



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2021/048

Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe

The Commission had aligned the Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into its programme of work, although action was needed to enhance some aspects of programme implementation

20 October 2021

Assignment No. AN2020-720-01

Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of strategic planning and implementation of the ECE programme of work in support of Member States' achievement of SDGs and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The audit covered the period from January 2019 to May 2021 and included: (a) strategic and annual work planning; (b) implementation and performance monitoring; (c) coordination mechanisms; and (d) resource mobilization. It focused on the activities of three out of eight ECE subprogrammes namely: environment, transport and statistics.

ECE had taken steps to align its programme of work with the 2030 Agenda by creating a strategy to guide the subprogrammes in their annual planning activities. Similarly, the ECE action framework for responses to the COVID-19 pandemic guided the overall response to the crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic had affected the productivity of all the three subprogrammes reviewed due to a reduction in the number of intergovernmental meetings with interpretation but ECE had taken action to address this. To further mainstream SDGs, ECE created four nexus clusters made up of cross-divisional teams to strengthen complementarities among subprogrammes in high impact areas. However, while the publication by the nexus on measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs had included important recommendations, these were not yet discussed by sectoral committees to enable their tracking and monitoring of implementation. ECE had also not set targets to ensure regional advisers complete national action plans summarizing ECE's current and future engagement with programme countries timely.

OIOS made two recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, ECE needed to:

- Prepare and implement an action plan for the review and endorsement of nexus publications by relevant subprogrammes, sectoral committees and the Executive Committee to enable timely tracking and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations related to the achievement of the SDGs; and
- Set targets for the completion of national action plans by regional advisers for their respective programme countries to optimize and tailor its support to the specific needs of each Member State.

ECE accepted the recommendations but was yet to take action to implement them.

CONTENTS

I. BACKGROUND	1-2
II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY	2
III. AUDIT RESULTS	2-9
A. Strategic and annual work planning	2-5
B. Programme planning, performance and monitoring	5-7
C. Coordination mechanisms	7-8
D. Resource mobilization	8-9
IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	9
ANNEX I	Status of audit recommendations
APPENDIX I	Management response

Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).
2. ECE was established on 28 March 1947 pursuant to Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 36 (IV). ECE's 56 member countries are in Europe, North America and Asia. ECE is responsible for promoting sustainable development and economic prosperity through: (a) policy dialogue, (b) negotiation of international legal instruments, (c) development of regulations and norms, (d) exchange and application of best practices as well as economic and technical expertise, and (e) technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition.
3. The adoption, in October 2015, of General Assembly resolution 70/1 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts the SDGs at the centre of the mandate of ECE. Regional commissions and entities in the United Nations Development Group, as members of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, are expected to facilitate more effective and flexible support for Member States in pursuing the development agenda.
4. ECE supports countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by focusing on three main strategic areas: (a) improving connectivity within the region, (b) reducing environmental pressures and using resources more sustainably, and (c) contributing to creating more dynamic and resilient economies. ECE works with Member States to build countries' capacities to implement its norms, standards and reliable statistics to monitor the SDGs.
5. The COVID-19 crisis presents an unprecedented socio-economic challenge for the European region. Besides the devastating economic, social and health impacts of the pandemic, COVID-19 has put impediments to achieving the SDGs. ECE has issued a framework to respond to the COVID-19 crisis structured on three main pillars: (a) facilitate connectivity, (b) address transboundary and other risks, and (c) support a green and resilient recovery.
6. The ECE mandate is executed through eight subprogrammes namely: (a) environment; (b) transport; (c) statistics; (d) economic cooperation and integration; (e) sustainable energy; (f) trade; (g) forests and the forest industry; and (h) housing, land management and population. ECE has established a Sustainable Development and Gender Unit in the Office of the Executive Secretary to provide policy advice, analysis and advocacy on cross-cutting issues relating to the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and on gender equality.
7. ECE is led by an Executive Secretary at the Under-Secretary-General level, who is supported by a Deputy Executive Secretary at the D-2 level. ECE's proposed programme budget for 2019 and 2020 amounted to \$32 million and \$33 million, respectively, with a complement of 188 posts for both years. In addition to funds appropriated in the programme budget Section 20, ECE receives funding for technical cooperation activities from: (a) the regular programme for technical cooperation (Section 23); and (b) the Development Account (Section 35). The audit covered the environment (subprogramme 1), transport

(subprogramme 2) and statistics (subprogramme 3). Table 1 details 2019 and 2020 budgets and 2020 posts for the subprogrammes under review.

