

ECE Regional People's Assembly Declaration

for the Sustainable Future for All

As we reach the midway point towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, our aspirations of delivering social justice, upholding human rights, ensuring fair distribution within and between nations, and building an environmentally conscious world for all appear increasingly distant and challenging to attain. Despite the relentless efforts of civil society and activists throughout the ECE region, our fundamental political, financial, economic, and social systems face erosion due to austerity measures, xenophobia, conflicts, and lack of political will. These factors lead us to question the feasibility of fulfilling the visionary commitments made in 2015.

We call on UNECE governments to recommit to the pledges they made in 2015. This Regional People's Assembly Declaration serves as a poignant reminder to policymakers, offering a set of recommendations aimed at advancing progress on the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region in 9 thematic fields.

The 2030 Agenda in Coming Years

Enhance Civil Society Engagement and Capacity Building: Governments should actively foster an enabling environment that promotes civil society engagement and values them as essential partners in SDG initiatives. Investing in capacity building for civil society organizations (CSOs) is crucial, ensuring they have the resources and knowledge necessary to contribute actively to SDG implementation. Adequate funding must be allocated to support CSOs in their meaningful engagement with SDGs.

Commit to VNRs and SDG Reporting: All UNECE member states should demonstrate a commitment to the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process and actively involve civil society throughout its entire duration. Strengthening inclusive and comprehensive reviews of SDG implementation at the national level will significantly contribute to enhanced progress in sustainable development.

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Address Data Deficiency: Governments must urgently address the need for sufficient and disaggregated data. Comprehensive and systematic data collection is essential for making informed decisions, crafting targeted SDG interventions, and tracking progress. This data is instrumental in identifying disparities, monitoring advancements, and formulating effective policies.

Foster Policy Coherence: Policymakers should prioritize efforts to ensure policy coherence, both at the national and regional levels, to facilitate the effective implementation of the SDGs. Coordinated policies and alignment are critical for addressing the intricate, interconnected challenges posed by the SDGs.

Establish Regional Collaboration and Peer Learning Mechanisms: The UNECE region currently lacks robust mechanisms for regional collaboration and peer learning. Establishing such mechanisms is paramount to fostering the exchange of best practices, sharing lessons learned, and promoting collaborative strategies. This approach will expedite progress toward achieving the SDG targets.

Social Justice and Inclusion

Ensure SDG 1.3 is recognized as the Foundation for SDG success; recognizing that SDG 1.3, committing to social protection floors (SPF) in all countries, is not only a standalone goal but also an enabler and foundational element for achieving all SDGs. UNECE governments should ensure that their local and national policies as well as their ODA programmes and grants have the long-term budgets and funds for putting in place social protection floors (SPFs) at home and abroad.

Locally-Responsive SPF Implementation: SPFs must be responsive to the local needs of local communities. They should be implemented with bottom-up approaches and strong involvement of local partners and community leaders, recognizing the unique capacities of different groups to leave no one behind. SPF implementation should also include strong empowerment and education dimensions: a secure floor for people should enable everyone to access dignifying social roles which include decent work.

Support the Global Fund for Social Protection: UNECE governments to support the call for the Global Fund for Social Protection and, include local partners and leaders in its modalities, recognizing the unique needs of different groups, and empowering local people in its implementation.

Leave No One Behind: UNECE countries to have monitoring tools which assess intersectionality for Leave No One Behind / Reach the Furthest Behind First” people in policy implementation Grassroots programs must involve all stakeholders in LNOB conversations to ground and support this challenge in all communities, rural and urban. Social inclusion programs have a life course approach and focus on the least well-served people, including migrants, youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Shrinking Civic Space

Full Implementation of UN Recommendations: Commit to fully implementing all recommendations accepted by states from UN Special Rapporteurs, Working Groups, and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. Compliance with these recommendations is essential to safeguarding human rights.

Enabling Environment for Civil Society: Create an environment that enables civil society organizations and individuals to operate freely without fear of harassment, intimidation, attacks, or reprisals. Protecting civic freedoms, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and civil society participation is crucial for a vibrant and democratic society.

Ensure Peaceful Protest Rights: Cease the use of excessive force against peaceful protesters, refrain from preempting and preventing protests, and adopt best practices that value and uphold the freedom of peaceful assembly. Protecting these rights is fundamental to a democratic society.

