

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
103rd Meeting
Geneva, 1 February 2019

EXCOM/CONCLU/103

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

Meeting of the Executive Committee
1 February 2019

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 103rd meeting was adopted.

Item 2 – Chair’s conclusions from the last meeting.

2. The representative of the United States requested that the phrase “Department of Justice” in paragraph 40 of EXCOM/CONCLU/101 be changed to “Department of Labor”.
3. The conclusions from the 102nd meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/102) were adopted as amended.

Item 3 - Matters relating to the Working Group on Ageing.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Working Group on Ageing

4. The Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Ageing (WGA), Ms. Aina Strand, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of WGA over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to endorse the revised Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Ageing including the change of its name to “Standing Working Group on Ageing”, as contained in the Annex of ECE/EX/2019/L.1, and to transmit these proposed changes to the Commission for consideration at its sixty-eighth session.
5. The representative of the Russian Federation said that population ageing was an increasingly relevant issue and attached great importance to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). He noted that the WGA played a key role in this context and supported interactions with national focal points. He supported efforts to increase awareness about the issues of ageing, the MIPAA and the implementation of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He did not object to the decisions put before EXCOM.
6. The representative of the European Union and its member States said that the European Union provide financial support as well as expert contributions to the WGA. He noted the concrete and useful tools developed by the WGA in 2018 as well as the planned future policy briefs such as the one on informal carers. He recalled that the Active Index Ageing had been developed jointly by the European Commission and UNECE and was pleased to see it expand. He did not object to the decisions put before EXCOM.
7. The representative of Belarus noted the positive cooperation of the WGA with his government. He said that the national focal point had participated at the Policy Seminar on Ageing and the SDGs in November 2018 and that agreement had been reached about the provision of technical assistance to Belarus on a national strategy for supporting the elderly population. He appreciated the WGA’s visit to Minsk in December 2018 to prepare the draft strategy and looked forward to continuing cooperation on this subject and to a second expert mission, potentially in April 2019. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM’s approval.

8. The representative of the United States said including elderly people in sustainable development efforts was essential and aligned with the SDG principle of leaving no one behind. He recalled the previous year's proposal to upgrade the WGA to a sectoral committee, which the United States had opposed due to concerns about resources and potential duplication of work. That upgrade had not been pursued. He said that the current proposal to upgrade to a Standing Working Group was more modest and would align the body's mandate closely to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant global agendas. Noting that the proposed change would be resource neutral, he was pleased to support it. He recalled that the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing met each summer in New York and encouraged the WGA to continue its participation there and to contribute country perspectives from the region.

9. The representative of Switzerland appreciated the work of the WGA in 2018, including the two policy briefs with best practice examples and other tools. He had no objections to the decisions put before EXCOM.

10. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Ageing for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Working Group on Ageing and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

(b) Decisions on matters related to the Working Group on Ageing.

11. The Chair concluded that EXCOM endorses the revised terms of reference of the Working Group on Ageing including the change of its name to "Standing Working Group on Ageing", as contained in document ECE/EX/2019/L.1, and invites the Commission to consider the proposed changes at its sixty-eighth session.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry.

12. The Vice-Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI), Mr. Christophe Dürr, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of COFFI over the past year and its plans for the future. He requested that EXCOM endorse the proposal on the name change of subprogramme 7 from "Forestry and Timber" to "Forests and the Forest Industry" as contained in document ECE/EX/2019/L.1, and to transmit these proposed changes to the Commission for consideration at its sixty-eighth session.

13. The representative of the United States regretted that the American Chair of COFFI could not attend the meeting and thanked the Vice-Chair for introducing the report on his behalf. He supported COFFI's work, especially in relation to the promotion of credible forest data and statistics, the expertise and capacity-building in technical and scientific areas and the organization of national and regional policy dialogues. He appreciated the transparency, effectiveness and ongoing collaboration of COFFI. He did not object to the decisions put before EXCOM.

