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Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee at its sixty-third session on the evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: subprogramme 4, Environment and development

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, presents the results of the triennial review of the OIOS evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): subprogramme 4, Environment and development ([E/AC.51/2023/6](#)), in which OIOS assessed the extent to which the recommendations emanating from that evaluation were implemented. All eight recommendations from the OIOS evaluation were implemented with evidence of positive outcomes.

In response to recommendation 1, in which the Environment and Development Division was requested to review its programmatic strategy following the transfer to the Office of the Executive Secretary of work related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Division reorganized its portfolio in line with intergovernmental mandates and complementarities with other United Nations entities, prioritizing climate change, air quality, ocean protection and urbanization.

In response to recommendation 2 on developing a capacity-building strategy for achieving stronger thematic focus and geographical balance, larger projects and better alignment with ESCAP partners, the Environment and Development Division developed and used an internal strategy to guide its technical assistance and launched a tracking mechanism for monitoring member State requests.

* [E/AC.51/2026/1](#).



In response to recommendation 3 on preparing and disseminating a list of service offerings, the Environment and Development Division created online and offline outreach materials articulating its mandate in environment and development-related areas.

In response to recommendation 4 on giving more prominence to sustainable urban development work, the Environment and Development Division increased the visibility of sustainable urban development, notably by clearly articulating expected urban-related outcomes under subprogramme 4 and strengthening intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder engagement, including by scaling up and adding a high-level ministerial segment to the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum.

In response to recommendation 5 on making more strategic use of the Commission's intergovernmental mechanisms to build regional consensus and secure mandates, including through discussions and policy debates based on its knowledge products, the Environment and Development Division expanded its portfolio of flagship publications and policy papers and applied ESCAP-wide dissemination practices. As a regional centre of excellence, it supported the establishment of knowledge platforms.

In response to recommendation 6 on strengthening regional coordination efforts, the Environment and Development Division co-led the issue-based coalition on raising ambitions on climate action, which is considered one of the most active coalitions. Joint briefings and initiatives supporting United Nations country teams were part of the coalition's offer. The Division also helped to establish a United Nations networking group on oceans and the blue economy under the Regional Collaborative Platform.

In response to recommendation 7, in which ESCAP was requested to consider integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Environment and Development Division, the Commission assessed the advantages and potential drawbacks, including through an independent review. Recognizing the strong substantive convergence among environmental, climate change and disaster risk reduction issues, it is in the process of integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section into the Environment and Development Division.

In response to recommendation 8, in which ESCAP was requested to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender, disability inclusion and human rights into its programme of work, the Commission has demonstrated robust achievements in gender equality and increased its attention to disability inclusion. Human rights principles and language are also embedded in the Commission's foundational documents and reflected in its work on inclusion more broadly.

The implementation of the recommendations contributed to several positive outcomes. The Environment and Development Division's sharpened thematic focus has strengthened its value proposition and elevated its influence on regional agendas in partnership with other United Nations entities, while its capacity development strategy served to broaden the Division's geographical reach and partnerships. Furthermore, enhanced intergovernmental engagement has elevated sustainable urban development as a cross-cutting regional priority and positioned ESCAP as a leading actor for integrated urban solutions aligned with the 2030 development agenda. Increased production of flagship publications and policy papers on priority and emerging themes reinforced the Commission's role as a centre of excellence, stimulating multi-stakeholder dialogue and influencing intergovernmental decision-making. Lastly, the Division maintained a consistent baseline of gender-related activities, and several encouraging developments emerged in its efforts to integrate disability inclusion and human rights into its programming.

I. Introduction

1. At its sixty-third session in 2023, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the evaluation of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): subprogramme 4, Environment and development (E/AC.51/2023/6).
2. In the present triennial review, OIOS examined the status of the implementation of the eight recommendations contained in the report. All eight recommendations were assessed as implemented. The review also addressed, where possible, the extent to which implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes and immediate outcomes.
3. The methodology for the triennial review included:
 - (a) A review and analysis of the biannual progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS TeamMate+ recommendations tracking database;
 - (b) An analysis of relevant ESCAP information, documents and reports related to the recommendations
 - (c) Interviews with five ESCAP staff members.
4. The report incorporates comments received from ESCAP during the drafting process. OIOS expresses its appreciation to ESCAP for the cooperation it extended in the preparation of this report.