Eliminate Restrictive NGO Laws: Governments worldwide should prioritize the revision and reform of laws, regulations, and practices that excessively limit civil society actors' access to funding, with a specific emphasis on countering overregulation trends. Additionally, states must take proactive measures to prevent the expansion of restrictive legislation targeting non-governmental organizations (NGOs), safeguarding their ability to operate freely and advocate for and promote human rights and social justice.

Engage in Diplomatic Negotiations: Initiate negotiations with nations that respect core civic freedoms and rights. These negotiations should aim to ensure the universal protection and respect of these rights globally. Engaging in dialogue and diplomatic efforts can foster a culture of mutual understanding and cooperation.

Peace and Conflicts

Emphasize Diplomatic Solutions to regional conflicts including invasion of Ukraine, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and tensions involving Israel and Turkey. Active involvement in conflict resolution, negotiation support, and promoting peaceful settlements will prevent further escalations and enhance stability. Establish independent mediators states who are able to navigate peaceful solutions.

Prioritize Arms Control and Disarmament Agreements due to UNECE countries' significant role in weapons production and export. Leading by example, these governments should actively engage in global efforts to reduce arms production and exports for enhanced global peace.

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Reaffirm Commitment to Nuclear Arms Control and non-proliferation efforts, considering the current high nuclear threat. Actively participate in discussions and negotiations to reduce nuclear arsenals and prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology, thereby reducing the risk of nuclear conflicts.

Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution: UNECE should organize capacity-building programs to prepare governments for conflict resolution and equip them with the skills to find diplomatic solutions in unexpected situations. This training will enhance their ability to effectively address conflicts through peaceful means.

Financing for Development:

Enhance Social Investments: To achieve the SDGs, avoid measures that undermine social and economic progress, such as cuts in social security, health, education, gender equality, and environmental protection. Prioritize social investments and implement progressive tax measures, taxing assets and wealth, while adjusting minimum wages for equitable societies. Phase out inefficient environmentally harmful subsidies to promote sustainability.

Meet International Obligations: Affluent ECE economies must fulfill international commitments. Provide a minimum of 0.7% of GNP in official development assistance (ODA), address additional (!) climate and biodiversity finance, and support mobilizing US\$ 100 billion with additional funds for loss and damage. Reallocate unused Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) from the 2021 allocation for global challenges. Assess public-private partnerships and blended finance outcomes to ensure alignment with development goals. Regulate financial sectors to mitigate future global financial crises.

Reform the International Financial System: Actively engage in international financial system reforms to create fiscal space for all nations. Advocate for a UN tax convention or instrument, proposed by the UN Secretary-General, to promote fair taxation practices. Establish a multilateral legal framework under UN auspices for comprehensive unsustainable and illegitimate debt resolution. Advocate for terminating investor-state-dispute-settlement mechanisms in trade and investment agreements. Push for governance, quota, and instrument reforms within international finance institutions.

Support the International Conference on Financing for Development: Encourage participation in a 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, strongly supporting it in UN General Assembly 2nd Committee negotiations. This conference offers a pivotal platform to advance reforms and foster international cooperation for sustainable development.

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Climate Action

Diversify Climate Solutions and Tailor Approaches: Governments should move away from promoting and relying solely on false solutions like nuclear, gas, and carbon capture technologies. Embrace a diversified portfolio of climate solutions that are not only technically sound but also socially inclusive and co-decided with local communities. Strengthen the monitoring of the impacts of those solutions at all governance levels.

Promote Social Dialogue and Inclusive Governance: Governments must prioritize institutionalized social dialogue mechanisms (i.e. participatory approaches, citizens empowerment) as a crucial part of crafting and implementing policies. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, local communities, trade Unions, and industry representatives, is essential to create climate-friendly job opportunities, quality education, and an economic model that is embedded into planetary boundaries in key sectors. Foster governance systems that transcend administrative boundaries and align with natural boundaries.

Integrate Climate Justice and Gender Equality: Governments should integrate climate justice and gender equality into all policy agendas. Recognize the historical responsibilities and disparities in climate impacts as well as the surge of conflicts and controversies, related to natural resources scarcity among others, and commit to addressing them comprehensively. Ensure that climate policies and practices are designed to promote fairness, equity, and accountability both domestically and globally. Emphasize the importance of gender-responsive climate policies, including disaggregated data on the intersectional experiences of women in all their diversity.

