

REVIEW REPORT

Independent Review of UNECE Efforts to Promote Cross-sectoral Collaboration and an Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development Work

Final Report

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPC	Committee for Programme and Coordination of the United Nations
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EPR	Environmental Performance Reviews
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EXCOM	UNECE Executive Committee
IMDIS	Integrated Monitoring and Document Information System
ITC	UNECE Inland Transport Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
OES	UNECE Office of the Executive Secretary
OIOS	Office for Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations
PPR	Programme Performance Report of the UN Secretary General
PMU	UNECE Programme Management Unit
PPME	Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RCM	Regional Coordination Mechanism
RFSD	Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
RPTC	Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDGU	Sustainable Development and Gender Unit
SPECA	UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia
THE PEP	Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme
UN	United Nations
UN/CEFACT	UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and eBusiness
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Background

1.1 About UNECE

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was created in 1947 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as one of five regional commissions. Its mandate is to facilitate greater economic integration and cooperation among its member States and promote sustainable development and economic prosperity. To this intent, UNECE provides a platform for policy dialogue; it facilitates the negotiation of international legal instruments and development of regulations and norms; it promotes the exchange and application of best practices as well as economic and technical expertise; and it provides technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition. Furthermore, UNECE contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations (UN) through the regional implementation of outcomes of global UN conferences and summits¹ and the development of conventions, regulations and standards.

2. At the highest level, UNECE is governed by the Commission, which meets for two days on a biennial basis (every two years). Over the years, membership has grown from 18 to 56 member States, spanning countries with very high, high and medium human development from within and outside Europe.² The European Union is an observer. It coordinates the positions of its 28 member States. Between Commission sessions, the Executive Committee (EXCOM), acting within the framework of the policies of the UN, is entrusted with the implementation of the overall guidance set by the Commission.³ Eight Sectoral Committees act as governing bodies for UNECE's eight sectoral-defined sub-programmes (see table 1). They are responsible for the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of biennial Programmes of Work for each sub-programme.

3. The UNECE Secretariat is located in Geneva, Switzerland. For the 2016-17 biennium, it had 224 staff members.⁴ Led by an Executive Secretary at the level of Under-Secretary-General, the Secretariat is comprised of an Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) and six substantive Divisions led by Directors (see table 1), financed from the UN regular budget and extra-budgetary resources.

Table 1: Overview of UNECE Sub-programmes, Divisions and Sectoral Committees

Sub-programme	Division	Sectoral Committee
1. Environment	Environment	Committee on Environmental Policy
2. Transport	Transport	Inland Transport Committee
3. Statistics	Statistical	Conference of European Statisticians
4. Economic Cooperation and Integration	Economic Cooperation and Trade	Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public Private Partnerships
5. Sustainable Energy	Sustainable Energy	Committee on Sustainable Energy
6. Trade	Trade	Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards
7. Forestry and Timber	Forests, Land and Housing	Committee on Housing and Land Management
8. Housing, Land Management and Population		Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

¹ http://www.unece.org/oes/nutshell/mandate_role.html.

² Reference is made to UNDP Human Development Reports and the Human Development Index.

³ ECE/EX/3/Rev.1: Terms of reference and rules of procedure of the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe, para 1.

⁴ 195 regular budget staff and 29 extra-budgetary staff. Source: Programme Budget 2016-17 Section 20.

4. In addition, the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and eBusiness (UN/CEFACT) and the Working Group on Ageing report directly to EXCOM. To simplify reference throughout this report, they are included as Sectoral Committees.

5. The inter-governmental nature of UNECE means that there are parallel lines of reporting and accountability: (1) staff in UNECE Divisions report to the Executive Secretary, who in turn reports to the UN Secretary-General, and through him to ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly; and (2) Sectoral Committees report to EXCOM, which in turn prepares the sessions of and reports to the Commission⁵, which reports to ECOSOC. The substantive Divisions service the Sectoral Committees and other inter-governmental structures.

6. Strategic Frameworks are the principal policy directives of UNECE, in line with requirements for all UN Secretariat entities. They cover a period of two consecutive calendar years and serve as the basis for programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation.⁶ Programmes of work outline the work of the respective sub-programmes and Sectoral Committees under the Strategic Frameworks. Programme Budgets detail the resources required by UNECE and its Divisions to implement the Programmes of Work and achieve the Strategic Framework objectives. UNECE's projected overall resources for the current 2016-17 biennium amount to \$103,131,200 – i.e., approximately \$71m from the regular budget and \$32m from extra-budgetary resources. The projected resources for 2018-19 are less - i.e., \$99.3m, of which approximately \$64.8m from the regular budget and \$34.5m from extra-budgetary resources. Reductions in regular resources have necessitated staff cuts. Extra-budgetary resources depend on successful resource mobilisation.

1.2 About Cross-sectoral Cooperation and an Integrated Approach within UNECE

7. UNECE and its work is historically organised along sectoral lines. The requirement to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation is not new. The *2005 Work Plan on ECE Reform* spoke to the need for “horizontal coherence of the activities of the organization” (para. 4). In para. 17 the Commission conferred responsibility to EXCOM to “ensure coherence between sub-programmes, inter alia by encouraging horizontal communication...”.⁷ It envisaged the possibility for Sectoral Committees to jointly prepare and submit proposals to EXCOM on issues and activities of common interest (para. 28). On the part of the Secretariat, the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) was entrusted with “the coordination of inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral activities” (para. 88). Furthermore, the Executive Secretary was tasked to “improve communication, coordination and cooperation across the Divisions and sub-programmes; and promote ... staff mobility and skill enhancement to ensure that staff members periodically change Divisions and sub-programmes...” (para. 98).

8. In the *Outcome of the Review of the 2005 Reform*, adopted at the 65th Commission session in April 2013, UNECE member States re-emphasised “the important role of the OES in ... promoting synergies among different sub-programmes” (para. 25).

9. The *UNECE Strategic Framework 2014-15* determined “greening the economy” as the overarching theme of UNECE for the biennium, “enabling the Commission to ensure synergies and linkages among all eight of its sub-programmes” (para. 17.9). The overarching theme of UNECE for the current 2016-17 biennium, according to the *UNECE Strategic Framework 2016-17*, is “sustainable development, which will be achieved through the strengthening of the synergies among its eight sub-programmes...” (para. 2).

⁵ ECE/EX/3/Rev.1: In particular, the Executive Committee shall: (a) prepare the sessions of the Commission (para. 3a); ... The Executive Committee shall submit to each session of the Commission a full report of its activities and plans (para. 4).

⁶ <http://www.unece.org/info/open-unece/strategic-framework.html>.

⁷ Later included in the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe (para. 3e).

10. Cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach has become all the more relevant in the context of the multi-dimensional Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The *UNECE Strategic Framework 2018-19 (adopted in 2016)* integrated the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as its overarching objective: “To ensure an integrated approach to sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the programme will enhance existing synergies and linkages between its eight sub-programmes” (para. 17.2).⁸

11. In 2015-16, the *Office for Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations (OIOS)* undertook a programme evaluation to assess the relevance and effectiveness of UNECE, and the extent to which it is fit for purpose to support member States with the 2030 Agenda. The evaluation report found that “UNECE has been pro-active in seeking to support its member States in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but faces challenges in fully optimizing its role”. The evaluation revealed that, besides some good examples, heavy demands on UNECE staff to service 218 inter-governmental bodies had hindered cross-sectoral collaboration (paras. 33, 34) and that inter-sectoral collaboration was weak.⁹ OIOS suggested that, in order to support member States within the 2030 Agenda, UNECE needed to “strengthen coordination among its different sectoral areas and sub-programmes as well as the linkages between its functions” (para. 51). OIOS recommended that the Secretariat “conduct a mapping of inter-sectoral and inter-divisional initiatives and activities in order to identify opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and sub-programmes ... which could include an assessment of the main challenges and opportunities...” for endorsement by EXCOM.

12. In the organisation’s management response, the UNECE Executive Secretary concurred with the recommendation: “In light of the inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary nature of the work for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the UNECE Secretariat has already emphasized the importance of working across thematic boundaries and has started the mapping of its inter-divisional and inter-sectoral activities, in order to identify further opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and sub-programmes. Moreover, as part of its 2016-17 Evaluation Work Plan, the UNECE Secretariat has planned to undertake a review of UNECE efforts to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and an integrated approach to sustainable development work”.

13. Around the same time, OIOS also conducted a thematic evaluation of the UN regional commissions to examine the relevance and effectiveness of their statistical work in support of measuring the achievement and implementation of internationally-agreed development goals.¹⁰ Specifically, the evaluation found that “statistics divisions have been responsive to internal requests for data collection, dissemination and analysis, but there remain untapped opportunities to improve internal coordination and collaboration” (paras. 42, 43). *Inter alia*, the UNECE databases on forestry and transport were referenced as good examples. Furthermore, the evaluation found that “while there are examples of cross-divisional collaboration to bridge the gap between data users and producers, the gap remains” (paras. 44, 45). A recommendation was for each regional commission to strengthen collaboration between its statistics division and other substantive Divisions with regard to the production and dissemination of sectoral data in view of anticipated increased demand for statistical assistance in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.¹¹

⁸ For 2030 Agenda please see: A/RES/70/1: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015.

⁹ Of 162 total responses to the OIOS staff member survey, 33.9% rated UNECE’s efforts to promote linkages between UNECE sub-programmes as “very effective” (8.0%) or “effective” (25.9%); 25.3% rated it “ineffective” (19.1%) or “very ineffective” (6.2%); 32.1% rated it “neither effective nor ineffective”.

¹⁰ E/AC.51/2017/8.

¹¹ Regional commissions were advised to establish (a) a clear plan for and the regular exchange of information on regional activities in statistics; (b) a clear commission-wide biennial plan for data collection aimed at identifying common data sources to avoid duplication; and (c) central data management and monitoring to ensure effective collaboration when updating databases within regional commissions. The indicator of achievement was “plans or protocols for internal coordination are developed”.

14. UNECE accepted the recommendation and agreed to determine an action plan while commenting: “At ECE, statistical production and dissemination of data occurs across our sub-programmes, and not just in the statistics sub-programme. While we acknowledge the scope of this exercise and the natural limitations for such reports, the sustainable energy, forestry, transport and environment all produce substantive mandated statistical outputs with direct relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals, which were, unfortunately in our opinion, given inadequate coverage in the final report. This is particularly important given the imperative of driving accessible and high-quality data for supporting member states to report on the broad range of thematic areas contained in the Sustainable Development Goals”.

