



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Sixteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

19 November 2021

PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECA THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

Introduction

The SPECA Thematic Working Groups implemented the following activities since the fifteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council held on 20 November 2020.

Water, energy and environment: In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to facilitate economic cooperation in the SPECA subregion as well as integration of the SPECA participating countries into the world economy for their attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and previous decisions of the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment the Working Group shall: (a) Provide a platform for supporting progress on strategic issues related to water, energy and environment, and towards achieving the respective SDGs (including, but not limited to SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy); (b) Aim at improving awareness of SPECA countries on the water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs, promote consideration of energy and water cooperation opportunities and intersectoral and transboundary impacts in the SDG implementation and related action plans; (c) Promote compliance with relevant international legal instruments (to which the countries are Parties), norms, guidelines, standards and recommendations in the fields of competence of the Working Group; (d) Act as a platform for identification, development, support and coordination of technical programmes and projects within the scope of Working Group competence thereby building capacity, promoting best practices and strengthening mutual trust at political level among the SPECA participating countries; (e) Identify, in consultation with its participating countries, their priorities and emerging issues, and consult on regional approaches, taking into consideration subregional aspects; (f) Promote dialogue among its participating countries, including subregional synergies, and an exchange of experiences on policies and programmes; (g) Monitor the implementation of the decisions of the Governing Council; and (h) Promote a collaborative approach to

addressing the development challenges of the SPECA subregion, where appropriate, between Governments and civil society, the private sector, as well as the United Nations and other international organizations.

Name of Activity	Time & Venue	SPECA participating countries	Major results
Development of a SPECA Strategy on Water, Energy and Environment	Ongoing	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	This activity is included in the project “ <i>Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land Nexus in Central Asia</i> ” (details below)
Capacity building for cooperation on dam safety in Central Asia	Completed	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Regional cooperation on dam safety in Central Asia enabled; national capacities in development and implementation of legal, regulatory and technical frameworks on dam safety improved, national legislation governing the management of dams improved; safety and transboundary cooperation on individual dams strengthened
Resource mobilization in support of implementation of the mandate of the WG on WEE	Ongoing	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Project “ <i>Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land Nexus in Central Asia</i> ” developed, and a preparatory phase launched
Integrated energy and water resource management in support of sustainable development in South-East Europe and Central Asia	Ongoing	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan	Through the project, the beneficiary countries gained experience in applying best practices, measures, and procedures, focusing on the cross-cutting nature of energy and water resources management and the progress towards the circular economy. The beneficiary countries improved national capacities to collect consistent, coherent and reliable data related to integrated and sustainable energy and water resources management using the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC) standards. The beneficiary countries strengthened national capacities to develop evidence-based policies and strategies for integrated water and energy resources management through the United Nations Resource Management System (UNRMS).
Enhancing transboundary energy cooperation through introduction of wind and solar energy into	Completed	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and	Recommendations related to the implementation of RES in the energy system provided

power systems of the CIS countries to support achievement of SDG 7		Uzbekistan	
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II. Sustainable transport, transit and connectivity: In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to support its participating countries in: developing subregional economic cooperation, integrating their economies into the world economy, and attaining the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WG-STTC fosters subregional cooperation to promote development of sustainable transport systems and improvement of international and regional connectivity in the SPECA countries. To achieve this through subregional cooperation, the Working Group: (i) Provides a platform for strategic discussions on supporting progress towards achieving the directly transport-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3, SDG 9 and SDG 11) and targets, and contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, as a whole, through subregional cooperation, exchange of best practices and experiences, consultations, relevant activities and implementation of projects in the SPECA countries; (ii) Raises awareness of SPECA countries on the transport-related SDGs and the role of transport and connectivity in supporting the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda; provides information and share best practice experiences, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) Promotes policy dialogue: to support accession and efficient implementation of the United Nations transport-related legal instruments; for coordinated development of road and railway networks, dry ports and intermodal transport; for elimination of physical and non-physical barriers to transport, and for safer and more environmentally friendly transport system; and (iv) Provides analytical work and capacity development activities and tools in the areas of transport infrastructure development, sustainable transport operations, operationalization of international transit corridors, use of new technologies and innovation, regulatory harmonization, intermodal transport, border crossing facilitation, transport of dangerous goods, and other areas, including identification of funding modalities for the SPECA activities.

