

Meeting Report

Annual Meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs
Gender-responsive policies to achieve SDG5 in the context of COVID-19
pandemic:
Critical and key emerging issues in the SPECA region
Tuesday 27 October 2020

Annual Meeting of the SPECA* Working Group on Gender and SDGs
 Implementing Beijing+25 and SDG 5 Commitments in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic
 27 October 2020

 ESCAP	 Uzbekistan	 ESCAP	 UN Women
 SECRETARIAT ESCAP	 Tajikistan	 UNECE	 Azerbaijan
 ESCAP	 Kazakhstan	 Azerbaijan	 FAO
			 UNECE

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

Similarly, the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting was convened by UNECE and UN Women in late 2019 with more than 850 participants in attendance, reviewing progress and persisting challenges as well as showcasing practical policy approaches that can help remove the structural barriers that hold women back from equal participation in all areas of life. Participants stressed the need for faster and stronger progress for women and girls and urgent realization of the commitments to uphold their human rights. Over the last five years, countries in the region have put a particular focus on three main areas: combating violence against women, women's economic empowerment and political participation. The Key

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

² With its adoption, countries in Asia and the Pacific committed, *inter alia*, to ensuring women's economic empowerment and the integration of women into the formal economy. Governments agreed to take appropriate measures and extend legal and social protections to ensure that all women and girls have equal opportunities for education, decent work, and financial inclusion. Countries further committed to work with key stakeholders to transform negative gender norms, discriminatory social attitudes and to eliminate structurally unequal power relations that persist between women and men. They additionally highlighted the need to strengthen gender-responsive national statistical systems and data collection for an enhanced understanding of gender gaps in the region.

conclusions of the Beijing+25 Regional Review meeting for Europe identified several areas for accelerated action to advance gender equality in Europe. These included intensified actions to eliminate violence against women, to support women's labour force and political participation, and to invest in inclusive and sustainable long-term comprehensive policies to remove structural barriers and discriminatory social norms.

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

Objectives

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

It was also expected that the meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs will (a) elect a new Chair for the Working Group; (b) approve the report for 2019-2020 activities; c) discuss joint initiatives for sub-regional collaboration and approve a work plan for 2021-2022; and (d) articulate key recommendations for priority actions to advance the ambitions of the 2019 Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review as well as the Key conclusions of the Beijing+25 Regional Review meeting for Europe.

Outcomes

The meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs approved the report of activities for 2019-2020 and adopted the work plan for the Working Group in 2021-2022. The approved work plan provided a strong basis for ESCAP and UNECE to support sub-regional collaboration among SPECA countries, including in the context of COVID-9 and its consequences.

The country experience shared by the Working Group members and key recommendations made contributed to the identification of both opportunities and challenges to achieving the ambitions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Modality/structure of event

The meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs was convened virtually on the KUDO platform, which allowed for simultaneous interpretation English/Russian. It was conducted using an interactive format in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, good practices and lessons learnt by representatives from SPECA countries.

The meeting consisted of two substantive sessions. The first session invited representatives from SPECA countries to provide a brief overview on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls. Representatives of international organizations, and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes were also invited to make interventions.

The objective of the second session was to review activities as well as to articulate key recommendations for priority actions for SPECA countries to implement the Beijing+25 outcomes within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on gender-responsive economic policies. It was expected that one or more joint initiatives will be identified for potential future sub-regional collaboration, and to discuss and approve the workplan on joint activities for 2021-2022 for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs.

Welcome Remarks

Welcome remarks were delivered by Dr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Ms. Monika Linn, Director, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Dr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) welcomed all participants and acknowledged the SPECA countries' efforts and achievements in advancing gender equality in the region. There are notable actions undertaken to achieve equality across the areas of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work; social protection; health; violence against women and girls and women's participation, with particularly identifying the adoption of laws, regulations, action plans and policies as the top achievement in the last five years. While there is progress in the ability of women to realize their economic potential, women's overall labour force participation rate remains significantly lower than men's in countries in the SPECA region. Women's continued burden of unrecognized and unpaid care work is also an important area of concern and detracts women from their ability to undertake paid work outside the home, limiting their economic potential. The topics are discussed in detail during Session. Dr. Tata reminded all participants that much work needs to be done to deliver on SDG 5, to achieve by 2030, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the SPECA region.