II. Results

Recommendation 1

Identify and focus the Environment and Development Division's work on niche areas

5. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

In view of the transfer to the Office of the Executive Secretary of the work related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should identify and focus its work on specific niche areas that are within its comparative advantages, transboundary and fully aligned with the Ministerial Declaration, including from the Committee on Environment and Development.

Indicator of achievement: revised strategy identifying focus areas of the Division's work, including approaches on how it aims to contribute to specific environment, climate and urbanization issues in ways that are complementary to other United Nations entities' efforts

6. In response to this recommendation, the Environment and Development Division reviewed its strategy to identify clear focus areas and approaches. There was a transfer of resource-intensive responsibilities for the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, on behalf of ESCAP and the United Nations system, from the Environment and Development Division to the Office of the Executive Secretary in 2024. While the Division continues to contribute to the Forum and organize environment-related Sustainable Development Goal events, it is no longer the primary convener.

7. Based on that review, the Environment and Development Division reorganized its portfolio, intensifying some areas of work and reintroducing others of high regional relevance. The Division now prioritizes transboundary issues, notably climate change, air quality and ocean protection, alongside urbanization. These priorities are aligned with the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development in 2022 and relevant Commission resolutions, and reflected in ESCAP subprogramme 4 for 2025 and 2026.

8. Under ESCAP subprogramme 4, the Environment and Development Division has continued to focus on urbanization, ocean work and, more recently, blue carbon. Its work on climate change, strengthened by Commission resolution 79/1 (2023), has been consolidated as a core area of focus structured around three pillars:

- (a) Internal coordination within ESCAP;
- (b) Substantive work (for example, capacity-building for development of nationally determined contributions);
- (c) External coordination with relevant United Nations entities.

9. The Environment and Development Division ensured complementarity with other United Nations entities in several ways, including through the following:

- Coordination with other United Nations entities through the Regional Collaborative Platform
- Collaboration under the multi-stakeholder Asia-Pacific Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution and the Asia-Pacific Initiative for Regional Cooperation on Ocean-based Climate Action
- Work with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) on urbanization
- Coordination and co-authoring of knowledge products, such as the annual review of climate ambition
- Co-organization of events, including Asia-Pacific Clean Air Week

10. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS also determined that implementation of this recommendation contributed to sharpening the Environment and Development Division's value proposition and leveraging the Division's influence in shaping regional agendas in collaboration with United Nations partners.

Recommendation 2

Develop a capacity development strategy to plan and implement technical assistance and capacity-building projects

11. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should develop a capacity development strategy to plan and implement technical assistance and capacity-building projects in line with the identified niche areas. The strategy should focus on:

- (a) Strengthening the strategic importance and geographical balance of its capacity-building activities across the five ESCAP subregions, including prioritizing the countries with special needs, as appropriate;
- (b) Incorporating the priorities identified in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks of the respective countries into the themes of its planned flagship reports to the extent possible;

(c) Establishing a mechanism to monitor and follow up on member State requests for assistance;

(d) Striving for larger and longer-term projects to pilot innovative ideas, scale up and disseminate results among key stakeholders;

(e) Strengthening collaboration with local partners and country-based United Nations entities to enhance the sustainability of its technical assistance projects. This should include the enhanced use of national-level implementing partners, consultants and civil society organizations.

Indicators of achievement: strategy for planning, implementation and balanced geographical reach of capacity-building activities; dissemination of results, including setting up a mechanism for monitoring member States' requests

12. In response to this recommendation, the Environment and Development Division developed a capacity development strategy to enhance the capacities of national, subnational and local governments. This strategy was used as an internal tool and provided a pragmatic framework to guide the Division's technical assistance, sharpen its thematic focus, ensure geographical balance and align its technical assistance with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework priorities. The strategy also enabled the Division to maintain flexibility to respond to member State requests within resource constraints. Staff interviewed suggested that an ESCAP-wide capacity development strategy, with different divisions articulating niche offers under a common framework, could further enhance the coherence and relevance of the Commission's technical assistance and capacity-building projects.

13. The capacity development strategy strengthens both thematic focus and geographical balance and articulates the Environment and Development Division's capacity-building activities across five priority areas: (a) low-emission and climate-resilient development; (b) clean air; (c) ocean protection; (d) sustainable urban development; and (e) access to information and participation. Targeted capacity-building support to the least developed countries and small island developing States has enabled the Division to commit to broadening its reach while also paying attention to countries with special needs.

