Draft Action Plan
for implementing
the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

Prepared for consideration by the
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and the
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1. Background

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasized the role of science, technology and innovation (STI) as an important vehicle for pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). STI can be a powerful engine for economic growth and can serve as a driver of structural transformation and economic diversification and sustainable development.

The ambition of the countries participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) to meet the SDGs calls for bold policy initiatives to facilitate and promote innovation and technological transformation. This challenge has become even more urgent in light of the impending energy transition and shift towards 'green growth', the devastating effects of the Covid-19 crisis on the world economy, as well as the expected impact of rapid global technological change on the competitive position of these economies.

Given the transboundary nature of many regional sustainable development challenges, such as those related to water, energy, environment and transport, both national and cross-border efforts would be needed in order to be effective in the pursuit of new technological solutions to these challenges. Hence the SPECA countries would need to work together towards cooperative solutions aimed at technological transformation and sustainable development to the mutual benefit of all countries in the region.

As a result of a series of discussions, the SPECA Governing Council approved in 2019 the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and encouraged the SPECA countries, donors and partner organizations to support its implementation. As reflected in this strategy, the ambition of the SPECA countries is to develop and consolidate their national capacities and capabilities to design and implement innovation policies for sustainable development taking into account not only their national contexts and existing constraints but also recognizing any possible transboundary effects.

The goals outlined in the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development are ambitious but challenging. This is because it is widely acknowledged that the national innovation systems of the SPECA countries are still underdeveloped and their STI capabilities are limited in terms of the scientific capacities, the general level of technological development and ability to absorb STI products and processes. Addressing such challenges will require governments to direct their efforts in implementing the Strategy towards developing their national capacity, strengthening innovation systems and enhancing innovation capabilities. Therefore, the SPECA countries should aim to work together to strengthen their institutional frameworks for regional cooperation regarding the implementation of innovation policies for sustainable development with possible cross-border effects to achieve synergies within the sub-region.

UNECE has a mandate to promote policies that support innovation, technological progress and sustainable development among its member States, including those in the SPECA subregion. Furthermore, UNECE, together with ESCAP, supports the SPECA intergovernmental policy dialogue in these area through the work of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG ITSD). The two UN agencies are also contributing analytical support to the intergovernmental discussions among SPECA countries as reflected in a series of analytical papers and reports on STI for sustainable development.

One example of such fruitful multilateral cooperation is the UNDA project 2023N "Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The project aims to support the seven participating SPECA countries in their efforts to spur innovation as a central driver of the increasingly urgent transition from a low productivity and resource-intensive model of economic development to knowledge-based and more sustainable economic growth, in line with the SDGs. The project's main objective is to strengthen the institutional capacities of the SPECA countries to harness innovation as a driver of sustainable development and regional integration.

Presently, the intergovernmental consultations and policy deliberations among the SPECA countries have reached a stage where the countries are prepared to discuss and, possibly, agree upon a series of collaborative actions that would support the implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. The present document reflects some of the main outcomes, including proposals for concrete cooperative actions, of the series of related intergovernmental discussions on this topic that have taken place during recent meetings of the SPECA WG ITSD, the SPECA Economic Forum and the SPECA Governing Council.

The governments of the SPECA countries are invited to participate actively in this final round of intergovernmental deliberations with a view to finalising the Action Plan to efficiently implement the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.

2. Logical Framework of the Action Plan

The underlying rationale of the Action Plan is to assemble a series of practical, joint actions to achieve the objectives of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development, as endorsed by the SPECA countries, reflecting their agreement to undertake these actions through cooperative efforts.

By and large, the Action Plan follows the logical structure of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development, in particular, its main objectives which are formulated as follows:

Objective 1. Upgrade the knowledge and skills base of key stakeholders in the SPECA countries to meet the challenges of addressing SDGs with innovative solutions;

Objective 2. Facilitate the diffusion of innovations and the transfer of technologies addressing sustainable development challenges in the subregion;

Objective 3. Enhance the institutional framework for subregional cooperation for implementing innovation addressing sustainable development challenges of common interest;

Objective 4. Contribute to improved performance of the SPECA countries as measured against the SDGs.

The SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development also states that, to achieve these objectives, the SPECA countries will be applying the following key cooperation mechanisms:

- *Strengthening the subregional policy dialogue and the sharing of good policies and practices,* including the attraction of leading international expertise in innovation for sustainable development;

- *Working together in identifying subregional and transboundary sustainable development challenges of high priority* and common interest that call for innovative solutions;

- *Raising awareness* in the SPECA countries on the role of innovation in achieving the SDGs.

- *Strengthening cooperation with existing platforms and mechanisms for international cooperation* to promote innovation for sustainable development within the United Nations family of organizations.

The main body of the Action Plan comprises a description of the actions through which the SPECA countries will target the above objectives. In formulating the list of actions, the proposed draft Action Plan draws on existing UNECE and ESCAP policy tools in the field of innovation and sustainable development, the experience of technical cooperation activities of the two UN agencies in the SPECA countries, as well as the main conclusions of a series of related analytical materials, including the background paper "Towards Technological Transformation of the SPECA Countries: The Innovation Imperative for Sustainable Development".

Other components of the Action Plan are the list of Strategy milestones which are checkpoints in the implementation process, a Gantt chart presenting the timing and sequencing of implementation of the individual actions as well as a description of the resources necessary for the implementation of the Action Plan.

Finally, the logical framework of the Action Plan contains a description of the governance and monitoring mechanisms envisaged for the oversight of progress in implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.

In addition to the above, Annex 1 contains a more detailed description of three proposed pilot joint initiatives/cooperation projects between SPECA countries which also incorporate the outcomes of the national capacity building activities undertaken in the context of the UNECE programme of work on innovation and competitiveness policies and within the programme of work of the SPECA WG ITSD. It is envisaged that these pilot initiatives – which are part and parcel of the Action Plan – will "lead by example" and stimulate cooperative efforts by the SPECA countries to implement other actions envisaged in the Plan.

3. Actions and milestones

The tentative list of proposed actions is presented in Table 1. The description of these actions is accompanied by an indication of the respective Strategy objective targeted by the action, the timeline of the action as well as the UN agency or agencies that would provide support for their implementation.[1] Where relevant and appropriate, the description of the actions is supplemented with a clarification of the targets/intended outcomes in terms of performance indicators to measure progress in implementation.

Table 2 illustrates the expected timing and sequencing of implementation of the individual actions within the overall time frame of the present Action Plan.

Table 3 presents another component of the Action Plan, namely, the list of Strategy milestones. Milestones are control points in the process of implementation of the Strategy which should allow the governance bodies to trace progress in implementation, assess any problems that may have arisen and decide on the steps, if any, required in the next implementation phases.

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[1] In principle, the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development can be regarded as a long-term initiative with an open horizon. The current Action Plan only includes actions envisaged until 2024 which is the horizon of the UNDA project 2023N "Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

Table 1. Proposed cooperative actions for implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