Ms. Monika Linn, Director, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) welcomed all participants and reminded of the call to further accelerate the achievements in gender equality made at the Beijing+25 Regional Review meeting. The fast spreading of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide is putting at risk many of the gains in gender equality, including in the SPECA region, with women and girls facing specific and often disproportionate economic, health and social risks. Ms. Linn further emphasized the importance of partnerships within the UN system as well as the cooperation of SPECA member States to integrate gender considerations into the building of policies and measures in response to this health and socio-economic crisis.

A short overview of the Working Group Meeting was delivered by **Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP.**

Election of Chair for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs

A new Chair for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs was elected. **Mrs. Sadagat Gahramanova, Deputy Chair, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, Azerbaijan,** assumed her role and urged participants to forge ahead to progress on empowering women and girls which is even more needed within the context of the socio-economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. She provided a brief background of this annual meeting in the context of the Beijing Platform for Action and the COVID-19 pandemic, and reminded that the pandemic has intensified the vulnerabilities of women and girls across the world with women often being caregivers for both children and older persons and therefore suffering from both financial and health-related impacts as they struggle to balance formal and non-formal care responsibilities during the on-going crisis.

Session 1: Review of gender gaps and challenges as well as gender-responsive initiatives from SPECA countries

Context

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

- a) Non-discriminatory labour market policies while hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation;
- b) Policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies;
- c) Policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors;
- d) Policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development; and
- e) Measures undertaken by governments to mitigate the adverse impact of COVID-19 on women and girls.

Presentations

The session was introduced by **Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP**, who provided an overview of the achievements made and challenges encountered in SPECA countries in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 5. While numerous laws, regulations, action plans and policies for the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women have been adopted across the region, adverse gender norms and negative stereotypes continue stifling progress. Ms. Cai Cai also introduced the new tracking framework developed by ESCAP to better monitor progress on the B+25 Declaration action items, and to support and inform discussions on the state and progress of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Ms. Sabina Manafova, Head of International Relations and Services Department, The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, Republic of Azerbaijan, provided an overview of the measures enacted by the country to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and the specific actions taken to cater to women's and vulnerable groups' needs during the pandemic. General measures include but are not limited to an Economic Action Plan, direct financial support for individual entrepreneurs and families, temporary tax exemptions, lump-sum payments for unemployed persons, scholarships, educational TV classes inter alia. Vulnerable groups such as internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, older persons, persons with disabilities as well as persons in remote and rural communities were given consideration.

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs (SCFWCA) strengthened the work of Child and Family Support Centers and specifically focused on Women Recourse Centers for vulnerable and socially excluded groups of women by providing them with the necessary support. Online trainings, webinars, TV programs and campaigns addressing mental health and domestic violence in the context of



the pandemic were offered to the public, and the work of the special monitoring groups on gender-based violence and violence against children was strengthened with the participation of different state organizations.

Ms. Shakhbaranu Zhakupova, Deputy Chairman, Economic Research Institute JSC, Ministry of National Economy, Republic of Kazakhstan, shared the achievements that Kazakhstan has made to advance gender equality in the country. Most recently, the Kazakhstan 2030 Concept of Family and Gender Policy was approved in 2016. In May 2020, a mandatory 30 per cent quota for women and youth in election party lists was introduced, and the overall representation of women in the public and political sphere is increasing with 55.7 per cent of women in public service and 40 per cent of women being leaders therein. Reproductive health has increased for women over the last ten years. Since 2009, the maternal mortality rate decreased by almost three times and the birth rate among adolescents fell by 20 per cent.

