

Evaluation

**The role of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development, *in the context of* UN development system reform
2017-2023**

Final Report

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Evaluation Commissioners:

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Disclaimer

The analysis, findings, and recommendations made in this report reflect the analysis and views of the independent evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM), UNECE Secretariat, or other stakeholders.

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Sincerely,
Alex MacKenzie.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Acronyms and Abbreviations	iii
Executive Summary.....	iv
1.0 Introduction	7
2.0 Background and context	7
2.1 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	7
2.2 UN Development System Reform	8
2.3 The UNECE	9
3.0 Methodology	13
3.1 Purpose and scope	13
3.2 Evaluation criteria and key questions	13
3.3 Methods	13
4.0 Evaluation results.....	15
4.1 Relevance.....	15
Relocation measures in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and the role of UNECE.....	15
Relocation measures taken by the UNECE.....	17
UNDS reform and the relevance of UNECE cooperation	19
4.2 Coherence.....	21
Alignment of UNECE in regional coordination mechanisms	21
Alignment of UNECE activities in country cooperation frameworks	22
UNECE and nexus priorities.....	23
Mainstreaming	24
4.3 Effectiveness.....	26
UNECE cooperation, in the context of UNDS reform	27
The role of Regional Advisers as country focal points	29
The contribution of UNECE to the SDGs	31
4.4 Efficiency.....	32
UNECE engagement with regional and country coordination mechanisms	32
UNDS reform and UNECE resources	34
4.5 Sustainability	37
5.0 Conclusion and recommendations	38

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBO; CBS	Common Back Office; Common Business Services
CCA	UN Common Country Analysis
CEB	United Nations Chief Executives Board
CF	Cooperation Framework (<i>short version of UNSDCF</i>)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
DES	UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary
ECA	Europe and Central Asia
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the UN
ES	UNECE Executive Secretary
EXCOM	UNECE Executive Committee
GEEW	Gender equality and the empowerment of women
HR/HRBA	Human rights/ Human rights-based approach
IBC	UN Regional Issues-Based Coalition
IFI	International Financial Institutions, including multilateral development banks
IP	Implementing Partner
JP	Joint Programme
JWP	CF Joint Work Plan
LNOB	Leave no one behind
PPB	UNECE Proposed Programme Budget A/78/6 (Sect. 20)
QA	Quality assurance
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RA	UNECE Regional Advisers
RBM	Results Based Management
RC	Regulatory Cooperation
RCP	UN Regional Collaborative Platform
R-OMT	UN Regional Operations Management Team
RG	CF Results Groups (country level)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TC	Technical cooperation
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDA	United Nations Development Account
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNO(s)	United Nations Organization(s)
UNRC/ UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator/ Resident Coordinator's Office
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (<i>see CF; formerly UNDAF</i>)
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group (<i>formerly UNDG</i>)
UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
XB	UNECE Extrabudgetary Resources

Executive Summary

In 2015, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#)¹ (SDGs) led to efforts to reposition the United Nations Development System (UNDS) to respond to complex, interlinked global challenges. The reform of the UNDS is intended to produce a UNDS that is '*fit for purpose*': more integrated, more focused on delivery on the ground... and with resources that are better aligned to support member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda².

At the regional level, the reform is intended to strengthen collaboration, transparency and efficiency in support of country level results. Regional commissions are positioned as the '*policy backbone*' of the UNDS, to translate the SDGs into concrete action and ensure that Member States can benefit fully from regional policy and technical expertise.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe ([UNECE](#)) has engaged actively in the reform process. Together with other UN organizations (UNOs) it implemented a range of measures to strengthen the regional UN architecture, engage in country coordination mechanisms and frameworks.

This evaluation has determined, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of UNECE efforts, *in the context of UNDS reform*, to become '*fit for purpose*'. The scope is organization-wide from 2017 to 2023. It aims to understand: (1) How the UNECE changed in response to UNDS reform – its ways of thinking and working internally and with others, and (2) To what extent these changes *made a difference* to the UNECE programme and its support to member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The evaluation used a mixed-method approach: document review and analysis, key informant interviews, and confidential electronic surveys of UNECE and external stakeholders.

Relevance: Actions taken by UNECE to engage in UNDS reform at the regional and country levels were aligned with and contributed to the strategic directions of UNDS reform. Internal repositioning measures helped the UNECE to better position itself and communicate its 'offer' among the UN family at regional and country levels; the UNECE offer can be summed up as: its knowledge and expertise, based upon the regulatory instruments developed by the inter-governmental sectoral committees.

UNECE regulatory and technical cooperation is highly relevant to member States. Analysis of programme and technical cooperation plans and reports demonstrate a high level of alignment between the work of the UNECE sub-programmes and the SDGs and/or SDG targets and indicators. *However*, UNECE efforts to engage in UNDS reform did not significantly increase this relevance. A strategic aim of the UNECE is to promote synergies³ between UNECE cooperation and work of other UNOs, in particular through the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) system and with UN Country Teams (UNCTs). UNECE plans and reports offer limited evidence of these.

Coherence: Actions taken by the UNECE Secretariat to engage in UNDS reform efforts at the regional and country levels were broadly coherent with those of other UNOs. UNECE actions to support the establishment and working of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) and Issues-based Coalitions (IBCs) have enhanced their overall functioning and effectiveness. At country level, UNECE actions enhanced the visibility and alignment of its technical cooperation in UN Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) and Joint Work Plans (JWP) and enabled UNRCs and UNCTs to better understand the

¹ Adopted by the UN General Assembly ([A/RES/70/1](#))

² The reform was launched with General Assembly (GA) resolution [A/RES/72/279](#), June 2018. It responded to proposals of the UN Secretary General (UNSG) ([A/72/124](#)) to reposition the UNDS to support Member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs

³ This is meant to: (1) Enhance national ownership and increase the alignment of TC with national priorities; and (2) Strengthen cooperation with UNOs and partners at the country level to find **cross-sectoral synergies and linkages**, and (3) Enhance the impact and sustainability of UNECE TC. UNECE-EXCOM, [Technical Cooperation Strategy](#), Informal Document 2021/11, 17 May 2021. Para 6, 10.

UNECE 'offer'. Results are not consistent across all programme countries, but overall there has been notable and tangible progress for UNECE positioning at country level. The roles of Regional Advisers (RAs) are especially important in this work.

The nexus approach helped to drive cross-sector collaboration within the UNECE Secretariat and to communicate the UNECE 'offer' and value added to external stakeholders but its ongoing relevance is in question. The high level themes appear to have greater relevance and to resonate more strongly with member States

The UNECE has sufficient policies, reflecting UNDS priorities and strategies, to mainstream gender equality, disability inclusion, the environment and human rights. While gender and environment and climate concerns are well integrated into the programme, human rights and disability inclusion are less visible in both plans and reports⁴.

Effectiveness: The findings above affirm that UNECE used the opportunity of UNDS reform to: (1) Better position itself and communicate its offer among the UN family; and (2) Enhance the coherence and functioning of regional and country coordination architecture and frameworks. Overall UNECE made considerable effort to engage and was perceived as a valuable team player and as a leader on several complex initiatives.

The question of effectiveness is about whether these achievements made a difference – in terms of UNECE support to member States to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs. Responses from key informants and UNECE plans and reports offer mixed or limited evidence for this. Three issues emerge:

- 1) There is still insufficient focus and priority for UNECE cooperation in programme countries; UNECE cooperation is perceived as fragmented and too 'projectized';
- 2) While Regional Advisers (RAs) have enhanced the relevance and coherence of UNECE at country level there are questions about whether the representation, coordination, and strategic functions are best carried-out by RAs and about their long-term effectiveness and sustainability;
- 3) The contribution of UNECE cooperation to the achievement of the SDGs by member States is difficult to see at the outcome level and the influence of UNECE engagement in UNDS reform appears limited.

Efficiency: UNECE engagement with regional and country level coordination mechanisms and frameworks was done in an efficient manner. A small group of staff carry large and complex workloads to sustain this work. While current staffing is sufficient to 'station-keep' it is insufficient for UNECE to engage more comprehensively with country coordination mechanisms and frameworks and to seek out the strategic synergies expected from collaboration, especially in programme countries.

Engagement by the UNECE in UNDS reform has not contributed to a significant increase in extrabudgetary resources (XB). While the RAs, backstopped by the PMU, were successful at integrating UNECE activities into the CFs and JWPs of the programme countries, this engagement has not led to a substantial increase in new joint initiatives with the UN system or an increase in related XB resources. This includes joint programmes and access to pooled funds.

Sustainability: The regulatory instruments produced by the UNECE are sustained mainly through the work programmes of the sectoral committees. These are supported by the UNECE sub-programmes. Engagement through country coordination mechanisms and frameworks has the potential to support

⁴ This finding aligns with 2023 OIOS evaluation related recommendation. OIOS, Evaluation of UNECE: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, Section G, para 72. While the finding is specific to the Division of Economic Cooperation and Trade (ECTD) and sub-programmes 4 and 6, similarities in working methods and the demand-driven nature of the work of the commission and secretariat suggest that it can be reasonably and plausibly applied to all of UNECE

programme countries to implement UNECE regulatory instruments. UNECE reporting offers limited evidence that these linkages and synergies are being made in a systematic manner.

Conclusion: There has been a tangible and valuable increase in the visibility and understanding of the UNECE offer within the UN system, particularly in the programme countries. UNECE informants widely acknowledge that: ‘They [*the wider UN system*] know us better – and what we can offer’. This is corroborated by all external informants and by survey results.

So far, these wins appear to be mainly internal for UNECE and for the UN family. They are not yet significantly enhancing the effectiveness or sustainability of UNECE cooperation, in terms of greater programmatic synergy, to support members States. Nor have they translated into significantly more joint initiatives, including joint programmes at country or regional level, with opportunities for resource mobilization.

Recommendations: There are five priority recommendations

- 1) The UNECE Secretariat should undertake a more strategic prioritization process tailored to each programme country. This should identify the top 3 to 4 specific priorities for technical cooperation where UNECE has an exclusive knowledge niche and where regulatory instruments and expertise can be marshalled for concerted action in partnership with the UNRC, UNCT and government.
- 2) The UNECE Secretariat should consider how to strengthen the country focal point role of RAs to achieve the representation, coordination, partnership and resource mobilization results it wants from engagement with country coordination mechanisms and frameworks.
- 3) The UNECE Secretariat should enhance its reporting on cooperation results to emphasize collaboration and synergies with the UN system; requirements for this should be included in reporting guidance, where feasible.
- 4) *Within available resources*, the UNECE Secretariat should realign available human resources to support engagement with country and regional coordination mechanisms and frameworks. Mindful of regular budget constraints and at the next opportunity, the UNECE Secretariat should pursue one additional post to focus on cooperation with the UNDS.
- 5) To sustain the cross-sector approach and promote collaboration across the sub-programmes, the UNECE Secretariat should continue to focus on the high level themes and take steps to reactivate the nexus approach.

1.0 Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe ([UNECE](#)) was established in 1947 by [ECOSOC](#). It is one of five regional commissions. UNECE includes [56 member States](#) in Europe, North America and Asia. The goal of the UNECE is to promote **pan-European economic prosperity**. It facilitates economic cooperation and integration among its member countries, in adherence with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UNECE does this through policy dialogue, negotiation of international legal instruments, development of regulations and norms, exchange of best practices and technical cooperation (TC). The countries of the region are diverse. While many are high income and fully integrated into the world economy, a number are middle and low income countries transitioning to a market economy. These **17 programme countries plus 1 territory** are beneficiaries of TC⁵.
2. In 2015, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and subsequent efforts to reposition the United Nations Development System (UNDS) recognized the need to grapple with complex cross-border and sub-regional challenges. These called for a better organized, more collaborative and impactful **regional UN presence and frameworks**. These are intended to facilitate the translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level and ensure that Member States can benefit fully from regional policy and technical expertise.
3. From 2017 to present, the UNECE engaged actively in the process to reposition the UNDS and implemented a range of measures to strengthen the regional architecture and enhance its value to member States in support of the 2030 Agenda. In order to assess the effectiveness of these measures, the EXCOM approved this programme-level evaluation for 2023⁶.

2.0 Background and context

2.1 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

4. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emerged from the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015. The outcome document ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, including 17 integrated and interrelated [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), was adopted by the UN General Assembly ([A/RES/70/1](#)). The goals include eliminating poverty and hunger, promoting good health and well-being, and taking action to combat climate change. Positioned as a universal and inclusive agenda it is applicable to all countries, with a principle to respond to vulnerability and to ‘*leave no one behind*’ (LNOB)⁷.
5. The 2030 Agenda highlights the importance of an adequately resourced, relevant, coherent, efficient and effective UNDS to support the achievement of the SDGs⁸. In response the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) initiated a wide-ranging reform to strengthen the UN Development system to become ‘*fit for purpose*’ to support Members States to implement the 2030 Agenda. A guiding concern was that the UN ‘*should not do everything, everywhere*’ but should be ‘*well-positioned to advise and provide or broker technical support to Governments across all areas of sustainable development*’⁹.

⁵ Programme countries and territories covered jointly by the UNSDG and UNECE: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo [S/RES/1244]. Within this group, the UNECE implements a [Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia \(SPECA\)](#), launched in 1998 with [UNESCAP](#), to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. SPECA countries are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

⁶ At its 119th meeting in December 2021

⁷ The 2030 Agenda: ‘...aims to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals and transform economies and consumption and production patterns, while protecting the environment and the dignity and rights of everyone, everywhere’. A/72/124 E/2018/3, para 22

⁸ A/RES/70/1, paras 46, 88.

⁹ A/72/124-E/2018/3, para 52

6. In July 2022 the UN released the [Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022](#). Multiple interlinked emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and the war in Ukraine, have reversed progress. The report called for ‘urgent action’ to rescue the SDGs and deliver meaningful progress by 2030. This is amplified in the 2023 [UNECE report for Europe and Central Asia](#) which offered evidence of this reversal: the region is on track to achieve only 21 or 18 percent of measurable targets by 2030, down from 26 in 2022. For 79 targets (up from 64 last year), progress must accelerate, and for 15 targets, current trends must be reversed¹⁰.

2.2 UN Development System Reform

7. Reform of the UNDS was launched with General Assembly (GA) resolution [A/RES/72/279](#), June 2018. It responded to proposals of the UN Secretary General (UNSG) ([A/72/124](#)) to reposition the UNDS to support Member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The reform is ongoing and involves far-reaching institutional changes.
8. It is intended to produce a UNDS that is ‘*fit for purpose*’: It is more integrated, more focused on delivery on the ground, with clearer internal and external accountability for contributions to national needs, and with capacities, skillsets and resources that are better aligned to support member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda¹¹. Relevant for this evaluation it is important to understand that **UNDS reform is not an end in itself**; it is a means to support member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.
9. Progress, constraints and lessons are reviewed annually by ECOSOC, on the basis of reports by the UNSG. Policy directions are reviewed and adjusted every four years during the Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the UN system ([QCPR](#))¹². Major changes expected from the reform are:
- » An independent and empowered **UN Resident Coordinator** (UNRC) leading an effective and accountable UN Country Team (UNCT);
 - » A better **configured UNCT**, with roles and profiles that are tailored to the country priorities;
 - » A shared set of **development outcomes** in the [UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework](#) (CF) as the main strategic instrument to focus UNDS support at country level
 - » Clear and more robust lines of **accountability for results** between the heads of UN organizations (UNOs) and the UNRC and from the UNCT to governments;
 - » More predictable and flexible funding for the UNDS in return for greater transparency and effectiveness, driven by complementary action by UNOs; a **Funding Compact** that serves as a mutual assurance agreement between donors and the UNDS; and
 - » Business operations harmonization between UNOs and a gradual roll-out of common back offices and service centres to achieve cost-efficiencies.
10. **At the regional level**, the repositioning of the UNDS is intended to strengthen collaboration, transparency and efficiency of United Nations regional assets, in support of country level results. Under the reform, regional commissions are positioned as the ‘*policy backbone*’ of the UNDS. They are to act as policy ‘*think tanks*’, providing data and solutions to address interconnected regional and country issues such as transboundary resource management, and supporting the development and implementation of regional norms, standards and conventions¹³. They are also

¹⁰ UNECE, [Growing Challenges for Sustainable Development: Can the UNECE Region Turn the Tide in 2023?](#), March 2023. 2-3.

¹¹ UN, [UN development system reform 101](#), June 2023

¹² ECOSOC, [QCPR](#), April 2023. The QCPR is the primary policy instrument of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to define the ways that the UNDS operates to support programme countries in their development efforts, and especially to achieve the 2030 Agenda and nationalized SDG targets. The implementation of the QCPR is reviewed annually through the [ECOSOC operational activities for development segment \(OAS\)](#). Starting in 2019, the OAS also reviews the implementation of GA resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the UN development system

¹³ A/72/124 E/2018/3 part B.

to serve as platforms for engagement and partnership with regional intergovernmental institutions, international financial institutions (IFIs), civil society, and the private sector.

11. This reimagining and restructuring of regional architecture and assets follows **five major recommendations** that were made by the UN Secretary-General in 2019 (A/74/73–E/2019/14)¹⁴ and endorsed by the UNGA through the QCPR in December 2020 (A/RES/75/233):
 - 1) Creation of a **UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP)** to foster collaboration on sustainable development across UN development system entities at the regional level; the RCP were to absorb duplicative coordination mechanisms. Flexible, time-bound **Issues-based Coalitions (IBCs)** are multi-agency mechanisms to coordinate the UN system response to cross-cutting global challenges and country level demands in the region.
 - 2) Establishment of strong **knowledge management hubs** in each region, by pooling together policy expertise, research and information currently scattered across entities.
 - 3) Efforts to enhance **transparency and results-based management** and annual reporting on system-wide results of the UN at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda.
 - 4) Consolidation of capacities and knowledge for data and statistics region-by-region change management process that will seek to **consolidate capacities around data and statistics**.
 - 5) Increased regional cost-efficiencies through **common back offices** that provide common services in areas such as human resources, procurement, IT, and common premises.

2.3 The UNECE

A brief history

12. The UNECE aims to promote sustainable development, regional cooperation, and economic integration. The organization covers a wide range of sectors such as environment, energy, transport, trade, innovation, and housing. The UNECE was established after World War II to support post-war reconstruction and economic cooperation. It served as a neutral forum during the Cold War to promote economic cooperation between East and West and now supports the economic transition of formerly planned economies. Since 2015, the UNECE has prioritized the 2030 Agenda and support to its member States to achieve the SDGs, while adapting to changing socio-economic and political environments, most recently the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Governance and structure

13. The UNECE has two main governing bodies: the Commission, which meets every two years, and the Executive Committee (EXCOM), which governs between Commission sessions. The substantive work is conducted by inter-governmental [UNECE sectoral committees](#) and the governing bodies for UNECE multilateral environmental conventions or [MEAs](#)¹⁵.

Regulatory cooperation (RC)

14. The development of **regulatory instruments**¹⁶ is the core work of the UNECE.

¹⁴ A/74/73 E/2019/14 paragraphs 110-118; See also: UN Regional Review, Repositioning the regional assets of the UN Development System to better service the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, Update to Member States, 27 January 2020, 3.

¹⁵ UNECE has negotiated five environmental conventions, also known as multilateral environmental agreements or MEAs, all of which are now in force: (1) [Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution](#); (2) [Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context](#); (3) [Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes](#); (4) [Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents](#); (5) [Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters](#) (the [Aarhus Convention](#)).

¹⁶ Examples include: (1) (1) [Environmental Performance Reviews](#) and [monitoring and assessment](#) (e.g. Shared Environmental Information Systems (SEIS)); (2) The UN Resource Management System ([UNRMS](#)); (3) The [Carbon Neutrality Toolkit](#); (4) 60 UN legal instruments on transport relating to infrastructure, vehicle regulations, traffic safety, cross-border facilitation and carriage of dangerous goods and perishable foodstuffs (see [TIR framework](#)); (5) A methodology, criteria and indicators for member States and partners to evaluate infrastructure projects against the SDGs ([PIERS](#)); (6) [Traceability and transparency](#) in the garment and footwear industry; (7) Regional

These comprise normative and policy instruments and tools both binding and non-binding¹⁷. RC is carried out through 8 sectoral committees and 3 steering committees and working groups that develop, implement and monitor their own work programmes. Generally, sectoral committees are led by a Bureau who regularly report on committee activities to the EXCOM. Subsidiary working parties, task forces, and specialists, play a significant role to conduct the work of the UNECE. Work under the MEAs is guided by the relevant governing bodies and led by Bureaus, and technical and policy subsidiary bodies.

15. Sectoral committees have active participation from UN Member States beyond the UNECE region. For example: (1) the Inland Transport Committee, the Conference of European Statisticians, and the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT); (2) some UNECE environmental conventions are open to accession by non-UNECE Member States; (3) Agricultural Quality standards (WP.7); and (4) UNECE's work on UN legal instruments on inland transport involves parties from Europe, North and South America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Regulatory instruments developed by the UNECE have **global relevance and applicability**. For example, in June of 2023 a meeting of the [G7 Transport Ministers](#) with the EU Commissioner for Transport recognized the UNECE World Forum for the Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations ([WP.29](#)) for its standards to promote safety and technological innovation for automated vehicles, air pollution abatement, and decarbonization.

