



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships****Fourteenth session**

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Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Innovation and Competitiveness Policies**Recommendations from the external evaluation of the
programme of national Innovation for Sustainable
Development Reviews****Note by the Secretariat****I. Background**

1. An evaluation of ECE's programme of national Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews (I4SDRs) for the period 2014-2020 was carried out in 2019-2020 by an external evaluator as part of ECE's organization-wide evaluation policy. The evaluation covered reviews of Armenia, Tajikistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia. The evaluation also explored the question of synergies between the national reviews and the sub-regional IPO. The present document replicates the overall conclusions from the executive summary of the final evaluation report. The full report is available on the Open ECE webpage.¹ The document also replicates the evaluation's 7 recommendations together with the secretariat's management response.

2. The evaluation was carried out by means of a desk review of relevant project documents and official meeting records, an electronic survey of national and international experts involved in the reviews and of members of the Committee and the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies, and in-depth interviews with experts, beneficiaries, donors and the Secretariat. The views expressed in the report are those of the external evaluator.

II. Purpose and overall conclusions of the external evaluation

3. Innovation, i.e. the successful introduction in the market of new products, services, production processes and business models, is as a key driver and means of implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since 2010, the Governments of the interested member States request the Economic Commission for Europe to analyse and describe the current innovation performance and policy frameworks in the country, to benchmark them against international best practice, and to develop tailor-made actionable recommendations on how to improve the existing policies. In response to such requests, the ECE's programme of national I4SDRs has been developed and implemented, by the Innovative Policies Development Section, with the support of extrabudgetary funding.

Purpose

4. The purpose of this subprogramme-level evaluation, commissioned by ECE Executive Committee in its 95th session of December 2017, is to review the relevance, coherence, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of the methodology and selection process of, and follow-up to, the ECE's programme of national I4SDRs in 2014 - 2020, and the synergies between the reviews programme and the sub-regional IPO . The scope of the evaluation explores the methodology, production process, and follow-up of five reviews prepared during the period of January 2014 to September 2020. The synergies between the programme and the IPO, the purpose of which was to provide a comparative perspective on innovation performance and policies across six countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine) in 2019-2021, have been also reviewed.

Overall conclusions

5. The overall conclusion of the evaluation is that the programme has been highly relevant, coherent, effective, and efficient. The programme results have been moderately sustainable. The reviews have contributed to the dissemination and application of ECE good practices and policy recommendations among national policy makers and practitioners.

6. The reviews have been highly relevant to the national priorities and the needs of the main beneficiaries. The reviews have demonstrated coherence with international good practice, including the peer review practice for high-impact papers. The internal structure of the reviews was coherent. Collaboration with other entities took place in the form of consultations, data inputs, and Resident Coordinators' assistance.

7. The reviews have achieved their objectives and have been relevant to the improvement of innovation policies in the target countries, demonstrating a good level of effectiveness. With a limited budget, the ECE has produced comprehensive innovation reviews for the five countries, organized preparatory and data collection missions, peer reviews and presentations for each review. The human and financial resources were used efficiently and commensurate to the project results. Sustainability of the results are moderate and depend on the availability of national budget resources and international donor agencies and development bank's assistance. To ensure effective implementation of the review's policy recommendations, the ECE offers to Governments a follow-up: capacity building and policy advisory missions and seminars (webinars) based on demand from the Governments.

8. The perspective of a sub-regional outlook and the analysis of a national review complement each other: while the latter gives a deeper qualitative assessment, the former provides structured quantitative analysis allowing for cross-country comparison. The review programme and the IPO could be regarded as parallel workstreams, flexible in terms of their succession when they cover the same countries and independent from each other when they cover different countries. The ECE has taken measures to incorporate gender mainstreaming and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people in its reviews produced under the 2030 Agenda, and to achieve 30% representation at least of each gender among participants. ECE reviews produced under the 2030 Agenda include the matters of equality and inclusion to a reasonable extent.

III. Recommendations and management response¹**9. Recommendation 1:**

The coherence of collaboration with different entities could be further developed by means of organizing joint activities and events with participation of other UN agencies, including WIPO, international organizations, development partners, and stakeholders in the process of the review preparation and implementation of recommendations.

Management Response:

¹ The management response, dated December 2020, can be found on Open UNECE at <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/I4SDRE~1.PDF>

Accepted.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

Although ECE is in the lead of activities, the Secretariat will further and systematically work with other UN agencies and other partners by inviting them to participate in the reviews themselves and to participate in or co-organise, capacity building activities in support of country efforts to put review recommendations into practice.

Specifically for the next I4SDRs, which will be on the Republic of Moldova and on Uzbekistan, the Secretariat will involve relevant UN agencies (including relevant ECE sub-programmes) and other development partners in the consultation processes, as authors or co-authors of individual chapters and in the peer reviews. For the follow-up capacity building with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Armenia, the Secretariat will explore the possibility of organizing events jointly with partners as a function of the topic and work programme agreed with these countries following review results and recommendations.

10. Recommendation 2:

Include in the reviews a tentative timeline to facilitate the implementation process for the Governments. Ensure that recommendations include concrete and practical measures to be implemented by non-academic professionals working in the area of innovation policy development.

Management Response:

Accepted

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

In the Georgia review, the Secretariat has already taken steps to further streamline, vet, and improve the coherence among recommendations, as well as to create a clear structure and summaries to guide the reader. Further steps will be taken to facilitate the implementation of recommendations in follow-up to the reviews. Specifically, the Secretariat will

- ensure in the upcoming reviews of the Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan that recommendations are mutually consistent and as specific and actionable as possible, and add guidance on timing, importance, and responsible bodies;
- aim to present the recommendations in the form of a one-page, high-level reform road map;
- as part of the follow-up capacity building for Georgia develop action plans or road maps with timelines and further develop specific practical policy measures to facilitate implementation of those policy recommendations the Government wishes to pursue.