Table 1: Budgets for subprogrammes 1, 2 and 3 and 2020 posts
(in thousands of United States dollars)

Division	2019		2020		Total	Posts
	Regular Budget	Extrabudgetary	Regular Budget	Extrabudgetary		
Environment	5,393	11,141	5,510	9,427	31,471	31
Transport	6,695	3,122	6,471	2,939	19,227	38
Statistics	4,369	447	4,475	233	9,524	27
Total	16,457	14,710	16,456	12,599	60,222	96

8. Comments provided by ECE are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

9. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of strategic planning and implementation of the ECE programme of work in support of Member States' achievement of SDGs and response to COVID-19 pandemic.

10. This audit was included in the 2020 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the challenges of mainstreaming SDGs into work programmes of regional commissions and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

11. OIOS conducted this audit from October 2020 to June 2021. The audit covered the period from January 2019 to May 2021. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas in: (a) strategic and annual work planning, (b) implementation and performance monitoring, (c) coordination mechanisms; and (d) resource mobilization.

12. The audit methodology included: (a) interview with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) analytical review of data; and (d) sample testing and other audit processes as required.

13. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic and annual work planning

ECE will identify institutions that may be able to assist Member States to implement SDGs in which the secretariat has no comparative advantage

14. ECE strategy for aligning its work with the 2030 Agenda (document 2018/12 dated 18 May 2018) identified nine SDGs where they had a comparative advantage for immediate mainstreaming. These were later revised to 11 SDGs as per the proposed programme budget for 2020 (A/74/6 Section 20). The secretariat further grouped the SDGs into nexus clusters of four high impact areas comprising: (a) sustainable use of resources; (b) sustainable and smart cities; (c) sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; and (d) measuring and monitoring SDGs. The nexus cluster approach involved staff contributing not only at the subprogramme level (vertical approach) but also across subprogrammes

(horizontal orientation). The approach also involved the formation of cross-divisional teams to strengthen complementarities among subprogrammes in high impact areas. As per the proposed programme budget, six goals were mapped to the environment subprogramme; eight goals to the transport subprogramme; and all goals to the statistics subprogramme due to its enabling nature. This includes developing international statistical standards, methods and guidelines to fully implement the global indicator framework to follow-up and review SDGs and their targets. Following the establishment of the nexus clusters, three additional SDGs were incorporated in the programme of work (SDG 1 – no poverty; SDG 2 – zero hunger; and SDG 14 – life below water).

15. While the strategy was comprehensive, it did not identify other actors¹ that could support Members States in implementing the three SDGs where ECE did not have comparative advantage: SDG 4 – quality education; SDG 10 – reduced inequalities; and SDG 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions. Such inclusion would help ECE to get a fuller picture on whether Member States have access to the needed information to obtain technical support and build capacities to ensure that they meet the necessary targets in all the 17 SDGs adopted in resolution 70/1.

16. ECE agreed that the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit would coordinate the review of the strategy for mainstreaming SDGs in all ECE subprogrammes noting that SDG-related work by ECE subprogrammes is done in partnership with other organizations and stakeholders. In this regard, ECE divisions will determine the key partners in these areas that could contribute additional expertise.

ECE needed to prepare an action plan for relevant sectoral committees to review and endorse nexus publications to enable timely implementation of its recommendations

17. OIOS selected the nexus cluster on measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs for detailed review as it covered all eight subprogrammes. The cluster had terms of reference, including work plans with a logical framework, and planned activities for the period from April 2019 to March 2020 and from April 2020 to March 2021. It was chaired by the Director, Statistical Division and engaged in four core activities: (a) the production of a publication on the challenges faced by countries in the region, expectations of the 2030 Agenda, and analysis of the key accelerators and recommendations for supporting Member States to achieve the SDGs; (b) one joint project, financed by extrabudgetary resources; (c) at least one capacity building activity, funded from the regular programme for technical cooperation; and (d) ongoing efforts to mobilize additional financial resources.

18. The timeframe of the work plan for the cluster was not synchronized with that of the annual programme budget, as it was running from April to March instead of from January to December. ECE explained that the nexus cluster work plan was tied to Commission's sessions, which are held biennially in April and at which the outputs from the nexus clusters are discussed. However, synchronizing the timeframe of both planning documents could facilitate programme implementation, monitoring and reporting. ECE is currently reviewing the future of the nexuses and will align the period of the work plans with that of the annual programme budget cycle if it continues to adopt the nexus strategy.