No.	Actions and sub-actions	Description	Targeted Strategy objectives	Lead UN Agency	Timeline	Performance indicators
A1	**Action Plan launch**	**Organisational activities to support Action Plan implementation in the SPECA countries**	**O1, O2, O3 O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2021-2022**	**N/A**
A1.1	Nomination of Focal Points	Each SPECA country nominates a Focal Point to coordinate implementation in the respective countries	O1, O2, O3 O4	UNECE ESCAP	2021-2022	**N/A**
A1.2	Promotional/awareness raising campaigns	Each SPECA country undertakes a national promotional/ awareness raising campaign to mobilise participation of national stakeholders in the implementation of actions	O1, O2, O3 O4	UNECE ESCAP	2022	**N/A**
A2	**National capacity development and skill-building workshops**	**The workshops will cover selected topics on innovation policy for inclusive and sustainable development based on identified needs and priority areas for cooperation for the SPECA countries**	**O1, O3**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2022-2024**	**100 participants Satisfaction rate > 4 (out of 5, based on survey)**
A2.1	First series of national workshops	Possible topics: a) Building institutional capacity in innovation for inclusive and sustainable development policy; b) Policy coordination on innovation for inclusive and sustainable development	O1, O3	UNECE ESCAP	2022	> 30 participants Satisfaction rate > 4 (out of 5, based on survey)
A2.2	Second series of national workshops	Possible topics: a) Policy experimentation in innovation policy for inclusive and sustainable development; b) Innovation-enhancing public procurement targeting innovation for sustainable development	O1, O3	UNECE ESCAP	2023	> 30 participants Satisfaction rate > 4 (out of 5, based on survey)
A2.3	Third series of national workshops	Possible topics: a) Alternative sources of early-stage financing: microfinance and crowdfunding; b) Facilitating digital innovation and digital ecosystems supporting inclusive and sustainable development in the SPECA countries	O1, O3	UNECE ESCAP	2024	> 30 participants Satisfaction rate > 4 (out of 5, based on survey)
A3	**Training materials on innovation for SD policies (in 3 sets)**	**Develop and disseminate training materials on good practices in innovation policies for inclusive and sustainable development**	**O1**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2022-2024**	**3 sets of training materials**

N/A – not applicable

Table 1 (contd). Proposed cooperative actions for implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

A4	**SPECA innovation/startup competition**	**A competition of innovation projects initiated by startups from the SPECA countries**	**O2, O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2022-2023**	**Participation of at least 4 countries**
A4.1	Competition launch	Announcement of the competition and its terms and ensuring wide publicity	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2022	**N/A**
A4.2	Collecting bids	Soliciting bids from eligible participants from the SPECA countries	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2022	**N/A**
A4.3	Review of submissions	The submitted bids will be reviewed by a UNECE+ESCAP jury of international experts	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2023	**N/A**
A4.4	Announcing winners	The jury of international experts ranks the bids. The winners are awarded prizes	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2023	3(5) prizes awarded
A5	**SPECA Innovation Week**	**A series of mini webinars on consecutive days, during each of which one or two SPECA countries share their good practices in innovation for sustainable development policy and practice**	**O1, O3**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2022**	**Participation of at least 4 countries Event report**
A6	**Technical assistance missions by international experts**	**During missions, leading international experts will share their expertise with SPECA policymakers on selected topics of innovation policy design and implementation**	**O1, O3**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2022-2024**	**N/A**
A6.1	First technical assistance mission	Possible topics: a) Building institutional capacity in innovation for sustainable development policy; b) Policy coordination in innovation for sustainable development	O1, O3	UNECE	2022	**N/A**
A6.2	Second technical assistance mission	Possible topics: a) Policy experimentation in innovation policy; b) Innovation-enhancing public procurement targeting innovation for sustainable development	O1, O3	UNECE	2023	**N/A**
A6.3	Third technical assistance mission	Possible topics: a) Alternative sources of early-stage financing: microfinance and crowdfunding; b) Facilitating digital innovation and digital ecosystems in the SPECA region	O1, O3	UNECE ESCAP	2024	**N/A**

N/A – not applicable

Table 1 (contd). Proposed cooperative actions for implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

A7	**SPECA startup accelerator programme and support network**	**The programme will help innovative SPECA startups to accelerate the life cycle of their businesses**	**O2, O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2023-2024**	**Participation of at least 3 countries**
A7.1	Programme and network launch	Announcement of the terms of the programme and launch of the support network	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2023	**N/A**
A7.2	Soliciting applications and their evaluation	The eligible submissions by SPECA startups are evaluated by a panel of international experts	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2023	**N/A**
A7.3	Programme runs in phases 1 and 2	The startups get intensive structured training and face-to-face consultations with mentors and prospective partners	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2023 – 2024	**N/A**
A7.4	Demo days	The participants pitch their startup to actual potential investors	O2, O4	UNECE ESCAP	2024	Private investment in 3(5) startups
A8	**Mid-term monitoring and evaluation report**	**Preparing a mid-term monitoring and evaluation report on Action Plan implementation**	**O1, O2, O3 O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2023**	**N/A**
A9	**SPECA subregional event on innovation for SD policy instruments**	**A skills development workshop on good practices in the design and administration of policy instruments targeting innovation for sustainable development**	**O2, O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2023**	**20 participants from 5 countries**
A10	**SPECA subregional event on innovation support institutions**	**A skills development workshop on good practices in design and management of innovation support institutions (business incubators, tech parks and technology transfer offices)**	**O2, O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2024**	**20 participants from 5 countries**
A11	**Final monitoring and evaluation report**	**Final monitoring and evaluation report on Action Plan implementation**	**O1, O2, O3 O4**	**UNECE ESCAP**	**2024**	**N/A**

