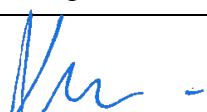


MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Evaluation Title:	Evaluation of UNDA Project 2124N “Accelerating the Transition Towards a Circular Economy in the ECE region”		
Period of Review:	2019 - 2024		
Date of Evaluation Report:	29/01/2025		
Approved by:	Chief, PMU Nicolas Dath-Baron	Date 15/12/2025	Signature 
Cleared by:	Director of Division, Elisabeth Türk	15/12/2025	
Prepared by:	Project Manager Ariel Ivanier	15/12/2025	

Recommendation 1:

ECTD should capitalize on the opportunities presented by the recommendations from the 2023 OIOS evaluation, which mandates ECTD to develop an integrated strategic plan. Specifically, **ECTD should embed the circular economy as a pillar of ECTD’s strategic plan.**

Management Response:

UNECE accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

ECTD will continue to strengthen its the circular economy as a pillar into its workstreams by consolidating it among the logical framework of its strategic plan for 2025-2027. The goal will be to continue to mainstream the transition to a circular economy in the ECE region. In particular, a specific Outcome with related Outputs that include enhanced circularity as an expected result will be prepared as well as selected deliverables.

ECTD-serviced normative bodies will continue to prepare guidance (e.g. a Code of Good Practice for food loss and waste reduction in dry and dried produce), and technical assistance projects will include policy advisory on the circular economy transition (i.e. on supply chain traceability, use of the PIERS methodology, transformative innovation for circularity).

Responsibility:

Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027

Recommendation 2:

Future projects would benefit from clearer mechanisms for mainstreaming cross-cutting perspectives, including targeted disability inclusion efforts, and explicit links to climate adaptation and mitigation goals. Additionally, increased collaboration with UN agencies specializing in these areas such as the ILO on workers' rights in the just transition context could enhance the depth and effectiveness of cross-cutting integration.

Management Response:

UNECE accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

With regard to human rights, ECTD will build on entry points already established through its tools that mainstream cross-cutting perspectives, such as the Sustainability Pledge for Textiles and Footwear and the PPP PIERS methodology. The circular economy workstream has explicit links to climate adaptation and mitigation goals, which will continue to be integrated.

Future projects will incorporate mechanisms to advance cross-cutting agendas on disability inclusion and gender equality. Both country-specific studies and general policy papers will include recommendations that promote inclusivity, in line with guidance from partner organizations.

Additional measures will involve expanding workstreams that trace ESG (environmental, social, and governance) aspects of value chains. Within policy advisory services, efforts will be made for extending coverage to new sectors such as agrifood and critical minerals.

Responsibility:

Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027

Recommendation 3:

To maximise impact and foster greater collaboration, UNECE should leverage the strong commitment of several member States and non-State actors to both the Circular STEP network and the ETIN network, created in a previous UNECE project, on transformative innovation. Bringing these networks together and embedding them in the respective intergovernmental structures (e.g. respective Teams of Specialists, Working Parties) would create a cohesive platform for advancing Circular Economy innovation and facilitating knowledge exchange and implementation across member States.

To maintain the momentum generated by these initiatives, UNECE should adopt a coordinated approach, aligning both networks under its leadership to support the attainment of SDG 12. This integration would enhance efficiency, strengthen partnerships, and position UNECE as a key driver of circular transformation and resilience in the UNECE region, unlocking new opportunities for collaboration, investment, and policy innovation.

Management Response:

UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

UNECE ECTD recognizes the complementarity and potential for synergies between the two networks (the strong circular economy dimension is also reflected in the title of the XB project under which ETIN was originally established). At the same time, the ETIN and Circular STEP networks were established under different institutional arrangements, and have since evolved differently, reflecting

distinct remits and operational modalities. ETIN, created through a previous UNECE project on transformative innovation, has already received support from member States to be integrated into the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies. In contrast, Circular STEP has been structured as a network, with more flexible engagement from member States and non-State actors around circular economy practices.

To maximize impact and foster greater collaboration, UNECE ECTD will leverage the complementary strengths of both networks, drawing on expertise that aligns with beneficiary needs for the development of policy papers and guidance, capacity-building activities, policy dialogues, peer reviews, and other ad-hoc interventions, always guided by the ECTD-wide integrated Strategic Plan, where Circular Economy is a prominent pillar.

Responsibility:

Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027

Recommendation 4:

To ensure the successful and sustained adoption of Circular Economy (CE) principles, UNECE should support member States in developing robust circular economy laws, policies, standards and governance structures, addressing the regulatory gaps that have slowed implementation. Additionally, targeted capacity-building efforts, including extensive training and technical support, are essential to equip government officials and industries with the necessary expertise in the circular economy. To improve coordination and avoid duplication, UNECE should strengthen collaboration with key international partners, such as UNEP, UNDP, and other development partners, such as the EU and the World Bank, ensuring a more aligned and effective approach to circular economy implementation at the country level.

