

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Review of UNECE's role to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the UN development system reform (2017-2023)

I. Evaluation objective and purpose

The objective of the evaluation is to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of ECE in becoming fit for purpose to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the context of the UN development system reform during the period 2017-2023.

As per ECE Evaluation policy, the evaluation aims to (i) Promote organizational learning, by identifying lessons learned and best practices; (ii) Contribute to improvement of programme performance; (iii) Ensure accountability of the Secretariat to member States, senior leadership, donors, and beneficiaries.

II. Evaluation scope

The evaluation scope will encompass an assessment of the support provided by ECE to its member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through work at the regional and country levels and whether such support has improved through the measures taken in the framework of the UN development system (UNDS) repositioning from 2017 to 2023.

The evaluation will review how ECE has reorganized its way of working following the UNDS repositioning, whether it is more fit for purpose to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and how its stakeholders, in particular member States, Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) in the UN programme countries in the ECE region¹ assess the support provided by ECE. The lessons and recommendations from this evaluation will help ECE understand whether any further measure is needed to improve its support to member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The evaluation should take into account the findings from recent evaluations of the support provided by ECE or by all UN Secretariat entities to the SDGs² and avoid duplication of work.

III. Background

The 2015 United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development resulted in the General Assembly adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)³, comprised of 17 inter-related, integrated and indivisible sustainable development goals (SDGs). While the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are owned by Member States, the UN Secretariat has an important role to play in supporting Member States towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the goals.

Recognizing that the 2030 Agenda implementation would require bold changes to the UNDS, in 2017, in his first report on the repositioning of the United Nations development system⁴, the Secretary-General put forward options for improving the accountability and overall coordination of the UNDS entities,

¹ See UNECE Technical Cooperation Strategy paragraph 5: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Item%207_ECE_EX_2021_11%20TC%20Strategy.pdf

² 2019 OIOS Evaluation of UN entities' preparedness, policy coherence, and early results associated with their support to SDGs; 2021 OIOS Audit of mainstreaming of SDGs and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the ECE; and 2023 OIOS Thematic evaluation of UN Secretariat support to the SDGs.

³ Resolution A/RES/70/1 "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"

⁴ A/72/124-E/2018/3

which were further defined in 2019 in the report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system⁵ that among others identified proposed measures to make the United Nations regional response fit for purpose (paragraphs 96-118).

At UNECE level, the Executive Committee (EXCOM) was regularly briefed and consulted on the UNDS repositioning⁶, including at its 107th meeting on 14 October 2019, when EXCOM was consulted⁷ on the Repositioning of the United Nations development system: Region-by-region review, as called for in E/RES/2019/15 and in May 2020, when the Secretariat provided the most recent update on Repositioning of the UNDS at the regional level – Implementation and Next Steps in Europe and Central Asia⁸. The ECE Commission (69th session) was also informed on UNDS repositioning through the report on activities of the Executive Committee⁹.

Subsequently, at the 119th meeting of 16 December 2021, EXCOM approved the UNECE Evaluation Workplan for 2023, which included one programme-level evaluation entitled “Review of UNECE’s role to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the UN development system reform (2017-2023)”. The General Assembly further approved the evaluation theme via approval of the Programme Budget for 2023 (A/77/6 (Sect.20) para. 20.19) in its resolution 77/264.

IV. Key evaluation questions

The evaluation will seek to answer questions related to relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of ECE role to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the UNDS reform.

Relevance

1. To what extent has the implementation of the UNDS reform allowed ECE to better position itself both strategically and operationally to support its member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
2. To what extent are ECE instruments and tools known and applicable to member States and United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? Were such instruments and tools adjusted following the UNDS repositioning?
3. In which areas would ECE be best placed to support member States in implementing the outcome of the SDG Summit?
4. To what extent are gender, human rights, climate change, disability and other cross-cutting perspectives mainstreamed in ECE processes supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? How could this be improved?

Coherence

5. To what extent are ECE plans and activities at the regional level coherent and harmonized with those of other UNDS entities through the Regional Collaborative Platform and Issue-Based Coalitions? Has the coherence improved since 2017?
6. To what extent are ECE plans and activities at the country level coherent and harmonized with

⁵ A/74/73-E/2019/14

⁶ At its 99th, 100th, 101st, 104th, 105th, 107th, 109th and 110th meetings

⁷ Informal document No. 2019/38 Consultation with member States Repositioning of the United Nations development system: Region-by-region review

⁸ ECE Informal document No. 2020/26

⁹ E/ECE/1499 paragraphs 18-19

those of other UNDS entities? Has the coherence improved since 2017?

Effectiveness

7. How effective has ECE been in tailoring its structure, objectives, strategy and results to the needs of member States with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the country and regional levels in the context of the UNDS reform? What were the challenges?
8. How effective has ECE been in implementing the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR)? What, if anything, has prevented ECE from achieving the desired repositioning results?
9. How effective has ECE been in coordinating its country activities with Resident Coordinators and UNCTs in the UN programme countries in the ECE region? To what extent can the increase in coordination be attributed to the role of ECE Regional Advisers?

