

# **Assessing Progress of Implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and its Action Plan**

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Subregional SPECA  
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# Background



- The SPECA Governing Council approved at its 14th session (Ashgabat, 21 November 2019) the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and encouraged the SPECA countries, donors and partner organizations to support its implementation.
- The Strategy reflected the ambition of the SPECA countries to develop and consolidate their national capacity to design and implement innovation policies for sustainable development to the mutual advantage of all countries the SPECA region.
- The overall objective of the Strategy is to achieve a sustained improvement in the national capacity and capabilities of the SPECA countries to formulate and implement innovation policies for sustainable development and to raise the level and quality of regional cooperation

# Main objectives of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development



- 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

# Key cooperation mechanisms in the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

- *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*

# Main activities envisaged in the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

Objectives	Strategy activities	Timeline			International partners
		2022	2023	2024	
1. Knowledge and skills	1.1 Knowledge-sharing seminars	X			UNECE, ESCAP
	1.2 Skill-building workshops	X	X		UNECE, ESCAP
	1.3 Study tours				UNDP, EU, USAID
	1.4 Technical assistance missions	X			UNECE, ESCAP, UNDP
	1.5 Awareness raising – S&T and Innovation	X	X	X	UNDP
	1.6 Awareness raising - SPECA Innovation Strategy				UNDP
2. Technology transfer	2.1 Innovation for SD Reviews	X	X	X	UNECE
	2.2 SPECA international linkages	X	X	X	World Bank; USAID
	2.3 Joint SPECA/regional technology transfer office		X	X	World Bank; Eurasian DB
	2.4 Global collaboration on technology transfer	X	X		UNECE, ESCAP
	2.5 Joint innovation for SD projects	X	X	X	UNECE
	2.6 Joint SD Innovation Fund		X	X	World Bank; EU
3. Regional cooperation	3.1 Policy issues of common interest				UNECE
	3.2 Stakeholder consultations and networking	X	X	X	UNDP; USAID
	3.3 Network of research institutions	X	X	X	Aga Khan DN
	3.4 Network of innovation support institutions	X	X	X	UNECE, ESCAP, UNDP
	3.5 Regional online support service		X	X	ESCAP
	3.6 SPECA competition - innovation for SD projects	X	X	X	UNECE
	3.7 SPECA Innovation Partnerships	X	X	X	EU
	3.8 Support to regional supply chains	X	X	X	World Bank; USAID
4. SDG performance	4.1 Cooperation on common SD challenges	X			UNECE
	4.2 Eliminate obstacles to SPECA cooperation	X			
	4.3 Report progress on SDG achievement	X	X	X	UNECE
	4.4 Subregional innovation policy Outlook	X	X	X	UNECE
	4.5 Cooperation with UN global initiatives	X	X		UNECE, ESCAP
	4.6 Liaise with international donors	X	X		UNECE, ESCAP

# The Action Plan for implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development


- In a following step, the SPECA Governing Council endorsed at its 16th session (Tashkent, 19 November 2021), an Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.
- The Action Plan was elaborated through the joint efforts of and inputs from all SPECA countries. This work was coordinated by SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development
- The Action Plan outlines a set of activities through which the SPECA countries aim to achieve the objectives of the Strategy
- The Action Plan also specifies the governance and monitoring mechanisms necessary for the oversight of progress in implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy

# Summary of the Action Plan for implementing the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development



No.	Actions	Description	Timeline	Performance indicators
A1	Action Plan launch	Organisational activities to support Action Plan implementation	2022	N/A
A2	National capacity building workshops	The workshops topics on innovation policy are based on identified needs in ISD policy priorities and areas for cooperation for the SPECA countries	2022-2024	100 participants Satisfaction rate > 4
A3	Training materials on ISD policies	Develop and disseminate training materials on good practices in innovation policies for inclusive and sustainable development	2022-2024	3 sets of training materials
A4	SPECA innovation/startup competition	A competition of innovation projects initiated by startups from the SPECA countries	2022-2023	Participation of at least 4 countries
A5	SPECA Innovation Week	A series of mini webinars during each of which SPECA countries share their good practices in ISD policy and practice	2022	Participation of at least 4 countries
A6	Technical assistance international experts	Leading international experts share their expertise with SPECA policymakers on selected topics of ISD policy design and implementation	2022-2024	N/A
A7	Startup accelerator pgm and network	The programme will help innovative SPECA startups to accelerate the life cycle of their businesses	2023-2024	Participation of at least 3 countries
A8	Mid-term evaluation	Preparing a mid-term evaluation report on Action Plan implementation	2023	N/A
A9	Subregional event on policy instruments	A skills development workshop on good practices in the design and administration of ISD policy instruments	2023	20 participants from 5 countries
A10	Subregional event on support institutions	A skills development workshop on good practices in design and management of innovation support institutions	2024	20 participants from 5 countries
A11	Final evaluation	Final monitoring and evaluation report on Action Plan implementation	2024	N/A

# Challenges encountered in the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan



- The global covid-19 pandemic that lasted for more than two years disrupted implementation
- Travel, trade, tourism as well as face-to-face human interactions worldwide were greatly interrupted
- Being land-locked, the SPECA region was particularly badly affected by these developments
- The disruptions caused by the pandemic imposed the necessity to introduce force majeure changes in implementation
- Some events in the SPECA countries had to be cancelled
- Other events were reformatted into an online format
- Yet other activities were redesigned both in content and format in the spirit of the Strategy objectives
- Overall this resulted in deviations from the envisaged Action Plan



# The evaluation survey

- The Strategy itself envisages regular monitoring of implementation on the basis of periodic evaluation reports
- We are now in the process of preparing the mid-term evaluation report as mandated in the Strategy
- For this purpose the UNECE secretariat undertook a survey among SPECA stakeholders to study their perception of the success/failure in implementation
- A questionnaire was circulated among a large group of leading SPECA innovation experts and practitioners
- So far we received 16 responses to the questionnaire and I take the opportunity to thank all respondents for their valuable effort
- The Survey continues and we expect to receive more responses
- The results of the survey will serve as the basis to compile the mid-term evaluation report as envisaged in the Strategy

# How successful was implementation in pursuing the Strategy objectives?

(“5” -> “successful” ; “1” -> “unsuccessful”)

No.	Objective	Average response
1	Upgrade the knowledge and skills base of key stakeholders in the SPECA countries to match the challenges of addressing SDGs with innovative solutions	4.19
2	Facilitate the diffusion of innovations and the transfer of technologies addressing sustainable development challenges in the region	3.88
3	Enhance the institutional framework for regional cooperation for implementing innovation addressing sustainable development challenges of common interest	4.25
4	Contribute to improved performance of the SPECA countries in the degree of SDG achievement	4.06

