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Capacity-building and technical assistance activities

Report on capacity-building and technical assistance activities

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides an overview of capacity-building and technical assistance activities undertaken as part of the Trade subprogramme programme of work. It also includes the overview of the fundraising activities carried out by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Economic Cooperation and Trade Division in 2022-2023 and planned activities since the seventh session of the Steering Committee that are subject to extra-budgetary funding.

The report takes into account the recommendations from the evaluation of the ECE Subprogrammes 4 (Economic Cooperation and Integration) and Subprogramme 6 (Trade) by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight conducted in 2022.

The document is presented to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards for decision.



I. Introduction

1. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Trade subprogramme supports trade and economic cooperation among ECE member States and facilitates their integration into global and regional value chains, drawing on the work of its intergovernmental bodies and expert groups. Through its normative and capacity-building activities, the subprogramme contributes to ensuring:

- A predictable, transparent and harmonized regulatory environment for commerce and business through strengthening the convergence of regulations, promoting international standards and developing best practices in areas of regulatory cooperation, conformity assessment and market surveillance.
- Sustainable trade in agricultural produce, integration into international supply chains and food loss reduction through the development of agricultural quality standards and related international best practice for implementation and use by regulatory authorities as well as the private sector.
- Simple, transparent and effective processes for global commerce through the development and maintenance of international trade facilitation instruments including global standards and best practices for moving from paper-based to automated electronic environments and for the harmonization and simplification of the business processes underpinning export and import activities.

2. ECE also provides policy analyses, advice and capacity building in the framework of the Working Group on Trade under the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

3. Technical assistance and capacity-building activities aim at supporting ECE programme in their efforts to implement ECE trade-related standards, recommendations and best practice guides. The activities also seek to support the removal of regulatory and procedural barriers to trade associated with capacity shortfalls and differences in administrative procedures, regulations and standardization policies. Activities also contribute to the cross-cutting topic of circular economy (69th Commission session), including the development of policy options for harnessing the power of trade and economic cooperation for the circular economy transition in the ECE region. Activities are demand-driven and delivered in close cooperation with development partners.

4. While certain inter-governmental meetings and development of good practices are funded by the UN regular budget, most country and issue-specific policy analyses and the subsequent capacity-building support depend on the availability of extrabudgetary funding. This is particularly the case for the work undertaken in the context of the Studies on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade (RPBT studies). These studies have been undertaken since 2012 for several countries: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (ECE/CTCS/2023/5).

5. In many instances, the RPBT studies have supported economic and trade reforms during the accession process to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Furthermore, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, some studies reviewed the impact of non-tariff barriers on end-to-end supply chains with particular focus on enhancing trade activities by female owned micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) (seven reports were produced).¹ RPBT studies might also have a thematic or sectoral focus (e.g. in 2020, a study provided recommendations for gearing non-tariff measures (NTMs) to support the reduction of food waste-food loss, and currently a study focusing on the agricultural sector of Kyrgyzstan is being prepared (ECE/CTCS/2023/3).

6. Over the past years, demand from member States for policy analysis and capacity building on trade matters has been growing. This includes traditional full-fledged studies covering various non-tariff measures and regulatory barriers, as well as sector specific

¹ Available at <https://unece.org/trade/studies-regulatory-and-procedural-barriers-trade>.

analyses. Furthermore, increasing requests from ECE member States were also made with regard to emerging cross-cutting topics, including circular economy (69th Commission session) and digital transformations (70th Commission session) (see table, below). To respond to these increasing capacity-building needs, the ECE secretariat explored options for integration of these two topics further into RPBT studies and prepared two notes for the consideration at the eighth session of the Steering Committee (ECE/CTCS/2023/6 and ECE/CTCS/2023/7).

7. In addition to conducting RPBT studies, the secretariat has supported the follow-up capacity-building in response to action-oriented recommendations made under the studies, including data collection of NTMs and integrating of NTMs into national and international databases. In many instances, these follow-up activities have been conducted jointly with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).² Requests for follow-up work reflect the success of ECE's earlier work and its positive impact on the member States in integrating into global and regional value chains. Table 1 below summarizes activities undertaken since the last session.