Technical Cooperation (TC)

16. TC activities are implemented through three sections of the regular budget: (1) Economic Development in Europe (Section 20); (2) The [Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation](#) (RPTC, Section 23)¹⁸; and (3) the United Nations Development Account (UNDA, Section 35). To delimit the scope, the evaluation focused mainly on the RPTC that involves advisory and capacity development services, linked concretely to regulatory cooperation¹⁹. It is guided by the work programmes of the sectoral committees and the requests of member States. All TC activities and projects aim to build the capacity of programme countries to implement regulatory instruments.
17. For both RC and TC, the UNECE cooperates closely with other UN regional commissions, particularly the UN Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific ([UNESCAP](#)). Programme countries covered by both UNECE and UNESCAP: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Examples: (1) The UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) ([SPECA](#)); (2) Trade facilitation and cooperation between [UN/CEFACT](#) and UNESCAP through the [UNNExt](#) practitioner and knowledge network²⁰, and (3) Environmental performance review with [Mongolia](#), [Morocco](#) and [Mauritania](#) and Road Safety Performance Review in Viet Nam (not member States).

The Secretariat

18. The UNECE Secretariat, based in Geneva, Switzerland, is relatively small compared to other international organizations and UN regional commissions. It consists of 229 staff members, including professional, administrative, and extra-budgetary staff. The Secretariat operates as part of the wider UN Secretariat. The Executive Secretary (ES), Deputy (DES) and Division Directors are

conventions, including [MEAs](#); (8) Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews (I4SDRs), the Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO), the Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade Studies (RPBT).

¹⁷ The binding instruments include conventions, agreements, protocols, and regulations. In addition to the legally binding instruments, UNECE has supported member States to develop numerous non-binding instruments including recommendations, political declarations, model treaties or laws, non-binding guidance, and documents outlining good practices to support implementation.

¹⁸ Assessed contributions also fund the Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC); for 2023 the RPTC budget for UNECE was USD \$2.33 million, no change from 2022 but up slightly from USD \$2.02 million in 2021 and \$2.17 million in 2020

¹⁹ Mainly workshops, seminars, study tours, training, and field projects.

²⁰ See also: <https://unece.org/trade/events/uneceunescap-task-force-ecites-epix-pilots-1>

accountable to the UNECE member States for the timely and effective implementation of the programme. The ES reports to the Secretary General of the UN.

19. The UNECE Secretariat facilitates the inter-governmental machinery, the work of the sectoral committees, and implements TC²¹. It does this through a diverse programme comprising **eight sub-programmes** (SP), linked concretely with the work programmes of the sectoral committees: (1) Environment, (2) Transport, (3) Statistics, (4) Economic cooperation and integration, (5) Sustainable energy, (6) Trade, (7) Forests and the forest industry, and (8) Housing, land management and population. Despite its small size, the **UNECE Secretariat** has significant convening and norm-setting powers²². In 2022 it:
 - » *Convened* 981 three-hour inter-governmental meetings;
 - » *Produced* 1674 parliamentary documents comprising resolutions, decisions, and recommendations;
 - » *Conducted* 191 days of seminars, workshops and training
 - » *Issued* 55 publications including regulatory instruments, guidelines, studies, and best practices.

The UNECE and the SDGs

20. The UNECE has prioritized nine **SDGs** to which it contributes: SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 15 (life on land). The gender equality commitments of member States and women's economic empowerment (SDG 5) are intended to be mainstreamed in all activities. Partnerships (SDG 17) with governments, international and regional organizations, the business sector, academia and civil society are central to its work²³.
21. Cross-sectoral collaboration is shaped by a [nexus approach](#). Introduced in 2018 it is intended to promote interlinkages between UNECE sub-programmes in areas where multiple goals converge and to respond to the complexity of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. There are four **nexus areas**²⁴:
 - » [Sustainable use of natural resources](#)
 - » [Sustainable and smart cities for all ages](#)
 - » [Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity](#);
 - » [Measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs](#) and support for evidence-based decision-making.

In addition, the last two Commission sessions endorsed **high level themes** to shape and direct its intergovernmental work toward sustainable development in the ECE region²⁵: (1) Circular economy (69th Commission Session, 2021) and (2) Digital and green transformation (70th Commission session, 2022).

Funding

²¹ This includes: coordinating meetings, preparing agendas, offering policy perspectives and solutions, and drafting the regulatory instruments including background documents, reports, and information materials. The Secretariat also contributes to independent data collection, policy analysis, and represents the organization.

²² This was affirmed by a 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6. It found that **convening power** to bring Governments together to build consensus on frameworks, norms, standards and agreements on economic cooperation and trade was the 2nd of 5 highest rated comparative advantages by respondents from member States. OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, para 20.

²³ <https://unece.org/mission>

²⁴ UNECE, Proposed programme budget for 2023, Section 20 Economic development in Europe, A/77/6 (Sect. 20), March 2022

²⁵ Agreed by the 119th meeting of the ECE Executive Committee as a cross-cutting theme of the seventieth session of ECE in 2023

22. The UNECE is funded through a combination of assessed contributions from member States and voluntary contributions from governments, international organizations, and other sources. Some voluntary contributions are made through UNECE Trust funds.
23. Assessed contributions from member States make-up the largest component of the UNECE regular budget. For 2023, this is USD \$ 37.23 million of which posts and other staff costs accounted for USD \$35.75 million or 96 percent. This ratio is consistent across the years covered by this evaluation²⁶.
24. UNECE TC activities are implemented through three sections of the regular budget: (1) Economic Development in Europe (Section 20); (2) The Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC, Section 23)²⁷; and (3) the United Nations Development Account (UNDA, Section 35). These are supplemented by extrabudgetary (XB) resources made up of voluntary contributions from member States, international organizations, and other development partners²⁸.
25. XB resources make-up the largest share of funding for TC. In 2022, XB accounted for \$24.46 million or 85 percent of expenditures for TC, followed by the RPTC (9.5%), and UNDA (5.5%). Specific funding arrangements and levels vary from year to year, depending on the priorities of member states, the availability of resources, and the needs of the UNECE programme.

A unique profile and competing pressures

26. The UNECE has **a unique profile** amongst UN regional commissions and UNOs. This stems from its inter-governmental structure, the focus on norms and standard setting, and absence of a social mandate. Amongst its member States, the UNECE must balance the needs of **two major constituencies**. The first larger constituency are the advanced economies. These provide the lion's share of resources and perceive the UNECE as standard-setting organization and not a development-focused one. They prioritize regulatory cooperation and instruments as the core work of the organization, based upon the programmes of the [UNECE sectoral committees](#). Accordingly, RC commands the lion's share of UNECE resources; on the basis of expenditures in 2022, the estimated **ratio between RC and TC is 75:25**²⁹.
27. The second constituency are the smaller group of programme countries that are the focus of TC. Increasingly, this is coordinated with other UNOs through regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks (e.g. RCP-IBCs, UNRC system, UNCTs, and CFs). UNECE TC is influenced to a greater degree by UNDS reform. It also tends to attract the attention and focus of the wider UN system as it considers how best to align and allocate scarce resources to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. There is a view amongst most UNECE and some external informants that UNECE regulatory cooperation, the lion's share of its work, is not well understood or appreciated by other parts of the UNDS.
28. Importantly, making tangible links between the work of the UNECE and the 2030 Agenda and SDGs is not of equal political or policy priority for all UNECE member States -- while it holds greater importance for programme countries, the majority of advanced economies consider it of lesser significance³⁰.

²⁶ PPB A/78/6 (Section 20), 2024, Figure 20.20, 60.

²⁷ Assessed contributions also fund the Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC); for 2023 the RPTC budget for UNECE was USD \$2.33 million, no change from 2022 but up slightly from USD \$2.02 million in 2021 and \$2.17 million in 2020

²⁸ UNECE collaborates with various partners, including governments, international organizations, private sector entities, and civil society organizations. These partnerships can involve financial contributions or in-kind support, such as providing technical expertise, resources, or hosting events.

²⁹ Email communication and budget calculations share by UNECE. Communication with Mr. Nicolas Dath-Baron, Chief PMU, 01 June, 2023

³⁰ Based upon responses of external KIs and some UNECE KIs.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Purpose and scope

29. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine, in a systematic and objective manner, the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of efforts by the UNECE, *in the context of UNDS reform*, to become ‘*fit for purpose*’ to support its member States to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
30. The scope of the evaluation is organization-wide from 2017 to 2023. It aims to understand: (1) How the UNECE changed in response to UNDS reform – its ways of thinking and working internally and with others, and (2) To what extent these changes *made a difference* to the quality and effectiveness of the UNECE programme and its support to member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.
31. In line with [UNECE evaluation policy](#), the recommendations are to: (1) Promote organizational learning; (2) Improve programme performance; (3) Ensure the accountability of the UNECE to member States, senior UN system leadership, donors, and beneficiaries³¹.

3.2 Evaluation criteria and key questions

32. The evaluation used the following criteria and key questions. The evaluation matrix is in Annex B.

Relevance	» To what extent has implementation of UNDS reform measures enabled UNECE to better position itself both strategically and operationally to support its member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
Coherence	» To what extent are UNECE plans and activities at the regional and country levels coherent and harmonized with those of other UNDS entities <i>through</i> the Regional Collaborative Platform and Issue-Based Coalitions?
Effectiveness	» In the context of UNDS reform, how effective has UNECE been to tailor its structure, objectives, strategy and results to the needs of member States to implement the 2030 Agenda at the country and regional levels?
Efficiency	» Since 2017, how has UNDS reform affected UNECE resources and what have been the consequences for it to deliver on its mandate and support member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
Sustainability ³²	» How have UNDS reform measures affected the sustainability of UNECE programme results, including technical cooperation, and the ownership by member States of UNECE instruments and tools?

3.3 Methods

33. The evaluation used a mixed-method approach with qualitative and quantitative methods
- » **Document review** focusing on key UNECE and UN system documents, plans and reports, including reports by the RCP and by the UNSG on UNDS reform and regional cooperation (see **Annex C**). This included the findings from recent evaluations of the support provided by UNECE to members States to achieve the SDGs³³.
 - » **Semi-structured interviews** with 21 key informants (KIs):

³¹ UNECE Informal document No. 2021/35/Rev.1

³² Per [OECD-DAC](#), sustainability is understood as: The extent to which the benefits of UNECE TC activities and results are likely to continue over the medium term.

³³ (1) 2019 OIOS Evaluation of UN entities’ preparedness, policy coherence, and early results associated with their support to SDGs; (2) 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) Gender mainstreaming in UNECE – Evaluation Report, 2019.

- 1) High-level government interlocutors from UNECE member States, including UN programme countries (ECE EXCOM delegations),
 - 2) UNECE leadership and staff, and
 - 3) UNRCs from four selected programme countries.
- » Short confidential **electronic surveys** to which there were 61 responses: 27 responses to the internal survey of UNECE staff and 35 responses from external respondents from the delegations, regional UNOs and UNCTs (Annex D).
34. The evaluation was conducted in a participatory manner, ensuring the involvement of the evaluations managers and key stakeholders. Every effort was made to ensure that information sources were treated confidentially and in a manner sensitive to gender, cultural, institutional and other factors. The evaluator used multiple questions with KIs to triangulate findings and to ensure that the data and information used and conclusions made are credible and convincing.
35. The evaluation had the following limitations:
- 1) *Measures taken* at the regional and country level, in the framework of the UNDS reform, are done jointly or in coordination with other UNOs through the RCP, IBCs and UNCTs. UNECE is not solely accountable for their implementation or performance and its *influence* over the measures is only indirect.
 - 2) SDG-related results at country level are achieved through the work and resources of multiple partners. It is assumed that UNECE has control only over the completion of its programme, including TC. UNECE does not have control over the actions of member States, other UNOs or implementing partners at regional or country level. This means that UNECE has *influence* over the achievement of outputs (*tangible new skills, products and services*) at country level, but only indirect influence over outcomes (*institutional performance* in member States) and less influence over SDG-related impacts (*positive changes in the lives of people*).
 - 3) The scope is large, encompassing support to UNECE members States to support implementation of the SDGs: It covers engagement with and support to regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks (e.g. RCP, IBCs, UNRC system, UNCT, and CFs) and the UNECE sub-programmes, over 7 years, including 17 programme countries and 1 territory. Given time limitations, the evaluation engaged with four programme countries, but could not investigate deeply into any specific sub-programme.

4.0 Evaluation results

4.1 Relevance

Repositioning measures in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and the role of UNECE

A. Actions taken by UNECE to engage in UNDS reform at the regional and country levels were aligned with and contributed to the strategic directions set out by the UNSG and QCPR resolutions of the UNGA.

36. Beginning from 2017, and accelerating with the GA resolution to reposition the UNDS, regional UN system entities, including the UNECE, used the opportunity of UNDS repositioning to identify and implement a range of measures to restructure and strengthen its regional architecture and operational activities for development. Measures can be grouped according to two broad phases before and following the report of the UNSG on the QCPR in April 2019³⁴: (1) optimization of existing regional structures and resources and (2) a more ambitious phase involving five key areas of transformation³⁵.

Optimization (prior to April 2019)

37. The optimization phase focused on information sharing and collaboration between the UNECE and other regional commissions with the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). Results included³⁶:

- » Joint meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and of the regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and six issue-based coalitions
- » Collaboration between UNECE and UNCTs to integrate analysis about regional and transboundary issues as part of Common Country Analysis (CCA) and Cooperation Frameworks (CFs);
- » Familiarization visits by UNRCs to UNECE offices within six months of appointment and involvement of UNRCs and UNCT members in regional conferences and platforms;
- » The UNECE joined regional UNSDG peer review mechanisms to offer quality assurance of critical joint planning documents of UNCTs;
- » A protocol to ensure that UNRCs are informed about all in-country development activities and missions supported by the UNECE
- » Mapping of publications and knowledge products at regional and country levels to identify opportunities for joint collaboration and publication.

Transformation (April 2019 to April 2023)

38. This phase to reimagine and restructure the regional architecture, assets and performance enacted the **five major recommendations** made by the UN Secretary-General in 2019³⁷. There was continuity for the region as the recommendations were informed by good practices *already instituted* by the Regional Coordination Mechanism. It is also important to emphasise that measures described below were taken jointly by the UNECE together with other UNOs at the regional level³⁸:

³⁴ Reports by the UN Secretary General on regional cooperation and UNECE ExCom and RCP reports

³⁵ At its 99th, 100th, 101st, 104th, 105th, 107th, 109th and 110th meetings; (2) Informal document No. 2019/38 Consultation with member States Repositioning of the UNDS: Region-by-region review; (3) ECE Informal document No. 2020/26; (4) E/ECE/1499 paragraphs 18-19.

³⁶ Prior to 2019: 1. Health, 2. Gender, 3. Migrants and internally displaced persons, 4. Social protection, 5. Youth and adolescents, 6. Data. Report of the Secretary General on Regional Cooperation [E/2018/15](#)

³⁷ (1) A/74/73 E/2019/14 paragraphs 110-118; (2) UN Regional Review, Repositioning the regional assets of the UN Development System to better service the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, Update to Member States, 27 January 2020, 3.

³⁸ (1) UNSDG, 2021 Regional Results Report of the RCP for Europe and Central Asia, 2021, 3-4; (2) UNSDG, 2022 Regional Results Report of the RCP for Europe and Central Asia, ADVANCED DRAFT, April 2023; (3) ECOSOC, Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields - Report of the Secretary-General, 8 June 2022 E/2022/15 para 45, 51.

39. The **UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP)** was established in 2020 with an annual workplan. It brings together the regional heads of the UN entities working on sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; it is a platform to identify and respond to common challenges that transcend country borders. UNECE serves as a vice-chair with UNDP. Over the period 2021-2022 the RCP focused on supporting member States with policy advice for COVID-19 recovery and regional analysis of the impacts of the war in Ukraine on countries in the region and where the RCP can best add value
40. As noted above, the use of multi-agency **Issues-based Coalitions (IBCs)** in the region *preceded* the UNDS reform drive that began in 2019. Currently the IBCs have expanded to seven: (1) Adolescents and youth, (2) Environment and climate change, (3) Gender equality, (4) Health and well-being, (5) Large movements of people, displacement and resilience, (6) Social protection, (7) Sustainable food systems. The UNECE co-chairs the IBC for environment and climate change; it also co-chairs the regional thematic and coordination groups for Digital transformation and Data and Statistics.
41. The UNECE, together with regional UNOs, reviewed and affirmed the alignment of the IBCs with the ambitions of the regional repositioning, and shared best practices with other regional commissions. The IBCs work to leverage opportunities to accelerate progress on the SDGs. UNECE leadership was highlighted in several areas: In 2022 the coalition on environment and climate change supported: (1) Training for UNRCs and UNCTs on a compendium of measures for [green transitions](#), post-pandemic³⁹ and to mainstream environment and climate change in the UN country programming cycle; (2) Policy advocacy with UNRCs, UNCTs, and members States for continued focus on [climate action](#) with concrete legislative and policy solutions. The coalition on sustainable food systems provided technical support to country teams in the preparation of the United Nations Food Systems Summit and launched a regional community of practice on the [sustainability of food systems](#). The RCP also reviewed and recalibrated the IBCs and other thematic groups to ensure support is demand-driven, based on requests of UNCTs, and to develop 'service offers' detailing a menu of value-added services. A sunset clause outlines the conditions under which a coalition or group can close. The most recent RCP report argues that the IBCs have gradually transitioned into '*genuine communities of practice providing agile and demand driven support to UNCTs*'⁴⁰.
42. In 2021, a [knowledge management hub](#) was embedded in the RCP website and launched in 2022. It facilitates access to the expertise, resources, events and service offers of the IBCs and regional working groups on a range of cross-cutting regional priority issues. For example the link to the IBC for [Environment and Climate Change](#), co-chaired by the UNECE, contains a [menu](#) of expertise and available services from the region that are available to UNRCs and UNCTs. The knowledge hub provides access to two valuable UNECE products and resources: (1) the UNECE [Knowledge Hub on SDG Statistics](#) offers an updated compendium of [guidelines and tools](#) to strengthen the collection and disseminations of reliable country statistics to monitor and measure progress toward the SDGs; (2) the [UNECE Statistical Database](#) provides access to SDG data, organized by country, subject, policy area, socio-economic classifications, and time period.
43. Both UNECE and external informants pointed to knowledge management and statistics for the SDGs as a major comparative advantage of the UNECE and an area where it showed effective leadership. For UNECE informants, it was also perceived as an area where insufficient progress has been made. For example, the UNECE is leading efforts to adapt the [MANARA](#) knowledge

³⁹ UNECE Circular Economy Progress report **E/ECE/1507 para 67 2023**

⁴⁰ UNSDG, 2022 Regional Results Report of the RCP for Europe and Central Asia, ADVANCED DRAFT

management platform, developed by UNESCWA. However progress is slow due mainly to a lack of human and financial resources for IT.

44. To enhance transparency and results-based management the RCP has produced an annual regional results report from 2021. The UNECE produces publicly available annual workplans, budgets and reports for technical cooperation.
45. A Digital Transformation Group for was established in 2020; it is co-chaired by UNECE and works to identify common UN system solutions to foster digital transformation in the region. It works with member States to identify and close key gaps in economic, social, demographic and environment statistics and to promote the modernization of statistical production. It provides a mechanism to coordinate such activities, with a specific focus on capacity development. Another key role is to support UNCTs through capacity development of data and reporting officers in UNRC offices.
46. Cost-efficiencies and common back offices (CBOs): A Regional Operations Management Team (R-OMT) was established in 2020 and a regional Business Operations Strategy (R-BOS) was developed in 2022. Subsequent back-office collaboration in finance, human resources and ICT led to cost avoidance of over USD \$220,000. The R-BOS is being reviewed in the first quarter of 2023 to increase areas of collaboration.
47. The most recent report of the UNSG on UNDS reform provides a startling finding for regional UNOs: that an increasing number of programme country governments find it **difficult to secure technical expertise from UN entities without a physical presence** in their countries⁴¹. It is difficult to square this with findings of the 2023 OIOS evaluation of UNECE sub-programmes 4 and 6 related to economic cooperation and trade: member States indicated very high levels of *alignment* between the work of UNECE and its inter-governmental mandates and the *responsiveness* of UNECE to the needs and requests of member States⁴². Variations may be explained by the target groups for the different surveys and interviews. Governments are not monolithic – it is likely that those in the best position to assess the value-added of expertise and policy contributions from UNECE and other regional UNOs are not the same as respondents from the coordinating ministries and bodies responsible to engage with the UNRC and UNCT (i.e. *not asking the right people*).
48. The two phases described above illustrate how the work of the UNECE and other regional UNOs has evolved from information exchange and coordination to shared analytical work, joint advocacy, and demand-driven support to UNCTs and countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The new service platforms available at the regional level provide a sound clearinghouse of available resources and expertise in support of the programme countries.

