



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

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) gap assessment of the SPECA countries: Paving the way to action under the SPECA Innovation strategy for sustainable development

(Online workshop, 26 November 2020)

Report

UNECE together with ESCAP is supporting SPECA countries¹ in their efforts to spur innovation as a central driver of the increasingly urgent transition from a low productivity and resource-intensive model of economic development to sustainable, knowledge-based growth in line with the SDGs. This support has been provided through a dedicated project on *Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* financed by the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) and implemented under the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development.

In the framework of this project and to help strengthen the institutional capacities of the SPECA countries to develop and reform innovation policies and institutions for sustainable development and regional integration, UNECE has prepared a *Science, technology and innovation (STI) gap assessment of SPECA countries*. The report highlights key common STI challenges and gaps that each of the seven SPECA countries faces and outlines recommendations for the forthcoming Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development, while taking into consideration the need to ensure resilient and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery and transitioning to the circular economy.

In addition, under the project, an initial draft of a *UNECE Handbook on Incubators to promote innovation for sustainable development in the SPECA sub-region* was produced to identify gaps in the innovation structure and guide efforts to design, run and monitor effective incubator policy to support innovative entrepreneurship as drivers of innovation-led sustainable development in the region.

Objective

The webinar aimed to present and validate the draft findings of the *STI Gap Assessment of the SPECA Countries*. It also aimed to discuss concrete actions for the first Action Plan under the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. To further guide the conversation on driving innovation for sustainable development in the SPECA sub-region, the potential for new industrial policy (NIP) to support STI development through technology upgrading was showcased. Technology upgrading appears to be the NIP approach most suited to the sub-

region, given SPECA countries' economic structure, innovation capabilities and the state of governance of industrial and innovation policies. In addition, the webinar featured discussion of effective incubator policy to support innovative entrepreneurship in the sub-region as a driver of innovation and sustainable development. This part was drawn on the *UNECE Handbook on Incubators to promote innovation for sustainable development in the SPECA sub-region* (forthcoming).

Participants

The workshop targeted government officials and experts from SPECA sub-region responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating innovation, entrepreneurship, and SME policies, as well as business and civil society.

Proceedings

Ms. **Elisabeth Tuerk**, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UNECE, welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of innovation as enabler of the transition to a knowledge-based economic model in the SPECA countries, in particular, in the context of the pandemic, in order to ensure a resilient and sustainable recovery. She also welcomed SPECA countries' commitment to promoting and strengthening their innovation policies under the activities of SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and the Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development. Ms. Tuerk also thanked colleagues from ESCAP for long-standing cooperation and donors and partners for their continued support. Mr. **Jonathan Wong**, Chief, Technology and Innovation Section, ESCAP, then provided his opening remarks, noting that innovation policy should be focused on achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), translating into inclusive policies (e.g. innovation activities including women and girls). He also highlighted the importance of a mission-driven approach to innovation and expanding the focus on STEM skills to include entrepreneurship skills to enable innovation. He also highlighted the importance of digital finance and the potential for impact investment to drive sustainable development. Mr. Wong also welcomed all the SPECA countries participating and thanked UNECE for the excellent cooperation. H.E. Ms. **Shahlo Turdikulova**, First Deputy Minister of Innovative Development, Uzbekistan, took the floor for the final opening speech, stressing the importance attached to innovation as a driver of the economy by the Government of Uzbekistan and that 2020 has been designated the year of science, education and development of the digital economy in Uzbekistan. She highlighted that more than 60 new legal acts were adopted to facilitate the development of science and innovation, including the adoption of two key laws on innovative development and on science and scientific development. In addition, several strategic documents like the Strategy of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan for 2018-2021 and the Concept of Scientific Development 2030 (adopted mid-November) will aim to accelerate the scientific and innovative development of the country. H.E. Ms. Turdikulova also noted that Uzbekistan has stepped up its efforts to ensure its scientific and innovative development, with the country's re-entry into the rankings of the WIPO Global Innovation Index in 2020 a welcome development. New initiatives are under way to support innovative entrepreneurship with the support of international partners, e.g. World Bank and UNESCO (financing of start-ups, training activities for innovative entrepreneurs, etc.).

