

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

110th meeting
Geneva, 3 April 2020

Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda

Informal document No. **2020/13**

**Economic Commission for Europe and partnerships:
Cooperation and partnership agreements**

(for information)

Note by the Secretariat

Background

1. Strong partnerships are a critical component for the successful delivery on mandates and the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over many years, UNECE has fostered fruitful cooperation with other entities. Areas for joint action are many, including knowledge production and exchange with other actors; dissemination of its normative work and standards; and capacity building for its uptake and implementation, to name but a few.

2. **Objectives:** The *Internal Review of Cooperation and Partnership Agreements in UNECE* considered the existing partnerships and practices underpinning the collaboration and explored ways to strengthen its effectiveness. In particular, the review had the objectives to

- complete of a UNECE-wide stocktake and review of existing Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) to assess their relevance, value-added, and tangible results, and propose a plan for phasing out less impactful agreements;
- deepen the strategic focus of UNECE partnership agreements;
- clarify internal workflows and development/update of related templates and guidance; and
- ensure full implementation, by the respective MoU Focal Points (FPs), of the due diligence measures and adherence to MoU-related policies established in UNECE.

3. During the review process, UNECE learned that the UNSDG Group at UN Headquarters is currently developing a partnership strategy for the larger UN system. As finalization of the Secretariat-wide strategy has been foreshadowed by the UNSDG Group for the second/third quarter of 2020, UNECE will defer the development of its own partnership strategy, initially identified as an additional objective, until after the issuance of such an overarching strategy to enable full alignment with the organization-wide approach.

4. **Definitions:** In UNECE, different forms of agreements with external partners are concluded. These include Donor Contribution Agreements, Host Country Agreements, Implementing Partner Agreements, agreements related to in-kind contributions, and Cooperation and Partnership agreements. The scope of this exercise is limited to Cooperation and Partnership agreements. In principle such agreements may not contain terms or conditions that create or give rise to financial or administrative obligations on the part of the organization. For the purpose of this review, the Cooperation and Partnership agreements are referred to as “agreements” or “MoUs”.

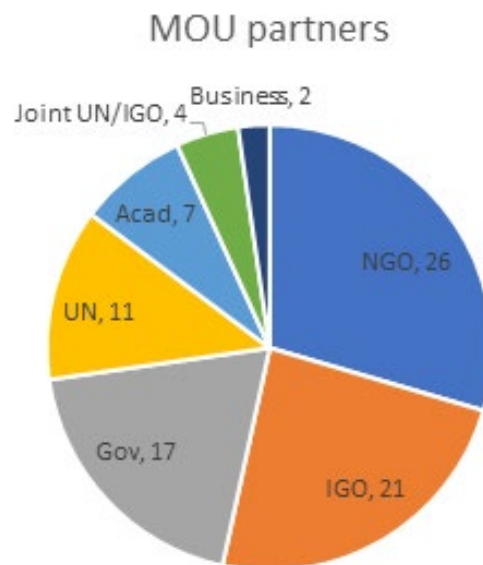
UNECE cooperation and partnership agreements: a stocktake of Memoranda of Understanding signed in UNECE since 1998

5. During the period of 1998 – 2019, UNECE concluded a total of 118 Cooperation and Partnership agreements. 31 have since expired. Of the currently valid 88 agreements, 81 have the

form of Memoranda of Understanding and 6 are enshrined in exchanges of letters or statements of intent, 1 is an Interface procedure. A review of the current body of MOUs (current of 1 February 2020) shows the following overarching trends:

6. **Overall approach:** UNECE does not currently apply an organization-wide strategy to formal partnerships. Usually, subprogrammes develop proposals for a prospective partnership and engage with the counterpart to plan details of the collaboration. Accordingly, most agreements are sectoral in nature. Consultations for cross-sectoral engagement are *ad hoc* and only undertaken in a small number of cases.

