



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

FOURTEENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA GOVERNING COUNCIL

(Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 21 November 2019)

**PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE SPECA THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS**

This document contains information on the activities carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the thirteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council which was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 21 September 2018.

**ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED INSIDE AND/OR OUTSIDE THE SPECA
REGION**

I. WORKING GROUP ON WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The 23rd session of the SPECA Working Group (WG) on Water, Energy and Environment was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on 2 October 2019. The session agenda was based on the last year discussions and decisions and aimed at: finalizing and endorsing the Terms of Reference of the WG; discussing the draft Concept of the SPECA Strategy on Water, Energy and Environment; strengthening partnership with other regional and development organizations in addressing water, energy and environmental challenges; and achieving synergy between national and regional policies within the mandate of respective UN agencies. Participants emphasized the importance of SPECA both in strengthening regional cooperation and the achievement of SDGs in the SPECA countries.

At its 23rd session, the WG made the main following decisions:

- The Working Group discussed the revised Terms of Reference of the Group. The Group notes its relevance to the needs of the SPECA countries to effectively and collectively address water, energy and environmental challenges in the region and attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Group requests the UN Secretariat to submit the Terms of Reference to the Governing Council of SPECA for consideration and adoption;
- The Working Group considered the draft Concept for the SPECA Strategy on Water, Energy and Environment and endorsed it as a basis for development of the Strategy;
- Country participants noted the need to explore opportunities for utilizing expertise and mandates of various UN agencies active in the area water, energy and environment with the aim to develop coherent approach in support of national priorities and better address regional and transboundary challenges; and

- The Working Group emphasized the importance and relevance of issues related to dam safety in the region and considers this topic as a priority in its work. With the aim of improving coordination of activities in this area in the region, the Working Group decides to establish a Central Asian Platform for Dam Safety within the framework of the WG. The Working Group requests the UN Secretariat to develop the Terms of Reference of the Platform and upon its endorsement by the national project coordinators submit it to the SPECA Governing Council for adoption.

With regard to the future role of the WG the participants from the SPECA countries agreed that the WG should: continue providing a platform for supporting progress towards achieving SDGs with a focus on the Goals directly related to water, energy and environment; raise awareness in SPECA countries on water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs through facilitating extensive exchange of information and sharing of best practice experiences; retain the status of a platform for identification of emerging trends and coordination of technical issues within the scope of the WG competence.

The directions of work during the reporting period included the following:

Dam Safety in Central Asia: Capacity-building and Subregional Cooperation

During the reporting period, the 3rd phase of the UNECE project continued supporting countries in the development of national legal and institutional frameworks for dam safety in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The round tables were conducted with the aim to review, discuss and provide recommendations on improving national legislation and institutional frameworks in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Pilot initiatives on the management of dams located on transboundary rivers between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are under consideration.

The regional meeting conducted in May 2019 in Tashkent involved several donor and development organizations, such as GIZ, OSCE, EBRD, CAREC, IWAC, French Development Agency. The event aimed to raise awareness on the problems of safe management of dams among donor and development organizations, deepen and expand cooperation in the area and mobilize additional support. This resulted in an agreement with the Slovak Agency on Dams Management (assisted by IWAC) to host a training-workshop for CA experts in October 2019 with travel supported by GIZ and OSCE. Finally, countries requested UNECE to assist in the development of a region wide agreement on dam safety. More information on the project can be found: http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety_third_phase.html

Development of Cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers

The UNDP/UNECE project on “Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Chu and Talas River Basins”, funded by the Global Environmental Facility, started in 2015.

Although the project ended in December 2018, the UNECE continues to put sufficient efforts to facilitate approval of SAP through different channels by raising this topic at the relevant meetings in the Chu-Talas basin and at international occasions, by liaising with the representatives of the CTWC who are in charge of further implementation and sustainability of the project results and by hiring a local consultant to facilitate SAP approval.

National Policy Dialogue Steering Groups in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, managed by UNECE and supported through several meetings, were used as inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms between two countries.

Water Quality in Central Asia

The Working Group meeting on Water Quality took place on 5 February 2019 in Tashkent. The meeting agenda included discussions on: draft Terms of Reference of the Working Group; activities of Central Asian countries in water quality issues, including water quality monitoring systems and institutional changes; the review of cooperation opportunities; results of the project; and, the draft Work Programme for 2019-2020 of the Group.

(For information see: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html>)

Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

Among others three SPECA countries are the beneficiary of the project: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. *Development Account project Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia* aimed to help countries with economies in transition to identify best practices, measures and procedures relevant to prepare a sustainable energy transition, with focus on the cross-cutting nature of energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy access. The project assists target countries in development of their national action plans for energy for sustainable development drawing on best practice guidance from the UNECE and ESCAP and will help to convert the plans into effective national policy frameworks. National consultants in each beneficiary country developed studies on relevant best practices on sustainable energy. They include both existing best practices in the countries and best practices from other UNECE countries. The Main focus of the case studies is on energy efficiency (in industry, buildings, and transport sectors) and renewable energy (wind, solar, hydro, and biomass). Each study contains 10-15 best practices identified both in and outside the respective country. The studies help to increase knowledge and understanding of what the best practices are throughout the UNECE region.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are among targeted countries of the project *“Integrated energy and water resource management in support of sustainable development in South-East Europe and Central Asia”*. It assists countries bring together UNECE internationally applicable framework for the classification, management and reporting of energy and mineral reserves and resources – the United Nations Framework Classification for Fossil Energy and Mineral Reserves and Resources 2009 (UNFC). The trainings on data collection related to sustainable energy and water resources management and monitoring and UNFC application as a tool for policy and strategic decision making were held for policymakers responsible for development of national policies on energy and water resources from targeted countries as well as for all other interested participants. The trainings increased knowledge of national experts on issues of relevance for each beneficiary country related to best practices on collection and monitoring of national data on energy and water resources management and monitoring in compliance with international standards. Based on knowledge acquired during trainings, national experts will be able to organize data collection in their countries in accordance with United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the UNFC.

The project *“Improving national capacities of Central Asian countries to harmonize and implement internationally applicable system of classification and sustainable management of energy and mineral resources”* aims at improvement of national capacities of Central Asian countries to harmonize and implement an internationally applicable system of classification and management of energy and mineral resources. National assessment reports (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) on the status of energy and mineral classification systems

have been completed. Regional workshop to validate the assessment reports and to develop policy recommendations for adoption of UNFC in countries' national regulatory frameworks have been conducted. The adoption and use of UNFC is expected to enable better management of natural resources with full considerations for social and environmental impacts.

The project *“Enhancing transboundary energy cooperation through introduction of wind and solar energy into power systems of the CIS countries to meet SDG 7”* is assisting Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in development of common and transparent rules for the functioning of power markets and the desire of countries to comply with these rules in practice. In particular, a methodology for assessing wind and solar energy potential including requirements for information on wind and solar energy potentials and key principles for development of regional wind and solar energy programmes was drafted. The project will help countries to develop and apply common methodological approaches to assessing the potential of RES, building and sharing information, the basics and principles for developing regional programmes for developing wind and solar energy, and will foster confidence among countries by encouraging the exchange of information, knowledge and best practices. The project will also promote synergies with other initiatives, for example within the SPECA activities, in the field of economic cooperation and integration.