The first session of the webinar was dedicated to discussions of the results of the STI gap analysis and potential areas for SPECA cooperation on innovation for sustainable

development. It also offered an opportunity to explore the potential of new industrial policy to drive innovation forward through technological upgrading in the SPECA countries.

Mr. **Rumen Dobrinsky** of the European Alliance for Innovation and lead consultant under the UNECE project, presented key findings of the STI gap assessment of the SPECA countries, showcasing the methodology used and the results achieved. Among the key challenges for STI development identified were: administrative hurdles, access to finance for start-ups, level of government support to STI, performance of the public administration, policy coordination, framework conditions for STI policy, industry-science collaboration, general STI capabilities and skills, business skills and education system, and small domestic markets. Key reform priorities include: the reduction of administrative barriers; implementation of result-oriented approach in STI policy; capacity development for STI practitioners; improving inter-agency collaboration and coordination; prioritization of STI activity; increasing public funding of STI activity; improving access to finance; enhancing financial incentives to knowledge-based industries and introducing new mechanisms and means to support tech-savvy industries. The recommendations have been grouped around two main areas: i) actions aimed at strengthening the national innovation systems and ii) actions aimed at boosting innovation for sustainable development in the SPECA countries. Detailed list of recommendations took form of an Action Plan which was circulated prior to the workshop among SPECA countries along with the full study of the STI gap assessment.

Ms. **Lyudmyla Tautiyeva**, UNECE consultant, has presented potential areas for regional SPECA cooperation on innovation for sustainable development. She highlighted the importance of cooperation to i) reduce costs and share risks of innovation activity; ii) accelerate the introduction of innovation in several markets with positive spill overs for several economies; iii) facilitate investment in innovation activities (otherwise too costly and too risky for one country to carry out) and the transfer of knowledge and best practices to address SD common challenges. Among the areas on which the SPECA countries could cooperate, is addressing challenges in innovation governance through policy learning and sharing of best practices (e.g. through UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews) and expanding the portfolio of policy mechanisms/tools to support innovation (e.g. through capacity-building activities on incubators in the sub-region). Beyond cooperation on STI, SPECA countries were also encouraged to consider implementation of innovative approaches and practices to boost trade flows (through trade facilitation mechanisms, implementation of the Principles of Sustainable Trade in the SPECA sub-region), and to enhance regional connectivity (through activities on building e-resilience and improving digital infrastructure and connectivity). SPECA countries could also consider using innovation to enable the transition to circular economy as well as development of sustainable cities to boost competitiveness of the region as the next steps.

The discussion on cooperation on innovation was taken further by the presentation of Mr. **Slavo Radosevic** of University College London presented on the potential for a new industrial policy approach to support technology upgrading for sustainable development in the SPECA sub-region. Mr. Radosevic outlined key elements of the new industrial policy approach (NIP) (i.e., pro-active and targeted focus on technology application areas, their “smart” and “market friendly” characteristics, and use of soft policies to embed foreign direct investment and global value chains (GVCs) as levers for domestic technology upgrading). He then outlined common challenges for the SPECA countries that could be tackled through the introduction of

NIP, in particular the low share of manufactured exports, low production sophistication and management quality, weak business and public sector R&D, and operation outside of GVCs, with the notable exception of resource-based industries. Given current institutional and governance constraints in the SPECA countries, the first steps towards using NIP would be to identify existing islands of excellence, where the countries can actual or potential comparative advantage and then experiment, applying the “best matches” approach, i.e. using policy solutions that correspond to limited administrative capacities.

Representatives of the SPECA countries expressed their appreciation of the work undertaken by the experts and usefulness of the findings and recommendations. They welcomed the results of the STI gap assessment, stressing its relevance for the region, as well as the need to cooperate to move forward in tackling the identified challenges.

Ms. **Aida Karazhanova, ESCAP**, reflected in her presentation how SPECA countries could use innovation to strengthen their e-resilience and build back better after COVID-19. She showcased existing regional cooperation initiatives in the SPECA region, in particular the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative that aims to increase the availability and affordability of broadband across Asia and the Pacific, and the partnership portal on infrastructure co-deployment. Ms. Karazhanova highlighted the tools made available by ESCAP for SPECA countries to assess the opportunities offered by smart corridors through a smart corridors simulator and to increase their e-resilience through an e-resilience monitoring dashboard. She stressed the importance of using innovation to overcome challenges brought about by the pandemic and to ensure a sustainable long-term recovery.