N/A – not applicable

Table 2. Sequencing of the actions for implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

Actions	2021	2022				2023				2024			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
A1	█	█											
A1.1	█	█											
A1.2	█	█											
A2		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
A2.1		█	█										
A2.2						█	█						
A2.3										█	█		
A3	█	█	█		█	█	█		█	█	█		
A4		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█				
A4.1		█											
A4.2			█	█	█								
A4.3						█	█	█					
A4.4									█				
A5		█	█										
A6		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
A6.1				█	█								
A6.2								█	█				
A6.3												█	█
A7						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
A7.1						█							
A7.2							█						
A7.3								█	█	█	█		
A7.4												█	█
A8							█	█	█				
A9								█	█				
A10												█	█
A11											█	█	█

Table 3. List of Action Plan Milestones

No.	Milestone name	Estimated date	Means of verification
M1	Endorsement of the Action Plan by the SPECA WG ITSD and the SPECA Governing Council	November 2021	SPECA WG ITSD; SPECA Governing Council
M2	Focal Points in SPECA countries nominated	January 2022	Nominations reported
M3	Launch promotional/awareness raising campaigns in each SPECA country	February 2022	Reports on the campaigns
M4	Announce the SPECA innovation/startup competition	March 2022	UNECE and ESCAP webpages
M5	Training materials on good practices on innovation policies and institutions for sustainable development finalized (first set)	May 2022	Final products approved
M6	SPECA Innovation Week completed	June 2022	UNECE and ESCAP webpages
M7	First series of national capacity building workshops completed	June 2022	Event report
M8	First technical assistance mission by international experts	June 2022	Mission report
M9	Launch the SPECA startup accelerator programme and support network	March 2023	Launch report
M10	Training materials on good practices on innovation policies and institutions for sustainable development finalized (first set)	May 2023	Final products approved
M11	Winners of the SPECA innovation/startup competition announced	June 2023	Winners receive prizes
M12	Second series of national capacity building workshops completed	June 2023	Event report
M13	Second technical assistance mission by international experts	June 2023	Mission report
M14	Kick-off event of the SPECA startup accelerator programme	October 2023	Event report
M15	Mid-term monitoring and evaluation report on the Action Plan implementation	November 2023	SPECA WG ITSD; SPECA CG sessions
M16	Subregional event on innovation for sustainable development policy instruments	November2023	Event report
M17	Training materials on good practices on innovation policies and institutions for sustainable development finalized (third set)	May 2024	Final products approved
M18	Third series of national capacity building workshops completed	June 2024	Event report
M19	Third technical assistance mission by international experts	June 2024	Mission report

M20	Demo days of the SPECA startup accelerator programme with the participation of investors completed	October 2024	Report successful private investment in SPECA startups
M21	Subregional event on innovation support institutions	November2024	Event report
M22	Final monitoring and evaluation report on the Action Plan implementation	November 2024	SPECA WG ITSD; SPECA CG sessions

4. Resources

The SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development is a framework for subregional cooperation and international technical cooperation and assistance. The implementation of its Action Plan will require the allocation of adequate resources by the SPECA countries as the owners of the Strategy for undertaking its activities, including the organization and hosting of events and support to networking among stakeholders. The main resource input expected from the SPECA countries will be human resources in terms of expertise and effort. Each SPECA country would be expected to nominate a core national team led by a national Focal Point who will be responsible for coordinating implementation in the respective country. Some of the Action Plan measures also call for the mobilisation of specialised expertise (such as SPECA IT experts) necessary for the implementation of the action.