19. The publication entitled Measuring and Monitoring progress towards SDGs was produced with the assistance of a consultant and released in April 2021. It included 11 recommendations, 5 of which were addressed to ECE and 6 were country specific. The ECE recommendations centred around strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices and systems; better coordination and collaboration by regional and global organizations on the work done in the statistical domain; and embedding SDG statistics and indicators in national reporting platforms or databases. However, ECE had not yet started tracking

¹ Such as experts from the business sector, civil society and academia, collaboration with other United Nations and international organizations, or public-private partnerships

implementation of these recommendations, explaining that the report was yet to be reviewed and endorsed by the sectoral committees. The delay was because the release of the publication was not synchronized with the meetings of the sectoral committees to allow for its timely endorsement and subsequent tracking and monitoring the implementation of the related recommendations. In accordance with the terms of reference for the study, the final report was subject to review by ECE staff, sectoral committees, Member States individually and/or the ECE Executive Committee (EXCOM). However, the review process and timelines were not articulated in any documents. ECE explained that the report will be tabled before the various sectoral committees whose meetings are spread over a year. This implies that the reviews would not be completed until April 2022. Taking almost a year before starting to implement important recommendations emanating from the nexus publication diluted its impact.

- (1) ECE should prepare an action plan for the review and endorsement of nexus publications by relevant subprogrammes, sectoral committees, and the Executive Committee to enable timely tracking and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

ECE accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit would coordinate the review of recommendations from the nexus publications. The recommendations will be put on the agendas and communicated for information to the relevant ECE expert groups that discuss issues related to SDGs. They will also be addressed in the statistics discussions of the annual meeting of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in spring of 2022. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that the nexus publications have been reviewed and endorsed by relevant sectoral committees.

ECE addressed the COVID-19 response as provided in its framework

20. ECE had several instruments and initiatives to support Member States in their efforts to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and promote sustainable recovery. These included its convening power through sectoral committees, production of norms and standards for common application in the region, and technical cooperation through the implementation of projects by subprogrammes. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, ECE participated in the preparation of joint activities with other regional commissions and launched online platforms and observatories to gather updates and policy resources to help Member States respond to the COVID-19 crisis. It also reviewed all extrabudgetary projects and repurposed some considering the pandemic. For example, the objective of a project in support of the High-Level Group for the Modernization of Official Statistics was expanded beyond measuring progress towards SDGs and their targets to also incorporate statistics needed to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

21. Out of 29 projects in the environment subprogramme that were covering a wide range of topics including pollution, industrial accidents, water and health, 19 projects had an SDG component and 9 had both an SDG and COVID-19 component. The transport subprogramme managed 11 projects that covered trans-European motorway, railway, and regional transport connectivity. Eight projects had an SDG component and three had both an SDG and COVID-19 component. Finally, the statistics subprogramme had three projects that were covering modernizing statistical production and all of them had both SDG and COVID-19 component. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Extrabudgetary projects in 2019 and 2020 that included SDG and/or COVID-19 component

Division	SDG component	Both (SDG-COVID-19)	Others	Total
Environment	19	9	1	29
Transport	8	3	0	11
Statistics	0	3	0	3
Total	27	15	1	43

22. Out of the 15 extrabudgetary projects with a COVID-19 component, 3 were related to the facilitation of connectivity, 3 to transboundary and other risks, 3 to green and resilience recovery and 6 to other components.

Table 3: 2020 ongoing extrabudgetary projects with COVID-19 component by pillar

Division	Facilitate connectivity	Address transboundary and other risks	Green and resilient recovery	Others	Total
Environment	0	3	2	4	9
Transport	3	0	0	0	3
Statistics	0	0	1	2	3
Total	3	3	3	6	15

23. OIOS concluded that ECE had taken steps to address the COVID-19 response as provided for in its framework to help Member States achieve sustainable recovery. Given that all the projects on COVID-19 were still ongoing, there was no data available to measure their impact on the countries in which they were being conducted.

