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Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships

Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships

Seventh session

Geneva, 30 November and 1 December 2023

Report of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships on its seventh session

I. Attendance

1. The Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) held its seventh session on 30 November – 1 December 2023. Over 200 participants attended the meeting. The session was attended by delegates from Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
2. Delegates from Algeria, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Haiti, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Senegal and Zambia, participated as observers.
3. Representatives of the European Union also participated in the session.
4. The following specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF).
5. Representatives from non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, academic institutions and independent experts participated in the session as observers.

II. Opening of the session

6. The Executive Secretary of ECE, Ms. Tatiana Molcean, opened the session highlighting the importance of infrastructure for social and economic development, especially in the context of post-disaster and post-war reconstruction. She praised the

Working Party – the only intergovernmental body in the United Nations system dedicated to sustainable PPPs and infrastructure finance – for developing guidelines for policy makers on how to accelerate PPP projects in these situations, with practical recommendations and alignment with the SDGs. In particular, she noted that these guidelines contain key policy recommendations for embedding circular economy principles and harnessing digital transformation – the two cross-cutting themes prioritised by ECE member States at the 69th and 70th Commission sessions.

7. She also commended the Working Party for identifying the ECE PPP and Infrastructure Evaluation and Rating System (PIERS) as an instrument for aligning reconstruction projects with the SDGs and remarked that the PIERS methodology has become a useful tool for many countries in a very short time. The PIERS methodology has been used by more than 35 countries in over 200 projects, ranging from large-scale infrastructure to small-scale community projects. Nevertheless, to become a flagship UN tool, she called for its further dissemination, both within and beyond the ECE region. Finally, she stressed the need to integrate climate resilience and adaptation into PPP and infrastructure projects and welcomed the Working Party’s initiative to develop practical guidelines for policy makers on climate resilient infrastructure.

III. Adoption of the agenda (Agenda item 1)

Documentation:

Annotated provisional agenda for the seventh session (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/1).

Decision 2023 – 1

The Working Party adopted the provisional agenda for its seventh session.

IV. Policy discussion:¹ Accelerating digital and green transformations and promoting women’s empowerment and stakeholder engagement in Public-Private Partnerships and infrastructure projects in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda item 2)

8. In his keynote address, H.E. Mr. Sharaf Sheralizoda, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tajikistan, expressed his gratitude to ECE for its PPP support to his country in the past ten years. In view of the triple planetary crisis, he emphasised the importance of a transformative change and strategy towards a green economy to achieve the SDGs. He also pointed out the advantages of the green transition for low and middle-income countries, especially for Tajikistan, which has a huge potential to produce and export renewable energy, and to develop organic agriculture. He also mentioned the adoption by Tajikistan of a green economy strategy for the period up to 2037. Finally, he praised the PIERS methodology as a unique tool to evaluate the sustainability of PPP and infrastructure projects and requested ECE support to evaluate a number of projects in Tajikistan using the PIERS methodology.

9. The Chairperson’s summary of three expert panel discussions is annexed to the report.

10. The Chairperson, Mr. George Katapodis (Greece), introducing the PIERS online platform, stated that the new user-friendly online version of the PIERS methodology was developed by the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) in line

¹ The policy discussion consisted of three expert panel discussions focused on the ECE PPPs for the SDGs approach to sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction, digital and transformations, women’s empowerment and stakeholder engagement.

with UN information security requirements and cybersecurity protocols. Furthermore, the PIERS online platform is hosted within the UN secure servers at the UN Information and Communication Technology Facility (UNICTF) in Valencia, Spain. He stressed that users can be assured that the data and information are treated in accordance with UN rules and regulations, and most importantly, there is no third-party involvement in storing or managing the data.

11. The secretariat presented the PIERS online platform, a web-based tool that enables users to self-assess the sustainability of their PPP and infrastructure projects. The online platform allows users to evaluate their projects using the PIERS indicators and generate reports with results of their assessments. The platform is designed to be user-friendly and interactive, with features such as an integrated user's guide, multi-language support, user account creation and management, and generation of qualitative feedback on the strengths and areas for improvements of projects based on their assessments. The PIERS online platform aims to help users apply the PIERS methodology on their projects, as well as to further disseminate its use in the ECE region and beyond.

12. The panellists and participants appreciated the very valuable and impactful work undertaken by ECE in promoting PPPs for the SDGs. They also emphasised the relevance of supporting the cross-cutting theme of the 70th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (April 2023) –digital and green transformations for sustainable development in ECE member States – and commended ECE for its timely work on topics of great policy relevance, including economic recovery and reconstruction, women's empowerment and stakeholder engagement.

13. The participants also appreciated the new PIERS online platform launched by the secretariat.

14. The Working Party thanked the panellists and participants for the productive exchange of experiences and their contributions to the discussion.

V. Review of the work since the sixth session of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships on 1-2 December 2022 (Agenda item 3)

Development of normative and policy documents: International PPP Standards, Guidelines, Guiding Principles, Declarations, and Recommendations

Documentation:

Standard on a Zero Tolerance Approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/3);

Declaration on a Zero Tolerance Approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/4);

Putting the Guiding Principles in Public-Private Partnerships in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into practice (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/5);

Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Railway (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/6);

Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Renewable Energy (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/7);

Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Roads (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/8);

Involving reliable and independent experts to develop Public-Private Partnerships in support of the Sustainable Development Goals in low and middle-income countries (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/9);

Guidelines on delivering Public-Private Partnerships projects for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/10); and

Annual summary report of Bureau decisions since the sixth session of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships on 1-2 December 2022 (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/INF.1).

A. Guidelines on delivering Public-Private Partnerships projects for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction in support of the Sustainable Development Goals

15. The Chairperson recalled the Working Party's decision (2022 – 5.2) at its last session to launch work on five new workstreams in 2023, including work on a practical guide on the pros and cons of simplifying and accelerating the delivery of PPP projects for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction in support of the SDGs. The Chairperson informed the delegates that the guidelines have been finalised and are contained in document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/10 submitted by the Bureau to the Working Party with a recommendation to endorse them.

16. The guidelines were introduced by Mr. Syed Zaidi, who led a multidisciplinary drafting team set up by the secretariat. He explained that there is an understandable push in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts to bring communities back together by rebuilding damaged physical infrastructure at a considerable pace. He added that the guidelines:

(a) Aim to ensure that policy makers are equipped with the right insights to decision making and streamline PPP projects;

(b) Provide an overview of the strategies, tools, and nuances to support the acceleration of PPP projects delivery; and

(c) Streamline PPP projects without compromising the broader goal of rebuilding economies and societies in alignment with the SDGs.

17. The practical guide is divided into four core chapters, with ten key policy recommendations for governments to consider in plans to simplify and accelerate PPP project delivery, namely:

(i). Use the PIERS methodology to evaluate outcomes;

(ii). Embed circular economy principles;

(iii). Prioritise projects that address essential services and needs;

(iv). Prioritise projects that contribute to economic recovery and job creation;

(v). Engage with communities and stakeholders in the planning process;

(vi). Take a programmatic approach to the PPP lifecycle;

(vii). Use innovative methods of funding and financing;

(viii). Create policies and regulations that support flexibility and address specific risks;

(ix). Put in place appropriate governance for rapid decision making; and

(x). Use innovative methods of project delivery.

18. The Chairperson thanked Mr. Zaidi for his presentation and reminded delegates that all drafting team members, including its leader, provided their time and expertise towards this exercise on a pro bono basis and no financial resources were allocated to prepare this

guide. All meetings of the drafting team, which were numerous over several months, were conducted online.