Tracking progress in implementation of SDG 7 in the SPECA countries

ESCAP is working on tracking progress in implementation of SDG 7 by collecting sustainable energy related indicators, policies and information on the energy infrastructure development in SPECA countries. This is a part of the region wide knowledge hub called Asia-Pacific Energy Portal - a “one stop shop” aggregator of open-access energy information for the Asia-Pacific region. It is a web-based, interactive information platform designed to increase the accessibility and use of Asia-Pacific regional energy information to support research, analysis, and, ultimately, informed decision-making. It is the only platform to offer free access to an extensive set of energy statistics, full-text policies, and infrastructure maps. It offers a collection of more than 200 datasets covering access, efficiency, renewables, trade flows, subsidies, investment and more from global institutions including the UNdata, International Energy Agency (IEA), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Energy Information Administration (EIA), United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), and Bloomberg. It also provides a set of policies sourced from official websites. With the InfraMap section, the Portal offers an interactive spatial and temporal display of power plant infrastructure in SPECA countries plotting more than 300 points of conventional and renewable energy power generation. Combining the three main information types of data, policy, and infrastructure creates a powerful analytical tool for all energy related stakeholders in SPECA countries. The Asia-Pacific Energy Portal can be found at: www.asiapacificenergy.org.

II. WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, TRANSIT AND CONNECTIVITY

Efficient transport connectivity plays a key role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA countries. Therefore, inland transport infrastructure development, facilitation of border-crossing procedures, railway and intermodal transport development and improvement of road safety is a priority for cooperation in the SPECA subregion.

The 24th session of the SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (WG-STTC) was held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, from 18 to 19 November 2019. The session was hosted by the Government of Turkmenistan, assisted by UNECE and ESCAP. Representatives of SPECA countries, multilateral development banks and international and domestic transport organizations participated in this event.

In 2019, the WG-STTC focus was on alignment of the WG strategic documents (draft ToR and draft Work programme for 2020-2021) with transport-related SDGs and SPECA Governing Council decisions in last two years. The main goal was to set-up more dynamic and realistic work programme which will be focused on transport and connectivity topics of great importance for the SPECA subregion. Discussion on establishment of more efficient connectivity, sustainable development of transport system and seamless international and regional transit clearly emphasized a need for deeper subregional cooperation. National representatives shared information on national achievements and plans on: inland transport infrastructure development and future investments in all inland transport modes – with special emphasize on coordination of regional development, accession and implementation of international conventions and agreements, identification and elimination of major bottlenecks along international transport routes, and road safety improvements. UNECE and ESCAP informed participants on new developments in preparation of international legal instruments, implementation of transport project and capacity development activities. The session of the WG-STTC also discussed monitoring and reporting on transport-related SDGs achievement.

All documents and presentations of the 24th session are available at: <http://www.unece.org/trans/main/speca/>

The SPECA WG-STTC activities with the UNECE and ESCAP support during the reporting period included the following:

Vienna Programme of Action

On 11-12 February 2019, ESCAP, UN-OHRLLS and UNECE organized the Euro-Asian **Regional Midterm Review of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024** in Bangkok, Thailand. Representatives of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan participated in the event. The objectives of the Euro-Asian regional review of the VPoA were to:

- Comprehensively review and taking stock of the implementation of the VPoA in Euro-Asian region, including identification of the major achievements, constraints experienced, emerging challenges and the opportunities presented;
- Identify and share best practices, experiences and innovative approaches to accelerate the implementation of the VPoA and the achievement of the SDGs in the region; and
- Formulate appropriate policy measures and action-oriented recommendations aimed at sustaining achievements in overcoming the special problems of LLDCs and accelerating the implementation of the VPoA and achievement of the SDGs.

The outcome of the Euro-Asian regional midterm review and its recommendations are to form substantive input that will feed into deliberations at the global midterm review of the VPoA.

Euro-Asian Transport Links

The **Euro-Asian Transport Links Project (EATL)** is the most relevant in the context of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPOA) as it is a long-term endeavour and gathers many Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and transit countries in Europe and Asia¹. It is supported by international organizations and the transport business community in an aim to improve conditions for trade and socio-economic development on the continent.

The UNECE EATL Phase III comprehensive report, which was officially launched as a publication in 2019, is a particularly useful tool for transport policymakers from LLDCs and transit countries in the EATL region and beyond, in that it, *inter alia*:

- Identifies and describes main commodity groups for the transport of which inland modes of transport can compete with maritime and aviation modes (incl. non-containerised, containerised and high-value containerised cargo).
- Provides analysis showing the economic advantage (in terms of time and costs) of inland routes compared to air or maritime routes for containerised cargo – particularly important to attract interest of the private sector.
- Identifies the current strengths and weaknesses and lists several recommendations to make inland routes more competitive vis-à-vis the other modes.

At a more specific level, it highlights the need for Governments from LLDCs to accede to and implement international agreements and United Nations Conventions in the field of transport and transit, in particular the ***International Convention on Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods, the Convention on International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention), and the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) and its additional protocol***. It stresses the need to develop institutions and procedures facilitating long-haul container block train operations along selected Euro-Asian routes and advocates for increasing complementarity between road and rail transport rather than increasing competition between these two modes on EATL inland routes and ports hinterlands.

UNECE International Transport Infrastructure Observatory

Recognizing that financing of Euro-Asian transport links remains a major obstacle, UNECE is taking the lead in developing an International Transport Infrastructure Observatory. The observatory is being developed in the framework of a project, which has as beneficiary countries Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) members in Central Asia and the South Caucasus (almost all of which are SPECA countries). The project has received full funding by the Islamic Development Bank.

The observatory is being devised as an online platform in a Geographic Information System (GIS) environment where (a) Governments find all the relevant data to prepare, benchmark and present their transport infrastructure projects and (b) International Financial Institutions (IFIs) can consider, analyse and compare projects from a regional/international perspective and identify projects they wish to finance.

IFIs could at a glance not only see online in the format of digital maps all relevant information (incl. pre-feasibility studies) about projects that are in need of funding but also they will be able to see if

¹ Phase III was supported by 38 countries, including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

these projects are part of international corridors, if these corridors are facilitated by the relevant United Nations international agreements, how much other Governments in the region have paid for similar infrastructure projects, etc.

The project's end date has been extended until March 2021. Immediate further steps include: collection of additional country data, a further prioritization analysis and conversion of the collected data into GIS shapefiles as well as production of the actual mappings.

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Railway facilitation and intermodality

Towards a Unified Railway Law in the pan-European along Euro-Asian transport corridors

Building further on the creation and gradual introduction of a CIM/SMGS Common Consignment Note from 2007 onwards UNECE is currently trying to solve remaining administrative issues through the creation of a full-fledged Unified Railway Law² (URL). The ultimate purpose of this initiative is the establishment of a unified set of transparent and predictable provisions and legal rules for Euro-Asian rail transport operations in all countries concerned leading to facilitated border crossing procedures, particularly for transit traffic. The work on Unified Railway Law (URL) has continued. During 2018-19, UNECE³ has been discussing the scope of URL and its conversion into a legally-binding instrument. The draft provisions of the URL contract of carriage were tested in a pilot tests: a test had been carried out in April 2019 along the corridor Azerbaijan – Georgia – Turkey. The Group has been also discussing and agreeing on necessary documents to support creation of a unified railway regime to facilitate the movement of freight on rail between Asia and Europe through key transit countries in the SPECA region through the creation of one contract of carriage, one liability regime and one consignment note.

