and climate change, a regional inter-agency coalition that brings together 17 United Nations entities to support resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in tackling emerging issues that require multifaceted responses. The coalition provides both targeted advice at the national level and broader guidance at the regional level, upon request. For example, in the context of the One United Nations initiative, the coalition mapped potential entry points for joint actions at the national and subregional levels in the complex water cooperation environments that limit economic development and climate adaptation in the Central Asia and South Caucasus subregions.

9. Through its environmental performance reviews, ECE responds to requests by countries for help in aligning economic development, including green transitions, with evolving environmental and sustainability objectives. Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan launched their third reviews at the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Baku. ECE also published the second environmental performance review of Armenia and the first of Mauritania, with each review tailored to provide policy recommendations that address the priorities set by each country. The fourth such reviews of Montenegro and Tajikistan are being prepared for publication, with the former including an innovative chapter on the nexus of energy, air pollution and health protection in the country.

10. In response to growing concerns over air pollution, Parties to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution have made significant strides in revising the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, with a view to making its targets more ambitious. In particular, Parties have shown strong support for the incorporation of commitments on methane – a key contributor to ground-level ozone – into the revised Protocol. Efforts are focused on updating emissions targets, promoting cost-effective air quality improvements, improving the technical annexes and encouraging wider adoption by non-Parties. Technical support for improving emissions inventories (in Armenia, Georgia and Montenegro) and reducing pollution (in Georgia) has contributed to national initiatives for clean air.

11. Water scarcity and floods have intensified in frequency and severity, with devastating impacts. Under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, significant progress has been made in addressing those challenges through a robust legal framework, capacity-

building, technical assistance and systematic monitoring. Amid escalating climate challenges, new Parties, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have joined the Convention with a view to enhancing their water governance. In the context of the Convention, ECE has supported countries in the Prut River basin (Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine), in the Luapula River basin (Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia) and in the Senegal-Mauritanian Aquifer basin (Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal), with the aim of strengthening cooperation through agreements and other arrangements in order to ensure that the management of shared resources is climate-proof.

12. These efforts are particularly important in view of the results of the third reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2, on transboundary water cooperation, jointly published by ECE and UNESCO in October 2024. In the report, the severe gap and slow progress towards achieving Goal 6 is revealed. Only 28 per cent of countries that share waters have effective arrangements in place to co-manage most of their shared waters; if current trends persist, barely one third of those countries will have such arrangements in place by 2030. According to the report, cooperation is key to mitigating the impact of climate disruption. In the report, calls are made for more efforts in that regard, given that concrete adaptation strategies are in place for only 14 per cent of transboundary river and lake basins, coordinated alarm systems for floods for only 50 per cent and coordinated alarm systems for droughts for only 30 per cent.

13. Access to water and sanitation are recognized human rights, yet inequalities in access persist across the ECE region due to factors such as income, geographical location, gender, disability and legal status. Identifying and addressing such inequalities has been a strong focus of the work under the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. With growing risks from climate extremes and potential new global pandemics looming, the “Equitable Access Score-card 2.0”, launched in December 2024, is aimed at addressing persistent and emerging inequalities in water and sanitation. The tool helps governments to integrate equity into planning, monitoring and budgeting.

14. The energy transition brings growing industrial risks, from accidents during the mining and processing of critical raw materials, to hazards linked to hydrogen and battery storage systems. A survey carried out under the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents in March 2024 revealed major gaps. For example, 68 per cent of countries were concerned about regulatory catch-up with emerging technologies and approximately 75 per cent reported that they were only moderately prepared to tackle new risks, pointing to a lack of expertise and knowledge and of basic documents on hazards and risks. In response, the secretariat of the Convention decided in November 2024 to establish a dedicated workstream to support countries in increasing knowledge and in improving legislation, risk assessment and emergency preparedness.

15. Inland transport continues to be a major contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, with the sector responsible for approximately 23 per cent of annual emissions, of which road transport alone accounts for 69 per cent. With demand for road transport projected to rise substantially by 2050, urgent measures are needed to transition to low-carbon mobility. In February 2024, the Inland Transport Committee of ECE adopted the Strategy on Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Inland Transport, which paves the way for carbon neutrality in the sector by 2050. Implementation efforts in 2024–2025 included the prioritization of public transport, cycling and walking; the promotion of zero-emission vehicles and energy-efficient networks; and the incorporation of circular economy principles and sustainable fuels.