19. The Chairperson remarked how these guidelines and the debate under agenda item 2 touched upon the cross-cutting themes of both the 69th and the 70th sessions of the Commission. For example, among the key success factors for project delivery, the guide highlights how digital tools can play a transformative role and accelerate the delivery of PPPs. In addition, one of the key recommendations encourages circular economy principles. He added that while the Working Party continues to contribute to the cross-cutting theme of the 69th Commission session – to promote the circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources – beyond the two practical guides that it produced in 2022, it is already contributing to the theme of the 70th Commission session – namely, to promote digital and green transformations in support of sustainable development.

20. The Chairperson expressed his appreciation to the drafting team leader, Mr, Syed Zaidi, the experts, KPMG and the secretariat for their contribution to the development of the guidelines.

Decision 2023 – 3.1

The Working Party:

1. Welcomed the debate that provided informative context for member States in response to the cross-cutting theme of the 70th Commission session where member States requested ECE to promote digital and green transformations in support of sustainable development (Decision B (70)); and
2. Noted with appreciation the Working Party’s contribution to promoting circular economy in PPPs and infrastructure in response to the 69th Commission session that was devoted to the circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources, where member States requested ECE to promote circular economy transition and sustainable use of natural resources (Decisions 69A and 69B).

Decision 2023 – 3.2

The Working Party:

1. Endorsed the Guidelines on delivering PPP projects for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction in support of the SDGs (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/10);
2. Expressed its appreciation to the drafting team leader and the international experts involved in the preparation of the Guidelines; and
3. Requested the secretariat to disseminate the Guidelines and use them in future capacity-building activities and policy advisory work.

B. ECE publication “Standard on PPP/Concession Legal Framework in support of the SDGs and its Accompanying Guide”

21. The Chairperson recalled that at its last session, the Working Party endorsed the Standard on PPP/Concession Legal Framework in support of the SDGs (ECE/CECI/PPP/WP/2022/5) and requested the Bureau to finalise the accompanying guide to the Standard. The Standard was subsequently approved by the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (the Committee) at its last session in May-June 2023. The Committee also requested the publication of the Standard and recommended its voluntary use in member States.

22. The Chairperson added that the Standard and its accompanying guide were available in a UN publication (ECE/CECI/35), which was launched at a reception for Working Party

delegates on 30 November 2023. The publication is available in English,² and will be translated in French and Russian.

23. The Chairperson expressed his appreciation to:

(a) The member States for their active involvement in the development of the Standard;

(b) The Bureau members and Bureau observers for their hard and diligent work over many years;

(c) The numerous international experts and organisations – some of whom made brief interventions on their experience contributing to this document, including and Mr. Marc Frilet and Mr. Ziad Hayek – whose names are listed in the acknowledgement section of the publication; and

(d) The secretariat for their facilitating role and by providing very useful guidance and expertise.

Decision 2023 – 3.3

The Working Party

1. Took note with appreciation of the UN publication “Standard PPP/Concession Legal Framework in support of the SDGs and its Accompanying Guide” (ECE/CECI/35) launched at a reception hosted by the Chairperson on 30 November 2023;
2. Thanked the Bureau, the secretariat, the international experts and organisations involved in its preparation for their contributions; and
3. Requested the secretariat to disseminate the Standard and use it in future capacity-building activities and policy advisory work.

C. Reissued documents in line with the decision 2022 – 4b.2³ of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships

24. The Chairperson recalled the Committee decision at its fifteenth session in May 2022 to change the name to “PPPs for the SDGs”, and to progressively reissue the documents endorsed and adopted by the Committee and the Working Party to reflect this change within the existing document quota for the Economic Cooperation and Integration subprogramme.

25. The Chairperson informed the Working Party that the three core documents identified by the Committee have been reissued and submitted to either the Working Party or the Committee at its last sessions respectively.

26. The Chairperson also informed the Working Party that the Bureau in 2023 decided which documents should be prioritised, and added that seven of the nine documents in

² The publication is available at: <https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/385961>

³ The Committee Decision 2022 – 4b.2 - Regarding the continued use of the name “*People-first PPPs for the SDGs*”, the Committee took note of the results of the informal consultations conducted with interested delegations on this matter since the fifth session of the Working Party in November 2021, and decided to (a) change the name to “*PPPs for the SDGs*” and (b) progressively reissue the documents endorsed and adopted by the Committee and the Working Party on PPPs to reflect (a) above within the document quota allocated to the ECI subprogramme and without incurring additional costs. The Committee requested the secretariat to reissue three core documents within twelve months, and the rest of the documents within three years. The Committee requested the Bureau of the Working Party on PPPs to decide on which non-core documents should be prioritised during this period.

question were reissued and submitted to the Working Party for information at this session, namely:

- (i). Standard on a Zero Tolerance Approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/3);
- (ii). Declaration on a Zero Tolerance Approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/4);
- (iii). Putting the Guiding Principles in Public-Private Partnerships in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into practice (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/5);
- (iv). Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Railway (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/6);
- (v). Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Renewable Energy (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/7);
- (vi). Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Roads (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/8); and
- (vii). Involving reliable and independent experts to develop Public-Private Partnerships in support of the Sustainable Development Goals in low and middle-income countries (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/9).

27. Referring to document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/9, one participant pointed to its conclusion and next steps, and more specifically to the proposal by the International Specialist Centre of Excellence on PPP Laws, Policy and Institutions in France for an ECE project team to elaborate a standard on the selection and employment of reliable and independent experts to develop pipelines of PPPs for the SDGs in low and middle-income countries. He enquired if the Working Party could consider this proposal.

28. The Chairperson replied that this proposal would be considered by the Bureau in due course.

Decision 2023 – 3.4

The Working Party took note of the following documents reissued to reflect the change of name in line with the Committee's decision 2022 – 4b.2:

- (i). Standard on a Zero Tolerance Approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/3);
- (ii). Declaration on a Zero Tolerance Approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/4);
- (iii). Putting the Guiding Principles in Public-Private Partnerships in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into practice (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/5);
- (iv). Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Railway (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/6);
- (v). Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Renewable Energy (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/7);
- (vi). Standard on Public-Private Partnerships in Roads (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/8); and

- (vii). Involving reliable and independent experts to develop Public-Private Partnerships in support of the Sustainable Development Goals in low and middle-income countries (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/9).

D. Ongoing work on new practical guides on Public-Private Partnerships Evaluation Methodology in support of the Sustainable Development Goals

29. The Chairperson referred to the policy discussion under agenda item 2, which touched upon some of the practical PPP guides under preparation, on:

- (a) Improving the delivery of PPPs through digital transformation throughout the project lifecycle in support of the SDGs;
- (b) PPPs in digital infrastructure: diagnostics in healthcare (telemedicine) and other digital public services;
- (c) Green and sustainable PPP procurement for the SDGs; and
- (d) The state of PPP and infrastructure finance midway to 2030.

30. The Chairperson recalled that work on these practical guides was launched in 2023 and is expected to be finalised in time for the next Working Party session in 2024. He then invited the drafting team leaders to provide a brief status report on their respective workstream on the progress achieved so far and plans to finalise the work in the coming months.

(a) Ms. Stacy Sinclair, drafting team leader of the guide on improving the delivery of PPPs through digital transformation, informed the Working Party that work on the guide started several months ago and a first draft is expected by April 2024. The guide should be finalised in June, and the session planned at the next edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in May 2024 will offer an opportunity to collect feedback and comments from experts.