8. The response to increasing capacity-building demands depends on extrabudgetary sources. In the past, the secretariat has raised some extrabudgetary funding, but more will be needed to meet demands in a timely and effective manner. Annex of this document contains a summary of recent fundraising efforts to meet fundings needs. Delegations to the Steering Committee are invited to consider making funding pledges in light with available ECE's instruments for resource mobilization

Table 1:

Capacity building and technical assistance activities since the previous session of the Steering Committee

<i>Project fund (RB/XB)</i>	<i>Beneficiary countries</i>	<i>Main activities (July 2022 – March 2023)</i>
<i>Regular Budget (RB) and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC)</i>		
ECE Regular Budget, Sect.20	ECE member States	<p>Round table on food loss and waste prevention and reduction, 15 November 2022.³</p> <p>Seminar on Sustainable Meat and Livestock Production, 29 September 2022.⁴</p> <p>ECE session at the WTO Public Forum, organised jointly with the Mission of Uzbekistan, on Circular Economy and Trade: opportunities and challenges for transition economies, 30 September 2022.⁵</p> <p>ECE session on Environmental, social and governance (ESG) traceability of supply chains during the WTO "Trade and Environment Week 2022" on 17 October 2023.</p>
ECE Regular Budget, Sect.23, Regional Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC)	Republic of Moldova	At the request of the government at the seventh session of the Steering Committee to receive technical assistance on transport facilitation, including the need to create a Single Window in the context of the implementation of the

² The Report of the seventh session of the Steering Committee, available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/ECE_CTCS_2022_2E.pdf.

³ See <https://unece.org/trade/events/round-table-food-loss-and-waste-prevention-and-reduction>.

⁴ See <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.7-Meetings/events/371519>.

⁵ See

https://www.wto.org/english/forums_e/public_forum22_e/pf_provisional_programme_020822.pdf.

<i>Project fund (RB/XB)</i>	<i>Beneficiary countries</i>	<i>Main activities (July 2022 – March 2023)</i>
<i>Regular Budget (RB) and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC)</i>		
		World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), a gap-fit analysis was prepared (ECE/CTCS/2023/4).
	Ukraine and GUAM countries (Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine)	The 12 th ECE Odessa seminar on trade facilitation and data sharing was organized online on 7 July 2022. ⁶
		The 13 th ECE Odessa seminar on trade facilitation and data sharing was organized online on 22 December 2022. ⁷ The webinar on the use of the package of standards and the UN/CEFACT for the implementation of the EU Electronic Freight Transport Information Regulation (eFTI) and its implication for Ukraine and other transition countries was recorded in three languages and can be used free of charge as a training tool.
	SPECA countries	The 17 th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade was organized by ECE and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on 31 August 2022. It covered: (1) collaboration among the SPECA countries in light on current geopolitical and economical challenges; (2) progress in the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and related roadmap; (3) further development and implementation of the Principles for Sustainable Trade in the subregion; (4) ECE RPBT Studies; and (5) standards for the digitalization of data and document flows in multimodal transport and trade. ⁸
	17 ECE programme countries	The synopsis study with recommendations on circular economy in ECE region was developed.
	Uzbekistan	The first draft of the National Trade Facilitation strategy of Uzbekistan was developed.

⁶ See <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/369106>.

⁷ See <https://unece.org/trade/events/international-seminar-trade-and-transport-facilitation-eu-electronic-freight-transport>.

⁸ See <https://unece.org/trade/events/seventeenth-session-speca-working-group-trade>.