Additional resources for the implementation of the Action Plan could be mobilized from international donors such as the World Bank, USAID, the EU (through its SWITCH-Asia initiative); the Eurasian Development Bank, the Agha Khan Development Network, ADB, CAREC and others. Some of these organizations and structures may also be invited to join and assist with the implementation of the Strategy.

UNECE and ESCAP will consider their support to the Action Plan within available budgetary and extrabudgetary resources, including the UNDA project 2023N "Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". UNECE and ESCAP may also approach other development partners for possible support to activities envisaged within the Strategy and its Action Plan and will also count on support from UN Resident Coordinator offices and also UNDP, which has offices in all SPECA countries.

The implementation of the Action Plan will also draw on the policy and normative work undertaken by UNECE and ESCAP in the field of innovation for sustainable development (see Annex 2).

5. Governance and Monitoring

Oversight of progress in implementing the Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development will rely on existing intergovernmental structures such as the SPECA Governing Council and the SPECA Thematic Working Groups (most notably

the WG ITSD). De facto, the SPECA Governing Council and the SPECA WG ITSD will perform the functions of a Joint Governance and Monitoring Body for the implementation of the Action Plan.

Action Plan implementation at the national level will require the participation of different SPECA national bodies and experts. To ensure their smooth and efficient participation, it would be desirable for the SPECA governments to appoint national Focal Points who would lead and coordinate the process of implementation in the respective countries. The Focal Points would be individuals delegated with the relevant mandate and responsibilities and, preferably, would also be supported by national teams (or an institutional body) in performing their functions.

For the national Focal Points to be fulfil their function, they would need to liaise with the relevant national stakeholders, consult them on the most appropriate means of undertaking the parts of the Action Plan pertaining to their respective countries and would plan and lead concrete national implementation initiatives in consultation with UNECE and ESCAP. They would also promote any national fundraising efforts needed for the implementation of the Action Plan and liaise with international donors for this purpose. The national Focal Points would also coordinate among themselves the most efficient means of implementing cooperation activities of a cross-border nature.

To ensure effective governance, the Governments of the SPECA countries will monitor Action Plan implementation on the basis of periodic Monitoring and Evaluation Reports submitted to and reviewed by the SPECA Governing Council. In the first instance, these may be based on progress checks against the performance indicators envisaged in the Action Plan (Table 1), and may over time develop additional indicators as recommended by the SPECA WG on ITSD and approved by the Governing Council. The national Focal Points and their teams will be responsible for preparing the inputs for these reports which will be compiled with support of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development and will take the form of national reviews of progress in implementing the Action Plan. On the basis of the implementation outcomes reported in the periodic Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, the Governing Council may decide to introduce changes to the Action Plan.

A N N E X   1

PROPOSAL

for pilot actions to be initiated within the Action Plan

1. Pilot Action "SPECA Innovation Week"

Annotation

The SPECA Innovation Week would comprise a series of mini webinars on consecutive days, during each of which one or two SPECA countries share their good practices on selected topics in innovation for sustainable development policy and practice. The contributions to the conference should be based on successful real-life experiences (such as actual success stories and/or existing pockets of excellence) and policy implementation that already showed good results. Each country will choose its topic based on their respective success stories.

Lead supporting organisation: UNECE

Organisational framework

Phases	*Steps/Sub-actions*	*Description*	*Timeline*
1	Launch and commitment	The supporting organisation initiates a dialogue with all SPECA countries to ensure their commitment to take part in the Innovation Week by presenting their experiences in innovation policy and practice	January 2022
2	Thematic planning	The supporting organisation initiates consultations with those SPECA countries that committed to participating in the Innovation week on selecting the concrete topics/themes to be presented at the week. The countries select experts who would prepare the contributions	February 2022
3	Substantive preparation	The experts from each participating SPECA work on preparing their presentations at the conference. *Note. The presentations should be based on successful real-life experiences of innovation policy and practice and the presenters will be expected to present hard evidence of the success of the experiences or actual policy evaluation*	March – May 2022
4	Organisational preparation	The supporting organisation plans, in consultation with the SPECA countries, all logistical elements of the Innovation Week	April – May 2022
5	Web-conference	The participating SPECA countries present their positive experiences and success stories in the selected topics of innovation policy and practice. The web-conference will present opportunities for sharing of good practices and policy learning *Note. The tentative Agenda of the conference is presented below*	June 2022

Tentative Agenda of the SPECA Innovation Week

Day 1.