While women's share in employment in sectors such as education, healthcare and social services, and accommodation and food services are significantly higher than that of men, the total share of enterprises led by women remains low at only 28.3 per cent. SMEs with shares of 64 per cent to 68.4 per cent of women leaders are similarly to be found in the education, household economics, and accommodation and food services sectors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has taken several measures to support its population through family allowances, lump-sum payments, and the provision of groceries, essential goods and sanitary masks.

Ms. Javohir Akobirova, Head of the Department of Gender Development and International Relations, Committee for Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, offered an overview of strategies to combat gender inequalities in the country with a particular focus on domestic violence. Reducing gender inequality is noted as an intersectional priority in strategic documents such as the Development Program of the Republic of Tajikistan currently being developed for 2021-2025. In addition, a number of normative legal acts have been adopted in the last five years, such as the State programme for education, selection and placement of capable girls and women in leadership positions in Tajikistan for 2017-2022, and the Action Plan of the National Strategy for enhancing the role of women in Tajikistan for 2015-2020, inter alia.

Political frameworks, state programs, and improved lawmaking aim specifically at addressing domestic violence against women, which became a particular focus of the COVID-19 response measures as well. Economically, women entrepreneurs were supported through tax exemptions. The country undertakes further efforts to counter negative stereotypes by providing improved access of women and girls to education in non-traditional professions and covering education costs of female students from low-income families through scholarships. Further steps to advance gender equality include but are not limited to promoting the involvement of women in decision-making processes at all levels and in all sectors and developing and promoting training and retraining programs for women returning to the labor market after a long break.

Ms. Shemshat Atajanova, Head of the Department of Democracy and International Relations, Institute of State, Law and Democracy of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, presented the country's efforts in establishing more and improved legal frameworks addressing gender equality. Women's situation in Turkmenistan is a governmental priority. The Gender Development Program is part of all governmental plans on social and economic development, and the main focus is to further women's integration into the social and cultural development of the country. While Turkmenistan has implemented a National Plan of Action for Gender Equality with specific indicators to monitor progress, a specific gender policy is still in progress. Efforts are made to integrate SDGs into the national and regional sectoral programmes and financial plans. To this end, a national coordinating mechanism with a multi-stakeholder working group to coordinate and monitor SDG implementation has been established.

Since 2019, active work has been carried out to learn and study inter-agency response to gender-based violence against women with the technical support of UNFPA. Recommendations were prepared to improve legal frameworks to enhance capacities of health and social protection authorities as well as setting up mechanisms to accomplish coordination between these sectors to provide comprehensive support to victims of domestic violence. The major goal is to overcome the hardships and difficulties brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and to implement the five priority areas of governmental services, namely healthcare services, insurance and social protection, economic recovery, social solidarity systems, and the goal to leave no one behind.

Ms. Feruza Eshmatova, Senator, The Senate of the OliyMajlis, Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan, emphasized that generally, women's economic participation is still insufficient, and that the pandemic not only affected all areas of development, but has revealed the weaknesses and the unpreparedness of governments. She reported that Uzbekistan has developed an Anti-Crisis Plan and issued more than 25 presidential decrees to support the vulnerable population and to ensure women's employment during the pandemic.

Ms. Eshmatova further provided an overview of governmental measures that include but are not limited to the creation of an Anti-Crisis Fund, improved legal frameworks and laws, the implementation of national strategies focusing on women's involvement in decision-making processes, the establishment of decision-making mechanisms such as the Committee on Women and Gender Equality in the Senate, and the Commission on Gender Equality of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the establishment of the Ministry of supporting neighborhood and family of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The country focuses as well on protecting victims of domestic violence through the establishment of shelters, telephone hotlines and social media outreach through Telegram. A parliamentary commission composed of members of the Senate and Lower Chamber as a controlling body has been established to monitor success in the implementation of SDGs, and a particular focus is further put on women's economic empowerment through offering measures specifically targeted to women entrepreneurs.

