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**Economic Commission for Europe****Sixty-ninth session**

Geneva, 20 and 21 April 2021

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Report on activities on the high-level theme of the  
sixty-eighth session: “Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for  
Sustainable Development” and update on the work in the nexus areas****Progress report on the work of the Economic Commission for  
Europe related to the high-level theme of the sixty-eighth  
session**

The high-level segment of the sixty-eighth session of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was held under the theme “Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for Sustainable Development.” The present report provides an update on the progress made in the work of ECE on this issue in the period from April 2019 to February 2021.

The designation of a cross-cutting theme marked an innovation in the format of the biennial Commission session. Drawing on the experience of the sixty-eighth session and the preparations for the sixty-ninth session, which will hold its high-level segment under the theme “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources”, the report also explores how planning for future sessions could be designed in a way that allows for all relevant expertise available in ECE to be engaged, as appropriate, to maximize impact and generate additional synergies across the organization.

The document is presented to the sixty-ninth session for consideration under agenda item 5.



## I. The high-level theme of the sixty-eighth session

1. The high-level segment of the sixty-eighth session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in April 2019 under the theme “Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for Sustainable Development”.
2. Discussions focused on national priorities and good practices related to sustainable cities in the region, ECE initiatives aimed at supporting governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda, and the impact of relevant ECE norms, standards and conventions at the national and regional level. The segment also considered how cities can provide inhabitants of all ages with a high quality of life, not leaving anyone behind, while becoming centres of innovation and competitiveness.

## II. Major achievements since April 2019

3. The designation of the high-level theme reinforced the culture of cooperation amongst Divisions on the topic and led to further enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation by the setting up in 2019 of the inter-divisional Nexus team on Smart Sustainable Cities for All Ages.
4. Furthermore, the event prior to the Commission session - the Day of Cities - allowed Governments to appreciate the contribution that local governments bring to the discussions on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and thus provided a good example of what the Forum of Mayors, subsequently established under the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, could look like.
5. While the Commission did not establish new mandates, it contributed to and inspired the further alignment of existing mandates, as manifested in the work of the Nexus and in some of the major achievements listed below, all of which have been conducted with a significant cross-sectoral emphasis. The ECE secretariat will continue working with the member States to ensure that this emphasis results in more cross-sectoral policy-making and governance arrangements at the national, regional and local level in ECE member States, aspiring to implement enabling conditions, policies and measures for sustainable and smart cities, and progressing towards meeting the 2030 Agenda.
6. Overall, the designation of the high-level theme showed how different sub-programmes in a nexus-like spirit could coordinate the preparation of a Commission Session, providing relevant expertise and shaping the session.

### 1. The Forum of Mayors of the Economic Commission for Europe

#### *Description:*

7. Cities have become key partners to tackle humanity’s most pressing challenges and support the efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The first Forum of Mayors (6 October 2020) brought together city leaders from the ECE region to address the key challenges of our time. Under the theme “City action for a resilient future”, mayors discussed critical questions: What will our urban life look like after the global pandemic? How can cities spur ambitious climate action? How can we become more sustainable while leaving no one behind?

#### *Impact:*

- Outcome document: [Geneva Declaration of Mayors](#);
- Effective mobilization of city representatives: 36 speakers, including 27 mayors and six deputy mayors;
- Wide participation: over 1,000 viewers from 65 countries on UN WebTV;
- New stakeholders: creation of a wide network of mayors and city contacts which is now actively participating in the work of ECE;

- Broad media coverage: 40 articles in 9 languages with a total approximate reach of 12.5 million, with an approximate reach of 479,000 via twitter alone.

## 2. Building urban resilience during and after COVID-19

### *Description:*

8. The Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management supports economic recovery of cities during and after COVID-19 pandemic through two projects:

- United Nations Development Account (UNDA) 13<sup>th</sup> Tranche “Rapid response” project “Building urban economic resilience during and after COVID-19” implemented in 2020–2021; and
- Project funded by the Regular Programme for Technical Cooperation (RPTC) on “Post COVID-19 Recovery in Informal Settlements in the ECE Region”.

9. The projects focus on strengthening the capacities of local governments in cities in the ECE region to design, implement and monitor sustainable, resilient and inclusive COVID-19 economic and financial responses, recovery and rebuilding plans.

