



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
9 December 2021

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Inland Transport Committee

#### Eighty-fourth session

Geneva, 22-25 February 2022

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Governance issues and other matters arising from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations bodies and Conferences**

## Impacts of COVID-19 and the liquidity crisis on the transport programme of work – 2021 update

Note by the secretariat\*

### I. Background

1. Following the declaration on 16 March 2020 by the Swiss authorities of an “Extraordinary Situation” in Switzerland due to the increasing number of coronavirus cases in the country, the secretariat has informed the Committee and its Bureau about the combined impacts of the COVID-19 and the liquidity crisis on the transport subprogramme’s 2020 Programme of Work (see ECE/TRANS/2021/5).
2. This note is intended to update the Committee about the ongoing situation in the delivery of the 2021 Programme of Work.

### II. Adjustment measures

#### A. Special procedures during the COVID-19 period

3. There have been no changes to the special procedures that were established in 2020.

#### B. Conference management related policy changes

4. In response to the COVID-mitigation measures, the liquidity crisis and the SHP constraints, the Conference Management Services of the United Nations Office in Geneva enacted in 2020, among other measures, two critical changes impacting conference and interpretation services for United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) meetings:

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\* This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter’s control.



- Service quotas for ECE were reduced from three meetings per day to one meeting per day
  - Interpretation duration was reduced from three hours per session to two hours per session for any hybrid meeting
5. These changes resulted in several cancellations, postponements, re-scheduling, shortening and downgrading to informal status of meetings in 2020 and part of 2021.
6. Three major changes took place in 2021 with regard to the above restrictions:
- As of 5 July 2021, the length of hybrid sessions was restored from two to three hours
  - As of the final third (September-December) of 2021, service quotas for ECE were restored back to three meetings per day, under the condition that **only one conference room per day with interpretation/hybrid platform would be moderated by UNOG**. Two more conference rooms per day with interpretation/hybrid platform would become available, but only if technically moderated by ECE.
  - The return to three-hour sessions was partially reversed from 1 November 2021. In the corresponding Note Verbale, the secretariat was informed that “this exceptional accommodation can no longer be extended beyond 30 October, due to the depletion of the global market for freelance interpreters. Effective 1 November, the duration of hybrid and virtual meetings with interpretation will revert to two (2) hours whenever active remote participation exceeds 30 minutes. The situation will be reassessed in mid-December and changes, if any, will be communicated.”
7. As a result of these policy shifts, the secretariat had to engage in an organization-wide exercise of reprioritization of scheduled meetings, with the direct involvement of and extensive negotiations among staff/secretaries and Senior Management at Directors’ level as last resort.

### **C. Impacts on deployment of staff**

8. Due to the extraordinary circumstances outlined above and in response to the requirements for restoring the ECE service quota to three meetings per day, staff of the Sustainable Transport Division were deployed for technical moderation functions, in order to be able to ensure the delivery of official meetings with interpretation to member States and Contracting Parties.

### **D. Cancellation, postponements, informal/remote (virtual) meetings, and combined informal/formal events**

9. Due to the extraordinary circumstances and policy adjustments outlined above, several planned meetings of ECE sectoral committees and their subsidiary bodies were rescheduled or cancelled. Others had to be serviced under the limited two-hour sessions with interpretation impacting their agendas.
10. Furthermore, in response to the above situation, and in full compliance with the EXCOM decision on special procedures for ITC subsidiary bodies, several meetings were held virtually under the special procedures to ensure business continuity.
11. In addition, several meetings were either shortened, due to the limited time available to them under hybrid status. Moreover, some planned meetings were held as “combined” events, partly held under informal status and partly as formal meetings, as a result of intra-ECE, cross-divisional negotiations, in order to accommodate as many subprogrammes as possible under UNOG’s restricted service quota.

### III. Impacts on the transport subprogramme's work

12. This section reflects the estimated impact on the transport subprogramme of the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the liquidity crisis.

13. Overall, on the basis of information available at the time of the preparation of this document, it can be said with certainty that the situation in 2021 is significantly better than in 2020. The level of implementation of the quantified deliverables of the 2021 Programme of Work of the Transport subprogramme is expected to reach 93 per cent. However, several quality-related issues exist, as discussed in this section.<sup>1</sup> This note focuses on the impact on:

(a) meetings of ITC subsidiary bodies, since their convening power is the cornerstone of the regulatory work of the Committee, in performing its role as the United Nations Platform for Inland Transport;

(b) documentation, which is a critical component in the updating of legal instruments.

#### A. Impacts on meetings

##### 1. Impacts on meetings of standing bodies (Working Parties)

14. At the time of writing, the combined effects of COVID-19 and liquidity crisis on the implementation of planned meetings of several ITC Working Parties in 2021 are still unfolding but it is safe to conclude that they will be significantly less severe than in 2020.

