Nexus Flagship Publication on Smart Sustainable Cities:

Concept Note

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The concept note presents information on the UNECE nexus on “Sustainable and smart cities for all ages” and its flagship publication which is being prepared and is expected to be published in 2020.

The Committee is invited to take note of the information provided.
1. **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The 2030 Agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides an ambitious and comprehensive framework that opens new perspectives for policymaking and international cooperation. Its integrated character draws attention to linkages and complementarities among policy areas.

Within its mandate, UNECE intends to further strengthen its contribution to the SDGs in the region by focusing on core strengths, using regional and multi-sectoral expertise, and promoting innovation across all activities. The new UNECE Nexus approach aims to support member States in tackling four cross-sectoral dimensions of the 2030 Agenda.

The objective of one of the nexus areas is for cities in the UNECE region to become smarter and more sustainable, with an improved quality of life for residents of all ages. In this context, smartness is seen as one of the enabling conditions for improving sustainable economic, environmental and social development. The nexus strategy aims at enhancing the understanding of cross-sectoral linkages, coherent policy-making and cross-border information exchange and cooperation. To this end, the nexus will not only support national governments - the primary constituents of most UNECE subprogrammes - as actors determining the legislative, policy, governance, and public investment frameworks affecting cities, and also selected regional and local level actors in cities of UNECE member States who will develop and try out solutions for the transition to smart and sustainable cities for all ages. It will address the elements which make cities smart and sustainable.

In order to enhance the knowledge of UNECE member States and to improve their expertise to develop integrated policy approaches for sustainable and smart cities in the context of the 2030 Agenda, a flagship publication is being developed. This flagship will be central to this work, providing an overview of current trends, challenges, and opportunities, and setting out policy recommendations and good practices to support policy makers.

2. **RESPONSIBILITIES**

UNECE will work with one lead consultant and one supporting consultant to put together the publication. The consultants are expected to:

- compile and analyze existing data, composite indices, trends, and surveys on smart cities, city competitiveness and innovation, and urban development in the UNECE region
- interview and engage with UNECE staff, partner organizations, and selected cities in the region
- consolidate existing relevant studies, instruments, good practices and policy recommendations of UNECE, partner organizations, and other entities in the fields concerned
- analyze the needs and challenges at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels, and
- consolidate and develop policy recommendations to address these needs and challenges.

The consultants will undertake this work under the substantive guidance of the main coordinator of the publication, and under the overall responsibility of the nexus cluster coordinator, with the input of the members of the nexus team, representing the various UNECE Divisions and secretariats to relevant sectoral Committees or Convention bodies.

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1 A smart and sustainable city has been defined as an “Innovative city that uses ICT and other means to improve quality of life, efficiency of urban operations and services, and competitiveness, while ensuring that it meets the needs of the present and future generations with respect to economic, social, environmental and cultural aspects.” (definition endorsed by the Committee on Housing and Land Management in 2015 (ECE/HBP/184) and contained in ITU-T Recommendation Y.4903)
3. **SCOPE**

The publication will encompass a coherent narrative about the importance of and role for cities as competitive, vibrant hubs of innovation and experimentation, not only with employing technology, to find solutions for sustainable development — not only for the cities themselves, but for society overall. Against the backdrop of an overall review of trends and developments, it will explore how the different aspects of smart and sustainable cities can contribute to, promote, and create the dynamics to find, try out, and diffuse across the rest of society the ideas that can underpin sustainable economic, social, and environmental development.

The discussion will cover both the immense opportunities that cities have to drive sustainable development as well as the challenges they will face — both from a broader perspective (incl. competitiveness, urban development, and rural-urban inequality), from various sectoral perspectives (environmental protection, disaster risk reduction, energy, housing, transport, trade, economic development, innovation), and from the perspective of governance, institutions, legislation and stakeholder partnership arrangements.

This will form the basis for recommendations for designing the right policies, institutions, and mechanisms (existing or new ones) for UNECE member States to facilitate this transition. The publication will provide policy recommendations (arising from various sectoral perspectives but) aimed at enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation, and developing effective, flexible policies, institutions, and governance arrangements. This will include mechanisms for diffusion of good ideas both among cities and the region, among cities and regional and national governments, and among cities and the often less developed rural areas. It will also address cross-border cooperation across these different levels, to exchange information, good practices and take account of developments beyond national and city boundaries.

4. **OUTLINE TABLE OF CONTENTS**

The table of contents is envisaged to comprise the following elements:

- Introduction
- Cities – and Smart sustainable cities (SSCs) – in the UNECE region
- SSCs as drivers of innovation and sustainable economic development
- SSCs and urban planning
- Governance of SSCs
- Towards SSCs for the SDGs – conclusions and recommendations

Throughout each chapter, the publication will contain examples of good practices and lessons learned, examples of UNECE support to member States address respective challenges (tools, capacity-development, etc.) and policy recommendations. Existing indicators and approaches, such as the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for smart sustainable cities will be used and presented as appropriate. The final chapter will summarize the discussion and the policy recommendations.

5. **TIMELINE**

The indicative timeline is as follows:

- September: Consultants start work
- mid-November 2019: Extended, detailed outline
- January 2020: First draft
- February-March 2020: Review by UNECE units/subprogrammes
- April 2020: Second draft
- May 2020: Review by expert review group, comprising representatives of intergovernmental bodies and experts
- June 2020: Final draft
- Summer 2020: Circulation to ExCom for approval of policy recommendation, and to sectoral Committees and Convention bodies for information
- September 2020 – December 2020: Copy-editing, translation, layout and printing in official languages
- Spring 2021: Presentation to 69th session of UNECE Commission.