<i>Project fund (RB/XB)</i>	<i>Beneficiary countries</i>	<i>Main activities (July 2022 – March 2023)</i>
<i>Regular Budget (RB) and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC)</i>		
	Ukraine, Türkiye, other ECE programme countries	A study on how to build a data pipeline to support the digitalization of data exchange in the Black Sea Grain Initiative corridor (involving Ukraine, Türkiye, Russian Federation and the United Nations) was conducted.
United Nations Development Account (UNDA), Regular Budget, Sect.35		
UNDA project “Global Initiative Towards Post-COVID-19 Resurgence of the MSME Sector” (2020-2022)	ECE members States	<p>A Training Manual was developed and presented to the UN/CEFACT Plenary in October 2022. The compilation of literature on electronic data exchange from different institutions is aimed to help MSMEs to digitalize their processes, including through the UN/CEFACT.</p> <p>An online course on agricultural quality standards and food loss reduction in fresh produce supply chains was finalized and made available online on 1 July 2022.⁹</p>
UNDA project on “COVID-19 Trade and Transport Connectivity” (2020-2022)	ECE members States	<p>The project was implemented in partnership with other organizations, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Association (FIATA), UNCTAD among others.</p> <p>An e-learning tool on how to use the standards and supporting instruments for the digitalization of data and document exchange developed in 2022 uses the products developed with assistance from RPTC.¹⁰</p> <p>Implementation of several pilot testing projects for the package of standards for digitalization of trade and transport data and document exchange is under way. Notably, the concept for a converter between UN/EDIFACT, the previous generation of UN/CEFACT standards, to new technologies in the era of Internet was prepared.¹¹ During the reviewed period, the project has advanced work in Ukraine on trade facilitation and digitalization.</p>
	17 ECE programme countries	The Guide to the Implementation of Art. 1 para. 3 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement: Trade Facilitation Enquiry Points

⁹ See <https://unece.org/trade/wp7/e-learning>.

¹⁰ See <https://unttc.org/documents/unttc-training-course-uncefact-standards>.

¹¹ See <https://unttc.org/documents/reconciling-standardized-dataset-international-standards-and-data-models-development>.

<i>Project fund (RB/XB)</i>	<i>Beneficiary countries</i>	<i>Main activities (July 2022 – March 2023)</i>
<i>Regular Budget (RB) and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC)</i>		
		was finalized jointly with the WTO Secretariat. ¹²
	Uzbekistan	Following the discussion of the RPBT Study for Uzbekistan at the seventh session of the Steering Committee, the secretariat finalised the work under the Study following suggestions by the government and taking into consideration the latest developments. Following the establishment of the Guide on Trade Facilitation Enquiry Points, Uzbekistan was the first country to launch a national Enquiry Point in October 2022 with the support of this guide. ¹³
UNDA 13th tranche “Accelerating the Transition towards a Circular Economy in the UNECE region” (2021-2024)	17 ECE programme countries	ECE implements a 4-year project to build capacities of member States to shape policies for circular economy transition. Under the project in 2022-2023, ECE initiated 1) the gap analysis for Serbia to support transition towards a circular economy in the Agri-food sector; 2) the gap analysis for Tajikistan to support the transition towards a circular economy and improving traceability in the garment and footwear industry.
UNDA 13th tranche joint transport and trade project “Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity (trade and transport nexus) in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Western Balkans” (2021 –2024)	17 ECE programme countries	The secretariat is updating the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) platform.
	SPECA countries	International High-level Conference on the “Digital Transformation of Information Exchange in Supply Chains using United Nations Standards” in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 31 October 2022. ¹⁴
	Lithuania and the other Baltic states	Capacity building for the use of the ECE and UN/CEFACT package of standards for digitalization of data and document exchanges. ¹⁵
Extra budgetary (XB)		

¹² See https://unttc.org/sites/unttc/files/2022-04/Guide%20to%20the%20Implementation%20of%20Art.%201%20para.%203%20of%20the%20WTO%20TFA%20-%20TFA%20Enquiry%20Points_EN.pdf.

¹³ See <https://unttc.org/sites/unttc/files/2022-09/Implementation%20of%20the%20interactive%20service%20«Enquiry%20Point%20for%20Trade%20Facilitation».pdf>.

¹⁴ See <https://unece.org/trade/events/international-high-level-conference-digital-transformation-information-exchange-supply>.

¹⁵ See www.unttfc.org.

