



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
23 January 2019

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Sixty-eighth session

Geneva, 9 and 10 April 2019

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

### Report on activities of the Executive Committee

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### Note by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee

#### I. Background

1. The rules of procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) require basic documents to be prepared in relation to the agenda items as appropriate. This document is being submitted to support the discussions under item 5 at the sixty-eighth session of ECE.

#### II. Functions of the Executive Committee

2. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) was established by ECE member States as a result of the Reform of 2005. Between the biennial sessions of the Commission, the Executive Committee acts on behalf of the Commission and is competent on all matters related to ECE activities in conformity with its terms of reference (ECE/EX/3/Rev.1).

3. At its sixty-seventh session in 2017, the Commission elected Latvia as its Chair, and Switzerland and Belarus as its Vice-Chairs.

4. EXCOM met on a regular basis, and the agenda of each meeting was set by the Chairperson in consultation with the Vice-Chairpersons and the Executive Secretary.

5. EXCOM prepared the sessions of the Commission; ensured programmatic coherence and oversight; addressed emerging issues calling for a decision in between the biennial sessions of the Commission; and oversaw the work of the secretariat.

6. The Chairs of the Sectoral Committees — or the Vice-Chairs — were invited to the meetings of EXCOM to report on the work of their respective Committees. At each meeting, the Executive Secretary briefed EXCOM on the latest developments and major activities carried out by the secretariat.

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### III. Main accomplishments

7. Since the last Commission session and until the time of submission of this report, EXCOM held 12 meetings and six informal consultations. Two more formal meetings are expected to be held before the Commission session in April 2019.

8. In line with paragraph 3 of its terms of reference the Executive Committee reviewed, evaluated and approved the programmes of work of the Sectoral Committees, namely the

- (a) Committee on Environmental Policy;
- (b) Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry;
- (c) Committee on Housing and Land Management;
- (d) Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships;
- (e) Committee on Sustainable Energy;
- (f) Conference of European Statisticians;
- (g) Inland Transport Committee;
- (h) Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards,

9. It approved the set-up, renewal, terms of reference and work plans of groups under the Sectoral Committees, examined with the Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons of the Sectoral Committees, their reports on the implementation of their Programme of Work and other relevant issues. Further, EXCOM approved the mandates, terms of reference, and programmes of work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and the Working Group on Ageing, respectively, and examined with the Chairpersons the reports on the implementation of the Programme of Work and other relevant issues. The list of decisions approved by EXCOM related to all of these ECE bodies is contained in the annex.

10. Over the past intersessional period until the date of submission of this document, EXCOM was also seized on other items. All of them are listed in alphabetical order in the annex, including in particular:

- (a) annual reports on technical cooperation for 2016 and 2017;
- (b) approval of the ECE evaluation work plan for 2020–2021 and annual report on evaluation 2017;
- (c) framework for the engagement with private sector entities;
- (d) mapping of the reach of the ECE products;
- (e) modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (A/RES/71/280);
- (f) report on the implementation of the ECE Resource mobilization strategy;
- (g) Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;
- (h) repositioning of the United Nations development system;
- (i) the United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund.

11. EXCOM was periodically informed of developments in the ongoing reform initiative of the Secretary-General to reposition the United Nations development system and main directions of the ongoing work of ECE on further alignment of the Commission to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

12. The secretariat initiated a comprehensive assessment of options to enhance the impact of the work of ECE, within existing mandates and without financial implications. It seeks to focus on core strengths and leverage the multidisciplinary nature of the Commission's mandate to address the SDGs in a cross-sectoral, integrated manner for additional synergies and more comprehensive solutions. ECE had identified nine SDGs where it has a comparative advantage and provides the most value added: SDGs 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 15 and the cross-cutting SDGs 5 and 17. In order to strengthen impact in these areas, the secretariat intends to enhance activities within current mandates and make proposals to relevant Commission's bodies as appropriate.

13. Under the leadership of the Executive Secretary, the secretariat introduced a more integrated way of working to leverage its in-house expertise to achieve greater impact towards sustainable development in the region. Working across the eight subprograms, cross-sectoral teams engaged in high-impact areas where multiple SDGs converge (nexus areas): (a) Sustainable use of natural resources; (b) Sustainable and smart cities for all ages; (c) Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; and (d) Measuring and monitoring SDGs (methodology). In line with the four nexus areas, ECE expanded and strengthened its network of knowledge partnerships with a wide range of actors, including with other organizations in the United Nations system. Member States expressed appreciation for this approach.

14. In line with its strategy on further alignment of ECE to the SDGs, the secretariat prepared an annual report on technical cooperation for 2017 structuring technical cooperation activities according to the core SDGs where ECE has the strongest impact. The new format was commended by member States.

15. In keeping with the guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies (E/2013/37-E/ECE/1464, appendix III), which specify that work should be "carried out in a way that is member driven, participatory, consensus-oriented, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, results-oriented and accountable", the secretariat regularly informed EXCOM on its efforts to strengthen its working methods and managerial practices focused on the four key management principles promoted by the Executive Secretary: accountability, transparency, participation and equality.