After the country overviews, representatives of international organizations and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes were invited to make interventions.

Ms. Dono Abdurazakova, Senior Advisor on Gender Equality and Social Protection, UN FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Budapest, Hungary, reflected that the presentations have shown how the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic not only has health but also economic consequences, and posed questions concerning the particular selection criteria for the support provided to women entrepreneurs, and whether there are specific programmes targeting young women's and girls' access to higher education from rural areas. While in Azerbaijan, a focus has been put on refugees, vulnerable families, particularly single mothers, women refugees, IDPs, and providing technical equipment for rural students, in Kazakhstan, distance learning programmes have been developed and grants and accommodation have been provided to students from rural and remote areas. In Tajikistan, an annual strategy for rural development is developed every year containing gender equality as a principle to be implemented on each city, district and area level. In Uzbekistan, a household survey identified people in need of assistance, particularly women from vulnerable populations and youth, and girls received recommendation letters to support their applications to higher educational institutions and tuition fees were covered by the government.

Ms. Nargis Azizova, Programme Specialist, Normative/Intergovernmental/Knowledge management, UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Istanbul, Turkey, spotlighted the establishment of a global database of governmental COVID-19 response measures with a specific focus on their gender responsiveness. It is based on a UNDP joint assessment regarding measures in the labour market and employment, social protection and welfare, and gender-based violence. As a result, a brief report and country fact sheets were prepared. While this global database allows to see countries' best practices on pandemic response measures, it also shows the negative impacts on women and gender inequality of the pandemic. The data will enable to improve policymaking and establish gender-responsive measures to mitigate the pandemic's negative effects on women. Ms. Azizova stressed the importance of understanding whether the measures allow to mitigate the lack of personal and economic state of security. She further reminded that gender inequality already existed prior to the pandemic and that we need to understand and tackle its root causes, especially in economic and social dimensions.

Session 2: Looking ahead – opportunities for future sub-regional collaboration

Context

The objective of the second session was to review activities and approve the report of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs for the period 2019-2020 as well as to discuss and approve a work plan for 2021-2022.

Presentation

The second session was moderated by **Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Focal Point, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE**. She presented the report of activities in the SPECA sub-region for 2019-2020 and a draft of the work plan for 2021-2022. In 2019-2020, UNECE has been following-up to the Beijing+25 regional review process in the area of women and the economy through policy analysis and research, exchange of best practices for policies, tools and measures to promote women's economic empowerment as well as capacity building for women entrepreneurs. In cooperation with the Development Agency at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel (MASHAV) and the International Training Centre Golda Meir (MCTC) biannual workshops for improving information, communication and technological skills for women entrepreneurs took place in 2020. As of 2020 UNECE started a new project focusing on the care economy and women in the context of COVID-19, including the SPECA sub-region and a special study on Kyrgyzstan. This research is part of a UN Development account 13 project in the area of social development and is bringing together all regional commissions to investigate the implications of COVID-19 on women's unpaid care work and provide recommendations for a gender-responsive recovery.

In 2021-2022, UNECE plans to continue its support to women entrepreneurs from the SPECA countries through biannual capacity building workshops on information and communication technologies and its policy research on investment in the care economy. ESCAP and UNECE envisage continuation of the research on women and unpaid care work and women's economic empowerment including in the SPECA sub-region. The outcome of this project will result in informed policy advice and improved capacity building in the countries. ESCAP will further focus on women's active economic empowerment through labor market policies to channel more women into higher value-added sectors. In addition, the joint UN DA account project will include more national studies on the situation of women and their unpaid care work as well as webinars to exchange the results of the studies and share good practices. Ms. Koparanova encouraged all participants to actively take part in providing examples of responses and initiatives that mitigate the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in their countries. Furthermore, ESCAP will continue conducting research and analysis, and develop policy recommendations to identify trends, challenges and good practices on gender equality in Central Asia, and will finetune the mapping framework introduced in the beginning of this meeting to support the implementation of the commitments of the B+25 Declaration.