Representatives of the SPECA governments took the floor to express their opinion and share perspectives on the policy issues discussed.

Ms. **Dinara Moldosheva**, Chair of the State Service of Intellectual Property and Innovation “Kyrgyzpatent”, **Kyrgyzstan**, highlighted the usefulness of the work on the STI Gap Assessment for moving forward in enhancing innovation in the country, and expressed appreciation for the longstanding cooperation with UNECE, building on the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Kyrgyzstan that played a major role in catalysing the government’s efforts to build an efficient innovation ecosystem in the country. Ms. Moldosheva highlighted the efforts of national policymakers to create an effective innovation infrastructure, including by updating the Law on Innovation Activity. For this, an interagency committee has been created to draft comprehensive amendments reflecting recent developments in the sphere of innovation and introducing key definitions (e.g. such as incubator, accelerator, innovation policy support tools, etc.) and strengthening government support to innovation. The first publicly supported Innovation Centre in Kyrgyzstan is also under construction and will play an important role in supporting innovative entrepreneurship in Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. **Fariz Guliev**, Board member of the Innovation Agency of **Azerbaijan** highlighted the challenges in providing public support throughout the innovation life cycle, the limits of a linear approach to support and the importance of coordination with the private sector. He also highlighted the usefulness of cooperation on science and technology under international programmes like Horizon 2020 and the need to attract investments in technology. He also mentioned the need to build technology-focused consumer- and producer-related habits to develop technological sectors through strengthened STEM education, awareness raising on innovation and targeted support to innovative enterprises.

Mr. **Ilias Ospanov**, President, Centre of Engineering and Transfer of Technologies, **Kazakhstan**, took the floor and presented his views on the STI gap assessment. He highlighted the usefulness of such a forum for sharing experiences and exchanging practices with the SPECA countries. Mr. Ospanov stressed the need to better coordinate IT and innovation policies, which are often treated separately, to maximise their effectiveness and societal benefits. He called for regional financial mechanisms to support researchers and developers in their activities. Mr. Ospanov also called for closer consideration of the potential of innovation activity in industry to drive innovation and of public procurement to boost demand for innovation.

Mr. **Anvar Kodirov**, Director, Centre for Innovative Development of Science and New Technologies, National Academy of Sciences of **Tajikistan**, highlighted the importance of the STI gap assessment and the efforts of Tajikistan to develop a sound institutional and legal framework to enable innovation activity (e.g. putting in place Centre of Science and New Technologies, Centre for Innovative Biology under the Academy of Sciences, etc.). He stressed that public investment in R&D remains low, at 0.12% of GDP, and is a significant hinderance to innovative development. Mr. Kodirov also highlighted the importance of improving digital connectivity and developing skills to ensure the transfer and absorption of technology.

Mr. **Araznury Ataev**, Head, Department of Economic Sciences of the National Academy of Sciences of **Turkmenistan**, highlighted the importance attached by national authorities to the development of science, technology and innovation. In particular, he outlined priority areas for innovative development, including nanotechnology, medtech and biotech, ICT, agriculture and environment. Mr. Ataev emphasised the importance of innovation, including digitalisation, to enhance the efficiency of water management and deliver improved social and environmental outcomes.

Mr. **Ziedbek Yunusov**, Deputy Director, Scientific and Practical Centre for the Implementation of Innovative Projects, Ministry of Innovative Development of **Uzbekistan** briefed participants on plans to increase R&D investment from 0.2% to 0.8% of GDP in the upcoming years with a significant proportion earmarked for innovation technologies. The National Development Strategy of Uzbekistan to 2030 defines key areas for innovation activities, including infrastructure and funding of innovative entrepreneurship. The national authorities plan to enhance support to start-ups by providing financial support (of up to 50 million USD in total) to help overcome financial barriers to start-up development and make best use of the country's human capital. Mr. Yunusov also mentioned that the pandemic accelerated the provision of services online but highlighted the need to improve quality of ICT infrastructure given additional demands of an increased number of users.