B. Programme planning, performance, and monitoring

Annual work plans were prepared and approved by the governing bodies and EXCOM

24. Each ECE subprogramme has an annual programme of work that is approved by its sectoral governing body (Sectoral Committees or Standing Working Groups) as well as by the ECE EXCOM. The programme of work for the following year is adopted by the sectoral governing bodies at their annual meetings during the current year. An exception was for the Inland Transport Committee which adopts the programme of work of the transport subprogramme for the current year at its annual meeting held at the beginning of that year. After that, the programme of work is submitted for approval to EXCOM.

25. OIOS reviewed the planned work for the three subprogrammes and noted that they were all approved by their governing bodies and subsequently by the EXCOM. The planning process was detailed, and intergovernmental bodies ensured that all projects approved under the programme of work met the objectives of ECE.

Programme performance declined because of COVID-19, but ECE was taking necessary action

26. Programme implementation is monitored and reported on through the Umoja Performance Monitoring Application (PMA). ECE subprogrammes update performance data in PMA at least every four months, which updates the Umoja Performance dashboard application and enables ECE senior management to monitor programme delivery.

27. ECE deliverables fall into four main categories: (a) facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert bodies through the preparation of parliamentary documents and servicing of meetings; (b) generation and transfer of knowledge through technical cooperation projects and workshops; (c) substantive deliverables through consultancy, advice and advocacy; and (d) communication deliverables through outreach programmes and media relations. During the period under review, meetings accounted for 53 per cent of deliverables in the environment subprogramme; 19 per cent in transport and 48 per cent in statistics.

28. OIOS reviewed the 2,764 outputs related to the expected deliverables of environment, transport and statistics subprogrammes for 2020 to assess their rate of implementation, which is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Deliverables for the period 2020

Deliverables	Environment	Transport	Statistics	Total
Approved target	522	2,064	182	2,764
Delivered	393	1,336	161	1,890
Percentage delivered	75%	65%	88%	68%

29. Designated focal points at the subprogramme level as well as division directors regularly monitor the progress of programme activities and report on the results to the Executive Secretary, sectoral committees, and other governing bodies. The reviewed subprogrammes delivered approximately 68 per cent of their approved programme schedule. The shortfall was mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a decrease and/or cancellation of meetings or their duration by governing bodies. When some meetings were cancelled, the related parliamentary documents were also not produced.

30. Due to the combination of COVID-19 response measures, financial constraints triggered by the liquidity crisis and the Strategic Heritage Plan (impacting availability of conference facilities), the number of face-to-face ECE intergovernmental meetings with interpretation serviced by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) was reduced from three to one meeting a day since mid-March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift to remote operations from different geographical locations via technological tools. This approach was not favoured by all Member States leading to the adoption of a hybrid of face-to-face and virtual meetings. Due to the steps taken by ECE to ensure important meetings were held, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this matter.

Need to enhance access to information on projects and activities funded from extrabudgetary resources

31. ECE implemented a project monitoring tool (PMT) in 2015 at the request of ECE Member States. PMT provides information on all projects and activities funded from extrabudgetary resources and is accessible by donors and Member States. However, the tool was not working as intended and, since May 2020, has been functioning sub-optimally with limited updates. ECE informed that the Programme Management Unit planned to coordinate the enhancement of a new PMT to ensure that it is integrated with other existing systems and is part of a larger knowledge management system to be deployed at the secretariat. Therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue.

The Programme Management Unit effectively implemented the ECE evaluation policy

32. According to its evaluation policy, ECE is expected to conduct four internal evaluations per biennium, three at the subprogramme level and one at the programme level. Also, all projects funded from the Development Account and extrabudgetary projects with a budget of or above \$250,000 are subject to internal evaluations. In addition, EXCOM requested that the annual analytical assessment of lessons learned from all evaluations and subsequent changes to the programme of work from the evaluation effort be

discussed on an annual basis. ECE has produced annual evaluation reports since 2018, which have been highly appreciated by EXCOM.

33. In the biennium 2018-2019, ECE planned to conduct one cross-cutting thematic evaluation – a review of the effectiveness and impact of gender mainstreaming in all eight subprogrammes. Also planned were three subprogramme evaluations covering the environment, trade and transport subprogrammes and 12 project evaluations. For 2020, the following evaluations were planned: (a) review of the innovation performance reviews regional index (economic cooperation); (b) review of ECE collaboration with the United Nations development group and other partners in delivering on energy for sustainable development (sustainable energy); and (c) review of the ECE active ageing index (housing, land management and population).

