Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Seventy-seventh session
Bangkok and online, 26–29 April 2021

Account of proceedings

Agenda item 1
Opening of the session

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) elected Mr. Mukhtar Tileuberdi (Kazakhstan) Chair of its seventy-seventh session on 26 April 2021, and he presided over the opening of the session. Video messages from Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, Mr. Munir Akram, seventy-sixth President of the Economic and Social Council, and General Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret.), Prime Minister of Thailand, were played. The Executive Secretary delivered a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General, as well as her welcoming remarks.

Policy statement by the Executive Secretary

2. In the policy statement delivered by the Executive Secretary, she reflected on the challenges the region faces and the opportunities before it. She noted that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to deeply affect each and every country and that the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific were at stake. Referring to the ongoing roll-out of vaccines and the hope for recovery it offered, she stressed the need to ensure the affordability and accessibility of vaccines for all. In follow-up to Commission resolution 76/2 on regional cooperation to address the socioeconomic effects of pandemics and crises in Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP had launched the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific\(^1\) and supported Governments’ efforts to ensure a sustainable economic recovery and overcome supply chain and connectivity disruptions resulting from border closures. To mitigate the unfolding climate crisis, ESCAP was working with member States to advance long-term innovative solutions, including for energy transition, disaster management and air pollution monitoring.

3. The Executive Secretary further underscored four priority areas necessary to ensure a recovery in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: first, integrating health risk management into socioeconomic policies and strategies and scaling up social protection policies to include informal sector workers, persons with disabilities and older persons as well as

\(^1\) ESCAP/CSD/2020/3, annex III.
vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population; second, prioritizing sustainable financing, in particular investment in resilient economies through targeted fiscal and monetary policies; third, enhancing regional connectivity with built-in resiliency to facilitate risk-informed development and promoting digital trade and contactless trade facilitation; and fourth, ensuring that a post-COVID-19 recovery was stronger, cleaner and greener, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. She stressed the urgent need to harness the full potential of inclusive and networked multilateralism and international development cooperation, including South-South and triangular cooperation.

Agenda item 2
Theme topic, “Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific”

4. A video on the theme topic was played. The following Heads of State and Heads of Government addressed the Commission, delivering special remarks: Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan; Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan; Mr. Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia; Mr. Taneti Maamau, President, Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of Kiribati; Mr. Sadyr Japarov, President of Kyrgyzstan; Mr. David Kabua, President of the Marshall Islands; Mr. Battulga Khaltmaa, President of Mongolia; Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of Tajikistan; Mr. Kausea Natano, Prime Minister of Tuvalu and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum for 2020–2021; Ms. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh; Dr. Lotay Tshering, Prime Minister of Bhutan; Mr. Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia; Mr. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji; Mr. Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan; Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka; and Mr. Abdulla Aripov, Prime Minister of Uzbekistan.

5. In his statement, the President of Afghanistan observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated inequalities and exposed structural inequalities in global systems. It had revealed the centrality of regional connectivity and integration in enabling countries to manage turbulence and promote recovery. He further noted the importance of social protection mechanisms and regional sustainable infrastructure investments in order to integrate the region further and create more efficient and effective supply chains. He also noted the need to focus on climate change. He highlighted the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to pursue climate change adaptation and resilience and take decisive steps to protect its natural environment. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of peace and his country’s readiness to pioneer approaches to stakeholder governance and stakeholder economic development that would result in the integration of the systems of State-building, market-building, peacebuilding, and regional connectivity and prosperity.

6. In his statement, the President of Azerbaijan informed the Commission of the unanimous adoption by the Human Rights Council of a resolution on equitable access for all countries to vaccines which had been submitted by Azerbaijan on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. He noted that his country’s conflict with Armenia had concluded and that his Government was eager to maintain sustainable peace and security in the region. He noted that his country had made enormous contributions to the launch of regional connectivity projects such as the East-West, International North-South and North-West transport corridors. He also highlighted that clean environment and green growth were identified as key priorities for development in the next 10 years.
7. In his statement, the President of Indonesia noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed the weakness of health infrastructure at all levels and the fragility of economies with regard to external shocks. He highlighted that economic recovery should not happen at the cost of the environment and should take into account the threats of climate change. He called for increased investment in strengthening regional health resilience; economic recovery with a focus on strengthening the digital economy; innovation to support tourism; and strengthening regional value chains and the integration of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in those value chains. He underscored that the threat of climate change was real and therefore called for investment in a green economy, including the adoption of renewable energy sources and technological innovation. He called on ESCAP to be a catalyst in those areas.

8. In his statement, the President of Kiribati emphasized the need for stronger regional cooperation to build back better and the role of ESCAP in that effort. The Government of Kiribati was addressing the impacts of climate change and redirecting the strategic focus of expenditure to embrace the new normal. He emphasized the importance of leveraging strategic partnerships to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable. He also mentioned his Government’s efforts and progress in repatriating nationals that had been stranded due to the pandemic.

9. In his statement, the President of Kyrgyzstan noted the serious problems the COVID-19 pandemic had caused for international trade and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and called on ESCAP to pay close attention to the future achievement of those Goals. In that context, he emphasized the important role of trade and investment in national development, in particular for landlocked countries, as well as regional cooperation in those areas. In that regard, he welcomed the Commission’s support for the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia.

10. In his statement, the President of the Marshall Islands noted that his country had remained COVID-19 free but had suffered economically from the impact of the pandemic. At the same time, the pandemic had enabled his Government to identify the weaknesses in existing systems and specifically in systems relating to health, social protection, digital connectivity and the environment. He emphasized his commitment to regional cooperation and that the United Nations system needed to ensure the inclusion of island-tailored solutions in regional assistance, including through meaningful implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway for small island developing States.

11. In his statement, the President of Mongolia observed that although each country was taking steps to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis had to be tackled together and multilateral cooperation had to be further enhanced. In that context, equal distribution and access to vaccines was the most effective way to overcome the crisis together. There was a need to integrate the economic recovery with people-centred development policies and address the challenges together. He also emphasized that it was crucial to expand international cooperation and develop a unified long-term policy aimed at improving human development and livelihoods and ensuring environmental sustainability. Given that infrastructure, energy and transport were the central development pillars of landlocked developing countries such as Mongolia, his Government proposed to jointly implement a project to build an energy power grid to address the rational use and distribution of power in North-East Asia,
and he highlighted the project’s contribution to environmental protection and climate change mitigation.

12. In his statement, the President of Tajikistan noted that the full impact of the pandemic still had to be assessed, but that it had led to an unprecedented rise in global unemployment, which could lead to food insecurity in many countries. To enable countries to recover fully from the pandemic, additional financial resources were required. He called on all countries of the region to expand social protection and invest in sustainable economic recovery; support trade and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises; ensure the smooth transportation of essential items, in particular food and medicines; protect the environment; counter possible future threats and crises; diversify the economy; promote the digitalization process; adapt to climate change; and foster the transition to the green economy.

13. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu noted that the Pacific island countries had managed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic but that the pandemic had impacted sectors such as tourism, retail trade and the fishing industry and had affected the implementation of the Blue Pacific initiative. He recognized the need for the Pacific subregion to look into ways it could benefit from the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific. He also recognized the importance of enhanced connectivity, in particular in the areas of information and communications technology (ICT) and transport to effectively respond to trade disruptions. He observed with concern the growing debt burden of small island developing States, including Tuvalu, and, hence, their need for access to financing and debt relief. He further observed that climate change remained the single greatest threat to the livelihood, well-being and prosperity of people in the Pacific and that there was an urgent need to implement the commitments under the Paris Agreement. He concluded by emphasizing the need for multilateralism and regionalism, including implementation of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, to build back better.

