

Evaluation of the UNECE project “Strengthening capacities of SPECA countries for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”
(August 2020)

Final progress report as of 31 December 2022

#	Recommendation	Management response	Responsibility	Target date	Progress
1	<p>Streamlining and improving the organization of the SPECA meetings:</p> <p>a. Rationalize on time, travel and ensuring continuity by trying to hold WG sessions, the Economic Forum and the Governing Council meetings together during four days, when feasible and demanded by the countries.</p> <p>b. Consider turning the Economic Forums, if the countries wish, into opportunities for more dynamic exchanges through round table formats instead of conference modality with little discussions.</p> <p>c. Rethink the format of reporting conclusions and recommendations from the various meetings. This could involve shortening documentation, revisiting recommendations stemming from the WGs and Economic</p>	<p>UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>a. Noting that the final decision depends on SPECA participating countries, which are owners of the SPECA Programme as per the 2018 SPECA Evaluation and subsequent decisions of the Governing Council, ECE (the SPECA Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator) will negotiate with the hosting country and try to rationalize on time when organizing the annual events and Working Group meetings of SPECA, when it coordinates the SPECA events (every second year) and will suggest that to ESCAP, when ESCAP coordinates the support for SPECA.</p> <p>b. The ECE SPECA Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator will discuss with the hosting country ideas for making the annual Economic Forums more dynamic, with more discussions and round tables, when ECE is coordinating these Forums.</p> <p>c. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will send the evaluation report and its recommendations to the ECE focal points for the SPECA thematic working groups</p>	SPECA Coordinator	November 2021	<p>Implemented as of 30 November 2021</p> <p>a. ECE communicated the recommendations to ESCAP and cooperated with them for the organization of the 2020 SPECA events in the spirit of these recommendations. See https://unece.org/speca/events/fifteenth-session-speca-governing-council and https://unece.org/speca/events/2020-speca-economic-forum. However, given COVID-19 all SPECA events in 2020 were organized online, and, for the time when virtual meetings prevail. The countries have expressed their preference that the WG meetings meet well in advance of the Forum and the Governing Council session. The 2021 events were prepared in the spirit of the recommendations: https://unece.org/speca/events/2021-speca-economic-forum and https://unece.org/info/SPECA/events/359263 By the 16th session of the SPECA Governing Council on 16 Nov.2021, four of the five WGs held their meetings, including the WG on Trade, which was held physically back-to-back in Tashkent. Only one of the groups (on Sustainable Transport) had to be organized later due to a request from the hosting country (Uzbekistan). The WG on Statistics is being closed.</p>

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	<p>Forums to make them more concrete, feasible and measurable.</p>	<p>(TWGs) and request them to support streamlining the conclusions and recommendations coming out of each meeting, so that they are concrete, feasible and measurable, bearing in mind that the final responsibility for this is with the SPECA countries, bearing in mind that these are decisions of the participating countries.</p>			<p>b. The ECE SPECA Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator have discussed with Uzbekistan and the UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan the idea to make the annual Economic Forum in 2021 more dynamic, with more discussions and round tables. UNECE did everything possible to make the 2021 Forum interactive with a focus on decisions for real work on the recommendations. Online and hybrid events, however, are not very conducive to people engaging in discussions. ECE has requested ESCAP to advocate the same in 2022.</p> <p>c. As a first step, the evaluation report and its recommendations were sent to the ECE focal points for the SPECA thematic working groups (TWGs). All these elements were constantly reminded to the hosts and the country representatives and the <i>Tashkent Statement</i> (outcome document from the 2021 Forum) and the decisions of the 16th session of the SPECA Governing Council (see here) were concrete, feasible and measurable, as agreed by the countries. ECE has requested ESCAP to advocate the same in 2022.</p>
2	<p>Strengthening mechanisms for follow-up:</p> <p>a. Documents coming out of the various meetings should become live documents that have an action plan and a system for follow-up and not be simply uploaded on a static UN website.</p> <p>b. Considering ways to allow networking of experts, policy advising, discussions between TWGs, experts and national</p>	<p>UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>a. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will send the evaluation report and its recommendations to the ECE focal points supporting the various TWGs, the Governing Council sessions and annual Forums and will work with them, the SPECA participating countries and the ESCAP counterparts on drafting conclusions that include really intended actions for the achievement of the recommended objectives.</p>	SPECA Coordinator	November 2021	<p>Implemented as of 30 November 2021</p> <p>a. The evaluation report and its recommendations were sent to the ECE focal points in 2020, supporting the various TWGs, suggesting that: documents coming out of the various meetings should become live documents; and networks of experts should continue the collaboration on the deliverables of each group on a regular basis all year round. The Ashgabat Initiative from the 2019 Forum, the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and Principles of Sustainable Trade developed by the SPECA WG on Trade and adopted by the Governing Council on 21 Nov.2019, the SPECA Strategy on Innovation for Sustainable Development adopted by the Governing</p>