14. Furthermore, the capacity development strategy was also aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework priorities to ensure that capacity-building projects facilitated engagement with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams and contributed to country-level uptake and policy relevance. For example, the Environment and Development Division's efforts in Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran under the project entitled "Confronting the silent crisis of Asia-Pacific's sinking cities" were aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework outcomes on resilience, environmental sustainability, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, sustainable urban development and inclusive governance.

15. The capacity development strategy also promotes a shift towards larger, multi-year initiatives, moving away from fragmented, short-term activities. ESCAP staff cited such projects as the Science-Policy Interface, Action and Regional Management project under the Kunming Biodiversity Fund and the Urban-Act: Integrated Urban Climate Action for Low-Carbon and Resilient Cities project under the International Climate Initiative. Shifting donor priorities, declining official development assistance (ODA) for the region, lack of access to major climate finance facilities and the lack of a country presence, however, have limited the Division's ability to consistently secure and deliver sustained, multi-year initiatives.

16. Lastly, the strategy underscores the importance of deepening partnerships with regional and country counterparts, as well as with other United Nations entities, to enhance sustainability and cost-effectiveness. One such example is the South-East Asia Climate and Clean Air Initiative, a multi-donor, multi-year and multimillion project with 21 partners.

17. In addition to developing a capacity development strategy, in December 2024, the Environment and Development Division launched a division-wide request tracking mechanism in which spreadsheets hosted on a document management platform are used to monitor incoming requests for technical assistance from its Environment and Development Policy Section and the Sustainable Urban Development Section. The tracker serves to monitor key information, including the date of request, the country, the thematic area, the type of support requested, potential partners, the Division's response, the budget, the follow-up timeline, the actions taken and the results achieved.

18. Nevertheless, because numerous fields of the tracker have been left incomplete, particularly those concerning follow-up actions, results and referrals to other ESCAP divisions or United Nations entities, it is difficult to track the history and outcomes of a request.

19. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS has also determined that the implementation of the recommendation has broadened the Environment and Development Division's geographical reach and partnerships and has contributed to a better overview and understanding of the Division's capacity development portfolio.

Recommendation 3

Prepare and disseminate a list of Environment and Development Division offers

20. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should prepare a list of its offers and disseminate it among key stakeholders at the regional and country levels. This effort should include the following elements:

(a) Development of a clear offer of analytical and national support work on the identified thematic areas of focus;

(b) Use of the offer list to make introductions and for outreach to key regional and national stakeholders, including relevant government officials and country teams;

(c) Through the monitoring mechanism (recommendation 2 (c)), filter and match incoming requests for support from member States on the basis of their offers, and refer requests falling outside the scope of their offers to other ESCAP units or United Nations entities, as appropriate;

(d) Use the outreach efforts as a basis to form communities of practice around identified thematic areas.

Indicator of achievement: division list of offers prepared and used for introduction and outreach to key stakeholders

21. In response to this recommendation, the Environment and Development Division has developed a list of its offers, which it has disseminated at the regional and country levels. In preparing this list, the Division developed online and offline outreach materials presenting its offer, including a presentation from 2024 entitled "Environment and Development Division offer of support at the national level", which was aligned with the five support areas of the Division's capacity development strategy discussed

above under recommendation 2. These materials, however, are not yet fully harmonized, partly due to resource constraints that have delayed website updates. The outreach materials have been shared with member States at regional and country events, including at the eighth session of the Committee on Environment and Development, and at other relevant forums to engage potential partners. The materials have also supported staff in communicating with other stakeholders. Outreach efforts have remained largely opportunity driven to avoid overpromising analytical and technical assistance, given resource limitations and the associated risk of undermining trust. Furthermore, a request tracking system involving a spreadsheet hosted on a document management platform was introduced in late 2024 to track member State requests for capacity development support, developed in response to recommendation 2.

22. Lastly, the Environment and Development Division has leveraged outreach to build practitioner networks around key themes, such as the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution, the community of practice under the Sinking Cities initiative and the United Nations networking group on oceans and the blue economy within the Regional Collaborative Platform.

23. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS has also determined that the implementation of the recommendation has supported ESCAP in clearly articulating its mandate and distinctiveness from other actors in environment and development-related areas.