The next session of the webinar was dedicated to the effective incubator policy to promote innovation for sustainable development. Professor **Yelena Kalyuzhnova**, Director, the Centre for Euro-Asian Studies, University of Reading and Henley Business School, presented key features of incubation policy as applicable to the SPECA sub-region based on the UNECE Handbook on *Incubators to promote innovation for sustainable development*, followed by discussions. Ms. Kalyuzhnova highlighted that there is no "one size fits it all" solution to incubation policy and that policymakers must experiment and adapt existing guidelines to the specific context of each SPECA country. She presented key points considerations when establishing an incubator (e.g. elements of the strategic planning process, specificities according to type of incubator and the implications for incubation policy, components of an

effective business incubator programme, etc.). Ms. Kalyuzhnova presented cases from the region, MGIMO Business Incubator, Russia, and MOST and NURIS incubators in Kazakhstan to illustrate different modalities and outcomes of incubation programmes. She outlined key elements of the Handbook that will later be published by UNECE.

Mr. **Tengfei Wang**, ESCAP highlighted the importance of ensuring the (financial) sustainability of incubators when designing incubator policy. He suggested that specific criteria be established to assess the value for money of public support, given competing demands for scarce public resources. He also stressed the managerial capabilities of business incubators as a key determinant of success and that policymakers should consider this important element when establishing incubators.

Mr. **Daniyar Medetov**, Association of Business incubators, Kazakhstan, shared incubator development experiences from Kazakhstan. He stressed the importance of embracing and experimenting with different approaches to incubator policy based on the experiences in comparable countries, e.g. Russia.

The floor was opened for comments by the **national consultants from the SPECA countries** that worked on the national STI gap assessments. Mr. Yuriy Aronskyi, national consultant for Turkmenistan, underlined that policymakers have now embraced the role of innovation as a key determinant of economic competitiveness and have implemented a number of reforms in the areas of digital economy, industrial modernisation and education to enable the development of new skills. Mr. Bahodur Mengliev, Tajikistan, highlighted the need to focus on building human capacity to enable innovation (e.g. strengthening STEM education, building entrepreneurship skills and promoting experimentation with ideas). Ms. Yulia Alieva, Azerbaijan, highlighted the importance of the STI gap assessment for the understanding of the country's standing relative to the SPECA region. While much has been done in recent years to strengthen the country's innovation support infrastructure, important gaps remain innovation policy coordination, access to finance for innovative entrepreneurs including venture capital, etc. Ms. Yelena Shevchenko, Kazakhstan, informed participants that the main building blocks of the national innovation ecosystem are in place and a new initiative on the development of techplatforms in ten priority areas (such as Industry 4.0, fintech, greentech, smart cities and others) was put in place to increase industry-science collaboration and technological readiness. Ms. Shevchenko also highlighted that challenges in innovation development remain, such as the need for comprehensive approach to STI development (a policy cycle approach) and the need to ensure multisectoral collaboration for technological development and closer industry-science linkages. She also emphasised the significant impact of COVID-19 on innovation development in the SPECA region and leveraging regional cooperation on innovation to solve important economic and societal challenges, for example, collaborating on e-resilience, energy transition, trade facilitation, etc. Mr. **Maxim Slesarev**, Manager, MGIMO Business Incubator, took the floor and shared some insights on the promotion of incubators through virtual networks and social media to raise awareness of the opportunities offered by incubators for innovative would-be entrepreneurs.

Mr. **Anders Joensson**, Chief, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE delivered some concluding remarks. He thanked the participants for their participation and feedback on the results of the STI gap analysis and potential areas for cooperation. He also commended Uzbekistan on its decision undertake a UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Review and thanked all government representatives of the seven SPECA countries for sharing

