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Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships

Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies

Sixteenth session
Geneva, 19 and 20 November 2024
Item 1 of the provisional agenda
Adoption of the agenda and election of officers

Annotated provisional agenda for the sixteenth session

To be held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, starting on 19 November at 10:00 in room XXIV*****

I. Provisional agenda

1. Adoption of the agenda and election of officers.

2. International policy dialogue on "Unleashing the power of innovation for climate action: AI for net zero and climate resilient infrastructure".

3. Review of the work of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies since its fifteenth session.

4. Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2024–2025.

5. Any other business and preparation of the draft report.

II. Annotations to the provisional agenda

Title of document	*Document symbol*	*For information/discussion*
Agenda	ECE/CECI/ICP/2024/1	Decision
Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2024–2025	ECE/CECI/2024/2, Annex II	Information

* All delegates should register on-line at: https://indico.un.org/event/1007308. Delegates are requested to present themselves with a valid identification card/passport at the Pass and Identification Unit of the UNOG Security and Safety Section, located at the Pregny Gate, Avenue de la Paix 8-14, Geneva 1211, for the issuance of an identification badge. Additional information for delegates, including a map of the premises, is available on the ECE website.

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Title of document	*Document symbol*	*For information/discussion*
Policy paper on Exploring the dynamics of experimentation and learning	ECE/CECI/2024/3	Information
Progress report on the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Ukraine	ECE/CECI/ICP/2024/INF.1	Discussion
Outcome document of the UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN) Action Forum	ECE/CECI/ICP2024/INF.2	Discussion

1. Adoption of the agenda and election of officers

Documentation: ECE/CECI/ICP/2024/1

1. The Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies (ToS-ICP) will adopt its agenda.

2. The objectives of the sixteenth session are to:

(a) Discuss and address topical, substantive issues related to the innovation and competitiveness elements of the programme of work of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP);

(b) Review the outputs and activities carried out since the fifteenth session of ToS-ICP in 2023 and agree on the Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for the work to be carried out until ToS-ICP seventeenth session in 2025.

3. ToS-ICP will elect officers to its Bureau in accordance with the "Guidelines on Procedures and Practices for ECE Bodies" (E/ECE/1468, Annex III para.V.8. p. 18).

2. International policy dialogue on "Unleashing the power of innovation for climate action: AI for net zero and climate resilient infrastructure"

2.1 Background

4. The substantive segment of ToS-ICP will be an international policy dialogue on "Unleashing the power of innovation for climate action: AI for net zero and climate resilient infrastructure", which will provide a platform for international knowledge-sharing and policy-learning in this area.

5. ECE member States designated "Climate action and resilient infrastructure for a sustainable future" as the theme of the high-level segment of the seventy-first session of the Commission (9 and 10 April 2025).[1] The Executive Committee has invited ECE subsidiary bodies and the secretariat to contribute to the preparation of the session of the Commission. The substantive segment of ToS-ICP responds to this request. Moreover, at the request of CICPPP, ToS-ICP continues the discussion and policy deliberations on those issues initiated at the policy dialogue of the Committee seventeenth session in June 2024. At this session member States started their dialogue on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for climate action, exploring the possible use of AI for the energy transition and addressing some of the challenges that may arise.[2]

[1] The seventy-first session of the Commission follows up on the workstreams of the seventieth session dedicated to green and digital transformations for sustainable development.

[2] The report of the seventeenth session of the Committee is available at: https://unece.org/info/Economic-Cooperation-and-Integration/events/389171

6. The international policy dialogue will be informed by relevant findings emanating from other UN initiatives on AI. Most importantly, in 2023 The UN Secretary General convened an AI Advisory Body tasked to prepare a report on Governing AI for Humanity to be presented at the Summit of the Future in September 2024. The interim report[3] calls for a closer alignment between international norms and how AI is developed and rolled out and it proposes to strengthen international governance of AI. The interim report notes that AI has the potential to be an enabler and accelerator in the achievement of agenda 2030 but several risks and challenges remain to be addressed. For example, it notes that AI risks perpetuating and even exacerbate biases present in the data set; it could lack transparency in the decision making of the models; it risks perpetuating privacy violation as it can be used to process and analyse vast amount of personal data. AI also comes with possible security risks and effects on employment and the widening of inequalities. The right governance and regulatory framework need to be in place to steer AI in the right direction.

