

Intermediate Progress Report – 15.08.2024

**Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe:
subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade (E/AC.51/2023/5)**

No.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Actions taken to close recommendation	Implementation date
1	<p>In addition to the existing mechanisms, ECTD should develop a comprehensive framework to document, track and report on member States’ requests for technical assistance to help the Division to inform its prioritization of available resources, identify relevant potential outcomes and assist in efficient project planning.</p> <p>Indicator of achievement: a comprehensive framework for tracking member States’ requests for technical cooperation discussed, developed and issued by ECE</p>	Important	<p>Findings and recommendations of the OIOS Evaluation and the Secretariat’s Management Response were presented to 128th meeting of UNECE EXCOM (15 May 2023).</p> <p>The OIOS Evaluation was also presented to the spring 2023 sessions of the two Sectoral Committees serviced by ECTD (16th session of CICPPP 30 May – 1 June and 8th session of SCTCS 26 – 27 June) – under a specific agenda item, with feedback from member States and interactive discussion, as well as in the respective sessions in 2024 annual sessions of the CICPPP, SCTCS and UN/CEFACT (June and July respectively).</p> <p>In 2023, the Programme Management and Support Services Division (PMSSD) developed an online tool to track all technical cooperation requests received by ECE.</p> <p>The tool has been rolled out in January 2024 in ECTD and other ECE divisions. The recommendation will be marked as implemented in December 2024 upon review of the information consolidated.</p> <p>Additionally, tabulated summaries of technical cooperation requests, together with cost-estimates for implementation had been submitted to the annual sessions of the Sectoral Committees serviced by the Division (e.g. ECE/CECI/2024/INF.4 and annex in ECE/CTCS/2024/11) hence responding to this, and also to the recommendation to create Divisional action-plans on resource mobilization, partnerships, and technical cooperation. Typically, the Committees reviewed the lists and adopted decisions inviting the secretariat, donors, and development partners to step up fundraising and resource mobilization efforts.</p>	<p><i>In progress</i></p> <p><i>Target date: 31 December 2024</i></p>

¹ Critical recommendations are those that address significant and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided regarding the achievement of programme objectives. They should be used infrequently and only applied when failure to implement the recommendation would result in programme failure. Any critical recommendations rejected by the evaluand may be elevated to the UN DSG or SG, if necessary. Critical recommendations that are due or past due are followed up quarterly, in January, April, July and October.

² Important recommendations address reportable deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance might be at risk regarding the achievement of programme objectives. Important recommendations are followed up semi-annually, in January/February and July/August.

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2	<p>ECTD should engage its staff, the Programme Management and Support Services Division and relevant stakeholders to undertake an integrated strategic planning process to develop a division-wide strategic plan with a view to strengthening interlinkages between its two subprogrammes and identifying at the minimum:</p> <p>(a) The overall divisional vision and organizational objectives, which should be framed around its mandate, strategic framework, the Sustainable Development Goals and the new nexus areas, including Commission-wide topics;</p> <p>(b) The most relevant topics in the context of its mandate, including priority themes vis-à-vis the geographical subregions and member States' priorities and need for support, and related potential risks and mitigation measures;</p> <p>(c) A full results-based framework with clear performance indicators and an articulation of the roles of each organizational unit under ECTD, which includes how each unit will work with the others towards shared objectives within ECTD and outside across other ECE divisions;</p> <p>(d) An outreach strategy on how the Division will communicate with sister agencies, including the resident coordinator system, to ensure that relevant stakeholders are aware of ECTD mandates, roles and comparative advantages in providing the required assistance.</p> <p>Indicator of achievement: a common strategy and strategic plan adopted and</p>	Important	<p>Several preparatory steps for developing an integrated strategic planning process and division-wide strategic plan were taken, considering developments regarding ECE-wide strategic reviews (e.g. as emanating from the spring 2024 ECE-wide retreat).</p> <p>ECTD preparatory steps included, for example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offering a possibility for the two Sectoral Committees, the four Working Parties and the numerous Teams of Specialists serviced by the Division (the two sub-programmes) to exchange views among each other, both, within and across sub-programmes. Both of the two Sectoral Committees serviced by ECTD held respective discussions allowing for such an exchange during their May/June 2023 and June 2024 sessions. 2. Offering member States in each normative meeting a briefing on the results and recommendations of the OIOS evaluation, followed by a discussion and typically the adoption of a decision, welcoming the results and expressing support for the implementation of the recommendation. This process was initiated in 2023 and continued in 2024, with the most recent discussions announcing a forthcoming consultation process, including with Geneva-based delegations, aimed at collecting further inputs for a Division-wide strategic plan. 3. Implementing pilot initiatives for Division-wide integrated activities to gain experience in and foster efforts that transcend section and subprogramm boundaries. These include i) responses to cross-cutting priority themes e.g. the Regional Conference on the Circular Economy Transition held jointly between the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and PPPs (CICPPP) and the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards on (SCTCS) on 26 June 2024; ii) supporting the Circular STEP network, covering circular economy-related themes from both sub-programmes and all four sections (e.g. also in the form of working papers and events); iii) conscious scheduling of inter-governmental events to facilitate cross-fertilization e.g. between CICPPP and SCTCS in June 2024). 4. Stepping-up regular communications with stakeholders, including the UN Resident Coordinator system, among others through regular information emails showcasing ECTD mandates, roles and deliverables, including in response to UN-wide priority 	<p><i>In progress</i></p> <p><i>Target date: 31 December 2025</i></p>