United Nations Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-Luggage carried in International Traffic by Rail

In February 2019, UNECE adopted the text of a new United Nations Convention on the “Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-Luggage carried in International Traffic by Rail”. The Convention, which is the 59th legal instrument in the field of inland transport, developed under UNECE auspices will help to:

- Facilitate and expedite border-crossing by means of efficient state controls systems and the application of international standards
- Extend the use of modern technologies, automatic gauge changeover technologies and high-speed rolling stock technologies.
- Reduce time-frames for the completion of technological operations and state controls.
- Provide comfort and quality of service for passengers, while reducing the running times of trains.
- Facilitate visa issuance procedures.

² Website: <http://www.unece.org/?id=32361>

³ Website: https://www.unece.org/trans/main/sc2/sc2_geurl_mandate.html

It will help to overcome the many time-consuming technical and administrative limitations that international passengers still experience when travelling by train in the Euro-Asian region. Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and other countries have already expressed their intention to start internal procedures to formally accede to the Convention soon.

Strengthening the logistics and transport competitiveness of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan project

In 2018, two studies were completed on Logistics and Transport Competitiveness, one in Kazakhstan and one in Kyrgyzstan. The studies identify the transport infrastructure and services available domestically, review the countries' recent and future transport investments, and sets out recommendations to ensure their transport network is ready to harness the growth in inland transport from rising East-West trade, particularly in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. The studies present the benefits of adhering to and implementing the full spectrum of UN Transport Conventions and Legal Instruments administered by UNECE, and through their continued participation in UNECE initiatives such as the Euro-Asian Transport Links project. The studies also highlight strengthening the harmonization of legislation as one of the most important conditions for the development of the transport infrastructure domestically and the broader region.

UNECE organized *a Workshop on Innovation in Railways* (21-23 November 2018). The wider meeting discussed the European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines of International Importance, rail security, safety, productivity and reform to mention a few while the workshop itself highlighted the role of innovation in the sector across passenger, freight and infrastructure and how this can help to improve the competitive position of the railways.

On 19-21 November 2018, UNECE organized the *Workshop on operational challenges of regional intermodal transport and innovative solutions*. The main aim of the workshop was to identify good practices and discuss ways of facilitating the computerisation of these documents to grow intermodal transport and breakdown the administrative barriers that persist for the railways.

Sustainable Inland Transport Connectivity Indicators

The UNDA funded project entitled *“Sustainable transport connectivity and implementation of transport related SDGs in selected landlocked and transit/bridging countries”* has been launched in autumn 2018. The project aims at developing a set of Sustainable Inland Transport Connectivity Indicators (SITCIN) and will be implemented from September 2018 - December 2020. It involves the following pilot countries: Kazakhstan and other countries. The main objective of the UNECE led project, which is implemented with the support of ECLAC and ESCWA, will be to provide a tool for LLDCs/ transit developing countries to measure their degree of connectivity: both domestically and bilaterally/subregionally as well as in terms of soft & hard infrastructure.

In September 2019, UNECE conducted a SITCIN kick-off mission to Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan/ Almaty and Khorgos) in the framework of which consultations were held with Government agencies in charge of transport, trade, customs and border management issues, as well as road and railway transport infrastructure managers and haulers including also representatives of logistics and freight forwarding associations and transporters. A visit was also paid to the Khorgos Eastern Gate Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at the Kazakh-Chinese border, which aims at providing a full range of logistics services for railway cargo between China, Central Asia and Europe

Road Safety Performance Review

Based on results of the UNDA-funded project *“Strengthening of the national road safety management capacities of selected developing countries and countries with economies in transition”* – the Government of Kazakhstan agreed with UNECE to prepare Kazakhstan Road Safety Performance Review. The project will assist Kazakhstan to strengthen the road safety management capacity and effectively address and improve national road safety record. It will help Government to identify the most critical road safety aspects and priority needs by preparing Kazakhstan Road Safety Performance Review. The project should be completed until end 2020.

The capacity development workshop **“The 1958 Agreement – a road map for implementation workshop”** on UN legal instruments and technical regulations applied to the broad automotive sector, addressing the safety and environmental performance of wheeled vehicles, their subsystems and parts was held on 20-21 May 2019 in Tbilisi. The aim of the workshop was to strengthen knowledge of experts from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and other countries on how to efficiently implement provisions of the 1958 Agreement and update national legislation to be in full conformity with the Agreement. The workshop provided hands-on training on United Nations Regulations for the approval/certification of new wheeled vehicles, type approval, reciprocal recognition under the 1958 Agreement, testing and monitoring methods. The workshop allowed exchange of international and national best practices on efficient implementation of the 1958 Agreement. Furthermore, workshop strengthened national capacities to improve road safety legislation.

Workshop on strengthening security on inland freight routes

On 3-4 September 2019, in Geneva, UNECE in collaboration with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other partners organized a workshop on strengthening security on inland freight routes. The workshop gathered over 50 security experts and officials from ministries of transport, customs committees and other relevant agencies as well as road and railway transport operators and private sector associations from across countries in the Euro-Asian region. The workshop took stock of the multiple crime and security challenges faced by inland transport systems globally. In particular, the workshop discussed various risk and threats, including theft of cargo and vehicles, attacks on train and truck drivers, trafficking, illicit trade, smuggling and contraband. The workshop also discussed risks for misuse of the international transport container system for criminal purposes as well as emerging security threats from digitalisation of inland transport networks, with a wide range of sensitive data streams flowing across different systems. Participants noted the potential of the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets to positively impact on inland transport security, particularly through digitalisation and the ongoing eTIR pilot projects.

Workshop on quantifying transport costs for landlocked developing countries

On 2 September 2019, in Geneva, UNECE in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) organized a workshop on quantifying transport costs for landlocked developing countries.

The workshop gathered representatives from Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) from across the Euro-Asian region, Africa and Latin America and discussed the specific challenges and disadvantages of LLDCs. Participants strengthen capacities on different approaches for quantifying and assessing corridor performance (through systematically measuring time and costs spent during

transport and quantifying transport bottlenecks experienced en route; measuring the actual time required for the release and/or clearance of goods from the time of arrival until the physical release of the cargo).

Participants were informed that LLDCs have transport costs which, in accordance with available research, are on average 50 per cent higher than developing countries that do have access to the open sea. As a result, LLDC exports are less competitive and the average LLDC has less than 40% of the trade volume of the average littoral state. Participants noted that the ability to quantify transport costs incurred by LLDCs would also help in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs.

Sustainable urban mobility and spatial planning handbook

Further to a decision of the UNECE a *Handbook on Sustainable Urban Mobility and Spatial Planning* has been prepared with extra-budgetary funding provided by the Government of the Russian Federation. The publication has been designed to assist countries in integrating transport, health, quality of life and environmental objectives into urban and spatial planning policies. It provides over 100 references to case studies, good practices and examples from cities across the UNECE region (and beyond) covering a wide array of thematic areas. The handbook consists of 7 chapters addressing the following topics: the future of sustainable urban mobility; spatial planning in function of sustainable urban mobility and accessibility; public transport planning as a cornerstone of sustainable urban mobility; The important role of active mobility for health and environment; and the potential of Intelligent Transport Systems in an urban context. The publication is currently in the editing, design and lay-out phase and is expected to be officially launched at the THE PEP High-Level Meeting scheduled for 2020.