Recommendation 4

Give more prominence to the sustainable urban development work of the Environment and Development Division

24. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

ESCAP should give more prominence to the sustainable urban development work of the Environment and Development Division and clearly delineate the thematic areas of responsibility between the two sections. This could include, for example:

- (a) Renaming the Division to reflect its dual focus on environment and urban development;
- (b) Scaling up the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum to consider urban issues beyond the environment and across all ESCAP subprogrammes;
- (c) Seeking a specific mandate from the Commission, as needed, to include an intergovernmental segment in the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum;
- (d) Outlining distinct results on urban work in the programme plan.

Indicator of achievement: evidence of considerations and actions undertaken to give prominence to urban work

25. In response to the recommendation, ESCAP undertook several steps to give greater prominence to the urban work of the Environment and Development Division. First, it considered renaming the Division to reflect its two sections and its dual focus on environment and urban development. Renaming, however, has proved to be challenging, with numerous options debated. Current proposals prioritize renaming subprogramme 4 to reflect the planned integration of the Disaster Risk Reduction Section into the Division (discussed further below under recommendation 7).

26. Furthermore, the Environment and Development Division undertook substantial efforts to elevate the issue of sustainable urban development. The most recent milestone in such efforts was Commission resolution 81/2, adopted in 2025, in which urban development was linked to regional priorities, such as climate action, disaster

risk reduction, biodiversity, gender equality and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the resolution, the Commission also recognized the role of local and subnational authorities and requested the Executive Secretary to provide technical assistance and policy analysis.

27. This achievement was part of a deliberate sequence of platforms, in which the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum played a pivotal role, raising urban development on the regional agenda. Following the OIOS recommendation, the Forum's intergovernmental dimension was strengthened through the introduction of a high-level ministerial segment and the issuance of a negotiated communiqué at the eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum in 2023. The eighth session of the Committee on Environment and Development was focused on urban development and its outcome document included a reference to that communiqué, which paved the way for member States to select sustainable urban development as the theme for the 2025 session and to adopt resolution 81/2. This resulted in unprecedented visibility for the Commission's urban agenda, beyond environmental aspects.

28. Significant progress was also evident in the strategic positioning of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum. Commission resolution 79/7 entitled "Advancing regional cooperation for sustainable urban development and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific", adopted in May 2023, established a foundation for elevating the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum from a stand-alone multi-stakeholder forum to a more policy-relevant regional platform. Building on this new framework, the agenda of the eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, organized by ESCAP and Suwon City, Republic of Korea, and held in October 2023, was expanded well beyond environmental sustainability to incorporate broader themes, including integrated urban and territorial planning, urban finance and inclusive urban digitalization.

29. In addition, ESCAP programme plans now demonstrate a clearer articulation of urban development-related outcomes and operationalization of urban development-related priorities. More specifically, programme planning reflects a progressive broadening of the Environment and Development Division's objectives, a broader target group, greater emphasis on sustainability and resilience in urban planning, stronger integration with the 2030 Agenda and a more pronounced climate focus. The objective of subprogramme 4 was gradually refined from "Sustainable urban development" in 2024, to "Inclusive and sustainable urban development" in 2025, and then to "Inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development" in 2026.

30. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS has also determined that the implementation of the recommendation has contributed to strengthening intergovernmental engagement, elevating sustainable urban development as a cross-cutting regional priority and positioning ESCAP as a leading actor for integrated urban solutions aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

Recommendation 5

Strategically utilize the Commission's intergovernmental mechanism

31. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should strengthen the strategic utilization of its intergovernmental mechanism to enhance its regional consensus-building mandate, obtain guidance and mandates on future work, and promote its analytical tools and policy recommendations among member States. This work should include discussions and policy debates based on Division flagship reports, position papers and other knowledge products, and should be one of the key elements that inform the capacity development strategy under

recommendation 2. In this regard, the Division should consider publishing periodic thematic and flagship reports in support of the Committee on Environment and Development, along with relevant dashboards and observatories, to enhance its role as a centre of excellence on multidisciplinary issues affecting environment, climate and urbanization. The Division should also have in place an active dissemination strategy and initiatives to promote the utility of its knowledge products.

Indicators of achievement: regular flagship reports in support of the Committee on Environment and Development; strategy and actions for dissemination of knowledge products; agenda and other documents of the Committee covering thematic areas of Division work and discussions based on Division flagship publications

32. In response to this recommendation, the Environment and Development Division has taken steps to more strategically harness its intergovernmental mechanism. First, it expanded its portfolio of flagship publications, publishing reports and policy briefs primarily aligned with member State priorities. Some addressed emerging topics to stimulate intergovernmental discussion, including the report entitled “State of blue carbon ecosystems for climate action in Asia and the Pacific”, in 2023, and the policy brief entitled “Localising Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one and no place behind in Asia and the Pacific”, in 2024. In 2025 alone, the Division published 21 reports and policy briefs in that same line.