<i>Project fund (RB/XB)</i>	<i>Beneficiary countries</i>	<i>Main activities (July 2022 – March 2023)</i>
<i>Regular Budget (RB) and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC)</i>		
XB project “Strengthening the capacity of the Kyrgyzstan National Trade Facilitation Council to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement”	Kyrgyzstan	The secretariat undertook advisory services, supporting the Ministry of Economy and Commerce of Kyrgyzstan in implementing activities outlined in the National Trade Facilitation Roadmap 2021-2025, which was launched in July 2021. Over 20 per cent of the roadmap activities have been implemented in the first year, including the development of five training modules and the delivery of training to over 100 trade facilitation experts. In addition, three international seminars and one roundtable have taken place.
XB project “Fostering resilient, diversified and sustainable value chains in the Eurasian region after COVID-19”	Selected countries in the Eurasian region	Following the concluding of the regional Study as part of this project in 2022, the Secretariat initiated national studies for beneficiary countries. The national Study for Kyrgyzstan was initiated in February 2023, also responding to the government’s request at the seventh session of the Steering Committee in 2022 to support with the export promotion of agricultural goods, including through establishing an export roadmap. The initial results of this project will be presented at the eighth session of the Steering Committee (ECE/CTCS/2023/3).
XB project “Enhancing transparency and traceability of sustainable value chains in the garment and footwear industry”	Global action including ECE Member states	From 2019-2024, this project developed Policy Recommendations, Implementation Guidelines, Information Exchange Standards, and a Call to Action, adopted by ECE Member States in 2021, in consultation with a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue platform (+ 200 experts). The call to action gathered about 100 pledges to advance traceability and transparency, from more than 350 industry actors across 22 countries. The blockchain system developed for the traceability of origin and ESG performance supports 18 use cases covering the full value chain (cotton, leather, wool) across 22 countries involving 85 companies, that benefitted from about 98 training sessions. Six multi-stakeholder policy dialogues were held for more than 600 experts from 37 countries in 4 world regions (Central Asia, Europe, Latin America, Northern Africa) in cooperation with other international stakeholders.

<i>Project fund (RB/XB)</i>	<i>Beneficiary countries</i>	<i>Main activities (July 2022 – March 2023)</i>
<i>Regular Budget (RB) and Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC)</i>		
XB project “Enhancing usage and uptake of standards for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with special emphasis on gender equality”.	Global	Since the seventh session of the Steering Committee, this project was completed and delivered (including the completion of e-learning platform, and the Guidelines on developing gender-responsive standards). Further countries have signed the declaration on gender-responsive standards and the initiative was converted officially to a Team of Specialists in September 2022.
XB project “Building Cross-border Cooperation for Sustainable Trade in the SPECA subregion”	Kazakhstan	Capacity-building on the nexus between Sustainable Trade, Water Management, Food Security, Trade Facilitation, and Circular Economy, Astana, 21 November 2022. ¹⁶
	SPECA countries	Business Process Analysis of the exports of sustainable trade friendly exports of fruit and grain in the SPECA countries. ¹⁷
XB project “Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system”	SPECA countries	Series of online events to support the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, each focused on a concrete element of the roadmap for the implementation of the strategy.

¹⁶ See <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/373002>.

¹⁷ See <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Astana-PPT-3-BPA-WheatCitrusExport.pdf>.