Strengthening the capacity of the Central Asian countries to develop sustainable urban mobility policy on car sharing and car-pooling initiatives

The objective of the UNECE project is to strengthen the capacity of Central Asian countries to develop a sustainable urban mobility policy on car sharing and car-pooling initiatives. The project will review experiences from various countries and identify the good practices and lessons learned from car sharing and car-pooling initiatives to provide Central Asian countries with a best practice guide on how to set up and regulate such schemes (including, economic, environmental, safety, security and social implications). Once prepared, the recommendations will be tested through pilot projects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to ensure its effectiveness and modify it as appropriate. One subregional workshop will be organized to discuss the pilot projects (potentially under the umbrella of the SPECA WG-STTC) and to update the guidelines according to the lessons learnt within the framework of the project. Initial desktop analysis of car sharing and car-pooling services globally containing good practices, and lessons learned already stated in September 2019. The project will be completed until December 2021.

Integrated transport infrastructure development

ESCAP is working to promote regional transport infrastructure connectivity, as a fundamental basis for addressing the challenges of regional cooperation and integration more broadly. It is to be enhanced through continued development, upgrading, planning and operationalization of the transport infrastructure networks in the region and beyond, including through the introduction of new technologies and harmonized operational and technical regional standards.

In this context, ESCAP is implementing a *Development Account Project on Addressing the Transboundary Dimensions of the 2030 Agenda through Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific*. It is a multi-disciplinary project targeting Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia and is spanning over four years from 2018 – 2021. The objective is to strengthen capacity of selected countries to develop sustainable and inclusive policies and mechanisms for trans-boundary infrastructure connectivity within the context of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under the project:

- a) An inception meeting was held from 2 to 4 October 2018 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The meeting introduced the project objectives and activities, implementation schedule and approach, reviewed the proposed project activities to ensure that they are in line with national priorities and needs, and took stock of progress and development in the energy, ICT, and transport sectors through the sharing of knowledge and good practices among policymakers.
- b) Consultations with experts from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan took place from 24 to 25 October 2019 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. They aimed at raising awareness and enhancing knowledge and capacity of government officials through hands-on trainings in identifying the challenges, gaps, and opportunities for current infrastructure design and development; proposing policy measures and strategies which incorporate cross-sectoral synergy, disaster resilience, social inclusion and viable financing into transboundary infrastructure projects.

ESCAP conducted a survey in the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway countries on cross-border co-deployment of fibre-optic cables along highway and railway rights-of-way and developed a study on “*Co-deployment of Fibre-Optic Cables Along Transport Infrastructure for SDGs*”. In order to discuss the findings and recommendations of the survey and study, ESCAP organized a *Workshop on cross-border co-deployment of fibre optic infrastructure along road and rail networks* on 22 November 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the workshop.

Sustainable road transport

Eighth Meeting of the Working Group on the Asian Highway convened in accordance with Article 7(2) of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network in Bangkok on 18 - 19 September 2019. The Working Group considered the implementation of the Agreement and any amendments proposed by the Parties. Notably, the Working Group adopted an amendment introducing a new route AH9, passing through Kazakhstan, connecting the Baltic sea and Pacific Ocean, from St. Petersburg, Russia Federation to Lianyungang, China. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan participated in the meeting.

The Working Group also served to advance discussions and information exchange on the operationalization of the Asian Highway Network. It recognized that greater efforts would be needed to manage the negative externalities of road transport operations in order to support the region’s sustainable growth. It was of the view that improving the quality of road infrastructure had become an increasingly significant factor in supporting economic growth and delivering results on sustainable development, including by mitigating carbon dioxide emissions and other types of pollution generated by road transport.

ESCAP jointly with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) organized *the Capacity Building Workshop on application of new technologies in transit facilitation for enhancing transport connectivity of LLDCs and transit countries* from 7 to 8 November 2019 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Islamic Republic of Iran is the closest transit country for most LLDCs in Central Asia to access the

sea. The workshop aimed to enhance understanding of the border officials of the selected countries (LLDCs and transit countries in North and Central Asia) in using new technologies to facilitate transit as demonstrated through ESCAP transport facilitation tools and frameworks for cross border and transit transport facilitation.

ESCAP is implementing a project on *Strengthening Capacity for Operationalizing Sustainable Transport Connectivity along the China-Central Asia-West Asia economic corridor*. The project countries include China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey and aims at assisting these countries, many of which are least developed and/or land-locked developing states, to achieve 2030 agenda. The project will focus on enhanced seamless transport connectivity, use of smart transport technologies, strengthened inter-regional cooperation and partnership by providing an inclusive platform where countries can discuss regulatory bottlenecks and connectivity indicators.

The Expert Group Meeting on Harmonization of Technical Standards, Rules and Regulations for Enhanced Railway Linkages between Northeast, Central and West Asia was organized from 17 to 18 September 2019 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to discuss the ways of enhancing railway infrastructure connectivity among Afghanistan, China, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and improving operational environment through harmonization of technical standards, rules and regulations for railway transport operations.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda has highlighted the importance of sustainable transport solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. To move towards such a system at the regional level, there is a need for proactive policy initiatives to encourage energy-efficient and environmentally friendly modes of transport such as rail. In order to strengthen and facilitate international railway transport in Asia and between Asia and Europe, it is imperative to develop and implement soft measures.

In this context, ESCAP undertook a project on *Harmonization of Rules and Regulations for the Facilitation of International Railway Transport* in the region. Three studies were commissioned under the project:

- Under the first study, on border-crossing practices in international railway transport, the processes at a number of selected railway border crossings in the region were documented and measures to enhance their efficiency proposed;
- Under the second study, on enhancing interoperability to facilitate international railway transport, three dimensions of interoperability were identified; and
- Under the third study, on electronic information exchange systems for international railway transport, the existing systems for electronic exchange of information for international railway transport were reviewed.

In addition, ESCAP, jointly with the Organisation for Co-operation between Railways, prepared a framework on enhancing the efficiency of railway border crossings along the Trans-Asian Railway network and beyond. In the framework, four specific issues are identified and targets and processes to achieve them are provided with a view to further enhancing the efficiency of railway border crossings along the Trans-Asian Railway network.

Dry ports and intermodal transport

While the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks constitute two important building blocks for an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system in Asia-Pacific, dry

ports serve as efficient cross-over points where freight can switch modes without delays or damage. ESCAP has developed and formalized dry ports through the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports. *Third Meeting of the Working Group on Dry Ports* was convened from 13 to 14 November 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand and considered the implementation of the Agreement and any amendments proposed by the Parties. The Working Group also provided a platform for discussions and considerations on the operation of dry ports, as well as development of intermodal transport corridors and multimodal transport operations in the region. Number of SPECA countries participated in the meeting.

Road Safety

In line with the Decade of Action for Road Safety, ESCAP works on the goal to stabilize and then reduce the forecast level of road traffic fatalities. The overall road safety goal for the Asia-Pacific region is a 50% reduction in road fatalities and serious injuries on the region's roads.

ESCAP has been conducting studies on two major causes of road crashes: (i) Speeding and (ii) Alcohol and Drug- Impaired Driving, with the objectives of assessing the status in the region as well as drafting recommendations for the countries. In this context, ESCAP organized the *Regional Seminar on Tackling Main Causes of Road Traffic Crashes, Fatalities and Injuries in Asia-Pacific Countries to Achieve Road Safety Targets of the Sustainable Development Goals* from 24 to 25 April 2019 in New Delhi, India. The participants shared experiences on road safety, speeding, as well as alcohol and drug- impaired driving, as well as reviewed the study findings. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the regional seminar.