### *Impact:*

- Assessment of impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the economic development of pilot cities – Bishkek, Kharkiv and Tirana – and development of local strategies to overcome COVID-19 pandemics consequences;
- A Post COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements for the ECE Region;
- Increased capacity of national, subnational and local governments in the four project cities/countries to transform informal settlements into sustainable, resilient urban areas in the recovery from COVID-19 pandemic.

## 3. Promoting evidence-based policies to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development at city level through the preparation of the smart sustainable cities’ profiles with policy recommendations

### *Description:*

10. The objective of Sustainable Smart City Profiles is to present the outcomes of the city evaluation against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Smart Sustainable Cities (SSC), and to propose action for the city to make progress towards achieving the SDGs.

11. In 2019– 2020, KPI evaluations were conducted and City Profiles were prepared for the cities of Grodno, Belarus, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and Alesund, Asker, Rana and Trondheim in Norway.

### *Impact:*

- Based on the recommendations in the City Profiles, the city governments will develop urban infrastructure investment programmes;
- The implementation of these programmes will improve quality of life of especially disadvantaged groups of the population.

## 4. The United for Smart Sustainable Cities Initiative

### *Description:*

12. The United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) is a United Nations initiative coordinated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), ECE and the United

Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat). It is supported by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP-FI), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP), the United Nations University – Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV), UN-Women and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to achieve SDG 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". ECE (Housing and Land management Unit), in cooperation with ITU and UN-Habitat, provide the secretariat to the initiative. ECE is involved in U4SSC activities also through specific thematic groups: namely:

- Thematic Group on Innovative Financing Instruments for Smart Sustainable Cities;
- Thematic Group on Artificial Intelligence for Smart Sustainable Cities;<sup>1</sup> and
- Thematic Group on Circular Cities.

*Impact:*

- Elaborated “Guidelines on tools and mechanisms to finance smart sustainable cities projects”. The Guidelines provide practical recommendations for city governments on how to develop projects that are easily understood and attractive to potential investors and led to the elaboration of a Compendium of Smart Cities Projects with an overview of the expected evolution of investment in Urban Infrastructure due to impact of COVID;
- A next step is to evaluate the projects in the Compendium using the People-first PPP Evaluation Methodology being developed by ECE to ascertain that the projects are SDG-compliant and to inspire other urban projects of this kind in other ECE member States;
- “Guiding principles for artificial intelligence in cities” are currently being developed as part of the multi-agency initiative - United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) - to identify solutions to implement Artificial Intelligence (AI) and make cities more resilient, autonomous, inclusive, green, circular and sustainable;
- Elaborated and published a “Guide for Circular Cities” which contains a circular city implementation framework. The Guide was developed in response to the growing sustainability challenges that cities are facing and the emergence of the circular economy concept and its applicability in the city setting. The Guide includes practical recommendations for preparing circular city actions and their implementation, and is complemented with 17 case studies that illustrate the application of the circularity concept based on experiences from cities around the world. Cities are invited to use this Guide to identify a course of action for improving circularity.

## **5. Geneva UN Charter Centres of Excellence on Sustainable Housing and Sustainable Smart Cities (CoEs)**

*Description:*

13. To support the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, endorsed by the ECE member States in 2015, five Centres of Excellence have been

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<sup>1</sup> The UN CEFACT secretariat acts as the ECE focal point on this Thematic Group.

established.<sup>2</sup> At national and local level, the Centres provide capacity building and training, analyse housing, urban development policies, and conduct outreach activities to promote the Charter. They further engage in a range of activities within their specialization and available expertise.

*Impact:*

- Developed training curricula on the management of multiapartment buildings for housing managers in countries with economies in transition and on facility services for condominium management;
- Supported application of Key Performance Indicators for Sustainable Smart Cities to evaluate the performance of 17 Norwegian municipalities;
- Supported the organization of the “Climate change, environmental and health impacts on housing affordability” (9 November 2020) workshop within the initiative “#Housing2030 - Improving Housing Affordability in the ECE region”.

## **6. #Housing2030 - Improving Housing Affordability in the ECE Region Initiative**

*Description:*

14. The Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management initiated the study “#Housing2030 - Improving Housing Affordability in the ECE Region. The study revolves around SDG 11 and is aimed to: (a) Explore housing affordability challenges and existing policy instruments for improving housing affordability in the ECE region; (b) Facilitate the exchange and dissemination of “good practices” in improving housing affordability among countries and cities; and (c) Identify the needs of policymakers in order to further develop and implement policies addressing housing affordability. The study also addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the housing sector.