33. To enhance its role as a regional centre of excellence on multidisciplinary issues related to the environment, climate and urbanization, the Environment and Development Division has also supported the establishment of knowledge platforms. The Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution partnership and collaboration platform serves as a gateway to air pollution information in the region. By the end of 2025, it featured 19 country profiles.

34. The Division’s flagship reports and technical papers have informed regional consensus-building and shaped intergovernmental outcomes. For example, the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development led to the Ministerial Declaration entitled “Protecting our planet through regional cooperation and solidarity in Asia and the Pacific” and to the formal adoption of the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution. The eighth session of the Committee on Environment and Development was focused on sustainable cities, leading to consensus on the decisions taken on urban sustainability and the launch of the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal Localization Platform. The Environment and Development Division has also leveraged the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum to promote its flagship reports and advance regional consensus.

35. In addition to progress in producing knowledge products, ESCAP staff reported adherence to entity-wide practices for disseminating publications, facilitated through the Communications and Knowledge Management Section. These practices include:

- Organizing public launch events, often accompanied by op-eds by the Executive Secretary, as well as blogs and social media coverage
- Uploading publications to the ESCAP website prior to launch, ensuring public access for a broad audience, including academic and library networks
- Promoting publications to targeted audiences through a range of channels, including mailing lists, newsletters, event-related outreach and direct communications

36. Furthermore, Environment and Development Division staff reported disseminating flagship publications through intergovernmental platforms, such as the

sessions of the Committee on Environment and Development, capacity-building activities and direct engagement with member States. With respect to monitoring publication reach, the ESCAP website facilitates access to publications and enables the tracking of downloads.

37. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. The Environment and Development Division has made notable progress in producing regular flagship reports and in using them to inform intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder deliberations, as well as inform discussions with other interested stakeholders.

Recommendation 6
Strengthen regional coordination efforts

38. Recommendation 6 reads as follows:

The Environment and Development Division of ESCAP should strengthen regional coordination efforts through the Regional Collaborative Platform and issue-based coalitions as opportunities to engage with the regional and country-level United Nations entities in a more systematic way. This should also include ongoing engagement with the resident coordinators and country team members to capture and showcase best practices and exchange lessons.

Indicator of achievement: evidence of enhanced participation in the Regional Collaborative Platform and issue-based coalitions and collaboration with country teams in the region

39. In response to this recommendation, the Environment and Development Division has enhanced its regional coordination efforts. First, it strengthened its engagement and participation in the Regional Collaborative Platform, where the Executive Secretary serves as Vice-Chair, and the issue-based coalition on raising ambitions on climate action (formerly the issue-based coalition on climate change mitigation and air pollution). The Division has strengthened its substantive involvement, coordination role and financial contributions to the issue-based coalition, which it co-leads with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and which is regarded as one of the most active coalitions in the region. The Division has also leveraged its convening role and rallied United Nations entities around major regional knowledge products, policy forums and initiatives. In 2024, the Division expanded its leadership beyond the issue-based coalition by supporting the establishment of the United Nations networking group on oceans and the blue economy under the Regional Collaborative Platform, which it co-facilitates with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNEP.

40. This enhanced participation and collaboration has yielded tangible outcomes at both regional and country levels, particularly in the areas of climate, oceans and water resources. At the regional level, the Division has enhanced coordination and knowledge-sharing in these three areas through its participation in several flagship initiatives, including by co-authoring annual reviews of climate ambition in Asia and the Pacific and convening regional meetings on the third generation of nationally determined contributions in preparation for the thirtieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Environment and Development Division has also advanced thematic collaboration and networking through initiatives in the areas of oceans, the blue economy and ocean-based climate action, including preparations for the Asia-Pacific Oceans Week in 2026. These new efforts have engaged other parts of the Division alongside United

Nations system partners, reflecting increased internal alignment and cross-divisional collaboration.