14. The representative of the Russian Federation supported UNECE's work in sustainable forest management and favoured strengthening the role of the Committee, including in the context of a legally binding agreement on forests in the pan-European region. He appreciated the partnership between UNECE and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and supported the efforts to implement the Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work. He supported the name change of the subprogramme. Referring to the rules of procedure adopted by COFFI at its session in November 2018, he said that the ninth paragraph thereof, on the participation in COFFI of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector, academia and other entities that do not enjoy consultative status at ECOSOC, was not in line with the rules of procedure of the Commission, nor with existing guidelines, and did not correspond to existing practice. The paragraph provided for the participation of any interested organization that has registered with the secretariat. However, the guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies stated that NGOs, including those enjoying consultative status at ECOSOC, needed to be invited by the Commission. He inquired as to the procedures to follow to amend the above-mentioned paragraph.

15. The representative of the European Union and its member States supported the work of COFFI and the joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section and appreciated their outputs. He highlighted tools such as the Forest Products Annual Market Review for 2017-2018 and the upcoming Guidelines on Green Jobs in the Forest Sector and took note of the technical cooperation activities carried out. He was pleased to see that important commitments on reforestation had been made by various member States as a result of the activities of COFFI. He thanked Canada for hosting the November 2018 session of COFFI. He supported the decisions put before EXCOM and wished COFFI success.

16. The representative of the Netherlands complimented the government of Canada, the bureau of COFFI and the secretariat for the organization of the November 2018 session of COFFI. He noted that the meeting's agenda had been timely and future-focused, addressing topics such as innovative wood construction in the framework of bioeconomy and forests and the circular economy. He thought these were factors that could significantly alter wood markets and forest resource management in the region. As a sign of the importance attached to this issue, the Netherlands had contributed 60,000 USD to the European Forest Sector Outlook Study which was part of the ECE/FAO programme of work.

17. The representative of Switzerland expressed support for COFFI and the joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, taking note of tools such as the Forest Products Annual Market Review for 2017-2018 and the upcoming Guidelines on Green Jobs in the Forest Sector and took note of the technical cooperation activities carried out in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

18. The representative of Kazakhstan appreciated the close cooperation between her government, COFFI and the joint section, and thanked the latter for support in defining feasible commitments to forest landscape restoration. Kazakhstan had hosted, in June 2018, a Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This event had led to pledges by the countries of the subregion to restore over 2.5 million hectares of forest landscape by 2030. The meeting also adopted the Astana Resolution, further committing the region to go beyond 2.5 million ha, and strengthen partnerships and regional cooperation to this end. The event had been made possible by financial contributions from Germany and jointly implemented by the Kazakh government and the joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber section, with support from the International Union for

the Conservation of Nature and the World Agroforestry Centre. She noted that an extrabudgetary project with the goal of following up on the Astana commitments was tabled under Item 8. She recalled that Kazakhstan had been one of the beneficiaries of the UN Development Account project “Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, which would conclude with a project summit in Kyrgyzstan in May 2019. She also noted that Kazakhstan would be supported in updating and finalizing its national forestry strategy. She did not object to the decisions put before EXCOM.

19. In response to the representative of the Russian Federation, the Secretary of the Commission said UNECE was committed to upholding the procedural guidance provided by member States for UNECE bodies. With regard to the COFFI Rules of Procedure (ECE/TIM/2018/2), she noted that paragraph 9 did not provide any details on the modalities of the engagement of observers in COFFI. Further guidance could be found elsewhere in the document, namely in paragraph 1 of the same rules of procedure, which specifies:

“The draft rules of procedure in this document have been prepared in accordance with the Guidelines on Procedures and Practices for ECE bodies adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe (E/2013/37-E/ECE/1464, annex III, appendix III). In any area not covered in this document, the Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe will be used and, where applicable, the Rules of Procedure of the Economic and Social Council, and taking into account the Guidelines on Procedure and Practices for ECE bodies mutatis mutandis.”