16. As part of the rail transport activities carried out by ECE, sustainable development objectives were advanced by improving international freight operations and supporting a modal shift in transport. The Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Rail, which was opened for signature in 2023, sets out a harmonized legal framework for international rail freight, aimed at streamlining liability regimes and documentation.

17. The Commission's work on transport statistics serves to support evidence-based policymaking through improved methodologies and data tools. The Working Party on Transport Statistics advanced data collection on passenger and goods transport, including new urban rail ridership indicators, which have provided more detailed insights into urban rail usage, for example in Türkiye. The launch of a microsite on the transport-related Goals and the Transport Data Commons Initiative has enabled enhanced access to data and tools for monitoring transport-related targets.

18. The inland water transport activities carried out by ECE contributed to economic and environmental sustainability. Updates were made to the European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance and to the harmonized requirements for vessels. ECE also advanced work on automation, digitalization and recreational navigation, in alignment with broader goals on climate resilience and economic inclusion.

19. In the area of intermodal transport and logistics, ECE supported a modal shift and digital transformation. Amendments to the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations served to strengthen intermodal effectiveness. The *Handbook on Digitalization and Automation in Intermodal Freight Transport*, which provides practical guidance, while emphasizing a human-centric approach, was issued in January 2025.

20. Despite global efforts, road traffic fatalities remain high, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. ECE intensified its road safety initiatives under the leadership of the Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety and the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations. The Global Forum advanced work on integrating new technologies into traffic rules, revising conventions and examining digital permits and driver education. The World Forum adopted new regulations on child restraint systems, seatbelt reminders and vehicle safety systems, and began work on regulating the export and import of safer, cleaner used vehicles.

21. The Commission also continued its support for the digitization of road transport documentation. The Group of Experts on the operationalization of eCMR made progress towards ensuring legal equivalence between electronic and paper consignment notes. In parallel, efforts under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme advanced the promotion of cycling through the development of a guide on national cycling networks and harmonized definitions of cycling infrastructure to support safe and consistent implementation across the region.

22. In the context of climate resilience, ECE assessed the exposure of transport systems to extreme weather. Exposure maps were developed and made available through the International Transport Infrastructure Observatory, in support of network-level adaptation planning. Complementary frameworks were issued for the stress testing of transport systems and the development of adaptation pathways to manage long-term uncertainty.

23. Corridor development remained a focus, particularly in the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors. Countries made progress in railway data collection, digitization of documentation and climate resilience. A ministerial round table held during the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change led to the adoption of a

communiqué in which infrastructure investment, digital transformation and sustainable logistics, with an emphasis on public-private partnerships and multilateral financing, were prioritized.

24. The Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics supported cross-sectoral initiatives, including the establishment of the Informal Task Force on E-Mobility to consider such matters during the period from 2024 to 2026. The Informal Task Force promotes electric vehicle deployment and infrastructure, while encouraging regulatory harmonization and clean energy integration. The Working Party also advanced work on integrating inland transport emissions into nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, and launched efforts to develop a standardized reporting template.

25. Decarbonization efforts across the ECE region continue to advance, with an increasing share of renewable energy sources being integrated into national systems. Nevertheless, progress remains insufficient to meet the energy targets of the Goals, particularly in regions such as Central Asia. Long-term, strategic planning frameworks can guide national efforts in transforming energy systems while ensuring affordability, sustainability and security.

26. The transition to sustainable energy systems depends heavily on enabling factors. ECE has supported the design of innovative financing mechanisms, such as the Green Finance Facility in North Macedonia, developed with the support of the United Nations country team, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Organization for Migration, to facilitate energy efficiency and renewable energy investments by small enterprises and underserved households. ECE has also promoted the role of digitalization through its *Compendium of Case Studies on Digitalization in Energy in the UNECE Region*, and advocated sustainable e-mobility through work on electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the integration of e-mobility considerations into energy systems. Such initiatives demonstrate how cross-sectoral collaboration and integrated planning can unlock progress and reduce implementation gaps.