7. The international policy dialogue will also be informed by relevant findings emanating from other UN initiatives on climate action, including the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

8. Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time, posing global threats to ecosystems, economies and communities. The world is not on track to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius as committed in the Paris Agreement. According to the International Panel on Climate Change, above the 1.5 degrees level the effects of temperature rise will lead to irreversible and catastrophic losses. Moreover, even with the optimistic scenario of 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature rise, climate events will become more adverse and more frequent with severe impacts on agriculture, water security and migration.[4]

9. Without investing in resilient infrastructure, major global cities could be underwater. According to the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 4 trillion USD need to be mobilized each year to fight climate change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[5] ToS-ICP international policy dialogue, will be informed by relevant UN initiatives regarding the financing of the climate transition, including the forthcoming ECE policy guide on promoting climate resilient Public-Private Partnerships and infrastructure projects in support of the SDGs.

2.2 AI for Climate Action

10. The ECE region needs to step up its efforts to both mitigate and adapt to climate change. This will require decarbonizing the economy and getting to net zero or even net negative carbon emissions. It will also require to urgently adapt to the climate change already happening and to make infrastructure more resilient to climate hazards. Transformative innovation, and AI in particular, will have a role to play in this endeavour.

11. Getting to net zero requires transformative innovation at the level of entire socio-economic systems, across all industries and especially at the level of cities where over 70% of global CO2 emissions is generated.[6] Governments, innovators, investors, businesses, consumers, and civil society need to collaborate to accelerate the development, deployment and scale-up of innovative solutions to climate change, including across borders.

12. AI promises to dramatically increase the productivity and pace of research, science, technology and innovation in all areas, including climate action.

13. AI can play a crucial role in the efforts of ***climate mitigation and achieving net zero***, and it can be employed, among other things, for:

- *Helping measure emissions*, *reduce emissions* and its effects, and *remove existing emissions* from the atmosphere;[7]

[3] UN AI Advisory Board, "Interim Report: Governing AI for Humanity" Dec 2023.
[4] IPCC, "Global Warming at 1.5 C – Summary for Policy Makers", 2019.
[5] UNCTAD Trade and Development report 2023.
[6] https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/cities-and-climate-change
[7] Boston Consulting Group, "Accelerating Climate Action with AI", November 2023.

- *Optimizing energy consumption* and *integrating renewable energy resources in the grid*. AI can understand and process information much faster than humans and it can be very helpful in a complex energy system — as the one with a transition to renewable energy — characterized by flexible demand and intermittent and distributed power generation;
- *Managing energy distribution more efficiently* by predicting energy demand and adjusting supply accordingly. AI can also optimize energy usage in buildings by learning usage patterns and making the necessary adjustments to minimize energy consumption;[8]
- *Reducing the experimental time* needed to explore and *identify new solutions to climate change*, including the discovery of new materials for example for batteries and materials to capture CO2.[9]

14. AI has also a fundamental role to play ***in climate change adaptation and disaster risks reduction*** and can be used for:

- *Gathering and analysing large amounts of data*, for example to map and track deforestation and iceberg melting;
- *Modelling weather events*, predicting where and when climate disasters occur and being leveraged for *early warning systems*;
- *Developing resilient infrastructure* to minimize the impact of climate hazards, where AI, through its data processing capacity, can help accelerate project development;
- *Assisting in coordinating emergency responses*, optimizing the allocation of resources such as food, water, and medical supplies to affected areas.[10]

15. Yet, the use of AI for climate action does not come without ***challenges and threats***.

- First of all, many applications of AI today *have large energy and environmental footprints*. To develop advance AI applications, the demand for energy will only continue to expand, creating the risk of higher carbon emissions.[11] The International Energy Agency forecasts that data-centre electricity consumption could double by 2026.[12] By 2027, generative AI could use as much energy as Spain needed to power itself in 2022;[13]
- Second, the growth of AI risks to *exacerbate inequalities within and among countries* and regions. Similarly, differences in access to existing and new AI and machine learning models, computational resources and infrastructure, and the lack of technical and management expertise and human capacity risk further enlarging the digital divide among countries and regions;
- Third, AI also poses significant new challenges for *data security*, *data privacy and ownership*, and ensuring that AI is used for the *common good*;
- At a practical level, the widespread use of AI in climate adaptation is still hindered by numerous *technical barriers*, e.g. in data compatibility.

