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Chapter two

A centre for sustainability



Sustainability at the heart of Building H

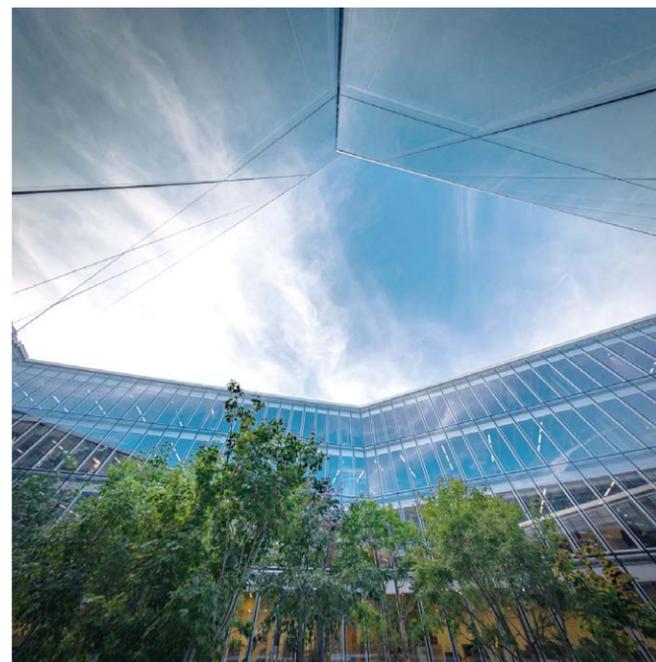
Sustainability is at the heart of the UN Geneva agenda and is factored into everything we do. It is therefore no surprise that sustainability is at the forefront of the [Strategic Heritage Plan](#) project, which includes the new Building H.

The state-of-the-art Building H has been designed as a healthy and efficient office building that is fully aligned with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). It features cutting-edge systems and energy-saving measures to meet the internationally recognized [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design \(LEED\) Gold Standard](#) for “green” buildings. These measures include:

- Solar panels mounted on the roof
- A glass façade that takes advantage of natural light
- The use of thermal energy from the water in Lake Geneva to cool the building
- A “green roof” to reduce the excess heat generated by a traditional building
- Concrete floors that store energy, which assist with heating and cooling
- An automated building management system that monitors, controls and adjusts the lighting, temperature and blinds using advanced predictive algorithms

Building H features a glass façade to make optimum use of natural light.

Sustainability efforts like these are also part of UN Geneva’s contribution to the [United Nations Secretariat Climate Action Plan 2020–2030](#), which aims to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of UN operations and increase the use of renewable energy sources, and to the [Greening the Blue](#) initiative, which seeks to transition the UN system towards greater environmental sustainability in the management of its facilities and operations.



UN Photo: Marija Potocnik

UN Geneva contributes to sustainable transport in Geneva

Responding to a call from the host country, Switzerland, UN Geneva will contribute to an upcoming major upgrade to the railway network in Geneva. Through the [Léman 2030](#) project, UN Geneva will help to improve green mobility into and out of the city.

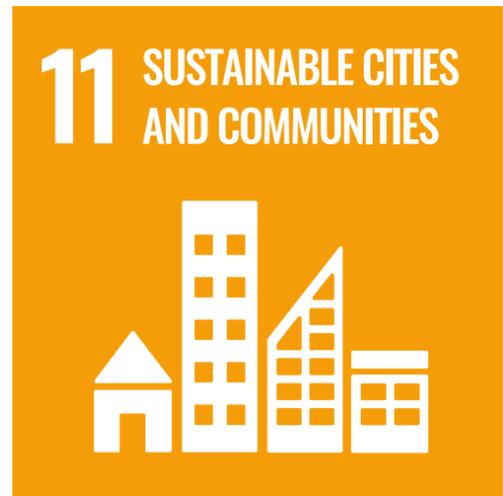
To enable this project, UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya has signed agreements with the City of Geneva and the Swiss Federal Railways, allowing for a small strip of Ariana Park – the home of the Palais des Nations – to be returned to the City of Geneva. Much of Ariana Park is actually owned by the City of Geneva, with UN Geneva having the right to use the land.

A tunnel will be constructed by the Swiss Federal Railways underneath the portion of land that is to be returned, enabling the laying of [new underground tracks into Geneva’s Cornavin station](#).

These agreements are an example of UN Geneva’s commitment to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), specifically [Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities](#) which urges investments in sustainable transport.