The thematic orientation of the activities of the WG-STTC includes: (i) Sustainable transport development, to enhance subregional and international connectivity in line with the needs of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, harnessing the opportunities arising from global and regional transport trends and technological advances; (ii) Accession and efficient implementation of the United Nations inland transport-related legal instruments, to further develop legal framework for efficient transport, transit and connectivity; (iii) Inland transport infrastructure development; identification of the missing links, removal of bottlenecks, increasing the quality of the infrastructure, transport project financing (including public-private partnership) and promotion of intermodal transport and development of dry ports and terminals; (iv) Development of efficient transport operations; transport facilitation and removal of non-physical barriers to transport (including border crossing facilitation); (v) Development of a monitoring mechanism for sustainable transport connectivity in support of SDGs, collection of transport and border crossing statistics, harmonization of data collection, publishing of subregional transport statistics; (vi) Road safety; activities to reduce road traffic fatalities and casualties in the SPECA region; and (vii) Promotion of subregional cooperation for sustainable transport connectivity which plays an important role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA countries.

Name of Activity	Time & Venue	SPECA participating countries	Major results
Interconnection of Customs Information System of Azerbaijan with the eTIR International System	01/11/2020-31/12/2020	Azerbaijan	The project resulted with interconnection of the eTIR International System with Azerbaijan customs information system making the eTIR a reality and new practice for performing border crossing facilitation.
Capacity development workshop on UN legal instruments on transport infrastructure and road safety	20/11/2020	Turkmenistan	National specialists in road and rail infrastructure development and road safety strengthen capacity on efficient implementation of six UN legal instruments which Turkmenistan acceded to in 2020.
Policy dialogue on efficient implementation of eTIR in Turkmenistan	19/02/2021 and 05/03/2021	Turkmenistan	Capacities for joining and efficient implementation of eTIR strengthened. Guidance on initial actions for efficient implementation provided.
Capacity development meeting to interconnect the Uzbek Customs system with the eTIR International System	29/03/2021	Uzbekistan	Capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system strengthened and next steps agreed.
Capacity development meeting to interconnect the Tajik Customs system with the eTIR International System	21/05/2021	Tajikistan	Capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system strengthened and next steps agreed.
Capacity development meeting to interconnect the Kyrgyz Customs system with the eTIR International System	02/06/2021 and 21/06/2021	Kyrgyzstan	Capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system strengthened and next steps agreed.
Capacity Development Workshop on efficient implementation of UN vehicle-related legal instruments	08/10/2021	Turkmenistan	Capacities of Turkmenistan representative on two vehicle related UN transport conventions strengthened. Guidance on initial actions for accession and efficient implementation provided.
Workshop dedicated to urban mobility, car sharing and car-pooling in Central Asia	08/10/2021	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan	The workshop strengthened capacities of national representatives on the good practices and lessons learned from urban mobility, car sharing and car-pooling initiatives
Development of a SPECA Transport Connectivity Strategy	Ongoing	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan,	This activity is included in the programme of work of SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and

		Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Connectivity
Sustainable Inland Transport Connectivity Indicators (SITCIN) Project (UNDA-financed)	Ongoing	Kazakhstan	During 2021 national connectivity report was prepared and discussed during policy dialogue workshop. National representatives strengthened capacity on an instrument (a measurable set of criteria) for governments enabling them to evaluate/ assess: the extent to which they implement the relevant United Nations transport-related legal instruments, agreements, and conventions; and the degree to which their inland transport system is inter-operable with the systems within their respective (sub)region.

III. Trade: In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to support its participating countries in developing subregional economic cooperation, integrating their economies into the world economy, and attaining the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WG on Trade shall foster subregional cooperation to promote national and regional development of sustainable trade in the SPECA participating countries. To achieve this through subregional cooperation, the Working Group shall: (i) Provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through subregional cooperation in trade and trade facilitation with a focus on SDGs directly related to trade development, notably SDG 17 on partnerships, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (ii) Assist in improving the awareness of SPECA countries on the trade-related SDGs; help provide information and share best practice experiences, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) Promote policy dialogue to support: trade policy cooperation among the SPECA countries and their trade negotiators; trade facilitation; aligning positions on sustainable trade, dealing with non-tariff measures, and investment policies; and (iv) Provide analysis and capacity-building in the areas of trade facilitation, sustainable trade development, regulatory harmonization, agricultural quality standards, elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade, investment, and other areas, including identification of funding modalities for SPECA activities.