She then referred to paragraph 6 of the Guidelines on Procedures and Practices for ECE bodies, which specifies:

“Officially designated representatives and other participants to all bodies of the ECE should be registered by the secretariat in the respective lists of participants which will be communicated to the Permanent Representations.”

20. The representative of the Russian Federation said he would consider these explanations and might revert with further comments about his position at a later stage. He felt that the above-mentioned paragraph 9 was sufficiently specific and that the other documents mentioned by the Secretary of the Commission might not be referred to when interpreting it. He did not wish to continue discussing the topic at EXCOM, in particular as no relevant decision was currently expected from EXCOM. He said he would continue to consult with the secretariat and stood ready to discuss the issue further with other partners.

21. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Vice-Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Committee and being kept aware of future directions of its work. Interested delegations will continue their review of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry, as contained in document E/TIM/2018/2.

(b) Decisions on matters related to the Committee on Housing and Land Management.

22. The Chair concluded that EXCOM endorses the proposal on the name change of subprogramme 7 from “Forestry and Timber” to “Forests and the Forest Industry” as contained in document ECE/EX/2019/L.1, and invites the Commission to consider the name change of subprogramme 7 at its sixty-eighth session.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 5 - Matters relating to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes

23. On behalf of the Chair of the Water Convention, the representative of Kazakhstan informed EXCOM about the outcomes of the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, held in Astana from 10 to 12 October 2018. She mentioned in particular the increasing interest in the Convention, including from countries outside the UNECE region, and the decision taken to request “the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work”.

24. The Executive Secretary appreciated the broad interest in the Convention and commended Member States for expressions of political will in support of the instrument. She said the Convention’s secretariat worked tirelessly to meet growing demands, but could no longer support the increasing interest brought about by the global opening of the Convention. She recalled that the secretariat consisted of only two regular budget staff (one P3 and one P4) and fifteen staff in total, which was insufficient to meet the increased workload, and would become even more so should the expected number of accessions from outside the region materialize. She welcomed the above-mentioned request of the Meeting of the Parties. Noting that the Convention had its own governance architecture and did not report to EXCOM, she said that UNECE that administered the Convention’s secretariat, had the obligation to transmit decisions that may have financial implications to UN Headquarters for further consideration. She invited EXCOM to submit the draft decision on additional resources contained in informal document 2019/3 to the Commission for consideration, and then onwards to ECOSOC. This would not be a pronouncement on the merit of the request, which would be addressed in New York during budget discussions.

25. The representative of Azerbaijan recalled previous statements made by Azerbaijan including the statement made at the 102nd EXCOM meeting on the importance that Azerbaijan attached to the Water Convention. Being a downstream country in terms of freshwater reserves, Azerbaijan continued to face challenges related to the preservation and provision of freshwater, and considered the Convention an important tool for preserving scarce resources, as well as for implementing the relevant SDGs. She hoped to continue the close cooperation in the framework of the Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health to which Azerbaijan is also Party. She believed that the tools provided under the Convention would be substantially more efficient when all neighboring and riparian States acceded to the Convention. Regretting the limitation that the Secretariat is facing in delivering on its mandate due to the lack of funding, she supported the draft decision and looked forward to its adoption by the Commission and subsequent positive consideration at ECOSOC.

26. The representative of the Russian Federation welcomed the global nature of the Water Convention, noted the increased need for secretariat support, and did not object to the draft decision.

27. The representative of Switzerland believed the Water Convention was key for sustainable development and the prevention of conflicts, and fully supported the transmission of the draft decision to the Commission.

28. The representative of the European Union and its member States agreed with the representative of Switzerland. The European Union was Party to the Convention and found it to be an important and useful instrument. He supported the transmission of the draft decision to the Commission.

29. The representative of France supported the transmission of the draft decision to the Commission and also expressed support for the Convention and its global opening.

30. The representative of Hungary aligned with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and its member States. He thanked Kazakhstan for hosting the recent Meeting of the Parties, which had been a successful event, including from the perspective of the Convention's global opening. As the former Chair and current Vice-Chair of the Convention, Hungary offered its support to the current Kazakh chairmanship.

