

Background Note

Annual Meeting

Thematic Working Group on Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

Theme: Building back fairer: Gender equality in a post-COVID world

Tuesday 2 November 2021, 9:30 – 12:30 (CET)

Virtual meeting

1. Background

Women's economic empowerment and gender equality are fundamental to achieving a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all. This is broadly recognized and is reflected in the 2030 Agenda both as a stand-alone goal for gender equality – SDG 5 – and as accelerator to other SDGs in specific gender-responsive targets. Measures and actions that promote equitable access to and control over resources, production and consumption equally shaped by women and men, and outcomes of activities that equally benefit women and men have proved to have a strong impact on all three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental.

Countries in the SPECA region have achieved substantial progress in expanding opportunities for women and girls in the economic realm in the last decades across the public and private sectors underpinned by legal reforms and policies at various levels. The advancement of women, however, remains slow, uneven across industries and occupations, and varies by countries. The progress reported at the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional review meeting on 29 and 30 October 2019 and the ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Beijing+25 Review from 27 to 29 November 2019 as well as at the Annual SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs meeting in October 2020, remains insufficient to close the gender gaps in employment, decision-making at all levels, payment and entrepreneurship.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences have added a new layer to existing inequalities and deepened their gender dimension due to the disproportionate impact on women and girls. Women have been hit harder than men as they tend to earn less and dominate in sectors that have suffered the most from closures during lockdowns and restrictions imposed to combat the spread of the COVID-19. The loss of income from employment, remittances, and other sources, including the informal economy, as well as increased domestic care responsibilities and risks of domestic violence, have worsened the living and health conditions of women both in urban and rural areas in the SPECA countries. The increased burden of unpaid care on women as schools closed during lockdowns has made many women drop out of the labour market, thus reducing their economic security amid growing uncertainties for re-joining gainful employment. Now, without targeted interventions to address the disproportionate

impact of COVID-19 on women, there is a risk that progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women would further reverse. This, in turn, will hold back the attainments of the SDGs.

To support a COVID-19 response and build a sustainable recovery towards resilient societies, policies are needed to mitigate the adverse impact on women and address women's economic empowerment through systemic efforts to reduce economic insecurity, provide opportunities for women to paid and decent work and reduce the unpaid care and domestic work. Special measures are needed to meet the challenges of women engaged in the care sector as well as of women entrepreneurs through both immediate actions as well as short- and long-term plans. As countries are still struggling to find the appropriate COVID response in line with their fiscal space, regional and sub-regional support is critical for building back better, and more equal.

The Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs under the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) continues to work in the area of gender mainstreaming and transformative policies that target women's non-discriminatory participation in economic activities, both in public and private companies, through promoting labour market policies, preventing stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors, and building support systems for women entrepreneurship development.

The annual meeting of the SPECA Working group on Gender and SDGs will focus on policy initiatives and measures undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic in the SPECA countries and their impact on women and girls with the aim to identify further strategies and actions for mitigating the adverse effects on women and accelerating gender equality in the economic realm. Special focus will be paid to the gender and care dimensions of the economic policy packages both in the short- and long-term plans and their implementation in the SPECA countries.

UNECE and ESCAP will convene the annual meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs on 2 November 2021 in the margins of the SPECA Governing Council and SPECA Economic Forum taking place from 15 to 17 November 2021 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The 2021 annual meeting of the SPECA Thematic Working Group and SDGs will be virtual and will be hosted by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs of Azerbaijan.

2. Objectives

The annual meeting of the *SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs* will serve as a forum for policy dialogue, capacity building and networking for government stakeholders from relevant key ministries and agencies in SPECA countries, in partnership with UN agencies, to discuss critical and key emerging issues for gender-transformative economic policies to empower women addressing the gender and care dimensions in measures and initiatives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. By this, the meeting will contribute to efforts towards women's economic empowerment and gender equality, poverty reduction and economic growth in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Participants will share experiences in implementing various measures and initiatives in response to COVID-19 and how these measures have affected gender equality in the countries. Strategies and actions will be further discussed to identify the way forward towards advancing on gender equality after the COVID-19 crisis, including women's full economic and political empowerment in support of the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the meeting will focus on economic policies for empowering women with a focus

on the care economy and the key actions necessary to ensure resilient societies during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in SPECA countries.

Specific objectives of the Working Group include:

- Increase awareness of the importance of participatory gender-transformative approaches to the design, implementation and monitoring of measures that tackle the structural barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.
- Share experiences and lessons learned on policy responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and discuss further policy initiatives in response to challenges and national priorities for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls particularly in the thematic priority areas identified as follows:
 - (a) Non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and a 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 research- and development sectors; and
 - (d) Policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development.
- Identify the necessary actions and best practices to improve the enabling environment for women and girls in SPECA countries, including cross-sectoral measures and institutional coordination, public-private partnerships and active engagement of women's associations and women beneficiary groups in consultative and decision-making processes.
- Identify opportunities for further sub-regional cooperation on the implementation of SDG 5 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls; and
- Approve the report of the SPECA Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs for 2020-2021 and agree on a work plan for 2022-2023

The annual meeting of the *SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs* will consist of three substantive sessions: (a) country presentations by participants (ten minutes each), sharing of best practices and lessons learned in the thematic priority areas for the Working Group, including on policy initiatives and measures implemented in response to COVID-19 and its economic and social consequences in SPECA countries, and (b) a group discussion to identify strategies and actions for further response to COVID-19 based on gender-transformative policies and opportunities for sub-regional cooperation and partnership, and (c) to approve the report of the SPECA Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs for 2020-2021 and to agree on the Work Plan of the SPECA Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs for 2022-2023.

3. Programme

Tuesday 2 November 2021, 9:30 – 12:30

Virtual meeting

9:20-9:30	Registration: setting up the on-line format of the meeting
9:30-10:00	Welcome remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representative, UNECE• Representative, ESCAP• Ms. Sadagat Gahramanova, Deputy Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs, Azerbaijan, and Chair of the Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs
	Session 1: Policy initiatives and measures implemented in response to COVID-19 and its economic and social consequences on women and girls
10:00-11:30	Country presentations (10 minutes each) Peer learning and sharing of best practices and lessons learned in the thematic priority areas for the Working Group, including policy initiatives and measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences for women and girls. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Afghanistan• Azerbaijan• Kazakhstan• Kyrgyzstan• Tajikistan• Turkmenistan• Uzbekistan Discussion
	Session 2: Group Discussion: Rethinking economic policies to systematically reflect gender and care dimensions in design and implementation
11:30-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic policies for empowering women with a focus on the care economy: key actions to ensure resilient societies during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in SPECA countries<ul style="list-style-type: none">- UNECE main findings and recommendations from assessments of women’s economic empowerment through reducing the unpaid care- ESCAP main findings and recommendations with regard to unpaid care and domestic work in the Asia-Pacific region

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of opportunities for sub-regional cooperation and to accelerate gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in SPECA countries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representatives of UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office - Representatives of UNDP Regional Hub - Representatives of FAO Regional Office • Discussion
12:00-12:20	<p>Session 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of the activities of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs for 2020-2021 – UNECE • Work plan of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs for 2022 – 2023 UNECE
12:20-12:30	<p>Closing Chair’s Summary of Proceedings</p>