The thematic orientation of the activities of the Working Group on Trade includes: (i) sustainable trade development among the countries in the region and with the main trading partners; (ii) trade facilitation and promotion of trade facilitation norms, standards and best practice recommendations; (iii) public-private cooperation for trade facilitation; (iv) regulatory harmonization, market surveillance and risk management; (v) agricultural commercial quality standards; (vi) investment and trade development; and (vii) other areas of competence of UNECE and ESCAP related to the development of trade, regional markets and harmonization of standards in these areas. The deliverables of the WG on Trade focus on four areas: (i) trade policy cooperation, including on the WTO negotiations; (ii) implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; (iii) implementation of the SPECA Principles for Sustainable Trade; (iv) non-tariff measures and barriers to trade; as well as (v) digitalization of multimodal transport information exchange, with which the WG started dealing in 2021.

Name of Activity	Time & Venue	SPECA participating countries	Major results
16 th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade	16 November 2021 Hybrid format of the session (in person and online)	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The overall objective of the session is to foster: exchange of experiences; mutual assistance to achieve trade facilitation, the trade-related SDGs, goals of the Ashgabat Initiative; SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade, Trade Facilitation Strategy; public-private cooperation; and more collaboration in the digitalization of trade and transport operations, aligned with the United Nations standards.
Assistance to the WTO process in the SPECA countries			
<p>Assessment of the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) (several activities):</p> <p><i>A.</i> Training for the consultants from Uzbekistan to assess the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)</p> <p><i>B.</i> Validation seminar of the consultants' report on assessing the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)</p> <p><i>C.</i> Consultants reviewed and finalized the readiness assessment report</p>	<p><i>A.</i> 9 December 2020, Uzbekistan, online</p> <p><i>B.</i> 22 April 2021, Uzbekistan, online</p> <p><i>C.</i> May 2021</p>	Uzbekistan	<p><i>A.</i> Seminar successfully organized online via WebEx with the UNECE Regional Adviser and a resource person from Ukraine. Template for the assessment report, questionnaire, and presentation of the measures drafted in Russian, as requested by the beneficiaries, who appreciated the materials. Extensive report on the discussions prepared – to serve as a basis for the assessment report by the consultants.</p> <p><i>B.</i> Seminar organized as an interactive event with the participation of UNECE and the resource person. Draft readiness assessment report reviewed. Comments made for the final editing of the readiness assessment report.</p> <p><i>C.</i> Readiness assessment report reviewed, finalized, and presented to the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Recommendations made for further action. Request by Uzbekistan for assistance on concrete measures issued: draft a national trade facilitation strategy; assist with the establishment of an enquiry point; assist with the digitalization</p>

			of transport corridors using UN/CEFACT standards; assist the use of UN/CEFACT standards in the Single Window of Uzbekistan.
National consultant to help Tajikistan make an assessment of the implementation of the WTO TFA, and assistance for the Trade Policy Review of Tajikistan	Starting in the fall of 2021, ongoing	Tajikistan	Consultant hired, started research; draft report to be ready in December 2021.
Implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy			
Seminar on information exchange for trade facilitation and trade procedures in the SPECA region, notably on web sites of the SPECA Customs services (art.1 WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, TFA)	12 February 2021, online	All SPECA countries	Established common approach to the facilitation of availability of information to conduct cross-border trade in the SPECA countries, on the basis of a proposed concept of a web tool for information sharing; agreement with GIZ to share the support for this initiative; awareness of participants on the issues discussed raised; and search for solution to the identified challenges started. Webinar participants agreed on the need for such a tool to improve the implementation of the WTO TFA; offer new channels for sharing trade-related information between the SPECA countries; ensure synergies between Customs authorities and the private sector. Experts from the Partnership on Transport and Logistics for Central Asia suggested to work on the provision of information. Participants from the SPECA countries expressed willingness to work on it and requested help from UNECE and GIZ. UNECE and GIZ started support projects.
Webinar on trade facilitation enquiry points (art. 1.3 WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, TFA)	2 March 2021, online	All SPECA countries	UNECE and experts from the region reviewed current experience and proposed a concrete approach to establishing a TF enquiry point in SPECA countries. The experts from the WTO secretariat provided information on the functioning and guide for SPS and TBT enquiry points, to be used as example for the TF enquiry point. Stakeholders from the SPECA countries participated in Q&A session and formulated a set of recommendations on developing a methodological guide on

