

Peer learning sessions of the 2022 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region**Key messages****On education – SDG 4**

Education systems need to become more resilient to prepare for future crises, including through digital learning for all. We should draw on the analysis of the lessons of the COVID-19 disruptions to ensure continuity of learning, including by offering more flexible curricula and assessments at all levels. Collaborative policy planning should involve stakeholder consultations and partnerships. Barriers facing learners in particular contexts should be addressed. Education providers should have autonomy to respond to their contexts. Education professionals should have decent working conditions.

Investment is required to make education systems inclusive and resilient. A particular focus is required on vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, minorities, learners with special needs and refugees. A gender perspective should be mainstreamed in all education policies.

Education systems must offer more support to enhance digital skills and competencies for all. Connectivity for all schools should be prioritized. Students in all grades should be provided with digital resources. Teachers should receive appropriate support.

And another important dimension of education – on Education for Sustainable Development

Education must prepare learners to navigate uncertain futures and help them create a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Our education systems urgently need to move beyond literacy and numeracy, and inculcate values, knowledge and skills that promote peace, sustainable development, human rights and democracy.

Sustainable development is possible through a worldwide shift of society towards transformed behaviour, production and consumption patterns. We must rethink and

reimagine the purpose, content and outcome of education. The outcome must be no other than creating a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable future for people and planet.

Education for Sustainable Development is a driver of change and cooperation at multiple levels. We need to engage and invest in young people to design and co-create sustainable solutions.

There cannot be sustainable development without peace, there cannot be prosperity without protecting the very foundation of our existence – “nature” that enhances our wellbeing and provides for our survival.

On gender equality - SDG 5

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated underlying structural inequalities and raised the risk of reversing progress, in particular regarding gender-based violence. There is a need to develop gender responsive standards for policies and legislation. Sufficient resources should be made available for national gender equality mechanisms and women’s organizations. Disaggregated data collection to track progress and gaps should be improved.

Equal participation is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders. Equal political representation at all levels is essential and the gender imbalance in managerial positions should be reversed. Gender sensitive institutions are necessary to deliver quality services. Quotas should be used to institutionalize representation of all people in their diversity.

Gender inequalities in the workplace continue. Improved care services and flexible working arrangements are needed. Gender sensitive reforms supporting equal access to decent work to all must be implemented.

Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights to all is required, addressing a serious setback in access to services for marginalized groups.

In addition to the round table, we also had a gender-related business dialogue that concluded that the urgency to advance gender equality has never been clearer. It is a fundamental human right with a strong business case for action. For acceleration, all types of businesses including in the most male dominated industries (such as, for example,

construction and technology) need to contribute. We often have commitments but the implementation gap remains huge.

It is possible to create a framework for progress that pays attention to cultural issues, builds a recruitment pipeline and makes the necessary investment to retain women. We need to have the disaggregated data within companies that allows the identification of inequalities. Data is needed to fight stereotypes – and to encourage women and girls to develop new careers in areas where they are less represented. There is no silver bullet to address underrepresentation- a systematic, collaborative approach that engages male employees is required.

On ocean literacy and the sustainable development of regional seas – SDG 14

We need a good understanding of the role and function of oceans -and of how our behaviour influences them. However, these issues are not sufficiently considered in national curricula. A number of initiatives seek to enhance ocean literacy, including project-based work and “blue curricula”. Partnerships with the local community, engaging with all stakeholders and recognizing the different specificities of countries and regions are essential to advance ocean literacy and bring about behavioural changes necessary for the sustainable management of ocean resources.

Human development activities have seriously tested the resilience of the marine and coastal resource base. Oceans have been perceived as a means of free resource extraction and waste dumping. The “Blue Economy” provides an alternative development model to incorporate ocean values and services in decision-making processes. Regional seas offer a particularly promising opportunity to apply this framework. The engagement of civil, society, governments and international organizations is crucial for preserving “the ocean we need for the future we want”.

On action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems- SDG 15

To date, 75% of all terrestrial ecosystems have been altered by human activity. Land degradation, overfishing and deforestation harm food security and livelihoods. Actions towards the achievement of SDG 15 must be accelerated.

Regional and national legally binding instruments are effective tools, provided they include measurable and time bound targets, and strong enforcement mechanisms. Experience of subregional mountain treaties and transboundary biosphere reserves demonstrates the success of working across borders, establishing ecological corridors and engaging all relevant actors. Support to farmers, particularly in vulnerable rural communities, is crucial in introducing new soil management technologies, prioritizing climate resilient endemic crops and promoting crop rotation and diversification.

Youth engagement in conservation and restoration contributes to innovative solutions for sustainable land-use and ecosystem restoration and helps create sustainable livelihood opportunities for young people at local level.

There's an urgent need to triple investments in nature-based solutions by 2030 and increase financing four times by 2050. This requires scaling up private sector finance by leveraging recent commitments to net zero and environmental preservation.

And in particular– on urban forests for future proof cities

Cities are responsible for around 75% of global CO2 emissions. They are therefore at the forefront of fighting climate change.

Sustainable urban forestry is an integrative and cost-effective nature-based solution that can help develop greener, healthier, and more resilient cities. Trees and forests in urban and peri-urban areas provide vital benefits for health and wellbeing, climate adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction. This contributes not only to sustainable local development, but also to national objectives and to most SDGs.

There is an urgent need to maintain and expand the urban forest cover in our urban and peri-urban areas. Any intervention should be planned, designed, and managed sustainably,

including through adequate funding. In addition to local action by city governments, national governments can support urban forestry through national policies and targets, standardized data collection and tools, the provision of financial support and by facilitating cooperation.

On partnerships for the goals – SDG 17

We covered first: Data and Statistics for Sustainable Development

Tracking the progress towards the SDGs involves the use of relevant, timely and sufficiently granular data for identifying areas, groups or regions that risk being left behind. This cannot be covered by official statistics alone. Cooperation and partnerships between all possible data producers, including national statistical offices, government agencies, non-governmental institutions, research and mass media is key to “leave no one behind”. Local data can mobilise local communities to act on issues that directly concern them, such as waste handling, pollution, etc.

There are multiple data sources and frameworks. Users may find it difficult to navigate this data. For producers it is not easy to ensure that their data will be used for evidence-based decisions. Improving communication between data producers and data users is key to enable progress measurement, informed decision-making, transparency, and accountability. Some good practices include the development of indices, data hubs, unified data policies and strengthening relations with data journalists.

And the second issue was acceleration of digital development through multistakeholder partnerships

Covid-19 has exposed the inequalities brought by the digital divide. The potential of digitalization to advance the 2030 Agenda remains unexploited across many SDGs. Digital skills for all should be fostered, including by changes in school curricula. Advancing gender equality on digital issues requires developing competencies, career guidance and self-confidence trainings. Digital solutions for sustainable use of resources under water should be implemented, including vessel monitoring tools and electronic reporting system. Standards,

including on eWaste and the international trade of animals, contribute to environmental protection. Multi-stakeholder partnerships through Public and Private cooperation are critical.

Financing is required to connect the unconnected to the internet with estimated needs of around 33 billion USD in Europe and Central Asia only. Multistakeholder initiatives, such as the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition, is a game-changing opportunity to take a holistic approach, catalyze new partnerships, and mobilize the resources needed. International standards developed by international organizations and their community of experts enhance investments and make them secure.