Wondering what the Léman 2030 projects are? Scan the QR code to watch a short [video](#).



Accelerating the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem

On 28 January, UN Geneva's [SDG Lab](#) and the [International Institute for Sustainable Development](#) launched [ACCELERATE](#), an initiative of the [Geneva 2030 Ecosystem](#) to mobilize Geneva-based actors working to make the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) a reality. Strategies were introduced to give fresh impetus to the Ecosystem, such as a pilot microgrant programme to support collaborative projects that place the Goals at the centre of COVID-19 recovery, and a monthly series profiling the people behind the Ecosystem. The virtual launch was opened by UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya and was attended by nearly 100 Ecosystem members.

Also in 2021, the SDG Lab and the International Institute for Sustainable Development, as co-conveners of the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem, introduced new formats for connecting the Ecosystem community around themes of common interest to accelerate implementation of the Goals. These themes include data, digitalization and connectivity, as well as sustainable finance, which is the aim of [Building Bridges Week](#).



Members of the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem take part in a virtual meeting.



Building Bridges and unlocking investment in sustainable development

[Building Bridges Week](#), which aims to create an international movement for sustainable finance, was inaugurated in 2019. UN Geneva, through its [SDG Lab](#), was instrumental in establishing this first-of-its-kind initiative in Switzerland.

After an absence in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, [Building Bridges Week](#) returned to Geneva from 29 November to 2 December 2021. [This year's programme](#) featured nearly 80 events that were attended by a diverse cross section of [Sustainable Development Goals](#) actors from the worlds of business, finance, international development, academia and civil society, who were all focused on learning, exchanging, promoting and pitching the latest developments in Sustainable Development Goals financing and investment.

The Summit, a one-day high-level event, opened [Building Bridges Week](#). UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed delivered an agenda-setting [keynote address](#), in which she described the world as being "at a breakdown or breakthrough moment" for sustainable development.

Speaking alongside the Deputy Secretary-General was Swiss Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Finance Ueli Maurer, as well as other distinguished guests, who collectively called for greater bridge-building among all Sustainable Development Goals stakeholders.

In the lead-up to and during [Building Bridges Week](#), the SDG Lab and its partner the [International Institute for Sustainable Development](#) hosted events to build interest and to unpack key themes up for discussion at the event. These included two workshops focusing on data gaps and on challenges in measuring the social dimension of sustainable investment, as well as a country-centred panel discussion on the SDG Lab's [Pipeline Builder](#) pilot project, which aims to streamline the investment origination process to drive more capital to Goals-focused small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries.

"Geneva is uniquely positioned to advance this collaboration and unlock financial resources that would be needed. The birthplace of multilateralism and home to a rich ecosystem of international organizations, civil society actors and a vibrant financial sector, Geneva is the world's hub to build partnerships for the 2030 Agenda."

UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed



UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses the Building Bridges Summit.



Photo: Anne Collard

Experts from various sectors discuss the challenges and opportunities of sustainable finance data collection and use, at a workshop organized by the SDG Lab and the International Institute for Sustainable Development and held during Building Bridges Week.

Unpacking the UN regional forums on sustainable development

Every year, each of the five UN regional economic and social commissions organizes a forum on sustainable development. The aim of these forums is to take stock of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region concerned, to promote the sharing of good practices and challenges and to foster dialogue between countries. The forums' themes are aligned with the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which takes place annually in July and serves as the global pulse-taking event on progress in achieving the Goals.

Whereas in 2020 the forums touched upon the potential risks and challenges of the unfolding global COVID-19 crisis, in 2021 the impacts of the pandemic were at the centre of the discussions. All five forums addressed the question of resilient and sustainable recovery from the pandemic, highlighting the Global Goals as the road map for building greener and better societies and economies.

UN Geneva's SDG Lab, in collaboration with the five regional commissions, captured key messages from the regional forums in a series of short videos. These were widely shared through UN social media networks, allowing the videos – and the messages – to receive tens of thousands of views.



Scan the QR code to watch the videos.



Photo: Mark Henley

Representatives of the UN, the private sector and the Government of Ghana discuss efforts to boost foreign investment in Ghana's Sustainable Development Goals plan, as part of a hybrid panel discussion on the SDG Lab's Pipeline Builder pilot project held during Building Bridges Week.