*Impact:*

- Increased capacity of national and local governments through participation in a series of online thematic and subregional workshops, preparation of the study report and a series of podcasts.
- The study report will be launched at the Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management in October 2021.

## **7. Activities of the ECE Joint Task Force on Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings**

*Description:*

15. The Joint Task Force coordinated jointly by the Sustainable Energy Division and the Forests, Land and Housing Division, implements its activities in accordance with the Terms of Reference for 2020–2021 (ECE/ENERGY/2019/8). A project on “Enhancing national capacities for development and implementation of the energy efficiency standards in buildings in the ECE region” was implemented as part of the Task Force workplan. The

<sup>2</sup> The following Centres of Excellence have been established: (i) Centre of Excellence on Sustainable and Resilient Settlements in Tirana, Albania; (ii) Centre of Excellence on Smart Sustainable Cities in Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; (iii) Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Housing in Tallinn, Estonia; (iv) Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Development Goal City Transition in Trondheim, Norway and (v) the Centre of Excellence on Smart Sustainable Cities in Vienna, Austria. The following Centres of Excellence are in the process of being established: (i) Centre of Excellence on Smart Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Urban Development at the University of Geneva, Switzerland; (ii) Toronto Center of Excellence on Youth Homelessness Prevention at York University, Canada; (iii) Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Finance for Infrastructure and Smart Cities at LIUC – Cattaneo University, Italy; (iv) Centre of Excellence on the Forum of Mayors and Sustainable Urban Development, Norman Foster Foundation, Spain.

project aims to improve energy efficiency (EE) in buildings and reduce global greenhouse gas emissions through the following activities:

- Mapping of EE standards in buildings in the ECE region;
- Online database of experts on EE in buildings;
- Workshop for stakeholders from energy and housing sector to validate the results of the mapping;
- Mapping of existing technologies to enhance EE in buildings, gap analysis and recommendations for their use in the region;
- Workshop to discuss and validate the results of the mapping.

16. Phase II of the project is being implemented. It builds on results and lessons learned from Phase I and focuses on building capacity through training activities in three selected countries of the ECE region (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and the Republic of Moldova) to accelerate dissemination of current best practices and attainment of the 2030 Agenda.

*Impact:*

- Improved knowledge of EE standards in buildings in the ECE region;
- Enhanced network of experts on EE standards for buildings in the ECE region;
- Increased understanding of existing technologies to improve EE in buildings.

## **8. High-Performance Buildings Initiative of ECE**

*Description:*

17. The [High-Performance Buildings Initiative](#) of ECE aims to deploy the Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings, and thereby reduce the carbon footprint of buildings and improve health and quality of life, comprises three pillars:

- International centres of excellence provide implementation-oriented education and assistance to building developers, contractors, architects, and engineers, as well as regulatory and planning officials;
- The Global Building Network undertakes research and advanced education in building materials, design, and construction for current and next generation architects, engineers, policy makers and other stakeholders;
- Case studies illustrate the application of the Framework Guidelines in countries around the world to demonstrate their validity in different climates, stages of development, and regulatory, legislative, and physical infrastructure.

*Impact:*

- ECE Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings (ECE/ENERGY/GE.6/2020/4) were updated in 2020;
- By end 2020, four centres of excellence on High-Performance Buildings were operating. Discussions on establishing additional centres of excellence are ongoing;
- The preparation of an education curricula and the establishment of a high-level research panel coordinated by Penn State University are underway;
- Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and the Republic of Moldova were identified for national studies on the application of the Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings.;
- The preparatory phase of a major extra-budgetary project was launched to improve the energy efficiency of the global building supply chain industry and its products to deliver high performance buildings in Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

## 9. “Standards for SDGs” Portal

### *Description:*

18. The [ECE Portal on Standards for the SDGs](#) was launched by the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) in October 2019. It maps those standards that relate to the 2030 Agenda and covers several SDGs, including SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). It is a one-stop shop that captures in one place the standards developed by ECE and other standard-setting organizations, including those relevant to cities. The Portal enables users to access standards-related information and provides a series of multi-disciplinary instruments, including: a tool to identify standards that help to realize SDGs; a collection of case studies of countries, cities and regions that have successfully used standards for sustainability, as well as supporting online training materials.

