



Economic Commission for Europe**Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards****Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards****Seventy-sixth session**

Geneva, 15—17 November 2021

Item 9 of the provisional agenda

Discussion on new areas of work**under the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards
in support of sustainable development and circular economy****Circular economy and the sustainable use of natural
resources *****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

At its sixty-ninth session the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) committed to step up efforts to promote circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources, by mainstreaming circularity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes as appropriate.

The Commission further requested the relevant Sectoral Committees and bodies reporting directly to the Executive Committee, and their subsidiaries, to consider how to enhance the impact of relevant existing ECE instruments, in order to foster circular and more resource efficient approaches, including by proposing ways to identify, assess and fill gaps in governance and good practices (Decision B (69) Circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources, contained in document E/ECE/1497).

Under this agenda item, member States are invited to discuss how the deliverables of the Working Party can contribute to promoting circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources, and to explore associated themes which may be taken into consideration by the Working Party in response to the Commission decision.

This document is submitted according to ECE/CTCS/2019/10 section IV, ECE/CTCS/2019/2 decision 2019-8.6, and A/75/6 (Sect.20) and supplementary information.

* Submitted on the above date to allow for consultations with member States.

I. Introduction

1. At the sixty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Europe, held on 20–21 April 2021 under the theme *Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region*, member States decided to promote circular economy transition and the sustainable use of natural resources, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through mainstreaming circularity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes, as appropriate.
2. The Commission emphasized the strength of ECE as a platform for inclusive dialogue, which can help overcome normative and governance gaps and help to achieve double digit circularity. Currently less than 10 per cent of global economic activity is circular. Progress will require a deep rethinking of production and consumption patterns in all sectors, in line with SDG 12.
3. Through its High-level statement, member States committed to step up efforts to promote circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources by mainstreaming circularity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes as appropriate (decision A (69), paragraph 2).
4. Through its decision B (69) on circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources, the Commission requested the relevant Sectoral Committees and bodies reporting directly to the Executive Committee, and their subsidiaries, to consider how to enhance the impact of relevant existing ECE instruments, in order to foster circular and more resource efficient approaches, including by proposing ways to identify, assess and fill gaps in governance and good practices (decision B (69), paragraph 10, E/2021/37–E/ECE/1494).
5. The Commission invited its subsidiary bodies to replicate and scale up existing approaches that facilitate broad and effective use of the appropriate instruments, including through capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities, and to consider developing proposals in their respective programmes of work, including possible collaboration across subprogrammes, for impactful and measurable solutions that promote a circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources and that can facilitate attaining the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (decision B (69), paragraphs 11–12, E/2021/37–E/ECE/1494).
6. The Commission further requested that the subsidiary bodies implement this decision without affecting their core mandate and activities carried out under each sectoral committee, and subject to available resources (decision B (69), paragraph 13, E/2021/37–E/ECE/1494).
7. It further pointed out that ECE should consider the regulatory gaps that currently prevent faster development of more circular and resource-efficient economies with a view to addressing them, as appropriate (decision A (69), paragraphs 3 and 5).

II. Questions for discussion

8. In line with the decision B (69), the Working Party is invited to consider how to enhance the impact of the instruments under its purview, in order to foster circular and more resource efficient approaches. As outlined in decision B (69) this may include options for replicating and scaling up existing approaches that facilitate broad and effective use of the appropriate instruments, including through capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities. This may also include developing proposals in the respective programmes of work, including possible collaboration across subprogrammes, for impactful and measurable solutions that promote a circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources and that can facilitate attaining the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
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