(b) Mr. Steven Van Garsse, drafting team leader of the guide on green and sustainable PPP procurement, remarked that work on the guide started in May 2023, and since then several online meetings were held and relevant case studies were collected. He added that two in-person sessions are planned in the first quarter of 2024 – on 26 January in Brussels, and on 9 February in New York – with a view to produce a first draft in April 2024, and hold a session at the UNECE International PPP Forum in May 2024 to finalise the guide.

(c) Ms. Agnes Mazurek, drafting team leader of the guide on the state of PPP and infrastructure finance midway to 2030, said that the work on the guide, which started several months ago, is progressing well. She added that a first draft is expected by April 2024 with plans to hold a session at the UNECE International PPP Forum in May 2024 for feedback with a view to finalise the guide soon afterwards.

(d) The secretariat, presenting on behalf of Mr. Gabriele Pasquini, the drafting team leader of the guide on PPPs in digital infrastructure, stated that work on the guide started in April 2023 with a focus on social digital public services (healthcare, education and long-term care). A first draft of the guide is expected to be ready in time for the UNECE International PPP Forum in May 2024, where a dedicated session will be organised to collect input and feedback from a broader audience.

31. The Chairperson thanked the drafting team leaders and the experts for their pro bono support and contribution to develop these practical guides. He called on the experts to pay particular attention to the rights of vulnerable people by adopting a human rights-based approach to PPPs and infrastructure in the preparation of these documents.

Decision 2023 – 3.5

The Working Party:

1. Took note with appreciation of the rich policy discussion under agenda item 2 on the use of digital and green technologies for sustainable recovery and reconstruction, promoting women's empowerment and optimising stakeholder engagement in PPPs and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs; and
2. Requested the secretariat to further explore some of these discussions at the UNECE International PPP Forum in 2024, in particular issues relevant to digital and green transformations, economic recovery and reconstruction, gender equality and women's empowerment, and stakeholder engagement.

Decision 2023 – 3.6

The Working Party:

1. Took note of the ongoing work on new practical PPP guides launched in 2023 on:
 - (i). Improving the delivery of PPPs through digital transformation throughout the project lifecycle in support of the SDGs;
 - (ii). PPPs in digital infrastructure: diagnostics in healthcare (telemedicine) and other digital public services;
 - (iii). Green and sustainable PPP procurement for the SDGs; and
 - (iv). The state of PPP and infrastructure finance midway to 2030.
2. Expressed its appreciation to the drafting team leaders and the international experts for their support and expertise;
3. Encouraged the drafting teams to:
 - (i). Pay particular attention in the guides to the rights of vulnerable groups by adopting a human rights-based approach to PPPs and infrastructure; and
 - (ii). Work closely with the Bureau and the secretariat to finalise the work on the guides and submit them to the Working Party at its next session in 2024; and
4. Requested the secretariat to organise sessions on these topics at the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in 2024.

Implementation of normative and policy documents: capacity-building activities and policy advisory services

32. The Chairperson referred to the very successful 7th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum held in Athens, Greece, on 3-5 May 2023, co-organised with the Municipality of Athens, and with the support of the Government of Greece. He asked the co-organisers to brief the Working Party on the main outcomes of the Forum.

33. The representative of Greece, on behalf of the Forum co-organisers, informed the Working Party that the Forum attracted over 900 participants, with 300 participating in-person, and 130 speakers and panellists during 24 sessions over three days, with 36 projects presented. She added that a highlight of the Forum was the PPP and infrastructure award 2023 organised by the secretariat, showcasing PPP and infrastructure projects from around the world. 49 projects from 33 countries with a total capital investment of 38.7 billion dollars were submitted and evaluated using the PIERS methodology, and an international jury pre-

selected five finalists. The winner was decided by the Forum participants through electronic voting. The winner of the competition was the 1915 Çanakkale Bridge in Türkiye, and the runner up was the Energy Retrofit of Buildings in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

34. Presenting the capacity building and policy advisory activities, the secretariat informed the Working Party that the PIERS methodology was at the centre of the nine capacity building activities, covering ten ECE programme countries, with over 550 participants, mostly public officials, attending these events.

35. Some of these activities were jointly held with partners, for example in:

(a) Kyrgyzstan: A training with the US Department of Commerce and the World Association of PPP Units and Professionals (WAPPP) for over 50 public officials from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Bishkek, 25-27 September 2023);

(b) Tajikistan: A training with the Eurasian Development Bank for over 50 public officials from Tajikistan on the use of the PIERS methodology (Dushanbe, 3 October 2023); and

(c) Turkmenistan: A training with the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Turkmenistan for public officials on the ECE PPPs for the SDGs approach (Ashgabat, 20 October 2023).

36. The other capacity building events in programme countries were organised in close collaboration with the host countries.

37. The secretariat also informed that 60 PPP projects were evaluated in the past year using the PIERS methodology, bringing a total of over 200 projects evaluated to date from more than 40 countries as part of the campaign to reach 500 projects that aspire to be SDG-compliant.

38. The secretariat added that a number of capacity building activities were organised in the context of an inter-agency project on Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFF). Within this framework, ECE joined the other four Regional Commission to deliver training on the PIERS methodology in ECE member States. A regional event is planned in the first quarter of 2024, and this is reported under agenda item 4 (below).

39. The secretariat mentioned the growing needs of the PPP section in terms of extrabudgetary funding to match the growing demand from member States for PPP support. A summary of this demand is contained in Annex III of document ECE/CECI/PPP/2023/INF.2, which was further discussed under agenda item 4. The secretariat further explained that fundraising was crucial to reach the next level of support to the member States. It then called on donors and development partners to consider making available extrabudgetary support to the secretariat to meet the ever-growing demand from member States for PPP capacity building and policy advisory services.

40. The secretariat further informed that in the past twelve month, it has embarked on a communication strategy to promote the PPP work. Besides a professional logo used in all external communications, the secretariat published several news stories, printed roll-up banners and increased its overall visibility on social media by launching in October 2022 the PPP LinkedIn page as a sub-page of the ECE LinkedIn account. With over 4,300 LinkedIn followers and a database of more than 3,000 PPP professionals around the world, the secretariat continues to promote the Working Party's efforts to ensure that PPPs are 'fit for purpose' for the SDGs.

41. The Chairperson expressed his appreciation to all the experts and the secretariat for their contribution to the success of the capacity building activities and policy advisory services.

42. The Chairperson reminded the Working Party that its policy advisory services and capacity building programme depended on extrabudgetary funding and in-kind contribution. He urged member States, donors, development partners and other stakeholders to provide in-kind and financial support to the ECE PPP programme in support of the SDGs.

43. The Chairperson informed the Working Party that the secretariat has published all decisions taken by the Bureau since the last Working Party session in document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/INF.1, in line with Rule 16 of the Rules of Procedure (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2021/5/Rev.1). Since the last session, the Bureau held 11 meetings and took 38 decisions.

44. The representative of Ukraine expressed his gratitude to ECE for its support in implementing the PIERS methodology on reconstruction projects in Ukraine to ensure their alignment with the SDGs. In particular, he thanked the secretariat for preparing a study on how to apply the PIERS methodology flexibly and effectively in Ukraine, as well as for its assessment of a number of pilot reconstruction projects using PIERS. The representative also thanked the secretariat for translating PIERS into Ukrainian, which will be required for all PPP projects in Ukraine once a new law is enacted. Lastly, the representative congratulated the secretariat for developing the PIERS online platform, which will enhance its accessibility and usability in countries.

45. The representative of Tajikistan thanked ECE for its support in implementing the PIERS methodology in Tajikistan. In particular, he referred to a training provided by ECE on 3 October 2023 for more than 50 public officials in Tajikistan on the PPPs for the SDGs approach and the use of the PIERS methodology.