15. When considering combined formal (in-person and hybrid with interpretation) and informal meetings under special procedures (without interpretation), the implementation of planned meetings in 2021 did not fall lower than 76 per cent among the various working parties (see table 1). By contrast, 2020 saw implementation levels as low as 35 per cent.

16. Overall, the subprogramme as a whole is expected to implement in full planned meetings for Working Parties, if meetings with and without interpretation are counted (see table 1, column (e)).

17. A key component however for the successful discharge of the responsibilities of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies is multilingualism and the ability to run meetings with full interpretation. From this perspective, **only 69 per cent of meetings will be delivered with interpretation.** Furthermore, several secretaries identified qualitative impacts due to the problematic consensus building, as a result of limitations in virtual meetings, including different times zone and reduced availability of duration of sessions.

18. Furthermore, in order to ensure this level of serviced meetings with interpretation, Division staff were re-deployed to support the technical moderation of the meetings by UNOG. **Overall, 28 per cent of meetings with interpretation in 2021 are expected to be technically moderated by the Division's staff, despite the fact that this requirement was enacted only in the final third (September – December) of 2021.** It is not clear at the time of preparing this note if the requirement will continue throughout 2022, however it is a requirement for meetings in the first quarter of 2022.

<sup>1</sup> Information correct at the time of preparation of this table; subject to further changes due to the fluid situation.

Table 1  
Impacts of COVID-19 and the liquidity crisis on meetings of Working Parties

<i>Intergovernmental body</i>	<i>2021 planned (a)</i>	<i>2021 actual (b) (est)</i>	<i>2021 actual with interpretation (c)*</i>	<i>2021 actual without interpretation (d)*</i>	<i>% Implementation (e)=(b)/(a)</i>	<i>% Implementation with interpretation (f)=(c)/(a)</i>	<i>Meetings with interpretation with STD moderators (g)</i>	<i>Share of STD moderated meetings (h)=(g)/(c)</i>
<b>Substantive services for meetings</b> (number of three-hour meetings, per entity/theme)	<b>364</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>105%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>4. The Inland Transport Committee</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>106%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>28%</b>
a. Inland Transport Committee and Bureau	16	17	11	6	<b>106%</b>	<b>69%</b>	4	<b>36%</b>
b. World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations	111	115	39	76	<b>104%</b>	<b>35%</b>	8	<b>21%</b>
c. Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs	8	8	7	1	<b>100%</b>	<b>88%</b>	7	<b>100%</b>
d. Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods	68	52	34	18	<b>76%</b>	<b>50%</b>	7	<b>21%</b>
e. Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics and subsidiary groups of experts	22	20	14	6	<b>91%</b>	<b>64%</b>	6	<b>43%</b>
f. Working Party on Transport Statistics	6	6	2	3	<b>100%</b>	<b>33%</b>		<b>0%</b>
g. Working Party on Road Transport and subsidiary groups of experts	6	12	11	1	<b>200%</b>	<b>183%</b>	4	<b>36%</b>
h. Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety and subsidiary groups of experts	14	24	17	7	<b>171%</b>	<b>121%</b>	2	<b>12%</b>
i. Working Party on Rail Transport and subsidiary groups of experts	6	26	26		<b>433%</b>	<b>433%</b>	10	<b>38%</b>
j. Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics	6	14	6		<b>233%</b>	<b>100%</b>	6	<b>100%</b>
k. Working Party on Inland Water Transport	18	14	14	4	<b>78%</b>	<b>78%</b>	6	<b>43%</b>
l. Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport and subsidiary groups of experts	46	38	32	6	<b>83%</b>	<b>70%</b>		<b>0%</b>
<b>5. The Economic and Social Council</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26%</b>
a. Committee of Experts on the	0	0	0					

<i>Intergovernmental body</i>	<i>2021 planned</i> (a)	<i>2021 actual</i> (b) (est)	<i>2021 actual with interpretation</i> (c)*	<i>2021 actual without interpretation</i> (d)*	<i>% Implementation with interpretation</i> (e)=(b)/(a)	<i>% Implementation with interpretation</i> (f)=(c)/(a)	<i>Meetings with interpretation with STD moderators</i> (g)	<i>Share of STD moderated meetings</i> (h)=(g)/(c)
Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals								
b. Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods	25	25	25		100%	100%	9	36%
c. Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals	10	10	10		100%	100%		0%
<b>6. The High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>100%</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

## 2. Impacts on meetings of Teams of Specialists (Groups of Experts)

19. The delivery of meetings of Groups of Experts is treated separately in this document, due to the finite mandates of these bodies. Table 2 summarizes the known implementation on their planned meetings in 2021, as reflected in Annex III of the 2021 Programme of Work of the Transport subprogramme. According to table 2, not less than 85 per cent of planned meetings are expected to be delivered in 2021 with full interpretation. By contrast, in 2020, less than 30 per cent of meetings planned under the workplans of the Groups of Experts were implemented.

