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Strategic questions of a horizontal and cross-sectoral policy or regulatory nature:

Capacity development activities in United Nations programme countries in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region

Inland Transport Committee Capacity Development Action Plan

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The eighty-second session of Inland Transport Committee (ITC) adopted the “Inland Transport Committee Capacity Development Action Plan” (hereafter the Action Plan) as a document which will define, integrate and frame capacity development activities done by the Sustainable Transport Division.

Two years after adoption of the Action Plan, this document is taking stock of results achieved and lesson learned. The Committee **took note** of progress in the implementation of the ITC Capacity Development Action Plan (2020–2025), in particular in the capacity enhancement area; **expressed its satisfaction** for progress achieved with the development of the E-learning platform; and **expressed its support** for the continued implementation of the ITC Capacity Development Action plan.

I. Background

1. The 81st session of the ITC (held on 19–22 February 2019) adopted the “Inland Transport Committee Strategy until 2030” (hereafter the Strategy) as a basic document for future directions of the ITC development. The mission for ITC is defined as “to contribute to sustainable inland transport and mobility for achieving the sustainable development goals in the ECE and UN Member States through policy dialogue, harmonizing regulatory frameworks, as appropriate, promoting new technologies, assisting in enhancing connectivity and supporting the implementation of legal instruments”.

2. The first pillar of the Strategy integrates several groups of activities, where a support to member States to facilitate accession to and efficient implementation of UN transport-



related legal instruments plays an important role. For that purpose, the Secretariat is mandated to offer support to all UN Member States through technical assistance and capacity development activities.

3. The Strategy mandated the Secretariat to develop new or adjust/update existing capacity-building programmes, training manuals, guidelines, standards and competency criteria in cooperation with other organizations and institutions, to assist in enhancing capacity in the accession and implementation of the legal instruments and organize training courses [Timeline: Short-, Medium- and Long-term] and also to develop indicators for Contracting parties to evaluate status and progress in the implementation of the legal instruments [Timeline: Short-, and Medium-term] .

4. The Strategy defined as the first priority the preparation of a comprehensive programme of work which will define, integrate and frame all capacity development activities done by the Sustainable Transport Division. The ITC Capacity Development Action Plan (hereafter the Action Plan) was presented and adopted at the 82nd session of ITC held in February 2020.

II. The ITC Capacity Development Action Plan

5. The Action Plan incorporated capacity development general principles and activities to “Enhance the role of ITC as the United Nations platform for inland transport conventions”. All activities are grouped into four strategic areas:

(a) **Awareness-raising** - Inform member States on United Nations transport legal instruments and on benefits of its efficient implementation.

(b) **Capacity enhancement** - Assist member States in developing capacities for efficient implementation of United Nations inland transport legal instruments.

(c) **Seek synergies** - Develop standards and competence criteria for accreditation of entities (academia, training centres, etc.) to promote United Nations inland transport legal instruments.

(d) **Monitor and evaluate results** and effectiveness of applied actions/methods.

6. The Action Plan general principles reflect the intention to do more for the promotion of efficient implementation of United Nations transport-related legal instruments and to achieve tangible results in member States. The proposed general principles are the following:

(a) **Offer A-Z solutions to Member States** – work hand-in-hand with member State on efficient implementation of United Nations transport legal instruments.

(b) **Recognize capacity development as a long-term relation and effort by member State and ECE** – give constant support during several years required for efficient implementation of one transport-related convention.

(c) Taking into account principles set-up in the Sustainable Development Goal 17, **seek synergies with United Nations development system, other international and regional institutions involved in development of sustainable transport system.**

(d) To reach optimal results with available resources, **capacity development activities should influence all three levels of capacity development** (individual, organizational and national), with special emphasize on a national level.

(e) **Use the Action Plan to mobilize XB funds** – the capacity development framework for member State will serve for mobilization of additional XB funding for capacity development, allocation of Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC) fund, RB staff time, etc.

III. Initial experiences with the Action Plan

7. Immediately after adoption of the Strategy, the Secretariat decided to pilot general principles (“A to Z” approach and long-term relation) before final adoption of the Action