Building resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics: policy brief launch by the SDG Lab and the Geneva Science-Policy Interface

How can the international community enhance its ability to prevent, react to and recover from shocks? This was a key question raised at a virtual [policy brief launch](#) hosted by UN Geneva's [SDG Lab](#) and the [Geneva Science-Policy Interface \(GSPI\)](#). Released on 25 March, the [GSPI policy brief](#) focuses on the benefits of a holistic mindset in governing future pandemics in light of COVID-19, and underscores how strengthening resilience not only improves the world's capacity to withstand future shocks but can also help humanity to attain the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya opened the event, welcoming more than 80 policy practitioners, experts, diplomats and other government representatives. Together, they discussed the policy brief in practical terms, sharing recommendations and tools to help enhance the governance of future pandemics and similar crises, from a sustainable development perspective. The Director-General called for resilience to be at the forefront of governance, in order to better address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. Additional insights were provided by speakers from the trade, health and employment sectors.

This was the second such joint initiative between GSPI and the SDG Lab; the first was the launch in January 2020 of the ["Behavioural insights for climate action"](#) policy brief.



Participants in the virtual policy brief launch

Charting the road to recovery: joint SDG Lab–World Bank briefing for permanent missions examines the Africa's Pulse report

UN Geneva's [SDG Lab](#) partnered with the [World Bank Group's Geneva office](#) to hold a [virtual in-depth briefing](#) on 3 February for Geneva-based permanent missions. Participants discussed issues raised in the most recent edition of [Africa's Pulse](#), a twice-yearly report that analyses the near-term macroeconomic outlook for sub-Saharan Africa.

The briefing focused on the impact of COVID-19 on economic activity in the region. It highlighted the role of connectivity and digitalization in helping sub-Saharan Africa to recover from COVID-19 and to accelerate progress towards the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). It provided participants with replicable examples of digital tools to drive new investments in infrastructure, enhance leadership, transparency and governance, and strengthen policy, regulations and legislation. There was also a call to increase fiscal space to avoid erosion of the continent's hard-won sustainable development gains.

The World Bank's Chief Economist for Africa, Albert Zeufack, delivered the briefing, with contributions from the Minister of Digital Economy and Digital Transformation of Togo, Cina Lawson, and the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau at the International Telecommunication Union and SDG Lab Advisory Group member, Doreen Bogdan-Martin. The event was moderated by SDG Lab Director Nadia Isler.



Speakers at the joint SDG Lab–World Bank briefing on *Africa's Pulse*

"COVID-19 has shown us that robust and resilient broadband networks must be considered basic infrastructure, as fundamental to the social and economic health of nations as networks like water, roads or power. Broadband is the catalyst that can dramatically accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals."

Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau at the International Telecommunication Union, Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Geneva Triologue on scaling open innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

On 18 March, the [University of Geneva](#), in collaboration with the [United Nations Institute for Training and Research](#), hosted the third [Geneva Triologue](#) of the [Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative](#), with the theme “Scaling open innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals”. [UN Geneva’s SDG Lab](#) participated in two of the seven thematic panel discussions, which were held virtually.

The first of these focused on the promotion of open innovation in the UN Geneva ecosystem, and analysed the benefits and challenges of scaling up open innovation across international organizations in Geneva. The second event, on blended finance for open innovation, was a deep dive into the use of innovative financial instruments to unlock private finance for the Sustainable Development Goals.

SDG Lab Director Nadia Isler presented the Lab’s work on incentivizing the sharing of knowledge and expertise and co-creating policy solutions between the development and the finance communities to accelerate private capital flow for the Goals, including through initiatives such as [Building Bridges](#) and the [Pipeline Builder](#).



A Geneva Triologue panel discussion on open innovation in the UN Geneva ecosystem

It Takes a Global Crisis: podcast series

In late 2021, the [UN Library and Archives Geneva](#) and the [SDG Lab](#) teamed up to produce *It Takes a Global Crisis*, a podcast mini-series focused on understanding how a global crisis like COVID-19 affects achievement of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). Experts working at the country level were joined in discussion by their International Geneva peers to create a dual perspective and to exchange their insights.

Produced as part of the Library’s [The Next Page](#) podcast, the series explores how numerous policies and projects for the Sustainable Development Goals accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the urgent social, health and economic needs that the crisis brought to the fore. As the series uncovered, before the pandemic many policies and initiatives aligned to the Goals were talked about often, but rarely implemented.