14. In her statement, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh noted the devastating impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on health systems and economies around the world and her Government’s responses to it. She noted the importance of regional cooperation and her Government’s active participation in various regional cooperation mechanisms and initiatives of ESCAP, such as the Intergovernmental Agreements on the Asian Highway Network and the Trans-Asian Railway Network, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific and the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement, as well as initiatives for public-private partnerships and renewable energy and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. She urged the international community to remain focused on the issue of a viable solution for the repatriation of the Rohingyas. She made the following recommendations: (a) the developed world, development partners and international financial institutions should work towards quick recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; (b) to build back better from any crisis, the development approach should be more inclusive, resilient and environment-friendly; (c) the Asia-Pacific region should institute efficient policies and strategies towards universal health coverage; and (d) there was a need to establish seamless connectivity in the areas of trade, transport, energy, ICT, and science and technology.

15. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Bhutan noted the primary importance of health and well-being and his Government’s lack of capacity to produce all health products domestically and, hence, its dependence on imports. He remarked that his country was guided by the development
principles of gross national happiness and had always had a special focus on the social sectors. He also observed that his country was already carbon negative. He concluded by stating that the concept of development with values could be an integral component of the new normal.

16. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Cambodia noted with concern the ongoing disruption of economies owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of new variants of the virus. In that context, he emphasized the importance and urgency of the distribution and utilization of vaccines in an equitable and affordable manner, especially for developing countries. In particular, with regard to post-crisis recovery, he emphasized the importance of the following issues: the importance of globalization and multilateralism through greater openness of international trade with preferential treatment to developing countries; promoting digitalization, including the establishment of digital government and accelerated uptake of digitalization by the private sector; enhancing social resilience by strengthening the health system and social protection; the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, including their formalization and integration into global value chains; and increasing investment in greening of infrastructure.

17. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Fiji observed that the COVID-19 pandemic was not just a health crisis, but a social and economic crisis as well, which had hit developing countries and small States, including Fiji, disproportionately hard. Those countries were facing a more difficult recovery ahead and required access to concessional financing to allow them to deal with fiscal and debt risks. He agreed with the four areas of regional cooperation presented in the theme study but underscored that actions must be tailored to those countries most in need. He noted that regional cooperation needed to be strengthened to ensure a full recovery from the pandemic and to build back better. In particular, the reopening of international borders was urgently needed to revive the tourism sector, which in turn depended on the availability of vaccines. He also emphasized that small island developing States could not be forced to sacrifice climate action to meet their immediate socioeconomic needs.

18. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Pakistan noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had posed setbacks for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and had plunged many people into poverty. He urged solidarity through international and regional cooperation to ensure that nobody was left behind. In that context, he suggested four key areas of focus: ensuring people-centred economic security, including pro-poor and inclusive policies in areas such as health and social protection; anchoring peace and development in human rights; ambitious climate action; and ensuring adequate financing for development, including debt relief.

19. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka informed the Commission that his country had successfully responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and remained committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. He called on ESCAP to assist small countries with pandemic recovery and vaccination programmes, encouraging growth of foreign employment opportunities, promoting eco- and health tourism, and encouraging investment into and the identification of new markets for emerging nations.

20. In his statement, the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan observed that recovery from the crisis required concerted efforts aimed at further liberalizing international trade, introducing effective banking and finance mechanisms, optimizing tax and tariff policies, and creating new jobs. He emphasized the
following seven initiatives and proposals: (a) develop a joint strategy for poverty reduction within the framework of the Commission and establish a regional centre on poverty reduction in Uzbekistan and an expert council on labour market development; (b) as part of the Commission’s platform, launch a programme called “Asian clusters” to foster industrial cooperation, innovations and digital technologies; (c) adopt a cooperation mechanism to promote food security together with the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization; (d) strengthen regional connectivity and efficient use of transport infrastructure and promote cooperation in the sphere of transit, including through the regional transport and communication centre being established in Uzbekistan; (e) develop the tourism sector post-pandemic; (f) for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Commission, organize a youth scientists world congress of the member States in Uzbekistan in 2022; and (g) organize a joint conference of science and research centres prior to future sessions of the Commission.

Sub-item (a)

General debate

21. The Commission had before it the summary of the theme study on building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/77/1) and the note by the secretariat on enhancing regional cooperation for seamless trade and transport connectivity in times of pandemic (ESCAP/77/2).

22. Representatives of the following members and associate members of the Commission made statements or submitted written statements: Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; France; Georgia; Hong Kong, China; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Micronesia (Federated States of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; United States of America; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam.

23. The representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction made statements.

24. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also made statements: International Atomic Energy Agency; International Monetary Fund; International Transport Forum; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA). The Chair of the Executive Council of the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network also made a statement.

25. The Executive Secretary delivered a brief presentation introducing the theme study.

26. Ms. Helen Clark, The Helen Clark Foundation; Mr. Guy Ryder, International Labour Organization; Mr. Petteri Taalas, World Meteorological Organization; Ms. Mari Elka Pangestu, World Bank; and Mr. David Wallerstein, Tencent, delivered keynote addresses.
Country statements

27. The Commission noted the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economies in the region. The pandemic had particularly affected vulnerable groups, especially those working in the informal sector, and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, disrupted supply chains and exposed gaps in health and education and other social sectors. It had undermined national and regional efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve its Sustainable Development Goals.

28. The Commission was informed of the various measures that Governments had taken to address the impact of the pandemic, such as implementing effective health and social protection measures and providing fiscal stimuli, including in the form of tax incentives, concessional loans and other financial support to households and businesses, in particular to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as providing unemployment benefits and enhancing vocational skills, promoting the digital economy and taking general relief measures. One representative also pointed out that reviving the economy and maintaining economic growth would be important for graduation from the category of least developed countries.

29. One representative noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had revealed the importance of good governance, transparency and accountability at all levels and of addressing structural problems, including inequality. Noting how the pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities, several representatives stressed that recovery efforts should be non-discriminatory to safeguard development progress and ensure that no one was left behind. The importance of a people-centred, pro-poor and unified approach to development, anchored in human rights, was emphasized.

30. In that context, the Commission noted the importance of equal access to vaccines, as a global public good, and called for vaccine accessibility and affordability for all developing countries. It recognized the central role of the World Health Organization, including its COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility to ensure universal access to vaccines. The Commission also acknowledged the call for vulnerable and marginalized countries, such as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, to receive assistance upfront and thereby ensure that no one was left behind.

31. In that context, the Commission noted the efforts of several members of the Commission to provide vaccines to various developing countries around the world.

32. One representative called for the World Trade Organization (WTO) to suspend intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 vaccines for a limited period of time, for rapid scaling-up of manufacturing and ensuring accessibility and affordability of vaccines.