Plan. ECE-led Georgia Road Safety Performance Review (RSPR) was completed in 2018. One of the RSPR recommendations stressed the necessity to update national legislation on safe vehicles. ECE in cooperation with the Georgian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development (MoESD) organized a workshop “The 1958 Agreement – a road map for implementation” on United Nations legal instruments and technical regulations on safe vehicles (Tbilisi, Georgia, May 2019). The workshop addressed the safety and environmental performance of wheeled vehicles and allowed exchange of international and national best practices on efficient implementation of the 1958 Agreement. Based on identified gaps, ECE experts worked hand-in-hand with the Georgian stakeholders on preparation of updates on national legislation on safe vehicles. Amendments on the Law on Motor Transport, draft Technical Regulation on procedures for granting Type Approval and designation of Technical Service provider pursuant to the 1958 Agreement and Action plan for efficient implementation of the 1958 Agreement in Georgia were completed and handed over to MoESD in December 2019. In October 2020, two years after completion of RSPR project, ECE, MoESD and LEPL Land Transport Agency organized a workshop to take stock on the project results in Albania and Georgia, with emphasize on results achieved in safe vehicles pillar. In 3rd Q^{tr} 2021, Georgian experts completed the draft national road safety strategy which is partly based on RPTC findings and recommendations. In this process experts identified a number of pressing issues which should be addressed in the strategy, subject to analysis of potential results and resources required for its implementation. As a continuation of cooperation with MoESD, ECE experts are analysing three road safety topics: seat belts on rear seat, child restraint system and speed management and will comeback with international best practice and potential benefits of implementation of these measures in Georgia. This analysis and recommendations will give sound information for Georgian legislators to introduce/delay implementation of proposed measures.

8. After adoption of the Action Plan, ECE cooperation with the Ministry of Communications and Transport of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MCT) on capacity development were streamlined on road safety assistance. Activities were initiated with sub-regional capacity building event (Sarajevo, March 2020) organized in cooperation with MCT and UNDP BiH. Policy dialogue among BiH road safety stakeholders identified a number of key road safety measures as a starting point for the Framework Road Safety Strategy (FRSS). Team of external consultants guided by ECE, MCT and UNDP BiH have prepared the draft FRSS and two reports: Roadmap for accession to and implementation of the 1997 Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Analysis on establishment of the roadside technical inspection in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2nd Q^{tr} 2021. Final draft FRSS was handed over to MCT for national consultations. Recognizing the need for further cooperation with MCT on implementation of FRSS recommendations and efficient implementation of United Nations legal instruments in safe vehicles area, ECE launched activities in preparation of the Roadmap for roadside technical inspection (RTI) in BiH. First opportunity to present initial findings on RTI was workshop on Periodic Technical Inspection and Roadside Technical Inspection (online, October 2021). The workshop took stock on current international legal framework (United Nations and European Union) for PTI and RTI and provided information how to update national legislation to be in full conformity with the 1997 Agreement¹. Finalization of the Roadmap, joint capacity development seminar and national policy dialogue on FRSS are planned for 1st Q^{tr} 2022.

9. Demand driven activities on accession to United Nations transport legal instruments based on the Action Plan principles were particularly fruitful in case of Turkmenistan. On the request of Turkmenistan, ECE organized two capacity development events (online, April and May 2020) which resulted in successful accession of Turkmenistan to six United Nations legal instruments (The European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries, The European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines, The European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations, The European Agreement supplementing the 1968 Convention on Road Traffic, The European Agreement supplementing the 1968 Convention on Road Signs and Signals, and The Protocol on Road Markings to the European Agreement supplementing the 1968 Convention on Road Signs

¹ Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Conditions for Periodical Technical Inspections of Wheeled Vehicles and the Reciprocal Recognition of Such Inspections, of 13 November 1997

and Signals) in 2020. Later that year, ECE organized second group of tailor-made capacity development events (online, November 2020) for national stakeholders on efficient implementation of legal instruments which Turkmenistan acceded. In 2021, cooperation with Turkmen transport stakeholders continued on accession and efficient implementation of two vehicle-related United Nations legal instruments - the 1958² and 1997 Agreement (October 2021), including advice on initial steps in implementation.

10. Real hands-on capacity enhancement were offered through two RPTC-financed field projects “Interconnection of Customs Information System of Georgia with the eTIR International system” and “Interconnection of Customs Information System of Azerbaijan with the eTIR International system” (November - December 2020). They provided two member States with a tool to connect their national customs systems with eTIR International and share all relevant information to support border crossing facilitation. After entering into force of the Annex 11 of the TIR Convention which describes the eTIR procedure in May 2021, electronic exchange of data become reality which will significantly reduce border crossing waiting times. During 2021 the eTIR specifications, which describe how the eTIR International system communicates with the information systems of the other stakeholders, are being finalized and national custom systems connected with eTIR International. In 2021 Turkmenistan requested capacity development to strengthen capacity of national specialist in road transport and border crossing facilitation. ECE responded with policy dialogue (March 2021) in which the Secretariat presented the aim and benefits of acceding eTIR International system, how to efficiently implement agreements and initial steps to join the system. With support of RPTC, Armenia initiated activities to connect national system with eTIR International system in 4th Qt 2021.

