

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

128th meeting

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Informal Document No. 2023/21

**Evaluation of UNECE subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration,  
and subprogramme 6, Trade**

(for information)

**Note to UNECE member States**

1. The Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) of the General Assembly (GA) selected for consideration at its 63<sup>rd</sup> session in 2023 an evaluation of UNECE subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade ([A/77/16](#), para. 16)
2. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted this evaluation, under the framework of GA resolutions [48/218B](#), [54/244](#), and [59/272](#), as well as [ST/SGB/2018/3](#), the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. OIOS last evaluated UNECE in 2015.
3. The evaluation covered the work of subprogrammes 4 and 6 for the period 2018-2021. The evaluation utilized a mixed-method approach including, inter alia, key informant interviews with UNECE staff, Member States, national, regional, and global stakeholders; surveys; 4 country-level case study; as well as direct observation of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP) and the sixth UNECE International Public-Private Partnerships Forum in Barcelona, Spain.
4. The OIOS evaluation report ([E/AC.51/2023/5](#)) is presented to the Executive Committee for information, to be followed by its introduction at the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the CPC, under Agenda item 3 (b) Evaluation ([E/AC.51/2023/1](#)).
5. The evaluation found that the work of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) was considered aligned with its mandate. The Division largely responded to specific Member States' requests. It had found its niche in a crowded space of trade and economic cooperation, by leveraging its comparative advantages towards strengthening Member States' economic cooperation and integration.
6. OIOS report noted inter alia that ECTD:
  - a. *Provides a regional platform* for international policy dialogue and exchange of best practices among countries in the UNECE region, which was considered the Division's top comparative advantage.
  - b. Acts as a *convening "power"*, bringing governments together to build consensus on frameworks, norms, standards and agreements on economic cooperation and trade, with numerous instances of norms and standards being adopted into national policies or legislations.
  - c. Is seen as a reliable *source of technical assistance* to specific needs of the Member States, and capacity-building services on topics related to economic cooperation and trade.
7. However, two factors impacted on relevance: ECTD functions and workstreams were still being clarified in consideration of the diversity of the UNECE membership; and there was a lack of overall strategy and synergetic approach for subprogrammes 4 and 6.
8. The Division's work on facilitating norms and standards setting was largely effective although the visibility and effectiveness of this work varied across workstreams. Whereas ECTD provided Member States with key thematic policy options, the extent of adoption and implementation of tools, standards and norms by Member States was mixed, and challenges were observed in ECTD's monitoring of outcomes.
9. Each of the ECTD subprogrammes were mandated to service their own set of intergovernmental bodies, which inherently affected ECTD internal coherence. Nexus areas initiated by UNECE in 2018 to contribute to the 2030 Agenda provided opportunities for enhanced coordination within the Commission. However, while there was evidence that ECTD cooperated with other UNECE Divisions, there was limited documentation of joint planning.

10. Also, while ECTD partnerships at Headquarters level were coherently managed and coordinated, the same was not true of its activities in programme countries. Additionally, the non-resident status of UNECE presence in programme countries created specific challenges for ECTD ability to effectively collaborate with UNCT and other actors.
11. ECTD ensured the sustainability of some key normative products. However, sustainability was not fully ensured for all workstreams. Specifically, the war in Ukraine and related resource implications posed significant risks to ECTD's ability to respond to Member States' requests originating from Central Asia.
12. The Division integrated gender and environment considerations in its programming; however, the inclusion of human rights and disability considerations was weak. Faced with Covid-19 pandemic, ECTD maintained its level of assistance to Member States and provided them with policy options on post-pandemic recovery.
13. OIOS made four recommendations to ECTD:
  - a. Establish technical cooperation request tracking mechanism;
  - b. Develop a division-wise integrated strategic plan;
  - c. Develop Divisional action plans to operationalize UNECE strategies on resource mobilization, partnerships, and technical cooperation; and
  - d. Ensure integration of gender, environment, disability inclusion, and human rights considerations in its various workstreams.
14. The four recommendations were accepted by UNECE; the full management response is available at the end of the report. The implementation is scheduled until 2025, as outlined in the Action Plan annexed.
15. In line with UNECE Evaluation Policy, the Inception report, the Evaluation report, and the Management response will be available in [Open UNECE](#). Future Progress reports reflecting the implementation of the recommendations will be uploaded twice a year.

