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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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**68th Commission Session
Concept note and programme outline**

Note by the Secretariat

68th Commission Session
Concept note and programme outline

Background

The future is urban. By 2050 almost three quarters of the world's population will live in urban areas. In the UNECE region, currently a large proportion of the population lives in cities - from less than 50% in Central Asia to more than 75% in Europe and 80% in North America. There is a trend towards urban concentration and agglomeration as well as towards urban sprawl not only in cities experiencing population growth. This provides a tremendous opportunity to strengthen cities as drivers of sustainable development far beyond their borders. But making the most out of this opportunity requires new mechanisms that promote and enable cities to experiment with a wide range of policies, rules, institutions, and technologies with a strong role for the private sector in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in other words: *Smart and Sustainable Cities*.

Cities continue to be leading engines of growth, spearheading much of the economic dynamism that has lifted billions of people out of poverty over the past decades. Since industrialization, people have been flocking to cities to improve their lives, attracted by vast employment, trade and commercial opportunities; education; health and other public services; and social connectedness. With their ability to bring people together, allowing them to interact and explore new ideas, cities have enormous potential to drive innovation and, ultimately, the structural changes to the economy that serves as the basis for sustainable development not only in the cities themselves, but far beyond.

This importance of cities as pools of talent and exchange is likely to grow in the face of rapid changes to how the world economy grows and the challenge of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that technological progress is needed to achieve global prosperity, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. However, new technologies must be green, smart, sustainable, and accessible to all to achieve these goals. Innovative solutions such as clean energy, high performance buildings, innovative housing supply and finance, intelligent and sustainable transportation, green technologies and infrastructure, e-business, e-government and state-of-the-art standards and norms are all essential elements to enable cities to continue to drive sustainable development and become *Smart and Sustainable Cities*.

At the same time, there are of course also many challenges. The rapid growth of cities and the urban population and the changes they bring about have trade-offs, especially in the short term: from growing inequalities to environmental degradation. Ageing as well as the increase in international migration flows in the UNECE region puts pressure on public services in areas such as affordable, adequate and healthy housing, infrastructure,

education and social services. Climate change, air pollution and natural disasters are causing vast economic and social losses and increase the need for resilience. Cities consume most of the world's available energy and contribute much of the world's pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. With the expansion of the knowledge economy and automation, and the need for risk management and investment into skills and institutions, cities must reform and invest in education, training and employment to respond to these new needs. Making cities smart, inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable requires cross-sectoral policy coordination; room for experimentation and peer learning opportunities; addressing the rural-urban migration; and intelligent investment choices that makes the most of resources, land, and human and physical capital.

Working together and developing innovative approaches

Global and international agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Action, the New Urban Agenda, the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing and other key international initiatives establish new policy frameworks which enable cooperation amongst and between different thematic areas and levels of government, requiring also a new understanding of action taken at the urban level.

To respond to the multidimensional challenges and opportunities that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development poses, UNECE has introduced the nexus approach. This allows the organization to bring together the expertise, mechanisms, standards and instruments of the UNECE sub-programmes to develop integrated programmatic activities and create greater synergies among its different areas of sectoral expertise[1]. The nexus area "Smart and Sustainable Cities" builds on UNECE's strengths to address urban development challenges and opportunities, including on transport, energy, economic development, innovation, environment, trade, private sector, standards, data availability, the digital divide, urban planning, and population dynamics.

Intersectoral cooperation and an integrated approach to urban development is also happening at the country level. Governments are addressing urban challenges and opportunities by going beyond city boundaries, involving different line ministries and fostering dialogues between municipal, provincial/regional and national governments; and involving stakeholders, including from private sector, academia and NGOs.

UNECE can play a leading role in further intergovernmental dialogue. Its deep knowledge of the region, its institutions, economic structures, and challenges and opportunities, will help translate the global dialogue into concrete actions and priorities at the regional level. Its strong tradition of intergovernmental cooperation, and its existing mechanisms and networks could serve as a platform for concerted dialogue. Its related expertise in a broad range of relevant policy areas, from urban planning and regulatory cooperation to innovation and public-private partnerships could provide much of the necessary analytical support for such dialogue. A Smart and Sustainable Cities platform, therefore, would

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[1] UNECE has identified four high-impact Nexus areas of its work: (A) Sustainable use and management of natural resources; (B) Sustainable and smart cities (C) Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; (D) Measuring and monitoring SDGs.

strengthen member States ability to create incentives to enable cities to act as engines of structural change and long-term growth in a sustainable and equitable manner through exchange of best practices, peer learning, experimentation and scalability.

Thematic focus

It is proposed to hold the 68th Commission on 9-10 April 2019 under the overall theme "Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers of Sustainable Development/Drivers for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/Drivers for Achieving the SDGs."

The session will consider action taken at different levels of government and across sectors in cooperation with a broad range of stakeholders to address innovative solutions for how cities can become centres of competitiveness, making the most of these opportunities while tackling urban challenges. Issues covered will include promoting innovation and competitiveness, land management, housing, and urban planning issues, transport and traffic related matters, energy efficiency, an aging urban population, alternative financing models for urban development, environmental challenges, urban services and more.