			<p>establishing and operating TFA enquiry points. The participants asked UNECE to work on it, and UNECE hired a consultant to prepare a draft of such Guide for the SPECA countries on how to establish a TF enquiry point.</p> <p>A national consultant hired in Uzbekistan to work with the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade on the establishment of a national TF enquiry point.</p>
Study on harmonization of border-crossing procedures in the SPECA region	Ongoing	All SPECA countries	Study on harmonization of border-crossing procedures in the SPECA region made a working document of the SPECA WG on Trade. Updated version to be presented at the 16 th session of the SPECA WG on Trade on 16 November 2021 and the 16 th SPECA Governing Council session on 19 November 2021.
Support to accession to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific	Ongoing since November 2020	Tajikistan	Inter-agency consultations held, and accession documentation prepared
Technical and Legal Readiness Assessment for Cross-border Paperless Trade	Ongoing since September 2021	Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan	Detailed assessment and national action plans expected by December 2021
Webinar on Using ESCAP's online Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisor (TINA)	July 2021	All SPECA countries	Policy analysts better equipped for regional trade agreement negotiations
Implementation of the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade			
Assessment of the readiness of the SPECA countries to implement the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade	November 2020 – February 2021	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	<p>National assessments on the readiness of 6 SPECA countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) finalized.</p> <p>Overall assessment report, building on the national reports – ongoing.</p> <p>Presentation of the overall report planned for the 16th session of the SPECA WG on Trade on 16 November 2021 and the 16th SPECA Governing Council session on 19 November</p>

			2021.
Analysis (study) of the interconnection between trade facilitation, sustainable trade, water management, food security and the circular economy in the SPECA region, considering the need for regional cooperation to achieve relevant SDGs	Ongoing	All SPECA countries	Analysis/study – ongoing. Presentation of the overall report planned for the 16 th session of the SPECA WG on Trade on 16 November 2021 and the 16 th SPECA Governing Council session on 19 November 2021.
Study of non-tariff barriers to trade			
National study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade in Uzbekistan	Ongoing (to be finalized by March 2022)	Uzbekistan	A regional study finalized and published in November 2020. A national follow-up: drafting
Using UN (UN/CEFACT) standards for the digitalization of multimodal transport data and document exchange			
National pilot implementation project in Uzbekistan	July – November 2021	Uzbekistan	National pilot study and recommendations for the implementation of the UN/CEFACT standards for the digitalization of multimodal transport data and document exchange – ongoing.

IV. Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development: The main objectives of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development are: (i) to provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on the SDGs directly related to innovation and technology development (including, but not limited to SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth; SDG 13 on combatting climate change and its impacts; and SDG 17 on partnerships); (ii) to aim at improving awareness of SPECA countries on the innovation and technology development related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) to become a mechanism for identification, implementation and coordination of technical programmes and projects within the scope of Working Group competence thereby building capacity, promoting best practices and strengthening mutual trust at political level among the SPECA participating countries; and (iv) to promote cooperation between SPECA countries on strategic approaches to harness innovation as a driver of future sustainable development in the subregion.

Thematic orientation of the activities of the WG on ITSD includes: (i) ICT for development; (ii) Promotion of innovation and innovative technology applications; (iii) Promotion of transfer and commercialization of innovative technologies; and (iv) Development of effective infrastructure for innovation support and financing, including through PPPs.

Name of Activity	Time & venue	SPECA participating countries	Major results
Second session of the WG on ITSD	20-21 October 2021, online	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The second session of the WG on ITSD discussed and proposed to submit for consideration by the SPECA Governing Council the Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. • During the session, representatives of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats briefed participants on the respective programme of work. The WG on ITSD adopted its Programme of Work for 2022-2023. • The session also served as a platform for the discussion of potential subregional cooperation on innovation through Innovation Policy Outlook for SPECA subregion. • The UNECE handbook on “Business incubators for sustainable development in the SPECA subregion” was launched. • The upcoming work on support to high-growth innovative enterprises was presented (i.e., background, structure of work, expected outcomes). • The WG on ITSD was briefed by ESCAP on work on digital connectivity and welcomed the online toolkit for e-resilience monitoring and for the digital foresight planning of ICT co-deployment developed by the Secretariat under the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) action plan for 2022-2024. • The WG adopted its decisions and agreed to hold its next session in 2022.
Supporting Innovation Policy for Sustainable Development in	9 June 2021, online	Kyrgyzstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the initial draft of the Roadmap for Development of Innovation