16. To overcome those challenges and steer AI in the right direction, governments have a crucial role to play in regulating AI. Establishing *clear and comprehensive regulatory frameworks* can ensure that AI applications are safe, ethical and effective. The frameworks

[8] Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, "Beyond Renewables and Carbon Capture: How Governments Can Harness AI-Era Technology to Reimagine Climate Action", December 2023.
[9] Ibid.
[10] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/02/ai-combat-climate-change/
[11] Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, "Greening AI: Policy Agenda for the Artificial Intelligence and Energy Revolutions", May 2024.
[12] https://www.iea.org/reports/electricity-2024
[13] https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/ai-energy-demand-infrastructure

must address issues such as data privacy, algorithmic transparency and accountability, as well as make sure that AI is used sustainably.

17. To lower AI energy demand, the private sector is already exploring ways to close the loop and reach a balance between AI use and climate protection.[14] Governments need to find the *enabling frameworks and incentives* to unleash innovation to make AI environmentally sustainable and lower its footprint.

18. *Training and re-skilling* can ensure that civil servants, private sector leaders, and other stakeholders use and interpret AI solutions effectively in the most critical contexts. AI solutions must be inclusive and equitable, considering the needs and perspectives of women and all communities, particularly those most vulnerable to climate impacts. AI models need to be trained on most diverse as possible data sets to ensure fairness and the accuracy of model output.

19. Finally, *international cooperation and capacity building* are instrumental to close the digital divide among countries and ensure equal access and technology transfer.[15]

20. The substantive segment of the sixteenth session of ToS-ICP aims at deepening the dialogue among ECE member States on the use of innovation, and AI in particular, for the transition to net zero and sustainable and resilient infrastructure. The aim is firstly to explore the benefits of AI in climate change action — both in mitigation and the transition to net zero and in adaptation and resilient infrastructure — secondly to highlight its risks and challenges and thirdly to identify policy recommendations for governments to steer the use of AI in the direction of a sustainable and equitable future.

21. The session will:

(a) Consider the ECE region achievements and barriers in the transition to net zero as well as climate adaptation efforts for resilient infrastructure;

(b) Discuss the role of transformative innovation, and AI in particular, for climate action;

(c) Explore the use and applications of AI for climate change mitigation and the energy transition in particular;

(d) Explore the use and application of AI for climate change adaptation and climate resilient infrastructure in particular;

(e) Discuss the challenges member States in the ECE region face in the sustainable use of AI;

(f) Identify policy recommendations for the sustainable and equitable use of AI for climate action as well as areas for regional and international cooperation.

22. Following ToS-ICP session, a policy paper will be developed as a contribution to the eighteenth session of CICPPP in spring 2025.

3. Review of the work of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies since its fifteenth session

Documentation: ECE/CECI/2024/3; ECE/CECI/ICP/2024/INF.1; ECE/CECI/ICP/2024/INF.2

23. ToS-ICP members will be briefed on the main outcomes and highlights of the work since the fifteenth session, including:

[14] For example, Google and Microsoft signed the 24/7 Carbon Free Energy Compact, which aims to secure renewable energy at all times. Moreover, Google aims to achieve 24/7 clean energy for their operations by 2030. Amazon and Meta are part of the Emissions First Partnership, that aims at reducing emissions as much as possible regardless of geographical and market boundaries.

[15] As highlighted at the thirty-four annual session of ECE Working Party 6 in August 20204.

(a) The policy document on “Digital and green transformations: exploring the strategic dynamics of experimentation and learning”;

(b) Progress on the work of the UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN). Serving as UNECE-coordinated platform, since its launch in 2022, ETIN has grown to over 40 members, from over 15 countries, and is currently expanding to the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia.

