



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 149 – 5-9 December 2005

Coming up soon ...

Gender and economy in Central Asia

Palais des Nations, Conference Room IX

Gender and economy in Central Asia will be discussed on 8-9 December under the aegis of the United Nations *Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)*.

The meeting will focus on what can be done concerning capacity building in the area of gender and economy, exchange of experience and promoting cross-sectoral links with other areas of SPECA activities, especially in statistics, trade and ITC. Attention will be given to supporting women's self-employment and entrepreneurship. ❖

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Did you know that ...

The average wage of women in Tajikistan was 35% less than men in 1995, and 57% less in 2000.

It's just happened ...

Use of prevention and response in UNECE treaty could have alleviated Chinese disaster

As a result of an explosion that occurred at a petrochemical plant in Girin in the Jilin Province in China on 13 November 2005, five people were killed and 70 injured. Thousands were evacuated from around the facility. Hazardous organic chemicals, in particular benzene – a very dangerous ⚠

Question of the week

to Aitkul Samakova, Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan and Head of the National Gender Machinery

Why was the initiative on gender and economy launched under SPECA?

SPECA - the *UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia* - provides an excellent framework to help countries mainstream gender into economic activities and policies.

Women's potential in our countries still remains untapped, even though they are more educated than men. The unemployment rate is higher among women. Although the future of Kazakhstan is linked with its industrial development, few women study technical specializations and constitute only a third of industrial sector employees. Average wages for women are one third lower than for men. Progress in this area is essential not only to ensure equal opportunities for women and men but also to effectively use the country's economic potential for sustainable development.



Countries could thus benefit from raising awareness on women's economic contribution, exchanging good practices, and identifying tools for mainstreaming gender into the labour market, budgetary, trade and ICT policies. We will also be able to discuss how to eliminate gender-specific barriers resulting in a wage gap, the difficulties of combining work with family responsibilities as well as cultural and social stereotypes of women's roles. Kazakhstan, as well as other SPECA countries, already has good practices in some of these areas, such as in developing micro-credit schemes.

This initiative was launched by Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan at the *International Conference on Strengthening Sub-regional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia and the Future Role of the UN SPECA* (Astana, 2005), where SPECA member countries agreed to consider establishing a new working group on Gender and Economy. Its work will be supported by UNECE and UNESCAP in cooperation with partner organizations. Kazakhstan will actively participate in the work of the new Working Group. ❖



Jilin Province, China

Agreement to clean up the River Dniester

One of Eastern Europe's largest rivers, the Dniester is facing serious environmental problems due to pollution and the impact of the water flow regime. Its basin is home to more than 7 million people, and the river itself is the main source of drinking water in the Republic of Moldova and parts of Ukraine. ⚠

↴ Chinese disaster ...

and poisonous substance – were spilled into the Songhua River disrupting the supply of drinking water to 3.8 million residents of Harbin and damaging the environment. The accident is expected to cause a transboundary effect as the toxic spill flows from the Songhua into the Amur River, a natural border between China and the Russian Federation. It may then affect the 500,000 population



of Khabarovsk. “The Chinese authorities waited for too long before information on the accident and its consequences was provided”, says Mr. Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UNECE Environment Division that has negotiated a Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents.

Effective notification systems

Mr. Bärlund notes that hazardous industrial installations can be made safer if their risks are assessed and if precautions are taken to prevent accidents. This requires the implementation of safety management systems and enforcement of prevention measures. Consequences of industrial accidents can often be

reduced if properly addressed. This, in the first place, requires the immediate activation of adequate on-site and off-site contingency plans, including coordinated response. To this end, effective notification systems are essential. What is also extremely important is that information is shared, without delay, with all actors, in particular with the affected public. “These are actions at the core of the UNECE treaty.”

International cooperation

Since industrial accidents may cause transboundary effects, countries must also develop and maintain contacts with their neighbours and cooperate with others at the international level.

In recognition of this, the UNECE Convention has proven to be an increasingly important European mechanism enabling countries to work together with an aim to increase industrial safety and thus reduce the threat of industrial accidents to human health and our common environment.

Mr. Bärlund concludes that the UNECE is prepared to share its experience in the area of prevention of and response to industrial accidents also to interested countries and regions outside the UNECE area. “The solutions that the treaty establishes for transboundary cooperation are equally useful for national contexts like that in China.” ❖

For more information contact Kaj Barlund (kaj.barlund@unece.org).

↴ River Dniester ...

The Dniester rises in the Ukrainian Carpathians, flows through the Republic of Moldova and reaches Ukraine again near the Black Sea. Much of the pollution comes from industries located upstream. Ukraine’s second city, downstream Odessa,



relies entirely on the river for its drinking water. The transboundary character of the river has so far made it difficult to solve the environmental problems and to improve the river’s management.

Landmark agreement

UNECE and OSCE have together facilitated a landmark agreement between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine to clean up the river Dniester. The two countries signed the agreement on “Transboundary Cooperation and Sustainable Management of the Dniester River” at a meeting in Odessa, Ukraine, on 1 December.

The project, financed by Sweden, Switzerland and the United States,



brought together government and NGO representatives from the two riparian countries to study the condition of the Dniester basin and agree on the way forward to strengthen collaboration and to improve the river’s management. The project put into practice the principles of the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, and involved experts from both UNECE and OSCE. ❖

For more information contact Bo Libert (bo.libert@unece.org).

This week ...

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| 28 Nov.-7 December | ECOSOC Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods |
| 7-9 December | ECOSOC Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals |
| 6-9 December | Working Party on Passive Safety |
| 5-7 December | Working Group on Water and Health |
| 8-9 December | Ad Hoc Meeting of SPECA Experts on Gender and Economy |

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