20. To ensure this level of implementation however, Division staff were re-deployed in order to support the technical moderation of the meetings by UNOG. Overall, 30 per cent of meetings of Groups of Experts with interpretation are expected to be technically moderated by the Division's staff, despite the fact that this requirement was enacted only in the final third (September-December) of 2021.

Table 2

### Impacts of COVID-19 and the liquidity crisis on meetings of Groups of Experts

<i>Group of Experts meetings</i> (ECE/TRANS/2021/8)	<i>2021 planned</i> (a)	<i>2021 actual</i> (b)	<i>With interpretation</i> (c)*	<i>Without interpretation</i> (d)*	<i>Per cent implemented</i> (e)=(b)/(a)	<i>Per cent implemented With interpretation</i> (f)=(c)/(a)	<i>Meetings with interpretation with STD moderators</i> (g)	<i>Share of STD moderated meetings</i> (h)=(g)/(c)
<b>Group of Experts on URL</b>	6	6	6	0	100%	100%	0	0%
<b>Group of Experts on PIRRS</b>	12	6	4	0	50%	33%	4	100%
<b>Group of Experts on International Rail Passenger Hubs</b>	12	9	9	0	75%	75%	6	67%
<b>Group of Experts on AETR</b>	6	6	6	0	100%	100%	2	33%

Group of Experts meetings (ECE/TRANS/2021/8)	2021 planned (a)	2021 actual (b)	With interpretation (c)*	Without interpretation (d)*	Per cent implemented (e)=(b)/(a)	Per cent implemented With interpretation (f)=(c)/(a)	Meetings with interpretation with STD moderators (g)	Share of STD moderated meetings (h)=(g)/(c)
<b>Group of Experts on Road Signs and Signals</b>	3	3	3	0	100%	100%	0	0%
<b>Group of Experts on a new legal instrument on automated vehicles in traffic</b>	6	4	4	0	67%	67%	2	50%
<b>Group of Experts on Benchmarking Transport Infrastructure Construction Costs</b>	8	6	6	0	75%	75%	3	50%
<b>Group of Experts on Assessment of Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation for Inland Transport</b>	8	8	2	6	100%	25%	0	0%
<b>Group of Experts on Conceptual and Technical Aspects of Computerization of the TIR Procedure</b>	6	22	17	5	367%	283%	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>104%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>30%</b>

## B. Impacts on documents

21. At the time of writing of this note, the combined effects of COVID-19 and the liquidity crisis on the delivery of documents is expected to be significantly less than in 2020. It is expected that 93 per cent of planned documents will be implemented in 2021 (see table 3). By contrast, the implementation level in 2020 was less than 70 per cent.

Table 3

### Impacts of COVID-19 and the liquidity crisis on transport subprogramme documents

	2021 planned (a)	2021 actual (est.)(b)	% implementation (b)/(a)
<b>A. Facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert bodies</b>			
<b>Parliamentary documentation</b> (number of documents, per entity/theme)	<b>1264</b>	<b>1173</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>1. The Inland Transport Committee</b>	<b>1071</b>	<b>1069</b>	<b>100%</b>
a. Inland Transport Committee and Bureau	31	31	<b>100%</b>
b. World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations	580	566	<b>98%</b>
c. Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs	33	30	<b>91%</b>
d. Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods	214	179	<b>84%</b>
e. Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics and subsidiary groups of experts	20	25	<b>125%</b>
f. Working Party on Transport Statistics	14	14	<b>100%</b>
g. Working Party on Road Transport and subsidiary groups of experts	10	16	<b>160%</b>
h. Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety and subsidiary groups of experts	16	12	<b>75%</b>

	<i>2021 planned (a)</i>	<i>2021 actual (est.)(b)</i>	<i>% implementation (b)/(a)</i>
i. Working Party on Rail Transport and subsidiary groups of experts	26	30	<b>115%</b>
j. Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics	15	15	<b>100%</b>
k. Working Party on Inland Water Transport	41	50	<b>122%</b>
l. Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport and subsidiary groups of experts	71	104	<b>146%</b>
<b>2. The Economic and Social Council</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>53%</b>
a. Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals	1	1	<b>100%</b>
b. Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods	157	78	<b>50%</b>
c. Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals	32	22	<b>69%</b>
<b>3. The High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>