

REFLECTIONS & IMPACTS

REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2026



INTRODUCTION

The UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) is a key political space where governments, UN agencies, and civil society come together to assess progress on the 2030 Agenda and shape regional contributions to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

RFSD 2026 took place in a moment of deep contradiction. While the urgency of the climate crisis, inequalities, and democratic backsliding continues to grow, political momentum for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is weakening across the UNECE region.

Shrinking civic space, rising anti-gender movements, increasing militarisation, and declining public investment are reshaping the conditions under which sustainable development is pursued, and often undermining it.

In this context, Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), together with partners in the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (ECE-RCEM), played a central role in coordinating civil society engagement. From preparatory strategy sessions to joint interventions and high-level dialogues, this work aimed to ensure that civil society voices remained visible, coordinated, and politically grounded.

This report captures key moments, contributions, and impacts of this engagement, and reflects on what it means to continue organising at UN level in a rapidly shifting political landscape.

IN SOLIDARITY,

HANNA GUNNARSSON

WECF & ECE-RCEM GOVERNING BODY

GENDER EXPERT



UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

OUR FOCUS



STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION AND DEFENDING CIVIC SPACE

Building aligned, cross-constituency collaboration across the UNECE region while responding to shrinking civic space, funding cuts, and ongoing UN reform processes that risk limiting participation.



ADVANCING FEMINIST AND RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

Ensuring that gender equality, intersectional justice, and care centred perspectives remain at the core of sustainable development, including advancing wellbeing economies and challenging growth driven models that overlook structural inequalities.



HOLDING THE UNECE REGION ACCOUNTABLE FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION AND GLOBAL IMPACTS

Highlighting regional responsibilities on SDGs under review – particularly water (SDG 6) and energy (SDG 7), while addressing their external impacts beyond the region. This includes confronting structural barriers such as: 1) militarisation and shifting public spending priorities; 2) fossil fuel extraction and subsidies; 3) extractivism and energy colonialism, and making clear that these dynamics undermine both regional progress and global justice.

ACTIVITY TIMELINE

Feb - Mar 2026



Strategy meetings for members, ECE-ROEM

Date & time: May 4, 2026 14:00 - 15:00 (UTC+3)

Description: Open to ECE-ROEM members, join us to hear more about the economy UNCTAD Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and Trade/Investment Opportunities (SDFIT) 2026.

Organizing: ECE/ROEM Secretary Office <http://ecf.euro.int>

STRATEGY SESSIONS

ONLINE: A series of 5 thematic online sessions brought together civil society actors across the region to contribute to RFSD processes. These sessions focused on SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17, as well as interlinkages and “Beyond GDP” frameworks.

These spaces enabled participation from those unable to attend in person, ensuring broader regional input and strengthening collective ownership of advocacy messages.

20 April 2026



CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

GENEVA: The Civil Society Forum, hosted by ECE-ROEM and led by WECF, convened approximately 30–40 participants from civil society, youth networks, academia, and regional institutions. The forum created space for:

- Collective reflection on shrinking civic space
- Analysis of geopolitical tensions
- Development of coordinated advocacy messages

Despite lower turnout compared to previous years, linked to funding constraints and declining engagement with Agenda 2030, the forum played a critical role in shaping joint interventions at RFSD.

21–22 April 2026



A COLLECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY VOICE ACROSS RFSD

Civil society delivered coordinated interventions across:

- Opening & High-Level Segment
- SDG Roundtables (6, 7, 9, 11, 17)
- Beyond GDP panel

These interventions brought forward key messages on: energy justice and fossil fuel dependency; inequalities in infrastructure and urban development; accountability in partnerships; the need to move beyond GDP towards wellbeing economies.

OUR SPEECHES

OPENING & HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

Centred shrinking civic space, anti-gender backlash, and the growing gap between SDG commitments and political realities. Calling for human rights, accountability, and renewed political commitment.

 [READ HERE](#)



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



ENERGY JUSTICE

Critiqued extractivist “green” transitions and petrol populism, calling for community-led renewable energy, ecological limits, energy justice and rights-based approaches to critical minerals and AI expansion.