27. Further action is needed to achieve Goal 12 (Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns); to that end, ECE has continued to provide support in relation to circular economies. Circularity is increasingly recognized as integral to decarbonization, sustainable development, resource efficiency and competitiveness. A circular approach includes encouraging reuse, recycling and sustainable product design, as well as engaging stakeholders from across industry, government and civil society to implement more circular practices at scale.

28. Critical minerals remain essential for the energy transition. The United Nations Framework Classification for Resources and the United Nations Resource Management System are widely adopted ECE tools that support equitable resource management. Notably, in the Critical Raw Materials Act, the European Union has recognized the Framework Classification for Resources as a standard for national inventories and company disclosure, marking a significant expansion of its international application.

29. At the Thirteenth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development, held in Bangkok in December 2024 and co-organized by the regional commissions, ECE presented its evolving approach to a just transition. The Committee on Sustainable Energy endorsed the development of a just transition framework for resilient energy systems, incorporating voices from young people, trade unions and underrepresented countries. The release of the document entitled “Advancing intergenerational justice in critical raw materials management: assessing the potential of demand-side measures” (ECE/ENERGY/2024/8) and the forthcoming guiding

principles on a just transition will guide the implementation and assessment of just transition strategies across the region. The just transition approach has been adopted by Kazakhstan as part of its Just Energy Transition Partnership. Continued engagement and cross-border learning are expected to further enhance its impact.

30. The need to continue prioritizing gender equality as a critical driver of sustainable development was at the core of the Beijing+30 Regional Review Meeting, held in Geneva on 21 and 22 October 2024 and co-hosted by ECE and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The meeting served to reinvigorate political commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and to assess progress on gender equality in the ECE region. Obstacles and entry points for concrete policy action in such areas as fostering the economic empowerment and political representation of women, financing gender equality, eliminating violence against women and protecting women from the impact of wars and armed conflicts, were highlighted.

III. Strengthening the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda

A. Data and statistics

31. The swift evolution of technology, alongside the use of data analytics and data science, has opened new doors for statistical agencies. Leveraging administrative and privately held data can enhance the speed, efficiency and quality of statistical production. In the evolving data landscape, national statistical agencies can play a broader role, drawing on their expertise in data quality assurance, privacy protection and data management. Generative artificial intelligence is poised to boost productivity and improve the services that national statistical offices can provide to data users.

32. International cooperation on developing common approaches and tools and exchanging experiences becomes even more important in that context, particularly for countries with stretched resources. ECE has been developing its statistical work in this evolving environment, including through collaboration with private data providers and the use of artificial intelligence, cloud computing and other advanced techniques.

33. The seventy-second plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians demonstrated the rich experience of national statistical offices and mapping agencies in using artificial intelligence and large language models, and highlighted the strategic issues and challenges in integrating new technologies. Projects have been launched on the governance of artificial intelligence, the ethical use of artificial intelligence in statistical offices and the improvement of the quality of machine-learning predictions.

34. In collaboration with the main international partners working in the respective areas, ECE has developed methodological guidelines and recommendations on: the measurement of well-being, social cohesion and hard-to-reach population groups; the use of new classifications for the consumer price index; the use of privately held data for official statistics; and ethics in modern statistical organizations. The highlight of the methodological work is the completion by the Conference of European Statisticians of recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses, which involved more than 200 experts over several years. The recommendations are aimed at identifying the core topics and providing harmonized

concepts, definitions and classifications, as well as guidance on the increased variety of data sources, methods and technologies used for the modern census.

35. The statistical work of ECE encompasses all the Sustainable Development Goals and helps national statistical offices to measure progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Work has continued to enhance the ECE regional platform for data and the knowledge hub on Goal-related statistics. New guidance and tools have been made available for assessing data availability at the national level to measure progress against Goal indicators.

