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Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

114th session

Geneva, 6-10 November 2023
Item 8 of the provisional agenda
Programme of work

Efficiency and methods of work of the Working Party

Note by the Secretariat*

Introduction

1. During its eighty-fifth session, the Inland Transport Committee, decided to proceed with the review of its Working Parties' mandates in the course of 2023. See paragraph 18 of ECE/TRANS/328.
2. The review of Working Parties' mandates by their parent sectoral committees is in line with the outcomes of the 2005 reform of ECE and the ensuing guidelines for the establishment and functioning of working parties within ECE (ECE/EX/1).
3. The review process will be based on a number of good principles or practices one of these being resource efficiency. In this respect, Chairs of the Working Parties are requested to provide inputs to the Inland Transport Committee to identify possible ways of improving efficiency and methods of work.
4. In this context, the Working Party may wish to review, update as necessary and reaffirm its commitment to the working methods it has already adopted as regards its calendar of sessions and its rules for documentation.
5. The following information was already presented at the 113th session in informal document INF.19. At that time, the Working Party wished to resume discussions on its calendar of sessions and its rules for documentation at the 114th session and requested the secretariat to submit informal document INF.19 as an official document.

Session planning and organisation

Rules concerning the agenda for the last session of an amendment period

6. At the 113th session, the Working Party confirmed that the agenda for the last sessions of the biennial periods (November sessions of odd-numbered years) could be extended to new proposals for amendments, as has been done in previous years. In particular, this made

* A/77/6 (Sect. 20), table 20.6



it possible to take advantage of the time freed up by the fact that the documents adopted by the Joint Meeting concerning the provisions common to the three inland transport modes were, in general, no longer discussed again within the Working Party in order to focus on new provisions specific to road transport. See ECE/TRANS/WP.15/262, paragraph 11.

Proposal 1

7. Based on this decision, the Working Party may wish to adopt the following revised rules concerning the agenda for the last session of an amendment period in place of the rules adopted at its sixty-fourth session (TRANS/WP.15/153).

“At the last (November) session of an amendment period, WP.15 shall consider the texts of all amendments adopted at previous meetings of WP.15 and the Joint Meeting.

WP.15 may also consider new proposals for amendments at this session if time allows. In this case, priority should be given to new documents which:

- Relate to modifications of the amended text
- Bring the Annexes into line with other international agreements concerning the transport of dangerous goods.”

Number and calendar of sessions

8. The Working Party may wish to reconsider its current number and calendar of sessions in the light of current workload and foreseen developments of ADR and taking into account the following information.

9. In the last two years the Working Party has not used all the meeting days allocated to it. In the past, the secretariat had already invited the Working Party to explore the possibility of reducing the length of its sessions or changing the calendar of meetings in order to decrease the number of meetings allotted to it (see ECE/TRANS/WP.15/2013/6).

10. The initial proposal in ECE/TRANS/WP.15/2013/6 was to replace the current calendar of meetings (four sessions per biennium) with a new calendar comprising only three sessions per biennium, organized as follows:

Even years (n): A session in May, in which some corrections to the list of amendments for entry into force on 1 January of the following year (n + 1) may still be adopted, if necessary, and new amendments that will enter into force on 1 January of year n + 3 are discussed.

Odd years (n + 1): A session in May and a session in late October – early November. This second session is the last in which amendments for entry into force on 1 January of the following odd year (n + 3) may, in theory, be adopted.

11. At that time, the majority of delegations who had spoken had confirmed that, in view of the developments envisaged in the Working Party, for example the revision of Part 9 of ADR, the incorporation of new intelligent transport systems and the organizing of information exchanges between the Contracting Parties to ADR, it was necessary to maintain the number of meetings.

12. Since 2010, the Working Party has agreed to reduce its second sessions in odd years to 8 meetings (4 days).

13. During the last two years, it appeared that only 15.5 days were used by the Working Party (31 meetings) instead of the 19 scheduled (38 meetings). Note also that, in 2021 and 2022, the length of each meeting was reduced to 2 hours instead of 3 because of the hybrid format.

14. The fact that the Working Party does not use all the resources allocated to it could have an impact on the budget dedicated to the Working Party in the future.

Proposal 2

15. Considering the above information, the Working Party may wish to reconsider the proposal in paragraph 10.

Documentation

16. The Working Party may wish to review, update as necessary and reaffirm its commitment to the rules for documentation it has adopted.

17. At its sixty-fourth session, the Working Party has adopted rules concerning the documentation to be submitted to its future sessions. These rules have been updated and reproduced in the Annex of the Working Party's Rules of Procedure (ECE/TRANS/WP.15/190/Add.1).

Official documents

18. The rules for the submission of official documents are well followed by the Working Party's participants. They could be updated to take into account the recent decision of the Working Party to invite delegations, when submitting proposals, to note in the justification part any interlinkage there might be with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the circular economy.

19. To this end, the secretariat identified some SDGs and their related targets which are particularly relevant for the work of the Working Party. This information is published on the Economic Commission for Europe's website at <https://unece.org/transport/dangerous-goods/unece-bodies-dealing-transport-dangerous-goods>.

Proposal 3

20. In the Rules of Procedure in ECE/TRANS/WP.15/190/Add.1, in Annex (Rules concerning documents to be submitted to the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods), in paragraph 4, after the line for "Enforceability", add the following new line:

"Circular economy, sustainable use of natural resources and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Could the proposed amendments have an impact on the transition to circular economy? Could the proposed amendments help to achieve sustainable management and use of natural resources? How the proposed amendments could contribute to achieve some of the SDGs and their related targets in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?"

Informal documents

21. The rules for the submission of informal documents are as follows:

Informal document may be submitted for consideration at a session provided:

- (a) That they contain specific commentaries or additional information concerning a new document included in the provisional agenda and that it has not therefore been possible to submit them in time;
- (b) That they are submitted solely for information purposes and require no decision from the Working Party;
- (c) That they are intended to correct flagrant errors in existing texts;
- (d) That they are intended to clarify the interpretation of existing texts; or
- (e) That they contain the report of an informal working group mentioned in the provisional agenda.

22. Since biennium 2012-2013, the number of documents to be considered per session has remained low and it appears that decisions on amendments or interpretation issues are sometimes based on informal documents.

23. This makes it difficult for the secretariat and the Bureau to plan the sessions and this could have an impact on the budget allocated to the Working Party in the future since the number of parliamentary documents issued is used by Member States to evaluate programme performance of the ECE subprogrammes.

24. Furthermore, most informal documents are available in English only which does not facilitate inclusive deliberations. They are also often submitted late which does not allow participants to conduct national consultations before discussion.

Proposal 4

25. The Working Party may wish to reconfirm the rules for the submission of informal documents in ECE/TRANS/WP.15/190/Add.1 and invite delegations to favour submissions in official documents whenever possible.