The report of the activities for 2019-2020 was approved and the draft work plan for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs for 2021-2022 was adopted by the Working Group.



Closing Remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by **Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Officer-in-Charge, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP**. He thanked all participants, partners and supporters of the virtual Annual Meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs and congratulated the participating countries on their achievements and good practices for the advancement of gender equality in the SPECA region. Mr. Pomoshchnikov called for strong collective work to deliver on SDG 5 to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030 and appreciated the new workplan for 2021-2022 to further strengthen the sub-regional collaboration.



Social Media Engagement

Tweets were posted on Twitter by the Subregional Office for North and Central Asia (ESCAP), the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs (Azerbaijan), Dr. Srinivas Tata (ESCAP) and Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan (ESCAP).

Srinivas Tata @SrinivasTata · 5 Std.

SPECA countries are making great strides to ensure that gender dimensions are systematically considered at all levels of policymaking. #GenderEquality #SDG5 #Agenda2030 #Beijing25 #UN75 @UNESCAP @sonca_escap @UN_Channe

1 6

SONCA_ESCAP @sonca_escap · 1 Std.

Together, we must form partnerships and cooperate to make #GenderEquality #SDG5 a reality.

#GlobalGoals #GenerationEquality #Beijing25 #UN75 #AsiaPacific @UNESCAP @UNECE @AileQadinUsaq @SrinivasTata @UN_Channe

1 1

Aila, Qadin, Uşaq Problemləri üzrə Dövlət Komitəsi @Aile... · 1 Std.

We must forge ahead to progress on empowering women and girls even within the context of the socio-economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic" Ms. Sadagat Gahramanova

@AileQadinUsaq @UNESCAP @UNECE @sonca_escap @SrinivasTata

1 2 4

SONCA_ESCAP @sonca_escap · 4 Std.

When women and girls are free from violence, stigma and harmful stereotypes, #GenderEquality can become a reality!

#GlobalGoals #SDG5 #GenerationEquality #Beijing25 #UN75 @UNESCAP @UNECE @AileQadinUsaq @SrinivasTata @UN_Channe

3 3

SONCA_ESCAP @sonca_escap · 4 Std.

Despite Parliament quotas in 2/3 of SPECA countries, only between 16.8 and 32% of Lower House members are women. We need to 🗳️ 🗳️ political participation to achieve #GenderEquality #SDG5.

#Beijing25 #UN75 #AsiaPacific @UNESCAP @UNECE @AileQadinUsaq @SrinivasTata @UN_Channe

7 4

Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan @UN_Channe · 25 Min.

It will take a concerted effort to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls in SPECA countries

#GlobalGoals #GenerationEquality #Beijing25 #UN75 #AsiaPacific @UNESCAP @UNECE @sonca_escap

1 1

SONCA_ESCAP @sonca_escap · 11 Min.

Together, we will build increasingly inclusive, sustainable, and more equal societies and economies to #LeaveNoOneBehind

#GlobalGoals #GenerationEquality #Beijing25 #UN75 #AsiaPacific @UNESCAP @UNECE @SrinivasTata @UN_Channe @AileQadinUsaq