<u>Morning:</u>
- Opening
- Introductory presentations by leading international experts

<u>Afternoon:</u>
- Presentations of good innovation policy practices and success stories in innovation experiences by one/two SPECA country/ies
- Discussion/policy learning

Day 2.

<u>Morning:</u>
- Presentations of good innovation policy practices and success stories in innovation experiences by one/two SPECA country/ies
- Discussion/policy learning

<u>Afternoon:</u>
- Presentations of good innovation policy practices and success stories in innovation experiences by one/two SPECA country/ies
- Discussion/policy learning

Day 3.

<u>Morning:</u>
- Presentations of good innovation policy practices and success stories in innovation experiences by one/two SPECA country/ies
- Discussion/policy learning

<u>Afternoon:</u>
- Summary of the outcomes by leading international experts
- Closing

2. Pilot Action "SPECA innovation/startup competition"

Annotation

The SPECA innovation/startup competition will be a contest among innovation projects initiated by startups from the SPECA countries. The projects should have already advanced from their initial conception phase to reach an intermediate implementation phase close to market (e.g., a prototype). The bids will be reviewed by a jury of renowned international innovation experts. The winners of the competition will be awarded prizes procured by the supporting organizations.

Lead supporting organisations: UNECE and ESCAP

Organisational framework

Phases	*Steps/Sub-actions*	*Description*	*Timeline*
1	Competition launch	The supporting organisations together with the national Focal Points of the SPECA Innovation Strategy will prepare terms of reference for the competition and announce the start of the competition and its terms. The terms should include eligibility criteria for the proposals, the criteria for their evaluation and the prizes for the winners. The Focal Points organize wide publicity of the competition among the potential participants and other relevant stakeholders in each country	March – May 2022
2	Soliciting bids from SPECA innovators	Each SPECA country organises a national submission e-window for collecting bids to the competition and nominates technical experts who will check the eligibility of the proposals with the help of international experts mobilised by the supporting organisations. The potential candidates are be invited to submit proposals (only in electronic form) as early as possible. The window for submission remains open for a sufficiently long period which will provide an opportunity for a second chance of successful submission to proposals that could not meet the eligibility criteria in a first attempt. The successful bids are be forwarded to the supporting organisations.	June - December 2022 (or: June 2022 – March 2023)
3	Review of successfully submitted proposals	The supporting organisations mobilise a jury of renowned international innovation experts which will be tasked with the review of successfully submitted proposals. The jury organises among its members the evaluation of the submitted proposals in accordance with the pre-announced evaluation criteria. Finally, the jury will jointly decide on the proposed ranking of all proposals. The final ranking of the jury will be coordinated with and validated by the supporting organisations.	January - April 2023 (or: April – October 2023)

4	Announcing the results and awarding the winners	The supporting organisations inform the national Focal Points of the results of the competition and the Focal Points organize wide publicity of these results. The top three (or five) proposals from the evaluation ranking will be awarded with prizes procured by the supporting organizations. The ceremony of awarding the prizes to the winners will take place at a SPECA event (e.g. the annual session of the SPECA WG ITSD).	May – June 2023 (or: October – November 2023)

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3. Pilot Action "SPECA startup accelerator programme and support network"

Annotation

The startup accelerator programme will aim to support successful innovative SPECA companies in their early stages to accelerate the life cycle of their businesses. To be eligible to enrol in the programme, the candidate startups will need to have demonstrated their viability and growth potential. The accelerator programme will help the selected participants acquire entrepreneurial competences and will provide them with various forms of structured strategic support (training, coaching, mentoring, access to seed finance and other funding opportunities, etc.) aimed at boosting the process of scaling of their business. The successful graduates of the programme will be offered the opportunity to pitch their projects to potential investors.