<p>the SPECA subregion: Second meeting of the Task Force on the Roadmap for the Development of the Innovation Ecosystem of Kyrgyzstan until 2025</p>			<p>Ecosystem of Kyrgyzstan to further lead the efforts of Kyrgyzpatent, the State Agency on Intellectual Property and Innovation, in building the innovation infrastructure and promoting innovation activity in the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Task Force was established by the Kyrgyzpatent to bring together stakeholders from public (other ministries and agencies), private (representatives of the business community, private business incubators) and academic (researchers, professors) sectors, as well as international partners, to discuss policy priorities. • Outcomes of the discussions and comments received were considered for inclusion in the draft Roadmap. • Support for this activity follows a request from the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzpatent) and is based on recommendations of the UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan (2019), the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and priority areas for innovation policy and sustainable development identified by the national authorities. It was provided under the UN Development Account (UNDA) project “Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. An international consultant was engaged to develop a draft Roadmap.
<p>The Training Workshop Series on "ESCAP Web-Toolkit for Integrated Planning of Infrastructure Corridors " is delivered for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan policymakers</p>	<p>17 May and 21 May 2021, online</p>	<p>Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan</p>	<p>This online training workshop series is organized to support active use of these products and tools by the ESCAP member States. The two web-based toolkits focus on integrated development of co-infrastructures, comprising ICT, energy, and transport, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Simulator of the Integrated Infrastructure Corridors, and the Study. This Simulation tool aimed at determining the most appropriate model for development of new Integrated Infrastructure Corridors. The knowledge product includes in-depth research and the methodology for

		<p>identifying and developing promising infrastructure corridors in the view of co-deployment of the ICT-Energy-Transport infrastructures and multi-stakeholder partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Partnership Portal on Co-deployment aimed at support ICT infrastructure co-deployment with road transport and energy infrastructure: https://co-deployment.online. The web-portal, as an information platform, provides developers and owners of ICT, road and energy infrastructure and other stakeholders with a good opportunity to: (1) to register new infrastructure facilities and find other compatible infrastructure development projects (planned or those at early development stage) that can be connected to various types of ICT and other infrastructure co-deployment; (2) make an assessment of technical compatibility and cost-effectiveness of co-deployment of infrastructure facilities; (3) promote partnerships and cooperation on co-deployment of ICT and other infrastructure; and (4) the web-based tool in the portal will also host the knowledge base on co-deployment of infrastructure. <p>The workshops at national level assembled government officials and experts from the two project target countries, i.e.: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Participants of the workshops - representatives from ministries, government agencies, public and private authorities, operators and nominated structures, who are engaged in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT and telecommunication infrastructure connectivity • Road and railway transport connectivity • Electric power, oil/gas pipeline connectivity. <p>Secretariat completed a few knowledge products on Infrastructure Corridor Series in two languages, namely on Part 1: In-depth Analysis of the Three Promising Infrastructure Corridors, Part 1: Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) gap assessment of the SPECA countries; Part 2 on the Toolkit;</p>
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			and Part 3 on the Calculation Results for the 3 for the most appropriate models of a corridor.
Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) gap assessment of the SPECA countries	26 November 2020, online	All SPECA countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the project on “Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” financed by the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) and with the aim to inform the Action Plan under the SPECA Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) gap assessment of the SPECA countries was conducted. It drew on the seven STI gap assessment reports prepared by national consultants in each of the SPECA countries, as well as desk research and UNECE analytical work on innovation in the SPECA countries. • The gap assessment was presented to and discussed with the seven SPECA countries during virtual meeting on 26 November 2020. In particular, the assessment called for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Addressing challenges in innovation governance by building institutional capacities to design, pilot, roll out, and monitor STI policies; ○ Developing flexible, transparent, cost-effective policy processes; and ○ Expanding the portfolio of mechanisms to support innovation and putting in place the right incentives for innovation, including building a robust network of innovation support institutions. <p>The STI gap assessment also inspired the discussions around potential priority areas for cooperation among the SPECA countries on innovation for sustainable development, including enhancing innovation support infrastructure/ecosystems, boosting trade flows, improving digital and physical connectivity, transition to a circular economy, and building smart and sustainable cities that</p>