31. The representative of Romania aligned with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and its member States. She supported the transmission of the draft decision to the Commission and also expressed support for the Convention and its global opening, noting that a unified approach to water management was important for human security. She thanked Kazakhstan for hosting the Meeting of the Parties.

32. The Chair expressed his satisfaction at the broad support for the draft decision contained in informal document 2019/3. He thought the Water Convention was a strong example of UNECE's work being in high demand within and outside the region, and was an important tool for the implementation of the SDGs and the prevention of conflicts.

33. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the representative of the Chair of the UNECE Water Convention for the briefing on the outcomes of the 8th Meeting of the Parties to the Convention. EXCOM takes note of the request of the Meeting of the Parties for "the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work". EXCOM decides to submit the related draft decision contained in informal document 2019/3 to the sixty-eighth session of the Commission for consideration under agenda item 6 "Other issues calling for decision by the Commission".

Item 6 - 2019 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development

34. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the Deputy Secretary-General would deliver remarks at the opening of the Regional Forum. She encouraged delegations to complete their registration and hoped for strong participation from capitals, both high-level representatives as well as experts for the peer learning round tables. She also encouraged member States to share concrete case studies and experiences related to the implementation of

the SDGs under in-depth review in 2019 (4, 8, 10, 13, and 16). UNECE was working in close partnership with 17 UN agencies from the region on the preparations. Noting that strong interest had been expressed in the side events, she encouraged delegations wishing to organize one to contact the secretariat as soon as possible. She also informed EXCOM that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/140 on “Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme would be holding a Regional Consultation on the Plan of Action to integrate volunteerism into the 2030 Agenda as a pre-event of the Regional Forum on 21 March 2019. The event would feature a presentation of the Regional Synthesis Report on the Situation of Volunteerism. She encouraged active participation in this regional consultation.

35. The representative of the Russian Federation thanked the secretariat for the work done on the preparations and the regular updates. He said the Russian Federation intended to organize a side event and would contact the secretariat soon.

36. The representative of Switzerland thanked the secretariat for the work done on the preparations and the regular updates. He said side events were a unique opportunity to showcase advances towards SDG implementation by countries, international organizations and the civil society. Together with the International Labour Organization, UN Women and OECD, Switzerland would organize a side event on equal pay for work of equal value, where a multi-stakeholder Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) working to achieve SDGs 5 and 8 would be launched in the region. Switzerland is actually chairing the EPIC steering committee. Switzerland was also exploring the possibility of a second side event.

37. The representative of the European Union and its member States thanked the secretariat for the work done on the preparations and the regular updates.

38. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the status of preparations for the 2019 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development. EXCOM encourages delegations to facilitate high level attendance from their capitals at the event and to share concrete case studies and experiences related to the implementation of the SDGs under in-depth review in 2019.

Item 7 - Preparations for the 2019 Commission Session

39. The Executive Secretary introduced informal documents 2019/4, containing draft decisions to be submitted to the Commission for consideration at its sixty-eighth session, and informal document 2018/7 containing the draft high-level statement for adoption by the Commission. She encouraged delegations to complete their registration and hoped for strong participation from capitals. UNECE had reached out to the ECOSOC Presidency and hoped to receive confirmation of the latter’s participation. Advance copies of the meeting documentation were available on the UNECE website, non-English versions were pending translation. The secretariat was refining the roundtable on “Regional and national solutions towards smart sustainable cities and the impact of UNECE instruments”, which would focus on the following thematic areas:

- i. Measuring performance in the transition to becoming a smart sustainable city
- ii. Towards the Circular Economy: Innovation Policies for Smart Cities
- iii. Increased road safety and sustainable transport in cities
- iv. Reducing the environmental footprint of cities

She further informed EXCOM that around 20 cities had confirmed their participation in the Day of Cities on 8 April 2019, with more having expressed interest, and hoped delegations would reach out to potential participants.

40. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the submission of the draft decisions and the draft high-level statement to the Commission session. He appreciated the flexibility of member States during the drafting of the statement.