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9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, INFRASTRUCTURE

Argued that innovation and infrastructure must be human rights-centred, warning against surveillance, digital exclusion, labour precarity and corporate concentration in emerging technologies and AI governance.

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11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES

Advanced housing justice as central to a just transition, criticising speculative housing markets and calling for intersectional urban planning, participation and investment in public and affordable housing.

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URBAN MOBILITY & ROAD SAFETY

Challenged technocratic mobility approaches by centring co-design, lived experience and disaggregated data, while linking transport justice, affordability, accessibility and climate goals.

[READ HERE](#)



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Argued that digital transformation is “not neutral,” highlighting surveillance, inequality, corporate control and environmental harms, while calling for inclusive, rights-based and democratic digital governance.

[READ HERE](#)



WATER & SANITATION

Framed water as a human right and public good, highlighting pollution, privatisation, menstrual justice and exclusion from sanitation access, while linking water insecurity to conflict and inequality.

[READ HERE](#)

OPENING & HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

Rejected growth-driven economic models, advocating for well-being economies centred on care, human rights, planetary boundaries and democratic participation rather than GDP growth alone.

[READ HERE](#)





REFLECTIONS

STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY INFLUENCE

BEYOND POLICY LANGUAGE

Impact within multilateral spaces is rarely immediate or linear. Many of the structural concerns raised by civil society, including militarisation, extractivism, foreign agent laws, anti gender and anti-rights backlash, and fossil fuel dependency, remain difficult to fully integrate into official outcomes and political commitments, as reflected in the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2026 outcome document.

SHIFTING NARRATIVES

Throughout RFSD 2026, civil society actors helped bring greater visibility to ecofeminist perspectives on energy justice, care economies, wellbeing approaches, democratic participation, and the interconnected social and environmental impacts of current economic models. RFSD 2026 reflected important shifts in regional discourse. UNECE officials explicitly referenced anti gender backlash for the first time, while growing international discussions around wellbeing economies and moving beyond GDP reflect years of sustained advocacy and movement building by civil society actors across the UNECE region and globally.

BUILDING LONG-TERM MOVEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

As part of the governing body of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for the UNECE, RFSD also functioned as a space for alliance-building, collective analysis, and sustaining relationships across feminist, environmental, youth, and human rights movements within the UNECE region.

“Impact in multilateral spaces is not only measured by policy change, but by the relationships built, narratives shifted, and collective power strengthened.”

OUR IMPACT



Agenda-setting
Anti-gender and wellbeing economy & shared feminist analysis in all interventions



Narrative shifts
Linking SDGs to militarisation & extractives.



Coalition-building
Strategy sessions, civil society forum, cross-coalition coordination



Collective visibility
Interventions, mobilised members to speak at UN organised side events



Relationship-building
Bilaterals with UN Women/WMG/LGBTI groups, ECE-RCES side event with UN representatives.

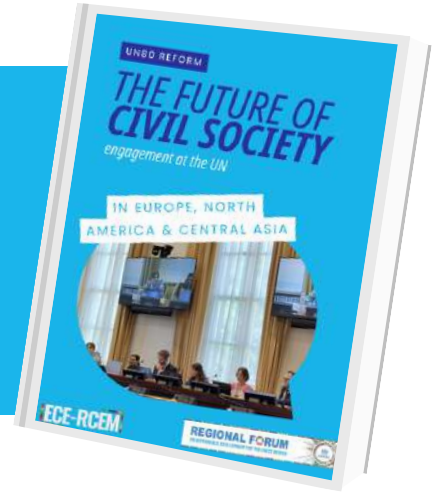


Sustaining civic space
Coordinating with the UN and organisers, securing member funding, speaking slots, and protections for human rights defenders.

Reading tip!

Examining the political implications of UN80 reform for human rights, gender equality, and civil society participation in the UNECE region.

[READ HERE](#)



**BILATERAL WITH UN WOMEN
EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA,
WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP AND
LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP**



FOLLOW US FOLLOWING NEGOTIATIONS.



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