46. The representative of Georgia expressed her appreciation to ECE for its PPP support and cooperation, and for the event on 9 November 2023 in Tbilisi on the use of the PIERS methodology in Georgia.

47. The representative of Kyrgyzstan thanked the secretariat for evaluating eight PPP projects in Kyrgyzstan using the PIERS methodology, and for a training event in Bishkek on 28 September 2023. He also mentioned the second international PPP conference organised by the Kyrgyz PPP Center in Bishkek on 28-29 September 2023 with the support of the ECE, and the training for public officials from Central Asia organised in Bishkek on 25-27 September 2023 by the US Department of Commerce, with the support of ECE and WAPPP. The representative also congratulated the secretariat for developing the PIERS online platform, and informed the delegates that the Kyrgyz PPP Center will promote the PIERS online platform and link it to its website to encourage its further use in Kyrgyzstan.

48. A representative from academia argued that academic institutions should take a more proactive approach to PPP capacity building in support of the SDGs. He added that the initiative 'taking PPPs out of the classroom' first launched by academia at the UNECE International PPP Forum in Athens in 2023 should be expanded to include PPP scientists and practitioners, by involving university professors, researchers, and students. He argued that the UNECE International PPP Forum in 2024 would be an optimal platform to continue discussing this important initiative.

49. The representative of Uzbekistan thanked ECE for the PPP support to Uzbekistan and referred to the importance of the PIERS methodology and other PPP tools being developed by ECE in support of the SDGs. He mentioned how Uzbekistan launched a major PPP programme in various sectors and argued that the tools developed by ECE are very helpful in ensuring that people and the environment are duly considered in PPPs together with their economic effectiveness. He added that he fully agreed with the speaker from academia on the need for academic institutions to play a more active role in promoting PPP capacity building and training.

Decision 2023 – 3.7

The Working Party:

1. Expressed its gratitude to the secretariat for organising a very successful 7th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum from 3 to 5 May 2023 (Athens, Greece), addressing topical issues such as the transition to the circular economy, green and digital transformations, economic recovery and reconstruction, climate and sustainable finance, and green PPP procurement;
2. Congratulated the winner and runner up of the competition organised by the secretariat at the Forum for the best PPP project contributing towards the transition to the circular economy, namely:
 - (i). The 1915 Çanakkale Bridge, Türkiye; and
 - (ii). The Energy Retrofit of Buildings in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and
3. Expressed its appreciation to the Government of Greece for supporting the Forum, and to the Municipality of Athens for hosting it.

Decision 2023 – 3.8

The Working Party:

1. Took note with appreciation of the application of the ECE PIERS methodology in over 200 PPP and infrastructure projects;
2. Expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for developing an online platform for the ECE PIERS methodology to facilitate its further use, and for its assistance to member States in self-assessing their PPP and infrastructure projects; and
3. Encouraged donors and development partners to consider providing financial contributions to enable the secretariat to continue applying the ECE PIERS methodology based on demand by member States.

Decision 2023 – 3.9

The Working Party:

1. Welcomed the PPP policy advisory and capacity building work carried out since its last session;
2. Took note of the requests for capacity building from Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan;
3. Thanked all stakeholders and donors for their support to the ECE PPP programme, in particular the experts involved in capacity building activities and in the various drafting teams preparing policy documents; and
4. Called on donors and development partners to consider providing financial and in-kind contributions towards ECE PPP capacity building and policy advisory activities.

Decision 2023 – 3.10

The Working Party took note of document ECE/CECI/PPP/WP/2023/INF.1 containing the decisions by the Bureau since its last session in December 2022.

Documentation:

Report of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships on its sixth session (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2022/2);

Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2023-2024 (ECE/CECI/2023/2, Annex II); and

Proposals for future work of the Working Party in support of Public-Private Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/INF.2).

50. The Chairperson referred to the Committee's Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2023-2024 (ECE/CECI/2023/2, Annex II), which lists PPP activities for the rest of 2023 and for 2024.

51. The Chairperson added that the next major PPP event is the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum on 8-10 May 2024, which is being planned as a hybrid meeting with strong in-person participation. He further added that no decisions are envisaged by the Working Party on those activities for the rest of 2023 and in 2024, which are already included in the Committee's Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2023-2024, while any other requests for activities from delegations can be added to the Working Party's work plan.

52. The Chairperson recalled that at its last session, the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, prepared and presented document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2022/INF.2, with a consolidated list of topics for PPP standards and practical guides. He also recalled that the list was endorsed by the Working Party, and that work on five practical guides started in 2023. The Chairperson added that the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, revised and updated the list of topics, which is included in Annex I of document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/INF.2. The Bureau recommends to the Working Party to launch work in 2024 on the following:

- (a) A practical guide on enhancing stakeholder engagement in PPPs for the SDGs;
- (b) A practical guide on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through PPPs for the SDGs;
- (c) A standard on off-grid renewable energy PPP projects in support of the SDGs; and;
- (d) A standard/practical guide on promoting climate resilient PPP and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs.

53. The secretariat, referring to document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2022/INF.2, stated that the proposed new standards and practical guides will be developed by drafting teams. The secretariat also informed that it has issued a call for volunteers to join the drafting teams and encouraged experts to contribute to this work.

54. The Chairperson asked experts to introduce the work on each of the topic above:

- (a) Speaking on the practical guide on stakeholder engagement in PPPs, Ms. Melissa Peneycad argued that the purpose of this guide is to provide the public sector in the ECE region with policy recommendations based on case studies and practical examples throughout the entire PPP project lifecycle;
- (b) Referring to the practical guide on gender equality and women's empowerment in a PPP for the SDGs context, Ms. Sedef Yavuz-Noyan stated that the purpose of the guide is to provide policy makers with policy recommendations based on case studies and practical examples on how PPPs and infrastructure projects can be designed and implemented to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in support of the SDGs;

(c) In relation to the standard on PPPs in off-grid renewable energy, Mr. David Baxter pointed out that the purpose of the standard was to provide informative context for member States wishing to develop off-grid rural electrification PPP projects that reflect current good practices and support the achievement of the SDGs; and

(d) When describing the topic of climate resilient infrastructure, Mr. David Dodd argued that a standard or a practical guide on climate resilient infrastructure would build on the ECE PPP Guiding Principles and supplement the PIERS methodology by guiding policy makers to progressively integrate climate resilience in PPP and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs. Any work on this topic will be coordinated with UNDRR.

55. The Chairperson thanked the experts for introducing the new topics. He then moved on to future capacity building activities, in particular those organised with other UN Regional Commissions to promote the PIERS methodology in member States.

56. The representative of ECA stated that as the PPP needs in Africa increase, there is scope to join hands with ECE to implement and use the PIERS methodology on projects in Africa. He mentioned that the new UN Development Account project provides an opportunity for two countries in Africa to receive training on the use of PIERS and evaluate a number of their projects.

57. The representative of ECLAC mentioned that the cooperation with ECE and ECA on the use of the PIERS methodology in Latin America and the Caribbean will be very beneficial to the region, which still lacks PPP knowhow and investment in infrastructure. He looked forward to jointly implement with ECE and ECA the new capacity building project to the benefit of member States.

58. The secretariat added that this cooperation with other UN Regional Commission in the context of the UN Development Account, is an excellent opportunity to implement the PIERS methodology in more countries, including those outside the ECE region. The secretariat added that this capacity building project will also bring the Regional Commissions closer in the true spirit of 'Deliver as One'.

59. The secretariat also added that it will organise, together with UNCTAD, a regional event on 21 March 2024 for the ECE programme countries to exchange knowledge and experience on INFF, with a focus on PPPs and infrastructure finance in support of the SDGs.

60. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed her appreciation to the secretariat for presenting the future PPP work of the Working Party and noted the importance of cooperation among the Regional Commissions to promote international PPP best practices. She highlighted the PIERS methodology as a tool to be promoted jointly with other Regional Commissions. She argued that such cooperation would avoid duplication, expands the expert base, and further promotes the ECE standards, guidelines and tools beyond the ECE region.

61. The representative of Kyrgyzstan reiterated his delegations plans to continue using the PIERS methodology and other PPP guides prepared by ECE in support of the SDGs. He also requested ECE support for additional training and capacity building in the use of the PIERS methodology. On the future PPP work, the representative suggested to add a practical guide on "small-scale PPPs in support of the SDGs" to the list of topics in Annex I of document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/INF.2 and proposed that a session on this topic is organised at the next UNECE International PPP Forum in May 2024, perhaps organised with other partners already working on this topic, such as WAPPP. The representative further suggested that some of the policy documents prepared by the Working Party be transformed into online training courses so that more people can be trained on the ECE PPPs for the SDGs approach. He requested that these two points – small-scale PPPs and online training courses

– are added to the Working Party’s work plan, in addition to the activities listed in the Committee’s Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2023-2024.

62. The representative of Ukraine informed the Working Party of an ECE training event on 12 December 2023 for public officials in Ukraine on the use of PIERS methodology. At the training, ECE will present the evaluation results of a number of reconstruction projects in Ukraine using the PIERS methodology. The representative expressed his appreciation to ECE for the further support from 2024 as part of a new project to scale-up the use of PIERS in Ukraine through further PPP training and the evaluation of further priority reconstruction projects.

63. The representative of Tajikistan thanked ECE for its plans for further PPP support from 2024 onwards and looked forward to implementing the PIERS methodology in Tajikistan. Among the activities planned for next year are an assessment by the secretariat of several PPP and infrastructure projects in Tajikistan using the PIERS methodology, as well as training to public officials and PPP practitioners on the use of PIERS.

64. The representative of Georgia expressed the interest of the PPP Agency of Georgia in learning more about the PIERS methodology and in applying it on PPP and infrastructure projects in Georgia to attract investors.

65. The representative of WAPPP informed the Working Party that WAPPP recently launched a one-year long programme on small-scale PPPs and proposed that a practical guide on the topic could be done jointly with ECE.

66. The Chairperson thanked the delegates for their comments, observations, and proposals, and added that the proposal by WAPPP will be considered by the Bureau at its next meeting. He further informed the Working Party that all requests for capacity building activities, offers for cooperation and new items to be included in the work plan have been duly noted and will be considered by the secretariat on the basis of available resources.

Decision 2023 – 4.1

The Working Party:

1. Took note of the Committee’s Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2023-2024 (ECE/CECI/2023/2, Annex II) and the list of the PPP activities planned for the rest of 2023 and for 2024; and
2. Requested the secretariat, working closely with the Bureau and subject to resources, to create online learning material for policy makers from ECE PPP policy documents and tools.

Decision 2023 – 4.2

The Working Party:

1. Took note with appreciation of document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2022/INF.2 prepared by the Bureau;
2. Approved the list of topics for PPP standards and guides with policy options/recommendations as contained in Annex I of the document, with the addition of a guide on small-scale PPPs;
3. Approved the detailed proposals for work on new PPP products to start in 2024 as contained in Annex II of the document, namely:
 - (i). Practical guide on enhancing stakeholder engagement throughout the PPP project lifecycle in support of the SDGs;

- (ii). Practical guide on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through PPPs for the SDGs; and
 - (iii). Standard on PPPs in off-grid renewable energy.
4. Took note of the list in Annex III with requests by member States for PPP capacity building and policy advisory services prepared by the secretariat addressing OIOS recommendations and in line with the ECE fundraising strategy;
 5. Emphasized the critical importance of extra-budgetary funding for continuing its work on PPP policy advice and capacity building and called on donors and development partners to consider providing additional funding;
 6. Requested the Bureau to:
 - (i). Approve a proposal in 2024 for the drafting of a new standard/guide on climate resilient PPP and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs, and on small-scale PPPs; and
 - (ii). Appoint the drafting team's leader/co-leads.
 7. Requested the secretariat, working closely with the Bureau, to:
 - (i). Mobilise the necessary expertise and resources for the new PPP products to start in 2024; and
 - (ii). Organise sessions to advance the work on the topics in Annex I at the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in 2024; and
 8. Requested the secretariat to include Annexes I and II of document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2023/INF.2 as Annexes to the report of the Working Party session.

67. The Chairperson informed the Working Party that Türkiye submitted a proposal to the secretariat to host the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in Istanbul, Türkiye, on 8-10 May 2024.

68. The representative of Türkiye informed the Working Party on the proposal by the Presidency of Strategy and Budget at the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye to host and co-organise the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum jointly with ECE, and she looked forward to welcoming PPP experts from around the world in Istanbul from 8 to 10 May 2024. She added that Türkiye looked forward to work closely with the secretariat to ensure a successful edition of the Forum.

69. The Chairperson thanked the representative of Türkiye for the kind offer to host the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in Istanbul in May 2024 and informed the Working Party that the Bureau fully endorsed this proposal and recommended to the Working Party to accept it.

Decision 2023 – 4.3

The Working Party:

1. Agreed to hold the 8th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in Istanbul on 8-10 May 2024; and
2. Requested the secretariat to organise the Forum in consultation with the co-organisers and the Bureau.

70. The representative of Azerbaijan informed the Working Party on the current PPP situation in Azerbaijan, the Law on PPPs adopted in December 2022, the PPP institutional framework, the role of PPPs in post-conflict reconstruction and development, the role of the

Ministry of Economy in the implementation of PPP projects and planned projects in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. The representative expressed the readiness of Azerbaijan to host the 9th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in Baku in 2025.

71. The representative of Germany informed the Working Party that Germany is also considering hosting the 9th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum in 2025 and suggested that a decision on the matter be taken at the appropriate body.

72. The Chairperson thanked the representatives of Azerbaijan and Germany for their statements. He clarified that the Forum was an activity decided by the Committee in its annual Intersessional Implementation Plans. He further explained that at its last session in May-June 2023, the Committee included the 2024 edition of the Forum in its Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2023 and 2024, and the Working Party has just decided on its venue. He added that procedurally, before deciding on a venue for the 2025 edition of the Forum, the Committee first needs to include it in its Intersessional Implementation Plan for 2024-2025. This, he explained, would take place at the next Committee session in June 2024.

VII. Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe Subprogramme 4 and Subprogramme 6 by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (Agenda item 5)

Documentation:

Evaluation of ECE Subprogramme 4, Economic Cooperation and Integration, and Subprogramme 6, Trade (E/AC.51/2023/5).

73. The Chairperson informed the Working Party that in 2022, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability, and integration of cross-cutting issues in ECE's Subprogrammes 4: Economic Cooperation and Integration, and 6: Trade for the period 2018 – 2021. The evaluation was part of the UN secretariat's regular programme that periodically evaluated selected aspects of its operations.

74. The Chairperson added that the OIOS evaluation was presented at the last session of the Committee in May-June 2023. The Committee welcomed the results of the evaluation and noted with satisfaction the evaluation's conclusions, notably that the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) had found its niche in a crowded space of trade and economic cooperation, by leveraging its comparative advantages towards strengthening member States' economic cooperation and integration.

75. The secretariat briefed the Committee on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, the associated management response, and plans on implementing relevant recommendations. The secretariat also expressed its appreciation to member States and experts who participated in the surveys and interviews related to this evaluation, as well as to a separate evaluation of an extrabudgetary project conducted in 2023, the results of which will be communicated to the relevant ECE bodies in 2024.