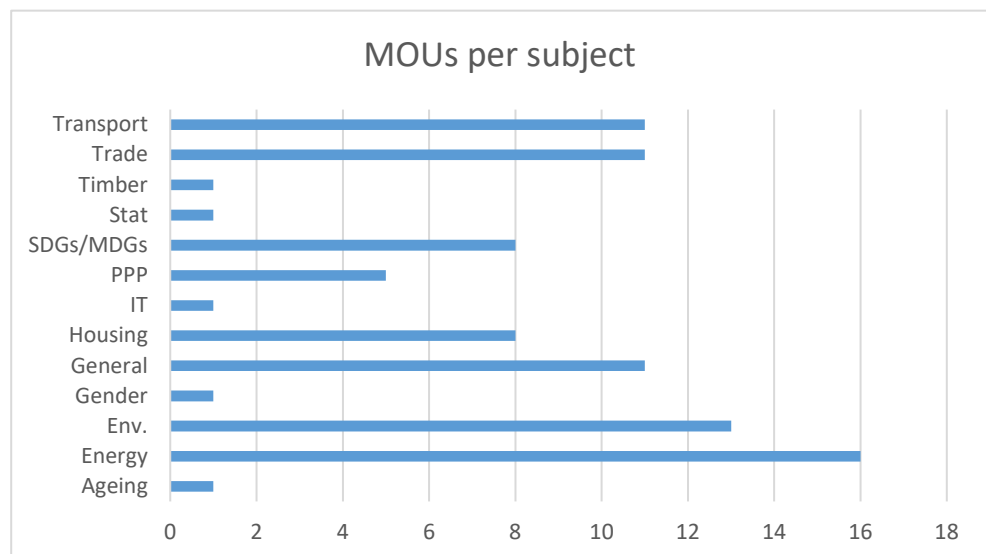
7. **MoU Partners:** Of the 88 currently active MoUs, 26 are concluded with Non-Governmental Organizations, 21 with Intergovernmental Organizations, 17 with national governments, eleven with UN organizations, seven with academic institutions, four among multiple UN system entities and Intergovernmental Organizations, and two with the business sector.



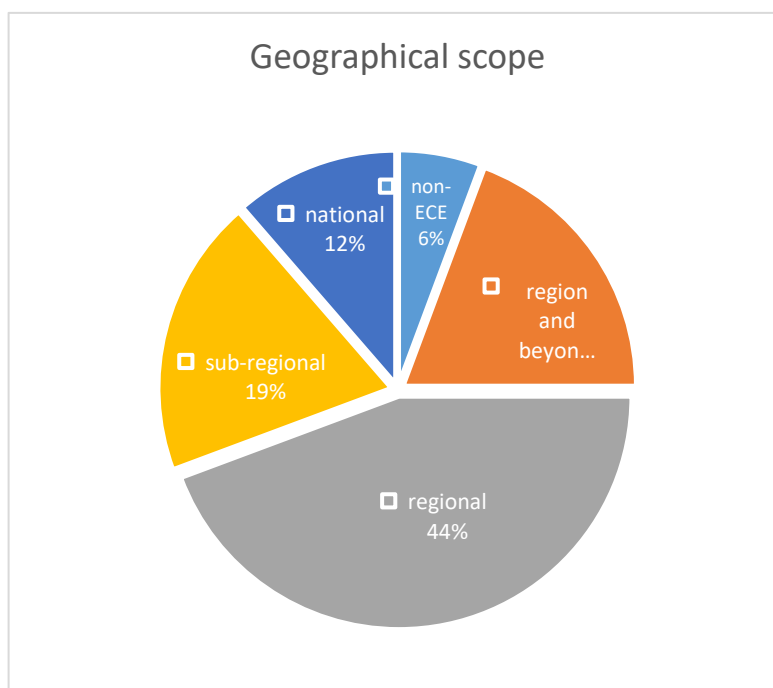
8. **Due diligence arrangements:** In compliance with OIOS audit recommendations, a due diligence questionnaire for engagement with NGOs and other entities as partners other than member States must be completed and signed by the entity prior to competing an agreement. The Executive Committee is informed of all planned MoUs prior to their signature.

9. **Subject**

matter: The use of formal MOUs is widespread across UNECE’s areas of responsibility. It is noteworthy, however, that the Statistics, Population and Forest Divisions use the formal partnership modality (conclusion of an MoU) very rarely.



10. **Geographic scope:** Some 70% of the current MOUs have a scope spanning the region or parts thereof, including a national (12%), sub-regional (19%) or regional (44%) focus. 19% cover the region and beyond, and 6% facilitate engagement with partners outside the ECE region.



11. **Reporting Arrangements:** Only three of the 88 currently active MoUs contain references to formally established reporting mechanisms to governing bodies. However, MoUs related to Centres of Excellence usually report periodically to a subsidiary body that oversees the related Programme of Work (see also chapter on CoE). More broadly, updates on the collaboration with other organizations are routinely included in the report of the Chairs of sectoral Committees reporting to the Executive Committee. The issue of partnerships is also included in reports presented to the respective subsidiary bodies of UNECE.

12. **Duration:** The duration of partnership and cooperation agreements is flexible. 36 MoUs are open ended. Ten MoUs have a duration of 5 years, nine MoUs have a duration of 4 years, 19 MoUs have a duration of 3 years, four MoUs have a duration of 2 years and two MoUs have a duration of 1 year. Eight MoUs are concluded for a limited duration specifying only end dates (in 2019, 2020, 2021, respectively). Most MoUs include the possibility of extension.

13. **Review procedure:** Overall, there are very limited provisions for a periodic review of partnership agreements. Among the 36 open-ended MoUs, only three contain a formal review clause. Nine time-limited MoUs have periodic review clauses. Other MoUs stipulate that, with the agreement of the parties, an automatic extension is effected unless a termination process is initiated by one of the parties.