Following the Regional Seminar, ESCAP organized a *Capacity Development Workshop on Road Safety for North and Central Asian Subregion* from 3 to 4 October 2019 in Baku, Azerbaijan, to strengthen the capacity of the policymakers from the countries in tackling speeding and drunk driving as two main causes of road traffic crashes, injuries and fatalities. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the workshop.

Transport connectivity between Asia and Europe

The ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Transport at its third session held in Moscow in December 2016, recognized the needs for coordination of efforts in enhancing Euro-Asian transport connectivity and has adopted the Regional Action Programme of Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017-21), which included the objective to work towards the establishment of an inter-regional coordination committee on transport between Asia and Europe. Against that background, the ESCAP is implementing a project to assist the launch of the inter-regional committee as an institutional bridge between the two regions. *Inter-regional Expert Group Meeting on Transport Connectivity between Asia and Europe* was organized from 30 January to 31 January 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Meeting shared information of the initiatives, views and actions related to the development of Euro-Asian transport connectivity in Asia.

Use of new technologies and Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)

To maximize the potentials of ITS in Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP has initiated a project entitled *“Innovative and Integrated Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) for the Development and Operation of Sustainable Transport Systems in Urban Areas”*. ESCAP organized an *Expert*

Group and Regional Meeting on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Development and Operation for Sustainable Transport Systems in Asia and the Pacific from 2 April to 4 April 2019 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The expert group and regional meeting focused on sharing the results of draft study report regarding the policy recommendations on ITS regulatory framework for the Asia-Pacific region, discussed challenges and issues related to ITS developments, provided an opportunity to exchange information, knowledge and ideas on developing ITS policies at the national level and to network and further build their regional ITS contacts. Finally, the meeting concluded with policy recommendations for ways forward in the new area of smart transport. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in the meeting.

ESCAP puts efforts to promote the use of technology and intelligent transport systems to move towards smart Asian highways, reducing road crashes, traffic congestion and negative environmental externalities in the Asia-Pacific region. In that context, ESCAP is implementing a new project, launched by the secretariat with the financial support of the Russian Federation, aimed at assisting countries in reaching a common understanding and increased awareness of the use of highly or fully automated vehicles along the network. The project aims at strengthening regional cooperation by developing a set of guidelines on the operation of connected and fully automated vehicles along Asian Highway network.

III. WORKING GROUP ON TRADE

Activities under the Turkmenistan Chairmanship of SPECA in 2019

Turkmenistan and UNECE organized several meetings on trade in 2019 (preparatory meetings of the First Caspian Economic Forum on 12 August 2019 in Avaza, Turkmenistan, and an Ambassadorial Meeting on 9 September 2019 in Geneva). The idea of establishing the SPECA Trust Fund and the concept of a SPECA *Initiative to lower barriers to trade and transport using UN norms, standards, best practice recommendations and other tools for trade and transport facilitation, in order to strengthen the regional market and cross-border supply chains, and make the region more attractive for investments, which would bring in technologies, innovation and modernization* were discussed. The Ambassadors supported both ideas: the SPECA Trust Fund and the Ashgabat Initiative.

The UNECE Regional Adviser participated in two meetings with programmes of assistance to the Central Asian countries to coordinate cooperation with SPECA: partners' meeting of the CAREC programme, run by ADB and several development banks, 23-25 September 2019, and the Eurasia Week of the Eurasian Economic Commission in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 26-27 September 2019.

14th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade

The 14th session of the SPECA WG on Trade (Ashgabat, 19 November 2019) discussed four documents for adoption by the SPECA Governing Council at its 2019 session, as well as the follow-up activities of the Group:

- Draft SPECA Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy;
- Principles of Sustainable Trade in the SPECA Subregion; and
- Concept Note for a Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in the SPECA Subregion.

The representatives of the SPECA participating countries approved the updated Terms of Reference of the Group and submitted them for adoption by the SPECA Governing Council session on 21 November 2019.

The representatives of the SPECA participating countries exchanged experiences and discussed cooperation on WTO and trade policy issues, mutual assistance on implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, WTO accession, enhancing a regional network of National Trade Facilitation Committees, and strengthening synergies between policymakers and national stakeholder from the private sector.

The session paid special attention to strengthening cooperation with other organizations working on trade facilitation in the region. The Vice-Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee presented their work on trade, GIZ the results of their Programme “Trade Facilitation in Central Asia” (01.2017-12.2019) and plans for the next three years, OSCE presented their work on connectivity, trade and transport facilitation in the region. All partners are expected to intensify additional activities to support the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, sustainable trade in the region and, as a whole, the forthcoming Initiative on reducing barriers to trade and transport using UN instruments in the SPECA region.

13th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade

The thirteenth session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade and a Third High-Level Seminar on Regional Trade Cooperation were organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on 4 July 2019.

Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, UNECE, ESCAP, UNCTAD, UNEP, ITC, IRU, the World Bank, WCO’s Regional Office for Capacity Building in Europe, WTO, GIZ, and the businesses community took part in the meeting. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were represented at the ministerial level, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan by the respective Ambassadors.

The WG on Trade session aimed at:

- (1) identifying key issues and fostering dialogue between the SPECA countries and international organizations on achieving Sustainable Development Goals 17.10 and 17.11 in the subregion;
- (2) advancing the work on three deliverables of the SPECA WG on Trade: (a) review the Draft Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy with a view to prepare it for submission for adoption by the SPECA Governing Council session on 21 November 2019; (b) discuss the Principles of Sustainable Trade in the subregion, which would go hand-in-hand with fostering dynamic economic development supporting inclusive trade and economic growth; and (c) discuss the Concept Note for a Regional study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. Such a regional study would permit even closer collaboration between SPECA countries to identify possible obstacles to successful achievement of the SDGs; and
- (3) analysing further the opportunities and challenges from participation in the multilateral trading system and making a brief overview of the status of implementation of the WTO TFA. Further development of SPECA cooperation at bilateral and regional levels is necessary to elaborate a common position in the multilateral international processes that would permit the SPECA region to become a transit hub in the heart of Eurasia.

The 13th session of the SPECA WG on Trade, held on 4 July 2019, recommended to the Governments of the SPECA countries to:

1. use the SPECA framework as a platform supporting the growth of intra-regional trade and sustainable development reforms to:
 - i. provide input to policy decisions in SPECA countries to achieve the SDGs;
 - ii. identify next steps (work programmes, cooperation plans, exchange of best practices, and the use of standards and tools for sustainable trade to achieve the SDGs in the SPECA subregion); and
 - iii. define areas, in which subregional projects on sustainable trade would attract funding;
2. strengthen the regional network of trade policymakers in defining trade policies and negotiating positions, notably on WTO accession and implementing trade facilitation;
3. further review the draft SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and make comments by 15 September 2019 to the UNECE secretariat for a final edit and presentation for adoption by the SPECA Governing Council, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 21 November 2019;
4. upon adoption of the Strategy, further develop the Roadmap of activities to implement this Strategy, with timelines and responsibilities distributed;
5. upon analysis of the results of the 2019 survey on trade facilitation and paperless trade, further work on: streamlining documentary formalities; border agency cooperation; governance and information availability; enhancing the stability of ICT infrastructure; and existing limitations in financing and human resource capacity. Address these challenges by closer cross-border collaboration through existing subregional mechanisms, exchange of best practices, and joint capacity-building activities;
6. strengthen subregional cooperation to support sustainable regional trade development; enhance the diversification of production and trade, foster economic, environmental and social innovations related to sustainable development to create more trade opportunities and generate larger-scale efficiency, while creating new “green” jobs;
7. review the draft principles for sustainable trade in the SPECA region (contained in the document “International Trade and Sustainable Development”) for adoption by the SPECA Governing Council on 21 November 2019 in Ashgabat. The secretariat should revise and shorten the document to focus on the list of principles, and present it to the SPECA Governments for review by 15 September 2019;
8. further consider the suggestion that UNECE prepares a regional study on non-tariff barriers to trade in the SPECA subregion, given resources are provided, and respond to the UNECE secretariat with their positions by 15 September 2019;
9. undertake activities on strengthening the transit regime in the SPECA subregion, including strengthening the implementation of the TIR Convention, to strengthen its position as a transit region at the heart of Eurasia;
10. reinforce collaborative efforts with relevant international organizations and development partners working towards the achievement of trade facilitation and sustainable trade in the subregion, included but not limited to UNCTAD, IRU, the World Bank, GIZ, USAID, ADB,

the Eurasian Development Bank, and others; further collaborate with donors, attract more support from the other SPECA countries in line with the 2018 SPECA Evaluation Report, and from other potential donors;

11. request the SPECA Governing Council and the Executive Secretaries of UNECE and ESCAP not to drop project implementation under the SPECA umbrella from the mandate of the SPECA, since this would impair the capacity of the Programme to address challenges that SPECA countries face in achieving SDGs that require cross-border cooperation. Request UNECE and ESCAP include projects involving bilateral and multilateral cooperation among SPECA countries in their programmes of support of SPECA as the focus of coherence of activities in the region. The SPECA Working Group on Trade will communicate this to the two Executive Secretaries; and
12. use the results of this session in the preparations for the 2019 SPECA Forum on *Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation in the SPECA Subregion*, aimed at strengthening the position of the SPECA countries as a trade and transport facilitation region through lowering barriers to trade, transit and transport, consolidating a regional market with stronger regional supply chains.

Involvement of Uzbekistan in the activities of the Working Group

On 17 October 2018, the UNECE Regional Adviser carried out consultations on further collaboration with Uzbekistan and the Association on Transport and Logistics Partnership in Central Asia in a regional SPECA perspective.

Legal and Technical Readiness Assessment for Cross-Border Paperless Trade in SPECA countries

Between November 2018 and September 2019, ESCAP supported an assessment of the national readiness of Uzbekistan for cross-border paperless trade. It was conducted by a team of international experts, based on the readiness checklist developed by the ESCAP Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation, of which Uzbekistan is a member. The team visited Uzbekistan in November 2018 to conduct interviews with relevant government agencies and private sector stakeholders. A national consultation on facilitating cross-border paperless trade was co-organized by the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan and ESCAP on 13 May 2019, where preliminary findings from the visits were further reviewed, consolidated and validated. Final findings and recommendations incorporating input and suggestions received during and following the consultation are presented in this report. Based on these findings and recommendations, an individual draft action plan for moving towards cross-border paperless trade for Uzbekistan has been prepared and is also presented in a report, issued in September 2019. The report, including the readiness checklist and its recommendations, may be useful to other SPECA countries.⁴

Capacity-building on five items related to the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, in which UNECE has comparative advantage

On 20-22 May 2019, UNECE organized with the Government of Kazakhstan (Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan), GIZ and ESCAP a capacity-building seminar for the SPECA countries

⁴ <https://www.unescap.org/resources/readiness-assessment-cross-border-paperless-trade-uzbekistan>

on the implementation of four selected measures of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and UN/CEFACT Recommendation 42:

- functioning of National Trade Facilitation Committees (WTO TFA art. 23.2 and UN/CEFACT Recommendations 4 and 40);
- streamlining formalities and documentary procedures (TFA art. 10.1 and trade facilitation recommendations of UN/CEFACT dealing with documents, documentary procedures, data harmonization, business process analysis, etc.);
- use of international trade facilitation standards (TFA art. 10.3 and most UNECE recommendations and standards on documents, codes, semantics of data exchange, etc.);
- Single Window for export, import and transit; and
- National Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism (TTFMM) (UN/CEFACT Recommendation 42).

The seminar raised the understanding among the Kazakhstan NTFC members and the representatives of the SPECA countries on the four TFA items and their implementation. The possibility to develop a national TTFMM was discussed with the Government and trading community of Kazakhstan. A second business process analysis (BPA) on the exports of grain from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan was developed for the seminar (five years after the first one in 2014). It was reviewed for finalization at the seminar, to illustrate the principle of TTFMM – periodically repeated studies on the same strategic product. The BPA presentation was followed by comments and further work was envisaged.

Further work on regional cooperation among National Trade Facilitation Committees, streamlining formalities and documentary procedures, implementation of international TF standards and Single Window was also envisaged. UNECE presented the vision of BPA and data harmonization, as well as the use of international global and sectorial standards for document layouts and documentary procedures for streamlining documentary formalities. UNECE presented a definition and categorization of international trade facilitation standards, notably the UN/CEFACT semantic standards. UNECE made an overview of the UN/CEFACT Single Window Recommendations (Recs. 33-37) and the key elements of a step-by-step approach to building a Single Window. UNCTAD and Kazakhstan Customs presented the progress made in the Kazakhstan Single Window project, which is implemented parallel to the implementation of the ASYCUDAWorld Customs data processing system (named Astana 1) in the country. This is the first time a project linking ASYCUDA to a Single Window project is implemented.

Capacity-building and data collection on Non-tariff Measures (NTMs) in the SPECA countries

ESCAP supported NTM data collection in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan between January and July 2019, in collaboration with UNCTAD. Country reports have been published based on the new data collected in October 2019 and are in the process of being incorporated in the <https://trains.unctad.org> database. ESCAP organized a subregional workshop on NTMs in North and Central Asia on 10-11 June 2019 and supported the participation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Following a first workshop on reducing the costs of NTMs in North and Central Asia co-organized by ESCAP, UNECE, UNCTAD and ITC in Geneva on 11 October 2018, a follow-up workshop on the same topic was held during the ESCAP Trade and Investment Week in Bangkok, co-organized with ISO - and attended by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

SPECA and the 2019 UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

Following introduction of the initiative at the SPECA Working Group on Trade in 2018, data was collected by UNECE, ESCAP and other regional commissions for all SPECA countries – and a total of 128 countries globally – on implementation of trade facilitation measures during the first half of 2019. The data is now available at <https://untsurvey.org>, covering not only WTO TFA measures but also other paperless trade facilitation measures as well as measures targeted at SMEs, the agricultural sector and participation of women in economy. A dedicated page has now been created for SPECA, available at: <https://untsurvey.org/group?id=SPECA>. It shows that the average trade facilitation implementation score of SPECA countries improved from 41.4% in 2017 to 53.94% in 2019.

IV. WORKING GROUP ON STATISTICS

The objective of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics is to strengthen the statistical capacity in the SPECA countries to produce statistical information to monitor demographic, social and economic progress, and the regional integration of their economies. It aims to implement international standards and guidelines for enhancing the capacity of the SPECA countries to produce internationally comparable and reliable data, with a focus on the data needed to measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that SPECA is not the best mechanism to deliver this objective. Representatives of the SPECA countries have made it clear that they prefer activities in the wider context of the eleven countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). They have also raised the issue at too many international forums with similar agendas.