### *Impact:*

- The Portal mapped 1,618 standards against five SDGs (6, 7, 11, 12 and 13), with additional SDGs to be included in 2021;
- In the area of standardization policy under WP.6, the Portal offers access to 417 standards, regulations and best practices pertinent to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

## 10. ECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 24 on “Ageing in Sustainable and Smart Cities”

### *Description:*

19. Focusing on three realms of urban life - housing, green and public spaces, and transport – the Policy Brief draws attention to the importance of ensuring that the needs of older persons are taken into account when planning, designing and implementing sustainable development plans at the local level. It addresses the question of how policy-makers, business and civil society actors, citizens, young and old, can design age-friendly sustainable urban environments with the help of new technologies that meet the needs of all generations, overcome the digital divide, foster inter-generational solidarity and ensure that older people are not left behind in sustainable and smart cities for all ages.

### *Impact:*

- The Policy Brief was widely disseminated to members of the Standing Working Group on Ageing and their national networks and from feedback received, the member States found it valuable;
- The Policy Brief was translated by member States into German and French for greater dissemination.

## 11. Information repository of good practices and lessons learned in land-use planning and industrial safety

### *Description:*

20. The information repository, developed by ECE in cooperation with the European Investment Bank in 2020, covers integrated issues of industrial safety, land-use planning, environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment, public participation and information to the public, and disaster risk reduction, including in a transboundary context. It is an online hub of over 40 case studies by ECE countries and organizations, collected through the networks of the Industrial Accidents Convention, Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA, Aarhus Convention and Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTRs), and the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management.

*Impact:*

- Mutual learning from experiences, lessons learned and good practices, with a view of their application to national, regional, sub-regional and local contexts;
- Enhanced implementation of above-mentioned ECE instruments;
- Improved understanding of the linkages of the ECE conventions, protocols, instruments and frameworks with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the SDGs.

## **12. Subregional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and Online Teaser Event**

*Description:*

21. The Subregional workshop for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus (Chisinau, 22–24 May 2019) gathered 37 experts in land-use planning, industrial safety and environmental assessment from the beneficiary countries, as well 7 international experts. It consisted of four sessions, a panel discussion, a practical exercise / role play, the launch of a video and a site visit.

22. The online teaser event (Geneva and online, 21 October 2020) to the Sub-regional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety, consisted of an interactive 2-hour session. Twenty-two participants and international experts participated in the session, aiming to support South-Eastern European countries in coordinating their land-use planning and industrial safety procedures, and showcasing international experience and good practice.

*Impact:*

- Improved communication and coordination to foster the integration of related policy domains (land-use planning, industrial safety, environmental and risk assessments) between respective national authorities (across and within borders);
- Enhanced national policymaking and governance;
- Improved implementation of ECE legal instruments, notably the Industrial Accidents Convention, Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and the policy instruments developed under the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management;
- Improved understanding of the linkages of ECE Conventions, protocols, instruments and frameworks with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the SDGs and New Urban Agenda.

## **13. Mobility as a Service (MaaS): publication of transport trends and economics**

*Description:*

23. The Working Party on Transport Trends and Economic (WP.5) has been discussing mobility as a service (MaaS) in the context of supporting a new trend in especially urban transport and mobility. MaaS is a new concept whose value proposition concerns integration of mobility services realized by providing trip planning and one-stop fare purchase for a traveller through a single platform. The MaaS vision is enabled by advances in intelligent systems, internet of things, cloud technology and big data management. The released publication introduces and explains the MaaS concept, presents MaaS enablers and discusses MaaS application challenges.

*Impact:*

- Seamless and efficient flow of information and people, both locally and on long distances;

- Globally scalable door-to-door mobility services without using a private car;
- A better level of service than the private car; and
- An open ecosystem for information and services in intelligent transportation.

#### **14. Intermodal transport and logistics' role in making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

*Description:*

24. The workshop in the framework of the Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24) was founded on the following considerations on urban freight transport:

- It plays an essential role in cities development and prosperity, as it delivers the numerous goods to where they are purchased, further processed or consumed;
- It is responsible for negative impacts on citizens' health and wellbeing due to air and noise emissions it generates and due to road safety risk it creates; and
- It requires solutions that maximize transport access and connectivity, and, at the same time, minimize negative externalities transport operations create.

*Impact:*

- The various policy, logistics and technology-based measures and practices agreed to support development of urban freight transport in a sustainable way will have a transformative impact on city administrations.