As part of this action, it is envisaged to establish a SPECA startup support network which will contribute to contribute to implementation and will foster regional cooperation in business incubation and acceleration.

Lead supporting organisations: UNECE and ESCAP

Organisational framework

Phases	*Steps/Sub-actions*	*Description*	*Timeline*
1	Programme preparation	The supporting organisations together with the national Focal Points of the SPECA Innovation Strategy prepare terms of reference for the startup accelerator programme and publish the call for applications. The terms should include guides for the applicants, eligibility criteria, submission deadlines and criteria for the evaluation of the applications. Each SPECA country organises a national submission e-window for collecting applications to the programme.	January – February 2023
2	Initiate a SPECA startup support network	Invite business incubators and accelerators form SPECA countries to join a SPECA startup support network as a framework for co-hosting the SPECA startup accelerator programme and a platform of regional cooperation in business incubation and acceleration. The Focal Points and the SPECA startup support network organise wide publicity of the SPECA startup accelerator programme among the potential applicants and other relevant stakeholders in each country.	March – April 2023
3	Soliciting applications from SPECA startups	The startups that are candidates to take part in the programme submit applications following the guide and within the preannounced deadlines, including proofs of their eligibility.	May – June 2023

		The supporting organisations mobilise renowned international experts and representatives of the SPECA startup support network to participate in the evaluation of the applications.	
4	Review of applications and preparation of the programme	The evaluation panel organises among its members the evaluation of the submitted applications in accordance with the pre-announced evaluation criteria. The panel jointly decides on the ranking of the applicants and the selection of participants in the programme. The selection proposed by the panel will be coordinated with and validated by the supporting organisations and the SPECA startup support network. The supporting organisations and the SPECA startup support network mobilise experts to act as mentors and coaches in the programme and coordinate with them its curriculum.	July – September 2023
5	Programme Phase 1	Phase 1 will be conducted under the topic "Business Model Development". It will include topics such as concept validation, customer development, product development, branding and design, intellectual property management, revenue models, marketing strategy. The participating startups will first join intensive structured training delivered by experienced international experts/coaches and later will have the opportunity to validate their ideas in face-to-face sessions with mentors and prospective industry partners. The objective will be for each participant to end this phase with a validated business model. An international panel of experts will evaluate the successful graduation (or failure) of each participating startup from Phase 1 based on its actual performance.	October 2023 – January 2024
6	Programme Phase 2	The successful graduates of Phase 1 will be offered the opportunity to participate in Phase 2 of the programme which will be conducted under the topic "Market Traction". It will include topics such as legal structure, hiring and onboarding, mastering sales, business growth, financial reporting, equity and funding. The participating startups will first join intensive structured training delivered by experienced international experts/coaches and later will have the opportunity to validate their ideas in face-to-face sessions with mentors and prospective industry partners. The objective will be for each participant to end this phase with a validated business scaling model. An international panel of experts will evaluate the successful graduation (or failure) of each participating startup from Phase 2 based on its actual performance.	February – June 2024
7	Demo days	The successful graduates of Phase 2 will be offered the opportunity to participate in Demo days with potential investors mobilised by the supporting organisations. Each graduating team will be able to pitch their startup to actual potential investors with the objective to attract funds for the future growth of their company.	September – October 2024

A N N E X   2

**Recent UNECE and ESCAP policy documents
in the field of innovation for sustainable development
that could be used in the implementation of the Action Plan**

UNECE

Good Practices and Policy Options for Accelerating the Adoption of Innovations Critical for Sustainable Development, ECE/CECI/2016/3.

Good Practices and Policy Options on Impact Investing – Financing Innovation for Sustainable Development, ECE/CECI/2017/CRP.1.

Innovation in the Public Sector, Country Experiences and Policy Recommendation. United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2017.

Towards the Circular Economy - Innovation Policies for Sustainable Production and Consumption, ECE/CECI/2018/3.

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