**Annex: Recommendation Action Plan**

**Evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogrammes 4 and 6**

**IED-23-001**

<b>IED Recommendation</b>	<b>Anticipated Actions</b>	<b>Responsible Entity(ies)</b>	<b>Target date for completion</b>
<p><b>Recommendation 1 (results A and C)</b></p> <p>In addition to the existing mechanisms, ECTD should develop a comprehensive framework to document, track and report on Member States’ requests for technical assistance to help the Division inform its prioritization of available resources, identify relevant potential outcomes, and assist in efficient project planning.</p> <p><i>Indicators of achievement:</i> A comprehensive framework for tracking Member States’ requests for technical cooperation discussed, developed and issued by UNECE</p>	<p>A comprehensive framework will be designed at ECE level to track Member States’ requests for technical cooperation and enable senior leadership to prioritize and plan accordingly. PMSSD will develop the tool in 2023 for implementation by divisions in 2024.</p>	<p>Director PMSDD for development in 2023</p> <p>Deputy Executive Secretary for deployment in 2024</p>	<p>December 2024</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2 (results A and C)</b></p> <p>ECTD should engage its staff, PMU and relevant stakeholders to undertake an integrated strategic planning process to develop a division-wide strategic plan to strengthen interlinkages between its two subprogrammes and identify at the minimum:</p> <p>a. the overall divisional vision and organizational objectives, which should be framed around its mandate, strategic framework, the SDGs and the new nexus areas, including Commission-wide topics;</p>	<p>ECTD Director will lead consultations with internal and external stakeholders to develop a division-wide strategic plan strengthening interlinkages between its two subprogrammes, identifying priority themes, potential risks and mitigation measures, following an RBM framework.</p>	<p>ECTD Director</p>	<p>December 2025</p>

IED Recommendation	Anticipated Actions	Responsible Entity(ies)	Target date for completion
<p>b. the most relevant topics in the context of its mandate, including priority themes vis-à-vis the geographic sub-regions and/or Member States' priorities and need of support, and identify related potential risks and mitigation measures;</p> <p>c. a full results-based framework with clear performance indicators and an articulation of the roles of each organizational unit under ECTD, which includes how each unit will work together with others towards shared objectives within ECTD and outside across other ECE Divisions.</p> <p>d. an outreach strategy on how the Division will communicate with sister agencies including the RC system to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of ECTD mandates, roles and comparative advantages in providing the required assistance.</p> <p><i>Indicator of achievement:</i> A common strategy and strategic plan adopted and implemented.</p>	<p>The strategic plan will also include an outreach strategy.</p> <p>The strategic plan will be presented for approval to the two sectoral committees and to the UN/CEFACT by December 2025, for translation in the 2026 Proposed programme budget.</p>		
<p><b>Recommendation 3 (results A, C, D, E, F and G)</b></p> <p>Based on the common Division strategy (recommendation 2), ECTD should develop Division-specific actions plans to respectively operationalize existing UNECE Strategies on Resource Mobilization, Partnerships and Technical Cooperation, upon adoption, to plug identified risks and strengthen partnerships, especially at programme country level, with implementation deadlines, roles and responsibilities, and a monitoring and reporting framework.</p>	<p>Deriving from the division-wide strategic plan, ECTD Director will develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resource Mobilization action plan (covering XB);</li> <li>- RPTC workplan (covering Sect.23 RPTC);</li> <li>- Proposals for UNDA projects;</li> </ul>	ECTD Director	December 2025

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<p><i>Indicator of achievement:</i> Division-specific action plans issued to operationalize the three UNECE Strategies.</p>	<p>Upon finalization of the Partnership strategy in 2023, ECTD will develop required inputs aligned with the division-wide strategic plan.</p>		
<p><b>Recommendation 4 (result G)</b></p> <p>ECTD should ensure equal integration of cross-cutting issues (gender, human rights, disability inclusion and environment) into its various workstreams, by establishing respective mechanisms and tools within the Division derived from a mainstreaming strategy, which should include the strengthening of partnerships with relevant UN agencies, national partners and think-tanks with subject-matter expertise.</p> <p><i>Indicators of achievement:</i> Common strategy for ECTD on integration of cross-cutting issues (gender, human rights, disability inclusion and environment)</p>	<p>A common strategy on integration of cross-cutting issues (gender, human rights, disability inclusion and environment) will be fully integrated into the division-wide strategic plan (Rec. 2) and subsequently operationalized in normative and technical cooperation activities.</p>	<p>ECTD Director</p>	<p>December 2025</p>