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	<p>authorities by creating more online platforms. Constant and sustained dialogue can continue on specific issues through guided online discussions.</p> <p>c. The designation of a Secretariat by the countries could make the follow up to recommendations and decisions an on-going task, relieving from the responsibility of the UNECE and ESCAP substantive divisions.</p> <p>d. Accelerate the nomination of Focal Points for SPECA and for the TWGs.</p>	<p>b. Furthermore, the SPECA Coordinator will discuss with the ECE focal points and relevant experts how to support the TWGs and networks of experts for a continuous collaboration throughout the year. This will include work through online platforms on topical issues that interest the countries.</p> <p>c. The ECE SPECA Coordinator requested ESCAP to ask the host country in 2020 (Kyrgyzstan) to include a discussion on the SPECA Secretariat on the agenda of the 15th session of the SPECA Governing Council on 20 November 2020.</p> <p>d. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will renew the call for nomination of focal points every year ECE is coordinating SPECA and raise the issue at the Governing Council sessions.</p>			<p>Council on 21 Nov.2019, are all strategic documents that were thoroughly followed up with activities on their implementation as reported at the relevant working groups and Governing Council sessions. ECE has invited the other WGs to do the same.</p> <p>b. Initiated in 2021 by the TWGs on Trade, Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Transport, which already support cooperation all year round. Online platforms for communication and online meetings of the WGs became widely used during the pandemic. E.g., at least 6 online seminars on the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy were held under the auspices of the SPECA WG on Trade in 2021.</p> <p>c. A discussion on the SPECA Secretariat was included in the agenda of the 15th session of the SPECA Governing Council on 20 November 2020 and the 16th session of the Governing Council on 19 November 2021. From this point on, this is a matter for the SPECA participating countries' Governments.</p> <p>d. UNECE and ESCAP called for renewal of the list of national coordinators and focal points for SPECA in the participating countries in 2020 and 2021. This exercise has to be repeated every year, as people change (notably now, in 2022).</p>
3	<p>Strengthening the work of the Thematic Working Groups:</p> <p>a. When next reviewing the ToRs of Working Groups, make them more targeted and focused on developing and implementing concrete outputs such as strategies with concrete action</p>	<p>UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>a. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will send this recommendation to the ECE focal points for the WG on Sustainable Transport and the WG on Water, Energy and Environment and relevant counterparts in ESCAP with a request to</p>	SPECA Coordinator	November 2022	<p>Implemented as of 31 December 2022</p> <p>a. SPECA focal points in ECE and ESCAP were informed about this recommendation and advised to support the work on strategies and roadmaps in their respective areas. The WG on Sustainable Transport is working on such a strategy, while the WG on Water, Energy and Environment started such work. The 16th session of the SPECA Governing Council took a decision to establish a WG on Investment, which will be operated by Uzbekistan with less</p>

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	<p>plans for their implementation.</p> <p>b. Encourage the WG on Gender and SDGs and the WG on Statistics to render more substantive and systematic support to the other TWGs.</p> <p>c. Reinforce the capacity of experts to be able to mainstream concerns of women's rights and the rights-based approach in the work of the TWGs and Economic Forums, based on input from the WG on Gender and SDGs.</p>	<p>continue support for the SPECA countries in developing strategies/ roadmaps in these areas. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will invite the ECE focal point for the WG on Gender and SDGs to suggest to the country representatives to develop a regional strategy in their respective area.</p> <p>b. The SPECA Coordinator will invite the ECE and ESCAP focal points for the SPECA WG on Gender and SDGs to provide direct support to each WG on how they can achieve relevant SDGs.</p> <p>c. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will work with ECE's TWG focal points to invite host countries organizing TWG activities, annual Forums, and Governing Council sessions, to pay special attention to mainstreaming women's rights and the rights-based approach defined by the UN.</p>			<p>support from ESCAP and ECE than the other WGs. ECE informed ESCAP about this recommendation. The ECE SPECA Coordinator invited the ECE focal point on gender, appointed in January 2023, to take the respective action.</p> <p>b. In 2022, the ECE SPECA coordinator had invited ESCAP focal points for the SPECA WG on Gender and SDGs to take the action. In 2022, there was a vibrant, session on women's economic autonomy in the context of the climate crisis, attended at senior level (DES level) from both, ECE and ESCAP, effectively providing guidance to each WG on how they can achieve relevant SDGs. The newly appointed ECE Gender focal point was invited to continue taking this action upon her appointment (January 2023).</p> <p>c. A session on Gender with this objective took place at the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum.</p>
4	<p><u>Improving cooperation and coordination with other UN and international entities working in the SPECA region:</u></p> <p>a. The UN Resident Coordinator System, as representative of the UN at the national level, could be formally enlisted for follow-up on the implementation of recommendations at the SPECA country level.</p> <p>b. Increase cooperation/harmonization</p>	<p>UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>a. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will liaise with his counterpart in ESCAP to advance the concept note on cooperation with the Resident Coordinator system in support of SPECA at the SPECA Governing Council and the Resident Coordinators.</p> <p>b. The ECE SPECA Coordinator will initiate discussions with his ESCAP counterpart on how to improve the efficiency of organizing the SPECA events to make the best use of increasingly scarce resources.</p>	SPECA Coordinator	November 2021	<p>Implemented as of 30 November 2021</p> <p>a. An updated version of the concept note on cooperation with the Resident Coordinator system in support of SPECA was presented to the SPECA countries Resident Coordinators in 2021. We will continue to promote this approach in 2022 and 2023. The Resident Coordinators are increasingly involved in the UN Secretariat's support for SPECA. Three of them chaired sessions at the 2021 Forum, including the RC in Kazakhstan in person.</p> <p>b. Regular consultations on the topic take place between the SPECA Coordinators and Deputy Coordinators in ECE and ESCAP. Regular meetings of the UNECE and ESCAP DESs and Deputy SPECA Coordinators with the Resident</p>

