

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

123rd meeting

Geneva, 8 July 2022

Item 5

Informal Document No. 2022/19

**Information update:
Preparations for the seventieth session
of the Economic Commission for Europe**

Note by the Secretariat

Information update on the status of preparations of the seventieth session of the Commission

Background

During its 119th meeting, held on 16 December 2021, the Executive Committee decided ([Informal document 2021/32](#)), *inter alia*, to:

- i. designate “Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the UNECE region” as cross-cutting theme for the high-level segment of the 70th Commission session.
- ii. invite relevant subsidiary bodies of UNECE and the secretariat to consider how they may contribute, as appropriate, to the cross-cutting theme of the 70th Commission session within their respective mandates, ongoing work and existing resources, and while making full use of the existing nexuses.
- iii. request the secretariat to prepare a background document on the cross-cutting theme, detailing a number of relevant UNECE activities and their impact, for discussion at the 70th Commission session.
- iv. ahead of the 70th Commission session, requests the secretariat to assess, based on feedback from subsidiary bodies, their experience with the follow-up to the last theme and preparation for the next theme simultaneously. This should allow the EXCOM to assess the impact of designating and following up on a cross-cutting theme on the work of the relevant subsidiary bodies.

With this note, the secretariat is pleased to provide EXCOM with an update on the preparations for the seventieth Commission session. It contains information on

- a) meeting planning arrangements for the 2023 session with a roadmap that proposes a timeline for further action;
- b) the engagement of the subsidiary architecture on substantive programme planning for the new high-level theme; and
- c) a further update on progress made on the implementation of the decisions taken at the 69th session.

EXCOM is invited to consider a draft decision to facilitate the next steps in the preparatory process.

A. Meeting planning arrangements

1. Meeting date: The Chair of the Commission, after consultation with the Bureau and the Executive Secretary, wishes to propose **18 - 19 April 2023** as the dates for the 70th session of the Economic Commission for Europe, to be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

2. Meeting format: At its 117th meeting, EXCOM requested the secretariat, *inter alia*, “to study the advantages and disadvantages of remote participation at the 69th Commission session, including through hybrid meetings formats, the contribution of pre-recorded messages and a webcast

functionality” ([Informal Document 2021/16/Rev.1](#)). The review of the 69th session ([Informal document 2021/15](#)) highlighted that different remote meeting formats (including prerecorded messages, hybrid modality, webcasting/UNTV) provided additional opportunities to engage with senior level representatives from capital and open the proceedings to a broader off-site audience. The level of participation was significantly more senior, and the session reached a much larger audience than past in-room only sessions. In view of this positive impact, and in light of a possible continuation or resumption of travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, EXCOM may wish to consider a hybrid format for the 70th session of the Commission, that could be arranged subject to available extrabudgetary funding.

3. Documentation: The secretariat will prepare the following documents for the consideration of the Commission:

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|------------|--|
| E/ECE/1502 | Provisional Agenda |
| E/ECE/1503 | Biennial Report |
| E/ECE/1504 | N.N. (Background document on the cross-cutting theme, detailing relevant trends, challenges and opportunities in the region) |
| E/ECE/1505 | N.N. (Background document on UNECE activities/tools related to the HL theme) |
| E/ECE/1506 | High-level statement |
| E/ECE/1507 | Progress report on the work of the Economic Commission for Europe related to the high-level theme of the sixty-ninth session |
| E/ECE/1508 | Report on activities of the Executive Committee |
| E/ECE/1509 | Other issues calling for decisions by the Commission |

EXCOM approval of the provisional agenda and draft decisions for onward transmission to the Commission is anticipated in the coming EXCOM meetings, following informal consultations among the membership.

- to facilitate the timely issuance of invitations by the secretariat, EXCOM may wish to approve the provisional agenda the 125th meeting, tentatively scheduled for 30 November 2022.
- to facilitate processing and translation of parliamentary documentation in line with related servicing timelines, decisions related to the remaining documents should be taken at the latest at the 126th EXCOM meeting, tentatively scheduled for 13 January 2023.

(Further scheduling details are contained in the roadmap below.)

4. Side events: Building on the successful practice of recent sessions, it is proposed that the Commission session be preceded by a series of informal thematic side events to facilitate information sharing, capacity building and progress reporting. Side events could be designed to

- update on progress and achievements, both related to the previous and the upcoming high-level themes of the Commission,
- showcase relevant UNECE tools and instruments,
- launch new initiatives, etc.