16. Further to a request from United Nations Member States to "strengthen due diligence and risk management measures to safeguard the reputation of the organization and ensure confidence-building with respect to developing partnerships with the private sector"<sup>1</sup>, the secretariat developed a set of guidelines to ensure the integrity, independence and impartiality in the engagement of ECE with the private sector in accordance with United Nations Rules and Regulations. The secretariat brought to the attention of EXCOM its due diligence review process to mitigate risks of partnerships with business sector and to complement the Framework. EXCOM adopted the Framework for the engagement with private sector entities and took note of the due diligence review of private sector entities.

17. In response to an evaluation of ECE by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the secretariat developed a document on "Mapping of the reach of the products of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe" for further consideration by member States. In addition to mapping the geographic reach of norms, standards and legal instruments hosted in ECE, the secretariat outlined opportunities for and constraints to broadening this geographic reach.

18. Pursuant to the request by member States, EXCOM was periodically informed about the United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund that was launched by the Secretary-General in April 2018. The secretariat informed EXCOM that the Trust Fund was fully operational

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<sup>1</sup> A/RES/70/224, paragraph 13 and 14.

after the constituting meetings of its governing bodies. Presently, ECE hosts its Interim Secretariat and is recruiting for the positions of the Trust Fund Secretariat. The Trust Fund has already received pledges and support from governments, foundations and other stakeholders, and has started to finance its first projects. The Trust Fund will prioritize projects to improve road safety in low and middle-income countries, where the majority of road fatalities occur.

19. EXCOM was also briefed on the 2018 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region (RFSD) that was held under the theme “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies” with some 600 participants. RFSD undertook an in-depth review on progress towards SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17 and submitted the chair’s conclusion to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) as official input from the ECE region. Member States commended the secretariat on the good organization of the Forum.

#### **IV. Challenges and way ahead**

20. Going forward, ECE will continue to concentrate its efforts on delivering effectively and with measurable impact on its multi-sectoral mandates and on supporting member States in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

21. The Secretary-General’s reform initiative outlined in his report “Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet” (A/72/684–E/2018/7), will bring changes for the Commission, especially in its technical cooperation activities. While the report reaffirmed the important role of regional entities in the United Nations development system, it highlighted the importance of better harnessing the substantial assets at the regional level, including those of the Regional Commissions. In resolution A/RES/72/279, Member States endorsed the Secretary-General’s vision and called for a two-phased approach to the regional reform of the United Nations development system.

22. Phase I of the reform process seeks to optimize the interaction between Regional Commissions and the Regional United Nations Development Group teams and with Resident Coordinators and the United Nations Country Teams. With its substantive contributions to 17 United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, the practice of Regional United Nations System Meetings (joint meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, chaired by ECE, and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group for Europe and Central Asia) and the inclusive Regional Forum that it convenes annually, ECE is well positioned to deliver on this approach and is actively engaged in aligning to other changes initiated at the country level.

23. Phase II of the reform process seeks to identify, in a region-by-region review, options to reprofile and restructure the regional assets of the United Nations, including those of the Regional Commissions, to better support country-level policy priorities and address regional cooperation, and subregional and transboundary issues. At the time of the submission of this report, the parameters and modalities of the region-by-region review were still under consideration. ECE will actively engage in the reform process to articulate its particular strengths and the comparative advantage that it brings to the larger United Nations development system. This will include highlighting its expertise in and contributions to the promotion of regional cooperation and economic integration through policy dialogue, normative work and technical cooperation. At the same time, ECE will also explore ways to leverage its special expertise and its role as a convening platform even more effectively to benefit the work of the larger United Nations development system.

24. To underpin his reform agenda, the Secretary-General has called on the secretariat and the wider United Nations system to launch concerted efforts to foster new working methods. He has challenged the Organization to become more innovative and strengthen its

ability to respond to change in an active and agile way. Concerted and determined action is required to overcome existing barriers to innovation. Building on its many strengths, ECE can become a more efficient, flexible organization that consistently looks for and promotes innovative solutions for the benefit of its member States. ECE has set up mechanisms and incentives to cooperate across Divisions and thematic areas and exchange knowledge more systematically. Going forward, the challenge will be to turn various related initiatives into a culture of innovation and explore ways to promote, honour, and reward innovative practices. To meet this challenge, ECE has adopted a set of working principles that foster innovation, is engaging with the new Innovation Network at United Nations Headquarters, and is elaborating an action plan with concrete proposals to strengthen the organizational capacity for innovation.