#### **15. Economic analysis of the transformation of urban transport systems in the framework of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5)**

*Description:*

25. Organizing an effective and efficient urban transport system is not an easy task as complex systems (such as transport and mobility set-ups) tend to interdepend on other systems to be able to operate. These interdependencies require a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach *inter alia* paying due consideration to spatial and urban infrastructure planning, social demography and geography as well as urban transit and logistics demands. In this context, the expert roundtable recognized that it is of utmost importance to understand:

- What are the costs of implementation of single or integrated policies?
- What benefits do they bring (in monetary terms)? and
- What are the risks and how to mitigate them in order to maximize benefits and minimize costs?

*Impact:*

- Increased awareness of stakeholders of the importance of conducting transport policy cost-benefit analyses as a basis for their decision and policymaking;
- Improved understanding of the main urban mobility policy categories and the role that policy options can play as key enablers for the sustainable development of cities.

## 16. THE PEP - Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

### *Description:*

26. Travel and transport are essential parts of modern life. People depend on transport to travel to work, for shopping and leisure, by car, by bus, by train, by walking and cycling. Human powered mobility can also contribute to our health and well-being through physical activity. But transport also has harmful effects on the environment and on health – through congestion, accidents, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. More than ever, the crucial connection between transport, health and the environment need to be considered.

### *Impact:*

27. Through the following publications of relevant resource materials, THE PEP establishes this link, creates awareness and builds capacity:

- Handbook on Sustainable Urban Mobility and Spatial Planning – Promoting Active Mobility (September 2020);
- Mobility Management – A Guide of International best practices (April 2020);
- Jobs in Green and Healthy Transport (May 2020);

## 17. Study on strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to develop sustainable urban mobility policy on car sharing and carpooling initiatives

### *Description:*

28. Shared mobility services are part of the shared economy, which is based on the idea of rational use of limited resources, which creates an opportunity for a person to afford high-quality goods and services at a reasonable price. This study provides a brief history of the emergence and development of shared mobility services, which contribute to a more efficient use of available resources and to achieve the SDGs.

### *Impact:*

- Offers clear guidelines and recommendations considering the best practices that may facilitate the transition in Central Asia to modern forms of sustainable urban mobility;
- Based on car sharing and carpooling in countries from Western Europe, Asia, and North America the study provides guidance on the possible development of similar services in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

## III. Intersectoral activities

29. The sixty-eighth Commission session and the Day of Cities occurred at a time of a major organizational development at ECE: the setting up of the nexus approach to foster inter-divisional synergies and cooperation on four cross-sectoral topics, namely sustainable use of natural resources; smart and sustainable cities; sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

30. Inspired by the Commission and the Day of Cities, the nexus on Smart Sustainable Cities for All Ages provided a framework for cross-sectoral cooperation primarily within the secretariat. This framework proved also beneficial for and reinforced the existing collaboration among the subsidiary bodies within the existing mandates (for example, cooperation between the Committee on Urban Development, Housing, Land Management and Housing and the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships have collaborated on the development of the guidelines on tools and mechanisms to finance smart sustainable cities projects as part of the United for Smart

Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) initiative). Below are concrete examples based on a selection of achievements mentioned in section II above:

(a) Declaration of Mayors – adopted in October 2020, the Declaration captured the work of all sub-programmes and various subsidiary bodies, including in areas of food waste, energy efficiency, urban transport, sustainable urban environment, safe and affordable housing, to mention but a few;

(b) Post COVID-19 Recovery in Informal Settlements in the ECE Region – To increase capacity of national, subnational and local governments in the ECE region to transform informal settlements into sustainable, resilient urban areas in the recovery from COVID-19 pandemic, a Post COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan for Informal Settlements for the ECE Region and a set of accompanying policy briefs are being prepared. The Plan and the Policy Brief are developed in collaboration with Smart Sustainable Cities for All Ages Nexus members from five Divisions as COVID-19 response in informal settlements requires an integrated approach across sectors.

(c) ECE Policy Brief on Aging in Sustainable and Smart Cities – originally planned to cover the topic of ageing in urban environments, inspired by the high-level theme and the nexus approach, the policy brief explored instead the inter-connections between ageing and the different areas of ECE work. Prepared by the Population Unit, the policy brief drew on the work of other sub-programmes, in particular Housing and Transport.