Annex

Summary of recent fundraising activities and funding gaps

1. The Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) of the ECE identified and liaised with several potential donors, developed tailored concept notes for its capacity-building activities and organized several fundraising missions. Among others, the ECTD has liaised with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Commission, Italy, Sweden, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank Group, the Islamic Development Bank, the International Trade Centre (ITC), Türkiye and the Organisation of Turkic States.
2. These efforts are also in line with the recommendations from the evaluation of the ECE Subprogrammes 4 (Economic Cooperation and Integration) and Subprogramme 6 (Trade) by the UN Office of Internal Oversight conducted in 2022 as part of the UN secretariat's regular program periodically evaluating selected aspects of its operations. The recommendations, among others, underscored the importance of the Division-specific action plan for the resource mobilization.
3. During the outreach stage, the secretariat worked closely with the Permanent Missions in Geneva, as well as the UN Resident Coordinator Offices (UN RCOs) and the UN Development Programme country offices. The role of the UN RCOs has been particularly instrumental during the fundraising missions. For example, in the case Turkmenistan, a mission was organised in response to the request of the Government of Turkmenistan to receive capacity-building assistance in relation to two ECE Studies – RPBT study and the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review. With assistance from the RCO in Ashgabat, the ECE secretariat met several development partners in the country to explore synergies for cooperation and mobilise funds, especially during a mission in November 2022.¹
4. Table 1 summarizes pending requests for capacity building that are subject to extra-budgetary funding. While this table is aligned with the general objectives under the Resources Mobilization plan of the ECE Annual Report on Technical Cooperation Activities 2021,² it focuses on country-specific requests, including expressed at the Steering Committee session in 2022. Requests at the eighth session of the Steering Committee will be included in this table with the objective to mobilise funds for demand-driven capacity building activities.
5. Delegations to the Steering Committee are invited to consider making funding pledges in light with available ECE's instruments for resource mobilization.

¹ See <https://unece.org/media/news/373623>

² Item 6 ECE_EX_2022_20_TC report 2021_0.pdf (unece.org)

Table A. I.
Planned activities, implementation subject to the availability of XB funds

<i>Member State</i>	<i>Capacity-building needs (as presented at the 7th session of the Steering Committee)</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Planned deliverables</i>	<i>Estimated funding needs (thousands of USD)</i>
1. Azerbaijan	ECE assessment of regulatory and procedural barriers to trade and transit, along existing trade corridors, taking into consideration the digitalization dimension.	The ECE secretariat has developed a concept note for the ECE RPBT Study focusing on digital trade, which takes into consideration the novel approaches with regard to integrating digital economy considerations into RPBT studies (ECE/CTCS/2023/7).	Study with a focus on digital trade.	100
2. Kyrgyzstan	Assistance with regard to training Kyrgyz farmers and the potential exporters through the Kyrgyz Export Academy in line with a roadmap to enhance agricultural exports with concrete action-oriented recommendations.	Capacity building will be needed in line with recommendations of the ongoing study (see table 1).	Development of a roadmap to enhance agricultural exports.	50
			Organization of training to agricultural exporters.	50
3. Republic of Moldova	Capacity-building in the areas of Information and Communications Technology, digitalization and trade. Other areas include supply chains, sustainability and traceability issues including in agriculture, circular economy with a focus particularly on MSMEs sector.	In November 2022 – March 2023 ECE conducted the RPBT Study with a focus on trade facilitation dimension (see table 1).	Support with the implementation of recommendations under the RPBT Study on trade facilitation (table 1).	100
			Study focusing on circular economy.	100
			Study focusing on digital trade.	100
4. Turkmenistan	Study on RPBTs in the context of the initiation of the WTO accession process.	The ECE secretariat developed the concept for the RPBT Study, which was discussed with the Government in November 2022. The RPBT Study will address a wide range of economic and legal areas related to the country's trade regime, with a particular focus on non-tariff measures.	RPBT Study covering traditional non-tariff measures (of critical importance for the WTO accession process) as well as the cross-cutting topics on circularity and digitalisation and related capacity building activities.	350

<i>Member State</i>	<i>Capacity-building needs (as presented at the 7th session of the Steering Committee)</i>	<i>Progress</i>	<i>Planned deliverables</i>	<i>Estimated funding needs (thousands of USD)</i>
5. Uzbekistan	Jointly with UNCTAD, review the existing Single Window for non-tariff measures and propose measures for further improvement of the system in Uzbekistan;	Assistance envisioned will follow up on the recommendations arising from the RPBT Study in Uzbekistan.	Support with the incorporation of NTMs into the database.	100
	Explore the possibilities on the circular economy initiatives, digitalization, innovation and green technology.		Study focusing on circular economy.	100
			Study focusing on digital trade.	100