Depending on overall interest and the preference of member States, such events may be scheduled

- a) as a one day programme on 17 April 2022 preceding the formal session (as was done for the 68th Commission session with the [Day of Cities](#) and the 69th

Commission session with [Cyber Monday](#)), or

- b) as a series of activities, held over a period of time in the lead up to the Commission session. (e.g. designated week or over the course of the month preceding the session, to allow for the wealth of topics to be addressed more comprehensively)

Given the limited availability of meeting rooms due to the ongoing renovation of the Palais des Nations, it is envisaged that such a side event programme would be held virtually only. Arrangements, including technical support and remote simultaneous interpretation, would be made as per available extrabudgetary funding.

5. Extrabudgetary project to support supplementary services and programme activities:

Subject to the interest expressed by delegations, the secretariat intends to present an extrabudgetary project to support Commission-related activities and support services for consideration by the 125th meeting of EXCOM on 30 November 2022.

- Member States wishing to host/contribute to a side event and/or contributing extrabudgetary resources to related activities are invited to contact the secretariat to explore further options. For financial contributions, expressions of interest are welcome by 20 October 2022 in order to permit the timely preparation of the project proposal for consideration by EXCOM.

6. Informal consultations:

The secretariat stands ready to convene informal consultations on the 2023 Commission session starting in early October 2022.

- Delegations are invited to submit initial inputs (for programme/agenda planning; elements of the draft high level statement; issues for draft decisions or logistics related to the session or the side events) by 15 September to inform the preparation of planning materials/zero drafts for further joint consideration.

7. EXCOM draft decision to facilitate further planning:

A draft decision pertaining to the above issues is provided under section D for the consideration of EXCOM.

B. Substantive programme planning for the cross-cutting theme of the 70th session

1. Subsidiary bodies and the secretariat

Further to the invitation by EXCOM for relevant subsidiary bodies to consider how they may contribute to the cross-cutting theme of the seventieth session of the Commission, in December 2021, the Executive Secretary of UNECE reached out to the Chairpersons of the sectoral committees and subsidiary bodies reporting directly to EXCOM, namely the

- Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP)
- Inland Transport Committee (ITC)
- Conference of European Statisticians (CES)
- Committee for Sustainable Energy (CSE)
- Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards (SCTCS)
- Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and the Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP)

- Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI)
- Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management (CUDHLM)
- Standing Working Group on Aging (SWGA)
- United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/ CEFACT).

The Bureaux of the above bodies and their subsidiaries, supported by their respective secretariats, have taken note of the cross-cutting theme and are considering possible contributions. Preliminary suggestions were made for possible future focus areas of work that - within existing mandates of the subprogrammes - may yield positive results in support of digital and green transformations in the UNECE region. These ideas will be further explored in the plenary sessions of the respective entities, as appropriate. The Secretary of the Commission is in discussions with the secretaries of the subsidiary bodies to facilitate coordination across the intergovernmental architecture.

As a normative and standard-setting body, UNECE plays a pivotal role in developing e-standards and conventions that enable the digital transformation of its Member States. In the lead up to the Commission session, the secretariat has initiated a review process to take stock of its existing capacity and explore future opportunities, both for the internal digital transformation as well as the development of additional digital tools or the refreshment of existing ones in support of its membership.

The rich contributions of the subsidiary bodies and the secretariat will be included the planning progress leading up to the Commission session, including in the formulation of draft decisions and elements of a high-level statement that will be presented to EXCOM for consideration. Relevant materials will also be reflected in the background documentation on the cross-cutting theme that EXCOM requested.

Some examples of discussions that have taken place so far at the sectoral committee level:

- The February 2021 session of the **ITC** “requested the Secretariat, in close cooperation with the Bureau, to prepare for the next Committee session an overview of current activities in the field of information and computerization technologies and intelligent transport systems carried out by Working Parties of ITC and link it, where appropriate, with the 70th ECE central theme in 2023”. The Ministerial Resolution adopted at the session calls for accelerating the further development and updating of the ITC by fully integrating and promoting technological changes in all inland transport modes, especially in relation to intelligent transport systems, autonomous and connected vehicles, automated driving and digitalization of transport documents and procedures in international transport.
- The May 2022 session of the **CICPPP** held an international policy dialogue on using the potential of procurement to enhance innovation for sustainable development with a link to digital and green transformations in the UNECE region. The Committee’s Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2022-2023 notes that work on standards and guides on green and sustainable PPP procurement and on digital transformation in PPPs for sustainable development will be decided by the Working Party on PPPs at its next session in December 2022 based on proposals by its Bureau and on existing resources. The Committee also asked the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies to start work on developing policy for and building the capacities of the UNECE Member States to strengthen innovation ecosystems that can harness disruptive and transformative innovation

and digital technologies for sustainable development.