31. The Smart Sustainable Cities nexus publication to be launched at the sixty-ninth Commission session provides a more detailed description of the ECE cross-sectoral city-based approach to sustainable development.

## IV. Planning for the high-level theme

### Preparations for the sixty-eighth session

32. The theme for the high-level segment of the sixty-eighth session was adopted by member States at the 100th meeting of EXCOM in September 2018, approximately seven months prior to the Commission session. Within this short lead-time, the secretariat concentrated preparations on the programme planning of the relevant agenda items, including in particular the keynote addresses for the high-level segment and the roundtable for the high-level dialogue on “Regional and national solutions towards smart sustainable cities and the impact of ECE instruments.” A background document was compiled, the “Toolbox of the Economic Commission for Europe: Instruments to support the transition to smart sustainable cities” (E/ECE/1489). Moreover, accompanying side events were arranged, including an exhibition and information fair that showcased success stories and presented tools used to embrace smart and sustainable practices.

33. The Commission session was preceded by a Day of Cities. To inform the intergovernmental discussions of ECE member States, Mayors and local authorities discussed how to create smart sustainable cities, focusing on ways to improve the quality of life of people and on improving efficiency of urban operations, services and competitiveness. Over 40 Mayors from the ECE region exchanged views and shared knowledge on good practices and successful planning strategies (see E/ECE/HBP/2019/3).

34. The short lead time, however, did not allow for an in-depth engagement of the entire subsidiary architecture of the Commission prior to the session. Many subsidiary bodies did not convene until after the Commission session; and those who held their regularly scheduled meetings could only adjust their agenda to a limited extent. The seventy-ninth session of the Committee on Housing and Land Management, for example, took place already in October 2018. Consequently, and as outlined above, much of the deepened cross-sectoral engagement of the expert bodies took place after the Commission session.

### Preparations for the sixty-ninth session

35. The sixty-ninth session of the Commission will also be held under a cross-cutting theme for the high-level segment. Drawing on the lessons learned from the sixty-eighth session, the theme “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources”

was adopted earlier: Member States designated it at the 109th meeting of EXCOM in February 2020, fourteen months ahead of the session. EXCOM invited relevant subsidiary bodies of ECE and the secretariat to consider how they may contribute, as appropriate, to the cross-cutting theme of the session within their respective mandates, ongoing work and existing resources, and while making full use of the existing nexuses.

36. This approach generated significant additional momentum and inspired broad consideration of the theme across the organization ahead of the Commission session. Especially bodies whose regular annual sessions were scheduled with sufficient lead time were able to include consideration of the item into their meeting agendas. Some sectoral Committees forwarded recommendations for further consideration by the Commission. Other entities seized the opportunity to host knowledge-sharing and peer learning activities and contributed to side events, including those of ECE partner organizations, during the intersessional period. Within its established mandates, the secretariat included the designated theme in its workplans and in the cross-divisional work of the nexus teams.

37. To facilitate early engagement even of bodies whose meeting schedule did not align well to the planning timeline, the Executive Secretary reached out to the Bureaux of all sectoral Committees and requested their inputs. Information on relevant work already undertaken, activities in progress, and possible future opportunities was solicited and reported back to the Executive Committee (EXCOM) throughout the intersessional period to inform further Commission preparation.

38. Member States welcomed this comprehensive approach but noted that not all bodies had been able to fully participate in the Commission preparation, as not all entities had been able to consider the issue during their formal plenary sessions. This was largely due to the fact that the subsidiary architecture of ECE did not have a complete annual meeting cycle to engage in the thematic discussions before EXCOM started informal consultations on possible draft decisions of the Commission and the formulation of the provisional agenda of the session in the fall of 2020. (The Inland Transport Committee, for example, convened only one week after the designation of the high-level theme and contributed mostly through informal inputs of the Bureau ahead of its subsequent plenary session in February 2021.) An additional constraint for full engagement was posed by the established documentation timelines that require submission of parliamentary documentation 10 weeks ahead of the respective meeting. The situation was further exacerbated by the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a significant reorganization of ECE's official calendar of meeting and the impact of the liquidity crisis of the Secretariat that reduced the meeting servicing capacity available for formal ECE meetings by two-thirds of its regular quota.