Repositioning measures taken by the UNECE

B. Internal repositioning actions helped the UNECE to better position itself and communicate its 'offer' among the UN family at regional and country levels; the UNECE offer can be summed up as knowledge and expertise, based upon the regulatory instruments that constitute the major products of its work through the inter-governmental sectoral committees and subsidiary working groups.

⁴¹ Only 50 percent of host Governments reported that it is easy to access expertise from outside their country – down from 61 per cent in 2021. UNGA, Implementation of GA resolution 75/233 on the QCPR-Report of the SG, Advanced unedited version, 23 April, para 31. It is difficult to 'square' this finding with information in footnote 40.

⁴² On alignment of UNECE work with mandates provided by the inter-governmental committee: Of 112 stakeholders from mS, 44% agreed strongly and 53% agreed (i.e. 98% agreement). On responsiveness to country priorities and needs: Of 95 mS stakeholders 60% agreed strongly and 35% agreed (i.e. 95% agreement). OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, paras 17-18, 25.

49. In parallel with the wider repositioning measures by UN regional bodies, the UNECE made a number of internal organizational changes and adaptations to focus its work and to respond to the UNDS reform:
- » In 2018 the UNECE adopted a nexus approach to prioritize its work and offer integrated solutions for clusters of interrelated SDGs⁴³. A matrix approach was introduced to facilitate cross-sector cooperation at the sub-programme level and to encourage joint initiatives. Cross-divisional teams were created as flexible arrangements to strengthen complementarities among UNECE sub-programmes.
 - » In 2019 Regional Advisers (RAs) were given additional responsibilities as country focal points to engage with and support UNRCs and UNCTs, including to provide inputs to the UN Common Country Analysis (CCA) and Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and to identify entry points for UNECE cooperation. It is important to note the standard practice for all UNECE staff to brief the UNRC during country missions, however the RAs are intended to be the most consistent interlocutors on programmatic issues. RAs in collaboration with the PMU and senior economist, played a key role to develop UNECE country briefs. In introduced in response to a 2021 OIOS audit⁴⁴, they offer a summary of UNECE work in the programme countries, including all 8 sub-programmes.
 - » Coordination of UNDS-related work is divided between the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) and the Programme Management Unit (PMU):
 - The SDU is focused on the regional level; it coordinates engagement with the RCP and IBCs, convenes the annual [Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#) for the ECE region, and leads internal cross-cutting work to align UNECE activities with the SDGs.
 - The PMU is focused on the country and subregional levels. It guides and coordinates technical cooperation (RPTC) as well as projects funded by extrabudgetary (XB) funding and the UN Development Account (UNDA) and it supports engagement, together with RAs, in UN country coordination mechanisms and frameworks including the UNRC system, UNCTs, UNSDCFs and Joint Work Plans (JWPs), and the Peer Support Group (PSG) mechanism for quality assurance⁴⁵.
 - » The PMU maintains a CF database to organize UNECE development activities by country from the RPTC work plans and those funded from XB and UNDA sources. The PMU incorporates UNECE development activities into the CF and its results framework and to upload this information into UN-info and 'off-line' JWPs. Review and updating of this information internally and with CF results groups at country level, occurs at least annually;
 - » The PMU is also the main focal point to engage in the regional Peer Support Group (PSG) mechanism⁴⁶ that provides support and quality assurance to the preparation of Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and the development and roll-out of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).
 - » The Technical Cooperation Strategy and Directive⁴⁷ and the Resource Mobilization Strategy⁴⁸ were updated to reflect and institutionalize these changes.
50. UNECE and external interview respondents were broadly in agreement that **UNECE did the right things** to engage in the major thrusts of UNDS reform at regional and country level. Actions and investments by the organisation from 2018 onward helped it to better position itself and

⁴³ Criteria to identify nexus priorities: (1) Relevance of the areas proposed for the current and future challenges facing the UNECE region; (2) Existence of core UNECE expertise and products to address multifaceted issues in these areas by integrating activities under different sub-programmes and engaging into meaningful partnerships.

⁴⁴ OIOS, Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe Report No. 2021/048. OIOS recommended also that UNECE set targets for regional advisers to complete national action plans for their respective programme countries to optimize and tailor ECE support to the specific needs of each Member State

⁴⁵ PPB A/78/6 (Sect.20), Para. 20.150

⁴⁶ (1) UNSDG [Peer Support Group for ECA-TOR](#); (2) [UNECE and PSG](#)

⁴⁷ UNECE-EXCOM, [Technical Cooperation Strategy](#), Informal Document 2021/11, 17 May 2021.

⁴⁸ UNECE-EXCOM, [Resource Mobilization Strategy](#), Informal Document No. 2020/27/Rev.1, May 2020.

communicate its 'offer' among the UN family at the regional level and among UNRCs and UNCTs in programming countries. These helped the UNECE to become more present and visible in major country analytical and planning instruments: the CCA and CF (formerly UNDAF), and JWPs. **Over two-thirds of survey respondents agreed:** through its engagement in UNDS reform, the UNECE is better positioned strategically and operationally to support member States to make tangible progress toward the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs⁴⁹.

51. At the same time, both external and internal informants were in broad agreement that more can be done and that UNECE positioning efforts are a '*work in progress*' (see Effectiveness).

UNDS reform and the relevance of UNECE cooperation

C. UNECE regulatory and technical cooperation is highly relevant to member States; UNECE efforts to engage in UNDS reform did not significantly increase this relevance

52. The relevance of UNECE regulatory cooperation to the 2030 Agenda and to the SDGs is established clearly in the annual Proposed Programme Budgets (PPB, Section 20). Analysis of PPB documents for the years 2018 to 2024 demonstrate **a high level of alignment** between the planned results and work of the sub-programmes and the SDGs and/or SDG targets and indicators. It is important to note that the major driver of the objective and strategy for each sub-programme are the programmes of work established by the inter-governmental UNECE sectoral committees. The [UNECE Portal on Standards for the SDGs](#) offers an valuable clearinghouse of over 20,000 available standards developed by UNECE and other normative organisations, mapped across the 17 goals.
53. Review of the Regular programme of technical cooperation (RPTC, Section 23) from 2018 to 2023 and the RPTC work plans for 2023 show **a high level of alignment** with the SDGs; the RPTC work plans include columns to indicate the expected contribution to particular SDGs and/or targets and the beneficiary countries. The PPB and RPTC are also embedded within the context of the numerous legislative mandates entrusted to the UNECE including resolutions of the GA and ECOSOC resolutions and decisions of the UNECE, many of which are derived from or linked with 2030 Agenda. The list of [technical cooperation publications](#) (over 2,600 of which 990 refer to Agenda 2030 and SDGs) speaks to the breadth and depth of UNECE cooperation.
54. Likewise reports on UNECE Technical Cooperation (TC) from 2020 and 2021 offer ample evidence for the alignment of TC with the SDGs. For example, the 2021 report highlights 473 demand-driven TC activities, linked with its mandated areas of work under sub-programmes or at the request of member States. Each TC report is structured according to the core SDGs and targets that are the focus of UNECE cooperation, rather than by sub-programme. These offer tangible, specific evidence about the delivery of planned TC activities across the entire programme, in support of the SDGs.
55. **A key question** is whether UNECE action and investment to implement *UNDS reform measures* led to tangible enhancements in its cooperation with member States to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs?
56. This strategic aim is explicit in PPB documents from 2022: '**To promote synergies⁵⁰ between the ECE technical cooperation activities and the work of other UN system entities, in particular through the resident coordinator system at the country level and the United Nations Development Group for Europe and Central Asia at the regional level**'⁵¹. The roles of **Regional**

⁴⁹ Evaluation survey - Q1: 69% of UNECE staff agreed or strongly agreed; 70% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

⁵⁰ **Synergy** is understood to mean: the interaction of elements that when combined produce a **total effect that is greater** than the sum of the individual elements, contributions

⁵¹ UNECE, PPB A/77/6 (Sect 20) for 2023 para 20.154 (m) and for 2024 para 20.148 (g). 2022 para 20.241 (m)

Advisers (RAs) are especially important in this aim. The arrangement to assign RAs as focal points for specific programme countries is *‘designed to identify synergies with the RCs and UNCTs to maximize impact when delivering technical assistance and advisory services to the governments’*⁵².

57. UNECE TC reports also emphasise *‘continuous efforts’* of UNECE to *‘enhance collaboration with the RC system and UNCTs to develop integrated solutions’*. This is meant to: (1) Enhance national ownership and increase the alignment of TC with national priorities; and (2) Strengthen cooperation with UNOs and partners at the country level to find **cross-sectoral synergies and linkages**, and (3) Enhance the impact and sustainability of UNECE TC⁵³.

58. **Substantive elements of UNECE plans and reports offer limited evidence for this:**

- » Reports on regulatory cooperation from 2018 to 2024 (PPB, section 20)⁵⁴ offer few references to activities or synergies with the wider UN system in the sections that concern programmatic performance and planned results of the sub-programmes⁵⁵. The *importance* of engagement, collaboration and seeking programmatic synergies is emphasised in multiple sections, but concrete evidence of these is limited.
- » Likewise, reports on technical cooperation from 2020 to 2022⁵⁶ offered few examples of collaboration or benefits of synergy with the wider UN system⁵⁷. It is important to note that several activities concern UNDA-funded projects for which UNCTs and other UNOs are listed as partners. This means there is a degree of consultation and collaboration with these partners. However progress reports offer limited reference to *synergies* or benefits accruing from this collaboration. Reporting on partnerships and programmatic synergies is not required by the template for UNDA progress reports.
- » Of the 8 RPTC work plans from 2023, only 2 (Environment and Statistics) make reference to engagement with the wider UN system including the RC and UNCTs, the CF and RGS⁵⁸.

59. UNECE and external stakeholders share the view that UNDS reform has had little influence over the direction and delivery of regulatory cooperation with member States -- the lion’s share of the work of the UNECE – and limited influence over TC. For example, some RAs could offer examples of where a UNECE TC activity was adjusted or strengthened because of engagement with the UN system, but these are limited and do not come across prominently in UNECE reporting.

60. Overall, there are important benefits from UNECE engagement in UNDS reform, but these appear to be mainly internal to the UN system: Increased awareness amongst UNRCs and UNCTs about

⁵² UNECE, Responses to 2022 survey of the UN development system entities’ headquarters, January 2023, Q7, 3.

⁵³ UNECE-EXCOM, [Technical Cooperation Strategy](#), Informal Document 2021/11, 17 May 2021. Para 6, 10.

⁵⁴ (1) UNECE, PPB A/77/6 (Sect 20): (1) 2024, 17 March 2023; (2) 2023, 21 March 2022; (3) 2022, 22 March 2021; (4) 2021, 1 April 2020; (5) 2020, 4 April 2019; (6) 2018-2019, 6 April 2017.

⁵⁵ The programmatic sections of two PPBs include a direct reference to collaboration or synergies with the UN system: (1) PPB 2024, SP 5 Sustainable energy, Lesson (para 20.87): Need for greater capacity building through UNCTs to support mS to better utilize ECE mechanisms for resilient energy systems; and (2) PPB 2021, SP 7 Forests and forest industry, Result 2 (20.129): Involvement of UNRCs to strengthen capacity and political commitment for ecosystem restoration in Eastern Europe. In all PPBs, there are occasional references to specific partnerships with individual UNOs such as FAO and UNCTAD, UNDP and UNEP.

⁵⁶ (1) UNECE EXCOM, UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2022: Annual Report, Informal Document 2023/27; (2) UNECE EXCOM, , UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2021: Annual Report, Informal Document 2022/20; (3) UNECE EXCOM, UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2020: Annual Report, Informal Document No. 2021/17.

⁵⁷ For example: Two (2) activities in the 2021 report on TC highlight tangible gains or synergies from collaboration with the UN system: (1) SDG 5: On gender-responsive and care-centred policies for UNECE region, joint publications with UN Women: Rethinking the Care Economy and Empowering Women for Building back Better (para 21); and (2) SDG 11: A UNECE-Housing and Europe-UN-Habitat joint study “#Housing2030: Effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region” containing a toolkit to promote affordable climate-neutral housing (para 95).

⁵⁸ **Environment:** (1) Serve as an entry point within UNECE for UZB, SRB, TAJ to facilitate two-way communication and collaboration with the RCOs, UNCTs and Results Groups to identify potential areas for developing technical cooperation projects and activities in the countries; (2) Participate in the EU-Central Asia working group on environment, climate change and water; (3) Participate in the meetings of IBC on Environment and Climate Change and contribute to the delivery of CB workshops for RCOs and UNCTs; (4) Provide support to RCOs and UNCTs on green transition (IBC online training programme) covering themes on circular economy and policy frameworks.

Statistics: Retreat for UNCT Data Officers to represent Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics

UNECE expertise and the availability of regulatory instruments that have a high degree of ownership and/or demand from UNECE member States. These are clear gains. However they do not appear to further enhance or strengthen UNECE cooperation, in terms of greater programmatic synergy with the UN system.

61. This can be anticipated from the structure and operating methods of UNECE where TC activities draw substantively from the normative work guided by member States through the UNECE sectoral committees⁵⁹. In other words, **TC is demand-driven, responding primarily to the direct expressed needs of UNECE member States**. The influence of country coordination architecture and mechanisms, including the RC system, UNCTs, and the CF, is limited⁶⁰. In addition, there appear to be **few institutional incentives** for increased linkage between TC and the work of the wider UN system:
- » The overall objectives and strategy for TC by the UN Secretariat makes no explicit linkage with UNDS reform or the necessity to coordinate or seek synergy with the work of the UN system at country level through the CF and or joint work plans. Coordination with the RC system and UNCTs is one part of the overall 'orientation' for TC, but it is not made explicit in the objective or strategy. (RPTC 2023 23.10 and 23.13).
 - » UNECE guidance and directives for TC do not explicitly include a strategy element or criteria related to synergies or strategic partnerships with UNRCs, UNCTs other UNOs at country level (physically present or not)⁶¹.

4.2 Coherence

62. As discussed above under relevance, UNDS reform has had very little influence over UNECE regulatory cooperation. This section will focus on the UNECE Secretariat role and contributions to the regional coordination architecture and to technical cooperation (TC) at the country level which is more influenced by UNDS reform.

Alignment of UNECE in regional coordination mechanisms

A. Actions taken by the UNECE Secretariat to engage in UNDS reform efforts at the regional level were broadly coherent with those of other UNOs and contributed to system-wide results.

63. Documentary evidence and interview respondents affirm that UNECE actions to support the establishment and working of the RCP and IBCs have enhanced their overall functioning and effectiveness. At the regional level, the UNECE is seen an effective and valuable team player for the RCP and the IBCs in which it is engaged. From 2020 to 2022, the RCP and its inter-agency mechanisms provided support to the UNCTs and the Resident Coordinator System in Europe and Central Asia on policy coherence, advocacy, technical advice in the development of CFs in the programme countries, as well as knowledge management and knowledge sharing. The thematic coverage has included health and well-being; gender equality; youth and adolescents; social protection; large movements of people, displacement and resilience; environment and climate change; digitalization; sustainable food systems; and data and statistics⁶².
64. The [Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#) is an example of a value-added joint initiative. It is convened by the UNECE, in collaboration with the other UNOs in the framework of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP). Despite limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluations

⁵⁹ RPTC Section 23 para 23.3 UNGA, Proposed programme budget for 2023, Part V, Regional cooperation for development, Section 23 Regular programme of technical cooperation, A/77/6 (Sect. 23), 17 May 2022.

⁶⁰ This is also, in part, a reflection of different planning and budgeting cycles of the UNECE and UN Secretariat.

⁶¹ In the UNECE Directive for TC UNECE engagement with UNRCs and UNCTs is a part of 'overall information' and RAs are required to identify new programmatic opportunities and develop joint project proposals with the UNRC and UNCTs. However these important elements are missing from the key sections on strategy and criteria for TC activities. UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022.

⁶² UNSDG, 2022 Regional Results Report of the RCP for Europe and Central Asia, ADVANCED DRAFT and RCP reports for 2021 and 2020.

by participants of the forum in 2022 reflect those of previous years and were very positive⁶³: Discussions were assessed as highly relevant to their work area or expertise (81% of participants), and the forum offered an excellent platform to exchange information and share experiences (71% of participants). Respondents from member States had a stronger view of the value of the forum to identify good practices and they underlined the importance of peer learning and exchange of good practices.

65. Overall, in its efforts to engage in UNDS reform efforts, both documentary evidence and stakeholder interviews affirm that UNECE demonstrated a willingness to seek complementarity and to harmonize and coordinate its efforts with other regional UNOs. Survey results support this finding: 76 percent of UNECE and 65 percent of external respondents agreed that the UNECE plays an active role in and brings value to the work of the RCP and IBCs⁶⁴.

Alignment of UNECE activities in country cooperation frameworks

B. Actions taken by the UNECE Secretariat to engage in UNDS reform at the country level enhanced the visibility and alignment of UNECE TC in Cooperation Frameworks and Joint Work Plans and enabled UNRCs and UNCTs to better understand the UNECE 'offer'

66. For the programme countries and territories, the alignment and inclusion of UNECE technical cooperation (i.e. development) activities into Cooperation Frameworks (CFs) (previously UNDAF) and Joint Work Plans (JWPs) has improved markedly. Both UNRCs, Regional Advisers and staff of the PMU report more consistent engagement by UNECE in country processes to develop, launch monitor and report on CF results. Results are not consistent across all programme countries and the level of inclusion and engagement differs, but overall there has been tangible progress for UNECE positioning at country level. Over three-quarters of survey respondents agreed that the UNECE is effective at engaging and coordinating with UN Country Teams to respond to country priorities through the CF⁶⁵.
67. The six Regional Advisers (RAs), backstopped by the PMU, are the primary actors in this engagement. In all programme countries the UNECE RA is considered a member of the UNCT. In two programme countries (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) the UNECE RA serves as co-chair of a UN Results Group. While performance is uneven, there is broad consensus that the RAs and staff of the PMU have helped to create a stronger 'connection' with the UNRC system and UNCTs.
68. RAs were also keen to point out that the emergence of an independent UNRC (as a part of UNDS reform) was *instrumental* in enabling UNECE and other agencies without physical presence (AWPP⁶⁶) to gain a stronger foothold in country coordination mechanisms and to ensure their visibility in the CF, JWPs and related documents. RAs also argue that involvement in country coordination mechanisms and frameworks helps other UNOs to better understand the value of UNECE-produced regulatory instruments and their relevance to country cooperation. This finding is supported by survey results: 73 percent of UNECE and 74 percent of external respondents agreed that UNECE is doing a better job to integrate its work into CFs and JWPs and to seek complementarities and synergies⁶⁷.
69. At the same time, UNECE internal respondents, including the RAs, point to limitations in their functions and performance and admit to some level of dissatisfaction with the arrangement. There are questions and concerns about whether the country focal point functions are best

⁶³ See RFSD evaluations 2022, 2021, 2020. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was established by the Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-seventh session in April 2017, with the aim to create "a regional mechanism to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" ([E/ECE/1480, Decision B \(67\)](#))

⁶⁴ **Evaluation survey – Q5:** 76% of UNECE staff and 65% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

⁶⁵ **Evaluation survey – Q6:** 81% of UNECE staff and 76% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

⁶⁶ Formerly referred to as Non-Resident Agencies (NRAs)

⁶⁷ **Evaluation survey – Q4:** 73% of UNECE staff and 74% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

carried-out by RAs and about their long-term effectiveness and sustainability. These questions are addressed below under Effectiveness.

UNECE and nexus priorities

C. The UNECE nexus approach helped to drive cross-sector collaboration and coherence within the UNECE Secretariat and to communicate the UNECE 'offer' and valued-added to external stakeholders but its ongoing utility appears to be in question; there are few concrete references in plans and reports.

70. Cross-sectoral collaboration by UNECE is guided by a nexus approach. The nexus approach was introduced in 2018 and evolved in parallel with the roll-out of UNDS reform at the regional level. It was not an institutional response to the reform; rather it was used to focus the work of the UNECE, promote linkages between sub-programmes to respond to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, and to communicate the work of the UNECE to external stakeholders. Four **cross-divisional teams** prepared nexus publications with recommendations that highlighted complementarities across the sub-programmes. In 2021 the OIOS recommended an action plan to review and seek endorsement of the nexus publications by relevant subprogrammes, sectoral committees and the Executive Committee to enable timely tracking and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations. Progress in this regard was reported in 2023 and nexus publications have been introduced or put on the agendas of 8 UNECE expert groups and working parties⁶⁸.
71. In addition, the last two Commission sessions endorsed **high level themes** to shape and direct its intergovernmental work: (1) Circular economy (69th Commission Session, 2021) and (2) Digital and green transformation (70th Commission session, 2022). High level themes are cross-sectoral and their introduction was informed by the nexus approach undertaken by the Secretariat, but they are positioned differently from the nexus areas. They emerged from the Commission process and decisions, have a higher level of buy-in from member States, and are valid for four years (two Commission cycles). Based upon EXCOM decisions⁶⁹, each sectoral committee has a standing agenda item for the theme that provides a rally point for cross-sector collaboration and all UNECE divisions are required to integrate the themes into sub-programmes.
72. UNECE interview respondents were in broad agreement that the nexus approach was important as a management approach. It helped to bring focus to UNECE comparative advantages and to offer incentives for cross-sectoral thinking and collaboration between the sub-programmes. The nexus areas were also seen to be effective communication tools to package and deliver clear messages to stakeholder and partners including member States, RCs and UNCTs, and current and prospective donors about the UNECE offer and valued-added in the context of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs⁷⁰. About two-thirds of UNECE respondents and 76 percent of external survey respondents agreed that the nexus priorities are highly relevant to the region and represent UNECE comparative advantages⁷¹.
73. Despite these results, the ongoing relevance of the nexus priorities appears to be in question. There are **mixed views** amongst UNECE informants: Some report that the work of nexus focal points and nexus cross-divisional teams is 'subsiding', 'fading' or 'inactive'. Moreover, the sectoral committees that guide the work of the UNECE have not explicitly endorsed the nexus areas or embraced them in programmes of work; they are perceived by some within the UNECE Secretariat as being un-interested. Evidence for a decline of the approach:

⁶⁸ (1) OIOS, Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe Report No. 2021/048; (2) UNECE, PPB A/77/6 (Sect 20) for 2024, Annex 2, 83.