76. The representative of Kyrgyzstan informed the Working Party that the Kyrgyz PPP Center was very much involved in the OIOS evaluation in 2022, and in that on the PPP extrabudgetary project in 2023. The representative stated that Kyrgyzstan welcomed these evaluations as they showcase the progress made by Kyrgyzstan as well as emphasising the high level of professional practical PPP services and support that Kyrgyzstan receives from ECE.

Decision 2023 – 5

The Working Party:

1. Took note of the evaluation of the ECE Subprogrammes 4 and 6 by the OIOS; and
2. Invited its Bureau and the secretariat to respond to these recommendations and to contribute to their implementation in line with the ECE management response.

VIII. Election of officers (Agenda item 6)

77. The Working Party elected its Bureau for the period 2023 to 2025.

Decision 2023 – 6

The Working Party:

1. Elected Mr. Syed Zaidi (Canada) as its Chairperson and Mr. Olivier Ginépro (France), Ms. Eleni Bakoula (Greece), Ms. Rose-Lourdes Elysée (Haiti), Mr. Gabriele Pasquini (Italy), Mr. Sanzhar Bolotov (Kyrgyzstan) and Ms. Jekaterina Šarmavičienė (Lithuania) as Bureau members for a period of two years; and
2. Thanked the outgoing Chairperson, Mr. George Katapodis (Greece), Vice-Chairperson, Ms. Sedef Yavuz-Noyan (Türkiye), and Bureau members – Mr. Steven Van Garsse (Belgium), Mr. Frederic Bobay (France), Mr. Sam Tabuchi (Japan), Ms. Svetlana Maslova (Russian Federation) and Mr. Arthur Smith (United States) – for their substantive contribution, leadership, and dedication towards the Working Party and the ECE PPP programme.

78. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed her delegation's appreciation to the outgoing Bureau members for their contribution to the Working Party and its programme in support of the SDGs. She also welcomed the new Bureau members and wished them well in their new roles.

IX. Other business (Agenda item 7)

Dates of the next session

Decision 2023 – 7

The Working Party agreed that its next session be held in the fourth quarter of 2024. The secretariat will fix the dates in consultation with the Bureau and the Conference Management Unit at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

X. Adoption of the report (Agenda item 8)

Decision 2023 – 8

The Working Party requested the secretariat to prepare a draft report of the session and distribute it to all Geneva Permanent Representations and the Bureau for subsequent approval by silence procedure in accordance with Rule 21 of the Rules of Procedure (ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2021/5/Rev.1). Once the draft report is adopted, it requests its publication in English, French and Russian.

Annex I

Chairperson’s summary of the policy discussion “Accelerating digital and green transformations and promoting women’s empowerment and stakeholder engagement in Public-Private Partnerships and infrastructure projects in support of the Sustainable Development Goals” under Agenda item 2

Introduction

1. The world is facing unprecedented challenges in achieving the SDGs by 2030, as the climate crisis, the increase of natural and man-made disasters, and the persistent inequalities and gaps in access to and benefit from infrastructure services have exacerbated the existing sustainable development challenges. To address these multiple challenges, there is an urgent need to accelerate economic, social, and environmental development in the ECE region and beyond. Delivering PPP and infrastructure projects that contribute to the SDGs.
2. The policy discussion explored how the ECE approach to PPPs for the SDGs can catalyse sustainable development by harnessing digital and green technologies, empowering women and engaging stakeholders in the project planning, design and implementation can make an important contribution in this regard.

Panel 1: Harnessing digital and green technologies for sustainable recovery and reconstruction projects using the ECE PPP and Infrastructure Evaluation and Rating System (PIERS)

3. Panel one highlighted the challenges of accelerating the delivery of sustainable PPP and infrastructure reconstruction programmes in post-war and post-disaster contexts, such as in Türkiye and Ukraine. In the face of a global infrastructure deficit and major reconstruction challenges across a planet shaken by a myriad of armed conflicts and natural disasters, the panellists argued that the infrastructure sector must streamline its *modus operandi* and accelerate its implementation capacity towards an efficient and SDG-focused recovery.
4. This imperative, the panellists stressed, will benefit from innovative thinking. How governments develop PPPs, involve stakeholders, and use blended finance that can also help reduce risks were cited as examples. Emerging digital technologies, most notably artificial intelligence, were also identified as tools to mainstream the SDGs and expediting projects. The need for capacity development and knowledge transfer was also highlighted as key elements for sustainable reconstruction and recovery. While considering all the SDG safeguards, the panellists argued that the implementation of PPP and infrastructure projects can be accelerated by accommodating a fast-track process allowing for exemptions and flexibility in the legal framework, as well as by using specific construction techniques such as prefabricates. This, the panellists stressed, should be carefully developed and implemented to safeguard the sustainability of PPP and infrastructure projects and their alignment with the SDGs. The panellists highlighted the ECE efforts to disseminate the much-needed expertise and know-how by deploying the PIERS methodology in member States and by supplementing its use through practical guides for efficient project development.
5. The panellists shared their experiences and insights on how to integrate digital and green technologies in PPP and infrastructure reconstruction projects in post-war and post-disaster contexts. They highlighted the benefits of using accurate data especially from the onset of projects, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), satellite information, climate models, and modular and innovative construction techniques to enhance the resilience,

efficiency, and sustainability of projects. They also emphasised the need for a programmatic approach, transparent reporting and communication, and needs assessment and stakeholder engagement in the reconstruction process. In particular, the practical guide just published by ECE on “Delivering PPP projects for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction in support of the SDGs” was mentioned as a document with useful guidance and best practices on how to integrate digital and green technologies and engage with all stakeholders, to promote sustainability outcomes in the reconstruction process.

6. Several panellists cited recent scientific reports that warned that temperatures are likely to rise by more than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels in the next five years. Given the increase in the intensity and frequency of natural disasters, the panel stressed the need to invest in disaster prevention rather than disaster management, which can be up to 15 times more costly. They also highlighted the importance of focusing on developing countries, where more than two thirds of natural disasters occur and where 90 percent of their negative effects are felt.

7. Referring to the increasing needs for the reconstruction of Ukraine, a panellist mentioned the reforms in the country to facilitate private sector involvement in the reconstruction process, for example, to allow the private sector to finance and manages state assets and to insure investments in Ukraine against war risks. Additionally, the need for Ukraine to build back better was highlighted as an imperative for sustainable reconstruction. Finally, it was noted that digital infrastructure has shown great resilience during the war.

8. Panellists also discussed how the PIERS methodology can help attract sustainable finance in PPP and infrastructure projects by assessing and improving the sustainability performance of the projects across the five desirable outcomes of PPPs for the SDGs. They stressed that PIERS is not a methodology meant to replace existing methodologies, but a complementary methodology that can be seen as an accompanying guide to understand and take into account existing guidance, tools and best practices.

Panel 2: The contribution of the ECE PPPs for the SDGs approach to empower women and improve gender equality

9. Panel two discussed the challenges and barriers to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment throughout the PPP project lifecycle. These include the lack of representation, participation, and leadership of women in the infrastructure industry, the gender-blind design and delivery of infrastructure projects, and gender gaps in access to and benefits from infrastructure services. Panellists also referred to a ‘fatigue’ on the topic of gender equality and women’s empowerment, with some arguing that gender equality has improved significantly in many countries to an extent that it was no longer necessary to promote it. One additional barrier to women’s empowerment is the notion that incorporating gender equality and women’s empowerment into project requires the hiring of more consultants, which is seen as an extra cost.