- **UN/CEFACT** has identified as priority areas developing and diversifying digital agricultural standards in the UNECE region and promoting more gender sensitive trade facilitation policies and trade facilitation bodies. The work streams on dematerialization, agriculture, traceability, green and sustainable use of resources and cooperation with other organizations are all geared towards digital and green transformations in the UNECE region.
- **COFFI** has identified supporting sustainable forest management and forest landscape restoration, promoting urban forestry as cost-effective nature-based solutions and advancing the sustainable production and consumption of wood products as work streams that respond to the major trends affecting forests in the UNECE region.
- **SWGA**, having focused in 2021 on “Ageing in the digital era”, has identified the need to enhance digital skills and literacy, the need to ensure access to services that increasingly move online, and the protection of human rights, as the three main related policy challenges. Policy briefs and seminars released in 2021 provided best practice examples to address these challenges. Follow-up in 2022 includes the planned launch of an interactive online training course on mainstreaming ageing, and discussions on digital literacy and inclusion at the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in June 2022.
- **CEP**, at its special session in May 2022 dedicated to the preparations for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference to be held in Nicosia in October 2022, considered a catalogue of actions/measures on possible voluntary actions/commitments under the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy, to serve as inspiration to countries and organizations interested to submit voluntary commitments related to the two themes of the Nicosia Conference, namely “greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”; and “applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism”.

(The above list is illustrative only – updates on the sessions of sectoral committees and other subsidiary bodies will be reflected in the progress report that will be presented to the 70th session.)

2. Member States

A consultative process on further programme planning for the Commission will commence in early October 2022 with informal consultations. In the lead up to these discussions, delegations may already wish to explore the following options for active engagement:

➤ **Senior representation at the session**

Building on the strong senior level representation at the 69th session, member States are encouraged to consider Ministerial level representation at the upcoming Commission session, mindful of the strategic discussions that are expected to take place at the Commission to guide the future direction of the organization.

Following the deliberations at the 123rd EXCOM meeting, the secretariat will issue a save the date invitation to all member States through the representations in Geneva in July 2022 to facilitate early engagement with capitals. A more detailed invitation will follow in early December 2022, providing the provisional agenda (tentatively scheduled for EXCOM consideration at its November meeting).

➤ **Voluntary commitment**

Member States may wish to consider making a voluntary commitment to accelerate progress re the high-level theme.

Responding to the feedback from the previous Commission session that encouraged the use of existing mechanisms with sufficient lead time and well-established processes, it is proposed to channel such voluntary commitments through the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E). This mechanism was adopted at the 8th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi, Georgia, in 2016. It has a broad scope to accommodate a wide range of actions and measures submitted as voluntary commitments and is fully aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It uses a standardized procedure for formulating/submitting commitments and a well-defined way to monitor and report on their implementation.

The “Nicosia call” for new BIG-E commitments has just been issued on the occasion of the upcoming Ninth Efe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, Cyprus, 5-7 October 2022). Member States may wish to coordinate the processes of making voluntary commitments related to the high-level theme of the ECE-70 and to the Efe-9. The mechanism remains open beyond the Nicosia meeting, should delegations wish to make commitments closer to the Commission date and based on further consultations on the high-level theme.

More information on the Batumi Initiative is available at <https://unece.org/big-e>. For questions, please contact efe@un.org and/or Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (zaal.lomtadze@un.org).

➤ **Side events:**

Interested delegations are encouraged to contact the secretariat to discuss proposals for side events, related to the high-level themes of the 69th and the 70th sessions (see Section A.4 above).

➤ **Financial contributions:**

Delegations are encouraged to consider making a financial contribution to the 70th Commission session, in support of the substantive programme, side events, facilitation of a hybrid meeting format, including remote simultaneous interpretation. (See section A.5 above.)

C. Progress on decisions taken at the sixty-ninth Commission session

1. Subsidiary bodies and the secretariat

The 120th meeting of EXCOM in January 2022 considered a status report on the implementation of decisions taken by the 69th session of the Commission related to the cross-cutting theme of the high-level segment ([informal document 2022/4](#)).