(c) Prime among these were:

- ETIN workstreams on strategic learning for transformative innovation, circular economy platform and innovation-enhancing procurement. By promoting peer learning and exploring innovative policies and practices, leveraging evidence-based analyses — all in a fully member-driven manner — the latter have created substantial engagement and broken new ground in improving understanding of how to unleash the transformative power of innovation;
- The workshop “Unlocking innovation in services in the Western Balkans”, held in Geneva, Switzerland on 13–14 May 2024 and co-organized with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), UNCTAD and the Green Economic Development Programme (RECONOMY). The discussion created substantial momentum around and scope for further engagement on the enormous potential of innovation in scalable and tradeable services as enabler of sustainable and inclusive growth;
- The “ETIN transformative innovation action forum” held in Brussels, Belgium on 1–3 October 2024, co-organised with the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD). The highly interactive and member-driven Forum reviewed and celebrated ETIN achievements to date; it explored and agreed a strong mandate for a potential next phase; it engaged a wider circle of members, especially from the Western Balkan, Central Asia, and the Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (EESC) region;
- The bi-weekly episodes of Innovation Circle (14 in total) and Innovation Matters podcast series (30 in total). The Innovation Circle discussions have become efficient and useful in establishing regular venues for informal, member-driven exchanges. The Innovation Matters podcasts have engaged leading experts to explore more in depth highly relevant topics such as frontier technologies, the platform economy, and the circular economy.

(d) Progress on the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review (I4SDR) of Ukraine;

(e) Regular policy dialogue meetings of the network of Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO) national focal points with updates on reforms implemented in the region. IPO focal points very much appreciated the opportunity to engage in these dialogues, meet and hold informal exchanges with various innovation experts across the EESC region and other ECE member States. Through peer learning, IPO focal points were able to take away concrete action points for policy making in their respective countries;

(f) A workshop on “Crafting Armenia high-tech industry vision”, as follow up to the I4SDR of Armenia, held in Yerevan, Armenia on 1–2 March 2024, organized with the Ministry of High-Tech Industry of Armenia, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID);

(g) Progress of the work under the Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD) under the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), including a range of capacity building activities, a

study trip on the role of startups in innovation for the circular economy, and a workshop on creative industries in the SPECA sub-region;

(h) Prime among these were:

- The annual session of the SPECA WG on ITSD held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on 27 June 2024. The session reviewed progress on the implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and its Action Plan and also adopted decisions in relation to requests for ECE I4SDRs and the SPECA Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators for Sustainable Development. The session was held back-to-back with a sub-regional workshop on "Innovation and technology for sustainable development" — with a focus on digital public services for small and medium-sized enterprises in North and Central Asia — and a workshop on "Prospects for the creative industries in the SPECA sub-region" on 25–28 June 2024. These events, attended by over 100 participants, fostered a greater understanding among stakeholders of ways to craft innovation policies to support sustainable development;
- A two-day study trip on "Innovation for the circular economy: empowering start-ups to do more with less" held in Tbilisi, Georgia on 20–21 December 2023. This activity for senior policymakers and practitioners from the SPECA sub-region offered a comprehensive learning experience, combining practical insights from business incubators and accelerators with discussion on policy implementation. The study trip promoted enhanced administrative capacity and knowledge, with the aim to foster the effective incorporation of circular principles into innovation and start-up programmes, and ultimately contribute to sustainable economic growth in the SPECA sub-region;
- An ECE policy handbook on "New innovation policies for the SPECA sub-region" issued as an official UN publication in January 2024. Its dissemination, including online and at the annual session of the SPECA WG on ITSD, has promoted a better understanding among policymakers on how complementary policies cross-government can better support innovation for sustainable development.

(i) Cooperation with the ECE Trade sub-programme on the topic of circular economy, including on the ECE Circular Stakeholder Engaging Platform (Circular STEP), and the joint conference on circular economy held back-to-back with CICPPP with a record number of participants.

24. ToS-ICP will be invited to take stock of past activities and to discuss effective means for the dissemination of outputs, and documenting impact.

4. Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2024–2025

Documentation: ECE/CECI/2024/2, Annex II

25. The secretariat will inform ToS-ICP of the main outcomes of the seventeenth session of CICPPP, held from 24 June to 26 June 2024.

Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2024–2025

26. ToS-ICP will discuss proposals for work to be undertaken in the remainder of 2024 and in 2025 in accordance with the Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2024–2025 of CICPPP (ECE/CECI/2024/2, Annex II).

27. The plans and proposals below reflect the Inter-sessional Implementation Plan adopted at CICPPP on 24 June 2024 and demands expressed by member States. Delegations are invited to submit additional proposals to enhance further impact of activities. Current proposals include:

International policy dialogue and development of good policy practice

28. The sixth session of the SPECA WG on ITSD will be organized in 2025 together with ESCAP and held back-to-back with a sub-regional policy conference for the SPECA-participating States.