Additionally, *It Takes a Global Crisis* underscores that the pandemic set back progress on several Goals, notably those on ending poverty and reducing hunger, and exposed fragilities and vast socioeconomic divides in all countries, all of this against a backdrop of immense suffering and tragedy on a global scale.

Over its four episodes, the series explored the role of sustainable cities in managing the pandemic, environmental resilience, advances in social protection, and digitalization and connectivity as levers for a post-COVID world that is better aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.



Scan the QR code to listen to the [podcasts](#).



UN Photo: Tiffany Verga

The Director of the UN Library and Archives Geneva, Francesco Pisano, and the Director of the SDG Lab, Nadia Isler, in discussion during a recording of the *It Takes a Global Crisis* podcast

It's a wrap: season 1 of GO solutions durables ends

GO solutions durables, a television programme by Geneva broadcaster Léman Bleu, concluded its first season in July. Ten episodes were aired, raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and showcasing International Geneva. UN Geneva's Perception Change Project and SDG Lab are founding partners of the series and were instrumental in ensuring that the specificities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the uniqueness of the Geneva ecosystem were at the heart of the programme.

In May, a special two-part episode on implementing the 2030 Agenda and the role of cities was filmed at the Palais des Nations, featuring several notable guests, including UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya, Swiss Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga, World Meteorological Organization Deputy Secretary-General Elena Manaenkova, and representatives of the Canton and City of Geneva. As part of the special segment, two youth reporters from the Geneva-based Eduki Foundation interviewed the Director-General on the Sustainable Development Goals and the future of multilateralism.

As one of the most watched programmes in the history of Léman Bleu, *GO solutions durables* will continue for a second season in 2022, providing viewers with new insights into International Geneva.



Scan the QR code to watch the *GO solutions durables* series.

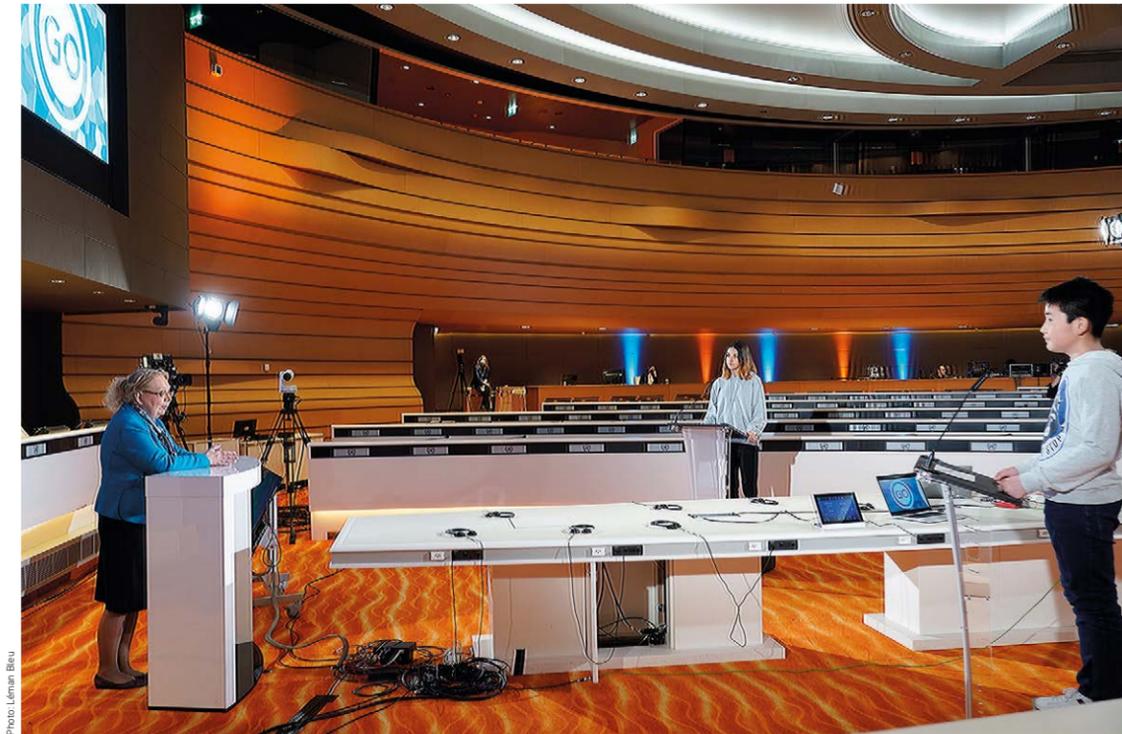


Photo: Léman Bleu

Youth reporters from the Eduki Foundation interviewed UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya as part of a special edition of *GO solutions durables*.