Management Response:

UNECE accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

Based on the respective elements of the ECTD-wide integrated Strategic Plan, UNECE ECTD will continue to develop demand-driven, country specific policy advisory and technical cooperation for developing frameworks to accelerate the transition to the circular economy among its member states and beyond, including advise on modernizing laws, policies, standards and governance structures. It will focus its technical assistance in developing tools that can help identify regulatory gaps that can act as a hindrance, as well as setup the right type of incentives, especially in countries with economies in transition.

UNECE ECTD will organise, workshops, seminars and other targeted capacity-building events with the goal to equip government officials and industries with the necessary expertise in the circular economy. In delivering these interventions, UNECE will liaise with the office of the Resident Coordinator in selected programme countries to ensure consistency with the countries' UN sustainable development cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs), and the respective integrated national financing frameworks (INFFs), when available, to ensure duplication of efforts is avoided.

Responsibility: Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027

Recommendation 5:

ECTD should reinforce its leadership in driving the CE transition by focusing on its core economic mandate while strategically expanding cross-sectoral collaboration. Systematic engagement with sister UN agencies should continue, building on existing partnerships such as those with UNEP on environmental aspects. Additionally, new partnerships should be developed to address key cross-cutting issues: collaborating with the ILO on workers' rights, FAO on food waste, and both UN Women and the ILO to ensure a just transition that integrates gender equality considerations.

To further enhance inclusivity, ECTD should explore cooperation with the Global Disability Fund (GDF) formerly the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) to ensure that disability rights are effectively integrated into CE strategies. Strengthening these partnerships will enhance policy coherence, maximise impact, and ensure a holistic approach to the CE transition.

Management Response:

UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

Based on the respective elements of the ECTD-wide integrated Strategic Plan, ECTD will continue to build on its core competencies to leverage the nexus between trade, innovation, and finance. It will strengthen partnerships in related policy areas — for example, with UN Women in developing Action Plans that mainstream gender into quality infrastructure for trade in beneficiary countries; with FAO in the context of policy dialogues held back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development; and with the ILO through its workstream on increasing the transparency and traceability of value chains.

In addition, ECTD will take action to ensure that disability rights are explicitly addressed within the circular economy workstream, including its policy advisory activities. It is noted that UNECE is not a member of the steering board of GDF. Therefore, the disability inclusion framework applicable to the UN Secretariat will be used.

Responsibility: Ms. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027

Recommendation 6:

During project design, **UNECE should systematically assess whether existing UNECE or other relevant networks can be leveraged as an efficiency measure before establishing new ones.** If the creation of a new network is deemed necessary due to a lack of viable alternatives, a comprehensive sustainability plan must be developed from the outset. By default, this plan should be integrated into project implementation from the beginning and maintained throughout the entire duration, rather than being addressed only at the project's conclusion, ensuring long-term impact and viability.

Management Response:

UNECE accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

In line with ongoing reforms on right-sizing and right-servicing UNECE intergovernmental bodies, and as part of the mandate prioritization process, ECE ECTD will not include the establishment of any new expert networks in upcoming projects. Instead, efforts will focus on ensuring that existing networks are more effectively engaged within the division's structures under subprogramme 4 (Economic Cooperation and Integration) and subprogramme 6 (Trade), guided by the ECTD-wide integrated Strategic Plan.

To this end, Circular STEP experts will be invited to participate in upcoming sessions of intergovernmental bodies, peer learning activities, and peer reviews of ECTD deliverables, in cases where their expertise is fit-for-purpose and aligned with the objectives of each meeting.

Responsibility:

Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027.

Recommendation 7:

ECTD needs to diversify its funding sources, as traditional donors face competing priorities in the context of groundbreaking geopolitical challenges in Europe and beyond.

Moving forward, UNECE has an exciting opportunity to fully integrate Circular Economy strategies into its (modest) regular budget workstreams and strengthen strategic partnerships to drive long-term impact.

Management Response:

UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

In line with Recommendation 1, the circular economy is being mainstreamed into the strategic results framework of ECTD, ensuring the development of a pipeline of deliverables that address the priorities of the circular transition among its beneficiaries.

In addition, UNECE ECTD will continue to strengthen resource mobilization efforts by identifying new opportunities across its various areas of work. However, measures to diversify funding sources must be understood within the broader institutional transitions affecting UNECE — in particular the ongoing UN80 reform, discussions on right-sizing intergovernmental mechanisms, and persistent geopolitical challenges — all of which may impact the capacity to realize these strategies. To this is added the general budgetary of UNECE member States, which are the typical donors of UNECE activities. Finally, as regards innovative funding sources (e.g. private donors, foundations, fee-based models etc.) guidance of UNECE EO will be needed to ensure full compliance with UN Rules and Regulations.

Responsibility:

Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027

Recommendation 8:

Future projects could benefit from stronger **partnerships with UN agencies specializing in gender, human rights, and youth empowerment to further enhance impact.**

Management Response:

UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.

Follow up actions and responsibilities:

As mentioned in Recommendation 5 UNECE ECTD, will continue to work based on the respective elements of the ECTD-wide integrated Strategic Plan, to build on its core competencies to leverage the nexus between trade, innovation, and finance. It will strengthen partnerships in related policy areas also for youth empowerment and human rights, as they matter for the areas where it has a remit.

Responsibility: Ms. Ariel Ivanier, Chief of Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Timeline: 31 December 2027