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Annexes

Programme

13:30-14:00	Online log-in
14:00-14:15	<p>Welcome Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)• Ms. Monika Linn, Director, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) <p>Overview of the meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP
14:15-14:25	Election of Chair for the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs
14:25 – 16:00	<p>Session 1: Review of gender gaps and challenges as well as gender-responsive initiatives from SPECA countries</p> <p>Overview presentation: Ms. Cai Cai, Chief, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, ESCAP</p> <p>Country Presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Azerbaijan: Ms. Sabina Manafova, Head of International Relations and Services Department, The State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs, Republic of Azerbaijan• Kazakhstan: Ms. Shakharbanu Zhakupova, Deputy Chairman, Economic Research Institute JSC, Ministry of National Economy, Republic of Kazakhstan• Tajikistan: Ms. Javohir Akobirova, Head of the Department of Gender Development and International Relations, Committee for Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkmenistan: Ms. Shemshat Atajanova, Head of the Department of Democracy and International Relations, Institute of State, Law and Democracy of Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan • Uzbekistan: Ms. Feruza Eshmatova, Senator, The Senate of the OliyMajlis, Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan <p>Representatives of international organizations, and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will also be invited to make interventions.</p>
16:00-16:30	<p>Session 2: Looking ahead – opportunities for future sub-regional collaboration</p> <p><i>Moderator:</i> Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs and Gender Focal Point, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of activities in 2020-2021 and identification of further sub-regional cooperation • Discussion on priorities and approval of workplan for 2021-2022
16:30-16:40	<p>Closing remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Officer-in-Charge, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP • Chair of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs



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Links to key documents

<https://www.unece.org/speca/ge.html>

<https://www.unescap.org/events/annual-meeting-speca-working-group-gender-and-sdgs-gender-responsive-policies-achieve-sdg5>

[Concept Note \(English\)](#)

[Concept Note \(Russian\)](#)

[Beijing+25 Review: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in SPECA Countries \(English\)](#)

[Beijing+25 Review: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in SPECA Countries \(Russian\)](#)

[A Framework for Tracking Progress of the Beijing+25 Review \(English\)](#)

[A Framework for Tracking Progress of the Beijing+25 Review \(Russian\)](#)

[Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review \(English\)](#)

[Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review \(Russian\)](#)

[Report of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review \(English\)](#)

[Report of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review \(Russian\)](#)

[UN Secretary-General Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women \(English\)](#)

[UN Secretary-General Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women \(Russian\)](#)

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

TERMS OF REFERENCE

SPECA WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND SDGs

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

II. OBJECTIVES

4. In line with the overall objective of the Programme to facilitate economic cooperation in the countries of the SPECA region as well as integration of the SPECA participating countries into the world economy for their attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Working Group on Gender and SDGs shall continue to work in the area of gender mainstreaming and transformative policies as follows:

- (a) Non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation;
- (b) Policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies;
- (c) Policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors; and
- (d) Policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development.

III. PARTICIPANTS

5. The Working Group shall comprise National Representatives, nominated by the Governments of the SPECA participating countries. The National Representatives shall be senior officials involved the formulation and implementation of national policies in their respective countries and able to effectively follow up the recommendations and decisions of the Working Group.

6. Each participating country shall also nominate, on a permanent or an ad hoc basis, experts on Gender and respective areas of activities of the Working Group.

7. Relevant regional organizations implementing programmes on Gender are invited to nominate their representatives to participate in the activities of the Working Group.

8. Other United Nations bodies as well as other bilateral and multilateral agencies and organizations operating in the area of Gender and SDGs in the SPECA region are invited to participate in the work of the Working Group on Gender and SDGs.

9. Representatives of the member States of UNECE and ESCAP, representatives of United Nations Funds, international financial institutions, and donors as well as representatives of the private sector and academic community may be invited to participate in the work of the Working Group.

IV. MODALITIES OF OPERATION

10. The SPECA participating countries elected Azerbaijan as the Chair country of the Working Group on Gender and SDGs.

11. Governments of the SPECA countries nominate Focal points for the Working Group to ensure successful delivery of programmes of work, according to the adopted Terms of reference.

12. The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats shall provide substantive support to the activities of the Working Group by:

- (i) Providing expertise as well as assistance to activities implemented by the Working Group; and
- (ii) Providing secretariat support to the preparation and organization of sessions and meetings of the Working Group, including preparation of documents and maintenance of records.

13. The Working Group shall hold its annual sessions at a date and venue agreed by the participating countries any time before or concurrent to the annual sessions of the SPECA Governing Council.

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

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

V. PROGRAMME OF WORK AND ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

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

VI. FUNDING

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

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

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

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

VII. OTHER MATTERS

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