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	<p>between the two Regional Commissions in order to pool funding.</p> <p>c. Coordinate/cooperate more closely with other regional processes in order to share resources, studies, projects, etc.</p>	<p>c. The ECE SPECA Coordinator and TWG focal points, working with ESCAP and the SPECA countries will intensify contacts and build synergies with such organizations and regional initiatives as UNRCCA, UNDP, UNEP, WTO, CAREC/ADB, EAEU, EU, ECO, OECD, the Islamic Development Bank and others, who would be willing to cooperate with SPECA.</p>			<p>Coordinators took place in 2021, and SPECA was a key item on the agendas of these meetings.</p> <p>c. Coordination with these organizations intensified, notably with CAREC on transport and trade.</p>
5	<p><u>Reinforcing the sustainability of support to the SPECA process:</u></p> <p>a. Find a mechanism to sustain the operational cost of supporting the SPECA process, such as the organization of annual meetings in a more systematic and less ad hoc way. This could be done for example by either ensuring that any eventual Trust Fund has a budget for operational support, or through encouraging more systematic contribution from SPECA countries, or by pooling of resources between the two Regional Commissions and devoting it to the sole purpose of organizing the annual meetings of SPECA institutions.</p> <p>b. Intensify efforts to ensure sustained funding to develop further projects/financing for</p>	<p>UNECE partially accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>a. Given that the establishment of a SPECA Fund fully depends on the will of the SPECA participating countries, ECE can only state that when and if established, it should include (a) budget for operational support for the SPECA process: the annual Forum, Governing Council and TWG meetings; and (b) funding for projects developed and implemented under the WGs. The ECE Coordinator and WG focal points will discuss with their ESCAP focal points how to pool resources in support of the organization of the annual SPECA events.</p> <p>b. The ECE SPECA Coordinator and WG focal points will enquire into the possibilities to raise funds for the implementation of concrete activities recommended in the Ashgabat Initiative; the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; the SPECA Innovation Strategy, the regional study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade, and redoing the SDG scoping</p>	<p>SPECA Coordinator</p>	<p>November 2024</p>	<p>Implemented as of 31 December 2022</p> <p>a. The new SPECA Coordinator has initiated the discussions about a future SPECA Secretariat and SPECA Fund that would include a budget for the operational support for the SPECA process. The 16th session of the SPECA Governing Council on 16 November 2021 took concrete decisions on these two issues. Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/4) In light of Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2020/3) of its fifteenth session in 2020, the Governing Council expresses gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the UNECE secretariat for conducting consultations among the SPECA participating countries in order to reach a final decision on the SPECA Secretariat and the SPECA Fund holistically. Building upon the consensus of establishing a Secretariat of SPECA on a rotational basis to ensure organizational support to the activities of the Programme, considering the official positions of the countries on the financing and staffing mechanisms, raised at the 16th session of the Governing Council, it decided to carry out additional consultations and establish an expert group to draft the Terms of Reference of the Secretariat and the modalities of its operation, using the concept note proposed by Kazakhstan as a basis. The Governing</p>

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	<p>the implementation of the Ashgabat Initiative; the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; the SPECA Innovation Strategy, the regional study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade, an updated SDG scoping study, etc.</p>	<p>exercise.</p>			<p>Council notes the offer of Kazakhstan to host the Secretariat in Almaty as the first location for the Secretariat. (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Decisions%20of%20the%2016th%20session%20of%20the%20SPECA%20Governing%20Council_EN_G.pdf).</p> <p>In supporting the above activities, the ECE SPECA coordinator and deputy coordinator have discussed how to pool resources in support of the organization of the annual SPECA events. While the ultimate decisions about the establishment of SPECA Fund and SPECA Secretariat are in the hands of the SPECA participating countries, the actions of the ECE SPECA coordinator are implemented.</p> <p>b. The focal points for the WG on Trade and WG on Sustainable Transport have raised funds for at least 6 projects for the implementation of the Ashgabat Initiative; SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; SPECA Innovation Strategy; SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade, and studies on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade. Discussions have taken place regarding a possible SDG scoping exercise in 2024. By end 2022, the main action (inquiring into the possibility to raise funds) has been undertaken, in fact overtaken by results – as funds have actually been mobilized. Hence the recommendation can be closed. Given the long-term nature of these issues, and the importance of ensuring sustainability of activities, efforts to raise funds will continue in the future.</p>