B. Finance

36. The Commission continued to support countries in mobilizing sustainable finance through innovative tools and targeted partnerships. A key instrument is the Public-Private Partnerships and Infrastructure Evaluation and Rating System, a practical and user-friendly evaluation methodology aligned with the Goals. The methodology, together with its accompanying guidelines, helps countries to plan and scale up climate-resilient infrastructure. As at May 2025, it has been applied to more than 280 projects across 24 sectors in 60 countries, representing a total capital expenditure of \$118 billion. Policymakers, regulators and private sector actors have been trained on the use of the guidelines, in which the need to attract sustainable infrastructure financing to advance innovation, climate action, human rights and gender equality, in line with the Pact for the Future, is emphasized.

37. Despite such efforts, recent stocktakes of progress towards achieving the Goals in the ECE region have highlighted that progress remains insufficient to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement by 2030. Financing gaps persist, in both volume and cost-effectiveness, particularly in the region's 17 programme countries. Barriers include misalignment between project sponsors and investors, perceived high risks and the challenges of structuring financing in fragmented markets.

38. In order to address those issues, ECE partnered with the high-level champions for climate action and strengthened engagement with major international financial institutions. Over the past three years, more than 400 project proposals have been analysed, and over 40 projects, worth \$15 billion, received support. Approximately 19 projects have reached full or partial financial close, totalling \$1.9 billion. In 2024, a public call for projects yielded 245 relevant climate projects; 3 were selected, and \$2.6 billion in additional funding was sought. This work underscores the importance of collaborative, bottom-up approaches to financing sustainable development.

39. As global water challenges are intensified by climate change, there is a growing need to raise finance for transboundary water cooperation and basin development. ECE continued to bring together various stakeholders, including government officials, water experts and multilateral development banks, and to raise awareness of the challenge of finding ways to address the financing gap.

C. Trade

40. To address the growing concerns about the detrimental effects of global trade on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, ECE intensified its support for sustainable trade. The ECE Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy continued to develop best practice guidelines, policy recommendations and information exchange standards. These tools are aimed at enabling regulators and enterprises to trace environmental, social and governance performance across

international supply chains, drawing on the work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business.

41. The Sustainability Pledge initiative, launched by the Team of Specialists in 2019 and aimed at promoting measurable and verifiable sustainability in the garment and footwear sector, had garnered over 100 commitments from around 800 industry actors in 30 countries by 2025, enhancing transparency and accountability in sustainability claims and corporate disclosures. Building on that success, ECE is extending its work to cover other high-impact sectors. That work includes developing ECE recommendation No. 49, which serves to promote transparency in sustainable value chains and extend the United Nations transparency protocol to agrifood, extractive industries and critical raw materials, thereby contributing to the implementation of the Global Digital Compact.

42. The Commission scaled up its work on digital connectivity, with an emphasis on improving the efficiency and sustainability of transport corridors, which are essential for ensuring the freedom of transit and expediting the movement of goods across borders. In addition, through the ECE-International Chamber of Commerce call to action for digital trade for an interoperable and digitalized global trade ecosystem, launched in 2024, ECE is helping countries to accelerate the digital transformation of global trade, promoting interoperability, the exchange of trusted data and internationally recognized digital trade standards. ECE has also assisted the Western Balkan countries, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in using the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business package of standards for data exchange.

43. In the area of regulatory cooperation, recent achievements include the launch of ECE guidance on the compliance of products with embedded artificial intelligence (ECE/TRADE/486) and the declaration on the regulation of products with embedded artificial intelligence. In the guidance, fundamental principles are established for the regulation of products containing artificial intelligence, and life cycle management challenges are addressed to ensure that artificial intelligence systems in products are safe, secure and trustworthy. In the declaration, ECE provides a voluntary framework for regulatory cooperation. The declaration is now open for signature by member States, thereby contributing to regulatory convergence globally, an essential requirement for facilitating market access.

44. The Commission continued to update its suite of more than 120 voluntary agricultural quality standards, which are aimed at facilitating trade in fresh fruit and vegetables, dried fruit and nuts, meat cuts and seed potatoes. In an era of slower growth and lower levels of formal employment, these standards are particularly important to improve the livelihoods of rural women farmers. In addition, as a member of the issue-based coalition on sustainable food systems in Europe and Central Asia, ECE continued to facilitate regional dialogue, knowledge exchange, policy coherence and joint programming on food systems transformation, including through co-organizing the regional preparatory meeting ahead of the second United Nations Food Systems Summit Stocktaking Moment.