Prioritize Education and Awareness: Governments should prioritize education and awareness campaigns to inform their populations about the importance of climate action and climate justice. Empower citizens, and local and regional governments with knowledge of the impacts of climate change, the significance of gender equality, and the value of inclusive governance. Promote a culture of climate responsibility and civic engagement, encouraging active participation in climate initiatives at all levels of society.

Digital Dividends and AI

Uphold Human Rights Principles and Ensure Human Control: Technological advancements, particularly AI, are moving at a warp speed. Stereotypes, discrimination, racism, and misogyny ARE being entrenched in technology. Decision-makers should restrict AI development until we have a policy in place to ensure human control. The current legislative efforts to tackle AI, such as the EU AI Act, must prioritize human rights and safeguard against potential risks associated with unchecked technological progress, such as digital misinformation campaigns by anti-gender actors, climate deniers, and big pharma.

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Foster Inclusive Governance and Digital Rights: Promote decolonization of internet governance and work towards fostering multilateral decision-making processes that include women and individuals from marginalized groups. Establish a Digital Rights Charter to ensure that digital freedoms are upheld and respected. Furthermore, legislation related to technology and internet governance including digital misinformation, should center on human rights obligations to prevent misuse that could lead to the silencing or censorship of civil society, media, and citizens.

Hold Big Tech Accountable: Given that many major tech companies are headquartered in the ECE region, there is a pressing need for accountability mechanisms and transparency in our region. These mechanisms should track and ensure that tech companies conduct human rights due diligence in their operations, promote human well-being and degrowth principles, and prioritize people over profit through ensuring that they operate within our planetary boundaries.

Promote Social Dialogue and ICT Education: Facilitate social dialogue to protect working conditions and service standards in the evolving world of work shaped by technology. Establish educational programs focused on information and communication technology (ICT) and artificial intelligence (AI) to ensure that everyone, in particular those from marginalized communities, throughout their life course has the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed to ensure that no one is left behind in our digital transformation.

Wellbeing Economy

Transition to a Wellbeing Economy: ECE Member States should shift away from the current economic model that prioritizes linear and rentier economies, focusing solely on GDP growth. Instead, embrace a human rights-based well-being economy centered on care, prosperity, and sustainable development. This transformation should be guided by the SDGs principles.

Embrace Academic Research and Innovative Policies: Acknowledge the wealth of academic research and innovative policy proposals that can facilitate this transformation. Policymakers should actively engage with these ideas and methodologies, moving beyond flawed green growth strategies that lack empirical foundations.

Reform the Global Fiscal Framework: Advocate for a fairer global fiscal framework that prioritizes the well-being of all people, particularly the marginalized. Reevaluate financial debt and debt relief mechanisms to ensure equitable outcomes. This shift in fiscal policies will redefine how societies produce, consume, and finance their development.

Focus on Regeneration and Address Global Inequities: Prioritize the regeneration of natural systems and ecosystems to achieve well-being for all, not just in the Global North but also in the Global South. Recognize the historical injustices of colonialism and wealth extraction from the periphery to the core. Address these issues within the context of sustainability, inclusion, and well-being.

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UN We Need

Accelerate SDG Implementation: UNECE governments must honor their promises from the UN75 Declaration of 2020 by utilizing the Summit of the Future (SOTF) in 2024 to fast-track the agreed SDG Summit outcomes. Further encouragement should come from active participation in the proposed World Social Summit and the 4th Financing for Development (FfD) Conference in 2025.

Expand Security Council Membership: Advocate for the expansion of the UN Security Council to include countries from diverse regions, particularly from the Global South. Expansion should align with principles of representation, equity, and commitment to the UN Charter's purposes and principles. Permanent Five members should refrain from misuse of the veto power.

Support UNMute Campaign: Back the call for the appointment of a Civil Society Envoy to the UN. This envoy would serve as a focal point and advocate for civil society within the UN system, fostering dialogue and partnerships between civil society and other stakeholders. Ensure that the Envoy has a clear mandate, adequate resources, and access to all levels of the UN system.

Honoring Commitments: UNECE governments should fulfill their Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments and deliver on the pledge to provide \$100 billion per year in climate finance to developing countries by 2020. Given the substantial resources mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is feasible for OECD countries to raise the necessary funds—\$3 trillion to \$5 trillion annually—to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

This statement has been formulated collaboratively with a diverse group of partners originating from the UNECE region. Principal organizing partners comprised:


