

Annual Meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs:

Gender-responsive policies to achieve SDG5 in the context of COVID-19 pandemic: Critical and key emerging issues in the SPECA region

Tuesday 27 October 2020 from 14:00 – 17:00 hours (Thailand Standard Time)

09:00 – 12:00 (Geneva) | 13:00 – 16:00 (Bishkek)

1. Introduction

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains the most comprehensive and progressive blueprint for achieving gender equality to date. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reinforces its ambitions, through advancing Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

At the 13th session of the SPECA Governing Council in Almaty, Kazakhstan, held on 21 September 2018, participating countries in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, (SPECA)¹ reiterated their commitment to the Programme as a platform for promoting sub-regional cooperation in the SPECA region and for achieving the SDGs. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) provide overall support to the Programme.

The SPECA Working Group on Gender and Sustainable Development Goals (WG on Gender and SDGs) is a subsidiary body within the governing structure of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). It works to raise awareness on the interdependency between gender and economy through sharing good practices in mainstreaming gender in economic policies, policy-oriented research and projects as well as developing cross-sectoral linkages and synergies with other relevant areas of the SPECA activities.

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review was convened by ESCAP and UN Women in late 2019 to review progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. More than 600 participants from 54 countries and 166 civil society organizations attended the Conference which culminated in the adoption of the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment - a comprehensive set of commitments and actions on region-specific issues that can move forward the gender equality agenda over the next 5 years².

¹ The member countries of the Programme are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

² With its adoption, countries in Asia and the Pacific committed, *inter alia*, to ensuring women's economic empowerment and the integration of women into the formal economy. Governments agreed to take appropriate measures and extend legal and

Similarly, the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting was convened by UNECE and UN Women in late 2019 with more than 850 participants in attendance, reviewing progress and persisting challenges as well as showcasing practical policy approaches that can help remove the structural barriers that hold women back from equal participation in all areas of life. Participants stressed the need for faster and stronger progress for women and girls and urgent realization of the commitments to uphold their human rights. Over the last five years, countries in the region have put a particular focus on three main areas: combating violence against women, women's economic empowerment and political participation. The Key conclusions of the Beijing+25 Regional Review meeting for Europe identified several areas for accelerated action to advance gender equality in Europe. These included intensified actions to eliminate violence against women, to support women's labour force and political participation, and to invest in inclusive and sustainable long-term comprehensive policies to remove structural barriers and discriminatory social norms.

The implementation of these commitments has been overtaken and frustrated by the emergence and stronghold of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this context, women are often caregivers for both children and older persons and may therefore suffer from both financial and health-related impacts as they struggle to balance formal and non-formal care responsibilities during the on-going crisis.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of the meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs is to serve as a platform for policy dialogue, capacity-building and networking for concerned government stakeholders from relevant key ministries and agencies in SPECA countries to discuss gender-responsive policies that are critical to the achievement of gender equality, SDG 5, and related SDGs, linked to poverty reduction and economic growth in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants share advances made and challenges encountered with respect to the implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality and will further discuss strategies to forge ahead on key emerging issues to advance gender equality, including women's full economic and political empowerment in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also expected that the meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs will (a) elect a new Chair for the Working Group; (b) identify one or more joint initiatives for potential future sub-regional collaboration; and (c) articulate key recommendations for priority actions to advance the ambitions of the 2019 Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review as well as the Key conclusions of the Beijing+25 Regional Review meeting for Europe.

social protections to ensure that all women and girls have equal opportunities for education, decent work, and financial inclusion. Countries further committed to work with key stakeholders to transform negative gender norms, discriminatory social attitudes and to eliminate structurally unequal power relations that persist between women and men. They additionally highlighted the need to strengthen gender-responsive national statistical systems and data collection for an enhanced understanding of gender gaps in the region.

3. Outcomes

The outcome of the meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs will inform the work of ESCAP and UNECE towards the Beijing+30 review process within the context of sub-regional collaboration with SPECA countries, including in the context of COVID-9. It is expected that one or more joint initiatives will be identified for potential future sub-regional collaboration. The key recommendations are expected to identify, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, both opportunities and challenges to achieving the ambitions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 5.

4. Participants

The meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender Equality and SDGs will bring together government representatives working towards the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in SPECA countries. In addition to government representatives, participants may include representatives of relevant UN agencies, funds and programmes; representatives of civil society organizations; and other relevant stakeholders across Asia and the Pacific.

5. Modality/structure of event

The meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs will be convened virtually and broadcast live on the YouTube platform, with comments enabled. The simultaneous use of the Kudo software will allow for simultaneous interpretation English/Russian. It will be conducted using a virtual and interactive format in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, good practices and lessons learnt by representatives from SPECA countries.

The meeting will be opened by high-level representatives from ESCAP and UNECE.

Following a brief overview of the meeting of the Working Group, a new Chair will be elected.

The meeting will consist of three substantive sessions.

The first session invites representatives from SPECA countries to provide brief overview on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls, with a focus on the following aspects:

- 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.
- e) Measures undertaken by governments to mitigate the adverse impact of COVID-19 on women and girls

Representatives of international organizations, and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will also be invited to make interventions.

Interventions are invited for 10 minutes each. Full versions of statements, if longer, may be submitted in advance of the meeting - these will be annexed to the meeting report.

A plenary discussion will follow the delivery of overviews.

The objective of the second session is to review activities as well as to articulate key recommendations for priority actions for SPECA countries to implement the Beijing+25 outcomes within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on gender-responsive economic policies. It is expected that one or more joint initiatives will be identified for potential future sub-regional collaboration.

The objective of the third and final session is to discuss and approve the workplan on joint activities for 2021 – 2022 for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs.

6. Contact

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7. Tentative Programme

13:45-13:55	Online log-in
13:55-14:00	Online group photo
14:00-14:15	<p>Welcome Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) • Ms. Monika Linn, Director, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) • Overview of the meeting Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP
14:15-14:25	Election of Chair for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs
14:25 – 15:45	<p>Session 1: Review of gender gaps and challenges as well as gender-responsive initiatives from SPECA countries</p> <p>This session invites representatives from SPECA countries to provide brief overview on progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls, with a focus on the following aspects:</p> <p>(a) Non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation;</p> <p>(b) Policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies;</p> <p>(c) Policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors;</p> <p>(d) Policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development; and</p> <p>(e) Policies mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on women.</p>

	<p>Presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afghanistan • Azerbaijan • Kazakhstan • Kyrgyzstan • Tajikistan • Turkmenistan • Uzbekistan <p>Representatives of international organizations, and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will also be invited to make interventions.</p> <p>Country’s representatives are invited for interventions of up to 10 minutes. Full versions of statements, if longer, may be submitted in advance of the meeting and will be annexed to the meeting report.</p> <p>Discussion in plenary (30 minutes)</p>
15:45-16:30	<p>Session 2: Looking ahead – opportunities for future sub-regional collaboration</p> <p>The objective of the second session is to review activities as well as to articulate key recommendations for priority actions for SPECA countries to implement the Beijing+25 outcomes within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is expected that one or more joint initiatives will be identified for potential future sub-regional collaboration.</p> <p><i>Moderator:</i> Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Focal Point, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of activities in 2020-2021 and identification of further sub-regional cooperation
16:30 – 16:55	<p>Session 3: Approval of workplan</p> <p>The objective of this final session is to discuss and approve the workplan on joint activities for 2021 – 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on priorities and future activities for 2021-2022
16:55-17:00	<p>Closing remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Officer-in-Charge, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia • Chair of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs



Annex I.

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

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SPECA WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND SDGs

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established by the Tashkent Declaration on 26 March 1998, signed by the Presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Executive Secretaries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan joined the Programme later.

2. The SPECA participating countries are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific provide overall support to the Programme.

3. The SPECA Working Group on Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter referred to as “the Working Group”) is a subsidiary body of the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. The Working Group on Gender and Economy (WG on Gender) was established in compliance with the proposal of the Special session of the SPECA Regional Advisory Committee (Astana, Kazakhstan, 27 May 2005) of setting up a Working group on gender and held its first session in Geneva on 5 – 9 December 2005. At the 13th session of the SPECA Governing Council (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 21 September 2018), the SPECA participating countries SPECA reiterated their commitment to the Programme as a platform for promoting subregional cooperation in the SPECA region and for achieving the SDGs, including the fundamental role of the attainment of gender equality in all areas – SDG 5. In particular, the Governing Council adopted the recommendations of the session of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy held on 19 September 2018 in Almaty, including the recommendation to rename the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy to the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs.

II. OBJECTIVES

4. 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.

III. PARTICIPANTS

5. The Working Group shall comprise National Representatives, nominated by the Governments of the SPECA participating countries. The National Representatives shall be senior officials involved the formulation and implementation of national policies in their respective countries and able to effectively follow up the recommendations and decisions of the Working Group.
6. Each participating country shall also nominate, on a permanent or an ad hoc basis, experts on Gender and respective areas of activities of the Working Group.
7. Relevant regional organizations implementing programmes on Gender are invited to nominate their representatives to participate in the activities of the Working Group.
8. Other United Nations bodies as well as other bilateral and multilateral agencies and organizations operating in the area of Gender and SDGs in the SPECA region are invited to participate in the work of the Working Group on Gender and SDGs.
9. Representatives of the member States of UNECE and ESCAP, representatives of United Nations Funds, international financial institutions, and donors as well as representatives of the private sector and academic community may be invited to participate in the work of the Working Group.

IV. MODALITIES OF OPERATION

10. The SPECA participating countries elected Azerbaijan as the Chair country of the Working Group on Gender and SDGs.
11. Governments of the SPECA countries nominate Focal points for the Working Group to ensure successful delivery of programmes of work, according to the adopted Terms of reference.
12. The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats shall provide substantive support to the activities of the Working Group by:
 - (i) Providing expertise as well as assistance to activities implemented by the Working Group; and
 - (ii) Providing secretariat support to the preparation and organization of sessions and meetings of the Working Group, including preparation of documents and maintenance of records.
13. The Working Group shall hold its annual sessions at a date and venue agreed by the participating countries any time before or concurrent to the annual sessions of the SPECA Governing Council.

14. The Working Group shall draw important policy issues to the attention of the SPECA Governing Council.

15. The working languages of SPECA are Russian and English.

V. PROGRAMME OF WORK AND ACTIVITIES

16. The annual sessions of the Working Group serve as a platform for policy dialogue, capacity-building and networking for concerned government stakeholders from relevant key ministries and agencies in SPECA countries to discuss critical and key emerging issues related to gender equality, poverty reduction and economic growth in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants share advances made and challenges encountered with respect to the implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality and will further discuss strategies to forge ahead on key issues to advance gender equality, including women's full economic and political empowerment.

17. The Working Group shall develop, agree upon and approve its Terms of reference and submit them to the Governing Council session for adoption.

18. The Working Group shall develop, agree upon, approve and implement its annual work programmes and prepare its annual reports to the Governing Council on progress made in their implementation.

19. The Working Group shall draw up its biennial work programmes which are integrated into SPECA Work Plans.

VI. FUNDING

20. The Tashkent Declaration calls upon other United Nations agencies, donor countries, international financial organizations as well as the private sector to provide financial and other types of assistance to SPECA.

21. The costs of participation of the experts in the sessions of the SPECA Working Group shall, as a rule, be borne by the Governments of the participating countries. In addition, the UNECE and ESCAP shall provide financial support, within their available resources.

22. SPECA participating countries are invited to provide financial and other types of support to the implementation of the programmes of work of the Working Group on Gender and SDGs.

23. The Working Group shall also seek funds and technical assistance from multilateral and bilateral donors for the implementation of specific capacity-building projects falling under the scope of the approved work programmes.

VII. OTHER MATTERS

24. The Terms of Reference shall be reviewed in 5 years or sooner if the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs so decides.