25. In delivering on its mandates and working to achieve maximum impact of its work, ECE is very mindful of the importance of fostering strategic partnerships and close collaboration with key stakeholders. Partnerships are a key aspect of the 2030 Agenda, recognized, inter alia, in SDG 17. The ability to mobilize a large number of experts not only from governments but also from civil society, the private sector and academia is one of the strengths of ECE. These experts regularly contribute their expertise to the subsidiary bodies of ECE and form a network of several thousand subject matter specialists that the Commission can draw on. To further strengthen its analytical capacity, ECE has stepped up efforts to collaborate with universities and other research institutions to collect best practices that inform its normative work and prepare joint publications to devise innovative solutions in support of the 2030 Agenda. To strengthen the dissemination and implementation of its products, ECE is also intensifying its collaboration with the private sector.

26. Resource constraints remain a major challenge for the Commission. Over the last four biennia, the budget of ECE has been cut by 10.9 per cent bringing the staffing table to 188 posts. Although ECE has so far largely been able to mitigate adverse results from these cuts on its programmatic delivery, the Executive Secretary suggested that there is practically no capacity left to absorb further cuts without compromising the ability of ECE to deliver on existing mandates. Moreover, it is no longer feasible to continue adding new mandates without reprioritizing existing work and even considering the discontinuation of some activities with lesser impact. There is a need to reconcile resources with demand. Under the leadership of the Executive Secretary, the secretariat will elaborate proposals to this effect for the consideration by member States. Additionally, ECE has embarked on a review of its organizational practices to deliver on recurrent administrative and backstopping tasks even more effectively to free up capacity for more value-adding activities.

## Annex

### Decisions of the Executive Committee relating to subsidiary bodies of the Economic Commission for Europe taken in the intersessional period (June 2017 - December 2018)

| <i>Subsidiary bodies</i>  | <i>Decisions</i>   | <i>EXCOM meeting</i> |
|---|--|----------------------|
| Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Programme of work (PoW) for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Renewal of the mandate and terms of reference (ToRs) of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for 2018–2021.</li> </ul>   | 99                   |
| Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI)                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Renewal of mandates of nine subsidiary bodies.</li> </ul>   | 95                   |
| Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM)                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Change of name of the Committee and change of name of the programme “Country profiles on Housing and Land Management”;</li> <li>- Extension of the mandate of the Real Estate Market Advisory Group.</li> </ul> | 93, 96, 102          |
| Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Renewal of the mandate of the PPP Business Advisory Board;</li> <li>- Renewal of the mandate of the ToRs of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies.</li> </ul>                      | 92, 98               |
| Committee on Sustainable Energy (CSE)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Renewal of mandates and work plans of five Group of Experts;</li> <li>- Change of name of Expert Group on Resource Classification and its ToRs.</li> </ul>  | 95, 102              |
| Conference of European Statisticians (CES)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Mandates and ToRs of the Teams of Specialists.</li> </ul>   | 95                   |
| Inland Transport Committee (ITC)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Matters relating to three subsidiary bodies.</li> </ul>   | 98                   |
| Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards (SCTCS)                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revised ToRs of the SCTCS;</li> <li>- PoW of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Activities of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2018.</li> </ul>                 | 94, 100              |
| United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consolidated mandate and ToRs of UN/CEFACT;</li> </ul>  | 92, 99               |

| <i>Subsidiary bodies</i>        | <i>Decisions</i>  | <i>EXCOM meeting</i> |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PoW for 2017–2018;</li> <li>- Mandate, ToRs of the UN/CEFACT Sustainable Fisheries Team of Specialists and PoW for 2018–2019;</li> <li>- Mandate and ToRs of the UN/CEFACT Advisory Group of the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE);</li> <li>- PoW of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries 2018–2019.</li> </ul> |                      |
| Working Group on Ageing (WGA)   | - Renewal of the mandate for the period 2018–2022 and ToRs of the WGA and the PoW of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2018–2019.  | 96                   |

| <i>Other issues discussed</i>   | <i>EXCOM Meeting</i>    |
|---|-------------------------|
| Achieving energy for sustainable development  | 98                      |
| Annual report on technical cooperation activities   | 98                      |
| Annual reports on evaluation (2016 and 2017)  | 92, 97                  |
| Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting   | 101                     |
| Evaluation activities: Evaluation workplan 2020–2021  | 95                      |
| Evaluation of cross-sectoral collaboration in the Economic Commission for Europe (2017)   | 96                      |
| Framework for the engagement with private sector entities   | 93                      |
| Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (A/RES/71/280)   | 92, 93, 94, 95, 97      |
| Main directions of the ongoing work of the Economic Commission for Europe on further alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals       | 98                      |
| Mapping of the reach of the products of the Economic Commission for Europe  | 92                      |
| Preparations for the 2019 Commission Session  | 100, 102                |
| Proposed programme budget of the Economic Commission for Europe for 2020  | 102                     |
| Regional Forum on Sustainable Development   | 93, 95, 96, 97, 99, 102 |
| Repositioning of the United Nations development system  | 99, 100, 101            |
| Resource mobilization strategy of the Economic Commission for Europe  | 97                      |
| Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management: Proposal for greater collaboration between ECE and UN-GGIM | 95                      |

Further, EXCOM adopted 39 extrabudgetary projects during the intersessional period.

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