⁶⁹ For example, see E/2021/37-E/ECE/1494)

⁷⁰ For example, one senior UNECE informant described the nexus priorities as providing a very useful 'elevator pitch' for communicating the focus and value of the UNECE programme.

⁷¹ **Evaluation survey – Q2:** 65% of UNECE staff and 76% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

- » Coverage in PPBs (Section 20): In 2020, there were **24 references** to nexus priorities in the programme, including in every sub-programme. By 2022 this had dropped to 11; the PPB for 2024 contains only 1 reference, under sub-programme 5, to the ‘food-water-energy nexus’, which is not one of the UNECE nexus priorities.
 - » The nexus areas are difficult to see consistently in narrative plans and reports. For example programme performance sections of the annual Programme Budget reports (Section 20) do not report consistently on the nexus areas⁷². The TC report for 2021 includes only 2 references to nexus results⁷³.
 - » Resource mobilization: In 2021 four nexus areas were seen as vehicles for resource mobilization up to USD \$1.02 million, including cross sectoral work on circular economy for an additional USD \$800,000⁷⁴; in 2022, only one nexus for sustainable and smart cities was seen as such, but with a much higher projected budget of USD \$2.5 million. This is a pilot project in Kharkiv Ukraine ([UN4Kharkiv project](#)) for integrated rehabilitation of settlements⁷⁵.
74. Other informants report that the influence of the nexus approach and thinking has permeated the sub-programmes and is being sustained. This is supported by the OIOS evaluation of 2023 in which 62 percent of staff reported high levels of internal coherence through the nexus areas⁷⁶.
75. Overall, the high level themes appear to resonate more strongly with member States. For example the Commission report from 2023 notes how the high-level theme of circular economy ‘*facilitated closer collaboration across the secretariat, the intergovernmental architecture and the broad expert community of the Commission*’ and enhanced access to collective expertise. The Commission requested the EXCOM to designate a future cross-cutting theme for all future Commission years⁷⁷.
76. The **risk** for UNECE is that more nexus areas and cross-cutting themes could lead to less focus. There is less about mission creep than about having too many competing or overlapping agendas and difficulties to connect these coherently to the programme of work and progress reporting. It can become a matching or ‘box-checking’ exercise, rather than a genuine consideration of tangible and value-added linkages across the programme to advance regulatory instruments. This could create reputational risk if member States and donors to the UNECE come to see the nexus areas and cross-cutting themes as a mainly communications strategy.

Mainstreaming

D. The UNECE has sufficient policies, reflecting UNDS priorities and strategies, to mainstream gender equality, disability inclusion, the environment and human rights; Action on gender equality and environment and climate change is stronger than for human rights and disability inclusion

77. The mainstreaming of major cross-cutting concerns in development cooperation is a priority for the UNDS⁷⁸. These include: gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion, the environment

⁷² For example, the PPB (Section 20) for 2024 and 2023 contains only one reference to the generic ‘food-water-energy nexus’ under SP 5 (Sustainable energy). There are no other references or reporting on the UNECE nexus areas under the sub-programmes. A/78/6 (Sect. 20), 17 March 2023;

⁷³ TC report 2021: (1) para 60: Project “Improving capacity in Ukraine to support the circular economy in e-mobility and sustainable resource management using a nexus approach (M-RaaS) (SDG8, 8.2); (2) para 95: SDG 11 para 95. A workshop on green urban transport (17 September 2021) to follow-up policy recommendations in Nexus publication “People-Smart Sustainable Cities – Sustainable and Smart Cities for All Ages” (SDG 11); (3) Also Strengthen understanding of the UNECE member States on good governance - human rights - environment nexus approach in capacity-building activities (note. not one of UNECE nexus areas) (SDG 17, 17.17).

⁷⁴ UNECE EXCOM, UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2021: Annual Report, Informal Document 2022/20, 8 July 2022.

⁷⁵ UNECE, Resource Mobilization Plans 2022-2024, DRAFT working document, May 2023.

⁷⁶ OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, paras 49, 52.

⁷⁷ UNECE, Biennial Report (20 April 2021-18 April 2023), Economic and Social Council Official Records, 2023 Supplement no 17, E/ECE/1503, Section C (70), 9.

⁷⁸ General Assembly resolutions and Secretary-General Bulletins: human rights (A/RES/60/1; A/RES/76/6), gender (A/RES/71/243), disability inclusion (A/RES/75/154) and environment (A/RES/76/L.75 and ST/SGB/2019/7).

and climate change. While cross-cutting concerns are not mentioned explicitly in the guiding principles for UNECE TC⁷⁹ they are generally well-reflected in UNECE policies and partnerships:

- » The UNECE policy for [gender equality and empowerment of women](#) (GEEW) is aligned with the system-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ([UN-SWAP and scorecard](#)); the policy aims for gender parity amongst staff of the Secretariat, it contains strategic objectives at the sub-programme level, and cross-sectoral implementation measures are specified in the UNECE Gender Action Plan (GAP), updated biennially. In 2022, the EXCOM endorsed the creation of a Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards. The UNECE maintains [partnerships to mainstream GEEW](#) in regional and country cooperation. For example: (1) the UNECE participates actively on the regional IBC for gender equality and the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality ([IANWGE](#)) with a focus on the economics of gender; (2) The [SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs](#), led jointly by UNECE and UNESCAP, strengthens sub-regional cooperation between Central Asian countries for the economic advancement of women.
- » In line with system-wide guidance, UNECE cooperation aims to respond to human rights issues, including discrimination⁸⁰. It does this by aligning its work with the commitments of programme countries and accepted recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)⁸¹ and other treaty-based bodies, special procedures, and ILO supervisory bodies.
- » The UNECE applies the 2019 UN system [Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) and reports regularly to the EXCOM on the development of related regulatory instruments for [disability inclusion](#)⁸². For example (1) Norms and regulation for [electric cars to emit audible signals](#), (2) Accessibility housing through a UN charter on [sustainable housing](#), and (3) Reducing barriers to safe [water and sanitation services](#) for people with disabilities. In 2021, the IBC supported UNCTs to promote disability-inclusive social protection; in 2022, the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held a special event on [digital inclusion](#).
- » In environment and climate change, the UNECE co-chairs the regional IBC for environment and climate change. In 2021, it played a key role to prepare [guidance](#) for UNCTs to integrate environment and climate change into CFs. These topics are the major focus of the UNECE sub-programme on environment, through the implementation of UNECE multilateral environmental conventions or [MEAs](#).
- » In addition, a UNECE working group convenes and supports the intergovernmental platform on [ageing](#) and issued guidance for member States in 2021 to [mainstreaming ageing](#)⁸³ in policy formulation and regulatory reform.

78. About two-thirds of UNECE and external survey respondents agreed that UNECE has succeeded to mainstream gender equality, human rights, climate change, and disability concerns into its programme, including TC⁸⁴.

⁷⁹ Apart from cooperation being 'anchored in UNECE normative work'. (1) UNECE-EXCOM, [Technical Cooperation Strategy](#), Informal Document 2021/11, 17 May 2021; (2) UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022.

⁸⁰ Based on the most recent outcomes from the human rights mechanisms. See UNSDG Companion Piece: Guiding Principles, on a human rights-based approach (HRBA) and normative frameworks related to human rights, 21.

⁸¹ OHCHR, [Human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms](#); OHCHR, [UPR Practical Guidance](#) (2020).

⁸² UNECE EXCOM, Implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy in the Economic Commission for Europe, Informal Document 2021/22.

⁸³ The Guidelines provide policymakers across the UNECE region with suggestions on how to advance or improve their mainstreaming efforts by developing a Strategic Framework for Mainstreaming Ageing

⁸⁴ **Evaluation survey – Q3:** 65% of UNECE staff and 69% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

This is tempered by actual reporting and expenditure⁸⁵: Action related to gender equality and environment and climate change appear most frequently in UNECE plans and reports⁸⁶:

- » Gender: The UNECE offers consistent support to member States to implement the Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and to promote gender action plans for standards bodies. Related TC concerns the mainstreaming of gender equality considerations into policies for trade, access to clean energy, road safety, and social protection for rapid recovery from COVID-19.
- » Environment and climate change: The UNECE: (1) Convened a regional forum on climate finance with high-level policy and decision-makers from the Ministries of Economy, Finance, Trade, Industry, Energy and Environment; and (2) Offered training and advice to UNCTs to mainstream environment and climate change in the UN country programming cycle. There is related TC across the sub-programmes. For example: transboundary water management and sustainable agriculture, climate neutral housing, green building and decarbonizing cities and towns, coal mine methane abatement and climate and health analyses in strategic and project environmental assessment.

79. While gender and environment and climate concerns are well integrated, human rights and disability inclusion are less visible in both plans and reports⁸⁷. This finding aligns with the 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6⁸⁸. In both plans and reports there is a lack of disaggregated data for gender, human rights, and disability concerns. However this reflects the focus of cooperation on activities: inter-governmental meetings, seminars, workshops and training, rather than outputs or outcomes.

4.3 Effectiveness

80. Effectiveness is about understanding to extent to which an intervention has achieved its planned results. UNDS reform is not an end in itself; it is a means (admittedly complex) to better support member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda and country SDG targets. For UNECE, this is explicit in its technical cooperation strategy and directive: *'UNECE engages with the Resident Coordinators (UNRCs) and the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) to maximise the impact of country-level technical cooperation, inter alia, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)*⁸⁹.
81. The analysis above affirms that the UNECE used the opportunity of UNDS reform to: (1) Better position itself and communicate its offer among the UN family; and (2) Enhance the coherence and functioning of regional and country coordination architecture and frameworks (*Regional: RCP and IBCs; Country: UNRC system, UNCTs, CFs and JWPs*)⁹⁰. Overall UNECE was seen both by internal and external UN system respondents having made considerable efforts to engage and

⁸⁵ In both 2022 and 2021, TC expenditure on SDG5 (gender equality) and SDG 13 (climate action) were less than 1%. However, as cross-cutting SDGs, other activities make contributions that are not easily counted. UNECE EXCOM, UNECE Technical Cooperation Activities 2022: Annual Report, Informal Document 2023/27, para 9.

⁸⁶ Ibid., paras 22, 146-147.

⁸⁷ For example, there were 26 and 55 *substantive* references to gender equality and environment and climate change, respectively, in the 2022 report on TC – there were no references to disability and only 1 to human rights.

⁸⁸ OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, Section G, para 72. OIOS recommendation: ECTD should ensure the 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 United Nations agencies, national partners and think tanks with subject-matter expertise.

⁸⁹ UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022.

⁹⁰ For example: During this evaluation, the UNECE engaged with the UNCT to respond to the **Kakhovka dam disaster in Ukraine**: preparation of the PDNA, identification of national level impacts and risks and contribution to sectoral response teams for environment, water and sanitation, energy, infrastructure and forestry. Informal communication with PMU, 20 June 2023.

was perceived as a valuable team player and, at the regional level, as a leader on several important and complex initiatives.

82. **For this evaluation, the question of effectiveness is about whether these efforts and achievements actually made a difference – in terms of supporting UNECE member States to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs?**
83. Just over half of UNECE survey respondents and 65 percent of external respondents agreed that the UNECE is using UNDS reform to deliver effective, value-added programme results for member States⁹¹. These perceptions are tempered by responses from key informants and UNECE plans and reports which offer mixed or limited evidence for this (from para 58). There are clear benefits for UNECE and for the wider UN family: Increased awareness amongst UNRCs and UNCTs about UNECE expertise and the availability of normative and policy instruments and tools that have a high degree of ownership from UNECE member States. However these do not appear to have significantly strengthened UNECE cooperation, in terms of greater programmatic synergy with the UN system. **Three issues emerge.**

UNECE cooperation in the context of UNDS reform

A. There is still insufficient focus and priority for UNECE cooperation in programme countries; UNECE cooperation is perceived as fragmented and too 'projectized'

84. UNECE is first and foremost a knowledge organization – there was consensus on this amongst both external and UNECE informants. About three-quarters of UNECE and external survey respondents agreed that regulatory instruments developed by the UNECE are valuable and used by programme countries⁹². For UNECE, engagement through regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks and partnerships with other UNOs is seen as a potential amplifier of UNECE knowledge – its regulatory instruments and expertise – and can help to move these to tangible policy implementation. This potential is recognized by external and UNECE informants. Here it is understood that UNECE TC must be nimble enough to identify the most promising opportunities to leverage its knowledge and 'plug-in' to ongoing UN initiatives at country level through partnerships with other UNOs. However all external and some UNECE informants point to a lack of focus and prioritization in UNECE engagement at country level. Amongst external informants there is a strong perception that the UNECE is trying to do too many things and lacks a coherent narrative about where and how its regulatory work can make the biggest difference for member States and to contribute to the SDGs.
85. Making choices about where and how to 'plug-in' is difficult. It is made harder when there are limited human and financial resources to ensure follow-up (see Efficiency). The **Country Briefs** are an example of one way in which the UNECE Secretariat and especially RAs have sought to make this task easier. The briefs were introduced in response to the 2021 OIOS audit of SDG mainstreaming in the UNECE programme⁹³. They offer a valuable summary of the entirety of UNECE work in the programme countries, including all 8 sub-programmes, and are from 10 to 16 pages in length. Most briefs offer main messages and 'asks', based on the work of the sub-programmes but not linked to country priorities or those in the CF. Coverage of the UNECE nexus areas is inconsistent and not always matching the five nexus areas.
86. The main limitation of the briefs is that they offer **no sense of priority** amongst the many potential actions and 'asks' are not directed to specific stakeholders. They provide good value in

⁹¹ **Evaluation survey – Q11:** 58% of UNECE staff and 65% of external respondents agreed.

⁹² **Evaluation survey – Q10:** 73% of UNECE staff and 70% of external respondents agreed.

⁹³ OIOS, Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe Report No. 2021/048. OIOS recommended also that UNECE set targets for regional advisers to complete national action plans for their respective programme countries to optimize and tailor ECE support to the specific needs of each Member State

terms of knowledge, but they are not actionable. Most briefs do not identify the top priorities for UNECE cooperation, in terms of where specific knowledge products (regulatory instruments) can best be positioned to support institutional change. Of the UNRCs interviewed for this evaluation, none were immediately familiar with the briefs. More importantly, the briefs are limited in terms of potential **partnership opportunities** with other UNOs and **stakeholder analysis**. This could help the UNECE Secretariat to better understand the power dynamics at country level, and key stakeholders in government and amongst donors who might oppose action or act as champions for specific regulatory change.

87. External informants, especially the UNRCs interviewed for this evaluation, urged the UNECE Secretariat to carry-out **more strategic and granular prioritization**. This would involve efforts to identify 3 to 4 specific sectoral policy needs at country level where UNECE has an exclusive 'knowledge niche' and where regulatory instruments and expertise can be martialled for relatively quick and consistent, action. For example, the UNRC in Serbia suggested three pressing areas of concern to Government in which UNECE is perceived to have comparative advantage: (1) [Carbon border adjustment mechanisms](#)⁹⁴; (2) An effective regulatory framework for lithium mining, including pollution abatement and participation and access to information⁹⁵; and (3) Sustainable urban transport⁹⁶.
88. Once priorities are established, it is not enough to place them into the CF and JWPs. This is insufficient to create the synergy that is desired by UNECE policy guidance and directives (para 56-57). Nor has it translated into significantly more joint initiatives, including joint programmes at country or regional level, with opportunities for resource mobilization. UNRCs point to a UNECE presence this is still highly '*projectized*' with limited links or synergies with the work of other UNOs and missed opportunities. For example: The Moldova brief highlights its role as a pilot country under a UNDA funded project [Accelerating the transition to a circular economy in the UNECE region](#). The UNRC noted this is a major priority of government, however the project is yet to be initiated and engagement with the UNRC and UNCT is needed to explore partnership opportunities.
89. UNRCs counsel four ways that UNECE could engage more effectively to get traction and generate partnerships for a smaller but more strategic set of country priorities, connected with UNECE regulatory instruments:
 - 1) Engage more fully in **CF Results Groups (RGs)** to formulate and review JWPs: These are launched and/or updated annually by end March. All UNRCs shared the view that, while always welcome, UNECE engagement in every UNCT meeting is not always the best use of scarce time, as not all meetings are relevant to the organization. However, all UNRCs emphasised the importance of consistent engagement with RGs, as the forum where complementarities and synergies with other UNOs are best explored and pursued.
 - 2) Undertake **cross-divisional review of JWPs** most relevant for UNECE cooperation: A focused period (annually) of cross-divisional review and discussion of JWPs vis-à-vis UNECE RC and TC could be used to highlight new or emerging partnership opportunities and prioritize effort. UNRCs emphasised the importance of follow-up discussion with them to help 'ground-truth'

⁹⁴ See: <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/as-cbam-carbon-border-tax-looms-eu-wants-to-help-western-balkans-to-adapt/>; Agora, Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: [Challenges and Opportunities for the Western Balkan Countries](#), June 2023.

⁹⁵ See: <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/23/rio-tinto-spends-million-euros-on-serbian-land-since-mine-cancellation/>

⁹⁶ This is in contrast with five programmatic opportunities from the UNECE country brief with partial overlap for (1) and (3): (1) Environment: Ratification of the Gothenburg protocol, and work to promote effective public access to information, participation in decision-making (Aarhus Convention) and engagement in [the National Policy Dialogue \(NPD\) for Industrial Safety](#); (2) Statistics: Serbia is leading informal group of Balkan countries to jointly develop new statistical production tools; (3) Energy: Decarbonizing the transport sector; (4) Forests: Scaling up forest landscape restoration and enhancement of forest ecosystems through regional cooperation; (5) Urban development: Policy reform to promote smart sustainable and resilient urban development and [sustainable Housing](#)

emerging priorities and to suggest partnerships at country level. The UNECE [Working Group on TC](#) may be an appropriate body for this review and prioritization⁹⁷.

- 3) Better connect the regulatory work and TC of the sectoral committee programmes to country frameworks and priorities: For example an annual meeting between the UNRC, UNCT, the UNECE RA and key **government focal points** for the work of the sector committees provides an opportunity to offer a briefing on top priorities and connect UNECE cooperation with priorities in the CF and government.
 - 4) Prioritize engagement in **development partners' meetings**, convened regularly by the UNRC, and propose topics for discussion: These offer the opportunity to share information and to identify potential areas for targeted joint work that aligns with country SDG needs and the priorities of donors and that utilize existing UNECE regulatory instruments. In particular, all UNRCs and some external informants emphasise the importance of finding synergies with the European Union (EU) and its country association and partnership agreements and [multi-annual indicative programmes](#) under the [European neighbourhood policy](#)⁹⁸. The EU policy covers 13 of the 18 programme countries and territory⁹⁹. EU cooperation with the five countries of [Central Asia](#) is through Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (EPCAs).
90. Choice-making is hard for every organization. Often the struggle is not over what is 'in' but what is left out. It requires consultation across the organisation with knowledgeable stakeholders AND with enough senior level authority to codify the choices, drive and sustain implementation, and adapt as circumstances change. Prioritization across the UNECE programme may be difficult for the RAs to lead when they are based within a single division and answerable to its chief.

The role of Regional Advisers as country focal points

B. While Regional Advisers (RAs) have enhanced the relevance and coherence of UNECE at country level there are questions about whether the representation, coordination, and strategic functions are best carried-out by RAs and about their long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

91. As discussed above the RAs, backstopped by the PMU, have made important strides to engage with UNRCs and UNCTs and to increase the visibility and coherence of UNECE in country coordination frameworks and mechanisms. Of survey respondents, 73 percent of UNECE and 74 percent of external respondents agreed that regional advisers worked closely with UNRCs and UNCTs and sought opportunities to employ UNECE regulatory instruments¹⁰⁰. At the same time there are questions about the future effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of this arrangement whereby RAs serve as focal points for programme countries. There are 6 RAs, each responsible for 3 countries. They have specific sectoral expertise and are based in a UNECE division responsible for one or more sub-programmes. From the generic TOR, the lion's share of their work is to ensure a direct link between regulatory cooperation and technical cooperation in the programme countries. The functions added in 2019 are cross-sectoral in programme countries. Specific tasks are to¹⁰¹:

⁹⁷ The WGTC is chaired by the DES. It is comprised of all Regional Advisers, RPTC focal points and the Director of the PMSSD. The WGTC meets as needed to steer the main direction of the UNECE technical cooperation, review the implementation of the RPTC programme of work and address emerging priorities. It is serviced by the PMU. UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022. Section 6.