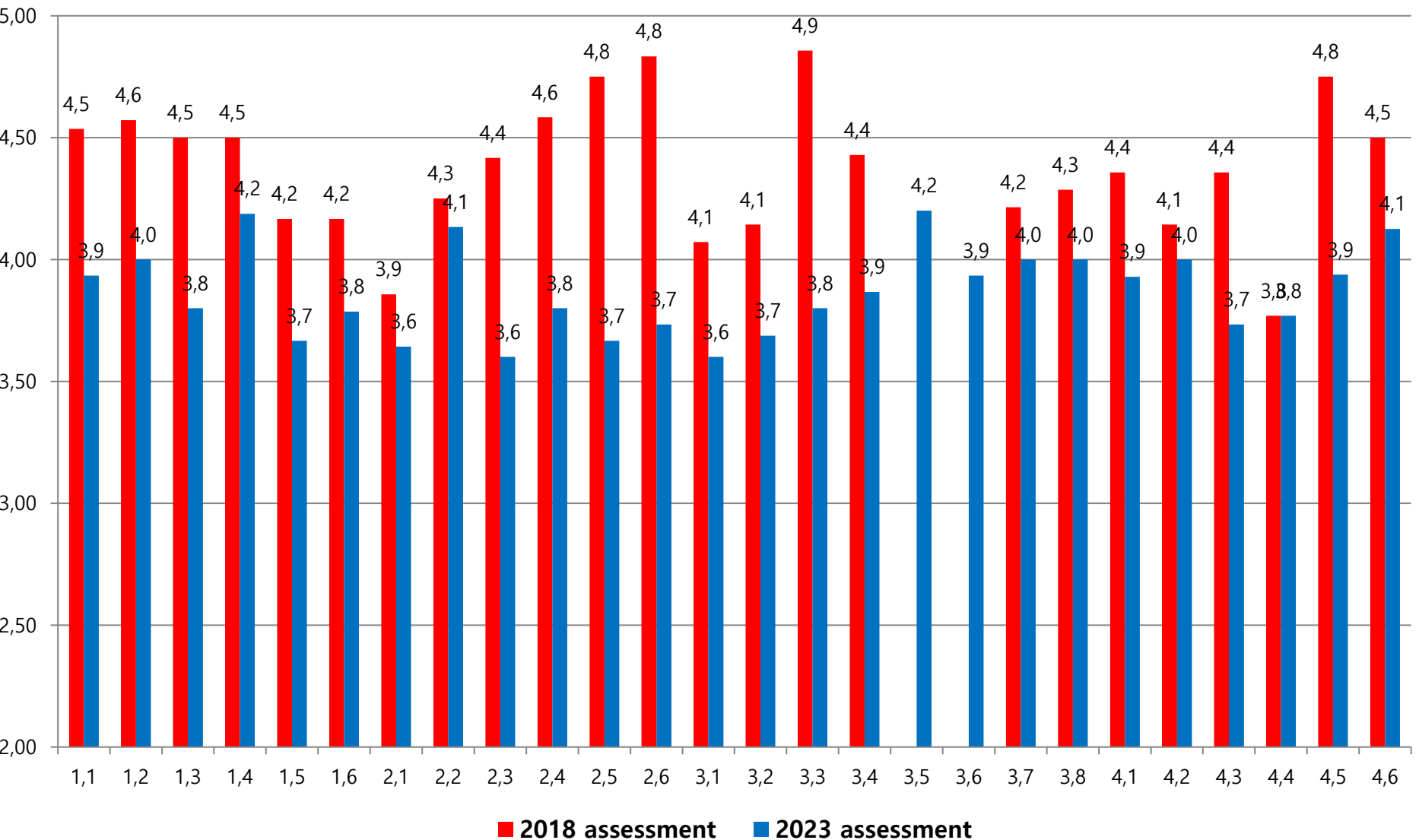
# Were the Strategy cooperation mechanisms efficiently applied? (“5” -> “efficient” ; “1” -> “inefficient”)

No.	Cooperation mechanism	Average response
1	Strengthening the regional policy dialogue and the sharing of good policies and practices; attraction of leading international expertise	4.00
2	Working together in identifying regional and transboundary sustainable development challenges of high priority and common interest	3.88
3	Raising awareness in the SPECA countries on the role of innovation in the efforts to achieve the SDGs	3.88
4	Strengthening cooperation with existing platforms and mechanisms for international collaboration in promoting innovation for sustainable development	4.00

# Main activities envisaged in the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

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4. SDG performance	4.1 Cooperation on common SD challenges	X			UNECE
	4.2 Eliminate obstacles to SPECA cooperation	X			
	4.3 Report progress on SDG achievement	X	X	X	UNECE
	4.4 Subregional innovation policy Outlook	X	X	X	UNECE
	4.5 Cooperation with UN global initiatives	X	X		UNECE, ESCAP
	4.6 Liaise with international donors	X	X		UNECE, ESCAP