33. The Commission noted that the pandemic also offered opportunities to build back better. A robust and sustained recovery of the economies of the ESCAP region following the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, would only be possible if additional investment in economic, social and environmental sustainability was secured, including through public-private partnerships. In particular, that required strengthening of and quality investments, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, in areas such as public health services, including universal health care and social protection systems, the digital economy, technology
transfer, home-grown development strategies, efforts to strengthen connectivity and supply chains, cross-border trade facilitation, climate change mitigation, low-carbon development and environment-responsive approaches, empowerment of women, border management and immigration, and disaster prevention and mitigation.

34. In that context, the Commission noted the importance of sustainable fiscal policy and having adequate, long-term and predictable means of financing. It was also important to continue exploring innovative financing to close the financing gap for post-pandemic achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was stated that the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development should be accelerated, while countries with special needs required debt relief and the backing of regional and international financial institutions to provide concessional financing support. The Commission also recognized the need for adjusting monetary policies to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain financial and payment systems stability and provide ample liquidity to individuals and businesses at a reasonable cost.

35. One representative called for regional institutions to provide technical assistance through customized policy development in the areas of regulatory and monitoring functions to improve and strengthen tax administration regimes so Governments could strengthen their revenue generating systems.

36. The Commission agreed that multilateral and regional cooperation were essential to build back better and should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda to ensure more sustainable and resilient economies. It was stated that regional and global cooperation should be promoted under the principles of multilateralism, unity, equality, mutual benefit, solidarity and respect for sovereignty, while preventing politically motivated factors and sanctions rhetoric from destructively affecting the overall efforts to recover from COVID-19 and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

37. The Commission noted that it was imperative to enhance regional cooperation and integration, including knowledge-sharing, in areas such as connectivity, social protection, human development, tourism, the innovative economy, resource management and climate change, energy, finance, technology adaptation and transfer, developing the digital economy, including bridging the digital divide, and trade and investment, including repairing supply chains and ensuring the continuous flows of goods.

38. It was stated that the region needed to act to forge regional health cooperation and build a more resilient regional public health system, including establishing and strengthening regional integrated disease surveillance networks, establishing coordinated mechanisms to slow the spread of viruses across borders, harmonizing health protocols and standards among countries, and exploring pooled procurement mechanisms for vaccines for effective pandemic management.

39. Noting with concern that the region was lagging behind in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Commission called on the United Nations, including ESCAP, to continue sharing best practices, knowledge and technical expertise through capacity-building to enable countries to recover from the pandemic, build back better, accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that no one was left behind. In that context, one representative expressed the hope that the United Nations could assist in providing recommendations and plans.
of action for countries to safely reopen respective borders to promote connectivity, particularly in the areas of tourism and trade. One representative called on ESCAP to formulate policy recommendations that strengthened the link between the economy and health, as well as between the economy and the environment.

40. The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted sectors on which many countries were dependent, such as tourism, and had revealed the need for economic diversification to build back better.

41. Several representatives noted the importance of open borders for trade and the need for transit and trade facilitation and, in that context, safeguarding the rules-based multilateral trading system with WTO as its core. One representative expressed the view that regional connectivity and trade opportunities were important for economic recovery but that the initiatives in those areas must be based on universally recognized international norms, good governance, financial responsibility, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality.

42. The Commission recognized the benefits of regional economic integration. It was stated that significant benefits were seen in the increased use of existing regional integration mechanisms to address the complex socioeconomic challenges created by the pandemic, especially those related to the movement of people, goods and services.

43. In that context, one representative advocated for a level playing field to expand intraregional trade beyond the export of commodities from developing to developed countries towards trade in value-added and finished products. Several representatives stated the need to effectively implement the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement for a higher level of trade liberalization and facilitation in the region, while some countries were considering joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. The Commission also noted that various countries in the region had acceded to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

44. One representative noted that it was important that member States with economic strength in the Asia-Pacific region provide least developed and smaller and vulnerable economies with investment, greater market access and trading opportunities.

45. It was stated that, given the importance of foreign direct investment for development, financial relations among countries must go beyond cross-border transaction agreements to include the examination of solutions to counter transfer pricing and base erosion and profit shifting by foreign investors in developing countries that affected their capacity to collect tax revenue from foreign investments.

46. One representative called on ESCAP to deepen its cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) beyond the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations (2021–2025) in the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance, citing as an example the ongoing collaboration between ESCAP and ASEAN on a comprehensive framework on the care economy in order to progressively realize gender equality and the empowerment of women.
47. The Commission called for advanced energy, broadband and transport connectivity cooperation under the principles of extensive consultation, joint contributions and shared benefits.

48. The Commission, highlighting the particular vulnerability of the landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring seamless transport connectivity, leveraging the existing cooperation mechanisms under the auspices of ESCAP, such as the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network and other instruments, and seeking synergy with national connectivity programmes on the basis of the principles of modernization, harmonization and digitalization. The Commission also recognized the important role played by innovative and modern technologies in improving the efficiency, safety and environmental sustainability of transport systems. The Commission was informed about members’ initiatives to enhance their infrastructure and operational connectivity, as well as to improve transport links between Europe and Asia.

49. The Commission noted that the digital economy played an important role in pandemic prevention and control and economic recovery, including the application and utilization of digital financial services and e-commerce and the development of e-government. The digital economy should be promoted through the dissemination and application of digital technologies, digital learning and by accelerating digital infrastructure construction to sustain economic activities, facilitate economic recovery, and enable transformation and upgrading of traditional industries. Various representatives called for regional cooperation on digital transformation within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative.

50. The Commission recognized the need to ensure security of data and the need for affordability and security of data exchange, including in the use of blockchain systems. The Commission was informed about the Global Initiative on Data Security. One representative called on ESCAP to enhance members’ capacity in the area of data collection and analysis with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to address data gaps.

51. The Commission noted with concern the impacts of climate change and deterioration of environmental health and agreed that economic recovery and development should not be at the cost of the environment, that it should be climate responsive and climate resilient to ultimately achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and bear positive impacts for future generations. The Commission stressed the need to address climate change and achieve carbon neutrality, including by investing in green and sustainable infrastructure and adopting green technologies and renewable energy and energy efficient solutions, including environmentally friendly energy solutions for transport, and by phasing out coal. One representative also highlighted the positive impacts of climate action in terms of revitalizing the economy and creating jobs.

52. The Commission urged members and associate members to take action to deliver on the Paris Agreement. Pacific island developing countries were particularly affected by climate change, and the Commission was informed about initiatives to strengthen island economies vulnerable to the economic shocks of COVID-19 and to respond to climate change.

53. Two representatives called upon ESCAP to help to safeguard environmental health through regional cooperation, including transboundary management of coastal and marine resources which recognized no political or
international boundaries. Their ecological integrity should be ensured in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant conventions.

54. The Commission noted the heavy impact of natural disasters in the region, including extreme weather events that were related to climate change, and that disaster prevention and mitigation measures were therefore important. The Commission was informed of initiatives promoting support for disaster risk reduction projects that were inclusive of persons with disabilities and that took into account gender equality. One representative noted the importance of the health aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. The Commission was also informed about the continued support to the programmes and activities of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management provided by the host Government.

55. The Commission emphasized that expanding social protection systems could reduce poverty and inequality, build people’s resilience and ensure their well-being, as well as promote economic growth. Recognizing this, several Governments had prioritized social protection in their responses to the socioeconomic fallout of the pandemic. Several representatives stressed the need for more progressive support for those left behind and to secure citizens’ incomes and well-being. One representative highlighted the potential of the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific to strengthen social protection.