10. The panel discussed how the PPPs for the SDGs approach can address and overcome some of these challenges and barriers, by providing a framework to mainstream a gender perspective in PPP projects that contribute to the SDGs. Panellists highlighted that the PIERS methodology serves as a valuable tool for designing, developing, and implementing gender-inclusive PPP and infrastructure projects.

11. Panellists discussed additional examples of concrete actions on how to overcome these challenges and promote gender perspectives in projects. Women must be included in stakeholder consultations and in the project design. In addition, women empowerment must be specifically targeted throughout the entire project lifecycle; women need to be trained for leadership positions and in areas where they are often underrepresented; and public

awareness on the topic must be increased. Lastly, gender equality and women's empowerment must be specified in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that must be incorporated at the beginning of the project and carefully monitored throughout the entire project lifecycle. The panellists also described what is needed to have more women involved in the design of infrastructure, such as creating a conducive environment, providing mentorship and role models, and addressing the gender pay gap.

12. Panellists also shared examples of policy actions and best practices to promote gender considerations in the design and operational stages of projects, such as gender-responsive budgeting, gender impact assessment, gender-sensitive procurement, gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis, and gender training and capacity building.

13. The panel explored how to integrate women's empowerment and gender equality throughout each stage of the PPP lifecycle. The project identification phase requires adopting gender-specific considerations, which are to be identified through stakeholder engagement and the results must be used to inform the project design and project development accordingly. Pre-assessment of a project's impact on women is crucial not only for socio-economic feasibility and project prioritisation but also for empowering women and improving gender equality. During the development phase of a project, contracts must address social, economic, and cultural risks for women as end users, and specify ratios for women employees and board representation in the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). In the project implementation phase, provisions should include women-owned or managed companies in the supply chain. KPIs aligned with these considerations must be monitored post-contract, with penalties for non-compliance.

14. The session also contributed to the preparation of a ECE practical guide on gender equality and women's empowerment in PPPs for the SDGs. The guide, work on which will start in 2024, aims to provide guidance and best practices on how to integrate gender considerations into sustainable PPP and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs. The session provided some emerging elements to be included in the guide, such as the importance of stakeholder engagement, governance, transparency, and accountability in gender mainstreaming, the need for a holistic and intersectional approach to address the multiple dimensions of gender inequality, and the potential of digital and green technologies to empower women and improve gender equality in PPPs.

Panel 3: Optimising stakeholder engagement in projects through the ECE PPP for the SDGs approach to catalyse sustainable development

15. Panel three discussed the challenges of optimising stakeholder engagement in PPP projects and explored how the PPPs for the SDGs approach and ECE tools can serve as a framework to enhance stakeholder engagement in the PPP project lifecycle in support of the SDGs. In particular, the panellists noted that stakeholder engagement is one of the five desirable outcomes of the PPPs for the SDGs approach but is also a key element of other outcomes such as access and equity. They also highlighted its importance in the context of PPP and infrastructure projects to not only ensure that the diverse interests and concerns of those who are affected by projects are considered but also to ensure projects' buy-in and support and help ensure their compliance with regulatory requirements.

16. The panel stressed the importance of effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement from the start, as it improves transparency, builds trust and accountability, and facilitates collaboration among governments, private investors, local communities, and other stakeholders. Also, regular communication with stakeholders was mentioned as a must to help identify and mitigate potential risks.

17. In this regard, panellists discussed the key elements for effective stakeholder engagement throughout the PPP project lifecycle in support of the SDGs, such as identifying and mapping relevant stakeholders, developing and implementing engagement strategies, fostering collaboration and maintaining stakeholder trust, and ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. They also discussed how governments can optimise stakeholder engagement in PPP projects in support of the SDGs and ensure that it becomes a core part of project preparation, design, implementation, and evaluation.

18. Panellists also shared some examples of challenges and best practices in stakeholder engagement in PPP projects. In particular, one panellist shared her experience in evaluating projects using the PIERS methodology, where stakeholder engagement was one of the weakest outcomes for the majority of the projects evaluated. The panel also discussed the experience of climate resilience infrastructure projects in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico. One panellist explained how the Katrina recovery project used a participatory approach to involve the local community in the design and implementation of a solar power microgrid, which increased the resilience and sustainability of the energy system. Similarly, the Puerto Rico reconstruction project used a stakeholder engagement platform to collect feedback and suggestions from the affected population and to provide transparency and accountability on the use of funds.

19. The PIERS methodology was also mentioned by the panellists as a tool that besides assessing stakeholder engagement in PPP and infrastructure projects, it can also help involve all relevant stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of projects. Stakeholder engagement is also a core element of human rights-based approach, and by using the PIERS methodology, project developers can help ensure that their projects are aligned with the human rights-based approach and that they respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all stakeholders, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable groups.

20. The session also contributed to the preparation of a ECE practical guide on enhancing stakeholder engagement in PPPs for the SDGs, work on which will start in 2024. The guide aims to increase the understanding of public officials on stakeholder engagement in PPPs for the SDGs and to provide guidance and best practices on how to optimise stakeholder engagement in the PPP lifecycle. The session provided some emerging elements to be included in the guide, such as the importance of stakeholder engagement for achieving the five desirable outcomes of the PPPs for the SDGs approach, the need for a context-specific and adaptive approach to stakeholder engagement, and the potential of digital tools and platforms to enhance stakeholder engagement in PPPs.

Annex II

List of topics for PPP standards and practical guides

The following list of topics for new policy documents was approved by the Working Party on its seventh session.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Standards/Practical guides with policy options/recommendations</i>	<i>Status^{1,2}</i>
1	Enhancing stakeholder engagement in PPPs for the SDGs	*
2	Improving the delivery of PPPs through digital transformation throughout the PPP project lifecycle in support of the SDGs	✓
3	Achieving digital transformation in countries through PPPs for the SDGs	
4	Supporting PPPs in digital infrastructure: diagnostics in healthcare (telemedicine) and other digital public services *	✓
5	Supporting the use of off-grid rural electrification renewable energy and energy efficient PPP solutions for the SDGs	*
6	Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through PPPs for the SDGs	*
7	Promoting green and sustainable PPP procurement for the SDGs	✓
8	Promoting climate resilient PPP and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs	*
9	Enhancing environmental sustainability in PPPs for the SDGs	
10	Promoting sustainable finance: the state of PPP and infrastructure finance midway to 2030	✓
11	Disseminating the use of blended finance structures in PPP and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs	
12	Enhancing fiscal sustainability in PPPs for the SDGs	
13	Simplifying and accelerating the delivery of PPP projects for the SDGs for sustainable economic recovery and reconstruction: pros and cons	✓
14	Increasing food security through PPPs for the SDGs involving the water, energy and agriculture nexus	
15	Promoting international best practices in small-scale PPP projects in support of the SDGs	*

¹ A check mark (✓) next to the topic denotes work that started in 2023.

² An Asterix (*) next to the topic denotes work that will start in 2024.

Annex III**[English only]**

The Annex contains detailed proposals on three practical guides/standards approved and prioritised by the Working Party for work to start in 2024.

1. Practical guide on enhancing stakeholder engagement in PPPs for the SDGs

Title

Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement throughout the PPP project lifecycle in support of the SDGs.

Purpose

The purpose is to develop a guide for the public sector in the ECE region with policy recommendations based on case studies and practical examples throughout the entire PPP project lifecycle to:

- (i). Increase the understanding of public officials on stakeholder engagement in PPPs for the SDGs;
- (ii). Provide guidance on identifying and mapping stakeholders relevant to PPP initiatives;
- (iii). Outline strategies for effective stakeholder engagement throughout the PPP lifecycle;
- (iv). Offer best practices for fostering collaboration and maintaining stakeholder trust; and
- (v). Highlight the importance of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in stakeholder engagement.