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	implemented		objectives (e.g. see “Summer Greetings Email” circulated 30 July 2024 and respective regular earlier information emails).	
3	<p>On the basis of the division-wide strategic plan (recommendation 2), 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.</p> <p>Indicator of achievement: division-specific action plans issued to operationalize the three ECE strategies</p>	Important	<p>In light of the sequencing between recommendation 3 and 1 (with recommendation 3 to be implemented on the basis, i.e. subsequently to recommendation 1), so far mainly initial, internal exploratory actions have taken place for this recommendation.</p> <p>For example, increasing attention is given to the Division’s engagement with and contribution to ECE-wide strategies.</p> <p>As regards ECE’s Technical Cooperation Strategy and Working Group, repeated engagement with the Divisions’ Regional Advisor (one Regional Advisor supporting two sub-programmes) aimed at identifying challenges and opportunities are being undertaken with a view to charting the best way forward.</p> <p>As regards ECE’s Partnership Strategy, ECTD is working to ensure that each normative body, at least at the level of Sectoral Committees, has an opportunity to consider partnerships with UN and other actions. This is typically, addressed as a specific self-standing agenda item in the annual meeting. Additionally, the partnership-based approach in response to the decisions of the 70th Commission session was presented to Sectoral Committees and UN/CEFACT at the 2024 June and July sessions.</p>	<p><i>In progress</i></p> <p><i>Target date: 31 December 2025</i></p>
4	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.	Important	<p>With a view to charting the way forward, ECTD started by taking stock of examples documenting the successful integration of gender, environment, human rights and disability in ECTD work streams. Examples include</p> <p>(i) For gender: the recently established Team of Specialists on Gender Responsive Standards (ToS GRS), which developed and adopted a “Code List for sex and gender in digitalized information exchange”, the inclusion of gender aspects into the ECE Evaluation Methodology on PPPs (PIERS) and respective activities (in May 2023, UNECE’s Annual International PPP Forum, hosted in Athens, Greece, convened several sessions on gender equality and women’s empowerment in PPP; in November 2023, the WP.PPP launched work on a practical</p>	<p><i>In progress</i></p> <p><i>Target date: 31 December 2025</i></p>

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	<p>Indicator of achievement: common strategy for ECTD on the integration of crosscutting issues (gender, human rights, disability inclusion and environment)</p>		<p>guide on promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment through PPPs), and the inclusion of gender aspects in its Innovation Policy Reviews, and into its Trade Facilitation work streams. As regards Trade Facilitation, for example, the 2023 ECE Regional Report shows that the the ‘women in trade facilitation’ subgroup reached an average implementation rate for the ECE region of 36%, with a slight increase from 27% in 2021. The implementation rate varies widely across country groups. The measures that has the best implementation rate is: ‘women’s membership in the NTFC (National Trade Facilitation Committees) or similar bodies’, currently being implemented by 39 countries, reaching an implementation rate of 38%. https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/ECE_TRADE_483E.pdf</p> <p>(ii) For environment the two standards on PPPs for the Circular Economy (Guidelines on Promoting Circular Economy in PPPs for the SDGs and Guidelines on PPPs for the Sustainable Development Goals in Waste-to-Energy Projects for Non-Recyclable Waste: Pathways towards a Circular Economy), the Code of Good Practice for Reducing Food Loss, the Team of Specialists for Sustainable Value Chains for the Circular Economy, and the continued expansion of the Sustainability Pledge are noteworthy. As regards the latter, the Sustainability Pledge, a flagship initiative supporting the traceability of environmental, social and governance (ESG) compliance in circular value chains, reached 100+ pledges from 750+ industry actors in the textiles and clothing sector. The ECE Sustainability Pledge toolbox was tested in 20 blockchain pilots covering 23 countries across the world. ECTD experts are working to replicate this initiative in the agri-food and critical raw materials (CRMs) sectors).</p> <p>The ECTD-serviced normative machinery also provided a setting for member States to discuss Circular Economy initiatives, such as information exchange standards for Digital Product Passport (DPPs) (UN/CEFACT, November 2023) or suggestions for integrating Circular Economy considerations into UNECE Studies on RPBTs (Trade Committee, June 2023).</p> <p>ECTD also services the Circular STEP network, which provides a vibrant stakeholder engagement platform for more than 25</p>	

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			<p>government-nominated focal points. This includes 16 focal points from countries with economies in transition, many of whom met at our first Circular STEP Regional Dialogue in Belgrade, Serbia in October 2023. This also includes in-depth coverage of circularity-related issues at the first Regional Conference on Circular Economy held in June 2024 in Geneva, on the occasion of the two Sectoral Committees serviced by the Division.</p> <p>(iii) For human rights, entry points already yielded results (the Sustainability Pledge for Textiles and Footwear, the PPP work stream). For example, following regular consultations with experts helping to shape the way forward (several meetings with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, were held in 2023 and with the “Business and Human Rights” community), a session was held at the UNECE 8th PPP Forum May 2024 focusing on “equal access”, with panellists addressing the question: In what ways do the UNECE’s PPPs for the SDGs approach and the PIERS platform support the incorporation of a human-rights-based approach in PPPs? Similarly, human rights issues are also addressed as part of the tracing of ESG (environmental, social and governance) aspects of value chains in the context of the ECE Sustainability Pledge.</p> <p>(iv) As regards the inclusion of disability in ECTD work streams, the work stream on Gender Responsive Standards (GRS) and on PPPs work (PIERS indicators and new work on stakeholder engagement) provide entry points. This is in addition to specific indicators on disability responsiveness and targets to be included in future PPP XB projects.</p>	