56. The Commission, noting that the pandemic had had a disproportionate impact on women and other vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, emphasized the importance of promoting human security, including support to those groups.

57. One representative noted that it was essential to establish and operate national risk management systems in a timely manner to guarantee socioeconomic development and cope with crises.

58. One representative called for strengthening the support of the United Nations system in the North Pacific subregion, including through the establishment of the proposed multi-country office.

59. At its 7th plenary meeting on 29 April 2021, the Commission adopted resolution 77/1 on building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific.

60. Prior to the adoption, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Bangkok transmitted to the secretariat the explanation of position of its delegation in relation to the resolution, stating that inhumane coercive measures and unilateral illegal sanctions violated the basic rights of developing countries, had been a double burden during COVID-19 and were in opposition to multilateralism. The Embassy stated that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran believed in an essential multilateral measure by all member States to resolve any impediment of internationally illegal unilateral coercive measures. The Embassy further stated that its Government considered safe, affordable, effective and quality medicines and vaccines to be prerequisites for the realization of sustainable development in the COVID-19 era and recalled that the Human Rights Council, at its forty-sixth session, had urged States Members of the United Nations to refrain from restricting affordable, timely, equitable and universal access to vaccines. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran urged States members of the Commission to remain in full
compliance with their commitments to the United Nations’ principle of international cooperation and solidarity and, in that connection, to refrain from engaging in any sort of anti-financial or anti-trade measures, which might hamper developing and least developed countries from accessing vaccines and medication on an equal basis with others.

61. Prior to the adoption of the resolution, the representative of the United States of America stated that the resolution demonstrated the region’s commitment to recover stronger from the toll of the pandemic and to set countries back on a path to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, he underscored that the resolution remained a non-binding document, which did not create rights or obligations under international law. He further stated that the United States dissociated itself in particular from operative paragraph 4 of the resolution and its reference to WTO. He stated that his Government was of the view that WTO was not the only international trading system in existence and could not be elevated above other international trading systems. He stated that it was the sovereign right of each member State to determine how it conducted trade with other countries and that the United Nations ought to respect the independent mandates of other processes and institutions, including in the area of trade negotiations. With respect to references to the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction contained in the resolution, he referred the Commission to the global explanation of position delivered by the United States on 1 September 2015. With those clarifications, the representative was pleased to join the consensus on the resolution.

62. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on enhancing regional cooperation for seamless trade and transport connectivity in times of pandemic (ESCAP/77/2).

**Sub-item (b)**

**Subregional perspectives**

63. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on subregional cooperation to build back better from crises in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/77/3).

64. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; and India.

65. The Executive Secretary made introductory remarks before a dialogue among the following representatives of subregional organizations and groupings: Ms. Meg Taylor, Secretary-General, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; Mr. Dato’ Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General, ASEAN; Mr. Esala Ruwan Weerakoon, Secretary-General, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); Mr. Vladimir Norov, Secretary-General, Shanghai Cooperation Organization; Mr. Mikhail Myasnikovich, Chair of the Board, Eurasian Economic Commission; Mr. Tenzin Lekphell, Secretary-General, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation; Mr. Hadi Soleimanpour, Secretary-General, Economic Cooperation Organization; and Mr. Andrey Smorodin, Director, Greater Tumen Initiative.

66. The representatives highlighted diverse subregional and multilateral actions for the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan in South-East Asia, the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund, the Moscow Declaration of the Council of Heads
of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Comprehensive Plan of Joint Measures to Counter Epidemics in the Region, as well as various subregional dialogues and coordination on sectoral measures for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

67. Several representatives stated that the unprecedented and devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of life required an unprecedented response and collaboration at the national, subregional, regional and global levels. They noted the role played by ESCAP in sharing good practices and knowledge on the Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 responses through subregional and regional dialogues. They called for continued support for building back better from the pandemic and other crises.

68. The Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat highlighted the unprecedented challenges faced by the Pacific subregion in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which compounded the challenges of climate change and natural disasters, and provided information on the collective response of the Pacific to facilitate immediate responses to member States’ requests for assistance. She outlined further priorities for regional cooperation, including health and social protection services; sustainable management and use of the Pacific Ocean; e-commerce capacity and the digital economy; sustainable development financing; and a Pacific regional travel bubble. She also highlighted the development of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent to drive the Pacific’s vision for the future and the establishment of the Pacific Resilience Facility.

69. The Secretary-General of ASEAN reiterated his organization’s commitment to building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic through inclusive, sustainable and people-centred development. The ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan, adopted at the Thirty-seventh ASEAN Summit in November 2020 provided an exit strategy from the COVID-19 crisis by outlining responses at different stages, while focusing on the sectors and segments of society that were most affected by the pandemic. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations was determined to safeguard development progress to achieve longer-term resilience for the benefits of the region.

70. The Secretary-General of SAARC stated that South Asia had been severely affected, with the pandemic threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, leading to reversals to the recent socioeconomic gains made over the past few decades. He stressed the need for collective action at national, subregional and regional levels and emphasized the importance of vaccines for all. He informed the Commission about initiatives of SAARC, such as the establishment of the SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund to finance COVID-19-related social projects under the SAARC Development Fund and to hold ministerial meetings to address impacts of the pandemic and develop strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. He concluded that to build back better, focus should be placed on economic diversification, structural transformation and increased investments in social sectors, such as health and education, to address inequalities.

71. The Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization highlighted the need for concerted and inclusive efforts by the international community to combat the pandemic and its negative consequences. He pointed out the essential role played by the United Nations system. In the Moscow Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the need to further strengthen international cooperation was
emphasized. In it, Shanghai Cooperation Organization members called for an open world economy that upheld the multilateral trading system. He also expressed readiness to establish trilateral cooperation between the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ESCAP and ASEAN.

72. The Chair of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission underscored the ongoing cooperation among countries in the Eurasian Economic Union to manage medical supplies and vaccine production and their efforts to create conditions for an efficient post-crisis recovery. He stressed that expanding interactive formats and dialogues, including under the auspices of the United Nations, was important in order to identify new sources of economic growth and ensure sustainable development. Countries within the Eurasian Economic Union region had emphasized that the expansion of cooperation with third-party countries and international organizations was a priority task for developing Eurasian economic integration until 2025.

73. The Secretary-General of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation highlighted that learning from good examples of collaboration and cooperation and the timely exchange of information and best practices would be critical to build back better. He stressed the important role that technology could play and suggested the further sharing of vital resources, skills and knowledge and speeding up the management and recovery process, including through coordination and partnership in vaccine production. He recommended that WTO members extend waivers under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights to produce COVID-19 vaccines, which was only possible through multilateral partnership arrangements such as the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator and the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility.

74. The Secretary-General of the Economic Cooperation Organization called for regional and subregional collaborative efforts to build resilience and advance sustainable development. He also highlighted the crucial role played by country groupings in reducing vulnerabilities to future disasters. Regional organizations should act regionally while engaging globally. He underscored that trade and investment were an engine for economic growth and connectivity, as well as a prerequisite for boosting cooperation and integration. International organizations and countries should support initiatives that could transform landlocked countries into land-linked countries. The complementary roles of regional organizations were important and joint financing mechanisms could be considered to increase investment in infrastructure development.

75. The Director of the Greater Tumen Initiative highlighted that his organization’s secretariat was striving to promote policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade and financial integration by maximizing synergies between it and other regional cooperation initiatives. In view of ongoing initiatives on cooperation in the medical and health fields in North-East Asia, he further indicated that the Greater Tumen Initiative secretariat stood ready to provide coordination and facilitation support among its members. He expressed the hope that the positive examples of joint activities on trade and transport between the Greater Tumen Initiative and ESCAP could be built upon to expand cooperation in other fields, such as the energy sector.

76. The Commission noted the ongoing collaboration between the ESCAP secretariat and subregional organizations on facilitating the exchange of best practices and development experiences, such as on recovery from COVID-19, the Sustainable Development Goals and the graduation of least developed
countries, and mobilizing their respective expertise for joint programmes on subregional connectivity.

77. The Commission recognized the central role of cross-border physical and economic connectivity, technology, bridging digital divides, the digital economy, grid development, disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation in fighting against the pandemic and requested ESCAP to pursue work in those important areas. The Commission also noted the importance of deepening subregional cooperation as well as strengthening communication and collaboration among subregional organizations.

78. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on subregional cooperation to build back better from crises in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/77/3).

Agenda item 3
Special Body on Least Developed, Landlocked Developing and Pacific Island Developing Countries

79. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat entitled “Summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021: Strengthening the Resilience of Least Developed Countries in the Wake of the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic” (ESCAP/77/4) and the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions (ESCAP/77/6).

80. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Lao People’s Democratic Republic; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tuvalu; and Vanuatu.

81. The Executive Secretary presented the key findings of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021: Strengthening the Resilience of Least Developed Countries in the Wake of the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic. The High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the Chair of the Committee for Development Policy of the Economic and Social Council made statements.

82. The Commission emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a disproportionate impact on the economies and health systems of Asia-Pacific countries in special situations (that is, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States) and pushed many people back into poverty. This had put a significant strain on the limited resources of those countries. The Commission underscored that most countries in special situations remained vulnerable to external shocks, such as climate change, natural disasters and other economic shocks. Those countries would therefore need multilateral cooperation to address the global pandemic and avoid protectionism.

83. The Commission highlighted the development successes of Asia-Pacific least developed countries during the implementation period of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020 (Istanbul Programme of Action), especially towards meeting the criteria for graduation from the category of least developed countries. The Commission congratulated Vanuatu for its graduation in December 2020 and noted that several least developed countries in the region were scheduled to graduate between 2023 and 2026. Many were already working towards a smooth and sustainable graduation.
84. The Commission noted that mitigating the adverse impacts of the pandemic would be difficult for graduating least developed countries as, upon graduation, they would also face the withdrawal of duty-free and quota-free exports and the possible reduction in grants and concessional loans. Several representatives of least developed countries requested the secretariat to scale up its technical and financial assistance to graduating and graduated countries in formulating, implementing and monitoring their respective graduation strategies. One representative further requested the secretariat to undertake a detailed analysis of the impacts of graduation to facilitate the preparation for graduation. Some representatives pointed out that, given the lack of resilience revealed by the pandemic, a smooth transition strategy for graduating countries needed review and strengthening, based on more holistic approaches, to ensure the sustainability of the graduation process and to increase the economic and social resilience of least developed countries.

85. The Commission emphasized the importance of expanding international support measures for graduated and graduating least developed countries. It urged the international community, including development partners, multilateral development banks and international financial institutions, to support countries in special situations in building their resilience, including by developing or strengthening robust public health and social protection systems, expanding investment in resilient infrastructure, implementing effective debt relief programmes, mobilizing financial resources, especially climate finance, and ensuring vaccine equity under the framework of multilateralism and regional cooperation. The Commission also emphasized the importance of the international community in strengthening the capacity of least developed countries. One representative requested the secretariat to consider enhancing its support to member States in facilitating structural transformation and economic diversification through technical assistance and targeted capacity-building programmes. Several representatives of other developing and developed countries expressed their Governments’ commitment and willingness to continue assisting the countries in special situations to recover from the pandemic, including through vaccination roll-out programmes, evidence-based advisory services and infrastructure development projects. One representative called on the secretariat to increase efforts to expand the membership of international agreements, such as the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network.

86. The Commission highlighted that the next programme of action for the least developed countries, to be adopted at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, in Doha in 2022, should focus on expanding productive capacity, reducing vulnerability to external shocks and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It should also focus on graduation and much needed actions of the international community to support graduating countries, including through an improved monitoring mechanism that linked monitoring to concrete policy interventions in the event that countries faced setbacks to a smooth transition.

87. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat entitled “Summary of the Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development Report 2021: Strengthening the Resilience of Least Developed Countries in the Wake of the Coronavirus Disease Pandemic” (ESCAP/77/4).
Agenda item 4
Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission

88. The Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its fifteenth session (ESCAP/77/5), the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions (ESCAP/77/6), the summary of the meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission held in the period 2020–2021 (ESCAP/77/7) and the annual reports of international and intergovernmental organizations provided to the Commission (ESCAP/77/INF/1).

89. The Deputy Executive Secretary delivered an introductory presentation on the agenda item. The Chairs of the subsidiary bodies of ESCAP that had met since the last session of the Commission reported on the outcomes of their respective meetings.

90. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the matters calling for action by the Commission or brought to its attention emanating from the meetings of its subsidiary bodies held in the period 2020–2021 (ESCAP/77/7).

91. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions (ESCAP/77/6) and the annual reports of international and intergovernmental organizations provided to the Commission (ESCAP/77/INF/1).

92. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia on its fifteenth session (ESCAP/77/5).

Sub-item (a)
Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

93. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (ESCAP/77/8).

94. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Japan; Republic of Korea; and Thailand. A representative of UNEP made a joint statement on behalf of the Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

95. The Commission reiterated its commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission recognized the great challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic for the achievement of the Goals, with one representative noting the overall uneven progress observed in Asia and the Pacific and the risk of hard-won development gains made in the past decades being rolled back. The Commission highlighted in particular the impacts of the pandemic on the economies and people of the region, with one representative noting that the pandemic brought to the fore the vulnerability and systemic weaknesses of societies.
96. The Commission stressed the need for regional cooperation to address those challenges, including with regard to financing sustainable development priorities, and noted regional cooperation activities put in place during the pandemic recovery phase.

97. The Commission underscored the need to adopt transformative approaches to overcome the pandemic and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and one representative stressed that rapid recovery should not equal a return to business as usual, which would exacerbate inequalities. One representative emphasized that broader investment in public health systems, a strengthened response to climate change and multifaceted partnerships were critical to accelerating progress towards the Goals in the midst of the pandemic. One representative highlighted the need to close the digital divide and ensure digital literacy for all during the recovery from the pandemic.

98. Representatives shared their experience with regard to efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals amidst the COVID-19 crisis, ranging from economic stimulus packages to support for the health, ICT, education and energy sectors, as well as for the industrial, manufacturing, agricultural and fisheries sectors, and the focus of those efforts on ensuring livelihoods and supporting all parts of society, including vulnerable groups.

99. The Commission emphasized the need to protect the environment and focus on climate action during the pandemic, and highlighted the efforts of member States to achieve green societies, promote low carbon development and ultimately attain net zero carbon emissions.

100. The Commission also highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement, partnerships and collaboration to ensure a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

101. The Commission stressed the important role played by the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in supporting a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. One representative called for the discussions that took place at the Forum to be pursued further at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

102. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report of the Eighth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (ESCAP/77/8).

Sub-item (b)
Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation

103. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its fifteenth session (ESCAP/77/9), the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology on its sixteenth session (ESCAP/77/10) and the note by the secretariat on promoting meaningful and affordable access to broadband Internet for inclusive development (ESCAP/77/11).
104. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Indonesia; and Republic of Korea.

105. The Commission recognized that digital connectivity, digital technology development and digital literacy had played an important role in the containment and recovery phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, closing the digital divide, promoting digitalized industries, digital transformation, social inclusiveness and improving quality of life.

106. The Commission called for all members and associate members to strengthen regional cooperation and collaboration on digital connectivity and digital transformation, including within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, and to engage in developing an action plan for the period 2022–2026 to promote digital infrastructure development that would bridge the digital gaps among countries.

107. The Commission was informed that a multifunctional satellite would be in operation in 2023, which would improve the quality of Internet service to the public and increase connectivity for local government and remote and underdeveloped areas for health-care and education services.

108. One representative expressed support for the sharing of best practices and capacity-building cooperation on ICT, science, technology and innovation among member States to strengthen their capacities for sustainable development.

109. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its fifteenth session (ESCAP/77/9) and the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology on its sixteenth session (ESCAP/77/10).

110. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on promoting meaningful and affordable access to broadband Internet for inclusive development (ESCAP/77/11).

111. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission, in light of exceptional circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, decided to defer the elections of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development to the seventy-eighth session of the Commission, in 2022, and to extend, on an exceptional basis, the term of the current members of the Council by one year.

Sub-item (c)
Committee on Statistics

112. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its sixteenth session (ESCAP/77/12) and the note by the secretariat entitled “Is everyone in the picture? Civil registration in the middle of the coronavirus disease pandemic” (ESCAP/77/13).

113. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Indonesia; Russian Federation; and Thailand.
114. Some representatives acknowledged the importance of high quality, reliable and accessible official statistics for social and economic development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission heard updates from several member States on developments within their national statistical systems, including the following: conduct of the population census of China in 2020 and postponement of the census of Bangladesh to late 2021; creation of Sustainable Development Goal coordination mechanisms; use of technologies to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 on statistical operations; enhancements to civil registration and vital statistics systems, including for migration; development of data catalogues for government data holdings; integrated data systems to strengthen the delivery of social protection programmes; and statistical-geospatial data integration. One representative stressed the importance of sustained funding for the ongoing production of quality official statistics.

115. Member States expressed their appreciation for the technical assistance provided by the secretariat and the skill enhancement provided by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific. Member States also renewed their commitment to capacity-building in official statistics in the Asia-Pacific region, including through cooperation fund projects, voluntary financial contributions and in-kind contributions. In that regard, the Commission was informed of initiatives for skills development and the delivery of training programmes in Central Asia for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the establishment of the regional hub for big data in China in support of the United Nations Global Platform to promote statistical capacity-building in the Asia-Pacific region.

116. One representative drew the attention of the Commission to the duty of development partners to ensure the broader involvement of national statistical offices in data collection efforts for the Sustainable Development Goals in line with the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind.

117. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its sixteenth session (ESCAP/77/12).

118. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat entitled “Is everyone in the picture? Civil registration in the middle of the coronavirus disease pandemic” (ESCAP/77/13).

Sub-item (d)
Committee on Social Development

119. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (ESCAP/77/27) and the report on the sixth session of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 (ESCAP/77/14).

120. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Indonesia; Japan; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

121. The Commission welcomed the Action Plan to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific as a guiding framework for extending social protection to all throughout the life cycle.
122. The Commission emphasized the challenges posed to societies by the COVID-19 pandemic and reaffirmed its commitment to fight the pandemic while making sure that population groups in vulnerable situations would not be left behind. In that regard, several representatives underscored the importance of empowering women, older persons and disadvantaged groups, especially persons with disabilities, in the responses to the pandemic and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

123. Several representatives highlighted long-term investment in social protection as crucial for achieving sustainable development and stressed the important role played by social protection in addressing the adverse socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

124. The Commission was informed of country experiences in building and expanding social protection programmes, including boosting cash transfers and allowances of existing schemes such as child grants, old-age allowances and disability benefits. One representative informed the Commission of a newly introduced one-stop shop to improve social protection services for those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and underlined the need to enhance human resources and institutional capacity for improved effectiveness. The Commission was informed that one member State had eradicated poverty 10 years ahead of schedule.

125. Some representatives stressed the importance of universal access to health care and the centrality of the equitable provision of social services to reducing inequalities and leaving no one behind. Some member States had introduced specific measures to enhance the well-being of older persons through improved access to health-care and social services.

126. Some representatives highlighted the importance of promoting equitable access to vaccines and immunization through collective efforts in line with the 2030 Agenda. Through multilateral cooperation, their Governments had offered vaccines and other COVID-19-related assistance to countries across the region and the world.

127. Several representatives reported on national initiatives to protect the rights of persons with disabilities during the pandemic through the expansion of social protection, dissemination of information in accessible formats, provision of assistive devices, and vocational training and employment programmes, as well as by addressing the particular needs of women and girls with disabilities.

128. A few member States expressed their commitment to enhance cooperation with ESCAP to promote women’s rights and disability inclusion in Asia and the Pacific through ongoing and upcoming capacity-building projects. One representative emphasized the importance of taking gender-responsive and disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction measures in the Asia-Pacific region.

129. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the report of the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (ESCAP/77/27) and the report on the sixth session of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 (ESCAP/77/14).
Sub-item (e)
Committee on Transport

130. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

131. The Commission underlined the close linkage between sustainable transport and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in the context of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It reiterated that transport was one of its priority areas and called for transformative action to achieve efficient and resilient transport connectivity against the backdrop of the pandemic with a view to ensuring economically viable, environmentally sound and socially inclusive transport systems, sustainable production and consumption and uninterrupted supply chains. In that connection, the Commission referred to the relevant outcomes of the sixth session of the Committee on Transport and the preparations for the fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport.

132. Recognizing the vital role of regional cooperation, several representatives recalled the outcomes of the Third Ministerial Conference on Transport, held in Moscow in December 2016, including the Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021).

133. One representative referred to the work of ESCAP in cooperation with other organizations, including the Economic Commission for Europe, on strengthening transport connectivity between Asia and Europe.

134. The Commission reiterated that the Intergovernmental Agreements on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-Asian Railway Network and Dry Ports played a critical role in enhancing sustainable transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and called on member States to continue supporting their implementation, including by actively participating in the relevant intergovernmental working groups. Furthermore, one representative recalled the important role of the Intergovernmental Agreement on International Road Transport along the Asian Highway Network in enhancing trade and economic relationships among member States and requested the secretariat to continue providing support for its implementation.

135. The Commission further underlined the importance of continued efforts to improve road safety and green transport and recognized that smart transport technologies and other innovations could play a key role in enabling the improvement and promotion of sustainable transport.

136. In that connection, the Commission was informed of various national initiatives to expand road, rail and port networks, develop green roads and design multimodal and resilient transport systems. Representatives also highlighted investments in mass rapid transit and transit-oriented development, integrating road safety into national transport plans and conducting road safety audits as well as promoting a shift to public and non-motorized transport and plans to transition to electric public buses in transport systems. The Commission was informed of efforts to promote seamless transport connectivity through bilateral and multilateral transport agreements such as the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement and its new operationalization protocol, as well as ongoing initiatives on trilateral highways.
137. With regard to the preparations for the next phase of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific for the years 2022 to 2026, the Commission called for a vision that would go beyond infrastructure development to achieve economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive transport systems. One representative referred to a broad concept of connectivity that would also address urban-to-urban, urban-to-rural and rural-to-rural links and underscored the importance of universally recognized international norms, good governance, financial responsibility, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality.

138. Several representatives called for the continuation of long-standing efforts to operationalize international transport corridors, harmonize technical standards and legal frameworks to facilitate cross-border transport, and promote multimodality, sustainable urban transport and road safety. Representatives also highlighted the role of innovation, digitalization and smart transport systems as drivers of sustainable transport and mobility, especially in the urban context.

139. At the same time, the Commission expressed its expectation that the next phase of the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity would serve to scale up sustainability aspects with a special focus on resiliency, climate change and green transport pathways, a strengthened link between sustainable transport connectivity and efficient and resilient supply chains, and inclusiveness. One representative highlighted the key role of transport education in that regard.

140. Lastly, the Commission was informed of upcoming major events related to transport, including the second Global Conference on Sustainable Transport, a regional meeting on the development of safe, efficient and sustainable urban transport in June 2021, a forum on sustainable transport connectivity between Europe and Asia and an international conference on transport education.

Sub-item (f)
Committee on Environment and Development

141. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization on its sixteenth session (ESCAP/77/15).

142. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Indonesia; Japan; Nepal; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

143. The Commission noted that the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and stressed the need to ensure a green recovery to build back better.

144. In particular, the Commission emphasized the need for climate action in Asia and the Pacific. Representatives highlighted national efforts in the area of climate change adaptation and mitigation, including the following: setting national carbon emission goals; initiatives on nature-based solutions; dedicated financial resources from national budgets; promotion of energy efficiency, green transportation and renewable energy; and adoption of local adaptation plans. One representative highlighted the need to adhere to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities to cope with climate change.
145. The Commission also identified air quality as an environmental priority in Asia and the Pacific. It highlighted the launch of the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership to reduce transboundary air pollution and the work of the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia, which had expanded its scope to include the monitoring of air pollutants other than acid rain deposition.

146. Several representatives emphasized national environmental and development efforts on transboundary collaboration for the effective management of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, including in protected areas, the sustainable management of marine resources and the protection of the marine environment. Representatives also highlighted national efforts on combating marine litter and pollution, the sustainable management of water and the promotion of better consumption and production including with regard to the management of plastic waste.

147. The Commission noted the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and resilience, including the disruption of agricultural production, food distribution and supply chains and the decrease in purchasing power. It also noted some of the measures being taken to address those impacts.

148. The Commission stressed the need for regional collaboration to address the environmental and development challenges of Asia and the Pacific, including climate change, air pollution and the ocean, and the need to continue to promote the concept of green development and build a closer green development partnership.

149. The Commission highlighted the importance of advancing regional cooperation on environmental matters in line with the provisions of key global environmental conventions and the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific, 2017, including the following: sustainable consumption and production; biodiversity conservation; sustainable management of protected areas, including the ocean; climate action; air pollution; marine plastic pollution; and greening agriculture.

150. One representative highlighted the need for financial and technical support from development partners for climate change initiatives, particularly at the provincial and local levels, as well as the need for a database on climate change.

151. One representative highlighted the establishment of the Technical Expert Group on Environment and Development at the sixth session of the Committee on Environment and Development, which would enhance regional efforts on the environment and sustainable development.

152. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization on its sixteenth session (ESCAP/77/15).

153. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission, in light of exceptional circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, decided to defer the elections of the Governing Council of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization to the seventy-eighth session of the Commission, in 2022, and to extend, on an exceptional basis, the term of the current members of the Council by one year.
Sub-item (g) Committee on Trade and Investment

154. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the 6th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation (ESCAP/77/16).

155. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; India; Republic of Korea; and Russian Federation.

156. The Commission noted that despite the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact, the region had witnessed important developments in the area of trade, including the accession of Mongolia to the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement and the entry into force in February 2021 of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, which contributed to deepening regional cooperation.

157. At the same time, several representatives observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had led to increased protectionist measures, which had led to disruptions in access to goods and services and investment in markets, and noted that the pandemic should not lead to new trade barriers.

158. In that regard, several member States reaffirmed their commitment to the rules-based multilateral trading system with WTO at its core and emphasized that any restrictive trade measure taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic should be temporary, transparent and in compliance with the rules and norms of WTO. One representative called on ESCAP to monitor and help to prevent the impact of such measures on trade and investment cooperation in the region.

159. It was stated that in order to address the tendencies towards protectionism, more attention should be paid to the role of regional integration and cooperation mechanisms and organizations, such as ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Union.

160. The Commission noted the importance of e-commerce and digital trade in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the opportunity for digitalization to create new economic opportunities, including in trade and investment. Therefore, there was a need to invest in digital infrastructure and skills and improve the regulatory framework in the area of digital trade, in particular in least developed countries, to overcome the digital divide in the region. To that end, various representatives called on the secretariat to provide capacity-building to members and associate members in the region upon their request, and one representative proposed a regional platform for the exchange of ideas and best practices. In that context, it was stated that the principles of technological neutrality and digital sovereignty as well as the protection of personal data in the development of international rules governing digital trade were of paramount importance.

161. One representative called for wider participation in the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific and the provision of enhanced capacity-building support by the secretariat to countries for its adoption and implementation. Another representative called for an open format in the implementation of the Framework Agreement to enable participation in substantive discussions by experts from countries not yet parties to it.
162. The Commission called for transparent investment regimes that promoted increased flows of foreign direct investment in support of sustainable development. One representative expressed the view that the screening of investment should be in line with the rules of WTO.

163. In that context, one representative called on ESCAP to provide country-specific support in the development of sustainable investment indicators and build capacity for the promotion of both outward and inward foreign direct investment.

164. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the report of the 6th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation (ESCAP/77/16).

Sub-item (h) Committee on Energy

165. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on enhancing energy security in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic for a greener, more resilient and inclusive energy future in the region (ESCAP/77/17).

166. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: Bangladesh; China; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

167. The Commission noted that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact not only the public health-care systems of countries in the region but also economic activities. Business and social activities had declined owing to the shutdown of enterprises, resulting in a natural decrease in demand for main sources of energy. Decreased demand, in turn, had negatively impacted the production of primary energy resources and the fuel and energy complex as a whole.

168. The Commission recognized the importance of strengthening energy security as a strategy for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission noted efforts made by member States to link energy security to the recovery from the pandemic through the development of energy transition strategies and policies, which included elements of addressing climate change, fossil fuel diversification, clean energy investment and the use of renewable energy in building a competitive sustainable energy future. The Commission was also informed about the progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 7 in Asia and the Pacific.

169. The Commission further noted the efforts of member States to promote clean energy in the context of the energy transition, smart grids, renewable energy and connectivity, while recognizing the importance of regional cooperation on clean energy in the efforts to recover from the pandemic.

170. The potential of cross-border power system connectivity was also identified as a measure for strengthening energy security, as evidenced by some initiatives for multilateral power trade in the region. The Commission recognized some of the challenges involved, including the need to ensure a sustainable fuel mix, the integration of large-scale power plants, cross-border power trade and investment in the energy sector. One representative highlighted the continued importance of natural gas as a long-term option in the context of the global transition towards new power sources.
171. With regard to the third Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, to be held in 2023, the Commission noted the necessity of initiating early and careful preparation with the involvement of experts from government agencies and the business sector as well as other interested participants to form a substantive basis for the meeting of energy ministers that would be mutually agreed by the member States.

172. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on enhancing energy security in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic for a greener, more resilient and inclusive energy future in the region (ESCAP/77/17).

Sub-item (i)
Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction

173. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management on its fifth session (ESCAP/77/18) and the note by the secretariat entitled “Pathways for managing systemic risks in Asia and the Pacific: regional and subregional approaches” (ESCAP/77/19).

174. Statements were made by representatives of the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; China; India; and Thailand.

175. The Commission recognized the importance of integrating the management of biological hazards and health risks to advance the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the 2030 Agenda and welcomed the efforts made in that regard to incorporate the Bangkok Principles into health management systems. The Commission further highlighted the important role of space science, technology and geospatial information applications in building resilience and reducing disaster risk in a post-COVID-19 world and in accurate monitoring and early warning, and in that regard expressed appreciation to members and associate members for sharing their technical expertise through the Regional Cooperative Mechanism for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning and the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development.

176. The Commission highlighted the urgency of integrating health and disaster risk management, noting the convergence of COVID-19 with other disasters like cyclones and floods. It noted efforts to scale up science, technology and innovation to address the expanding disaster riskscape of the region and underscored the need to build integrated risk scenarios to take into account converging hazards and to assist maritime States in addressing the impacts of both biological and oceanic hazards.

177. The Commission, noting the increasing complexity and interconnectedness of disasters, expressed its continued commitment to strengthen regional and subregional cooperation for disaster risk management, including for multi-hazard early warning systems, infrastructure resilience, disaster-related statistics, and geospatial applications for disaster management, not only with regard to large-scale disasters but also small, medium and locally specific disasters.

178. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report of the Governing Council of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management on its fifth session (ESCAP/77/18).
179. Also at its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat entitled “Pathways for managing systemic risks in Asia and the Pacific: regional and subregional approaches” (ESCAP/77/19).

Sub-item (j)

Committee on Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Reduction and Financing for Development

180. In addition to the documents for consideration common to agenda item 4, the Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on economic policies and financing strategies to build resilient, inclusive and sustainable economies (ESCAP/77/20).

181. The representatives of Bangladesh and China made statements.

182. The Commission was informed about macroeconomic packages to support the economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. They included fiscal stimulus policies, the provision of credit to the banking system to support businesses and the expansion of social protection systems to protect the most vulnerable.

183. The Commission emphasized the importance of prioritizing investment in development in the recovery from the pandemic. In that regard, the international community was called upon to fulfil its commitments on official development assistance and to help least developed countries and developing countries severely affected by the pandemic, including through the provision of concessional finance and debt relief measures.

184. The Commission noted the role of ESCAP in facilitating regional cooperation in macroeconomics, poverty reduction and development financing, including through cooperation projects in the areas of public-private partnerships and infrastructure financing.

185. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on economic policies and financing strategies to build resilient, inclusive and sustainable economies (ESCAP/77/20).

Agenda item 5

Management issues

186. The Executive Secretary made an introductory statement on management issues.

Sub-item (a)

Proposed programme plan for 2022

187. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the proposed programme plan for 2022 (ESCAP/77/21).

188. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the proposed programme plan for 2022 (ESCAP/77/21).
Sub-item (b)
Programme changes for the 2021 programme plan

189. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on programme changes for the 2021 programme plan (ESCAP/77/22).

190. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the programme changes for the 2021 programme plan (ESCAP/77/22).

Sub-item (c)
Overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development

191. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development (ESCAP/77/23).

192. Representatives of the following members and associate members made statements: China; India; Japan; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

193. The representative of Japan congratulated the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific on its fiftieth anniversary and thanked member States for their congratulatory messages. The Government of Japan, the host country of the Institute, pledged almost $3 million in cash and in-kind contributions to support its 2021 workplan.

194. The representative of the Republic of Korea stated that his Government intended to pledge approximately $4.6 million in support of the ESCAP programme of work and regional institutions as well as the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia, the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation and the Korea-ESCAP Cooperation Fund.

195. The representative of Thailand expressed her Government’s support for ESCAP and its subsidiary institutions and encouraged member States to make appropriate contributions to ESCAP, specifically to the ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries. She noted the additional contribution of $30,000 made to the Fund in 2020. The Government of Thailand pledged $54,000 for 2021 to regional institutions and the Pacific Trust Fund.

196. The representative of the Russian Federation noted that it remained a stable donor to ESCAP despite the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the national economy. The Government of the Russian Federation made a voluntary contribution in April 2021 totalling $1.2 million for the Russian Federation Fund and committed $30,000 to support the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.

197. The representative of China expressed support for the work of ESCAP and announced the Government’s pledge of approximately $2.7 million and RMB 1.5 million to ESCAP, the regional institutions, the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation and the China-ESCAP Cooperation Programme.

198. The representative of India noted his Government’s support for the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology and encouraged member States to increase voluntary contributions to the Centre. The Government of
India announced its pledge totalling $974,000 to support the Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia, the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology.

199. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the note by the secretariat on the overview of partnerships, extrabudgetary contributions and capacity development (ESCAP/77/23) and expressed its appreciation for pledges amounting to approximately $11.8 million for 2021 from the following members and associate members: Bangladesh; Brunei Darussalam; China; India; Japan; Macao, China; Myanmar; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand.

Sub-item (d)
Report on the evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development

200. The Commission had before it the report on the evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (ESCAP/77/24) and the information document on the evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (ESCAP/77/INF/2/Rev.1).

201. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission endorsed the report on the evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (ESCAP/77/24) and took note of the information document on the evaluation of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (ESCAP/77/INF/2/Rev.1).

Agenda item 6
Activities of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission

202. The Commission had before it the report of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ESCAP/77/25).

203. The Permanent Representative of Nepal to ESCAP presented the report of the Advisory Committee on behalf of its members.

204. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission took note of the report of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ESCAP/77/25).

Agenda item 7
Dates and venue of and theme topic for the seventy-eighth session of the Commission (2022)

205. The Commission had before it the note by the secretariat on the dates and venue of and theme topic for the seventy-eighth session of the Commission (2022) (ESCAP/77/26).

206. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission decided that its seventy-eighth session would be held in Bangkok from 23 to 27 May 2022. The Commission also decided that the theme topic for its seventy-eighth session would be “A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”. The Commission further decided to postpone the third
Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific to 2022 (ESCAP/77/26).

**Agenda item 8**

**Other matters**

207. In accordance with rule 12 of the rules of procedure, the Vice-Chair reported that the Chair and the Vice-Chairs had examined the credentials of representatives received by the member States and found them to be in order.

**Agenda item 9**

**Adoption of the report of the Commission**

208. At its 7th plenary meeting, on 29 April 2021, the Commission unanimously adopted the report on its seventy-seventh session (ESCAP/77/28).