Some SPECA countries do not attend meetings of the Working Group on Statistics, even though financial support is offered. For example, in 2017 and 2018, only five of the seven SPECA countries attended the Working Group meetings.

The main sponsor of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) has signalled that it plans to stop sponsoring future meetings for the reasons above.

In response to these challenges, the UNECE secretariat, in cooperation with the European Union and the European Free Trade Association, has decided to rationalise the number of meetings held in future for the countries of the EECCA subregion. The meetings previously organized separately by these bodies will now be combined to improve efficiency and reduce duplication. There will be a single annual high-level seminar on statistics for the EECCA countries, replacing several previous meetings, including those of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics. On 24-26 September 2019, as a transition, the first of these joint High-Level Seminars was held in Moldova, including a special half-day session for SPECA countries.

Capacity development

During the period of this report, UNECE provided the following main types of capacity development services:

- Advisory services, aimed at assisting beneficiary countries on the implementation of international guidelines and methodology, and formulation of specific capacity development projects/programmes.
- Capacity development workshops aimed at promoting international guidelines, stimulating the exchange of best practices and supporting the establishment of active networks of experts at the subregional level.
- Capacity development projects, including those with multi-sectoral and/or subregional focus, in areas where the UNECE has mandate and expertise.

Capacity development activities conducted by UNECE are demand-driven, results oriented and strongly rely on ongoing “Global Assessment” reviews of national statistical systems, undertaken in partnership with the European Union and the European Free Trade Association.

A Global Assessment of the national statistical systems is planned in Kyrgyzstan in 2020. The assessment provides a comprehensive analysis of the institutional, organizational and technical capacity of a country to produce official statistics and comply with international standards and recommendations. Global assessment reports provide detailed recommendations for the further development of national statistical capacities, to help national authorities, international organizations and other bilateral partners, to better coordinate and prioritise statistical capacity development programmes.

During the reporting period, ESCAP initiated the project “Strengthening research and studies for improved quality of SDG statistics in Central Asia” funded by the Russian Federation. The aim of the project is to strengthen the capacity of the countries of Central Asia to produce data for priority SDG indicators through the development of training material, including in the Russian language, and the subsequent design and delivery of training courses through face-to-face and/or e-learning modalities. The inception workshop of the project was held on 8-10 May 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. The first training workshop, on the SDG indicators on water-use efficiency and water stress, was held on 8-10 October 2019 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-learning courses on poverty statistics and the water stress indicator are in the final stages of translation; delivery is scheduled to commence in the coming months.

2018 session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics

The 2018 session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics was held in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, on 1-3 October 2018. The main topics for discussion were:

- 1) Defining the national statistical system;
- 2) Progress in developing statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- 3) Using geospatial information for SDGs and other statistics; and
- 4) Registers and data integration for SDGs and other statistics.

2019 session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics

A short session was held during the afternoon of 26 October 2019 on the margins of the joint UNECE / Eurostat / EFTA High-Level Seminar of Statistics for the EECCA countries, in Chisinau, Moldova. The session discussed the consolidation of international forums, and priorities for future activities within the new structure.

V. WORKING GROUP ON KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Implementation of the UNECE project “Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews”

- Within the framework of this project, **Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and other CIS countries** have been completed. Reports are available in English and Russian. The Review process and structure has been updated to reflect the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The **Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan** has been completed and the findings and policy recommendations presented to stakeholders in Bishkek on 28 February 2019. These policy recommendations will form the basis of future capacity-building activities of UNECE secretariat to support implementation efforts by the Government of Kyrgyzstan, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

Review of the PPP laws of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan:

- UNECE is providing capacity-building and policy advisory services to the Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic, to facilitate and sustain the implementation of the new PPP Law in Kyrgyzstan. Specifically, UNECE is preparing guidelines to assist the public sector in the process of identification and initiation of PPP projects under the new PPP law. A preparatory mission took place in Bishkek from 3 to 5 September 2019. A seminar was organized in Bishkek on 30 October 2019 to present these guidelines to public officials of the Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- A Roundtable was organized in Bishkek on 31 October 2019 by UNECE and the Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic, to showcase projects and discuss International PPP best practices including the UNECE Guiding Principles on People-first PPPs and the UNECE Standard on a Zero Tolerance approach to Corruption in PPP Procurement.
- UNECE is providing capacity-building and policy advisory services to the Public-Private Partnership Center, State Committee on Investment and State Property Management of the Republic of Tajikistan. A fact-finding mission was realized in Dushanbe on 19-21 August 2019 and a report is being prepared to review the PPP law in Tajikistan.

ESCAP activities in support to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative

- Through AP-IS, ESCAP has been supporting countries in the North Central Asian subregion, including SPECA countries, to promote the development of broadband infrastructure and access that will improve broadband affordability, coverage, reliance and resilience, thereby addressing the digital divide.
- In line with this, ESCAP organized the **Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Subregional Steering Group Meeting for North and Central Asia** on 5 October 2018 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. It was the first subregional meeting convened as part of the AP-IS, providing platform for sharing current development of broadband connectivity in the subregion and facilitating the discussion and building consensus on the future plan and activities of the AP-IS to be undertaken in the subregion. As a result, a number of activities and corridor approach were identified and targeted to support countries in the implementation of AP-IS initiative, i.e. to promote broadband expansion.

ESCAP Development Account Project on “Addressing the transboundary dimensions of the 2030 Agenda through regional economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific”

- The project aims at strengthening national capacity of selected countries to develop sustainable and inclusive policies and mechanisms for trans-boundary infrastructure connectivity within the context of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The project spans over four years from 2018-2021. Two SPECA countries, namely Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, were among the selected countries in the project.
- In the initial step of the project implementation, ESCAP organized the project inception meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 2 to 4 October 2018, to review the project concept and its plan of activities, ensuring that it's in line with the national priorities and needs. As a result, the project activities were discussed and agreed upon by the participating country representatives, noting importance of the project in the subregional and national development agenda. At the same time, the meeting also served as a platform for exchanging developmental views, sharing knowledge and good practices among policymakers, with the subject focus on (1) FOC co-deployment along passive infrastructure, (2) promoting social inclusion and disaster risk reduction in cross-border infrastructure development, and (3) identifying feasible infrastructure financing modalities.
- After the inception meeting, ESCAP is now preparing subregional assessments and national studies on the three above-mentioned topics and developing guidelines and training modules for the capacity development workshops in each selected country. Two workshops per country are expected in 2019-2020.

Expert Group Meeting: Advancing Co-deployment Financing through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway in North and Central Asia

- ESCAP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communication of Kazakhstan, organized an Expert Group Meeting on “*Advancing Co-deployment Financing through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway in North and Central Asia*” in Almaty on 31 January and 1 February 2019. This meeting has brought attention and raised awareness among participating representatives from ministries and government agencies on opportunities and challenges associated with infrastructure co-deployment and relevant financing modalities for broadband infrastructure. The participants also benefited from integrating infrastructure co-deployment approach and developing concrete plans of action, including policy updates and capacity development, within the framework of AP-IS.