15. Both OIOS evaluations were considered by the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) of the United Nations at its 57th session in June 2017.¹² Delegations commended UNECE’s work in sustainable development and the SDGs and appreciated the analysis of OIOS of the role of UNECE in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They expressed their appreciation for the statistical support provided by the regional commissions, in particular in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Inter alia, the CPC recommended that the General Assembly “encourage the regional commissions to continue to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their support to national statistical offices by streamlining coordination with member States and within and among regional commissions”.

16. A detailed *mapping exercise* with numerous examples of “inter-sectoral and inter-divisional activities in UNECE” was tabled as informal document 2016/58 to EXCOM on November 18th 2016. In terms of cooperation modalities, the mapping distinguished between ad hoc forms of inter-sectoral and inter-divisional collaboration and those underpinned by institutional structures or organizational arrangements and clearly reflected in work programmes, more specifically: joint programmes of work and associated governance structures; joint inter-governmental groups; activities involving ad hoc forms of collaboration¹³; and cooperation related to external initiatives. The note also highlighted ongoing cooperation related to gender mainstreaming and the particular role of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division in servicing different sub-programmes. However, the note is not analytical in terms of discussing the main challenges and opportunities for enhancing the linkages and collaboration within UNECE as suggested by OIOS.

17. EXCOM requested the Secretariat to prepare a follow-up document to further explore opportunities to deepen such cross-sectoral and inter-divisional activities, which was pursued in the context of the 67th Commission session in April 2017.¹⁴

18. Cross-sectoral action and an integrated approach was thus at the centre of the 67th Commission session in April 2017. The *High-level Statement*, adopted by the Commission, clearly supports an integrated approach: “The implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region will require a strong focus on issues such as poverty reduction, inclusive and sustained economic growth, productive employment, and environmental protection, which are inherently interlinked and require an integrated response. Gender equality and the empowerment of women also need to be considered across all sectors and areas of activity. UNECE can facilitate effective solutions by strengthening cross-sectoral work across its programmes - from trade, transport and environment to energy, forests, housing and statistics - and by strengthening its partnerships with other international organizations, the private sector, and civil society. Cross-sectoral work is most effective when it builds on strong political support for sustainable development at the highest level and on governance models that support creativity, innovation, cooperation, and exchange of information” (para. 4).

19. Furthermore, cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to the 2030 Agenda was *one of two high-level thematic discussions*. The annotated provisional agenda introduced the

¹² Report of the CPC (57th session) A/72/16.

¹³ Such as publications, capacity-building activities, joint workshops and different forms of information exchange.

¹⁴ Source: SDGU.

topic with the following statement: “With its diverse programmes and in multiple partnerships, UNECE is already pursuing a cross-sectoral approach to address the inextricable linkages between transport, health and the environment, and between water, food, energy and ecosystems, to name but two examples. Effective implementation of the SDGs will require an approach for all SDGs that goes beyond individual sectors, addresses interdependencies and realizes potential synergies, where appropriate...” (para. 8). A *background note* was prepared by the Secretariat for this particular high-level discussion outlining the need for a cross-sectoral approach and cross-sectoral work at UNECE, including different modalities of as well as barriers to cross-sectoral cooperation.

20. Moreover, the Secretariat organised an informal *breakfast discussion* among the Chairs of the Sectoral Committees on the potential for deeper cross-sectoral collaboration among the Sectoral Committees and with other subsidiary bodies in support of mainstreaming SDGs in the work of UNECE, for which another *background note* was produced.

2. Review Purpose, Objectives and Scope

21. *Purpose:* This review is in response to the 2016-17 Biennial Evaluation Work Plan. In 2015, EXCOM approved the *2016-17 Biennial Evaluation Work Plan*, which includes a “Review of UNECE efforts to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and an integrated approach to sustainable development work”. According to this Work Plan, the review should specifically explore the role of the OES to promote cross-sectoral collaboration, and identify opportunities for enhancing an integrated approach to sustainable development in UNECE. In February 2017, following further discussions in light of the above-mentioned OIOS evaluation, the objective of the review was amended by UNECE senior management to focus more broadly on cross-sectoral collaboration and an integrated approach to sustainable development within UNECE.

22. *Terminology:* The title of the present review is “Review of UNECE efforts to promote cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to sustainable development work”. The title refers to both “cross-sectoral cooperation” and “an integrated approach”. Literature, including from within the UN, often uses “cross-sectoral” and “integrated” inter-changeably. For instance: “The ‘cross-sectoral, integrated, or nexus’ approach to multi-stakeholder partnerships under the SDGs era differs from the ‘sectoral or silo’ approach to multi-stakeholder partnerships under the MDGs era”.¹⁵ While cross-sectoral cooperation can well also happen outside an integrated approach, the present review, given the connection of both terms within its title, understands “cross-sectoral cooperation” as an element of an “integrated approach” when working together towards common goals. While “integrated approach” is an organisational strategy and commitment, “cross-sectoral cooperation” is a *modus operandi*. Given their common aim, they are to some extent used inter-changeably.

23. *Objectives:* The OIOS evaluation of UNECE recently ascertained that cross-sectoral cooperation has been weak and hampered by otherwise heavy demands on staff. The objective of the present review is to learn from experience in order to identify gaps to close and key opportunities for enhancing an integrated approach to UNECE’s sustainable development work and effective implementation of the SDGs.

24. To identify gaps and key opportunities/options for enhancing an integrated approach in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the review assesses the:

- effectiveness of cross-sectoral cooperation between sub-programmes in the implementation of UNECE’s mandate
- efficiency of cross-sectoral cooperation in UNECE
- relevance of cross-sectoral cooperation to the successful implementation of UNECE’s mandate

¹⁵ 2016 PARTNERSHIP FORUM - Breaking the Silos: Cross-sectoral partnerships for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Issues Note, 31 March 2016, Dialogue One (10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.), ECOSOC CHAMBER, UN Headquarters, New York.

25. *Scope:* The present review focuses on UNECE's cross-sectoral cooperation and integrated approach during the period 2013-17. Due consideration is given to statistics and gender.¹⁶ Given the recent (2015-16) and evidence-based statement by OIOS that cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE is weak, the review does not endeavour to re-assess the situation (keeping in mind the possibility of very recent improvements), but is rather forward-looking building on experience. The review focuses on cross-sectoral cooperation internally. It does not speak to UNECE external partnerships. Its main focus is on enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach within the Secretariat; only to the extent required are recommendations regarding inter-governmental structures and mechanisms also conceivable.¹⁷

26. It is important to note that this review took place during a time of heightened UN reform activities aimed at repositioning the UN development system, to which UNECE belongs, to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. Latest developments are picked up and contextualised in the evaluator's conclusions and recommendations in chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

3. Review Methodology

3.1 Review Questions

27. The review assesses gaps/needs and opportunities for better embedding a cross-sectoral and integrated approach within the UNECE Secretariat based on experience with cooperation among the eight sub-programmes of UNECE (and six Divisions) and with a particular focus on four case studies pre-selected by the Secretariat - i.e.,

- UNECE Series of Reviews (e.g., Environmental Policy Reviews, Innovation Performance Reviews, Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade, Road Safety Performance Reviews, Country Housing Profiles)
- Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP)
- Joint Taskforce on Environmental Statistics and Indicators
- Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM)

The assessment of the RCM was removed from this final review report on the grounds that it is not an instrument to foster UNECE-internal cooperation but a UNECE-led inter-agency mechanism to promote cross-sectoral work between UN agencies in the region.

28. The remaining three case studies are an attempt to showcase and analyse cross-sectoral cooperation within different modes of UNECE's work - i.e., analytical work, operational work and normative work - and between different sub-programmes.

29. The key questions the review seeks to answer are:

Effectiveness:

- EQ1 (initiation): How and why were opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation identified? Who initiated them?
- EQ2 (delivery): How was cross-sectoral cooperation organized? What were the internal cooperation arrangements and modalities? What were the benefits?
- EQ3 (facilitating factors): Which factors facilitated cooperation in a cross-sectoral manner?

Efficiency:

- EQ4 (constraining factors): What were the constraining factors (bottlenecks) limiting the potential of cross-sectoral cooperation in UNECE?
- EQ5 (costs): Were there additional costs and/or savings for sub-programmes and UNECE more broadly as a result of cross-sectoral cooperation?

¹⁶ Taking into account guidance provided by the UN Evaluation Group on the matter.

<http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/980> and <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1452>.

¹⁷ See inception paper dated May 15th and approved by the UNECE Directors' Meeting on May 16th 2017.

Relevance:

- EQ6 (alignment): To what extent did cross-sectoral cooperation respond to UNECE's mandate and priorities? To the extent applicable, why not?

3.2 Data Sources and Data Collection and Analysis

30. The review builds on relevant primary and secondary information and data gathered through desk review, interviews and two surveys. A matrix (see annex 1) provides an overview of review questions and sub-questions as well as data collection methods and sources, thus ensuring a solid basis for triangulation and a structure along which data are analysed.

Desk review:

Key documents included: UNECE Strategic Frameworks; UNECE Programme Budgets; Commission and EXCOM documentation; parliamentary (Sectoral Committees) documents relevant to cross-sectoral action (including Programmes of Work); Programme Performance Reports; UNECE Resource Mobilization Strategy; previous relevant evaluations; documentation related to selected case studies and other cross-sectoral activities. See annex 2.

Interviews:

Face-to-face and skype semi-structured interviews and group interviews explored experiences, opinions and suggestions. Thirty-six (36) persons were interviewed (see annex 3), either in person or by telephone, of which two were group discussions and six were interviews with member State representatives. Besides selected P-level staff, the evaluator was able to interview the Directors of the Environment Division, Transport Division, Statistical Division and Sustainable Energy Division; as well as the Officer-in-Charge of the Economic Cooperation and Integration Division.¹⁸ The evaluator also interviewed the outgoing and incoming Executive Secretaries, the Deputy Executive Secretary, the Chef de Cabinet and the Executive Officer.

Surveys:

To engage a wider number of stakeholders, two self-administered online surveys were conducted to (1) UNECE P- and GS-level staff in the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) and the substantive Divisions (182 persons) and (2) member States through EXCOM representatives (120 persons) and Chairs/Vice-chairs of Sectoral Committees (105 persons).

3.3 Management and Implementation of the Review

31. The Acting Director of the Programme Management Unit (PMU), Catherine Haswell, was the manager of the review. The senior international evaluation expert, Alison King, conducted the review under her guidance. The PMU provided kind and valuable support for organizing interviews, collecting documentation and launching the surveys.