their perspectives and suggestions that would help guide the next steps under the project. Mr. Joensson also stressed that it would be important to sustain the momentum on the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. He highlighted once again the crucial role of innovation for sustainable development, the importance of mission-oriented innovation to address sustainable development priorities, and the solid foundations in SPECA countries (high levels of educational attainment, moderate wages, well-developed services and trade, etc) to build on. Mr. Joensson stressed the crucial role of the experimentation and discovery processes inherent to innovation and the importance of ensuring that institutions and policies enable these dynamics through effective innovation governance. He highlighted the potential for regional cooperation to tackle common STI policy challenges and the importance of sharing experiences to find solutions adapted to the context of the SPECA countries (examining what works, what has not and why, what can be done better, and how it could be applied in the SPECA context). Mr. Joensson reminded participants of the need to provide their feedback on the *STI Gap Assessment of the SPECA countries* and the *Background paper on potential areas for SPECA cooperation on innovation for sustainable development* by 10 Dec and informed them of the upcoming study of Professor Slavo Radosevic on the new industrial policy approach through technology upgrading for sustainable development in the SPECA countries, as well as on the *UNECE Handbook on Incubators to promote innovation for sustainable development in the SPECA sub-region*, forthcoming in 2021.

List of participants

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26 November 2020

First Name	Last Name	Position	Organisation	Country
Nesar Ahmad	Abidi	Head of Foreign Relation	Ministry of Communications and IT	Afghanistan
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Yuliya	Aliyeva	Consultant	UNECE	Azerbaijan
Gulshirin	Annadurdyeva	Employee of the innovation center	Ministry of Education	Turkmenistan
Mario	Apostolov	Regional Adviser, Trade	UNECE	Switzerland
Yuriy	Aronskly	Chairman	Union of Economists	Turkmenistan
Nurbek	Arzymbaev	Head of IT Unit	Kaz Minerals	United Kingdom
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Araznury	Atayev	Head of the Department of Economic Sciences	National Academy of Sciences	Turkmenistan
Jeyhun	Atayev	Member of Board	Transparency International - National Chapter in Azerbaijan	CIS

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Uran	Esengeldiev	Team Member, Telecom and Datacenters	World Bank	
Fariz	Guliev	Board Member	Innovation Agency	Azerbaijan
Muqadar Shah	Hashimi	Director of Economic Policy	Ministry of Economy	Afghanistan
Zhanserik	Ilmaliyev	Director	Satbayev University	Kazakhstan
Yernur	Izbassar	project Coordinator	JSC Science Fund	Kazakhstan
Anders	Joenson	Chief, Innovative Policies Development Section	UNECE	Switzerland
Rano	Jumaeva	Director	NGO "Cultural -Educational Center Tomiris"	Tajikistan

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Anvar	Kodirov	Director	Centre for Innovative Development of Science and New Technologies of the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan	Tajikistan
Fazilat	Kodirova	Leading Specialist	Ministry of innovative development of the. Republic of Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan
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Anastasia	Krasenkova	Project manager	MGIMO Incubator	Russia
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Makhambet	Kuspangaliyev	Director of NILAS Building Materials Testing Lab	Satbayev University	Kazakhstan
Daniyar	Medetov	Research Advisor for the Association of Business Incubators in Kazakhstan, Industry Expert	Henley Business School	Kazakhstan and UK
Bahodur	Mengliev	National Consultant for UNECE		Tajikistan

Dinara	Moldosheva	Chairman	Kyrgyzpatent	Kyrgyzstan
Meirbek	Mukatov	Deputy Director of International Cooperation Department	Ministry of Information and Communications	Kazakhstan
Timur	Muraviev	senior specialist, division of business development and investment promotion	Innovation Agency	Azerbaijan
Aisuluu	Mustapakulova	Head, Division for Innovation	Kyrgyzpatent	Kyrgyzstan
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Malika	Odilova	Leading Specialist	Ministry of Innovative Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan
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Michal	Podolski	Associate Economic Affairs Officer	UNESCAP	Thailand
Slavo	Radoshevich	Professor	University College London	United Kingdom
Rajan	Ratna	Economic Affairs Officer	UNESCAP	India
Aminagha	Sadigov	Academician Secretary(vice-president) of Azerbaijan National	Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences	Azerbaijan

		Academy of Sciences		
Nurgeldy	Seyitgeldyev	Head of the Department of Technical Sciences	National Academy of Sciences	Turkmenistan
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Elisabeth	Tuerk	Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division	UNECE	Switzerland
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Tengfei	Wang	Economic Affairs Officer	UNESCAP	Thailand
Jonathan	Wong	Chief, Technology and Innovation Section	UNESCAP	Thailand

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