45. Through the activities of its Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, ECE continued to support countries with economies in transition, helping them to better integrate into global supply chains and leverage trade for transformative change. In addition, ECE continued to support member States in efforts aimed at the transition to a circular economy through national needs assessments and the development of policy options for action-oriented measures in countries such as Belarus, Serbia and Tajikistan.

D. Innovation

46. In its work on innovation and competitiveness, ECE is increasingly focusing on systems change and transformative innovation and experimenting with ideas that could trigger societal transformation towards achieving the Goals. ECE continued to support the Transformative Innovation Network, which is focused on supporting peer learning, experimentation and collaboration among policymakers, innovation agencies and experts, through demand-driven training activities in developed countries and lower-middle-income countries.

47. The Network, the Joint Research Centre and the Directorate General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission co-organized the Transformative Innovation Action Forum, held from 1 to 3 October 2024 in Brussels. The Forum served as a platform to discuss innovation in sociotechnical transformations, leveraging the Network's work on ecosystem development and strategic learning for transformative innovation, as well as the Joint Research Centre's work on systems dynamics and place-based innovation.

E. Technical cooperation

48. In 2024, ECE continued to conduct impactful technical cooperation activities through various funding streams, including regular budget sources and extrabudgetary contributions. Grounded in normative work and guided by country needs, ECE technical cooperation is demand-driven, providing analytical support, capacity-building and advisory services at the national, subregional and regional levels. Collaboration with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, as well as with United Nations entities active in the region, has strengthened the connection between ECE frameworks and on-the-ground implementation, identifying emerging priorities and shaping joint initiatives.

49. Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe were the top beneficiaries of technical cooperation, engaging in 27 and 13 per cent of the technical cooperation activities, respectively. This was followed by the Caucasus and Eastern Europe regions, with 9 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively. Nearly half (43 per cent) of the initiatives had a regional scope, fostering shared progress among countries.

50. Several initiatives combined analytical studies, reviews and capacity-building activities. In sustainable energy, strategic insights and recommendations were set out in studies on the following topics: integrating twin transition with legacy energy systems; establishing a national energy efficiency and renewable energy agency in Georgia; and energy connectivity in Central Asia. These studies supported governments in advancing Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy).

51. In data and statistics, ECE conducted a global assessment of the national statistical system of Uzbekistan, recognizing progress and providing strategic recommendations. As part of sector reviews of environment and climate change statistics in Georgia and Kazakhstan, data quality and data application were evaluated, fostering South-South knowledge exchange.

52. In environmental governance, ECE supported the accession of Armenia to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers by reviewing legislative frameworks and recommending structures for a national pollutant release and transfer register system to enhance transparency and public access to environmental information.

53. Under the issue-based coalition on environment and climate change, ECE commissioned reports on United Nations initiatives on water management in the

South Caucasus and Central Asia, in which it identified strategic policy and programmatic entry points for joint United Nations action. The findings enhanced the capacity of country teams to address water-related challenges and informed potential joint initiatives.

54. Technical cooperation activities across the ECE region were coordinated through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia, fostering national ownership and deeper cooperation with development stakeholders. The integrated approach boosted the impact and sustainability of ECE efforts.

IV. Spotlight on local action for sustainable development

55. Local action is the cornerstone of sustainable development; local governments are on the front line of managing rapid urban growth and provide housing, transportation, sanitation and energy services, all of which are central to the Sustainable Development Goals. Cities directly face the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation. With the global progress towards the 2030 Agenda remaining critically insufficient, the role of local and regional governments in delivering the Goals has become more urgent than ever.

56. Local authorities are uniquely positioned to translate global commitments into tangible outcomes given their proximity to citizens, their deep understanding of local contexts and their ability to act swiftly and inclusively. The localization of the Goals, through a process of subsidiarity, multilevel governance, inclusion and partnership, is not only a necessity for achieving the 2030 Agenda, but also the engine driving its acceleration.