3.4 Limitations

32. Previous evaluations in UNECE seeking inputs from a wide range of stakeholders have traditionally received low survey response rates. While the overall response rate to the staff survey (i.e., percentage of staff who started to respond to the survey) was a good 40.1% (73 persons), the completion rate (i.e., those who finished the survey) was low (27.5% or 50 persons). However, combined with the 30 staff members interviewed, a total of 80 to 103 staff voices were heard, equivalent to 35.7 to 46.0% of total UNECE staff (224), providing for a sufficiently good evidence base. Voluntary qualitative comments provided by survey participants were also useful.

33. Despite an attempt to mitigate a low response rate to the member State survey by providing English, French and Russian language versions, the outcome was disappointing. A very low 8.9%

¹⁸ At the time of the interviews, the Director of the Transport Division was just about to retire; the Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division was unavailable.

completed the member State survey. Representatives from 21 member States had started the survey. Member state survey results have been used to supplement evidence from the interviews and staff survey, but should be read with a sense of caution. See annex 4.

34. It was not possible to gather quantitative (financial) data in order to triangulate stakeholder views on the cost and on time implications of partnering across UNECE divisions.

4. Review Findings

4.1. Initiating Cross-sectoral Cooperation

¹⁹How and why were opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation identified? Who initiated them?

Finding 1: Working across sectors first and foremost serves to increase UNECE's relevance and effectiveness in line with member States' needs and within the broad framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. Creating efficiencies and more successful fundraising are less prominent motives.

35. All interviewees, most of which were UNECE staff, agreed with the basic premise of this review that cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE should be enhanced. Clearly, cross-sectoral cooperation has been and - in the opinion of interviewed interviewees - should first and foremost be initiated to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of UNECE in support of its member States within the framework of UNECE's mandate, country needs, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Cross-sectoral cooperation serves to increase UNECE's contribution - alongside others and as part of the UN development system - to achieving the SDGs, which take a broader, integrated approach, and are complex to achieve. According to many interviewees, cross-sectoral action should enhance UNECE's relevance and effectiveness thanks to better alignment; increased added value through a greater focus on sectoral interfaces and nexus; increased networking and cooperation between stakeholders from different sectors and line ministries; more cross-fertilisation, innovation and synergies; and increased quality and usefulness of UNECE products. Survey results²⁰ echo this main line of reasoning: in the experience of 71 survey participants (UNECE staff and member States)²¹, 52 (73.2%) agreed strongly or somewhat that cross-sectoral cooperation was relevant and 50 (70.4%) felt that it was effective - i.e., that it improved the results of the sub-programmes.

36. Other motives for enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation have to do with increasing UNECE's visibility, image and credibility. Efficiency - i.e., avoiding overlaps and inefficient solutions and decreasing staff costs - was also mentioned, but was not at the top of people's minds; neither was increasing fundraising prospects.

37. As mentioned repeatedly by interviewees and reflected throughout this report, the decision to engage in cross-sectoral cooperation needs to lead back to member States. Besides being needs-based, a background note for the 67th Commission session²² emphasises the importance of evidence-based decisions: "Cross-sectoral collaboration is often based on or initiated by an assessment of the situation, which may have been carried out independently or jointly. Gathering evidence or

¹⁹ Review question 1.

²⁰ Staff survey Q7 and member State survey Q6.

²¹ Staff survey Q15 and member State survey Q13.

²² "Strengthening cross-sectoral action and mobilizing resources in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda."

undertaking a scoping exercise appear to be necessary steps to identify the potential opportunities opened by collaboration”.

Finding 2: Multiple stakeholders within the UNECE architectural framework have initiated cross-sectoral cooperation, although evidence suggests that across the board more could and should be done to identify and grasp opportunities. EXCOM and Sectoral Committees are important starting points for cross-sectoral cooperation as is UNECE senior management. Secretaries to UNECE Sectoral Committees, the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit and the Programme Management Unit could also provide more impulses and support for an integrated approach.

38. It is clear that the needs of UNECE member States are the starting point for all of UNECE’s work. Multiple stakeholders have initiated cross-sectoral cooperation in the past. Cooperation has emanated from EXCOM and the UNECE Sectoral Committees where member States are represented by diplomats and subject-matter experts. The high-level political Commission, which only meets every two years for a short period, seems to have played less of a role - besides engaging in a high-level discussion on cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach during the 67th Commission session in April 2017. Looking ahead, some interviewees emphasised the central role that EXCOM could play for promoting an integrated approach. Indeed, according to its terms of reference, EXCOM “will ensure coherence between sub-programmes, inter alia by encouraging horizontal communication within the organization”.²³ In view of this happening, some stressed the need for EXCOM to engage in more substantive, cross-sectoral debates, fed by different technical experts. Others pointed to difficulties at times for member States to reach consensus on priorities and strategy, which naturally also occurs in the case of cross-sectoral initiatives.

39. UNECE Sectoral Committees could also more deliberately explore and generate opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation. The extent to which this will happen depends a lot on their Bureaux. Several interviewees positively noted the very first effort to assemble Sectoral Committee Chairs during the 67th Commission session to discuss cross-sectoral cooperation.

40. Member States closely guide the work of UNECE. At the same time, member States also rely on UNECE staff to provide visions, thinking, ideas and proposals. UNECE senior management is well positioned to identify opportunities for, advise on and facilitate an integrated approach to sustainable development work. In the minds of many interviewees, the expectation is for the UNECE Executive Secretary to have a clear vision for UNECE, which involves cross-sectoral cooperation. Directors are also expected to be a driving force. Especially Senior Management Team meetings could provide more space for discussing matters of substance in support of member States as opposed to dealing with administrative issues. One interviewee suggested organizing Senior Management Team retreats.

41. Secretaries to the UNECE Sectoral Committees could also play a stronger role than to date by providing important impulses to the Chairs and Bureaux of UNECE Sectoral Committees, keeping in mind that the Committees differ in their composition and the way they work and function. Active and engaged Secretaries, provided with the necessary time and autonomy, could strengthen member State awareness and support more dynamic meetings.

42. Furthermore, some interviewees remarked on the coordinating role that the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit (SDGU), located in the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES), plays regarding cross-sectoral cooperation with external partners and internally. With the development and adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the focus of the SDGU has been on the external component, particularly inter-agency coordination within the RCM and supporting regional follow-up and review of the SDGs through the very recently established Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.²⁴

²³ ECE/EX/3/Rev.1: Terms of reference and rules of procedure of the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe, para 3(e).

²⁴ Source: SDGU.

Evidence from staff interviews suggests an expectation for the unit to provide more guidance and advice to the sub-programmes on how better to relate and align to the SDGs.

43. The work of the Programme Management Unit (PMU), also located in the OES, also influences the way UNECE sub-programmes interact and cooperate. Individual interviewees offered concrete suggestions for PMU to facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach under the current set-up:

1) *Programme management*: From a programme management point of view (planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation), PMU should continue to identify and promote ways to facilitate efficient and effective inter-divisional cooperation (good examples: extra-budgetary funded UNECE cross-sectoral flagship projects²⁵; joint proposals for technical cooperation activities to be funded from the Regular Programme on Technical Cooperation (RPTC); pooled funding);

2) *Strategic planning*: PMU should build into the process of designing biennial UNECE Strategic Frameworks and Programmes of Work a timely opportunity for exchange and formulation of joint outcomes;

3) *Technical Cooperation Working Group*: PMU convenes the Working Group on Technical Cooperation, which brings together Regional Advisors from the substantive Divisions. This platform would be worth strengthening for enhancing inter-divisional cooperation.

44. Both SDGU and PMU are relevant to promoting cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach in the context of the SDGs (see text box 1). According to the UNECE Programme Budget for 2018-19 SDGU's role is that of an expert/advisory body on the SDGs and on cross-sectoral cooperation in the context of the SDGs. PMU is more hands-on support for all aspects of programme management.

Box 1: Relevant Core Functions of SDGU and PMU

SDGU's core functions are to liaise and coordinate UNECE's work on the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and on gender equality. It prepares policy-oriented contributions on these themes and coordinates inputs from the UNECE substantive Divisions. Furthermore, the Unit provides guidance on the alignment of UNECE activities with the 2030 Agenda and on strengthening cross-sectoral/inter-sectoral activities.

PMU, on the other hand, provides guidance and ensures overall coordination of all aspects of programme management. It provides guidance and ensures overall coordination of technical cooperation, and promotes synergies between the normative and operational work of the organization. It chairs the Working Group on Technical Cooperation and guides, quality assures, oversees and coordinates technical cooperation activities.²⁶

Extracts from UNECE's Programme Budget for 2018-19, Annex 004.

Finding 3: The importance of and ease of doing cross-sectoral cooperation and pursuing an integrated approach also goes beyond Geneva-based stakeholders to the United Nations in New York where member States and the UN Secretariat take decisions that impact on UNECE's mandate, management, finances and administration.

45. Ultimately, an integrated approach to sustainable development within UNECE also depends on stakeholders in New York: the influence of the General Assembly (including the 5th Committee), ECOSOC and the UN Secretariat on UNECE were frequently mentioned.²⁷ Influence from across the Atlantic extends to the regional commissions' role within the UN system and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the timing and structure of UNECE's strategic planning; to the way it is

²⁵ <http://www.unece.org/info/open-unece/resource-mobilization.html>. For example, energy efficiency standards in buildings.

²⁶ Annex 004 anticipates PMU support for resource mobilization. However, this was reassigned to the Deputy Executive Secretary in July 2017.

²⁷ Representatives of two UNECE units disagreed with this finding when consulted on the draft final review report.

managed, administered and held accountable; and to the level and allocation of its regular budget, all of which - in the eyes of those expressing an opinion - has not been enabling. Three interviewees suggested strengthening UNECE's presence in New York-based debates as a potential measure for improving cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach within UNECE.

Finding 4: The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs in 2015 has influenced UNECE's strategic orientation and confirmed its commitment to pursuing an integrated approach. It has not significantly resulted in a more integrative programmatic approach.

46. According to the current Strategic Framework 2016-17 (*adopted in 2014*), UNECE's overarching theme is "sustainable development, which will be achieved through the strengthening of the synergies among its eight sub-programmes: (a) environment; (b) transport; (c) statistics; (d) economic cooperation and integration; (e) sustainable energy; (f) trade; (g) forestry and timber; and (h) housing, land management and population". The overall orientation of the UNECE Strategic Framework 2018-19 (*adopted in 2016*) is: "To ensure an integrated approach to sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the programme will enhance existing synergies and linkages between its eight sub-programmes: (a) environment; (b) transport; (c) statistics; (d) economic cooperation and integration; (e) sustainable energy; (f) trade; (g) forestry and timber; and (h) housing, land management and population".

47. Shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, OIOS found that "UNECE has been pro-active in seeking to support its member States in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but faces challenges in fully optimizing its role". The review revealed that, besides some good examples, heavy demands on UNECE staff to service 218 inter-governmental bodies had hindered cross-sectoral collaboration and that inter-sectoral collaboration was weak.

48. Cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE is not new, and numerous examples, including more recent ones, were mentioned in interviews and included in the "mapping" produced for EXCOM. Interviews revealed that the SDGs have increased awareness and are "helping to connect the dots" as one interviewee put it. Individual sub-programmes - e.g., Environment²⁸, have outlined their anticipated contributions to individual SDGs, including in partnership with external stakeholders and other UNECE sub-programmes.

49. Nonetheless, numerous interviewees still regretted the "siloed approach" to UNECE's work, which constrains cooperation across the sub-programmes. Recognizing that it is still early days, the SDGs have not (yet) made a significant difference or resulted in institutional change.

Finding 5: More than one UNECE sub-programme aims to contribute to SDGs 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 17 respectively (see figure below for explanations). Of these, UNECE's financial importance in absolute terms has been greatest for SDGs 3, 8, 9, 11, 13 and 17, although small compared to other UN development system entities (between \$3m and \$5m). Survey participants see most opportunity for collaborating in support of member States to achieve SDGs 7, 9 and 11.

²⁸ ECE/CEP/S/2016/5: Mapping of the Environment subprogramme processes and activities that support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - Note by the secretariat.



50. At the outset, it is important to reflect the statement made by many interviewees that not every aspect of UNECE’s work lends itself to cooperation between sub-programmes, and that cooperation should “make sense”, “should add value”, “should not be artificial”, “should be natural” - or as one person put it: “not every silo needs to be broken”.

51. While no interviewee was unaware of possibilities for cooperating between sub-programmes, the staff survey²⁹ showed a slightly different picture: 27.7% (13/47) disagreed somewhat (10) or strongly (3) that opportunities were clear. Some hoped for more transparency, information and analysis. As for nexus areas, sectoral interfaces or “crossroads” as one person said, interviews revealed a whole range of possible combinations; as did the surveys.³⁰ Of the 52 UNECE staff members who participated in the survey and provided a view, half or more than half felt that the combination of the following sub-programmes had *strong* potential, all involving the Environment sub-programme:

- environment and sustainable transport;
- environment and statistics;
- environment and sustainable energy; and
- environment and forestry and timber.

52. The UNECE Strategic Framework 2018-19 (*adopted in 2016*) outlines connections between individual sub-programmes and the SDGs. The following table 2 reorganises this information to identify SDGs where two or more UNECE sub-programmes are explicitly involved. Reactions to the draft review report reveal that the Strategic Framework does not give the whole picture - e.g., the alignment of the Energy and the Housing and Forests sub-programmes with SDG7 and the alignment with the Housing and Forests and the Environment sub-programmes with SDG 15.

Table 2: SDGs Where Two or More UNECE Sub-Programmes Have Engaged

SDGs with the involvement of two or more UNECE sub-programmes	Involved UNECE sub-programmes
SDG 3: healthy lives and well-being	Environment; Transport; Housing, Land Management and Population; Statistics
SDG 5: gender equality	Forestry & Timber; Housing, Land Management and Population; Statistics

²⁹ Staff survey Q18.

³⁰ Staff survey Q11.

SDG 8: decent work and economic growth	Economic Cooperation and Integration; Trade; Statistics
SDG 9: infrastructure, innovation and industrialisation	Transport; Economic Cooperation and Integration; Sustainable Energy; Statistics
SDG 11: sustainable cities and human settlements	Environment; Transport; Sustainable Energy; Housing, Land Management and Population; Statistics
SDG 12: responsible consumption and production	Environment; Economic Cooperation and Integration; Sustainable Energy; Statistics
SDG 13: climate action	Environment; Transport; Sustainable Energy; Statistics
SDG 17: partnerships	Environment; Economic Cooperation and Integration; Trade; Statistics

Source: UNECE Strategic Framework 2018-19.

53. In June 2017, in the context of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR³¹) and continuing UN reforms, an external consultancy (Dalberg), commissioned by the United Nations in New York, also identified UNECE primary and secondary SDGs and analysed (non-exhaustively) the respective sub-programme contributions.³² With one exception (SDG 5), the same picture emerges.

54. From a financial point of view and according to Dalberg estimates, UNECE is the third-smallest contributor to the SDGs (total of \$50m) after the UN Programme for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) (\$30m) and the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS) (\$6m).³³ Looking closer at those SDGs that have been targeted by different UNECE sub-programmes, the following expenditures were noted (in descending order): \$5m for SDG 9; \$5m for SDG 11; \$4m for SDG 8; \$3m for SDG 3; \$3m for SDG 13; \$3m for SDG 17; \$1m for SDG 5 and \$1m for SDG12.

55. According to the combined staff and member State surveys³⁴, participants believe there is most opportunity for UNECE sub-programmes to cooperate in support of member States to achieve SDG 7 (access to sustainable and modern energy) - i.e., 54.7% (41/75) followed by SDG 11 (52.0% or 39/75) and SDG 9 (49.3% or 37/75). It is worth noting that the first ranking SDG 7 neither appears in the Strategic Framework nor in the Dalberg analysis as an area where more than one sub-programme has been involved.

Finding 6: Besides nexus areas, sub-programmes also have cross-cutting/horizontal issues in common, such as gender, green economy, climate change, energy efficiency, innovation, and statistics.

56. Evidence from interviews suggests that it could be worth differentiating on the one hand between sectoral interfaces or nexus areas as discussed above, and, on the other hand, cross-cutting or horizontal issues that are relevant to achieving the SDGs and where all or most UNECE sub-programmes are challenged, irrespective of whether they are working in a sectoral or cross-sectoral manner.

57. Gender is an example of a theme that some interviewees explicitly cited as a golden thread that should be running through UNECE's work, and which is reflected in UNECE policy and strategic documents, including Strategic Frameworks and the High-level Statement on the occasion of the 67th

³¹ A/RES/71/243: Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 2016.

³² Dalberg: Outline of UNDS Functions and Capacities: UNECE Strategic Priorities from Planning Documents – DRAFT, June 2017.

³³ Out of a total of 29 UN entities.

³⁴ Staff survey Q12; member state survey Q10.

Commission session in April 2017.³⁵ Other themes mentioned, which could be considered as cross-cutting (while not excluding targeted interventions) are statistics, climate change, environment, ageing and demographic change, public-private partnerships, green economy, innovation, integration, and energy. Staff and member State survey participants³⁶ put green economy in first place (76.1% or 54/71) followed by climate change (64.8% or 46/71), energy efficiency (54.9% or 39/71) and innovation (49.3% or 35/71). Greening the economy was the overarching theme of the UNECE Strategic Framework 2014-15 to “enable the Commission to ensure synergies and linkages among all eight of its sub-programmes...”.

Finding 7: While not dismissing potential for cooperating in policy dialogue and normative work, and recognising a relatively weak evidence base, technical cooperation seems particularly conducive for working across sectors and divisions, but represents only a minor share of UNECE’s core work.

58. Interviews are inconclusive in terms of which type of UNECE work - i.e., policy dialogue, normative work or technical cooperation - lends itself most to cross-sectoral cooperation. Two aspects point towards technical cooperation (including advisory services, training courses, seminars, workshops and field projects) as having good potential: 1) the existence of Regional Advisors and the Technical Cooperation Working Group; and 2) the implementation of multi-dimensional transboundary programmes and initiatives involving shared spaces between countries. 40.4% of staff survey participants (21/52³⁷) and 11 member State survey participants also considered technical cooperation to lend itself most to cross-sectoral cooperation. However, in terms of outputs, technical cooperation is only a small proportion of UNECE’s work funded by the regular budget: over half of UNECE’s outputs since 2010 were meetings and related parliamentary documentation - i.e., directly related to its normative work (see annex 5).

4.2. Delivery of Cross-sectoral Cooperation

³⁸How was cross-sectoral cooperation organized? What were the internal cooperation arrangements and modalities?

Finding 8: There have been various ways for UNECE sub-programmes to cooperate, ranging in intensity from coordinated short-term activities and one-off outputs such as information sharing, joint events and workshops to designing/implementing joint strategies, programmes and projects, and servicing cross-sectoral bodies. Information-sharing across sub-programmes has been most frequent. Formally-mandated cooperation has been the exception. Inter-divisional cooperation agreements are informal, which stakeholders mostly appreciate, mainly because of the flexibility they provide.

59. There have been various ways for UNECE sub-programmes to partner to deliver on the Commission’s mandate. A background note for a breakfast discussion among UNECE Sectoral Committee Chairs differentiates between “coordinated short-term activities and one-off outputs”, “joint long-term projects” and “cross-sectoral bodies”.

60. Evidence from different sources revealed that cooperation has extended to servicing joint taskforces; implementing joint strategies, programmes and projects; contributing to country reviews and similar studies; jointly preparing papers, strategies, standards, guidelines, etc.; cooperating on databases and publications; organising joint events and workshops; mutual invitations to participate

³⁵ Of the 162 total responses to the OIOS staff survey, 43.9% considered UNECE’s efforts to integrate gender into the programme of work as “very effective” (13%) or “effective” (30.9%); 31.5% found it “neither effective nor ineffective”.

³⁶ Staff survey Q13 and member State survey Q11.

³⁷ Staff survey Q14 and member State survey Q12.

³⁸ Review question 2.

in events, workshops and Sectoral Committee meetings; information sharing across sub-programmes; and coordinated UNECE representation in external fora and processes. Survey participants were asked about the types of cooperation they had been involved in or witnessed.³⁹ 45 staff members offered this information. According to them, information sharing across sub-programmes has been most frequent (28/45) followed by joint events and workshops (22/45) and joint strategies, programmes and projects (17/45). Responses from member State representatives (16) follow the same pattern.

61. Cooperation formally mandated by inter-governmental bodies has been the exception. Important examples include the Joint Taskforce on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (see text box 2 and annex 6); the Joint Taskforce on Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings⁴⁰; the Taskforce on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystem Nexus; THE PEP (see text box 3 and annex 7); and the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECAs). Even if formally mandated, cooperation between concerned UNECE Divisions in order to deliver expected results has been based on informal agreements - e.g., as regards agenda setting; preparing documentation; reporting; and administrative and financial arrangements.

Box 2: Joint Taskforce on Environmental Statistics and Indicators

The Joint Taskforce on Environmental Statistics and Indicators is an example of formally-mandated cooperation between two UNECE sub-programmes - i.e., the Environment Division and the Statistical Division - stemming from inter-governmental decisions in 2008 and 2009 respectively. On the up-side, the initiative's long-term perspective; the possibility to mobilise funding from both the environmental sector and statistics; burden-sharing between the involved Divisions; and flexibility thanks to informal in-house cooperation arrangements are considered advantages and opportunities. However, stakeholders have also experienced challenges: Having two different mandates and two different funding streams has complicated matters somewhat, increasing the bureaucratic burden for the Secretariat. Moreover, it is not always easy to find consensus due to differences between environment ministries and National Statistical Offices on the one hand and donors and developing countries on the other. Internal coordination requires time and relying on personal interest and staff availability is admittedly risky.

Box 3: THE PEP

THE PEP is another example that originates from an inter-governmental process, dating back to the 90s, and involving the Environment Division and the Sustainable Transport Division as well as WHO/Europe. Although it is a complex joint programme with formal governance mechanisms, administering THE PEP relies on informal inter-divisional cooperation arrangements; there is no MoU or similar institutional agreement. Internally, responsibilities rotate between the two Divisions - e.g., organizing and convening annual THE PEP Steering Committee meetings, forecasting and submitting official documents, and reporting in IMDIS. THE PEP projects are extra-budgetary funded. Two THE PEP trust funds are located in WHO/Europe and UNECE respectively. Both UNECE Divisions engage in fundraising. Interviewees appreciate the informal flexible arrangements and the sharing of the work burden. Cooperation has worked well based on a friendly atmosphere and friendly relationships, including with the bureau of THE PEP Steering Committee. THE UNECE PEP trust fund, available to both Divisions for THE PEP projects, is a welcome addition to limited regular resources. Ultimately, an important benefit of this cross-sectoral initiative is considered to be its potential to bring together different domestic actors and stakeholders. There are also challenges and disadvantages: Firstly, having three sectors involved makes the task more complex and time-consuming. Secondly, it has at times been difficult to mobilise funding from sectoral sources for cross-sectoral purposes. Thirdly, relying on personal availabilities and motivation is a risk.

62. Although not originally conceived as cross-sectoral in nature, the Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) are another UNECE flagship product, which over many years have engaged UNECE Divisions other than Environment, which has the lead. EPRs are clearly considered

³⁹ Staff survey Q9 and member State survey Q8.

⁴⁰ <http://www.unece.org/info/media/stories/save-energy.html>.

another good example of cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE and the EPR methodology has served as model for other UNECE country reviews/profiles (see annex 8), which, except for the Road Safety Performance Reviews, also reflect on nexus areas, depending on individual country needs. All UNECE county performance reviews, apart from the most recent Road Safety Performance Reviews, were initiated by UNECE inter-governmental bodies, serviced by the UNECE Secretariat. Responsibility for individual reviews is assigned to a particular UNECE Division. Responsibility, including for resource mobilisation and expenditures, remains with individual UNECE Divisions and Sectoral Committees. In-house cooperation has not been institutionalised. It is informal and has depended on personal interest, available staff capacities and alertness to potential win-win-situations.

63. Collaboration in the context of performance reviews has been most extensive in connection with the EPRs. It has extended to consultation, peer reviewing and preparation of particular chapters. In some instances, review results have been circulated, including presentations to other Sectoral Committees - e.g., presentation of EPRs to the Inland Transport Committee. In an ad hoc manner, country reviews have also used the same experts and drawn on each other’s findings. However, as suggested by a background document to the 67th Commission session⁴¹ “these efforts are not supported by a well-established mechanism to exchange information, share findings, reconcile basic assessments of the different countries under review or ensure consistency of recommendations. Managing the knowledge accumulated under reviews in different fields would serve to identify new prospective areas for cross-sectoral collaboration and facilitate the external communication of their results”. Recently, member States acknowledged the role of EPRs in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region.⁴²

4.3. Factors Facilitating and Constraining Cross-sectoral Cooperation and an Integrated Approach

⁴³Which factors have influenced cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE?

Finding 9: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs undoubtedly facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE. Constraining factors are organisational barriers; the United Nations strategic planning process and management instruments; and limited human and financial resources. With different outcomes on a case-by-case basis, effective cooperation between sub-programmes has also depended on member State ownership and leadership, UNECE senior management buy-in, personal motivation and professional relationships, and the level of bureaucracy.

64. The extent to which an organisation such as UNECE is capable of identifying and successfully pursuing cooperation between different organisational units and pursuing an integrated approach depends on numerous factors. Factors tend to be either facilitating or constraining in nature. Interviews and surveys suggest the following:

65. *2030 Agenda and SDGs*: As earlier findings regarding the goals of and potential for cross-sectoral cooperation reveal, evidence from different sources confirms that the SDGs are a key factor facilitating cooperation between and across UNECE sub-programmes. Of the 67 staff and member State representatives providing a view⁴⁴, nearly all (63 or 94.0%) agreed strongly or somewhat that

⁴¹ “Strengthening cross-sectoral action and mobilizing resources in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.”

⁴² ECE/CEP/2017/L.2: Role of Environmental Performance Reviews in supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region - Note by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews.

⁴³ Review questions 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ Staff survey Q18 and member State survey Q17.

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs provide a strong incentive for cross-sectoral action and an integrated approach.

66. *Organisational barriers:* Since its creation by ECOSOC in 1947, UNECE has historically relied on a sectoral set-up with traditionally independent sub-programmes and Divisions with relatively strong hierarchies. This has been an important hindrance to cross-sectoral cooperation according to numerous interviewees.

67. *Member State ownership and leadership:* Interviews ascertained that cross-sectoral initiatives are more likely to thrive where member States collectively show strong ownership and leadership. Member States have been important champions, but on occasion also bottlenecks, because of differing interests and priorities; the sectoral set-up of UNECE inter-governmental bodies; and because of sectoral ministerial architectures within member States. The surveys suggest somewhat differing perceptions regarding the extent to which UNECE inter-governmental bodies have promoted/been supportive of cross-sectoral cooperation⁴⁵: While nearly all (14/16) member State representatives providing a view agreed strongly or somewhat that this was the case, just over half of the responding staff (27/43) disagreed.

68. *Senior management leadership:* To a great extent, at the institutional level, UNECE leadership (encompassing UNECE member States and senior management) has not been able to overcome structural barriers. As already suggested above, UNECE senior management is well-positioned to facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and to develop a joined-up organisation, and a number of good examples of joint work exist under their leadership, but it has not yet met the expectations of a number of interviewed and surveyed stakeholders who based their comments on the underlying assumption that cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach is in principle desirable. With exceptions, many interviews revealed that cross-sectoral cooperation continues to suffer from silos within the Secretariat and a certain reluctance to share resources. Survey responses were more positive.⁴⁶

69. *Strategic planning:* The United Nations strategic planning process (including the biennial Strategic Framework, the Programme Budget and Programmes of Work) has not been conducive to promoting an integrated approach. Interviews revealed various weaknesses and impediments. UNECE does not have control over the focus on quantitative sub-programme outputs, the impossibility to adapt the sub-programmes to evolving needs and priorities, and missing opportunities to formulate and report on/share credit for collaborative efforts and outputs. However, it could, as was suggested, make better use of required planning processes to have timely and strategic discussions on nexus areas.

70. *Human and financial resources:* Many interviewees also explained how limited human and financial resources have hindered cooperation. Many UNECE staff feel overstretched. They are struggling to implement and produce expected deliverables within fixed deadlines, mainly in terms of servicing their respective Sectoral Committees and other inter-governmental bodies, with none or little financial resources. Without making an extra effort, they simply have no time or energy to explore and engage in cross-sectoral cooperation, which one interviewee considered a “luxury”.

71. *Bureaucracy:* Interviews suggest that cross-sectoral cooperation (without distinguishing between UNECE’s regular budget and extra-budgetary work) has at times led to valuable staff time being spent on what are considered as unnecessarily heavy administrative and oversight requirements and arrangements. Anecdotal examples given included: requiring clearance of more

⁴⁵ Staff survey Q16 and member State survey Q14.

⁴⁶ Staff survey Q16 and member State survey Q14: more participants (both staff and member States) agreed strongly or somewhat that the Senior Management Team and UNECE Directors strongly promote/are supportive of cross-sectoral cooperation (79) than those who disagreed (44).

than one Director, duplication of project documents, managing parallel funding streams, servicing multiple Sectoral Committees, and adhering to individual donor reporting requirements.⁴⁷

72. *People:* Personal characteristics and relationships, including between Secretariat staff and between Secretariat staff and member State representatives, have played a very important role. Interviewees stressed how important “personal interest” in a subject matter, “personalities”, “mentalities”, “personal acquaintances”, “social ties”, “friendly relationships” and “trust” have been for exploring, initiating and implementing joint work. It is for this reason that some emphasised threats to cross-sectoral cooperation posed by staff changes within the UNECE Secretariat. Some interviewees explicitly regretted missing institutional incentives that promote teamwork. According to the surveys⁴⁸, 91.1% of staff providing an opinion (41/45) and 90.5% of member State representatives (19/21) agreed somewhat or strongly that - in their experience - learning opportunities associated with cross-sectoral action are motivating.

4.4. Financial Implications of Cross-sectoral Cooperation and an Integrated Approach

⁴⁹Were there additional costs and/or savings for sub-programmes and UNECE more broadly as a result of cross-sectoral cooperation? Were additional resources raised?

Finding 10: There are no hard data for assessing additional costs and/or savings generated by cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE. What can be ascertained is that cross-sectoral cooperation has neither positively nor negatively influenced UNECE’s regular budget or overall staff costs. Other than that, qualitative evidence reveals different experiences, both positive and negative.

73. As seen above, enhancing efficiencies is not one of the main goals of cross-sectoral cooperation within UNECE. Interviews revealed that extra costs and savings because of cross-sectoral cooperation would be difficult (if not impossible) to measure in quantitative terms. Costs and savings take the form of time or money. They could occur to the Secretariat and/or to member States.

74. *Costs:* Cross-sectoral cooperation has not affected the regular budget, 95% of which covers staff costs. It has neither resulted in the hiring of extra staff nor has it been used as a justification for staff cuts. As for the remaining 5% and extra-budgetary resources, some interviewees saw potential for dollar savings - e.g., by organising joint workshops or publishing joint publications. In some instances (e.g., the Joint Taskforce on Environmental Statistics and Indicators), the Secretariat promoted back-to-back meetings to create synergies and savings. It is unclear from interviews whether this was indeed useful. A background note for the breakfast discussion among Sectoral Committee Chairs in the margins of the 67th Commission session warned that “the establishment and maintenance of [new inter-governmental] bodies entails important resource costs...” both for Secretariat and member States.

