1. **Introduction**

Assessment and evaluation are crucial elements of results-based management (RBM). RBM is a management approach focused on achieving results. ECE’s work is evaluated to strengthen accountability towards its stakeholders, notably member States and donors of extrabudgetary resources. The process also ensures that lessons learned are taken into account in planning its future activities.

More specifically, performance assessments and evaluations are undertaken in order to:

(a) Review and reaffirm the relevance of activities in view of ECE’s overall objectives;
(b) Assist in measuring more precisely their impact;
(c) Assess the effectiveness of activities in achieving expected results and the efficiency with which these activities are carried out.

A properly designed and conducted evaluation[^1] should provide answers to the following three key questions: (i) are we doing the right thing; (ii) are we doing it right; and (iii) are there more efficient ways of achieving our expected results? Effective programme management at all levels will benefit from properly conducted evaluation, formulation of recommendations resulting from an evidence-based analysis, and most importantly, management response to these findings.

The current ECE evaluation policy provides for the following types of evaluations:

(a) Internal mandatory evaluations;
   (i) Programme performance assessment and reporting (PPR);
   (ii) Biennial evaluations of subprogramme performance at cluster-level;
   (iii) Self-evaluations;

(b) External evaluations:
   (i) Mandatory evaluations;
   (ii) Discretionary evaluations.

2. **Internal evaluations**

Internal evaluations may be mandatory, e.g. the biennial evaluations of subprogramme performance by sectoral committees (SCs) mandated by the ECE member States, or discretionary, e.g. self-evaluations by the subprogrammes.

[^1]: An evaluation is an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, institutional performance etc. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors an causality, in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions and contributions of the organizations of the UN system. An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into the decision-making processes of the organizations of the UN system and its members (source: UNEG/FN/Norms(2005)).
A. Internal assessments for the programme performance reporting

The Secretariat reports its performance in the context of the established objectives of programme budgets to the General Assembly at the end of every biennium in the form of a PPR. Performance assessments are carried out at subprogramme level to prepare the PPR for ECE.

PPR comprises the reporting of the achievement of expected accomplishments, usually three per subprogramme. It is measured by a set of indicators of achievement and performance measures. The results achieved and lessons learned are summarized in concise results statements (one per expected accomplishment). These all are part of the performance assessment in the Integrated Management and Document Information System (IMDIS). They also form part of the “Report of the Secretary General on Programme Performance for the biennium” (see e.g. A/63/70 and A/65/70).

B. Biennial evaluations of subprogramme performance

The ECE member countries agreed, at their annual session in 2004, to place more emphasis on evaluation as a tool in managing the Commission’s work. Therefore, the Commission requested SCs to conduct biennial evaluations of their respective subprogrammes and to take into account the results of these evaluations in determining their work programmes. The 2005 ECE reform further strengthened this approach to strengthen and demonstrate the impact, effectiveness and efficiency of each subprogramme and that of the ECE as a whole. The Commission mandates the SCs to manage and conduct biennial evaluations of subprogramme performance. At its tenth meeting in 30 November 2006 EXCOM requested all SCs to implement the specific procedures laid out in the “Guide for Biennial Evaluations of Subprogramme Performance by UNECE Sectoral Committees”.

Each SC, in cooperation with the relevant Division of the secretariat, defines clusters of its activities, which are more than the usual three selected for the internal assessment for PPR. For each of the clusters the SC identifies expected accomplishments, indicators of achievement as well as quantitative performance measures. At the end of a biennium, either the relevant SC or its Bureau considers a report for each expected accomplishment, drafted earlier by the SC secretariat. Programmatic adjustments may be submitted to the relevant SC for endorsement. Key findings and possible adjustments are reported by the Chair of the SC to the Executive Committee of ECE (EXCOM).

C. Link between biennial evaluations and the programme performance report

The biennial evaluations on subprogramme performance follow the same results-based methodology as used for the ECE’s PPR and the Report of the Secretary General on Programme Performance. The biennial evaluations are based on expected accomplishments that are identical at a more disaggregated level than that of the expected accomplishments in the PPR. More specifically, the biennial evaluations are based on cluster-level expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement.

D. Self-evaluations

Self-evaluations are managed and conducted by ECE staff at the subprogramme level as recommended by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). Usually, activities or thematic areas considered to have a potential for improvement are selected for such evaluation. Projects implemented through the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC) can also be the subject of self-evaluations. In general, each subprogramme undertakes one self-evaluation per biennium. Divisions may use their consultancy budget to hire consultants to assist in conducting self-evaluations.

2 http://iseek.un.org/LibraryDocuments/1432-200810290513321881232.pdf
The Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PPME) Unit compiles a list of self-evaluations on the basis of proposals from the Divisions responsible for the ECE subprogrammes. The identification of topics or areas is done before the biennium as part of the programme budget narrative. The final list is submitted to the Executive Secretary for endorsement and also made available to the Headquarters in New York. Once the subprogramme has identified the topic, it prepares the terms of reference following a given outline to properly plan and conduct the exercise, usually in the beginning of the biennium, and also submits them to the PPME Unit. The self-evaluation is carried out during the biennium and led by the professional staff in charge of the activity or work area to be evaluated. Reports on self-evaluations, including lessons learned and recommendations for adjustment or improvement, are first provided to the Division Director. The PPME Unit organizes a workshop in the beginning of the following biennium to present and discuss the reports. The reports are further reported to ECE management in a manner suitable for the recommended action. Some reports of self-evaluations may be made available to member States and/or donors (in cases of projects or activities funded from extrabudgetary resources).