57. The Commission has demonstrated its steadfast dedication to promoting multilevel governance and local action for the Goals, actively supporting cities as key actors and amplifying their voices in the United Nations system. Through its cross-cutting mandate in sustainable urban development, ECE plays a critical role in promoting the localization of the Goals across the region and beyond, helping to build resilience, sustainability and inclusivity in the face of compounding global challenges. The work of ECE ensures that local governments are equipped, empowered and engaged, thereby helping to drive global progress from the ground up.

58. In 2024, the fourth Forum of Mayors, the “Cities Summit of the Future”, was held in Geneva on 30 September and 1 October, immediately prior to the eighty-fifth session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, held from 2 to 4 October, gathering more than 400 participants from across the ECE region and the globe. Building on the momentum of the Summit of the Future and the Pact for the Future, the Forum provided a space for city leaders to reflect on how to implement the Pact locally, through sustainable development, digital transformation and inclusive governance. It culminated in the adoption of a forward-looking outcome statement, which was transmitted to the Secretary-General, in which cities’ roles as incubators of innovation and champions of equity, resilience and sustainability was emphasized.

59. The Forum of Mayors also continued to break new ground in strengthening multilevel governance. As a unique United Nations platform in which mayors engage directly in intergovernmental processes, it demonstrated the growing international recognition of cities as essential actors in the evolving multilateral system. The Forum’s call for formal recognition of local and regional governments within the United Nations system highlights the need for a more inclusive and networked global governance structure. States were encouraged to consider the Forum as an effective

model for cities from all United Nations regions to exchange knowledge, best practices and local solutions, and to participate in the work of the United Nations on the localization of the Goals and other global agendas and challenges.

60. The Commission also advanced the localization of the Goals through supporting the development of voluntary local reviews – an increasingly vital tool for monitoring of progress towards the Goals and planning related action at the local level. The third edition of the regional voluntary local review guidelines was endorsed, which provide cities with updated, practical advice based on field-tested experiences, including on challenges related to data and indicators. Online training materials were expanded and translated into Russian and were complemented by bilingual webinars to broaden access across Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

61. In partnership with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, concrete technical support for the development of voluntary local reviews was delivered to cities including Niš (Serbia), Tbilisi, Bishkek and Dushanbe. In Bishkek, ECE further supported capacity-building to align municipal planning processes with voluntary local review outcomes.

62. In Ukraine, ECE continued its vital assistance under the “UN4UkrainianCities” project, which supports sustainable, post-conflict urban planning and resilience-building. The project has been focused on Kharkiv and Mykolaiv and is aimed at ultimately benefiting all Ukrainian cities, reinforcing long-term recovery through inclusive urban development and local empowerment.

V. Leveraging intraregional and cross-regional partnerships for sustainable development

63. The Commission works with partners to amplify its impact, pool resources and expertise, ensure consistency in standard-setting, share knowledge and support programme countries through technical cooperation and capacity-building. Such collaborative partnerships – with United Nations organizations, the private sector, academia and non-governmental organizations – play a crucial role in effectively fulfilling ECE mandates in complementarity with other organizations and advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

64. The Commission continued its support for Central Asian countries through its joint programme with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) – the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. Support during the 2024–2025 period included facilitating policy dialogues on accelerating transformative innovation and the transition to digital trade. In the framework of the Special Programme, ECE also organized training activities to support the implementation of various strategies on trade facilitation, innovation and sustainable trade.

65. A number of ECE workstreams are supported by long-standing collaborations with other United Nations organizations. For instance, ECE continues to work closely with the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe in managing the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme, with a focus on bringing together ministries of transport, health and the environment to find solutions to sustainable urban transport through a focus on active mobility, public transport, green jobs and spatial planning. In 2024, the Pan-European Master Plan on Walking, aimed at promoting walking as a fundamental part of transport, was adopted.

66. The Commission is pooling efforts with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the context of a joint project to implement the Public-Private Partnerships and Infrastructure Evaluation and Rating System in selected countries across the three regions. Furthermore, in collaboration with the regional commissions and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, ECE launched the sixth United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. The 2025 survey covers 62 measures, including new measures on trade facilitation for e-commerce and green trade facilitation, thus moving towards enhanced implementation of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation of the World Trade Organization.