75. *Time:* Experience and views regarding the extent to which cooperation between sub-programmes requires more or less time (as opposed to working alone) are mixed. On the positive side, interviews with UNECE staff revealed that individual sub-programmes have experienced time savings thanks to shared efforts; additional possibilities for fundraising were opened. Survey respondents were also generally positive: 52 or 81.3% agreed strongly or somewhat that cross-sectoral cooperation was efficient - i.e., that it saved time and money.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ As noted under “limitations”, the evaluator was unable to triangulate stakeholder perceptions with quantitative data.

⁴⁸ Staff survey Q15 and member State survey Q13.

⁴⁹ Review question 5.

⁵⁰ Staff survey Q15 and member State survey Q13.

76. In other instances, interviewed staff experienced cross-sectoral cooperation to be comparatively more/too time-consuming. Reasons for this include greater subject-matter complexities and coordination due to the number of parties involved, but also lack of leadership and what was perceived as unnecessary bureaucracy. Some survey respondents providing additional views regretted that inefficiencies had overshadowed programmatic gains. In their view, cross-sectoral cooperation has been too resource-intensive and slow, because of the time required for coordination, because of a certain lack of commitment, and because of the administrative burden posed on those involved. A background note to the 67th Commission session⁵¹ highlights the costs involved to reconcile disparate interests and address trade-offs when pursuing cross-sectoral activities.

77. Efficiencies can be expected immediately and/or can occur over time: Another train of thought concerns the need to acknowledge that short-term investments can be expected to pay off in the future by leading to greater long-term benefits and efficiencies or rather avoiding long-term inefficiencies.

Finding 11: While staff expectations are high, cross-sectoral cooperation has not systematically generated higher resonance, buy-in and contributed to more successful resource mobilisation.

78. As seen above, the prospect of mobilising extra-budgetary funding, while sorely needed, does not seem to have been a particular driver of or motivation for cross-sectoral cooperation; nor has it been one of the main goals.

79. In the recent past, cross-sectoral initiatives have received donor funding in the form of extra-budgetary resources or from regular budget channels such as the UN Development Account (UNDA). And indeed, a number of interviewees also expect an integrated approach to improve UNECE's funding situation, thanks to joint resource mobilisation efforts, greater innovation, complexity and value added of the organisation's support and thus an improved image. Nobody mentioned, but it is still worth noting that member States, in the 2016 QCPR resolution, urged for non-core contributions to give priority to pooled, thematic and joint funding mechanisms and that earmarking to sector-specific activities should be limited.⁵²

80. However, experience expressed in the interviews also suggests that cross-sectoral cooperation has not per se been a reason to expect higher resonance, buy-in and more successful fundraising. Other aspects influence such decisions, including distinct donor priorities, financial constraints and political obstacles. Moreover, two interviewees and one survey participant pointed to concrete difficulties because very often sectoral funding sources prevail and individual line ministries do not feel responsible. Hence, there is some risk that cross-sectoral initiatives fall between the cracks of donor line ministries. The background note for a breakfast discussion among Sectoral Committee Chairs in the margins of the 67th Commission session recommends joint fundraising for multi-sectoral projects.

81. Generally, survey respondents were positive: 45 or 88.3% of those providing an opinion agreed strongly or somewhat that cross-sectoral cooperation helps to leverage additional funding.⁵³ 72.9% (42/53) agreed strongly or somewhat that UNECE's new Resource Mobilisation Strategy⁵⁴, the objective of which is to identify the most effective ways to mobilise extra-budgetary resources for UNECE mandated work, can significantly enhance cooperation between sub-programmes.⁵⁵ Among

⁵¹ "Strengthening cross-sectoral action and mobilizing resources in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda."

⁵² A/RES/71/243, para. 32.

⁵³ Staff survey Q15 and member State survey Q13.

⁵⁴ The UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary is responsible for implementing the new Resource Mobilisation Strategy.

⁵⁵ Staff survey Q17 and member State survey Q15.

other things, the Resource Mobilisation Strategy commits to reviewing and streamlining internal administrative procedures to support effective resource mobilisation. It envisages pooled funding for cross-sectoral activities to “ensure an integrated and coherent approach to resource mobilization and facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation among the sub-programmes”. An existing example of pooled funding - although one that outdates the new Strategy - is THE PEP UNECE trust fund.

4.5. Alignment with UNECE Mandate and Priorities

⁵⁶To what extent did cross-sectoral cooperation respond to UNECE’s mandate and priorities? To the extent applicable, why not?

Finding 12: Going back to 2013 and beyond, UNECE overarching strategic documents clearly reflect an institutional commitment to cooperation between sub-programmes to advance sustainable development. Individual sub-programmes, as part of their work strategies, also envisage cross-/multi-sectoral work. However, they do not clarify the priority to be given to in-house cooperation or specify relevant partner sub-programmes to achieve cross-sectoral objectives. Stakeholders are generally confident that cross-sectoral initiatives are aligned with and designed to contribute to UNECE objectives and expected accomplishments.

82. Dating back to 2013 (and even beyond to 2005⁵⁷), UNECE overarching strategic documents clearly reflect an institutional commitment for sub-programmes to cooperate in order to promote sustainable development.

83. The current UNECE Strategic Framework 2016-17 (*adopted in 2014*), speaks to sustainable development as UNECE’s overarching theme, to be achieved, *inter alia*, through the strengthening of synergies among its sub-programmes. The overall orientation of the Strategic Framework 2018-19 (*adopted in 2016*) is to ensure an integrated approach to sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNECE intends to achieve this by enhancing existing synergies and linkages between its sub-programmes, and by aligning every sub-programme to its specific SDGs and related targets, with due consideration to climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

84. At the level of most sub-programmes, UNECE strategic and planning documents envisage cross-/multi-sectoral work, programmes and projects as part of their implementation strategies. However, the documents are not explicit on the priority to be given to in-house cooperation in order to achieve cross-sectoral objectives, let alone do they specify relevant partner sub-programmes. For example:

- the environment sub-programme will “... further strengthen integration of environmental concerns into sectoral policies through the implementation of ECE policy tools; education for sustainable development; transport, health and environment; the ECE multilateral environmental agreements; and the sharing of information (e.g., through the Shared Environmental Information System), experiences and good practices in the ECE region...”; or
- the sustainable transport sub-programme will “... work on multi-sectoral projects, with particular focus on promoting sustainable development of transport, and specifically on joint servicing of the Pan-European Programme on Transport, Health and Environment”; or
- “To support forest management ... the sub-programme ... takes a cross-sectoral approach to ensure that the strategy is well integrated into the policy framework of other sectors”.⁵⁸

85. As for the extent to which actual cross-sectoral initiatives are aligned with and are expected to contribute to UNECE objectives and expected accomplishments, the staff survey indicates that more often than not this has been the case: 64.6% (31/48) confirmed that “yes, directly”; a further

⁵⁶ Review question 6.

⁵⁷ Already the 2005 Work Plan on ECE Reform speaks to the need for “horizontal coherence of the activities of the organization”.

⁵⁸ UNECE Strategic Framework 2016-17.

15 participants selected “partially, it is difficult to say”; only two claimed “no, not at all”. Interviewed interviewees implied that whatever activities UNECE implements, whether sectoral or cross-sectoral, existing oversight and management mechanisms ensure that they are in line with expected results.

4.6. Possible Entry Points/Options for Future Cross-sectoral Cooperation and an Integrated Approach

⁵⁹In future, how could cross-sectoral cooperation between sub-programmes be (further) strengthened? Lessons learned? Recommendations?

Finding 13: Stakeholder suggestions and recommendations for facilitating cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach circle around the following strategic intervention areas: programmatic and organisational structures; strategic planning and budgeting; leadership; information and knowledge sharing; coordination mechanisms; administration; and human resource management. Preferences for institutionalised or informal internal partnership arrangements vary, but with a strong bias towards the informal.

86. As mentioned earlier, the current and next UNECE Strategic Frameworks emphasise sustainable development and the need to pursue an integrated approach and strengthen synergies between sub-programmes in order to contribute to the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The High-level Statement made at the 67th Commission session in April 2017, and adopted by the Commission, also clearly supports a cross-sectoral approach: “The implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region will require a strong focus on issues such as poverty reduction, inclusive and sustained economic growth, productive employment, and environmental protection, which are inherently interlinked and require an integrated response ... UNECE can facilitate effective solutions by strengthening cross-sectoral work across its sub-programmes...”.

87. Interviewees and survey participants⁶⁰ were asked about their views on how to (further) enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach within UNECE. They are aggregated in the following paragraphs and grouped under identified sub-headings.

88. *Programmatic and organisational structures:* Restructuring - as has happened in the past as part of UNECE reforms - naturally also came to mind when talking about promoting cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach for achieving the SDGs. Individual interviewees even stressed that there was no choice but to adapt. Potential was acknowledged for creating synergies by re-orientating the thematic focus of UNECE’s sub-programmes towards nexus areas and adjusting organisational and inter-governmental structures⁶¹. The example of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) was given (see text box 4). A proposal was also made to structure the Strategic Framework, sub-programmes and Divisions along relevant SDGs.

89. However, appetite for restructuring was minimal among most UNECE stakeholders voicing an opinion, both staff and member State representatives. In view of decreasing regular budgets and any further downsizing strategies, two interviewees proposed to apply cross-sectoral cooperation as one criterion for deciding on staff cuts and re-assignments.

⁵⁹ Review question 4.3.

⁶⁰ Staff survey Q19 and member State survey Q18.

⁶¹ For instance, the majority of Secretariat and member State survey participants agree strongly or somewhat that changes to the working modalities of UNECE Sectoral Committees/Working Groups would significantly enhance cross-sectoral cooperation: 87.5% of participating staff offering an opinion (35/40) and 57.1% of member State representatives (8/14). Participants make the following suggestions: (1) cross-sectoral work could be added to the ToR of Sectoral Committees/Working Groups; and (2) Sectoral Committee structures could be reformed.

Box 4: Integrated Approach to Promoting Sustainable Development in ESCWA

In the context of the post-2015 development agenda, and based on an extensive process of internal consultations, the ESCWA Strategic Framework 2016-17 provides a framework for a more effective integration of the Commission's work. The seven ESCWA inter-dependent sub-programmes are now grouped around three strategic pillars and eight priority areas to better achieve equitable and sustainable development in the region. The three strategic pillars are inclusive development, regional integration, and good governance and resilience. Through its work on inclusive development, ESCWA focuses on three priority areas: social justice; knowledge economy and employment; and sustainable natural resources. Under regional integration, ESCWA focuses on two priority areas - i.e., policy coherence; and agreements and strategies. Under good governance and resilience, ESCWA focuses on three priority areas: institutional development; participation and citizenship; and resilience to crises and occupation.

