



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships****Sixteenth session**

Geneva, 31 May-2 June 2023

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

Implementation of the Programme of Work – Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies**Progress of the work of the UN-ECE Transformative
Innovation Network****Note by the secretariat¹****I. Introduction**

1. The UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN) is a joint initiative between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the German Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation. It is operated under the project “Reinforcing the innovation ecosystem in the UNECE region to promote disruptive innovation and digital technologies for sustainable development and for the circular economy transition” funded by the Ministry of Economics and Climate Change of Germany. The project runs from December 2021 through 31 December 2024.

2. The project responds to an articulated need for a concerted and structured dialogue regarding the ways in which innovation may best support a sustainable transformation of society. At present, the UNECE region is not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and there is an urgent need for increased coordination to accelerate innovation to reach stipulated targets. This raises new questions regarding innovation policy making that involve also new opportunities for joint learning and capacity building.

3. ETIN aims to meet these needs. It provides a strategic platform and meeting place for peer learning in which relevant actors (including policy makers, innovation agencies, think tanks, entrepreneurs, industry representatives and experts) in the field of transformative innovation can discuss, consult, collaborate, and jointly develop tools to promote innovative processes that increase competitiveness and accelerate a sustainable transformation in the UNECE region.

II. Conceptualizing and launching ETIN (Q1 and Q2 of 2022)

4. The first two quarters of 2022 involved an extensive external consultation, including:
- (a) a series of meetings with potential members of the network; and

¹ This document has not been formally edited.

(b) a larger consultation meeting in mid-May with more than 40 institutional representatives participating online.

5. This process further clarified the needs and expectations of prospective network members and the niche that ETIN should aim to occupy. The results were captured in an inception report that established the fundamental objectives of the network and a first work plan for the months ahead.

6. ETIN was officially launched during the fourteenth Session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies (ToS-ICP) in Geneva on 14 and 15 November 2022. On that occasion, ETIN played a significant role in the planning and organisation of the session's substantive segment, i.e. a policy dialogue on "Digital and green transformations: Innovation for a sustainable future". This close coordination between ETIN activities and the ToS-ICP moving forward was further consolidated with the election of a representative of the Swedish national Innovation Agency Vinnova, one of ETIN's core members, as chair of ToS-ICP.

III. Consolidating internally and preparing for the ETIN roll-out (Q3 2022 – Q1 2023)

7. Since ToS-ICP, all work has been dedicated to put ETIN and its activities into practice. The period between December 2022 – February 2023 was largely dedicated to consolidating the internal organisation and plan for future activities. This work involved:

- (a) internal capacitation (regarding the essence of transformative innovation)
- (b) the production of several internal steering documents, including:
 - ETIN Strategic Plan 2023
 - ETIN Work Plan 2023
 - ETIN Communication Plan 2023
 - ETIN Governance Plan 2023

IV. Rolling ETIN activities externally (Q1 and Q2 of 2023)

8. The period from March 2023 and onwards saw thereafter a drastic shift in ETIN activities, with an increased focus on external activities and outreach. This change in operational mode can be divided into three types of activities.

ETIN initiated events

9. A first category concerns activities that ETIN initiated, or co-organised with some of its members. These events were:

(a) A hybrid *seminar* entitled "Platforms, circular economy, and transformative innovation: a cross-industry comparison" that successfully marry insights from two ongoing debates – i.e. platform economy and circular economy – to explore potential synergies (3 March 2023).

(b) Two virtual *policy dialogues* on the broader topic "Pathways to transformative innovation", co-organized with the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems, Vinnova (7 March 2023) and NESTA, the UK's innovation agency for social good (14 March 2023). In these events, participants and invited experts discussed the opportunities and pitfalls of different models currently emerging to govern and organize work processes for transformative innovation.

ETIN initiated events back-to-back to UNECE flagship events

10. Adding to the above, ETIN also held a series of events back-to-back with UNECE flagship events to create synergies between the network and UNECE by having its members participating in, contributing to and learning from ongoing UNECE debates.

(a) The first *ETIN Innovation Days* organised in conjunction with the UNECE Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (29-30 March 2023). The ETIN Innovation Days highlighted the international dimension of transformative innovation – a topic that is gaining surprisingly little attention in the debate. To that end, ETIN organized a series of meetings and encounters in relation to, but also outside, the Regional Forum. Moreover, several ETIN members participated in the peer-learning roundtable, “Transformative innovation to accelerate sustainable development” that the network co-organized at the Regional Forum.

(b) ETIN was also actively involved in both the design and completion of some of the *virtual side events* leading up to the 70th session of the Commission (4-5 April 2023). Several ETIN members were actively involved in the activities around “The future of regulation in the pan-European region: Horizon-scanning for a sustainable and equitable future” and on “Leveraging digital solutions for the circular economy”.

Other activities

11. In parallel ETIN has also pursued other forms of outreach.

(a) The podcast series “*Innovation Matters*” that has been ongoing since late May 2022. It is *now* on its 11th episode with a new release about every month.

(b) The *policy* report “Transformative innovation for a sustainable future” (ECE/CECI/2023/3), which will serve as an input to the 16th session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships.

V. Charting the ETIN way forward (Q2 2023 and onwards)

12. Building on these experiences, ETIN is now entering a new phase where the ambition is to further develop the network. Two broader issues will guide this strategic discussion:

(a) how to best grow and extend the network (governance);

(b) how to fill the more specific niche in which ETIN can provide unique support and insights (format and content); and

(c) how to build the basis for ensuring sustainability of the current success, including by planning for the mobilization of follow-up funding for the post-2024 period.