In the high-level segment, discussions will focus on national priorities and good practices related to sustainable cities in the region, UNECE initiatives aimed at supporting governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda, and the impact of relevant UNECE norms, standards and Conventions at the national and regional level. Further, in a roundtable, the session will highlight the importance of cooperation and partnerships in the work on smart sustainable cities, involving a broad range of stakeholders also from civil society, academia, the private sector, and the UN system.

The Commission session will be preceded on 8 April 2019 by a Day of Cities. A roundtable of Mayors from cities in the UNECE region that allows for peer learning on urban issues will be complemented by an information fair that showcases innovative solutions towards smart and sustainable cities in the UNECE region and discuss how UNECE tools, standards and projects can assist the transition towards Smart Sustainable Cities.

Next steps

Member States are invited to endorse the overall theme for the 2019 Commission session as outlined in this document at the 100th session of EXCOM.

On 10 October 2018, the secretariat will convene informal consultations for interested delegations to discuss the agenda for the 2019 Commission session in more detail. As per past practice, the secretariat will table a list of possible draft decisions for consideration and further elaboration by member States. Additional informal consultations will be scheduled as necessary.

Programme elements

8 April 2019 - Day of Cities

The Day of Cities will gather **Mayors from cities across the UNECE region** discussing challenges and presenting success stories implemented in various cities. Areas discussed will mirror the topics to be covered by the Commission Session (see below).

The afternoon session will be dedicated to discussing on UNECE tools, standards and projects to facilitate the transition to Smart, Sustainable and Resilient Cities that drive sustainable structural transformation of the broader economy.

Throughout the day, participants are invited to showcase their work on smart, sustainable and resilient cities in **an information fair** that presents innovative concepts, effective approaches in support of the SDGs at the municipal, national and regional level. Member States are encouraged to display their national strategies and success stories on smart, sustainable and resilient cities. UNECE will inform about the scope and impact of its related programmatic work.

9-10 April – 68th Commission Session

The high-level segment will be held under the theme "Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers of Sustainable Development/Drivers for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/Drivers for Achieving the SDGs".

To set the scene for the discussions of the day, a **key note speech** will provide an overview of the opportunities and challenges in cities in the UNECE region.

The **high-level dialogue** will foster exchange between countries and across sectors. Each country is encouraged to identify the line Ministry best placed to provide information on urban challenges, opportunities and solutions at the national level, focusing on specific actions taken that have yielded significant results. This will result in a variety of Ministries being represented at the session, leading to a true cross sectoral dialogue.

A representative from the Mayors' round table held on the day prior to the Commission session will provide a readout from the discussions and highlight issues for further consideration.

A **roundtable** in the afternoon will be dedicated to the topic "Regional and national best practices and experiences in responding to urban challenges and opportunities and results/ impacts of UNECE cross-sectoral activities". It will focus on practical examples and success stories that demonstrate the benefits of integrated planning and comprehensive solutions for smart, sustainable and resilient cities. These will be brought to the session by a range of

stakeholders, including government representatives, officials of city governments (preferably mayors), international governmental and international and national non-governmental organizations including urban associations, city networks, academia and the private sector.

The roundtable will also discuss results and impacts of UNECE initiatives that foster cooperation across subprogrammes, different parts of governments and build on broad partnerships. Recommendations will focus on good practices and next steps to further enhance this important area of work.

Examples may be taken from the following areas:

- New approaches to public-private partnerships, alternative financing, policies, regulation, institutions, and technologies
- Sustainable transport in cities/ road safety in cities
- Increasing urban resilience to natural and man-made disasters and mitigating/adapting to climate change
- New approaches to reducing the environmental footprint of cities (including urban air quality)
- Sustainable use of land and green areas and public spaces
- Sustainable, energy efficient, affordable and resilient buildings
  Smart, sustainable cities as hubs and drivers of innovation, trade competitiveness and the transition towards a circular economy
- Interoperability of city systems: Harvesting the potential of block chain, internet of things and Artificial Intelligence
- A changing urban population
- Accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of urban decision-making.

The second day of the Commission Session will be dedicated to the general segment that covers recurrent agenda items (including report on the activities of the Executive Committee; issues requiring a decision; election of officers; adoption of the report of the session).

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Time	Agenda item

<div align="center"><u>Day of Cities</u></div>

Monday,
8 April 2019

10:00–13:00	**Mayors Roundtable**
15:00–18:00	**UNECE instruments in support of smart and sustainable cities**
10:00 – 18:00	**Information Fair**

<div align="center"><u>68th Commission</u></div>

Tuesday,
9 April 2019

10:00–10:30	Opening and adoption of the agenda
	High-level segment: **Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers of Sustainable Development** **Drivers for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** **Drivers for Achieving the SDGs**
10:30–13:00	Keynote address Presentations by Ministers/Heads of delegations Presentation on the outcomes of the Day of Cities and the Mayors Roundtable
15:00–18:00	Roundtable: Regional and national solutions to urban challenges and results/ impacts of UNECE cross-sectoral "urban" projects.

Wednesday,
10 April 2019

<div align="center">General segment</div>

10:00–13:00	Report on activities of the Executive Committee
	Other issues calling for decision by the Commission
	Election of officers
	Other business
tbc	Adoption of report of the session