Applying an integrated approach, several or all of the sub-programmes have a joint role in contributing to the impacts that ESCWA seeks to achieve in each of the three strategic pillars; none of the strategic pillars is the sole purview of any single sub-programme. The 2016-2017 Strategic Framework thus reflects the activities both of individual sub-programmes and of ESCWA as an integrated organisation. Using these three strategic pillars, ESCWA has adopted a results-based management approach in developing fully-integrated work plans for its sub-programmes. In addition to delivering programmed outputs, ESCWA targets predetermined and measurable outcomes under each priority area. It has shifted the focus of its implementation and monitoring efforts from individual outputs or workplans of each sub-programme to their overall contribution to the outcomes established for each priority area and strategic pillar. Resource changes were a result of new mandates and inter-component changes, including staff deployments.

Source: Proposed Strategic Framework for the Biennium 2016-2017 (E/ESCWA/2013/C.8/4 ESCWA).

90. *Strategic planning:* All things equal, some interviewees suggested that the process of developing biennial UNECE Strategic Frameworks, Programme Budgets and sub-programme Programmes of Work could be better used to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, and “to ensure that the dots are connected earlier” as one said, for instance by institutionalising cross-divisional/cross-sectoral discussions as part of the programme planning process. A more flexible and dynamic funding model as well as exercising more influence at the level of New York-based UNECE budget allocations could also serve the purpose. A background note prepared on the occasion of a breakfast meeting between Sectoral Committee Chairs in the margins of the 67th Commission session recommended, *inter alia*, considering the possibility of having joint programmes of work “to reformulate and institutionalise UNECE’s engagement in an inherently cross-sectoral topic”. Similarly, interviews generated the idea to introduce joint outputs and joint expected accomplishments. 87.8% of staff providing an opinion in response to the staff survey (36/41) agreed strongly or somewhat that UN Secretariat programme and budget rules are not conducive to cooperation between the sub-programmes. 71.4% of member State participants (10/14) were of the same opinion.⁶²

91. *Leadership:* According to numerous interviews conducted and survey responses, the next step is for UNECE’s leadership – i.e., UNECE member States and senior management - to be an example and to “walk the talk” in order to convert policy statements into institutional priorities and into action. In future, UNECE leadership should identify organisation-wide priorities within the context of the SDGs and break or at least water down existing silos. The point was made that advancing cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach, in the current resource-constrained circumstances, necessarily requires difficult debates, compromises and bold decisions on where to prioritise and what to drop.

92. *People matter:* Cross-sectoral cooperation is clearly about people, their mindsets, motivation and the organisational culture. A number of concrete human resource measures were put forward by interviewees and survey participants for consideration in view of promoting teamwork. At the outset, UNECE needs to attract and hire the right people with the necessary motivation and skills for working across sectors - including “staff who have the big picture”. Onboarding of new staff members should go beyond their host Divisions and sub-programmes to help them connect more broadly. Once

⁶² Staff survey Q17 and member State survey Q15.

recruited, it would also be useful for job descriptions to show how incumbents and their functions play a part in the overall set-up and support UNECE's overall contribution to sustainable development. To encourage staff to cooperate, evidence suggests freeing up time for creative work, setting up a rewarding incentive system for cross-fertilisation and collaborative success, including a cross-sectoral cooperation goal in ePAS to appraise staff performance, and putting more emphasis on staff mobility.

93. Staff and member State survey participants tended to agree with the statement that changes to UNECE human resources management (e.g., job descriptions, performance assessments; trainings) are needed to significantly enhance cross-sectoral cooperation⁶³: 69.6% (32/46) of participating staff voicing an opinion agreed strongly or somewhat; 72.2% (13/18) of member State representatives.

94. *Cross-sectoral information and knowledge sharing*: Interviews revealed several ideas how to enhance cooperation by way of intensifying information and knowledge exchange between sub-programmes: Generally speaking, all things equal, numerous interviewees would welcome more space and platforms for networking in order to be able to establish needs and identify opportunities - the resumption of staff days was mentioned by one interviewee; communities of practice by another. As several interviewees noted, knowledge management and better-quality communication in the right places at the right time would also serve to enhance cross-sectoral action by improving access to and the use of relevant information. A great majority of survey respondents providing an opinion⁶⁴ (82.3% or 51/62) agreed strongly or somewhat that improvements in knowledge management would significantly enhance cooperation between UNECE sub-programmes. The above-mentioned breakfast discussion background note recommends giving more visibility to Committee activities on cross-sectoral collaboration and SDG implementation for the purpose of organisation-wide knowledge sharing. The recent UNECE Knowledge Management Strategy (2016) is relevant for improving communication and cooperation across UNECE Divisions and sub-programmes. Amongst other things, its Action Plan envisages Brown Bag Series/occasional meetings to share knowledge - e.g., periodic informal briefings on cross-cutting issues and good practices.

95. *Coordination mechanisms*: Existing coordination mechanisms could be strengthened and new ones considered. In terms of coordination, it was specifically suggested to make better use of Senior Management Team meetings to discuss substance and opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation. One interviewee suggested organising Senior Management Team retreats. An enhancement of the Working Group on Technical Cooperation, composed of UNECE Regional Advisers, could support cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach in UNECE's technical cooperation. Moreover, more efforts to convene the Chairs of the UNECE Sectoral Committees, such as happened during the 67th Commission session, could be helpful; as would regular - informal - meetings between the Secretaries of Sectoral Committees. A similar thrust was already identified and recommended for further consideration on the occasion of the Chairs of the Sectoral Committees breakfast discussion on the margins of the 67th Commission session⁶⁵ - i.e., (1) continued or enhanced practices of inviting other Committees to provide informational updates at one another's annual sessions; and (2) meetings among the Chairs and Secretaries of Sectoral Committees, as well as Division Directors, the Chair of the Commission, the Executive Secretary and the Secretary of the Commission.

96. Interviews reveal a mix of preferences for institutionalised and informal arrangements for enhancing cross-sectoral partnerships within UNECE, but with a strong bias towards informal. On the one hand, advantages of informal agreements were considered by many to provide greater flexibility and reduce bureaucracy (for instance: "MoUs between sub-programmes/ Divisions would be overly bureaucratic"); on the other hand, some interviewees reflected that institutionalised arrangements

⁶³ Staff survey Q17 and member State survey Q15.

⁶⁴ Staff survey Q17 and member State survey Q15.

⁶⁵ "Breakfast Discussion: Potential for cross-sectoral cooperation in support of mainstreaming SDGs in the work of UNECE."

give more importance and are more reliable - i.e., cooperation between sub-programmes is “not left to coincidence”.

97. **Bureaucracy:** Clearly, interviewed UNECE staff expressing a view were generally concerned about the amount of time required for delivering their outputs. As one interviewee summarised the situation: “there is a need to reduce the overburden, which is a major blockage” or another: “UNECE needs to cut red tape”. References were made to time-consuming UNECE administrative procedures for receiving and administering funds and for managing human resources, inter-governmental approval processes, and donor reporting requirements. As already outlined above, a number of stakeholders have experienced or obviously fear that cross-sectoral cooperation, especially if formalised, will pose an additional administrative burden.

98. By way of contrast, other interviewees had a more balanced view. While stressing the need to comply with financial rules, policies and procedures and respond to audit recommendations as well as acknowledging some outdated rules, regulations and processes (emanating from the UN Secretariat) and room for streamlining (including reporting requirements), they rather located the problem in an inherent culture of bureaucracy and hierarchies. One interviewee coined the term “self-inflicted processes”.

5. Conclusions

99. At the end of the day, all interviewees, most of which were UNECE staff, agreed with the basic premise of this review that cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach within UNECE should be enhanced in support of member States (*see finding 1*). They differed as regards the extent to which this should happen, whereby largely, all things equal, preference was given to a voluntary approach within the current set-up (*see finding 13*).

100. Based on above findings and particularly finding 13 on potential entry points and options for cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach, this review proposes a theory of change for UNECE’s future efforts to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and an integrated approach to sustainable development work within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. The theory of change is described in the following paragraphs and visualised below.

Why cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach?

101. Needs- and evidence-based integrated programming within UNECE ensures better alignment with the SDGs, additional programmatic synergies, more innovation, better quality and increased usefulness of UNECE products, greater visibility, and a higher added value. This, in turn, aids broader stakeholder ownership in UNECE member States, greater use of and follow-up to UNECE outputs and improved development outcomes. At the highest result level, cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach ultimately increases UNECE’s contribution to the achievement of SDGs by its member States (*see finding 1*).

Which integrated approach?

102. There are different options for UNECE to pursue cross-sectoral cooperation within an integrated approach for achieving the SDGs. Three alternative scenarios are at the centre of this discussion: (1) leave sub-programmes as are; (2) position existing sub-programmes within an integrative framework; and (3) design new sub-programmes (*see finding 13*).

103. Scenario (1) could be called the “partnership” model. The large majority of interviewed stakeholders implicitly assumed or explicitly advocated for maintaining the status quo - i.e., eight sectoral-defined sub-programmes and associated Divisions and Committees. Sub-programmes should be aligned with individual SDGs, and better conditions should enable the joint pursuit of common interests through cross-sectoral cooperation - besides priority sectoral work and on a voluntary basis.

104. This scenario would certainly be a step in the right direction, but presumably less effective and efficient than the other two. It would not reflect bold changes in the United Nations development system promoted by the UN Secretary General to better place organisations to accelerate their transition to the 2030 Agenda and to help deliver tangible results in the lives of the people that they serve.⁶⁶

105. Scenarios (2) and (3) are different degrees of models of remodelling and institutional integration. They would reduce the currently high reliance on personal motivation and relationships.

106. Scenario (2) simulates the ESCWA model described above, which was developed in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In this scenario, UNECE sub-programmes and Divisions would remain as are, but components, expected accomplishments and outputs would be aligned as appropriate to common higher-level and longer-term objectives linked to the SDGs, for which the organisation as a whole would be accountable to EXCOM and the Commission. The extent to which sub-programmes cooperate - e.g., form cross-divisional teams and joint task forces - to achieve those objectives or work individually in their own sectors depends on the best suited *modus operandi*.