Subsequently, in their periodic reporting, Chairs of Sectoral Committees to EXCOM have included updates on work undertaken in relation to decisions of the 69th session. These include:

| Entity | Document |
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| Committee on Environmental Policy | Report by the Chair Informal document 2022/9 , see esp. para: 2, |

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|--|---|
| | 4, 19, 22, 31, 35, 36, 45, 49, 55, 59-62, 64-66, 65, 72-73, 75, 81 |
| Inland Transport Committee | Report by the Chair Informal Document 2021/9 , see esp. para 50-51 Informal document 2022/14 , see esp. paras 56-57 |
| Conference of European Statisticians | Report by the Chair Informal document 2022/1 , see esp. para 13, 50, 56-57, 74, 80, 83-84, 87 |
| Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP) | Report by the Chair Informal document 2021/23 , see esp. para 7, 11, 17, 24, 28, 33, 36, 41, 45, 51-54 |
| Committee on Sustainable Energy | Report by the Chair Informal document 2021/30 , see esp. para 7, 9, 12, 13, 20, 25, 27, 29, 30, 35- 37, 39, 40, 42 |
| Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards | Report by the Chair Informal document 2021/24 , see esp. para 10, 11, 16, 17, 24-26 |
| United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). | Report by the Chair, Informal Document 2021/14 , see esp. paras: 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24, 29 |
| Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry | Report by the Chair Informal document 2022/2 , see esp. pages 2-4, 6-8, 9, 11, 13,14, 16, 18 |
| Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management | Report by the Chair Informal document 2021/31 , see esp. para 28-32, 80-81 |

Further information on relevant activities is regularly provided on a dedicated section on the UNECE website under the heading “Circular Economy” (<https://unece.org/circular-economy-0>).

2. Member States

In follow up to the voluntary commitments made by member States related to the cross-cutting theme of the 69th session, delegations are invited to inform of their experiences and progress made in the lead up to the next session. Further arrangements will be discussed at the informal consultations.

3. Assessment: Engagement on two cross-cutting themes

Further to the decision from EXCOM, requesting the secretariat “to assess, based on feedback from

subsidiary bodies, their experience with the follow-up to the last theme and preparation for the next theme simultaneously”, the secretariat will launch a consultation with the subsidiary bodies in the fourth quarter of 2022 and provide a note to EXCOM126, to be held in January 2023 on the issue. This should allow the EXCOM to assess the impact of designating and following up on a cross-cutting theme on the work of the relevant subsidiary bodies.

D. Roadmap for next steps

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|----------------------------------|--|
| 8 July 2022 (EXCOM 123) | Draft decision on date and format of the 70 th Commission and related planning arrangements |
| Mid-July 2022 | Save-the-date invitations sent out to capitals |
| July – mid September 2022 | <p>Call for proposals Opportunity for delegations to submit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - draft inputs to draft agenda, - issues for draft decisions and - elements for high-level statement - Expressions of interest for side events in the lead up to the Commission - Pledges for contributions of extrabudgetary funding in support of supplementary activities related to the 70th Commission. <p>Submission deadline: 15 September (to inform oral update to EXCOM 124 and preparation of first round of informals)</p> |
| 30 September 2022 (EXCOM 124) | |
| October - November 2022 | Informal consultations on the draft agenda, high-level statement and decisions, programme planning and side events (secretariat will provide zero draft agenda) |
| Fourth quarter 2022 | Gathering of feedback from subsidiary bodies re the designation of cross-cutting theme and its impact on the subsidiary architecture. |

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| | (Findings to be presented in note by the secretariat for EXCOM 126) |
| 20 October 2022 | Deadline for extrabudgetary contribution pledges from member States |
| 30 November 2022 (EXCOM 125) | EXCOM expected to approve: - agenda - extrabudgetary project for the session - any decision items that are already ready for onward submission |
| Early December 2022 | Mailing of invitation letters |
| 13 January 2023 (EXCOM 126) | EXCOM expected to approve remaining draft decisions and high-level statement for onward submission Assessment of cross-cutting theme |
| Early March 2023 (date TBC) (EXCOM 127) | Last meeting before the Commission (final opportunity for approval of draft high-level statement for onward submission) EXCOM to consider the assessment of the experience of subsidiary committees with the follow-up to the last theme and preparation for the next theme simultaneously |
| 18 – 19 April 2023 70 th Commission | <i>(date subject to approval by EXCOM)</i> |

E. Draft decision for consideration by the Executive Committee at its 123rd session:

The Executive Committee

- Takes notes with appreciation of the information update on the preparation of the seventieth session of the Commission, presented by the secretariat in informal document 2022/19, and looks forward to receiving further periodic update on related issues;
- pursuant to Rules 1 and 2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Commission, decides to hold the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe on 18-19 April 2023 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland;
- subject to available resources, decides to hold the session in hybrid format and encourages delegations to consider providing the necessary extrabudgetary funds for related support services;

- **requests the secretariat to convene informal consultations starting in early October 2022 to continue joint preparations of the 70th session, in line with the roadmap and proposed timeline presented by the secretariat in informal document 2022/19.**
 - **encourages the membership of UNECE to explore how they may contribute to the high-level theme of the seventieth session, “Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the UNECE region” to inform further programme planning.**
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