National and sub-regional policy analyses and recommendations

Innovation for Sustainable Development Review (I4SDRs)

29. The I4SDR of Ukraine will be completed. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have requested ECE to carry out I4SDRs. These requests are subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources.

Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO)

30. Work may begin in 2025 on an IPO for Central Asia, with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as beneficiaries, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

Capacity building

31. Regular policy dialogue meetings of the network of the IPO national focal points will continue to be organized to exchange good policy practices and build government capacity to implement policy recommendations from the Outlook.

32. As follow-up to the national I4SDR of Armenia, support Armenia in developing the next strategic priorities for the country in Science, Technology and Innovation subject to the availability of resources. The aim is for the outcomes of the I4SDR and following capacity building to feed into national strategic documents of the Armenian Government to be developed in the next two years.

33. Further capacity building activities to support implementation of recommendations from existing policy analyses at the national level may be undertaken upon request and subject to available resources.

34. Under the SPECA WG on ITSD, ECE will continue to implement sub-regional capacity building activities, subject to demand and the availability of extrabudgetary resources. Based on strong interest from the SPECA-participating States, study tours, policy dialogues and trainings will continue to be organized. This will include activities in support of implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and under the auspices of the SPECA Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators for Sustainable Development, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

35. ECE will continue contributing to the capacity building workstream of the UN Inter-agency Task Team on Science, Technology, and Innovation for Sustainable Development as appropriate, subject to available resources.

36. Work on developing international good practices on transformative innovation policy and on building the capacity of national innovation agencies on this topic will continue under the auspices of ETIN, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

5. Any other business and preparation of the draft report

37. ECE work on innovation, both the regular budget (RB) financed and the extrabudgetary (XB) financed work streams, have delivered results and achieved impact on the ground. This has triggered additional requests for technical assistance and capacity building activities from numerous ECE programme countries, which cannot be met in absence of additional resources. In addition, certain successful XB-financed activities have also created a need to ensure their sustainability and impact in the longer term. Both developments are occurring against the background of an increasingly challenging RB situation, which creates the need to find avenues for funding regular activities, such as the participation of experts to the sessions of ToS-ICP.

38. Together, this creates a growing need for extrabudgetary funding. Over the past year, the secretariat has stepped up fundraising activities. This includes fundraising specifically focussed on innovation, as well as fundraising as part of broader ECTD-wide and ECE-wide initiatives. The secretariat has also responded to respective recommendations from the evaluation of the Economic Cooperation and Integration sub-programme and the Trade sub-programme by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). This includes tabulated summaries of technical assistance requests submitted to respective inter-governmental fora. Delegations and experts are invited to discuss modalities for funding for the implementation of the Inter-sessional Implementation Plan 2024–2025.

39. The secretariat will prepare the draft report of the session and distribute it to the Permanent Missions in Geneva for adoption by silent procedure in accordance with paragraph 21 of Appendix III of document E/ECE/1464 (Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies). Once the draft report is adopted, it will be published in English, French and Russian. The Chair's summary of the international policy dialogue (Item 2 of the agenda) will be annexed to the report.

40. ToS-ICP will decide on the date of its seventeenth session. The secretariat proposes two days meeting on 27 and 28 October 2025.

III. Provisional timetable

Time	*Agenda Item*
Tuesday, 19 November 2024	
10:00 – 10:15	Item 1. Adoption of the agenda and election of officers
10:15 – 13:00	Item 2. International policy dialogue on "Unleashing the power of innovation for climate action: AI for net zero and climate resilient infrastructure"
15:00 – 18:00	Item 2 (cont.). International policy dialogue on "Unleashing the power of innovation for climate action: AI for net zero and climate resilient infrastructure"
Wednesday, 20 November 2024	
10:00 – 13:00	Item 3. Review of the work of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies since its fifteenth session
15:00 – 16:30	Item 3 (cont.). Review of the work of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies since its fifteenth session
16:30 – 17:30	Item 4. Inter-sessional Implementation Plan for 2024–2025
17:30 – 18:00	Item 5. Any other business and preparation of the draft report