41. At the country level, collaboration with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams has also been intensified through joint briefings and targeted initiatives. There has been regular engagement with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, including annual briefings on outcomes of the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and their implications for Asia and the Pacific. The Environment and Development Division is further expanding cooperation with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams on urban air pollution, clean air and smart cities, addressing pressing challenges in major and secondary cities. Despite this progress, however, the depth and consistency of country-level engagement and the pooling of resources remain uneven due to differences in country-level mandates, working methods and resource availability among members of the issue-based coalition, as well as variations in United Nations country team capacities and technical knowledge.

42. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS has also determined that the implementation of the recommendation has contributed to greater alignment across United Nations entities, mobilizing system-wide capacities and delivering concrete regional and country-level results for the environment and development.

Recommendation 7

Integrate the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Environment and Development Division

43. Recommendation 7 reads as follows:

ESCAP should consider integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Environment and Development Division, in consideration of the substantive proximity of issues related to the environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction, and with a view to aligning its structure with the thematic grouping of these issues in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks of countries in the region.

Indicator of achievement: evidence supporting management deliberation and decision on integrating the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Division

44. In response to this recommendation, ESCAP has undertaken substantive deliberations and has made concrete managerial decisions regarding the integration of the Disaster Risk Reduction Section within the Environment and Development Division. In 2024, ESCAP commissioned a comprehensive external review to assess the feasibility and implications of transferring the Disaster Risk Reduction Section from the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division to the Environment and Development Division. The review concluded that programmatic synergies between the Disaster Risk Reduction Section and the Environment and Development Division were stronger than those with the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, while also identifying budgetary and organizational considerations requiring management attention. Based on those findings, ESCAP senior management agreed to strengthen linkages between the Environment and Development Division and the Disaster Risk Reduction Section, regardless of whether formal integration would take place, emphasizing closer collaboration in such areas as nature-based solutions and ocean-related work.

45. Recognizing the substantive convergence of environmental, climate change and disaster risk reduction issues, ESCAP is in the process of integrating the Disaster Risk

Reduction Section into the Environment and Development Division as a third section, which has been accelerated by the liquidity crisis and the UN80 Initiative. Formal integration is documented in subprogramme 4 of the draft 2027 programme plan for consideration by member States in 2026.

46. The implementation of this recommendation has contributed to some early positive outcomes. Enhanced collaboration among the Environment and Development Policy Section, the Sustainable Urban Development Section and the Disaster Risk Reduction Section has led to joint initiatives, including the ESCAP Risk and Resilience Portal, the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report* and the enhancement of the ocean-climate resilience pillar of the Asia-Pacific Initiative for Regional Cooperation on Ocean-based Climate Action. Looking ahead, ESCAP plans to expand integrated approaches, addressing slow-onset disasters, water scarcity and stress in urban settings and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, thereby further strengthening member State resilience.

47. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS has also determined that the implementation of the recommendation has contributed to greater internal coherence and new project opportunities in the areas of environment and development.

Recommendation 8

Strengthen the mainstreaming of gender, human rights and disability inclusion

48. Recommendation 8 reads as follows:

ESCAP should strengthen the mainstreaming of gender, human rights and disability inclusion into its substantive programme of work.

Indicator of achievement: guidance on mainstreaming gender, human rights and disability inclusion developed and disseminated throughout ESCAP

49. In response to this recommendation, ESCAP has demonstrated a strong institutional commitment to mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in its work. In 2024, the Strategic Programme and Management Division conducted an evaluation of the Commission's gender mainstreaming performance, which confirmed substantial progress in accountability and institutional commitment while identifying the need for more systematic integration of gender-transformative approaches across all subprogrammes, enhanced technical capacity and sustained resources for the gender architecture. Acting on the recommendations of the evaluation, ESCAP updated its Gender Equality Policy and introduced a Gender Equality Action Plan in 2025. This new framework, which is complemented by mandatory gender training delivered by the Sustainable Development Division, provides clear direction.

50. Similarly, ESCAP has increased its efforts to mainstream disability inclusion, maintained its Disability Inclusion Policy and Implementation Plan over the period 2020–2025 and introduced new measures in 2023, including a guidance note on a disability-inclusive project management cycle, internal guidelines on accessible conferences and meetings, and mandatory online training for staff. For the first time, ESCAP divisions were required to apply a disability inclusion marker when preparing the 2027 programme plan, which signals a move towards institutionalizing disability considerations in planning and programming.

51. ESCAP has made less progress in further mainstreaming human rights into its work, for which it has no intergovernmental mandate. The Commission has not issued a separate human rights policy, implementation plan or guidelines, but human rights

principles and language are embedded in its foundational documents and reflected in its work on inclusion more broadly.