Scope

Stakeholder Engagement is one of the five desirable outcomes of the ECE PPPs for the SDGs' approach, and it captures the range of processes required to achieve meaningful participation and inclusivity to lift the welfare of the wider community long term. The ECE guide will provide governments with a comprehensive framework for effective stakeholder engagement throughout the entire PPP lifecycle, emphasizing collaboration, timeliness, and transparency. It will assist governments in engaging stakeholders at all stages. The ECE guide will cover key aspects such as stakeholder identification, communication strategies, accountability mechanisms, and capacity building. It will promote continuous improvement and knowledge sharing to enhance future stakeholder engagement in PPP for the SDGs.

The ECE guide will sit alongside the PIERS methodology as a practical resource for government authorities that would like to introduce a PPPs for the SDGs approach into their projects. The importance of stakeholder engagement in PPPs is elaborated in the PIERS methodology, where a number of criteria and indicators are included to ensure that stakeholder engagement is a core part of project preparation, development and implementation.

Added value by ECE

The lack of proper stakeholder consultation in infrastructure decisions is one of the main reasons for PPP failures. A number of guides have been written on stakeholder consultation, but none of them holistically integrates the SDGs or cover the whole PPP lifecycle.

The ECE guide would instead cover all the crucial phases and apply stakeholder engagement practices throughout the whole PPP lifecycle. Furthermore, the ECE guide will build on Guiding Principles (Principle 1 in particular) and the PIERS methodology by addressing the:

1. Optimization of stakeholder participation in PPP projects to ensure wider social participation, leaving no one behind; and
2. Social impacts from the project identification to its implementation.

Drafting and/or peer review team

Membership is open to experts with broad knowledge in the area of stakeholder engagement in PPPs and infrastructure.

Timeline

Work on the guide should be commenced by the secretariat in 2024 in coordination with the Bureau and should be completed and submitted to the Working Party for its consideration at its 8th or 9th session.

2. Practical guide on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through PPPs for the SDGs

Title

Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment through PPPs for the SDGs.

Purpose

The purpose is to develop a guide for the public sector in the ECE region with policy recommendations based on case studies and practical examples on how PPPs and infrastructure projects can be designed and implemented to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in support of the SDGs.

Scope

As we reach the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is crucial to accelerate the delivery of infrastructure projects that empower women and promote gender equality. Including gender considerations throughout the PPP lifecycle can have a positive impact on project outcomes and empower women at every stage. By integrating gender equality practices, PPPs can improve, *inter alia*, women's health, mobility, security, justice, employment, and education. The PPP lifecycle offers a unique opportunity to incorporate gender equality processes and practices in each of the stages to have beneficial impacts on women and gender equality.

The scope of the guide is to provide policy recommendations to ensure that PPPs empower women and promote gender equality throughout the project lifecycle. It will address the impact of social norms and policy frameworks on equal access to PPP services and infrastructure, focusing on streamlining delivery to benefit both women and men. Policy options will expand from the seven ECE PPP recommendations on women's empowerment will have a focus on increasing public officials' skills in delivering projects in line with the PPPs for the SDGs outcomes. In particular, to ensure that governments are fully aware on how they can better empower women in projects as well as incentivizing the private sector to contribute to the necessary transfer of skills.

The ECE guide intends to showcase how gender equality could be improved in each PPP stage through the PPPs of the SDGs approach. It will focus on PPPs and infrastructure

projects and will supplement the Guiding Principles, the PIERS methodology, and the five desirable PPPs for the SDGs outcomes. The ECE guide would draw on the existing work undertaken by the international community and international best-practice showcased through a number of examples.

Added value by ECE

Case studies and examples that illustrate women's empowerment and gender equality will be showcased in the guide to inspire other governments in the ECE region to replicate and scale them up.

A lot has been written on the need to include a gender aspect to infrastructure, but none of the existing guides focus on PPPs and its contribution to the SDGs. The added value of the ECE guide is its focus on the SDGs, in particular, on the five desirable PPPs for the SDGs outcomes, as they provide a unique insight to mainstream a gender approach in PPP projects that contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Drafting and/or peer review team

Membership is open to experts with broad knowledge in the area of gender equality, women's empowerment and PPPs, ideally with experience in low and middle-income countries.

Timeline

Work on the guide should be commenced by the secretariat in 2024 in coordination with the Bureau and should be completed and submitted to the Working Party for its consideration at its 8th or 9th session.

3. Standard on off-grid renewable energy PPP projects in support of the SDGs³

Title

Standard on PPPs in off-grid renewable energy

Purpose

The purpose is to develop an ECE standard on off-grid renewable energy PPP projects in support of the SDGs, in particular to:

- (i). Provide informative context for member States wishing to develop off-grid rural electrification PPP projects that reflect current good practices and support the achievement of the SDGs;
- (ii). Use PPP examples and international best practices as empirical evidence for policy options and recommendations to develop off-grid renewable energy projects; and
- (iii). Create awareness of relevant international PPP trends and practices in the off-grid renewable energy sector as well as the potential contribution of the PPPs for the SDGs approach to provide clear energy to rural communities.

³ The template for a proposal to draft a new PPP standard is contained in Annex II of document ECE/CECI/WP/PPP/2021/5/Rev.1 adopted by the Committee in May 2022.

Scope

SDG 7 calls for governments and stakeholders to ensure “access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”, and sets ambitious targets by 2030 to ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services (7.1), to increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix (7.2), to double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency (7.3), to enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology (7.a), and expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries (7.b). Thus, it is crucial to accelerate the electrification of remote locations through sustainable energy, specifically renewable energy.

The scope of the standard is to provide examples of off-grid rural electrification PPPs and highlight some of the important aspects of delivering off-grid electrification PPPs to contribute to achieving the SDGs and to present a set of voluntary policy options and recommendations based on case studies from around the world. The standard will build on the ECE Standard on PPPs in Renewable Energy (2018) and will benefit from input by the ECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy.⁴

Deliverables

The expected deliverables are:

1. A review of existing PPP examples and best practices in off-grid rural electrification powered by renewable energy;
2. A review of the wider energy infrastructure requirements for the establishment and management of a robust PPP off-grid renewable energy programme aligned with the SDGs and the five ECE desirable outcomes; and
3. A standard on off-grid renewable energy with policy options and recommendations.

Geographical focus

The focus of ECE standards is the ECE region but may be applicable more broadly. Experiences and samples from all around the world should therefore be taken into account.

Drafting team leadership

The drafting team’s leader/co-leads are to be decided by the Bureau of the Working Party upon recommendation by the secretariat.

Drafting team membership and required functional expertise

Membership is open to experts with broad knowledge in the area of PPP and infrastructure projects in the renewable energy sector (on and off-grid), sustainable infrastructure and experience with how these projects were implemented in countries.

Resource requirements

Participants in the drafting process shall provide resources for their own participation. The existence and functioning of the drafting team shall not require any additional resources from the secretariat.

Timetable

December 2023: Project initiation and approval by Working Party on PPPs

⁴ The ECE Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, serviced by the Sustainable Energy Division, provided useful comments in 2018 during the preparation of the ECE Standard on PPPs in Renewable Energy.

November 2024:	First draft ready for review by key stakeholders
February 2025:	Publication of draft standard on UNECE website for public review
September 2025:	Endorsement of draft standards by the Bureau of the Working Party on PPPs
September 2025:	Draft standard submitted to the Working Party on PPPs