⁹⁸ Bilateral cooperation with Neighbourhood countries is framed by Joint Documents (Partnership Priorities, Association Agendas or equivalent). They are concluded between a partner country, the EU and its Member States, setting the political and economic priorities for cooperation. [Multiannual indicative programmes](#) (2021-2027) set cooperation priorities drawn from the Joint Documents. When these are absent, cooperation is based on annual special measures.

⁹⁹ See [Countries](#) of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU also engages with the countries of Central Asia through the **Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (EPCAs)**.

¹⁰⁰ **Evaluation survey – Q7:** 73% of UNECE staff and 74% of external respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

¹⁰¹ Regional Adviser, Generic job description: UNECE, TOR INTER-REGIONAL ADVISER, P5, Job Code Title : INTER-REGIONAL ADVISER.

- » Represent the organisation in discussions with UNRCs and UNCTs and work closely with them to identify new programmatic opportunities and proposing new joint projects; and
 - » Contribute to the UNSDCF processes at the country level, and the United Nations Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia ([SPECA](#)) at the subregional level.
92. UNECE informants, including the RAs, point to limitations in their functions and performance and admit to some level of dissatisfaction with the focal point arrangement. A summary of concerns:
- » As specific sectoral experts the RAs are not always suited for the role of coordination focal point (i.e. 'not the right people for the job') ¹⁰²;
 - » That specific technical requests outside their area of expertise are 'lost in translation' when communicated back to UNECE, slowing effective response beyond their own division;
 - » That information sharing between the RAs, sub-programmes and PMU is still too informal or opportunistic, lacking a systemic approach to track and respond to country needs in a timely fashion with the right expertise;
 - » That engagement with country coordination mechanisms is better situated with the PMU thereby reducing duplication of functions and tasks;
 - » The time requirements and workload to engage with country coordination mechanisms is underestimated by UNECE management and that RAs find it difficult perform their divisional tasks and fulfil the expectations of them as focal points (i.e. they must choose)¹⁰³;
 - » A general lack of UNECE resources for TC, especially compared with other Regional Commissions, limiting the effectiveness of UNECE engagement in the CF and JWPs;
 - » A lack of training, mentoring and ongoing in-service support or guidance to enable them to take up the expected representation, coordination and facilitative roles as focal points;
 - » That the focal point role detracts from or is a distraction from their major focus of their work and accountability for RC and TC through their division and sub-programme¹⁰⁴;
 - » That the performance of RAs as focal points is not adequately assessed or recognized in annual performance reviews by their Divisional heads¹⁰⁵.
93. Overall, and despite their achievements, RAs expressed concern about the value-added to UNECE of the focal point role (i.e. '*What we get is less than what we put in*'). For example several RAs pointed out that while their roles helped to increase awareness of the wider UN system about UNECE and its offer, it did not strengthen working relationships with line ministries in the programme countries, through the sectoral committees.
94. Under UNDS reform, UNECE must and will continue to engage with country coordination mechanisms to support achievement of the SDGs. The concrete functions involve:
- » A knowledge and awareness function to communicate the UNECE offer and to connect normative and policy instruments and tools to country cooperation by the wider UN system;
 - » A coordination function to ensure ongoing inclusion and alignment of UNECE TC into the CF and JWPs, with links to regulatory cooperation through the sectoral committees
 - » A strategic function to spot opportunities for joint work with other UNOs that can amplify the value UNECE normative and policy instruments and tools – this is often done in the

¹⁰² Some of these concerns were reflected in the 2023 OIOS evaluation of subprogrammes 4 and 6. It found that, while regional advisers provided specific technical support in their specialized areas, they did not coordinate ECE activities consistently. OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, para 55.

¹⁰³ For example, during the 90 minute interview, one RA received 6 messages from a single country.

¹⁰⁴ Based on the generic job description for the Regional Adviser, the country focal point role accounts for 3 of 14 major responsibilities or about 20 percent.

¹⁰⁵ Some RAs expressed concern that the Division chiefs are the 1st reporting officer for RAs but are not fully aware of the focal point role and requirements and cannot appraise their performance. In addition, RAs argue that there is little added-value for the SP and Director from their role as focal points.

context of UNCT meetings, meetings of CF results groups, and regular development partners' meetings;

- » Linked with this, a resource mobilization function to identify opportunities for UNECE technical cooperation, including through joint programmes; and
- » A clearing house function to communicate country and UN system requests for technical expertise and tools back to UNECE

The question before UNECE is whether the current focal point arrangement is the best way to achieve these ends.

The contribution of UNECE to the SDGs

C. The contribution of UNECE cooperation (both RC and TC) to the achievement of the SDGs by member States is difficult to see at the outcome level; the influence of UNECE engagement in UNDS reform appears limited

95. From UNECE reports, gauging *its contribution* to the achievement by members States of their country SDG targets is a challenge. This is because reporting by UNECE against the expected results of its regulatory cooperation is limited by reporting guidelines and formats and somewhat disjointed from year to year and reporting against technical cooperation is mainly activity-based.
96. Regulatory cooperation (RC):
 - » In PPB (Section 20) documents each **sub-programme** has a concrete objective, strategy, and set of expected results, for example: PPB (Section 20) 2023 paras 20.22; 20.35; 20.51; 20.67);
 - » These results can be understood as the **expected outcomes** of UNECE cooperation as they concern institutional changes and performance by member States to adopt and implement the normative and policy instruments and tools that are developed through regulatory cooperation.
 - » These outcome level results are not accompanied by a consistent set of indicators with baselines and targets;
 - » Based on the template provided and strictly enforced by the UN Secretariat annual reporting against these outcomes, is limited to 1 or at most 2 topics per sub-programme¹⁰⁶;
 - » This reporting is disjointed from year to year; the result reported against is often not from among the planned results in the previous PPB document.
97. Technical cooperation (TC):
 - » Reporting on TC is organized according to the UNECE **core SDGs** and selected targets (para) but reporting is activity-based;
 - » The narrative suggests the outcomes or institutional level changes to which there may be a contribution¹⁰⁷, but there is limited reporting against these.
98. For both RC and TC there is a critical but *unwritten* assumption that planned activities, which are closely monitored and reported, make a tangible contribution to increased country capacities and institutional outcomes to achieve the SDGs. This is reasonable and plausible. But the evidence of these contributions is fragmented/ piecemeal. In both, **the added-value of synergies or cooperation with the wider UN system is difficult to see**. As noted above (para 58), there are very few references to activities or reporting on synergies with the wider UN system in sections for programmatic performance and planned results of the sub-programmes.

¹⁰⁶ For example UNECE informants note the prescriptive guidance and high level of scrutiny and control exercised by UN Secretariat budget office and via the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ).

¹⁰⁷ For example: the development of a national strategy, the introduction of national legislation, or alignment of existing laws with standards and protocols.

99. While examples exist at Committee level, Section 20 and TC reports lack a consistent narrative about the contributions of the UNECE -- organization-wide -- to efforts by member States at the outcome level, as defined in PPBs (Section 20). This is echoed in the 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6. It pointed out the solid reporting and evidence about the work of UNECE to promote policy dialogue, facilitate development of regulatory instruments, norms and standards, and contribute to country policy formulation and implementation through TC, but that concrete results (i.e. outcomes) were mixed. Evaluations can help: For example, the same evaluation found evidence of a significant increase in global trade in fresh fruit and vegetables resulting from the adoption of UNECE standards and their knock-on adoption by the EU (plausible contribution to SDG targets 17.10-17.12)¹⁰⁸.
100. Reporting on outcomes in a diverse and complex regional environment driven by intergovernmental processes is not simple. Each division and sub-programme acts as secretariat to the related inter-governmental sectoral committee. They facilitate the development and adoption of regulatory instruments, norms and standards by fostering consensus among member States, and support implementation with TC. But norms and standards can be voluntary – they are agreed but not binding, with timeframes and reporting obligations. This approach offers member States the discretion and flexibility to incorporate norms and standards into their national legislation when timing and other contextual factors allow.
101. Implementation by member States is the concrete next step toward achievement of the related SD target(s). Here, the influence of UNECE is only indirect at best, through its advocacy and TC. It can take up to 2 or more years to adopt a particular standard and begin implementation at country level; the contribution of regulatory instruments toward a SDG target can only be understood over a long period – at least 5 years from adoption¹⁰⁹. This is a **clear attribution challenge** for UNECE in its monitoring and reporting. Moreover, the framing of progress around the 2030 Agenda and SDGs is not equally relevant to all members States. UNECE and external informants suggest that, for the advanced economy member States who make-up the majority, the 2030 Agenda is of lesser importance to policy makers and decision-takers in government.

4.4 Efficiency

UNECE engagement with regional and country coordination mechanisms

A. UNECE efforts to engage with and contribute to the effective functioning of regional and country level coordination mechanisms and frameworks was carried out in an efficient manner; there appears to be no efficiency gain from UNDS reform for UNECE cooperation with member States

102. Engagement and coordination with the regional and country level coordination mechanisms is labour and time- intensive. Most of this work is performed by a **small group** of UNECE Secretariat staff, comprising about 8 percent of all regular staff¹¹⁰. This includes: 4 staff in the SDU; 5 staff in the PMU, under the Programme Management and Support Services Division¹¹¹; and 6 RAs (one in each programme division), with the caveat that only about 20 percent of RA responsibilities relate to their coordination and facilitative roles as country focal points¹¹². Of the above, there are two posts (1 P3 in the PMU and 1 P4 in the SDU) that are responsible for the lion's share of

¹⁰⁸ OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4 Economic cooperation and integration and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, Section C, paras 40-41.

¹⁰⁹ OIOS Eval 2023

¹¹⁰ This is based on the 188 regular posts shown in PPB A/78/6 (Section 20), 2024 Table 20.24, p63. This does not refer to coordination on substantive, technical issues, where work is performed directly by relevant Division staff.

¹¹¹ See PPB A/78/6 (Section 20), 2024, paras 20.150, 20.151, and Annex I Organizational structure and post distribution, p82.

¹¹² RA job description, the country focal point role accounts for 3 of 14 major responsibilities or about 20 percent.

work related to the UNDS and carry large and complex workloads to sustain UNECE engagement with regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks.

103. In 2016, the UNECE Secretariat, alone amongst the other regional secretariats, was unsuccessful to receive additional staff positions to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda and engage in UNDS reform efforts under [resolution 71/272](#)¹¹³. This lends credence to a widely held view within the UNECE Secretariat that they were asked to do much more to engage in UNDS reform, with no additional staff resources. Over half of UNECE and the majority of external survey respondents (41 percent) indicated that the UNECE is not adequately resourced to engage effectively and consistently in UNDS reform efforts and to coordinate and work effectively with UNRCs and UNCTs¹¹⁴. Most of the current, key UNECE posts that engage in UNDS reform were classified in 2013 or earlier; it appears that none have been reviewed or reclassified following the addition of substantial new responsibilities under the reform. For example a review of the duties and responsibilities of the PMU P3 post¹¹⁵ shows that only 1 of 16 responsibilities in the job description and classification concerns engagement and coordination with the wider UN system, both regional and country levels. This is in addition to the major focus of the post to support coordination and reporting on UNECE TC across all programme countries and sub-programmes and planning monitoring and reporting on all XB and UNDA funded projects. The coverage of work on UNDS reform is not commensurate with the level and scale of the actual effort required.
104. Overall, the relevance and coherence gains to the UN system at regional and country levels from the engagement of the UNECE Secretariat were achieved with no additional staffing expense: **this made it highly efficient**. The work plans and activities of the staff involved in and contributing to UNDS reform are broadly in line with the scale and scope of expected results, but these are not sufficiently described or weighted in the relevant job descriptions. While current staffing resources are sufficient to ‘station-keep’ they are insufficient for UNECE to engage more comprehensively with country coordination mechanisms and frameworks and to seek out the strategic synergies that are expected from collaboration with the UN system, especially in programme countries.
105. A further question is whether the investment of time and effort by the core group of UNECE staff led to tangible efficiency gains for UNECE to support member States to implement the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. In other words: Was the delivery of RC or TC made more efficient by the efforts of UNECE staff to support and better position the organization within regional and country coordination mechanisms? Under half of UNECE and external survey respondents agreed that UNECE engagement in UNDS reform has improved the overall efficiency of the organization and achievement of programme results¹¹⁶.
106. Evidence for this is not available in UNECE reports. As noted above there are very few references to collaboration or synergies with the wider UN system in Section 20 and technical cooperation reports. Perceptions of UNECE informants are that engagement in UNDS reform has led to few efficiency gains. Certainly there was greater knowledge and awareness amongst UNRCs and UNCTs and UNECE TC was better positioned and coordinated, but this did not appear to translate into efficiency gains for the UNECE or member States. Some RAs expressed concerns that engagement with country coordination mechanisms reduced their overall efficiency to link

¹¹³ Section XII. *Supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development*), December 2016. While UNESCWA did not receive new posts under Section XII it did receive four temporary posts until December 2030 under Section XIII (para 3).

¹¹⁴ **Evaluation survey – Q8:** 58% of UNECE staff and 41% of external respondents dis-agreed; 9 external respondents (26%) did not know.

¹¹⁵ UN office at Geneva, Division of Administration and Human Resources, Classification Notice GP1146, Economic Affairs Officer, P3.

¹¹⁶ **Evaluation survey – Q9:** 46% of UNECE staff and 49% of external respondents agreed; 10 external respondents (29%) did not know.

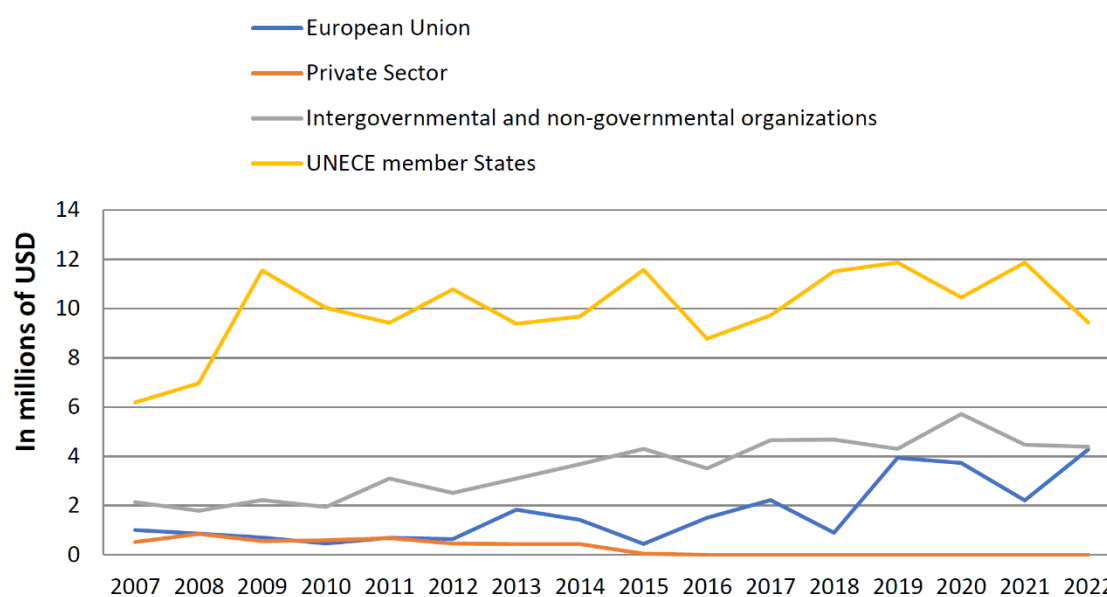
UNECE regulatory cooperation and technical cooperation in the programme countries, as directed by the work programmes of the sectoral committees.

UNDS reform and UNECE resources

B. Engagement by the UNECE in UNDS reform has not contributed to a significant increase in extrabudgetary resources (XB).

107. XB are voluntary contributions to UNECE and make-up the largest share of funding for TC. In 2022, XB provided 85 percent of funds for TC, followed by the RPTC (9.5%), and UNDA (5.5%). TC activities support regulatory cooperation by building the capacity of member States to implement regulatory instruments. TC is closely associated with work by the UNECE Secretariat to engage with UN coordination mechanisms and frameworks in programme countries.
108. In 2022 XB contributions to the UNECE were USD \$18.1 million, a decrease from 2021 by 2.4 percent. The largest contributors were member States providing about 52 percent of total XB. The top 5 donors were: Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, France, and Italy. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the EU each contributed about 24 percent. The war in Ukraine has had a major negative impact on contributions from the Russian Federation. In 2021 the Russian Federation was amongst the top 3 donor countries providing USD \$1.37 million; this dropped to \$10,000 in 2022¹¹⁷. Trends are shown below.

Figure 1. Trend in extrabudgetary contributions by source, 2006-2022



109. While there are some large fluctuations from year to year, and especially between 2021 and 2022, overall trends in extrabudgetary contributions are positive. However, both UNECE and external informants caution against inferring any causality between these trends and the results of UNECE engagement in UNDS reform. There was consensus amongst informants that **success with UNDS reform does not constitute a major incentive for member States to increase their voluntary contributions to the UNECE**. The objectives and results of the work programmes of the UNECE intergovernmental sectoral committees figure much more strongly in the investment decisions of member States.

¹¹⁷ This was noted in the 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6: The war in Ukraine significantly affected the continuity of those ECTD workstreams in programme countries that relied heavily on extrabudgetary funding from the Russian Federation. OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, para 60.

C. The UNECE has had modest success to secure additional extrabudgetary resources from engagement with regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks, including pooled funds

110. Engagement with UN regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks and stronger positioning of UNECE does come with the prospect of additional resource mobilization. This can be achieved in partnership with other UNOs through MOUs, partnership agreements and joint programmes. For UNECE, these resource mobilization aims, especially at country level, are explicit in the 2021 Technical Cooperation Strategy and 2022 directive for the Management of the RPTC¹¹⁸. Both the PMU and RAs share the role to ensure greater coherence and linkage between UNECE TC and the work of UNRCs and UNCTs. RAs are expected to spearhead efforts to identify opportunities for new technical cooperation projects and activities that can mobilize additional resources for UNECE.
111. Based upon UNECE reports, extrabudgetary contributions from the UN system are modest. Following a large increase from 2019 to 2020, they have levelled off at about 12 percent of XB or about USD \$2.1 million per year. The number of contributors has also remained modest. Notably the largest contributors, year-on-year, are the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office, UNIDO, and UNOPS. UNDP was a larger contributor prior to 2020; the Joint SDG Fund (managed by the MPTF Office) was a first time contributor in 2022.
112. XB contributions to UNECE from UN organizations ('000 USD)

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022
Amount	760	2,611	2,298	2,091
Nº contributors	4	5	14 ¹¹⁹	5
% of total XB	3.8	13	12.4	11.6

113. The MPTF Office manages Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs) also called inter-agency pooled funds; the Joint SDG Fund is an example. Since the UNDS reform, pooled funds are an increasingly important source of funds for UN system efforts towards the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. These funds exist at global, regional or country levels, often requiring joint programmes involving multiple UN organizations to leverage their strengths and create synergies¹²⁰. Member states contributed \$3.4 billion in 2021 to all pooled funds (development and humanitarian), triple the amount in 2015¹²¹. Development-related pooled funds received \$1.6 billion in 2021, accounting for 12 percent of non-core development funding. The growth of pooled funds can be attributed, in part, to the [Funding Compact](#) in 2019 where UN member states committed to allocating at least 10 percent of earmarked development funding through pooled funds by 2023¹²².
114. The UNECE has four small projects with funding from the Joint SDG Fund: one each in North Macedonia and Georgia, and two in Ukraine¹²³. In 2022, total funding was about USD \$361,000 or 17 percent of XB from UN contributions and 2 percent of total XB resources. These amounts

¹¹⁸ (1) UNECE-EXCOM, [Technical Cooperation Strategy](#), Informal Document 2021/11, 17 May 2021. Section H, 7.; (2) UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022. Section

¹¹⁹ In 2021 there was a one time increase in the number of UNOs (8) each contributing between USD \$2000 and \$3000 per annum. It was not repeated in previous or subsequent years.

¹²⁰ Examples of MDTFs or inter-agency pooled funds are the Joint SDG Fund and the Peacebuilding Fund. See the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office [Gateway](#) for others, especially [development pooled funds](#)

¹²¹ UN MPTF Office, [UN pooled funding trends](#), June 2023; (2) UN MPTF Office, [2022 Multi-Stakeholder Pooled Funding Discussion Forum](#); See also: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and UN MPTF Office, [Financing the UN Development System 2022: Responsibilities in a World of Disarray](#), 2022.

¹²² GA, Implementation of GA resolution 75/233 on the QCPR - Report of the SG, Advanced unedited version, 23 April, 2023, para 195-197.