11. Recommendation 3:

Widen the pool of relevant experts, including the local ones, for team set-up or emergency replacement. Special attention should be paid to the experts' understanding of the context of the target countries, legal frameworks, private sector, and the link between innovations and sustainable development. Female experts should be encouraged to apply. Arrange interactive discussions with the member States Governments, where they could validate the draft reports as peer reviewers do.

Management Response:

Accepted.

Follow-up actions and responsibilities:

The Secretariat agrees that the pool of international experts should be widened to bring in fresh perspectives, to strengthen the expertise on sustainable development, and to aim for increased engagement of female experts. The secretariat will also continue to recruit new experts with specific expertise needed for individual elective chapters. For the upcoming reviews of the Republic of Moldova and of Uzbekistan, the secretariat will

- engage at least one female expert as an author for each review;
- increase gender balance among peer reviewers;
- engage at least one new expert or organisation as an author;

- provide detailed guidance to newly recruited experts on the expected structure of their respective chapters through a concept note explaining and aligning the approach to the subject matter based on desk research and agreement with beneficiary countries;
- continue the practice of interactive, regular discussions with beneficiary countries on the content of chapters, the analysis, and draft chapters and reviews.

12. Recommendation 4:

Speed up the reviews production process via further structuration and standardisation of the process, e.g., introducing concept notes and data collection questionnaires for the experts. Process optimisation is a subject for an individual piece of work requiring deep analysis. The peer review practice could be further upgraded by making written peer reviews collection a standard procedure.

Management Response:

Accepted.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

To further standardise the process, the Secretariat is undertaking concerted consultations with countries and experts on the methodology and scope of the sub-regional IPO. In parallel, it is developing a detailed IPO manual that specifies and streamlines each step of the analysis, engagement, writing, review, and communications process based on the lessons learnt from the pilot. After having piloted several ways of revising the review process, the Secretariat aims to try out additional ways to ensure synergies with the IPO and streamline processes in the reviews of the Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan and put together a similar manual for the reviews. For the upcoming reviews of the Republic of Moldova and of Uzbekistan the secretariat will

- circulate a questionnaire, using the IPO questionnaire as a basis, to the focal points to collect information from stakeholders to inform the brunt of parts I and II of the review;
- collect, as already done for Georgia, peer review comments in written form in addition to the peer review meeting;
- in the case of the Republic of Moldova, build on the findings from the corresponding chapter of the IPO, aiming to complement and update these with strong focus on in-depth chapters in part III.

13. Recommendation 5:

Pay more attention to special features and needs of individual countries. Private sector engagement should be strengthened. The IPO and the reviews should be regarded as independent streams of work that complement each other in terms of data and perspective, especially when they cover the same countries, but can be sequenced in any convenient order depending on circumstances.

Management Response:

Partially accepted.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

For the upcoming reviews of the Republic of Moldova and of Uzbekistan the Secretariat will identify two to three topics which the requesting Governments consider priorities to be covered in separate chapters, following a similar approach already taken for the review of Georgia. The Republic of Moldova I4SDR will draw on the results of the IPO (see comments above).

Private sector engagement is important, but our review beneficiaries and the subject of analysis is the nature of the innovation system and the role of governance, policies, instruments, and institutions in enabling and promoting innovation across the economy and society. While the I4SDRs have covered policies and mechanisms for Governments to engage systematically with the private sector and have consulted with the private sector extensively during the review process, including visiting individual companies and talking to business associations and chambers of commerce to get their views on existing innovation policies and how they respond to private sector needs, the focus should clearly remain on governance.

14. Recommendation 6:

Introduce a more streamlined approach to the follow-up (including capacity building) and incorporate it in funding proposals. Introduce webinars as a regular part of follow-up capacity building. Collect the information about follow-up activities at a single webpage and link it with the reviews programme webpage.

Management Response:

Accepted.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

Funding for capacity building has already been included in the projects for the I4SDR of Georgia and for upcoming reviews of the Republic of Moldova and Armenia. As a good practice for all subsequent reviews, we will agree on a detailed capacity building programme around a specific planned or on-going reform effort in line with review recommendations with Georgia similar to the one carried out in 2019-2020 for Belarus. We will also revise the way information on the I4SDRs and on related capacity building is presented on our website.

15. Recommendation 7:

Enrich the I4SDRs with an individual chapter and practical advice for Governments on how to mainstream gender equality, women empowerment, and disability inclusion in innovation development. Engage international and local experts to work in pairs on these subject matters.

Management Response:

Partially accepted.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

The Secretariat accepts the objective of further mainstreaming gender equality, women's empowerment and disability inclusion (along with other aspects of inclusiveness from the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, such as poverty reduction or the closing of digital and urban-rural divides). However, this objective can be achieved not only with a separate chapter, but also by mainstreaming these topics, i.e. by covering these aspects within other chapters as part of the relevant narrative, as has already been done increasingly, especially in the Georgia review. Which approach works best will depend on the situation in the country and the needs and expectations of the requesting Government, which has to agree on the review content generally and the topics for the elective, in-depth chapters of Part III in particular.

For the upcoming I4SDRs of the Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan, the Secretariat will consult with the Governments and propose different ways of addressing these topics and will structure the reviews accordingly.