			could serve as hubs of innovation.
UNECE Handbook on Business incubators for innovation through incubators in the SPECA subregion	March 2020 – September 2021	All SPECA countries	<p>UNECE developed a handbook to guide the efforts of policymakers in the SPECA subregion in designing, implementing and monitoring effective incubator policy to support the development of innovative entrepreneurship as a crucial element of the innovation ecosystem.</p> <p>The Handbook contributes to evidence-based policymaking when it comes to developing an effective innovation infrastructure and supporting innovative entrepreneurship in the SPECA subregion.</p> <p>It also provides valuable guidance in strengthening innovation support infrastructure through business incubators across the SPECA subregion and thus informs the Action Plan under the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development in relation to support to innovative entrepreneurship.</p>
E-resilience Monitoring Dashboard for Pandemic Recovery	Ongoing, online	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	<p>Following the Expert group meeting on “Digital connectivity and e-resilience for crisis preparedness (virtual meeting)” of 10 November 2020, the ESCAP secretariat has developed an E-resilience Monitoring Dashboard ICT & DRR Gateway. This online monitoring tool will take the e-resilience readiness status to: (a) the next level; (b) ensure evidence-based foresight planning in SPECA countries at the national level; and (c) support regional cooperation towards digital transformation. An ability to properly assess e-resilience is a key component of successful disaster risk management and adaptation in the recovery period. Four important, inter-dependent areas under the interactive e-resilience monitoring dashboard would illustrate ICT indicators performance at national level within specific economic groups. Therefore, ICT indicators are grouped into four pillars (ESCAP, 2020):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “ICT policy in different sectors” serves as the foundation for e-resilience modelling; 2. “ICT’s role in setting up new systems and applications” is essential for an e-adaption and recovering from the pandemic;

			<p>3. “ICT’s role in data management” (data gathering, big data analysis, and decision-making) leads to actions and policies that influence disaster resilience and adaptability; and</p> <p>4. “ICT infrastructure resilience” serves as physical foundation for all the above.</p> <p>This online e-resilience monitoring dashboard provide scoping of opportunities for countries’ cooperation and highlights the importance of e-resilience along with vital contributions to policy design and reforms that will enable sustainable growth. A number of knowledge products on e-resilience, as the fourth pillar of the AP-IS Initiative 2018-2022, such as policy briefs and working paper series were also delivered.</p>
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V. Gender and SDGs: In line with the overall objective of the Programme to facilitate economic cooperation in the countries of the SPECA region as well as integration of the SPECA participating countries into the world economy for their attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Working Group on Gender and SDGs shall continue to work in the area of gender mainstreaming and transformative policies as follows: (a) Non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation; (b) Policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies; (c) Policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors; and (d) Policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development.

Name of Activity	Time & venue	SPECA participating countries	Major results
2021 session of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs	2 November 2021	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The annual meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs consists of three substantive sessions: (a) country presentations by participants, sharing best practices and lessons learned on the thematic priority areas for the Working Group, including on policy initiatives and measures implemented in response to COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on women in the SPECA countries; (b) discussion on policy plans, strategies and actions for further response to COVID-19 pandemic based on gender-transformative policies; and (c) a group discussion that sought to identify opportunities

			for further subregional cooperation and partnership, including through discussions of the report on activities in 2021 and the work programme for 2022-2023.
Capacity building workshop “Use of ICTs for the Promotion and Implementation of Gender Equality in Small Business Development”	1–22 November 2021	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The workshop is aimed at training participants in specific ICTs tools and various ways to practically use them to accelerate the achievement of gender equality in the respective sectors. Sessions focus on digital applications, how to make best out of networking and business psychology; explore and discuss various business models that can help them in marketing and management and how to mainstream gender in using these tools. They address ways in which new technologies can influence small business management and in particular how ICTs could be a successful tool to achieve gender equality and to expand the reflection of gender issues when developing network skills, gender mainstreaming in projects and making use of ICTs, and business thinking development.
Capacity building workshop “Economic Empowerment of Women during and after COVID-19”	8-24 June 2021	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	The participants of the workshop: trainers, business consultants and representatives of governmental, non-governmental and civil society organizations that deal with women’s economic support and development, received training in financial literacy, networking, business thinking and leadership skills. All the tools were tailored towards expanding women’s opportunities for active engagement during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Special session on women’s economic empowerment addressed the pathways to accelerating women’s participation in all areas of economic activities in public and private life. The discussions, exchange of ideas and interactions improved their skills for networking, creative thinking, and implementation of the various models of businesses in their respective countries and communities.
Research and analysis: North and Central Asia: An analysis of the Beijing+25 review reports	21 January 2021	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The report contains a summary of the identified achievements, challenges, and key actions taken by the ESCAP members States in the North and Central Asia subregion to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. The countries that have submitted their national review reports, and are therefore included in this report, are the following: Azerbaijan,

			<p>Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the key priority areas for action for countries in the region for the next five years are identified, with a view to accelerate the achievement of gender equality in the region of progress in implementing the Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.</p>
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