¹²³ (1) Renewable energy and energy efficiency for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and households in **North Macedonia** (\$100,850, May 2022-Dec 2023); (2) Strengthening food and energy resilience in **Georgia** (\$59,920, July 2022-Mar 2023); (3) Addressing the compounded food and energy crisis in **Ukraine** through innovative technologies and adaptive agricultural practices (\$80,000, Sep 2022-Mar 2023); and (4) Developing and implementing the People-first Public-Private Partnerships model for sustainable development in **Ukraine** (\$120,161, August 2020-July 2022).

are not proportionate to the level of engagement and can be read as seed funding for further potential bigger projects for ECE. Based on discussions with UNECE informants, these initiatives can be attributed to engagement by UNECE in regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks. It is difficult to determine whether other XB contributions from the UN system resulted from UNECE engagement in UNDS reform and partnership efforts with UNRCs and UNCTs or as part of existing partnership arrangements.

115. While the UNECE was successful to integrate TC activities into the CFs and relevant JWPs of the programme countries, **this engagement has not led to a substantial increase in new joint initiatives with the UN system or an increase in related XB resources**. This includes joint programme and access to pooled funds. This finding is echoed by the 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6. It found no evidence that the resource mobilization and TC strategies were operationalized or that implementation action plans were developed, in coordination with UNRCs, to align resource mobilization with priorities in programme countries¹²⁴.
116. Both UNECE and external informants offered several reasons for this. Most concern the lack of consistent physical presence at country level and the role of UNECE a knowledge and standard-setting organization, rather than an operational one:
 - » As a knowledge organization with a focus on norms and standard setting, the UNECE struggles to be operational and lacks a ‘business case’ for engagement, unless the joint initiative is related to a specific knowledge product.
 - » UNECE is not nimble at country level – it struggles to quickly allocate human or financial resources for joint initiatives, unless related to an ongoing TC activity.
 - » Resource mobilization needs to be aligned with the work programmes of the sectoral committees; responding to opportunities beyond these is perceived as being difficult.
 - » In both perception and reality, UNECE cannot compete with the implementation capacities and consistency of larger, operational UNOs that have a physical presence¹²⁵, multi-year country programmes and more flexible budget and staffing arrangements. In the words of an external informant: *‘UNECE has the knowledge’, but it lacks ways and means to bring it at the right time and with the right people’*.
 - » Lack of human and financial resources for ‘follow-up’ is a related concern for both UNECE and external informants. One-off workshops, seminars, or trainings do not create sufficient, consistent presence for UNECE to be able to engage in longer term joint programmes and support implementation over several years. This finding was echoed in the OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6¹²⁶;
 - » Without physical presence, UNECE struggles to connect with and mobilize resources from donor representatives at country level; RAs feel some pressure and more confidence to mobilize resources for their ‘home’ divisions, rather than for UNECE as a whole.
 - » Increasingly, joint programmes with fewer participating organizations are seen as more effective and efficient¹²⁷; In a crowded field with many larger UNOs having a physical presence, it is often difficult for UNECE to provide a strong rationale for its inclusion.
 - » That there are **few institutional incentives** for other UNOs, especially the larger agencies with physical presence, to call upon the expertise and resources of UNECE.
117. This last point was emphasised by several external informants: **Collaboration and synergy require team work** – it is a two-way street and UNECE cannot create synergies alone. It is

¹²⁴ OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, para 59. The evaluation also noted a lack of country-specific resource planning.

¹²⁵ This is echoed in the 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6: *‘... the non-resident status of ECE in programme countries created specific challenges for ECTD to collaborate effectively with country teams and other actors to sustain the implementation of its norms, standards and recommendations’* (Para 58).

¹²⁶ Ibid., section E, paras 54-55.

¹²⁷ The recommended number of PUNOs is **not more than five** with a preference of from two to four. [UNSDG Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes](#), Oct 2022, 4.

suggested that many UNOs do not (or will not) see the value of partnering with UNECE when it is faster to hire consultants, even when it creates duplication or results that are of lesser quality than the instruments and expertise available from UNECE. In the words of an external informant: *'...there are few carrots and even fewer sticks to motivate the bigger operational agencies to work with the normative ones'*.

118. Amongst external informants there was a view that seeking collaboration and synergy at the country level with UNOs will only generate piecemeal results. UNECE must also work to secure strategic and longer-term partnerships with the headquarters and regional offices of UNOs that have a larger operational presence at country level. This would create more powerful institutional incentives for partnership.

4.5 Sustainability

A. The sustainability of UNECE cooperation, especially its RC and the adoption and implementation of its regulatory instruments, is tied closely to the work of the Sectoral Committees.

119. There is broad agreement amongst UNECE informants that the regulatory instruments and tools produced by UNECE RC and supported by TC are sustained through the work programmes of the inter-governmental sectoral committees and subsidiary working groups.
120. The sectoral committees identify the need for new or revised normative and policy instruments and tools, prepare work programmes for their development and adoption, and drive the direction of the RPTC work plans, carried-out the UNECE Secretariat, to build the capacities of member States for implementation. As noted above the sector committees assess the relevance of this work against the SDGs, made adjustments in their work programmes in support of the 2030 Agenda and continue to explore further opportunities to enhance their contribution to SDG implementation. Evidence for the successful development and implementation of these instruments and tools through the intergovernmental process, though piecemeal, is available in UNECE reporting (Section 20).
121. There is a view within UNECE that engagement with the UNRC system and UNCTs and the inclusion of UNECE TC in the CF and JWPs is an important avenue to further support programme countries to implement UNECE regulatory instruments. UNECE is first a foremost a knowledge organization, driven by the expressed demands of its member States. But UNECE TC is limited in scale and scope. By linking the instruments and tools more clearly with the work of the UN system and creating synergies with the work of other UNOs through the results groups and JWPs, the idea is that this *should* contribute to their implementation and sustainability.
122. This is a plausible theory of change. However, **UNECE reporting offers limited evidence that these linkages and synergies are being made in a systematic manner.** Creating synergies also increases demand and raises expectations. As noted above under efficiency, limited human and financial resources are a significant challenge for UNECE to sustain its engagement with regional and especially country coordination mechanisms and frameworks.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

123. Based upon the evidence and findings, there are four broad conclusions and key issues:

- 1) The UNECE made relevant, coherent and efficient efforts to engage in and support the effective functioning of the regional coordination architecture (RCP and IBCs) and to engage in and support country coordination mechanisms and frameworks (the UNRC system, UNCTs, RGs, CFs, and JWPs).
- 2) The nexus approach helped to drive cross-sector collaboration within the UNECE Secretariat and to communicate the UNECE 'offer' and value added to external stakeholders but its ongoing relevance is in question. The high level themes appear to have greater relevance and to resonate more strongly with member States
- 3) As a result, there was a tangible increase in the visibility and understanding of the **UNECE offer**¹²⁸ within the UN system, particularly in the programme countries. This progress is evident in the integration and harmonization of UNECE's initiatives within CFs and JWPs. UNECE informants widely acknowledge that: *'They [the wider UN system] know us better – and what we can offer'*. This corroborated by all external informants who view the UNECE as a valuable team player, offering leadership on important and complex initiatives.
- 4) These wins appear to be mainly internal for UNECE and for the wider UN family. Based upon documentary evidence and the views of UNECE and external stakeholders, they are not yet significantly enhancing the effectiveness or sustainability of UNECE cooperation in terms of greater programmatic synergy with the UN system, to support members States. Nor have they translated into significantly more joint initiatives, including joint programmes at country or regional level, with opportunities for resource mobilization.

124. Key issues emerging for the consideration of the UNECE:

- 1) Insufficient focus and priority-setting of UNECE cooperation at country level that is perceived as still too fragmented and 'projectized';
- 2) Ongoing questions about whether the representation, coordination, and strategic 'choice-making' functions with programme countries are best carried-out by RAs as country focal points;
- 3) Stronger monitoring and reporting about cooperation results and synergies achieved in collaboration with the UN system¹²⁹;
- 4) Linked to the above, a more consistent narrative about the contributions of the UNECE – organization-wide - to member States is needed that speaks to both the implementation of regulatory instruments and progress toward the SDGs; and
- 5) A need for expanded strategic and substantive partnerships with key UN organizations, the EU that can help to amplify the UNECE offer at country level and create institutional incentives for greater collaboration.

125. These conclusions need to be read in the institutional context of the UNECE with an understanding of its constituencies and pressures (para 26-28). For example, the most recent report of the UNSG on UNDS reform reports that only a small majority of UNRCs have benefitted

¹²⁸ The UNECE offer can be summed up as knowledge and expertise, based upon the regulatory instruments that constitute the major products of its work through the inter-governmental sectoral committees and subsidiary working groups

¹²⁹ Explicit in PPB documents from 2022: *'To promote synergies between the ECE technical cooperation activities and the work of other UN system entities, in particular through the resident coordinator system at the country level and the United Nations Development Group for Europe and Central Asia at the regional level'*

from the normative, technical and policy expertise of RCPs¹³⁰. The report urges RCPs (including the UNECE) to identify entry points as well as corrective measures to collectively connect global instruments and advocacy in support of the 2030 Agenda and implementation of the SDGs and to ‘...*accelerate alignment to expectations of countries as channelled by UN country teams and resident coordinators*’. A linked report on development coordination argues that: ‘*Culture change and reform ambition must be consolidated, particularly at regional level through real-time expertise and support to UNRCs and UNCTs*’.¹³¹ These points suggest a one-size-fits all approach to UN regional commissions and some lack of understanding about the unique elements and value-added of UNECE regulatory cooperation.

126. A central dilemma for the UNECE Secretariat is that it connects its normative mandate, regulatory instruments (some global) and advocacy in direct ways through facilitation of the inter-governmental machinery of the Commission and the work programmes of the sectoral committees. Many UNECE respondents from senior to programme level emphasised this message in different ways: That UNECE *already has access* to policy-makers and decision takers in the governments of member States, without having to resort to the channel of the UNRC system and UNCTs. Moreover, its facilitation and policy engagement to shape the work programmes of sectoral committees is perceived by some to be more responsive to specific technical needs expressed by member States¹³² (demand-driven) AND more effective and efficient than working through a collective UN system response via the CF and JWPs.
127. Evidence for this can be seen in the OIOS evaluation of 2023¹³³. On the basis of responses from 112 stakeholders from member States, it identified two top comparative advantages¹³⁴:
 - 1) Providing a regional platform for international policy dialogue and exchange of best practices among countries in the ECE region; and
 - 2) Convening power to bring Governments together to build consensus on frameworks, norms, standards and agreements.
128. These points in no way diminish the valuable and time and labour-intensive efforts by the UNECE Secretariat to engage and align UNECE cooperation in regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks. It is an essential component of acting and being perceived as a reform ‘team player’ and of ensuring that UNRCs and UNCTs are aware of the ongoing work of the organization and how it fits. However, the potential gains from increased investment of resources in UNDS reform must be weighed carefully against the costs.

¹³⁰ A small majority of UNRCs assess that their UNCT has benefitted from their technical expertise (57%) and normative and policy expertise (48%). Overall, the QCPR report flags a decline in perceived benefits and support for policy discussion and exchange from RCPs in 2023 (61%) compared with 2021 (75%). UNGA, Implementation of GA resolution 75/233 on the QCPR-Report of the SG, Advanced unedited version, 23 April, 2023, paras 44-45.

¹³¹ UNDCO, Highlights on the United Nations development system reform, May 2023.

¹³² For example: ECTD facilitated a presentation by the Central Asian Working Group on dried apricots in Working Party 7, which allowed the countries to put forward standards that were most applicable to them. OIOS Evaluation of subprogrammes 4 and 6,

¹³³ OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, paras 20-22.

¹³⁴ While the finding is specific to the Division of Economic Cooperation and Trade (ECTD) and sub-programmes 4 and 6, similarities in working methods and the demand-driven nature of the work of the commission and secretariat suggest that it can be reasonably and plausibly applied to all of UNECE.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (Effectiveness 4.3 A; Efficiency 4.4 C; Sustainability 4.5 A)

The UNECE Secretariat should undertake a more strategic prioritization process tailored to each programme country. This should identify the top 3 to 4 specific priorities for technical cooperation, where UNECE has an exclusive knowledge niche and where regulatory instruments and expertise can be marshalled for relatively quick and consistent action in partnership with the UNRC, UNCT and government.

This is about making UNECE more opportunistic and focused on partnership with programme countries and through UN coordination mechanisms.

- » The prioritization exercise should take place above and across the UNECE divisions and sub-programmes; it is important that priorities speak to country policy priorities and not to the regulatory process *per se*; for example a priority is not 'to ratify the latest protocols to the Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution' but rather to reduce disaster risks';
- » It should be informed by the country briefs and the knowledge and insights of the RAs, the PMU, and programme managers, but driven at the level of ES or DES; Priorities may include sub-regional and transboundary concerns;
- » Emerging priorities should be validated with the UNRC and UNCTs with a strong emphasis on forging partnership(s);
- » The collective priorities should be presented as a single coherent 'vision' for TC with the aim to communicate how UNECE will support the implementation of critical regulatory instruments that are closely aligned with country priorities and national SDG targets; this vision document could be used to mobilize additional XB from the UN system and member States;
- » The Working Group on TC (WGTC), in consultation with Divisional Directors, may be the most appropriate mechanism for this action¹³⁵.

Recommendation 2 (Effectiveness 4.3 A, B)

The UNECE Secretariat should consider how to strengthen the country focal point role of RAs to achieve the representation, coordination, partnership and resource mobilization results it wants from engagement with country coordination mechanisms and frameworks.

This should involve a mapping of key functions (para 94) and the best response channels within UNECE Secretariat. For example, representation, coordination and resource mobilization functions need not be played by the same actor. Several options emerge from this evaluation:

- » A staff member of the largest UNECE funded project at country level could carry out the representative functions (i.e. the face of UNECE);
- » The WGTC, chaired by the DES and backstopped by the PMU, could be tasked to support and sustain a strategic prioritization process (see recommendation 1). It would coordinate across divisions to ensure the right expertise is tapped to respond to specific sectoral opportunities and country requests on a timely basis and to pursue identified partnership and resource

¹³⁵ The WGTC is chaired by the DES. It is comprised of all Regional Advisers, RPTC focal points and the Director of the PMSSD. The WGTC meets as needed to steer the main direction of the UNECE technical cooperation, review the implementation of the RPTC programme of work and address emerging priorities. It is serviced by the PMU. UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022. Section 6.

mobilization opportunities. The WGTC may need updated and expanded TOR and working practices for it to play this role¹³⁶.

If the focal point responsibilities of RAs continue, the UNECE Secretariat should:

- » Define and document a clear division of labour between the RAs and PMU;
- » Offer training or mentoring support to RAs to enhance their engagement with UNRCs and UNCTs;
- » Adjust the performance appraisal process for RAs so that assessment of their performance as country focal points is done at a level with oversight of the entire programme and the aims of strategic engagement at country level, for example: the DES.

Recommendation 3 (4.1 C)

The UNECE Secretariat should enhance its reporting on cooperation results to emphasize collaboration and synergies with the UN system; requirements for this should be included in reporting guidance, where feasible.

Both external and UNECE informants point out that synergies with the wider UN system, while inconsistent, do exist. However these are largely missing from progress reports. Reporting guidelines and requirements should be amended to place greater emphasis on these synergies. For example, the annual TC report could highlight at least 3 tangible examples or stories about how collaboration with the UN system at regional or country level brought added value to the design and delivery of UNECE regulatory or technical cooperation with member States. While UNECE has limited ability to adjust guidance and requirements for performance reports in PPBs (Section 20), Divisions should refer to collaboration with the UN system wherever this contributed to results.

Recommendation 4 (Effectiveness 4.3 A; Efficiency 4.4 A; Sustainability)

Within available resources, the UNECE Secretariat should realign available human resources to support enhanced engagement with regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks.

- » Review and reclassify (as appropriate) the existing posts related mainly to UNDS reform (in PMU and SDU) to take account of the added workload and responsibilities for the success of inter-agency engagement and cooperation. Revise the relevant job descriptions to reflect the *de facto* focus on cooperation with regional and country coordination mechanisms and frameworks
- » Mindful of regular budget constraints and at the next opportunity, the UNECE Secretariat should pursue one additional post to focus on cooperation with UN coordination mechanisms and frameworks, support the strategic choice-making processes within the UNECE Secretariat and reporting on synergies with the UN system (recommendations 1 and 3)

Recommendation 5 (Coherence 4.2 C; Effectiveness 4.2 A)

To sustain the cross-sector approach and promote collaboration amongst the sub-programmes, the UNECE should focus on the high level themes and take steps to reactivate the nexus approach.

¹³⁶ For example: regular agendas and minutes and results-oriented action points at the end of each meeting. Note that reference to the WGTC was included in PPB A/76/6 (Section 20) for 2022 under the PMSSD and PMU, but has been removed from the same section in 2023 and 2024.

The current nexus priorities are not static. There is recognition that they must be reviewed and adjusted, periodically, based upon the expressed needs and priorities of member States. Suggested reactivation steps include: (1) Plans for Technical Cooperation, especially the RPTC¹³⁷ workplans and UNDA project proposals, should consistently but more selectively identify the expected contribution of one more TC activities to a nexus priority, specifying the concrete ‘connection’ or synergy expected¹³⁸; (2) Cross-divisional nexus teams should be assessed with the aim to reactivate them with specific TOR, action plans and reporting requirements; and (3) Reporting guidance should be adjusted to require *substantive* coverage of how RC and TC contributed to promote or further the nexus priorities¹³⁹.

Other recommendations, for consideration

Recommendation 6 (Effectiveness, Sustainability)

Based upon a strategic prioritization process (recommendation 1) the UNECE Secretariat should work to secure strategic, longer-term partnerships with selected UNOs that have a larger operational presence at country level and with other major partners and donors.

These would help to create more powerful institutional incentives for partnership between the UNECE and larger operational and funding partners at country level. A statement of collaboration between the UN Regional Commissions and the UNSDG dates from 2016¹⁴⁰. While speaking generally to the importance of alignment and synergy, it is insufficient to drive strategic partnership between the UNECE and targeted UNOs with physical presence. These should focus on substantive topics that speak to country priorities and can utilize specific UNECE regulatory instruments and expertise (i.e. the knowledge niche). Examples of these do exist with other UNOs that also have a normative role but tend not to have a large physical presence at country level. For example the [UNECE/FAO](#) collaboration on forestry and timber and [Integrated Programme of Work](#) and [Trade promotion capacity building](#) with UNIDO.

Recommendation 7 (Relevance 4.1 C; Coherence 4.2 D)

To operationalize strategies and directives for technical cooperation (TC), the UNECE Secretariat should: (1) Adjust the strategy and criteria for TC activities to promote linkages with the CF, where relevant¹⁴¹; and (2) Include the mainstreaming of cross-cutting concerns explicitly in guiding

¹³⁷ This is echoed in recommendation 2 (para 70a) of the 2023 OIOS evaluation: Develop a division-wide strategic plan with a view to strengthening interlinkages between its two sub-programmes and identifying: (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**. OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, para 70a.

¹³⁸ A nexus is a connection linking two or more things. For example, the RPTC work plans for Environment and Energy consistently refer to one or more nexus areas, but **do not offer details about the connection** i.e. how the TC activity connects with or contributes to a something else or a higher level result at country or regional level. This practice also suggests that every activity contributes equally to a nexus result.

¹³⁹ This is instead of the current approach which reports simply that a TC activity ‘contributed’ to a nexus. This offers the interested reader no concrete details about how the particular nexus priority was promoted or furthered.

¹⁴⁰ UNSDG and UN Regional Commissions, Supporting Member States in Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Statement of collaboration, 1 Jan, 2016.

¹⁴¹ In the UNECE Directive for TC UNECE engagement with UNRCs and UNCTs is a part of ‘overall information’ and RAs are required to identify new programmatic opportunities and develop joint project proposals with the UNRC and UNCTs. However these important elements are **missing from the key sections on strategy and criteria for TC activities**. UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022.

principles for TC¹⁴² (gender equality, human rights, disability inclusion, the environment and climate change)

This would strengthen institutional incentives for partnership¹⁴³ and mainstreaming. At present, alignment with CFs is a kind of retrofitting where already planned TC activities are mapped or linked to the CF and JWPs but without systematic engagement with the UNRC, UNCTs and CF Results Groups (RGs).

Recommendation 8 (Relevance, 4.3 C, Sustainability)

The UNECE Secretariat should explore ways to offer a stronger and more consistent narrative about its major contributions and valued-added at the outcome level (as defined in PPBs); this should emphasise contributions to member States to implement regulatory reform AND contribute to the SDGs.

One option is for each sub-programme, in consultation with the sectoral committees, to identify a limited set of SDG targets (2 to 3) that are most relevant to the major planned outcomes and regulatory and technical workstreams. Similar to TC reports, these can offer a framework to track and report progress. These selected targets would act as proxies for the overall relevance and effectiveness of the UNECE programme.

In addition, the UNECE Secretariat should annually ask member States to assess the contribution and valued added of UNECE regulatory and technical cooperation to country priorities and the SDGs.