Other ESCAP AP-IS activities

The *Eurasian Summit “Digital Agenda in the Era of Globalization 2.0: Eurasia Innovative Ecosystem,”* held on 1 February 2019 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, ESCAP delivered a presentation in a session on Digitization in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. At the session, ESCAP shared its views on the role and importance of ICT in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development agenda 2030 as well as the approach it has been doing to support the SPECA countries to fast forward the expansion of broadband internet network under the framework of AP-IS, particularly through infrastructure co-deployment between ICT and roads, railways, electricity power lines, etc., which could help significantly reduce costs and quicken the expansion of the ICT network within and across border. The expansion of broadband network would also facilitate the

development and application of advanced emerging technologies and innovation for better economic, social and environment development of the subregion.

ESCAP Project on Disaster-related Statistical Geospatial Indicators for Monitoring the Implementation of the SDGs

- ESCAP supported SPECA countries through organization of the expert group meetings (EGMs), in Almaty, Kazakhstan from 31 January to 1 February 2018, and in Almaty from 31 January to 1 February 2019. The key objective of the meetings was to discuss and develop the conceptual framework of disaster-related statistical geospatial indicators (and index) by reviewing relevant existing models and methodologies on disaster-related indicators, as analytical tools, for the SPECA countries to monitor and report the progress of the implementation of disaster-related SDGs.
- Proposed framework and indicators of disaster-related statistical geospatial data supported policymakers and technical officials of the SPECA countries to analyse disaster-related conditions, improve capacity to use combined statistical data and geospatial data, and prepare more effective policies and actions for reducing disaster risks, and preventing or mitigating human and economic and environmental loss. The proposed frameworks and disaster-related statistical geospatial indicators also contributed to improving statistical accuracy of the already established SDG indicators, the Asia Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development 2018-2030, the ESCAP Regional Roadmap for the SDGs and the UN global agendas such as the UN Global Statistical Geospatial Framework.

Implementation of the ESCAP Project on Development of Decision-making Tool(s) and Applications for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning in Central Asia

- In January 2019, ESCAP started a new project to build capacity of Central Asian countries on geospatial information applications for drought monitoring and early warning. Kyrgyzstan and other drought affected countries in Central Asia will be the pilots. The project contributes to achievements of SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 13 (climate action) and 15 (life on land), and supports the implementation of the Asia Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development (2018-2030) and the ESCAP Regional Roadmap for the Implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific.
- At the end of the project in December 2020, the customized drought monitoring system and a set of decision-making tools will be proposed to senior officials of SPECA countries for applications and the capacity to use space applications and geospatial data for drought monitoring and early warning will be strengthened.

KOICA-ESCAP Fellowship Programme for 2018

- The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and ESCAP conducted a KOICA-ESCAP Fellowship Programme in the Republic of Korea from 29 October to 10 November 2018 inviting 19 government officials from SPECA countries. The key focus of the Programme in 2018 was to enhance knowledge and capacity to SPECA countries on use of space applications and geospatial information systems to find solutions for challenges of urban planning and disaster risk reduction. The Programme contributed to promoting the implementation of SDGs 11 and 15.

- The 2019 KOICA-ESCAP Fellowship Programme was organized in Bangkok, Thailand, with the theme on drought monitoring and early warning from 23 to 28 September 2019, inviting 20 government officials from Central Asian countries and ASEAN countries.

UNECE and ESCAP capacity-building activities in the SPECA countries

- A Regional Workshop on “Innovation and Technology Applications for Sustainable Development” was organized by UNECE with support of ESCAP in Bishkek on 26-27 June 2019, hosted by the State Service of Intellectual Property and Innovation under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, “Kyrgyzpatent”.
- The eleventh Session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development was organized by UNECE with support of ESCAP in Bishkek on 27 June 2019.
- A Roundtable in support of implementation of policy recommendations of the innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan was organized by UNECE and Kyrgyzpatent in Bishkek on 25 June 2019.
- 1st Expert Group Meeting on Development of decision-making tools for geo-drought monitoring and early warning in Central Asia was organized by ESCAP in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, 4-5 July 2019.
- National workshop as part of the Development Account project: Addressing the transboundary dimensions of the 2030 Agenda through regional economic cooperation and integration in Asia and the Pacific was organized by ESCAP in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 10-12 September 2019.
- Capacity-building event for SPECA countries “From ideas to applications: Sharing best practices on incubators, science parks and technology transfer”, UNECE in partnership with MGIMO, Moscow, Russian Federation, 21-23 October 2019.

VI. WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND SDGs

In the lead to the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the 5th anniversary of the implementation the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countries recognized the fundamental role of gender equality for achieving a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all. Recent decades of experience in development policy and practice have further reinforced that addressing gender inequality has a strong impact on all three dimensions of sustainable development - social, economic and environmental.

In 2019, SPECA countries addressed the progress and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, in its 12 areas of concern, looking at the linkages with the SDGs in the framework of a common for the UN system questionnaire. The efforts of the SPECA countries were focused on collaboration of the gender machineries in these countries with the line ministries to ensure comprehensive national-level reviews in all overarching dimensions of the linkages between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. All SPECA countries provided the national-level comprehensive reports in due time.

The SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs (WGG) participated in the subregional consultations in July and September 2019, organized prior to the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting. For some countries, such as Azerbaijan, the process was led by the members of the SPECA WGG, in others – members of the WGG provided substantive inputs to the reports.

Against this background, all information for the country's policy, strategies and actions towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the national level was reflected in the UNECE synthesis report of the Beijing+25 Regional Review presented at the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting, 29-30 October 2019 in Geneva. The representatives of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs participated and took active part in the discussions at the UNECE Regional Review Meeting.

The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats organized a meeting of the WGG countries which preceded the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting on 29-30 October 2019. A brief summary of the discussion is summarized below.

Sharing Experience and Knowledge in the Area of Gender and SDGs

In 2019, broad exchange of information among the members of the network of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs continued. Special attention was given to the empowerment of women through entrepreneurship and its linkages with the achievements of the SDGs. Women's entrepreneurship as an important resource for achieving SDGs both in national and international markets, as well as the development of information and communication technologies to support women entrepreneurs in doing their businesses were the key focus of the International Conference on women's entrepreneurship development held in Baku, Azerbaijan on 21 June 2019. The Conference was organized by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the participation of the SPECA WGG and international organizations. Discussions were held with representatives of women associations and entrepreneurs from various regions in Central Asia on the barriers that women face when setting up and/or expanding their activities.

Annual session of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs

The SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs met in Geneva, Palais des Nations, on 28 October 2019. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, as well as of the Regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia of UN Women, UNDP and FAO contributed to the results of this meeting, facilitated by UNECE and ESCAP. The governments were represented by the senior officials from their respective national machineries as well as from the line ministries - the Ministry of national economy (Kazakhstan) and the Ministry of labour and social development (Kyrgyzstan). The meeting was chaired by Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the WGG and Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the meeting, the representatives of the SPECA countries reviewed the activities in 2019 and discussed key steps in the implementation of the policies towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in their respective countries. The Group shared examples of gender-transformative economic policies in the SPECA countries, identified priorities, discussed setbacks in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in their national policies.

The meeting recognized the importance of subregional cooperation within the SPECA in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and the role of the Working group as a platform for discussion of gender-transformative policies, programmes and models of legal instruments in these countries and with international institutions, including the challenges the SPECA region faces in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The participants of the meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs discussed and approved the updated Terms of Reference for the Working Group. The WGG discussed the activities for the forthcoming biennial period and approved the work programme for 2020-2021.