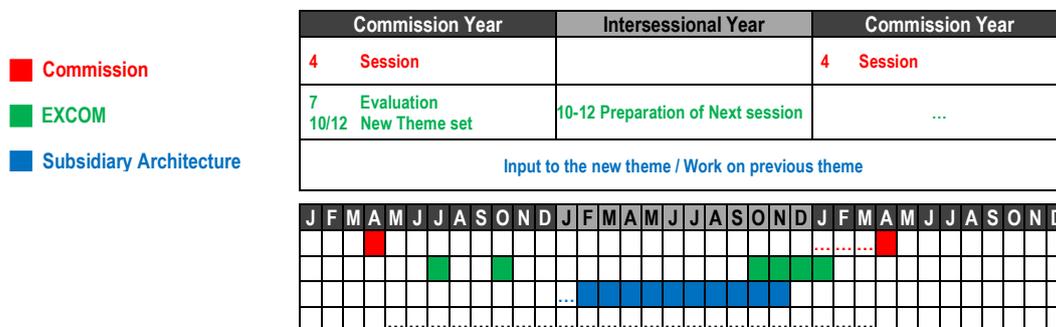
#### **Proposed future planning timeline**

39. To review the implications of the practice of designating a cross-cutting theme early in the process, EXCOM requested the secretariat to conduct a post-session lessons learned survey, and to prepare a proposal for the preparation of future Commission sessions. It is foreseen that EXCOM will review the findings of such a survey in July 2021. Taking into account the experiences gained during the preparations of the sixty-eighth and the sixty-ninth Commission sessions, respectively, EXCOM may wish to consider designating a high-level theme for the subsequent Commission session even earlier than in the past, ideally within six months of the preceding session. This would allow each subsidiary body to hold its annual meeting sufficiently ahead of the following Commission session, to significantly advance work related to the high-level theme, and submit substantial contributions and recommendations through EXCOM for consideration at the Commission session.

40. A proposed future planning timeline for the designation of a high-level theme could thus be as follows: Within three months of a Commission session (April), EXCOM would review the findings of a post-session lessons learned survey (July of a Commission year). As appropriate, at that time first proposals for a future Commission theme could be presented to member States for consideration. By October, or latest December of the Commission year, EXCOM would designate a high-level theme for the following Commission session and request the subsidiary bodies to contribute to the Commission preparations. Each subsidiary body would then have the entirety of the intersessional year to deliberate on the theme and make recommendation on how it may contribute within its mandated activities. These inputs

would inform further planning by EXCOM, including through the review of recommendations made at the expert level for possible draft decisions to be transmitted to the Commission for consideration. Such a planning cycle would allow member States to benefit from the full expertise of ECE and advance their preparations for the session in time for the established documentation timelines.

**Possible future planning cycle of the preparation of Commission sessions**



41. To monitor the impact of the designation of a high-level theme, the Commission could routinely include in its agenda a progress report of the Commission on the high-level theme of its prior session. Such a document would inform a related agenda item to be considered on the second day of future Commission sessions.

## Annex

The ECE body with a specific mandate on Smart Sustainable Cities is the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management which, since 2013, has been addressing the topic under its work area 2: Sustainable Urban Development. Mandated activities include among others the development of:

- Key Performance Indicators for Smart Sustainable Cities (SSCs), developed together with ITU;
- Guidance for member States on SSCs; and
- City Profiles for Smart Sustainable Cities, amongst others.

Specific references to the mandate are listed in the table below.

A number of other subprogrammes have mandates that touch upon matters relevant to Smart Sustainable Cities, and these are also listed in the table below.

<i>Mandate document</i>	<i>Focus area</i>
<b>Housing, Land Management and Population</b>	
<b>Housing and Land Management<sup>3</sup></b>	
Report of the Committee on Housing and Land Management ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/173</a> )	The Committee included into its programme of work the topic of smart cities under its Sustainable Urban Development area of work
Report of the Committee on Housing and Land Management at its 75 <sup>th</sup> session in 2014 ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/179</a> ).	The Committee took note of the information provided on activities on smart sustainable cities under its programme of work and agreed to present to the next Committee Session a set of Smart City Indicators for its consideration and endorsement
Report of the Committee on Housing and Land Management at its 77 <sup>th</sup> session in 2016 ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/188</a> )	The Committee endorsed the revised Key Performance Indicators on Smart Sustainable Cities elaborated under the United for Smart Sustainable Cities Initiative to address the achievement of the SDGs
Report of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management at its 81 <sup>st</sup> session in 2020 ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/206</a> ).	The Committee endorsed “ECE Protocol on the Evaluation of City Performance Against the Key Performance Indicators for Smart Sustainable Cities”
Report of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management at its 81 <sup>st</sup> session in 2020 ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/206</a> ).	Support of the ECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management (CUDHLM) to building urban resilience during and after COVID-19
Report of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management at its 80 <sup>th</sup> session in 2019 ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/201</a> )	Promoting evidence-based policies to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development at city level through the preparation of the smart sustainable cities’ profiles with policy recommendations
Report of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management at its 80 <sup>th</sup> session in 2019 ( <a href="#">ECE/HBP/201</a> )	Forum of Mayors