A concise, annual user satisfaction survey, timed with the annual meetings of the Sectoral Committees, would create a UNECE narrative about the relevance and effectiveness of its cooperation. This would help to counter other narratives (see para 47) that may be based on the perspectives and opinions of stakeholders who are unfamiliar with the work of the UNECE¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴² Apart from cooperation being 'anchored in UNECE normative work'. (1) UNECE-EXCOM, [Technical Cooperation Strategy](#), Informal Document 2021/11, 17 May 2021; (2) UNECE Directive No. 22, Management of the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC), 01 March 2022.

¹⁴³ This is echoed in recommendation 3 (para 71) of the 2023 OIOS Evaluation: the ECTD should develop division-specific actions plans to operationalize existing ECE strategies on resource mobilization, partnerships and technical cooperation, upon adoption, to address identified risks and **strengthen partnerships**, especially at the programme country level, with implementation deadlines, roles and responsibilities, and a monitoring and reporting framework. Indicator of achievement: division-specific action plans issued to operationalize the three ECE strategies. OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023, para 71.

¹⁴⁴ The key questions and type of respondents used in the 2023 OIOS evaluation of sub-programmes 4 and 6 offer a useful starting point for a **purposive and short annual survey** of member States. OIOS, Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe: Subprogramme 4 Economic cooperation and integration and subprogramme 6, Trade, E/AC.51/2023/5, 08 March 2023.

Annex A. Evaluation matrix

This matrix guided the evaluation. It is based upon the TOR and helped to make the evaluation as effective, objective, and transparent as possible. The matrix shows the evaluation criteria, key questions and sub-questions for investigation, the data collection methods, the sources of information, and the indicators or standards of success.

Criteria	Key question	Sub-Questions	Data collection methods	Sources of information	Indicators of performance and success
Relevance	1. To what extent has implementation of UNDS reform measures <i>enabled</i> UNECE to better position itself both strategically and operationally to support its member States (mS) in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?	<p>1.1 How relevant are the ‘nexus’ priorities¹⁴⁵ and 11 ‘focus’ SDGs¹⁴⁶ to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the region?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How were these influenced by UNDS reform? - Should UNECE continue with these priorities/ focus areas and why? <p>1.2 To what extent are gender equality, human rights, climate change, disability and other cross-cutting perspectives mainstreamed in UNECE processes, regulatory cooperation (RC) and technical cooperation (TC)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has mainstreaming by UNECE been influenced by UNDS reform? - How can this be improved? <p><i>Supplemental:</i></p> <p>1.3 How were the comparative advantages of the UNECE identified</p>	<p>Document review focused on UNECE cooperation strategy, programme budgets (PPB), RPTC plans, TC reports, and reports from the SG and RCP</p> <p>Key informant (KI) interviews</p> <p>Electronic surveys</p>	<p>- Documents for evaluation (Annex B)</p> <p>- EXCOM reps</p> <p>- Government reps (ECE programme countries)</p> <p>- UNECE leaders and staff</p> <p>- UNRCs/ UNCT reps</p>	<p>- Evidence that the prioritized areas are aligned with both country development frameworks and UN Cooperation Frameworks</p> <p>- Positive stakeholder perceptions about the overall relevance of UNECE nexus priorities and ‘focus’ SDGs to country priorities and needs</p> <p>- Stakeholders can offer concrete examples of <i>how</i> UNECE programme results and TC (individually or jointly with UNOs) made a positive contribution toward SDG results at country level</p> <p>- RC and TC strategy, work plans, activities are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Informed by operational HR principles: a. Non-discrimination and equality; b. Participation and inclusion; c. Accountability and the rule of law (2) Linked to recommendations/action plans from ratified international treaties and regional treaties and conventions, and country gender policies <p>- Stakeholder perceptions about the level and quality of mainstreaming</p> <p>- RC and TC strategies and work plans are informed by and incorporate LNOB analysis, activities, and disaggregated data (esp human rights, GEWE)¹⁴⁷</p> <p>- Evidence that assessment of UNECE CAs was credible and involved perceptions of other mS and other UN agencies and stakeholders</p>

¹⁴⁵ Nexus priorities: (1) Sustainable use of natural resources; (2) Sustainable and smart cities for all ages; (3) Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; (4) Measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs and support for evidence-based decision-making. The last two Commission sessions endorsed high level themes: (1) Circular economy (69th Commission Session, 2021) and (2) Digital and green transformation (70th Commission session, 2022).

¹⁴⁶ The 11 are: SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15. These are where UNECE perceives it has comparative advantage and provides greatest value. UNECE, Main Directions of UNECE ongoing work on further SDG alignment, Informal document No. 2018/12.

¹⁴⁷ TC results, activities, targets and indicators apply data disaggregated by: income, sex, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other forms of discrimination prohibited by international law, as appropriate. CF Guidance, 2019.

Criteria	Key question	Sub-Questions	Data collection methods	Sources of information	Indicators of performance and success
		and used to select the regional priorities and SDG focus areas? - To what extent have these changed through the UNDS reform process?			- Stakeholder perceptions about the <i>alignment between the CAs and UNECE priorities and focus SDGs and RPTC work plans (i.e. are they connected logically from plan thru to implementation)</i>
Coherence	2. To what extent are the UNECE programme and activities at the regional and country levels <i>coherent and harmonized</i> with those of other UNDS entities <i>through</i> the RCP and IBCs?	2.1 How well do UNECE plans and activities ‘fit’, i.e. <i>are complementary and synergistic</i> , with those of: a) Regional UNOs (through the RCP and IBCs) - how complementary and synergistic? b) UNCTs in the context of the CCA and CF, including joint programmes (<i>e.g. Success of efforts to integrate the programme and TC into CFs & JWPs?</i>) 2.2 How did UNDS reform measures taken by UNECE affect this coherence?	Document review focused on UNECE cooperation strategy, programme budgets (PPB), RPTC plans, TC reports, and reports from the SG and RCP Key informant (KI) interviews Electronic surveys	- Documents for evaluation - EXCOM reps - Government reps (ECE programme countries) - UNECE leaders and staff - UNRCs/ UNCT reps	- Evidence that UNECE adjusted its plans and activities for improved fit with those of regional UNOs and UNCTs and to avoid duplication Positive stakeholder perceptions about the overall coherence of UNECE plans and activities with those of regional UNOs and UNCTs (esp. integration of UNECE programme and TC into the CF and JWPs) Evidence from mS that increased coherence <i>contributed</i> to stronger SDG-related results at country level (i.e. Stakeholders can offer examples of complementarity and synergy -- where 1 +1 =3)
Effectiveness	3. In the context of UNDS reform, how effective has UNECE been to tailor its structure, objectives, strategy and results to the needs of member States to implement the 2030 Agenda at country and regional levels?	3.1 To what extent has UNECE used UNDS reform to strengthen its ‘offer’ to mS to deliver effective, value-added RC and TC in support of the SDGs (structure, objectives, strategy, results) 3.2 How effective are internal efforts to promote the nexus priorities and cross-sector collaboration and are these influencing the work of Sectoral Committees (RC) and TC 3.3 How effectively did UNECE <i>contribute</i> to regional efforts, through the RCP and IBCs, to implement decisions of the QCPR? 3.4 How effectively has UNECE coordinated with UNRCs and UNCTs in programme countries - What has been the role and contributions of UNECE Regional Advisers to changes in coordination?	Document review focused on UNECE cooperation strategy, programme budgets (PPB), RPTC plans, TC reports, and reports from the SG and RCP Key informant (KI) interviews Electronic surveys	- Documents for evaluation - EXCOM reps - Government reps (ECE programme countries) - UNECE leaders and staff - UNRCs/ UNCT reps	- Objective comparison of actual programme results and TC activities delivered and results achieved <i>vis</i> the strategic direction of the programme (Section 20) and RPTC work plans -Positive stakeholder perceptions about the influence of the nexus priorities and cross-sector approaches on the normative work of the sectoral committees and RPTC workplans and results - Positive stakeholder perceptions that UNDS reform measures (joint as part of RCP and independent) contributed to more effective programme results including TC - Stakeholders can offer concrete examples of effective TC activities (e.g. new skills, abilities, products and services) and <i>how these contributed</i> to SDG-related results at regional and country level (e.g. institutional performance or behaviours) - Stakeholders attribute positive changes in coordination between UNECE and UNRCs/UNCT to UNECE Regional Advisers

Criteria	Key question	Sub-Questions	Data collection methods	Sources of information	Indicators of performance and success
		3.5 What has prevented UNECE from achieving the desired repositioning results? How can this be improved?			
Efficiency	4. Since 2017, how has UNDS reform affected UNECE resources and what have been the consequences for it to deliver on its mandate and support mS to achieve the 2030 Agenda and SDGs?	4.1 How has UNDS reform affected UNECE resources and how realistic are work plans and activities <u>related to</u> UNDS reform efforts vis-à-vis the expected results	Document review focused on UNECE programme budgets (PPB), RPTC plans and TC reports	- Documents for evaluation	- Evidence that UNDS reform has helped UNECE to better position itself with mS and donors and has contributed positively resource mobilization
		4.2 How well has UNECE tapped into new resources emerging as part of the UNDS reform (e.g. inter-agency pooled funds, such as the Joint SDG Fund)?	Key informant (KI) interviews	- EXCOM reps	- Work plans and activities related to UNDS reform are broadly in line with scale and scope of expected services and results
		4.3 What was the overall performance in programme delivery: a. delivery rates; b. management expense ratios (<i>as available</i>)	Electronic surveys	- Government reps (ECE programme countries)	- Evidence and positive stakeholder perceptions that UNECE has used UNDS reform as a way to secure greater access to new sources of funding
		4.4 To what extent has UNECE engagement in UNDS reform improved its overall efficiency?		- UNECE leaders and staff	- Positive stakeholder perceptions about the timelines, efficiency and 'value for money' of UNECE TC and results
Sustainability	5. How have UNDS reform measures affected the sustainability of UNECE programme results, including TC, and the ownership by mS of ECE instruments and tools?	5.1 What measures were taken by UNECE to sustain its programme results and TC?	Document review focused on UNECE programme budgets (PPB), RPTC plans and TC reports	- Documents for evaluation	- Stakeholders report awareness and use of instruments and tools by their institutions/bodies with concrete examples
		- How have these been affected by UNDS reform?	Key informant (KI) interviews	- EXCOM reps	- Evidence that UNECE adjusted instruments and tools to respond to the needs of mS and UNCTs
		5.3 (2) To what extent are UNECE instruments and tools owned and applied by mS?	Electronic surveys	- Government reps (ECE programme countries)	
		5.4 How aware are UN organizations, (esp UNCTs) about the instruments and tools developed by UNECE?		- UNECE leaders and staff	
				- UNRCs/ UNCT reps	

Annex B. Documents for the evaluation

Evaluation Terms of Reference

1. 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)

SG Reports

2. A/74/73-E/2019/14, Report of the SG on implementation of GA resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019
3. Subsequent SG reports on QCPR available as available on ECOSOC website [here](#)
4. SG reports, regional cooperation: E/2022/15, E/2021/15, E/2020/15, E/2019/15, E/2018/15
5. Summary of the work of the Economic Commission for Europe, 2021–2022 and 2019-2020

Briefings/consultations with EXCOM

6. Regional Review. Repositioning the regional assets of the UNDS to better service the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Update to member States, January 2020 (EXCOM 109th meeting)
7. Informal documents No. 2020/26, No. 2019-38, No. 2018-25, No. 2018-17

Report to ECE Commission on the activities of EXCOM

8. E/ECE/1499 paragraphs 18-19
9. OIOS Evaluation of UN entities' preparedness, policy coherence, and early results associated with their support to SDGs, June 2019
10. OIOS Thematic Evaluation of UN Secretariat support to the SDGs, April 2023

ECE, RPTC and DA Proposed programme budgets (PPB)

11. Proposed strategic framework for the period 2018-2019
12. PPB ECE Section 20 (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2018-19)
13. PPB RPTC Section 23 (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2018-19)
14. PPB DA Section 35 (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2018-19)

Regional Results Report of the Regional Collaboration Platform for Europe and Central Asia

15. 2021 Regional Results Report of the RCP for Europe and Central Asia
16. 2020 Regional Results Report of the RCP for Europe and Central Asia

Evaluations of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD)

17. Evaluation Survey of the RFSD for the UNECE Region 2022
18. Evaluation Survey of the RFSD for the UNECE Region 2021
19. Evaluation Survey of the RFSD for the UNECE Region 2019

ECE Technical Cooperation Strategy and activities

20. Technical Cooperation (TC) Strategy approved by ECE Executive Committee at 116th Meeting (Strategy and Chair's conclusions from this meeting)
21. Database of TC activities (funded from RPTC in 2022) – Excel file
22. Internal directive 22: Management of the RPTC
23. Annual report on Technical Cooperation Activities 2022, Informal Document No. 2023/27
24. Annual report on TC Activities 2021, Informal Document No. 2022/20
25. Annual report on TC Activities 2020, Informal Document No. 2021/17
26. Regional Adviser (RA) job opening describing RA responsibilities
27. RPTC workplans by ECE subprogramme
28. RPTC database (mission reports)

QCPR survey – ECE answers (2017-2023)

29. QCPR surveys (HQ and UNCT) – ECE responses (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)

Previous ECE evaluations

30. OIOS Evaluation of ECE Subprogrammes 4 and 6, 2023

31. OIOS Evaluation of ECE, 2016
32. Review of UNECE engagement with the private sector (2021) - Evaluation report
33. Gender mainstreaming in UNECE (2019) - Evaluation report
34. Audit of mainstreaming of SDGs and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the ECE available [here](#)

Other documents

35. Regional Advisers synthesized ECE work in programme countries (see Programme Countries Briefs)
36. Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCP) Functioning and Working Arrangements
37. ECE Resource Mobilization strategy
38. UNECE Annual Report 2022
39. Growing Challenges for Sustainable Development: Can the UNECE Region Turn the Tide in 2023?
40. E/ECE/1507 - Progress report on the work of the Commission on the promotion of a circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources (ECE 70th session, April 2023)
41. E/ECE/1504 - Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe, Note by the secretariat (ECE 70th session, April 2023)
42. Nexus publications: Measuring and Monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals; Natural Resource Nexuses in the ECE region; UNECE NEXUS: Sustainable Mobility and Smart Connectivity; People-Smart Sustainable Cities.
43. Document references on the designation of High-level theme of the Commission

Annex C. List of Key Informants

Ms. Olga Algayerova, UNECE Executive Secretary

Mr. Dmitry Mariyasyn, UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary

Mr. Michael Sylver, UNECE Director, Programme Management & Support Services Division, PMSSD

Ms. Monika Linn, UNECE Director, Sustainable Development Unit

Ms. Nicola Koch, UNECE Chef de Cabinet and Secretary of the Commission

Ms. Sarangoo Radnaaragchaa, UNECE Regional Adviser, Environment,

Mr. Taeke Gjaltema, UNECE Regional Adviser, Statistics,

Mr. Oleg Dzioubinski, UNECE Regional Adviser, Sustainable Energy

Mr. Nenad Nikolic, UNECE Regional Adviser, Transport

Mr. Mario Apostolov, UNECE Regional Adviser, Trade and Economic Integration

Mr. Talaibek Makeev, UNECE Regional Adviser, Housing and Forestry

Group Interview with selected Secretaries of UNECE Sectoral Committees (Inland Transport, Environmental Policy, Water, Air & Industrial Accidents Conventions, European Statisticians): Mr. Georgios Georgiadis, Ms. Franziska Hirsch, Ms. Francesca Bernardini, Ms. Tiina Luige, Mr. Yaroslav Bulych

Ms. Anna Walch, Attaché, Permanent Mission of Austria, EXCOM delegate

Mr. Igor Kaniukov, Attaché, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation, EXCOM delegate (in writing)

Ms. Francoise Jacob, UN Resident Coordinator, Serbia

Mr. Simon Springett, UN Resident Coordinator, Moldova

Ms. Vladanka Andreeva, UN Resident Coordinator, Azerbaijan

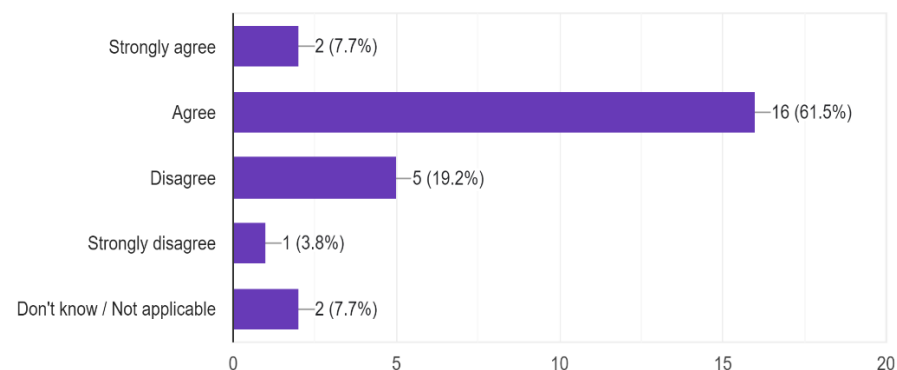
Ms. Antje Kristin Grawe, UN Resident Coordinator, Kyrgyzstan

Annex D. Survey results

Internal survey (26 responses)

1. Through its engagement in UNDS reform measures, UNECE is better positioned, strategically and operationally, to support member States, including in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

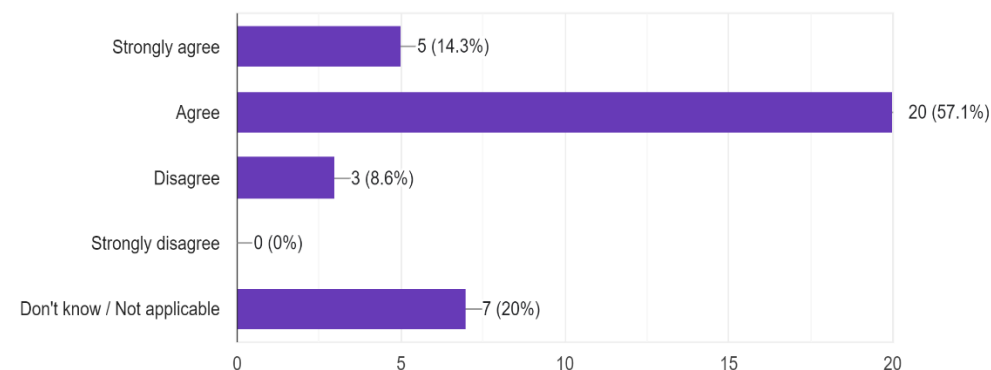
26 responses



External survey (35 responses)

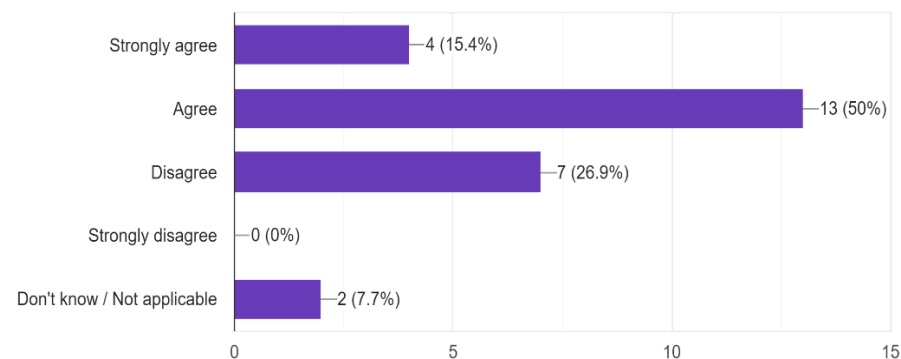
1. Through its engagement in UNDS reform measures, UNECE is better positioned, strategically and operationally, to support member States, including in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

35 responses



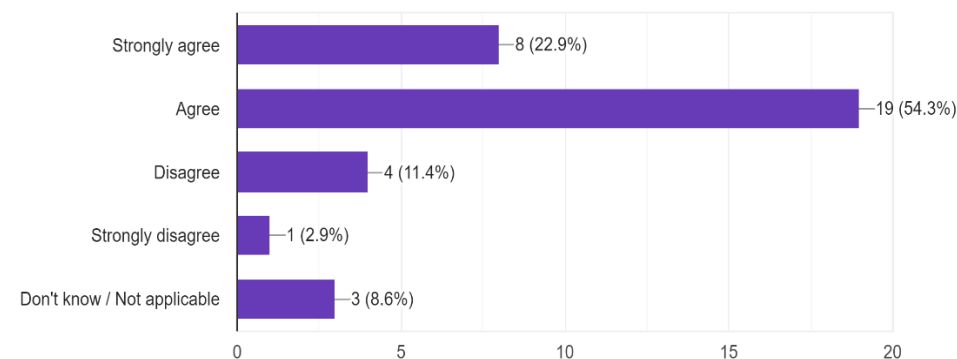
2. The SDG 'nexus' priorities of UNECE are highly relevant to the region and to my country and represent UNECE comparative advantages