# Average priorities assigned to Strategy activities by the SPECA participants in the surveys (“5” -> “high” ; “1” -> “low”)



# Most important achievements of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development

- Contributed to the mobilization of efforts in the region towards innovation for sustainable development
- Relevant capacity building/training programmes of high quality
- Better understanding of SD challenges and ways to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs
- Useful sharing of good practices and experiences in addressing SD challenges through innovative solutions
- Establishing direct contacts with leading international experts
- Better understanding of venture financing and access to venture funding
- **The SPECA business incubator network – a success story**

# Most important problems and challenges in implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy

- Insufficient resources for the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan
- Insufficient geographic coverage of the implementation of actions
- Gap between the Strategy activities and the general awareness of the public in the region regarding its topics
- Gap between the Strategy objectives and the concrete innovation projects in the region, on the one hand, and prospective investors, on the other hand
- Insufficient publicly available information about actual implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan
- Still low awareness regarding ISD among the public in the region

# Assessment of already implemented Action Plan activities (“5” -> “high” ; “1” -> “low”)

No.	Action Plan Activities	Relevance	Effectiveness	Organization
1	“Challenges and opportunities for supporting innovative, high-growth enterprises in the SPECA countries”, Webinar, 23 December 2021	3.79	3.36	3.60
2	“Supporting innovative, high-growth enterprises in the SPECA sub-region”, Online training for SPECA policymakers, 15 and 17 February 2022	3.53	3.36	3.47
3	“New approaches to innovation policy in the transition economies of the SPECA sub-region”, Webinar, 19 May 2022	3.73	3.40	3.53
4	Expert Group Meeting on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development, Hybrid event, (Almaty, Kazakhstan), 19-20 July 2022,	3.33	3.20	3.57
5	"Effective management and development of business incubators and accelerators", Online training for SPECA countries, 27-29 September 2022	3.87	3.93	3.56
6	Development of business incubators and start-up accelerators: educational programme for university management. Online training for SPECA countries, 21 February 2023	3.88	4.07	3.73
7	Working with venture funds and business angels: UNECE practical online training for staff of business incubators and accelerators in the SPECA sub-region. 16 March 2023	4.07	4.00	3.44
8	SPECA Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators for Sustainable Development	4.00	3.88	3.69



# Assessment of Action Plan activities behind schedule (“5” -> “high” ; “1” -> “low”)

No.	Action Plan Activities	Importance
1	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	3.75
2	SPECA startup accelerator programme. The programme will support successful innovative companies in their early stages to accelerate the life cycle of their businesses. The successful graduates of the programme will be offered the opportunity to pitch their projects to potential investors.	4.13
3	SPECA innovation/startup competition. The competition will be a contest among innovation projects initiated by startups from the SPECA countries. The winners of the competition will be awarded prizes procured by the supporting organizations.	4.19

# Suggested new actions in the future implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy



- Increase the number of activities directly supporting the practical work of innovation practitioners in the region;
- More hands-on-trainings which are the most important and useful activities
- Increase the number of face-to-face SPECA events
- Develop concrete new activities targeting the support/facilitation of technology transfer in the region
- Contribute to the development of a SPECA Fund supporting innovation projects and startups
- Contribute to the initiation of concrete cooperative projects among SPECA countries
- Mobilize venture investors and funds to take part in SPECA activities

## Suggested new actions ... (contd.)



- Mobilize more internationally renowned experts to participate in the SPECA events
- Develop SPECA partnership programmes on topics of bilateral or multilateral interest
- Contribute to the development of university-based incubators in the region
- Improve the reporting and dissemination of the implementation outcomes of the Strategy and its Action Plan
- Improve the gender balance in the SPECA activities
- Contribute to the monitoring of SDG achievement in the SPECA region



**Thank you!**

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