<sup>3</sup> The ECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, established in 1947, is the only intergovernmental body addressing the housing and urban development challenges of the ECE region and the highest policymaking body of ECE in housing, urban development and land management. The Committee has a comprehensive set of mandates for work on affordable and energy efficient housing, energy-efficient and safe buildings, urban planning, smart sustainable cities and land administration and management. The mandates listed in the table highlight work of the Committee specifically on smart sustainable cities. Please see more on the Committee activities at <https://ECE.org/housing/history-committee>.

<i>Mandate document</i>	<i>Focus area</i>
<b>Population</b>	
Programme of work of the Population Component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2019–2020 and Programme of Work of the Standing Working Group on Ageing 2018–2022 (Publication mandate: <a href="#">ECE/WG.1/2018/2, Annex 2</a> )	ECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 24 on “Ageing in Sustainable and Smart Cities”
<b>Trade</b>	
Report of WP6 at its session in 2018 ( <a href="#">ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2018/2</a> )	“Standards for SDGs” Portal
Mandate and Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group on Advanced Technologies in Trade and Logistics ( <a href="#">ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2019/22/Rev.1</a> )	Artificial Intelligence in cities
<b>Sustainable Energy</b>	
Framework guidelines for energy efficiency standards in buildings <a href="#">ECE/ENERGY/GE.6/2017/4</a> and Updated Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings <a href="#">ECE/ENERGY/GE.6/2020/4</a> .	Energy efficiency standards in buildings in the ECE region
Framework guidelines for energy efficiency standards in buildings <a href="#">ECE/ENERGY/GE.6/2017/4</a> and Updated Framework Guidelines for Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings <a href="#">ECE/ENERGY/GE.6/2020/4</a> .	High performance building initiative
<b>Environment</b>	
Workplan of the Industrial Accidents Convention for 2019–2020 ( <a href="#">ECE/CP.TEIA/38/Add.1</a> ).	Information Repository of Good Practices and Lessons Learned in Land-Use Planning and Industrial Safety
Workplans of the Industrial Accidents Convention for 2019–2020 ( <a href="#">ECE/CP.TEIA/38/Add.1</a> ) and for 2021–2022 (ECE/CP.TEIA/42/Add.1, forthcoming)	Subregional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus (Chisinau, 22–24 May 2019), and Online Teaser Event: Subregional workshop on land-use planning and industrial safety in South-Eastern Europe (Geneva and online, 21 October 2020)
<b>Transport</b>	
Publication mandate: <a href="#">ECE/TRANS/WP.5/66</a> , point XII.A. para. 68; substantive mandate is provided in <a href="#">ECE/TRANS/WP.5/60</a> , point XII. D. para. 62	Mobility as a Service (MaaS): Publication of Transport Trends and Economics
<a href="#">ECE/TRANS/WP.24/145</a> , point XI, para. 56	Intermodal transport and logistics’ role in making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
<a href="#">ECE/TRANS/WP.5/66</a> , para. 54-55	Economic analysis of the transformation of urban transport systems in the framework of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5)
THE PEP High Level Outcome Document/ Paris Declaration: <a href="https://thepep.ECE.org/sites/default/files/2016-10/Paris_Declaration_in_English_Final.pdf">https://thepep.ECE.org/sites/default/files/2016-10/Paris_Declaration_in_English_Final.pdf</a>	THE PEP - Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme
Executive Committee, 104 <sup>th</sup> meeting	Study on strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to develop sustainable urban mobility policy on car sharing and carpooling initiatives
<b>Economic Cooperation and Integration</b>	
Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2020–2021 of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships ( <a href="#">ECE/EX/2020/L.6</a> , Annex, para. 25).	People-first PPP Evaluation Methodology for the SDGs