26 responses



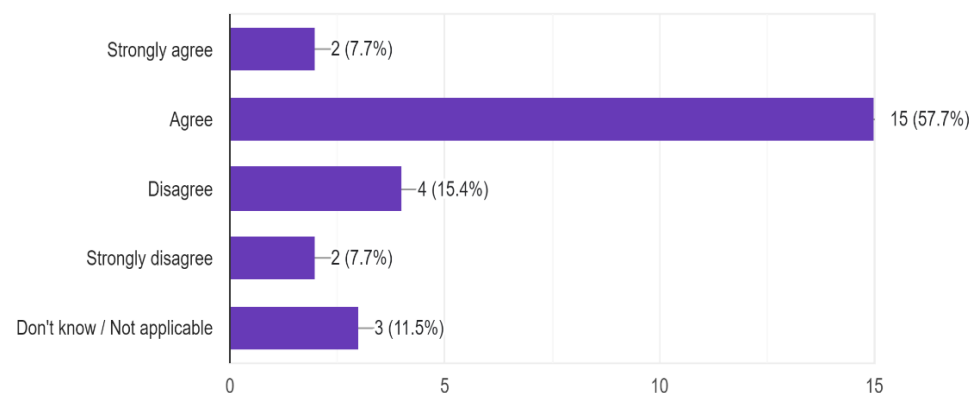
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35 responses



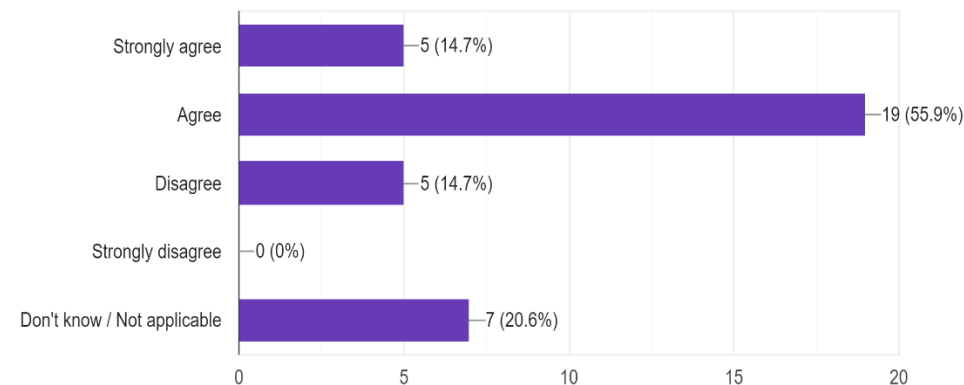
3. UNECE has been successful to mainstream gender equality, human rights, climate change, and disability concerns into its programme, including technical cooperation

26 responses



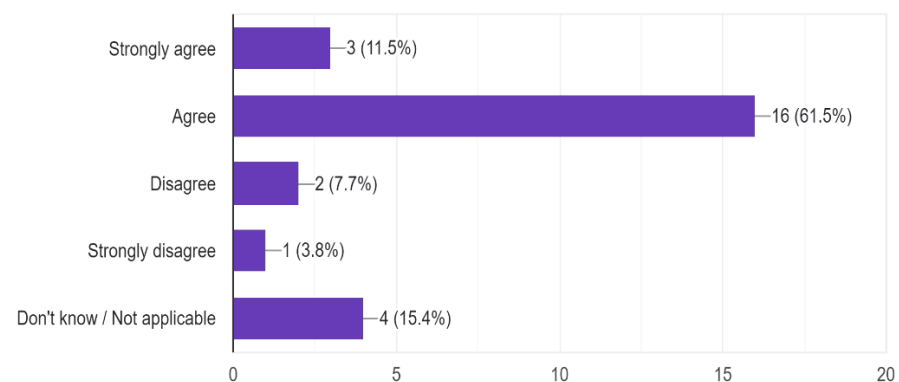
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34 responses



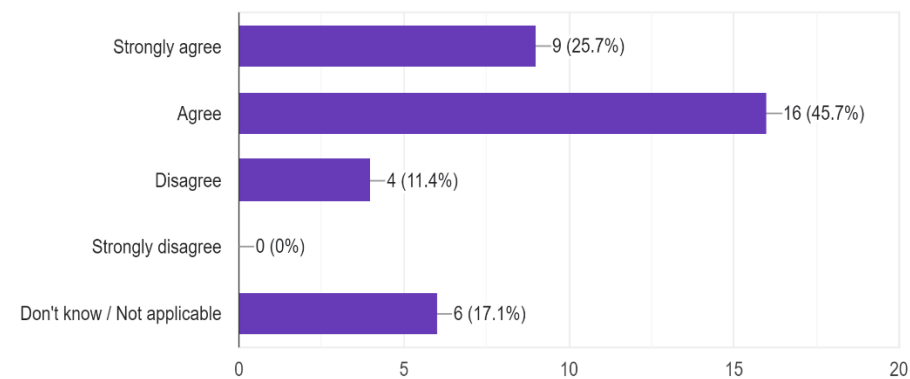
4. UNECE is doing a better job to integrate its programme and technical cooperation into UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (...lans to create complementarities and synergies

26 responses



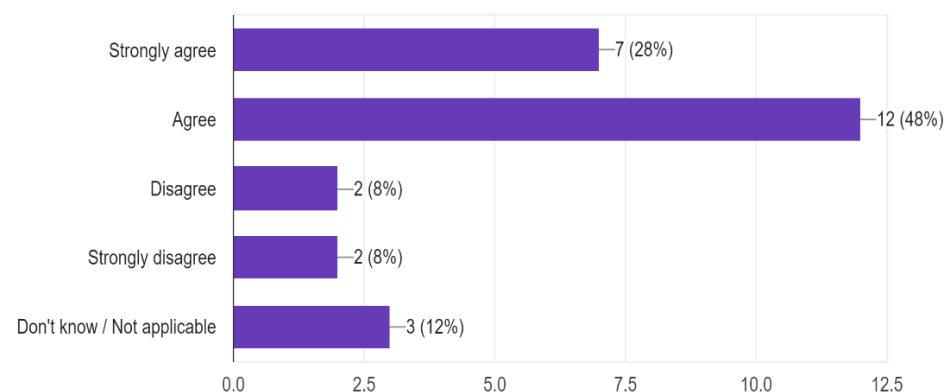
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35 responses



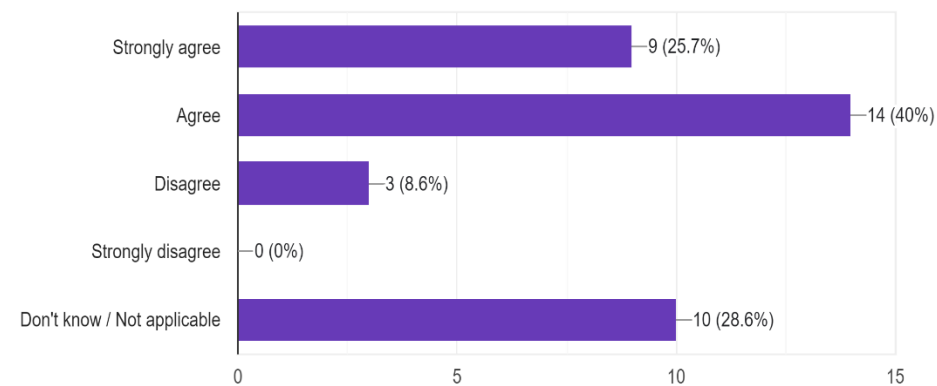
5. UNECE plays an active role in and brings value to the work of the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) and Issues-Based Coalitions (IBCs)

25 responses



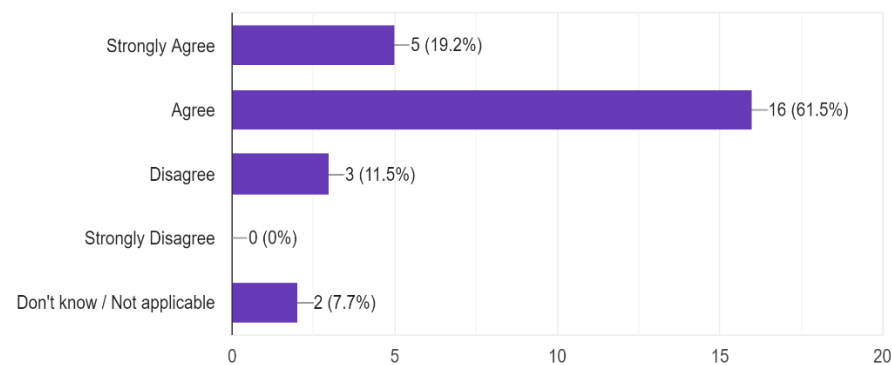
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35 responses



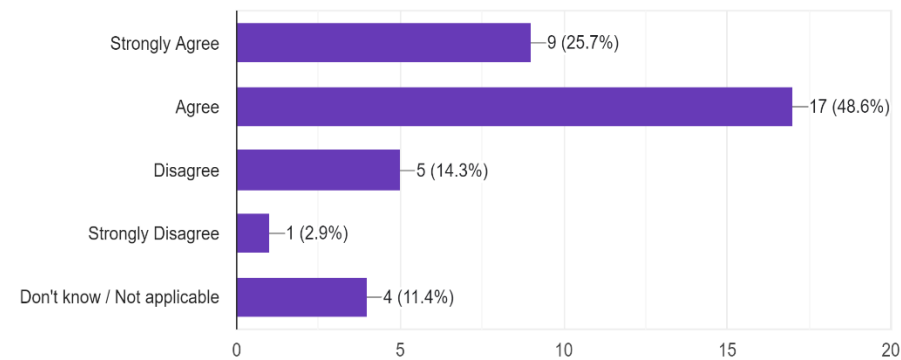
6. UNECE is effective at engaging and coordinating with UN Country Teams in programme countries to identify and respond to country priorities through the UNSDCF

26 responses



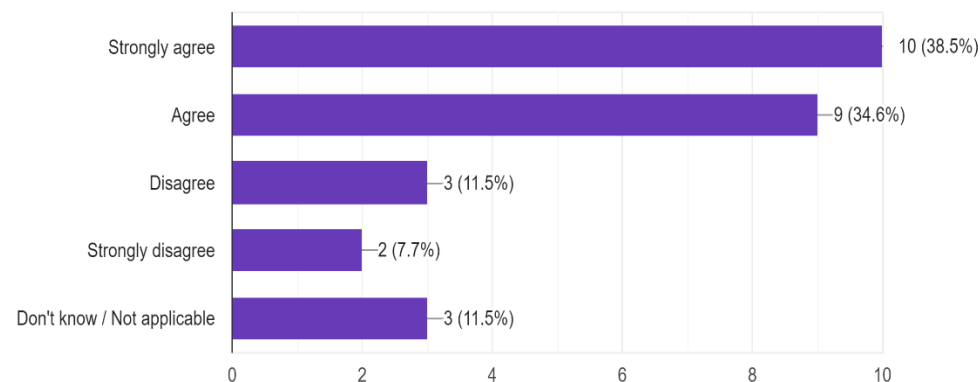
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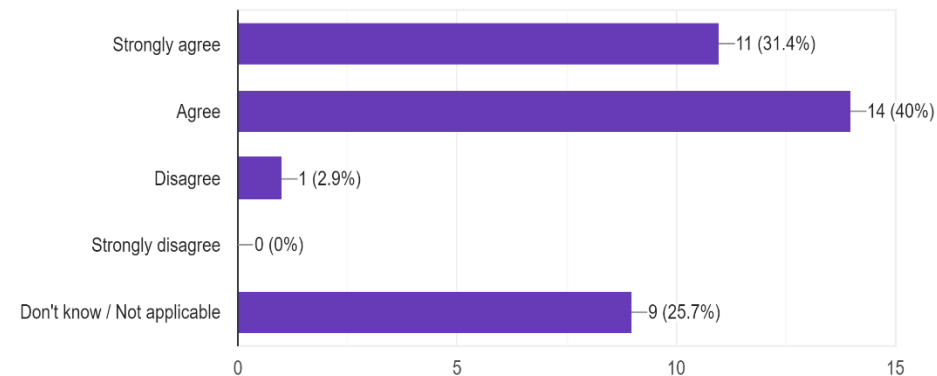
7. UNECE regional advisers play an important role to work closely with UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams to contribute to the Common...ECE normative and policy instruments and tools

26 responses



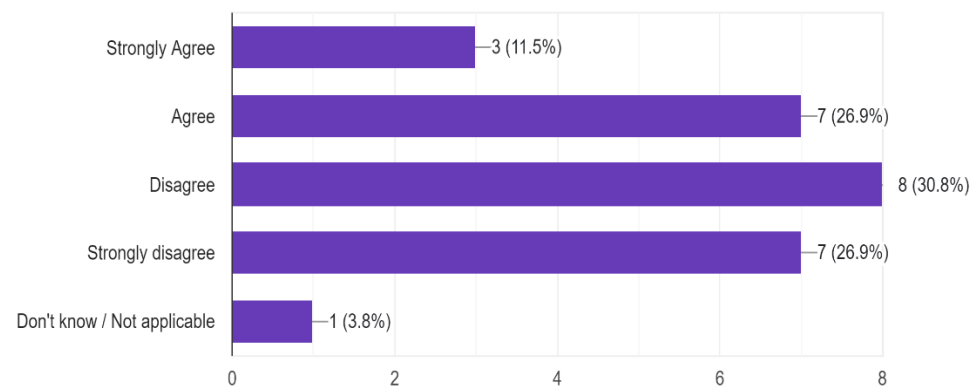
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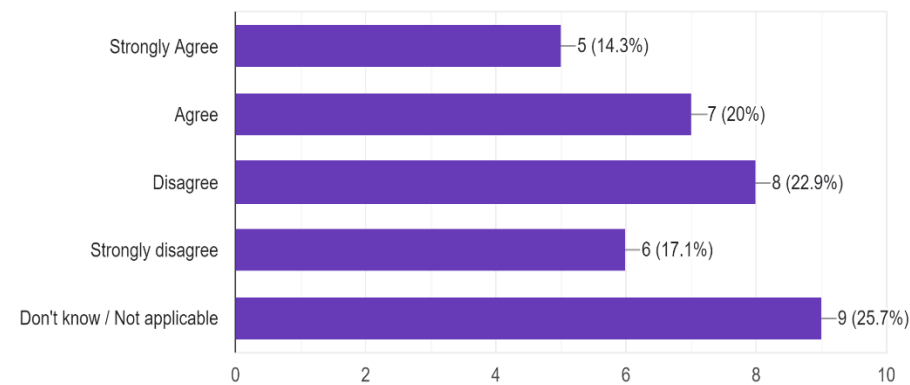
8. UNECE is adequately resourced to engage effectively and consistently in UNDS reform efforts and to coordinate and work effectively with UNRCs and UNCTs

26 responses



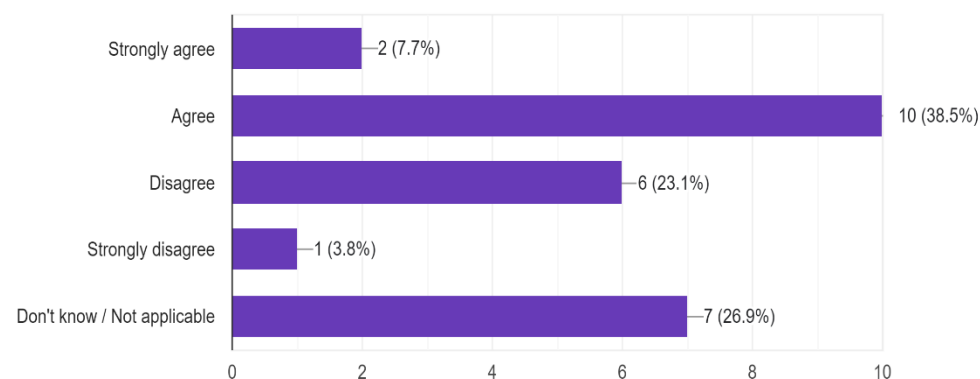
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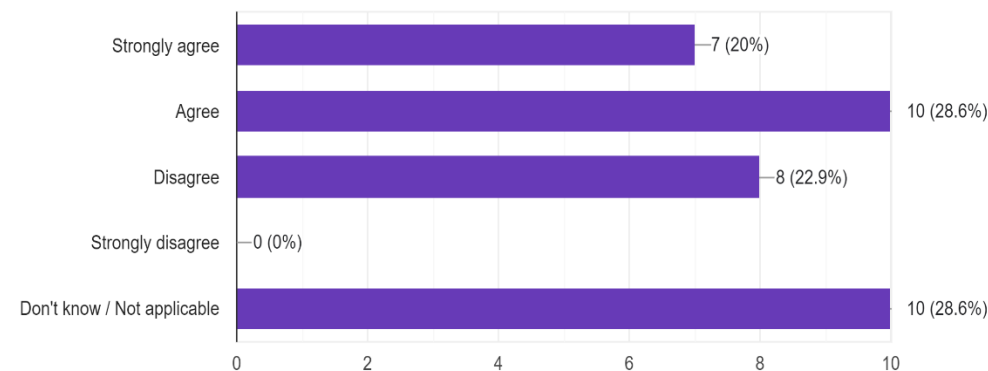
9. UNECE engagement in UNDS reform has improved the overall efficiency of the organization and programme results, including technical cooperation...mic manner (i.e. avoiding waste and duplication)

26 responses



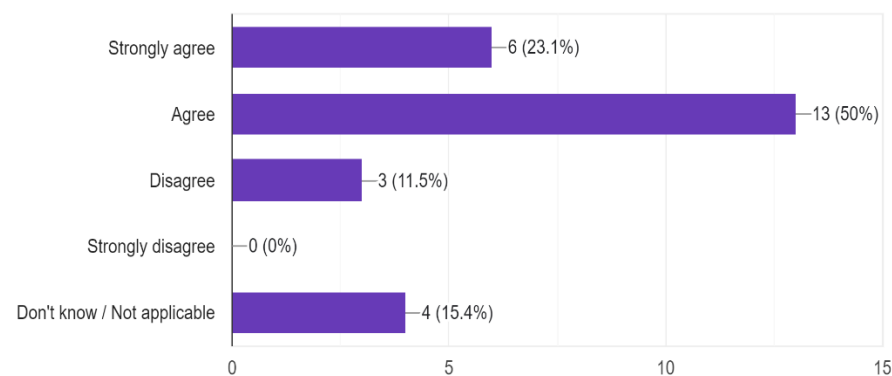
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35 responses



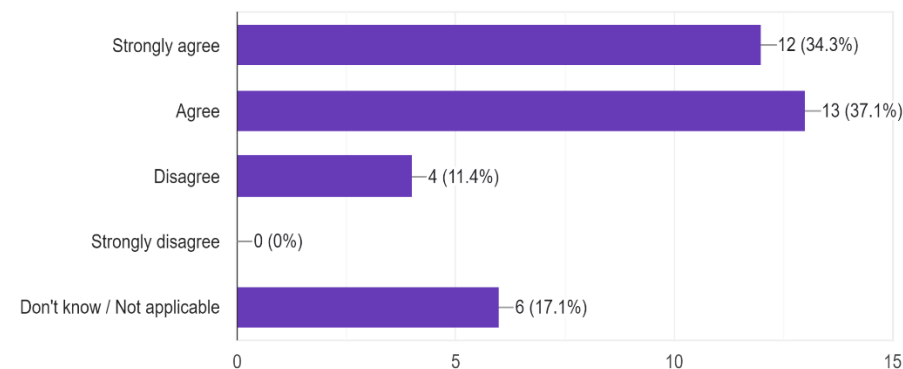
10. The normative and policy instruments and tools developed by UNECE are valuable and used in my country or by my organization

26 responses



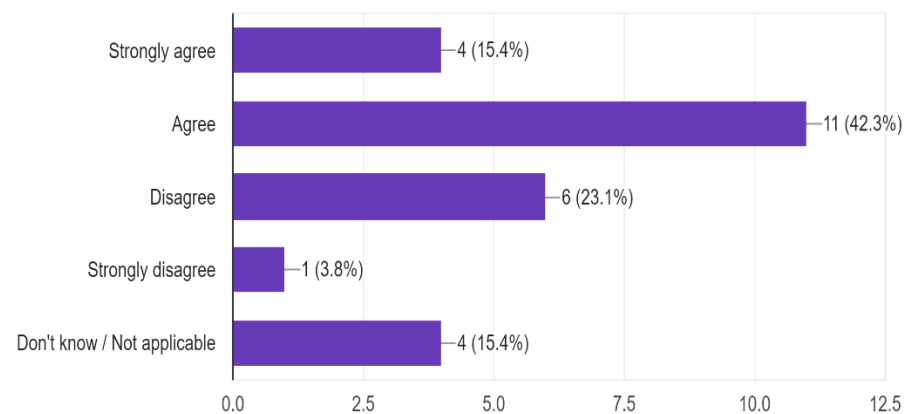
10. The normative and policy instruments and tools developed by UNECE are valuable and used in my country or by my organization

35 responses



11. UNECE is using UNDS reform to deliver effective, value-added programme results and technical cooperation to members States, including UN progr...untries, in support of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs

26 responses



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35 responses

