

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Evaluation of E293 project

Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system

I. Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNECE project E293 “Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system” were achieved.

The evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in strengthening capacities of its target countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system.

The evaluation will also assess any impacts the project may have had on progressing human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction in the context of this engagement. The evaluation will finally look at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assess, where relevant, UNECE’s COVID-19 early response through this project.

II. Background

The project aimed to strengthen national capacities of the beneficiary countries (the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan, countries participating in the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)) to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system.

The project expected accomplishments were:

1. Enhanced capacities of policymakers and experts in National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement Trade Facilitation (TF) policies and measures, notably in the area of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) Articles 10.1; 10.3; 10.4; and 23.2
2. Improved capacities of policymakers and experts to measure progress in the implementation of TF, and to achieve internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures.

To achieve the expected accomplishments, the project team engaged in several core activities:

A.1.1. Adaptation and development of training materials and modules for national TF courses to cover the relevant target areas in the TFA for the implementation of WTO TFA provisions related to Articles 10.1 on formalities and documentary requirements; 10.3 on use of international standards; 10.4 on single window; and 23.2 on national trade facilitation committee (NTFCs).

A.1.2. Organization of two capacity-building seminars for members of NTFCs, regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders on the development of national TF roadmaps, including for the implementation of the WTO targeted TFA measures.

A.1.3. Organization of one sub-regional SPECA capacity-building and experience sharing conference to strengthen cooperation on the implementation of TF measures and supporting international standards, including on the aspects of Single Window interoperability.

A.1.4. Translation of the training materials developed (under A.1.1) into Russian.

A2.1. Development of training materials on benchmarking mechanisms to measure progress and achieve policy coherence in the implementation of TF measures, based on the UN/CEFACT Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Methodology (TTFMM) in the beneficiary countries.

A2.2. Organization of two capacity-building seminars for NTFBs on the development of national benchmark mechanisms to measure progress and achieve policy coherence in TF based on the UN/CEFACT TTFMM methodology.

A2.3. Translation of learning materials and training courses into Russian.

A2.4. Update and maintenance of the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) by incorporating project results and lessons learned and the new learning materials, including through the development of new itineraries providing a step-by-step approach to the implementation of TF measures in the project target areas, and the drafting of case stories.

A2.5. Organize a concluding Conference (in the context of the UN/CEFACT Forum) on regulatory cooperation for TF to disseminate project outcomes and share lessons learned from project target countries.

III. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions

The evaluation will be guided by the objectives and indicators of achievement established in the logical / results framework of the project document. The evaluation will be conducted in Q4 of 2023 and Q1 of 2024. It will cover the full implementation of the project, from May 2018 to December 2023 in the ECE member States

The evaluation criteria are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.

Relevance

1. To what extent did the project respond to the priorities and needs of participating countries?
2. To what extent were the project activities consistent with global and regional priorities and aligned with the SDGs?
3. How relevant were the project activities vis-à-vis the programme of work of the UNECE? What value has UNECE's efforts added in this area?
4. To what extent were gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change considerations integrated into the design and implementation of the project? How can these perspectives be better included in future projects design and implementation?

Effectiveness

5. To what extent were the project design and set-up effective for meeting the needs of the beneficiary countries?
6. To what extent were the project objectives and expected results achieved?
7. To what extent are the project activities coherent and harmonized with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities?
8. What were the challenges/obstacles (including COVID-19) to achieving the expected results? How successfully did the project overcome these?

Efficiency

9. Were the resources adequate for achieving the results?
10. Were the results achieved on time and were all activities organized efficiently?
11. To what extent were the resources used economically and how could the use of resources be improved?

Sustainability

12. What measures were adopted to ensure that project outcomes would continue after the project ended and to what extent have these measures addressed the existing risks for sustainability?
13. To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the project? How is the stakeholders' engagement likely to continue, be scaled up, replicated, or institutionalized?

IV. Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the ECE Evaluation Policy¹; the Administrative instruction guiding Evaluation in the UN Secretariat²; and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation³. Human rights and gender equality considerations will be integrated at all stages of the evaluation⁴: (i) in the evaluation scope and questions; (ii) in the methods, tools and data analysis techniques; (iii) in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the final report. The evaluator will explicitly explain how human rights, gender, disability, SDGs, and climate change considerations will be considered during the evaluation.

The evaluator is required to use a mixed-method approach, including qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis as the basis for a triangulation exercise of all available data to draw conclusions and findings. The evaluator shall conduct online surveys and interview a wide range of diverse stakeholders.

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

1. A desk review of all relevant documents, including the project document and information on project activities (monitoring data); materials developed in support of the activities (agendas, plans, participant lists, background documents, donor reports and publications); proposed programme budgets covering the evaluation period; project reports to the donor.
2. Online survey of key stakeholders and beneficiaries: the survey will be developed by the consultant on her/his preferred platform.
3. Interviews (in-person and/or by telephone/video): the evaluator shall interview a wide range of diverse stakeholders and beneficiaries including policymakers, representatives of the government, international organisations, academia, civil society as applicable.

The evaluator will further elaborate on the evaluation methodology in the Inception Report that will among others include the electronic survey questions and interview guide. The evaluation report will be written in English, will consist of approximately 30 pages and will include an executive summary (max. 2 pages) describing the evaluation methodology, key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

V. Evaluation schedule⁵

December 2023	ToR finalized
By 20 December 2023	Contract finalized
Late December 2023	Evaluator starts the desk review
February 2024	Evaluator submits inception report including survey design
March 2024	Launch of data gathering, including survey and interviews
April 2024	Evaluator submits draft and final evaluation reports

VI. Resources and Management of the evaluation

An independent consultant will be engaged to conduct the evaluation under the management of the Programme Management Unit (PMU). Payment will be made upon satisfactory delivery of work.

The PMU will manage the evaluation and will be involved in the following steps: Selection of the evaluator; Preparation and clearance of the Terms of Reference; Provision of guidance to the Project

¹ [UNECE Evaluation policy](#)

² ST/AI/2021/3

³ [UNEG 2016 Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#)

⁴ In line with UNEG Guidance contained in [Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations](#)

⁵ Final timetable to be agreed following engagement of the evaluator

Manager and evaluator as needed on the evaluation design and methodology; Clearance of the final report after quality assurance of the draft report.

The Project Manager, in consultation with the Division Director, will be involved in the following steps: Provide all documentation needed for desk review, contact details, support and guidance to the evaluation consultant as needed throughout the timeline of the evaluation; Advise the evaluator on the recipients for the electronic survey and for follow-up interviews; Process and manage the consultancy contract of the evaluator, along the key milestones agreed with PMU.

VII. Intended use / Next steps

The results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future activities of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Integration Subprogramme. Findings of this evaluation will be used, when possible, to:

- Improve direct project's follow up actions, implementation of products by project beneficiaries and dissemination of the knowledge created through the project.
- Assess the gaps and further needs of countries in the area of this project.
- Formulate tailored capacity building projects to strengthen the national capacity in enhancing innovation.

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

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

VIII. Criteria for evaluators

The evaluator should have:

1. An advanced university degree or equivalent background in relevant disciplines.
2. Knowledge of and experience in working on economics and trade matters desirable.
3. Relevant professional experience in design and management of evaluation processes with multiple stakeholders, survey design and implementation, project planning, monitoring and management, gender mainstreaming and human-rights due diligence.
4. Demonstrated methodological knowledge of evaluations, including quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for end-of-cycle project evaluations, including demonstrated experience in conducting questionnaires and interviews.
5. Fluency in written and spoken English and Russian.

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