34. All planned programme and subprogramme evaluation activities for 2019 and 2020 were executed although seven projects initially scheduled for completion in 2020 were extended and thus the planned evaluations were postponed. These projects were extended to enable the secretariat to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic by rescheduling some activities and repurposing others. OIOS concluded that the Programme Management Unit had effectively implemented the ECE evaluation policy. This was consistent with the newly published United Nations Evaluation Dashboard that also concluded that ECE had maintained a robust evaluation system, complete with an evaluation policy, plan and procedures.

C. Coordination mechanisms

ECE agreed to take action to increase the participation of resident coordinators in the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

35. The Secretary-General's report on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019 (A/74/73) encouraged collaboration between regional commissions and regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. One of the deliverables in the report under the heading "Optimizing functions and collaboration at the regional level" was for resident coordinators to be systematically invited to take an active role in regional conferences and platforms.

36. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is a multi-stakeholder event organized by ECE with the collaboration of the Regional United Nations System for Europe and Central Asia, now referred to as the Regional Collaborative Platform, to share best practices and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ECE organized the regional forum in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and provided support to 17 United Nations programme countries² in the European region by collaborating on the cooperation framework cycle and through technical cooperation activities. Seventy-three per cent of resident coordinators participated in the regional forum in 2019 and 29 per cent in 2021 but none in 2020 due to conflicting engagements and sudden change of the forum to a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is a valuable opportunity to foster coordination and partnership on the implementation of SDGs through the active participation of resident coordinators in the forum.

37. ECE could implement measures to coordinate the timing of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development with the Development Coordination Office Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to

² Countries and territories covered by the United Nations Resident Coordinator system. In the ECE region they are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo.

improve the participation of resident coordinators in the region. ECE noted that the timing for the Forum is agreed with its EXCOM; is dependent on the dates for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; and is subject to constraints regarding availability of conference rooms and interpretation services. Nevertheless, ECE agreed to work with the Development Coordination Office Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to boost the participation of resident coordinators and coordinate with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on the Forum dates to the extent possible.

ECE regional advisers should complete the preparation of action plans for the countries under their portfolio

38. ECE has five regional advisers covering the 17 programme countries, funded from the regular programme of technical cooperation. Their functions include provision of technical assistance through: capacity building of governments on national or sectoral development strategies; programmes and policies in environment, statistics, transport, energy or trade; and economic cooperation and integration. To refocus the delivery of ECE support at the country level, ECE repositioned the post of regional advisers to strengthen engagement with ECE programme countries and the resident coordinators in the region. Central to the reform as articulated in General Assembly resolutions 71/243 and 72/279 was to increase collaboration by regional commissions with United Nations country teams and resident coordinators.

39. According to action points agreed between the Executive Secretary and regional advisers in April 2020, each adviser would: (a) engage with the resident coordinators in their assigned countries; (b) develop a national action plan summarizing ECE's current and future engagement with a specific country; and (c) engage with the respective resident coordinator to ensure alignment between ECE technical cooperation activities and country specific cooperation frameworks, as led and coordinated by the resident coordinator.

40. The regional advisers had developed national action plans for only 10 out the 17 programme countries, summarizing ECE's current and future engagement with the countries. This was mainly because there was no agreement between the regional advisers and ECE management as to the timeframe for completing the action plans for programme countries.

(2) ECE should set targets for regional advisers to complete national action plans for their respective programme countries to optimize and tailor ECE support to the specific needs of each Member State.

ECE accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the Deputy Executive Secretary would oversee the completion of the national action plans by the regional advisers for their respective programme countries. The national action plans will be turned into meaningful instruments linking the tools proposed by ECE and the Cooperation Framework of the programme countries. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that regional advisers have completed national action plans for their respective programme countries.

D. Resource mobilization

The resource mobilization strategy could include details on other funding sources supporting the Secretary-General's priority areas

41. The revised ECE resource mobilization strategy approved by EXCOM on 29 May 2020 emphasized the importance of extrabudgetary resources to support Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The resource mobilization strategy outlined the vision, principles, and planning and monitoring mechanisms. The strategy also specified stakeholders' roles and responsibilities for its implementation. ECE submitted the 2020-2022 resource mobilization plan for all subprogrammes to EXCOM on 22 January

2021, pursuant to the approval of the revised resource mobilization strategy by EXCOM on 29 May 2020. The main objective of the resource mobilization plans was to develop a more coherent and predictable approach to mobilizing extrabudgetary resources. The plan included strategic results, key outputs, possible donors and extrabudgetary funding targets. According to the strategy, the Deputy Executive Secretary leads the implementation, while directors lead the efforts for their subprogrammes and the nexus clusters.