Efficiency

10. Since 2017, how have pressures on ECE resources changed and what (if any) consequences has this had for the responsibility of ECE to deliver on its mandate and support member States in line with expectations? How could the use of resources be improved?
11. Were ECE objectives and results as outlined in ECE Programme budgets and referring to UNDS repositioning processes achieved on time and the efforts sustained during the period?

Sustainability

12. What measures were adopted to ensure that the outcomes of ECE technical cooperation can be consistently sustained by the countries?
13. To what extent do member States have ownership and understanding of ECE tools and instruments channelled through multilateral mechanisms to continue applying them?

V. Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with: the ECE Evaluation Policy¹⁰; the Administrative instruction guiding Evaluation in the UN Secretariat¹¹; and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation¹². Human rights and gender equality considerations will be integrated at all stages of the evaluation¹³: (i) in the evaluation scope and questions; (ii) in the methods, tools and data analysis techniques; (iii) in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the final report. The evaluator will explicitly explain how human rights, gender equality, disability, SDGs, and climate change considerations will be taken into account during the evaluation.

The evaluator is required to use a mixed-method approach, including qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis as the basis for a triangulation exercise of all available data to draw conclusions and findings. The evaluator shall conduct online surveys and interview a wide range of diverse stakeholders, including high-level government interlocutors from ECE member States (through ECE EXCOM delegations), government representatives from ECE programme countries, ECE staff, UN Resident Coordinators and representatives of United Nations Country Teams in UN programme countries in the ECE region.

The evaluation should be conducted based on the following mixed methods to triangulate information:

¹⁰ [UNECE Evaluation policy](#)

¹¹ ST/AI/2021/3

¹² [UNEG 2016 Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#)

¹³ In line with UNEG Guidance contained in [Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations](#)

1. A desk review of all relevant documents, including the ECE proposed programme plans and budgets covering the evaluation period; ECE reports to EXCOM and ECOSOC.
2. Online survey of key stakeholders and beneficiaries, including UNECE management and staff at large, member States through EXCOM delegations and UNCTs management in the UN programme countries in the ECE region. The survey will be developed by the consultant on her/his preferred platform.
3. Interviews (by telephone/video): the evaluator shall interview a wide range of diverse stakeholders and beneficiaries, to be identified through discussions between the evaluation manager (PMU) and the evaluation consultant. To ensure representativeness, the evaluator shall speak to a large sample of stakeholders including high-level government interlocutors whom UNECE has worked with and UN senior officials and government representatives from UN programme countries in the ECE region.

The evaluator will further elaborate on the evaluation methodology in the Inception Report that will among others include the survey questions, travel plans and whether any of the UN programme countries in the ECE region will be selected for an in-depth assessment. Based on the above list of evaluation questions, the evaluator will also prepare and include in the inception report an evaluation matrix, linking evaluation questions with assumptions to be assessed, indicators, overview of risks, data sources and data collection tools. The evaluation report will be written in English, will consist of approximately 30 pages and will include an executive summary (max. 2 pages) describing the evaluation methodology, key findings, conclusions and recommendations. The evaluator will also produce an Evaluation Brief, summarizing key evaluation findings, lessons learned and recommendations, including through images and infographics.

VI. Provisional Schedule for the Review¹⁴

| Timeline (2023) | Action |
|------------------------|---|
| February | ToR approved by ECE Executive Secretary |
| March | Evaluator selected by PMU |
| April | Contract signed. Evaluator starts the desk review |
| End-April | Evaluator submits inception report including survey design |
| May | Launch of data gathering: survey distribution and stakeholders interviews |
| June | Evaluator submits draft report to PMU for further distribution to ECE leadership for comments |
| | Final draft report shared with ECE Directors for comments |
| End-June | Evaluator submits the final report and evaluation brief to PMU |
| July-August | Management response is approved by the Executive Secretary |
| 9 October | Evaluation report and ECE management response are submitted to EXCOM for information |

VII. Resources and Management of the evaluation

An independent consultant with experience in sustainable development and UNDS reform will be engaged to conduct the evaluation under the management of the PMU. The P-4 Programme Officer in PMU will manage the consultant and coordinate requests for information from the subprogrammes.

¹⁴ Final timetable to be agreed following engagement of the evaluator. The contract of the evaluator ends after the submission of the final report.

VIII. Intended use / Next steps

The results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future UNECE programme activities, to further improve the way ECE supports its member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The results of the evaluation will be reported to ECE Executive Committee.

Following the issuance of the final report, the Project Manager will develop a Management Response and action plan for addressing the recommendations made by the evaluator. The final evaluation report, the management response and the progress on implementation of recommendations will be publicly available on the UNECE website.

IX. Criteria for evaluators

The evaluator should have:

1. An advanced university degree or equivalent background in evaluation.
2. Specialized training in areas such as evaluation, project management, statistical research and analysis, gender analysis, human rights.
3. Knowledge of and experience in working with intergovernmental processes, 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and UNDS reform.
4. Relevant professional experience in design and management of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, project planning, monitoring and management, gender mainstreaming and human-rights due diligence.
5. Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations. Demonstrated experience in conducting questionnaires and interviews is an asset.
6. Fluency in written and spoken English. Knowledge of Russian and French will be an advantage.

Evaluators should declare any conflict of interest to UNECE before embarking on an evaluation project, and at any point where such conflict occurs.