52. Regarding the Environment and Development Division more specifically, the Division strives to apply corporate frameworks and to incorporate gender equality, disability inclusion and social inclusion into its projects and events, with the support of divisional focal points for gender equality and women's empowerment and disability inclusion. Examples include capacity-building for sustainable urban development under the framework of the Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy, in which targeted efforts have been made to encourage applications from women mayors, and an analysis of gender-specific air pollution impacts conducted as part of the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution. Despite this progress, the Division has faced challenges in ensuring gender parity in its projects and events, such as its reliance on member States' commitment to cross-cutting commitments and the availability of technical experts in environmental and development themes from vulnerable groups.

53. According to the ESCAP programmatic dashboard for the period 2022–2025, the Environment and Development Division consistently maintained a baseline of gender-related activities, ensuring that gender equality remained a visible and measurable component of its project portfolio. While some fluctuations were observed across the period, several positive trends stand out. Most notably, the share of Division activities with a significant or principal focus on gender equality showed meaningful improvement in 2024, rising to 18.7 per cent, its highest level in the four-year period. That improvement included a strong increase in activities with a principal focus on gender equality, which rose to 18.1 per cent, demonstrating the Division's capacity to scale gender-responsive programming when conditions and prioritization align.

54. Despite variations over the period 2022–2025, several encouraging developments also emerged in the Environment and Development Division's efforts to integrate disability inclusion into its programming. A notable advancement occurred in 2023, when 11.6 per cent of activities were marked as embedding disability considerations more systematically. Progress was also evident in accessibility integration. The share of activities incorporating accessibility considerations increased from 10 per cent in 2022 to 19 per cent in 2023 and remained comparatively strong at 18 per cent in 2024. These trends highlight growing awareness within the Division and a demonstrated capacity to strengthen disability inclusive and accessible programming.

55. Mainstreaming of human rights has been more limited. One example has been the support for human rights in the environment and development sphere through environmental governance. This resulted in the Division partnering with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNEP to develop and adopt the ASEAN declaration on the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

56. Based on this evidence, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented. OIOS has determined that the implementation of the recommendation has contributed to robust achievements in gender equality and women's empowerment at the corporate level and increased attention to disability inclusion, as aligned with United Nations system policies and strategies. It has also contributed to greater attention to cross-cutting issues in the Environment and Development Division's work.

III. Conclusion

57. The full implementation by ESCAP of all eight recommendations has resulted in a clearer strategic focus, stronger regional influence and improved collaboration for the Environment and Development Division, which implements subprogramme 4. The Division sharpened its thematic niche, expanded capacity development support to the least developed countries, small island developing States and countries in the Pacific and Central Asia, and advanced major multi-year initiatives. The Division also supported new regional platforms and broadened its portfolio of flagship publications, although challenges regarding outreach and knowledge dissemination, along with limited resources, have hampered its ability to achieve wider results. Regional United Nations coordination has improved through the Division's active leadership in coalitions and networks, and the strengthened linkages between the Environment and Development Division and the Disaster Risk Reduction Section has generated early benefits through thematic convergence and joint products. Lastly, ESCAP and the Environment and Development Division in particular have also strengthened the mainstreaming of gender and disability inclusion in their work, although the mainstreaming of human rights has lagged behind.

Annex***Comments received from the Environment and Development Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on the draft report**

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) welcomes the triennial review undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). ESCAP notes with satisfaction OIOS's assessment that all eight recommendations from the evaluation have been implemented and have contributed to clearer strategic focus, strengthened regional engagement, and improved delivery under Subprogramme 4.

Since the 2022 evaluation, ESCAP has taken deliberate steps to sharpen the strategic positioning of its environment and development work, concentrating on areas of demonstrated comparative advantage – namely climate action, air quality, ocean, urban development and environmental governance – while ensuring complementarity with the wider United Nations (UN) system.

ESCAP has also enhanced the use of its intergovernmental mechanisms to translate analytical outputs into regional dialogue and policy uptake. Capacity development approaches have been refined to better respond to Member State needs, with increased attention to Countries with Special needs and stronger alignment with UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

In line with OIOS observations, ESCAP will continue to consolidate progress in several areas. These include strengthening cross-divisional coherence in capacity development delivery, improving internal monitoring of technical assistance results, and leveraging the planned integration of disaster risk reduction functions within Subprogramme 4.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.