14. **UNECE repository of Cooperation and Partnership Agreements:** While completed agreements are generally posted on the UNECE website in chronological order sorted by year of signature, currently no organization-wide registry for related documents is maintained that assess progress/impact or provide further details on collaboration modalities.

Partnerships without formal agreements

15. The internal review also found that the majority of UNECE’s partnerships is not enshrined in formal agreements. As shown in the reports of the Chairs of the sectoral Committees to the Executive Committee, UNECE maintains collaborative arrangements with some 200 partners. These include:

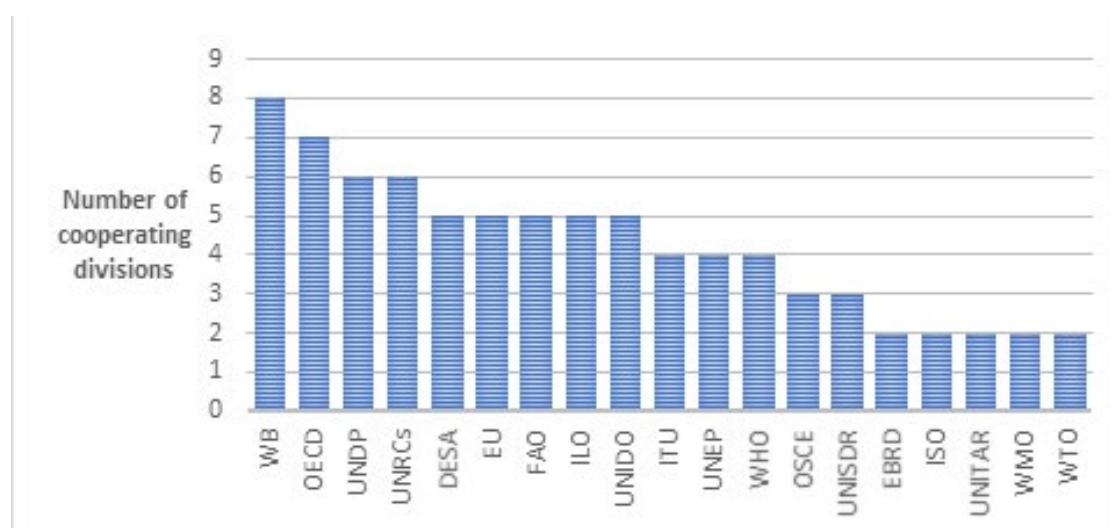
IGOs	NGOs	Banks/ business	Non- profits	EU and its institutions	Governments	Academia	UN -related
67	13	19	29	8	8	3	54

16. Subprogrammes with the most elaborate network of partners are

- Trade – over 60 partners
- Environment – over 50 partners
- Forest – over 35 partners
- Housing - over 25 partners
- Transport - over 30 partners

Collaboration takes place in joint projects/activities (such as joint meetings, joint workshops/trainings; inputs to joint studies, contribution to meeting papers), exchange of information, use/dissemination of products, informal inter agency groups, etc. In lieu of a formal agreement, necessary arrangements are made via e-mail, by phone or by video conferences.

17. Collaboration with certain partners is particularly far-reaching and covers cooperation with several divisions.



Next steps

18. The UNECE secretariat has committed to implement the following recommendations stemming from the internal review to strengthen accountability and impact of its partnerships.

- a. UNECE has formulated a roadmap to engage with its existing partners to strengthen value-added, impact, and results-reporting of the collaboration and explore ways to engage in a more integrated, cross-sectoral manner, where appropriated. Agreements found to be of limited effect will either be revised or phased out.
- b. Once the UN-Secretariat-wide partnership strategy has been released by the UNSDG Group, UNECE will consider to what extent it can be applied to its organizational context and initiate UNECE-specific customization, as needed.
- c. In the meantime, UNECE has adopted a number of good practices to implement a more strategic and integrated approach to partnerships. These include
 - Prior to engaging a prospective partner in collaboration negotiations, a strategic assessment will be developed for joint review and approval by senior management.
 - Generally, new or renewed agreements should contain an annexed action plan with clear deliverables to be completed in a given timeframe to agreed key performance indicators.
 - For each partnership, a FP will be assigned who is accountable for the management of the collaboration and adherence to policies governing UNECE partnerships, including in particular due diligence and impact reporting obligations.
- d. The new UNECE-wide approach to partnerships will also inform the collaboration with outside partners that are not governed by a formal agreement.
- e. The web repository of partnership agreements will be developed into a more comprehensive inventory of key strategic documents, incl. governance documents, periodic reports, etc., to ensure greater transparency and strengthen knowledge sharing.
- f. The secretariat will report to EXCOM annually and provide an update on its partnership activities, highlighting key developments and major achievements during the reporting period.

The Executive Committee may wish to take note of the information provided.