E. Link between self-evaluations and the biennial performance evaluations

Activities and areas for self-evaluation can be chosen to match one of the clusters of activities for which a biennial evaluation will be conducted. In such case the self-evaluation should link with the expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement of that cluster and provide further insight to the results from the biennial evaluation. The report of the self-evaluation thus provides the basis to later prepare the relevant accomplishment account for that cluster.

3. External evaluations

External mandatory evaluations are managed and conducted by independent entities, e.g. OIOS. They may be mandated by the General Assembly, the Committee for Programme Coordination (CPC), ECE member States, or donors. ECE itself may also decide to launch an external (discretionary) evaluation at programme, subprogramme or thematic level, resources permitting.

A. Mandatory external project evaluations

Major technical assistance projects funded from the regular budget (in particular the UN Development Account) or from extrabudgetary resources should, in principle, have a built-in requirement for external evaluation unless otherwise agreed with the donor(s). This also applies to joint projects implemented with other partner organizations. Project documents should specify all necessary evaluation details, including the amount and source of funds required for the evaluation.

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4 It might be appropriate to link such a requirement with a threshold in terms of duration and/or budget of the project. In this respect, the experience of some other UN agencies is as follows:

- The document describing the ILO Evaluation strategy in Nov 2000 states that “present arrangements will remain for the evaluation of technical cooperation (all projects with a value of over $250,000 will be subject to an independent evaluation at least once in the project’s life cycle, to an annual self-evaluation and to an evaluation before starting a new phase)” (see GB.279/PFA/8).

- Recent “Evaluation Policy” by ESCWA of Sep 2010 states that “External project evaluations provide programme managers and donors with independent feedback on a project or programme. As per UN Standards, all new projects with a budget of or above US$250,000 should include an evaluation element in the project document”, although such a recommendation cannot be found in UNEG document “UN Standards”.

- Democracy Fund (UNDEF) proposes in its “Project Document Guidelines” that “10% of the project budget (capped at $25,000 for projects over $250,000, except for in the case of UN executed projects where the cap will not apply) will be set aside by UNDEF from each project to cover monitoring and evaluation.”

- UNEP recommends that all projects include evaluation in project budget, usually a few % of total budget (ranging from $5000–75,000; UNEP’s “UNEP Project manual: formulation, approval, monitoring and evaluation” states that “Projects with budgets between $250,000 and $500,000 are subject to terminal evaluations conducted either as desk or in-depth evaluations.”
B. Discretionary external project evaluations

Other smaller-scale projects may undergo external evaluation at the discretion of the programme manager or Division Director. Such projects may also be subjected to a self-evaluation.

4. Evaluation knowledge sharing

Result statements, which are part of the PPR, are compiled and considered at the Directors meetings after the completion of a given biennium. The finalized statements are submitted to the headquarters in New York.

The SCs discuss and review the biennial evaluation reports of the ECE subprogrammes. Logical frameworks and accomplishment accounts for the biennial evaluations of subprogramme performance, after being considered by the SCs, are made available to all interested ECE staff members through the Intranet site5 of the PPME Unit.

The recommendations made in the self-evaluation reports are subject to a response from the respective management. The follow-up is made in connection with the next internal workshop on self-evaluations.

5. The role of the Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit

The PPME Unit has, among its other duties in the Office of the Executive Secretary, defined tasks to implement and contribute to the evaluation activities. These include:

(a) Support to the Divisions in:
   (i) The preparation of PPR;
   (ii) The preparation of submissions to SCs, in particular the biennial evaluations;
   (iii) Providing advice on planning and conducting self-evaluations;

(b) Putting together the evaluations of subprogramme performance, i.e. the PPR and biennial evaluations;

(c) Support to the ECE-wide evaluation knowledge sharing among staff, in particular to arrange appropriate training and sharing of experiences.

The Unit also ensures an acceptable level of quality of the assessments and evaluations undertaken at ECE. It considers self-evaluation reports, makes them available in the PPME Intranet site6. The PPME Unit also organizes evaluation-related training and/or information sessions in ECE at least once every biennium to promote all evaluation work, ensure common approaches, and also serve as quality assurance. Due to resource limitations, the Unit does not carry out evaluations itself.

6. Guidance for evaluations

Self-evaluations and PPR-related assessments are conducted at ECE in accordance with the relevant UN Regulations and Rules. They also take into account the guidance of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)7, in particular the relevant standards, norms and quality checklists (UNEG/FN/Standards(2005), UNEG/FN/Norms(2005), UNEG/G(2010)/1 and 2).

5 http://iseek.un.org/webpgdept1432_5.asp
7 http://www.uneval.org/normsandstandards/index.jsp?doc_cat_source_id=4