Photo: Léman Bleu

The Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room of the Palais des Nations was turned into a temporary television studio in May for a special edition of *GO solutions durables*.

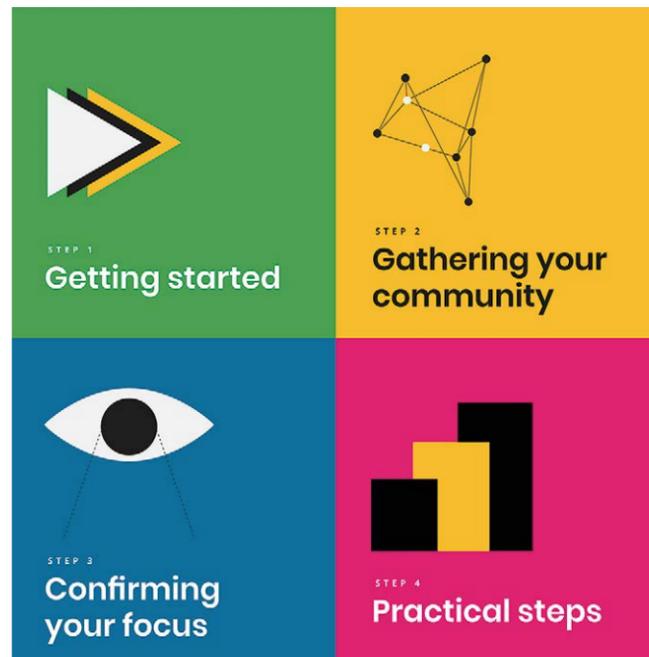
Replicating the SDG Lab model to help achieve the Global Goals

In December, UN Geneva launched the [SDG Lab Learning Journey](#). This online resource passes on the knowledge and skills that the [SDG Lab](#), an initiative centred on realization of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), has built from the ground up. The Learning Journey includes tips, techniques and tools to support all actors – from Governments to civil society organizations to individuals – in accelerating implementation of the Goals in their own communities and contexts.

The SDG Lab Learning Journey had its genesis in requests from Member States, other UN system organizations and non-governmental organizations interested in replicating the SDG Lab model or using some of its methods and approaches. Just as collaboration is a cornerstone of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the Learning Journey provides users with in-depth advice and resources on how to convene and partner for the Goals.

“It’s my hope that the SDG Lab Learning Journey will serve as a compass or road map to help other organizations, entities, start-ups and individuals in their own journey towards bringing the Sustainable Development Goals to life in their own contexts.”

Director of the SDG Lab Nadia Isler



The SDG Lab Learning Journey outlines steps for replicating the model in other contexts.

Sustainable industries for a healthy planet

On World Environment Day, the UN launched a global campaign to protect and restore life on our planet – the [United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#). It aspires to unite the world behind a common goal of preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide. However, like the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), it will only succeed if everyone plays a part, including businesses in the primary and industrial sectors of the economy.

During 2021, UN Geneva had the opportunity to contribute to collaboration and innovation in these areas. In June, Director-General Tatiana Valovaya participated in the Special Forum on Responsible Diamond Sourcing, held on the margins of the Kimberley Process intersessional meeting. This was an occasion to build bridges between the public and private sectors and to discuss how the commitments to social responsibility in this industry could be turned into tangible actions. Emphasizing that the sustainability paradigm was a major departure from the economic growth paradigm, the Director-General commended the readiness of business to become more than a partner for financial resources and to play a meaningful role in the implementation of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

In July, the Director-General took part in Sustainable Fashion Hard Talk, organized by the [United Nations Alliance for Sustainable Fashion](#), alongside representatives of a wide range of Geneva-based UN specialized agencies and partner organizations. Held on the sidelines of the [high-level political forum on sustainable development](#), the event resulted in the creation of a knowledge base to improve coordination between UN agencies and promote projects that not only respond to social and environmental problems related to the fashion industry, but also ensure that the fashion value chain contributes to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Speakers at Sustainable Fashion Hard Talk

“The Sustainable Development Goals are not just abstract ‘UN goals’. It is important to understand that reaching these Goals will bring benefits for the long-term viability of private companies in every type of industry.”

UN Geneva Director-General Tatiana Valovaya