41. The representative of the Switzerland thanked the secretariat for the work done on the preparations and the regular updates. He supported the high-level statement. He said Switzerland was interested in supporting the engagement of cities in the Day of Cities.

42. The Chair recalled that the Commission would elect its new Bureau at its upcoming session, and encouraged interested delegations to send an official letter to submit their candidacy by 1 March 2019. He recalled the informal practice of a geographically diverse Bureau composition consisting of one member State from the western part of the UNECE region, one from the eastern part and one from the other parts. He concluded that EXCOM decides to submit the draft decisions contained in informal document 2019/4 to the Commission for consideration at its sixty-eighth session under agenda item 6 “Other issues calling for decision by the Commission.” EXCOM decides to forward the draft high-level statement contained in informal document 2019/7 to the Commission for consideration at its sixty-eighth session under agenda item 4 “consideration of the high-level statement”.

Item 8 - Important new developments: briefing by the Executive Secretary

43. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that UNECE was undergoing an audit by the Board of Auditors (BoA). The Comptroller General of India had appointed by the General Assembly to the UN Board of Auditors in July 2018, and the team currently auditing UNECE was under his authority. The duration of the audit would be from 21 January to 8 February 2019. The audit focused on the 2018 financial period, but requests had also been made related to prior periods. As per the mandate of the BoA, auditors could proceed to such detailed examination and verification as they decided. Questions concerned compliance with the UN rules and regulations, compliance of plans and mandates against implementation and performance (programmatic and financial implementation). The final outcome of the audit would be included in the financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2018 and the Report of the Board of Auditors Volume I, to be issued during the summer 2019 and presented to the General Assembly in its 74th session. The Fifth Committee of the General Assembly would look at this document alongside the 2020 Proposed Programme Budget.

44. The Executive Secretary updated EXCOM on the UN Development System (UNDS) reform. The second phase of the review of the UNDS at the regional level was about to start. An internal review team (IRT) would be constituted with all 5 Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions and the Principals of 7-9 (7 big, 2 small) agencies, funds and programmes. All regional assets of the UN system would be considered. The Secretary-General would identify options, on a region-by-region basis, for the longer term reprofiling and restructuring of those regional assets. The Secretary-General’s recommendations would be presented to ECOSOC in May 2019 as part of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review report. Some of the key questions to be considered in the review were as follows:

- i. What are the capacities of the regional UN system for supporting member States with SDG implementation?
- ii. How are capacities managed and how can their use be optimized for the benefit of member States?
- iii. How to better align the work of the UNDs at global, regional and country levels?
- iv. What are the options for adapting the current UNDS institutional architecture for better results?

The IRT would hold likely hold its first meeting in late February in New York. The review would combine desk reviews with surveys and interviews with regional UN entities and key clients, including member States. The key findings would go to the QCPR report by the middle of April 2019. She stated that she would keep EXCOM appraised of further developments.

45. The Executive Secretary recalled that UNECE was operationalizing the “nexus” approach to align its work with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and enhance the impact of its efforts. Cross-divisional teams had been created for each nexus area as a flexible arrangement to strengthen established synergies and complementarities among UNECE sub-programmes and identify opportunities for possible new joint or coordinated activities. These activities might include joint projects, advocacy events, and through the extrabudgetary project tabled under Item 9 for EXCOM’s approval, the launch of one flagship publication for each nexus. These publications would contain an in-depth substantive analysis of the nexus areas as applied specifically to the UNECE region. The cross-divisional teams would next draft their work programme and clarify their working methods, within existing mandates.

46. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following recent meetings:

- i. 29-31 January, Geneva: 24th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy

47. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events:

- i. 5-7 February, Geneva: Intermediary session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention
- ii. 19-22 February, Geneva: 81st session of the Inland Transport Committee

Item 8 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

48. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal documents 2019/5 and 2019/6.

Item 9 – Other business

49. The Chair informed EXCOM that the next meeting would be held on 11 March 2019.