107. Same as the first one, this model would not upset current organisational structures. As opposed to the first scenario, it would have the added benefit of bringing the organisation and its sub-programmes around a common vision and purpose within the 2030 Agenda in the ECE region.

108. Scenario (3) would create new sub-programmes and Divisions with multi-professional teams around those SDGs and associated targets relevant to UNECE member States and UNECE's mandate, and would be the most extreme attempt to pursue an integrated approach. However, also in this case where UNECE's work would be structured around selected SDGs, it would be necessary for sub-programmes to coordinate and to be able to cooperate in an efficient manner given that the SDGs should be read as a network of targets connecting the different goal areas and not as standalone goals.⁶⁷ The evaluator is unaware of any organisation structured in this manner.

109. When discussing these scenarios, one aspect needs to be kept in mind - i.e., the considerable interval between formulating Strategic Frameworks, Programme Budgets and Programmes of Work, their adoption and the start of actual implementation. The UNECE Strategic Framework 2018-19 was already approved by the UN General Assembly in 2016; the Strategic Framework 2020-21 needs to be submitted by 2018 and its drafting is underway. Under normal circumstances, any substantial redefinition of UNECE's sub-programmes could not formally enter into effect until 2022-23.

110. Another aspect for consideration are the likely implications for UNECE inter-governmental bodies and particularly the eight Sectoral Committees. While the partnership and ESCWA models (scenarios 1 and 2) would not necessitate structural adaptations to the Sectoral Committees or changes to their composition, designing new sub-programmes around selected SDGs would. The ESCWA model would bolster the role of EXCOM and the Commission in providing strategic direction and guiding UNECE towards organisational goals.

111. Finally, there is a possibility that the UN General Assembly will shortly give the UN Secretariat, including UNECE, a mandate to plan and report against the SDGs, and that changes will be made to the current strategic planning process and instruments. This would be a strong call for

⁶⁶ Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda - Ensuring a Better Future for All - Report of the Secretary-General. Advance Unedited Version - 30 June 2017.

⁶⁷ See for instance "The SDGs as a network of targets," from David Le Blanc, "Towards integration at last?," DESA Working Paper No. 141 ST/ESA/2015/DWP/141.

http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2015/wp141_2015.pdf

change in the way UNECE works and possibly, but not necessarily, in the way its sub-programmes are defined and structured.⁶⁸

How to facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach?

112. The present review has brought to the surface certain changes at the level of the organisation that would facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to the SDGs, irrespective of the chosen model:

- Make better use of the strategic planning and budgeting process (*see findings 9 & 13*)
- Provide opportunities and create spaces for cross-sectoral information and knowledge sharing (*see findings 8 & 13*)
- Strengthen existing and establish new corporate coordination mechanisms (*see finding 13*)
- Implement human resource measures (*see finding 13*)
- While complying with UN rules, policies and procedures, explore scope and necessity for reducing the administrative burden (*see findings 9, 10 & 13*)

Underlying assumptions

113. For the necessary organisational changes to take place for a more integrated approach and greater UNECE impact on the SDGs in UNECE member States, the theory of change implies certain assumptions.

114. Importantly, it assumes that UNECE leadership walks the talk (*see findings 9, 10 & 13*). EXCOM delegates, members of Sectoral Committee bureaux and UNECE senior management all need to act in concert to prioritise an integrated approach and to bring about cultural and institutional change and greater impact. Linked to this, the theory of change assumes that UNECE leadership can agree on a 2030 vision for UNECE and accordingly prioritise its contributions to selected SDGs and associated targets consistent with the organisation's mandate and limited resources (*see finding 13*). The evaluator is aware of ongoing discussions and efforts within UNECE to this intent.

⁶⁸ A/72/492: Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all – Report of the Secretary-General; A/72/492/Add.1: Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: improving and streamlining the programme planning and budgeting process – Report of the Secretary-General.

Increase UNECE's contribution to the achievement of SDGs by member States

Improved development outcomes
Greater use of & follow-up to UNECE outputs
Broader stakeholder ownership

Higher added value

Better quality & increased usefulness of UNECE products

Greater visibility

Better alignment

More innovation

Additional synergies

Needs- and evidence-based cross-sectoral cooperation and integrated approach

Strategic planning & budgeting

Information and knowledge sharing

Coordination mechanisms

Structural inefficiencies

Human resource measures

6. Recommendations

115. As stipulated in the assumptions above, the following recommendations will only be effective in a cultural and leadership context that is favourable to cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to the SDGs.

Recommendation 1: Become a more integrated organisation

116. The international community is very clear that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs demand complex cross-sectoral considerations and an integrated approach. The 2016 QCPR, under the heading of “Improving the functioning of the United Nations development system” affirms the need for integrated action in response to the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda, while stressing the importance of national ownership and leadership and alignment with member States needs and priorities.⁶⁹ According to the UNECE Strategic Framework 2018-19, UNECE will ensure an integrated approach to sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore, any sectoral activities, while per se not excluded, need to be seen within the bigger picture and implemented in tandem with other interventions, fully aware of implications - positive and negative - on other areas and member State development goals. Neither the current set-up nor scenario (1) outlined above fulfil this mandate and requirement. Cross-sectoral cooperation ought not be optional, but engrained in the institution. This review therefore recommends further consideration of scenarios (2) and (3) in order for UNECE to enhance its contribution, with a preference for scenario (2).

Recommendation 2: Include “nexus dialogues” in UNECE strategic planning and budgeting process

117. Currently UNECE is obliged to formulate biennial planning documents in adherence to UN Secretariat requirements, defined by UN member States. The UN General Assembly in New York signs off on plans and budgets, structured along sub-programmes. While methodological weaknesses beyond UNECE’s control are acknowledged - e.g. no possibility to include joint outputs or higher-level outcomes - and methodological changes may be mandated in the near future - the formal planning process offers regular opportunities for the organisation’s leadership and staff to bring sub-programmes closer together in a complementary manner. To profit from this, this review recommends that the UNECE Executive Secretary task SDGU, with the support of the respective substantive Directors, to organise and document timely and mandatory “nexus dialogues” for those sub-programmes that contribute to the same SDGs and associated targets as part of the strategic planning exercise.

Recommendation 3: Encourage and institutionalise information- and knowledge sharing among subject-matter experts

118. The surveys conducted as part of this review pinpointed information sharing across sub-programmes as the most frequent form of cross-sectoral cooperation. At the same time, evidence revealed a desire among Secretariat staff for more opportunities for cross-sectoral exchange of information and knowledge - both informal and institutionalised - to increase connectivity and the effectiveness of their work in support of member States. UNECE leadership should encourage information and knowledge sharing; it should also ensure that it happens. This review therefore recommends setting up communities of practice to empower meaningful contributions to the SDGs; the brown bag series⁷⁰, managed by OES, should make a particular effort to disseminate good practices of cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach within UNECE.

⁶⁹ GA resolution A/RES/71/243, para. 47.

⁷⁰ See Knowledge Management Strategy: “Brown Bag Series/ occasional meetings to share knowledge (periodic informal briefings on cross-cutting issues and good practices)”.

Recommendation 4: Capitalise on existing corporate coordination bodies

119. Senior management convenes regularly as do UNECE Regional Advisors. Cross-sectoral cooperation has not been given particular attention on these occasions, except for more recently in the case of the Working Group on Technical Cooperation. Given their inter-divisional nature and birds-eye view of the organisation, this review recommends capitalising on these meetings to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to implementing UNECE sub-programmes in support of member States. Cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to the SDGs should be standing agenda items.

Recommendation 5: Establish a network of Secretaries to Sectoral Committees in support of Sectoral Committee bureaux

120. While good examples of mutual informational briefings exist and in at least two instances joint task forces have been established, UNECE Sectoral Committees have for a long time worked in a sectoral mode and member State representatives risk remaining unaware of ongoing work in other sub-programmes in support of the same SDGs. They thus could miss out on opportunities for creating synergies and risk experiencing long-term inefficiencies. To provide more impulses for cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach, this review recommends institutionalising regular meetings between the Secretaries of the Sectoral Committees, chaired by the Secretary of the Commission.

Recommendation 6: Introduce human resource measures that facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation

121. Cross-sectoral cooperation has greatly relied on individuals. A number of concrete human resource measures were put forward by consulted stakeholders to promote inter-divisional teamwork and broad staff ownership of what UNECE stands for. Moreover, the 2016 QCPR urges the UN development system, to which UNECE belongs, “to align its staff capacities to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including by building transformative and empowered leadership, repositioning staff capacities to respond to the cross-sectoral requirements of the 2030 Agenda, promoting inter-agency mobility and facilitating a mobile and flexible global workforce”.⁷¹ While recognising that human resources management is not entirely within the control of UNECE, this review recommends that UNECE leadership adopt measures that put more attention on cross-sectoral teamwork in employee recruitment, onboarding, training, performance appraisal and career development, among other things through lateral rotation of staff among Divisions.

Recommendation 7: Address structural inefficiencies linked to cross-sectoral cooperation

122. Many interviewed staff complained of the bureaucracy they generally face in their work for UNECE; they suggested that reducing the administrative burden - besides stronger prioritisation (including discontinuing certain activities) - would free up time for cross-sectoral cooperation. Ultimately, evidence gathered does not pinpoint any internal procedures imposed by PMU or the Executive Office that are over and above formal requirements of the UN Secretariat or EXCOM, but this was beyond the scope of this review. Moreover, the evaluator was informed that UNECE has started the process aimed at simplifying administrative procedures.⁷² However, some stakeholders have also experienced that cross-sectoral cooperation causes and its implementation is hindered by what they personally perceive as additional inefficiencies.

123. While, as put forward by interviewed staff, PMU should continue to facilitate efficient and effective cross-sectoral cooperation as part of its core functions, evidence also suggests that perceived inefficiencies of cross-sectoral cooperation have their roots in the tight oversight role of the Sectoral Committees and EXCOM, UNECE’s sectoral set-up, donor-specific needs, and organisational barriers to cross-sectoral cooperation (silo approach).

⁷¹ A/RES/71/243, para. 74.

⁷² Source: OES.

124. This review recognises that cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach, by way of its nature, requires certain investments, which should pay off in the long run. The question revolves around how much “overburden” is appropriate and how to minimise the burden without compromising on quality, oversight and accountability. In other words, which perceived inefficiencies of working across UNECE Divisions are also real, and therefore it is in the interest of the organisation to reduce them? This review did not collect sufficient evidence to make a solid assessment. It recommends that PMU organise a stakeholder workshop to gather more insights on structural (both administrative and architectural) inefficiencies that hinder cross-sectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to sustainable development.