67. The Commission's work on digital transformation for sustainable and competitive cross-border transport is underpinned by multi-stakeholder cooperation and long-standing partnerships to ensure a balanced approach between the policy objectives of member States and sector requirements for transport and trade facilitation. The work on the eTIR international system is carried out in close cooperation with the International Road Transport Union, while efforts to digitalize the *carnet de passages en douane* are under way in partnership with the International Automobile Federation. ECE is also leveraging points of common interest and expertise with the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, the World Customs Organization, the International Transport Forum and others to exploit synergies and avoid duplication.

68. Promoting the critical role of efforts at the local level to advance sustainable development, ECE organizes the meetings of the Forum of Mayors together with ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); in partnership with Global Cities Hub and United Cities and Local Governments; and in cooperation with UNEP and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

69. A network of nine centres of excellence (representing academia and civil society organizations) across the region supports ECE in the implementation of the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing by collecting best practices, conducting research, providing support and offering training in the fields of housing, sustainable smart cities, urban development and land management.

70. The Commission works under a standing partnership agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to foster coordinated sustainable development in the forest sector of the ECE region. In addition, ECE partnered with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, ESCWA, member States and cities on the Trees in Dry Cities Coalition, under which a collective action plan to support the integration of trees in dry cities into local, national and international plans and funding was developed. ECE is also collaborating with the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank on financing for urban forestry in dry cities.

71. The International Transport Infrastructure Observatory has been developed by ECE in partnership with the Islamic Development Bank. It is a web-based, multi-stakeholder geographical information system platform that enables the mapping and analysis of multimodal transport infrastructure, covering roads, railways, ports, airports, inland waterways, logistics hubs and border crossings. It currently includes data from 79 Member States, with data from an additional 27 countries to be included in the course of 2025. The platform serves as a strategic tool for governments to raise awareness of their transport infrastructure priorities and promote investment-ready projects to multilateral development banks and other funding partners.

72. Multi-stakeholder and horizontal partnerships have also been strengthened to advance the sustainable energy transition. In particular, collaboration with a number of International Centres of Excellence on Sustainable Resource Management and International Centres of Excellence on Coal Mine Methane across the globe has been fortified. The purpose of these independent entities, embedded in their local geographical areas of relevance and engaged with national and local administrations, as well as with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, is to disseminate and build capacity on ECE tools, such as the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources and the United Nations Resource Management System, so that they can be applied at the regional and national levels.

VI. Conclusion

73. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains a central guiding framework for the ECE region, even as persistent crises – geopolitical instability, environmental degradation and technological disruption – challenge the pace and coherence of progress. In that context, ECE continued to play a vital role in supporting its member States through normative frameworks, policy dialogue, data and analytical tools, and technical cooperation. Its work covers all the Sustainable Development Goals, with a continued focus on cross-cutting issues, such as the environment, energy, sustainable infrastructure and inclusion.

74. As environmental thresholds are increasingly breached and risks mount across sectors, the preventive orientation of the 2030 Agenda provides essential direction. The importance of foresight methodologies and robust data has become more evident in planning resilient responses. ECE work on air quality, water cooperation, urban development and sustainable energy has been instrumental in addressing regional vulnerabilities and promoting integrated solutions.

75. The present report contains an overview of how ECE leverages multilateralism and partnerships – from technical cooperation in Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe, to policy harmonization across transport corridors – in order to address disparities and support coherent action. ECE efforts in facilitating digitalization, promoting resource efficiency and empowering local governments serve as foundational pillars for inclusive recovery and long-term sustainability.

76. Looking ahead, a shared vision, supported by strong multilevel governance and effective implementation tools, will be vital. In promoting circularity, resilience and innovation, ECE will continue to provide platforms for dialogue, coordination and cooperation, ensuring that no one is left behind. ECE remains committed to fostering knowledge exchange, facilitating investment and guiding evidence-based policy as part of a collective response to the region's sustainable development challenges.