

Report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

The report highlights regional cooperation among the five Regional Commissions during the period the April 2020 to March 2021 as part of the implementation of mandates entrusted to them by intergovernmental bodies. It also chronicles, with evidence, how the Regional Commissions have translated resources into results for member States in their respective regions. The report, submitted to the Economic and Social Council, represents a subset of what has been accomplished during the reporting period.

The first part of the report provides an overall assessment of the journey to achieving the SDGs with the COVID-19 pandemic presenting both enormous challenges and tremendous opportunities. One year into the outbreak, COVID-19 continues to aggravate systemic socioeconomic weaknesses, unmasking deeply entrenched vulnerabilities, gaps and inequalities between and within countries, and reversing progress achieved in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Against this background, the report focuses on demonstrating the value proposition of the Regional Commissions to effectively support COVID-19 response and recovery and get member States back on track in the implementation of the SDGs. The report also takes stock of progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the regions. Progress in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda has been significantly hampered in all the regions, and often reversed, by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has also pushed millions of vulnerable and neglected groups particularly women, youth, migrants, and persons with disabilities to poverty, caused economic stagnation, and exacerbated food insecurity. Most developing countries in the regions have faced serious liquidity challenges, reduced fiscal space and exorbitant cost of debt impeding stimulus measures that can pave the way for strong recovery. Progress is lagging particularly in critical areas related to decent work and sustained growth, climate change and the sustainable use of natural resources and social inequality. In summary, the assessment paints a mixed picture with a worrying outlook for achieving the sustainable Development Goals, with greater challenges than were identified a year or so ago. The report asserts that COVID-19 has made the SDG ambition more urgent than ever whilst showcasing how opportunities for transformative change have been leveraged by Regional Commissions.

The report also provides an overview of regional levers of change such as financing for development, inclusive digitalization or regional and transboundary cooperation and ongoing regional initiatives with the potential to support inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery pathways that contribute to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda.

In the second part, the report sheds light on policy matters addressed by the Regional Commissions, including through the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, as well as on steps taken to operationalize the outcomes of the regional review process, in particular the rollout of the Secretary-Generals recommendations in five transformative areas. Inter-regional cooperation through joint projects covered important topics including harmonization of statistical data on the SDGs, strengthening social protection for pandemic response, transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics and implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The Regional Commissions also effectively coordinated their positions on global policy issues and made contributions to regional responses in support of the 2030 Agenda.

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