42. Table 5 lists extrabudgetary contributions received in 2019 and 2020 for the three subprogrammes covered by the audit. The funding shortfall in 2019 was \$1.2 million and in 2020 the funding shortfall was \$7.2 million.

Table 5: Extrabudgetary contributions for the period 2019 and 2020
(millions of United States dollars)

Division	2019		2020	
	Contributions received	Forecast	Contributions received	Forecast
Environment	12.4	12.2	11.0	17.1
Transport	2.6	4.4	2.0	3.0
Statistics	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.5
Total	15.7	16.9	13.4	20.6
Shortfall		1.2		7.2

43. OIOS noted that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, one notable funding mechanism had been established with which ECE subprogrammes and nexus clusters can engage on behalf of Member States for targeted funding for the region. This was the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. ECE agreed to update the resource mobilization action plans to include information on the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

44. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of ECE for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) Eleanor T. Burns
Director, Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ³ / Important ⁴	C/ O ⁵	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁶
1	ECE should prepare an action plan for the review and endorsement of nexus publications by relevant subprogrammes, sectoral committees, and the Executive Committee to enable timely tracking and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the nexus publications have been reviewed and endorsed by relevant sectoral committees.	31 December 2022
2	ECE should set targets for regional advisers to complete national action plans for their respective programme countries to optimize and tailor ECE support to the specific needs of each Member State	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that regional advisers been completed national action plans for their respective programme countries.	31 December 2022

³ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

⁴ Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

⁵ Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

⁶ Date provided by ECE in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

MEMORANDUM

To: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary-General
Office of Internal Oversight Services

Date : 8 October 2021

From: Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary
Economic Commission for Europe

Ref.: 2021/OES/212

Subject: **Draft report of an audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe (Assignment No. AN2020-720-01)**

1. This is in reply to your memorandum dated 29 September 2021.
2. My team has reviewed the draft report and we would like to propose adding two minor clarifications in paragraph 36 of the report:
 - a. In the first sentence, add “now referred to as the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP)” after “Regional United Nations System for Europe and Central Asia”. For reference, please go to: <https://unsdg.un.org/un-in-action/rcp-europe-and-central-asia?tab=countries-listing>
 - b. In the third sentence, add “in light of the COVID-19 pandemic” after “virtual format”. This would follow the presentation in para. 1 of [ECE/RFSD/2020/2](#).
3. I am pleased to note that the audit acknowledges both the steps taken by ECE to align its programme of work with the 2030 Agenda, and the action framework for responses to the COVID-19 pandemic which continues to guide us.
4. Enclosed is Appendix I completed. I have accepted the two recommendations for implementation by 31 December 2022.
5. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the professionalism of the OIOS audit team. We are very appreciative of the fruitful discussions and the flexibility to conduct this exercise in the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic.

cc: Ms. Eleanor T. Burns, Director Internal Audit Division, OIOS
Ms. Muriette Lawrence-Hume, Chief, Internal Audit Division, OIOS
Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, Deputy Executive Secretary
Mr. Michael Sylver, Director, Programme Management & Support Services Division
Mr. Nicolas Dath-Baron, Officer-in-Charge, Programme Management Unit

Management Response

Audit of mainstreaming of Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the Economic Commission for Europe

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	ECE should prepare an action plan for the review and endorsement of nexus publications by relevant subprogrammes, sectoral committees, and the Executive Committee to enable timely tracking and monitoring of the implementation of recommendations related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.	Important	Yes	Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit	31 December 2022	The Sustainable Development and Gender Unit will coordinate the review of the recommendations from the nexus publications. The recommendations will be put on the agendas and communicated for information to the relevant ECE expert groups that also discuss issues related to the SDGs. The recommendations will also be addressed in the statistics discussions of the annual meeting of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Spring 2022.
2	ECE should set targets for the completion of national action plans by regional advisers for their respective programme countries to optimize and tailor its support to the specific needs of each Member State.	Important	Yes	Deputy Executive Secretary	31 December 2022	The Deputy Executive Secretary will oversee the completion of the national action plans by the regional advisers for their respective programme countries. The national action plans will be turned into meaningful instruments linking the tools proposed by UNECE and the Cooperation Framework of the programme countries.

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.