11. A good example that some of the Action Plan activities could be implemented sub-regionally is assistance to SPECA countries. Capacity development activities were directed towards: (i) organization of the Regional Dialogue “Strengthening transport connectivity in the SPECA region and beyond in the era of COVID-19” and (ii) continuation of activities in the SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity. More than 90 participants, including nine Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Transport from Central Asia and the Caucasus, members of United Nations system, Multi Development Banks and international organizations joined the Regional Dialogue (online, September 2020). The ECE-led Regional Dialogue facilitated an inclusive discussion and coordinated actions and plans on harmonization of international inland transport procedures to enhance connectivity in the SPECA region, especially during COVID-19 pandemics. During 25th (online, October 2020) and 26th (online, November 2021) sessions of the SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (WG-STTC) ECE advised SPECA countries on transport connectivity, regional cooperation in infrastructure development, and border crossing facilitation. Member States shared the experiences and information on latest developments in the improvement of regional connectivity (infrastructure development, removing of bottlenecks), international transit (border crossing facilitation and corridor management) as well as road safety. Furthermore, countries shared information on COVID-19 measures and responses and discussed operationalization of the conclusions of the Ashgabat Initiative³ and the SPECA Regional Dialogue. Back-to-back with the 26th WG-STTC session, UNCE organized the SPECA Workshop on digitalization of transport services (eTIR and eCMR) with the aim to strengthen knowledge of the national representatives of SPECA countries on digitalization of transport services, procedures and documents (eTIR and eCMR) highlighting the advantages that new electronic systems can bring on trade and border crossings facilitation in the sub-region. ECE presented case studies from countries that has already started implementing eTIR and participated in different pilot projects.

² Agreement concerning the Adoption of Harmonized Technical United Nations Regulations for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these United Nations Regulations, of 20 March 1958.

³ The Ashgabat initiative on reducing barriers to trade and transport using United Nations legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations while bolstering connectivity in the SPECA region.

12. It is of utmost importance to mention that development of training platform including manuals and guidelines on acceding to and efficient implementation of United Nations transport-related legal instruments is crucial for the Action Plan implementation. Currently, the Secretariat is implementing the United Nations Development Account - financed project “Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity (trade and transport nexus) in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Western Balkans” which is due to continue until end 2024. The project aims to develop the capacity of member States to implement sustainable mobility and connectivity policies, through the development of the Smart and Sustainable Connectivity E-Learning Platform (SCELP). The platform will include training materials on sustainable mobility and connectivity tied to the legal instruments but also to the development of appropriate policy tools to implement the requirements of legal instruments, standards and guidelines.

IV. Lessons learned

13. In 2020-21 planning and implementation of activities defined by the Action Plan were seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemics. Possibility to organize capacity development events in-person and to offer advisory missions were excluded, therefore the Secretariat decided to focus on demand-driven capacity development activities to be implemented via videoconference or by engaging of regional consultants.

14. Although first two years of implementation of the Action Plan were extraordinary and pandemics highly affected abilities of the Secretariat to offer wide spectrum of capacity development activities, there are number of points which could be drawn from this experience:

- There is a big demand for ECE capacity development activities on United Nations transport-related legal instruments – having a global outreach, ECE-administered conventions and agreements are beneficial and interesting for all member States. Depending on the status of accession and overall level of development of inland transport system, ECE could define two types of packages of capacity development activities:
 - Informational – for member States which did not acceded to United Nations legal instruments (including: SCELP platform, how to accede road maps, information workshops, etc)
 - Efficient implementation (awareness raising, peer reviews, advisory services, preparation of national legislation, etc)
- Member States which so far benefited from the Action plan activities highly appreciated A-Z approach. ECE assistance accompanied with participation/peer review of experienced external experts help national stakeholders to better understand benefits of United Nations transport-related legal instruments, strengthen ownership and knowledge of national stakeholders and help to avoid pitfalls in the process of transposition into national legislation.
- A number of member States are sharing common problems in implementation as their neighbours. Therefore, there is a strong potential for regional cooperation which will introduce shared solutions.
- So far, closer cooperation with the United Nations Development System in Member States (UN programmatic countries) was proven mutually beneficial. ECE shared expertise and improved outreach and UN Country Teams provided real-time information and got support for their activities. Still, more alleys for cooperation should be elaborated (e.g. mutual projects, fundraising).
- Very important topic for the Action Plan implementation is a regular sharing of information on activities and projects amongst different sections and ECE divisions. In that sense all stakeholders will be able to plan mutual collaboration, common fundraising and avoid overlapping in the future.
- The COVID-19 pandemics seriously slowed development of the Methodology for National capacity development framework (NCDF) preparation. It was not easy to

agree on mid-term plans including commonly agreed goals/objectives, time schedules, resources in such volatile environment. Having in mind that NCDF will bring stability and long-term commitment of all partners, the Secretariat will devote additional efforts for preparation of the Methodology and policy dialogue with Member States on its implementation.
